

PERSONIFICATION AND PROMINENCE IN FOREIGN REPORTING ON THE EXAMPLE OF LATIN AMERICA'S NEWS COVERAGE IN THE GERMAN PRESS



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DOI: 10.25200/BJR.v16n1.2020.1247

Received in: September 16th, 2019

Reviewed on: January 6th, 2020

Reviewed on: January 21st, 2020

Approved on: January 24th, 2020

ABSTRACT – This paper aims at reassessing through quantitative content analysis the role of the factors “personification” and “prominence” in the foreign reporting, using the news coverage of Latin America in the German quality press as a case study. The corpus comprises 3.831 news articles published between January 2000 and December 2014 in market-leading media outlets: the dailies *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ), the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), the alternative tageszeitung (taz) and, additionally, the weekly *Der Spiegel*, the most relevant political magazine in the country. The factors have similar importance among the publications, although the FAZ shows the less personified and the most elitist coverage, while *Der Spiegel* exhibits the most vigorous intensity of personification. Besides, under the analysed types of individuals, the press tends to depict celebrities and politicians, mostly from the executive, in a more personified way. Lastly, countries against the Washington consensus and with a high degree of political coverage are more inclined to present the substantial intensity of both factors.

Key words: News factors. News values. Journalism. Foreign reporting. Global news coverage. Personification. Prominence. News selection.

PERSONIFICAÇÃO E PROEMINÊNCIA NO JORNALISMO INTERNACIONAL A EXEMPLO DA COBERTURA NOTICIOSA DA AMÉRICA LATINA NA IMPRENSA ALEMÃ

RESUMO – O objetivo desse artigo é reavaliar, por meio da análise quantitativa de conteúdo, o papel dos fatores “personificação” e “proeminência” nas coberturas internacionais, utilizando como estudo de caso a cobertura noticiosa da América Latina na imprensa de qualidade alemã. O corpus engloba 3.831 artigos publicados entre janeiro de 2000 e dezembro de 2014 em periódicos líderes de mercado: o *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ), o *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), o alternativo *tageszeitung* (taz) e, adicionalmente, o semanário *Der Spiegel*, a revista política mais relevante da Alemanha. Os fatores têm pesos semelhante entre as publicações, embora o FAZ tenha uma cobertura menos personificada e mais elitista, enquanto a *Der Spiegel* possui uma intensidade de personificação mais marcante. Além disso, em relação aos tipos de indivíduos analisados, a imprensa tende a retratar celebridades e políticos, principalmente do executivo, de uma maneira mais personificada. Por fim, os países contra o consenso de Washington e/ou com um alto grau de cobertura política estão mais inclinados a apresentar uma maior intensidade de ambos os fatores.

Palavras-chave: Fatores noticiosos. Valores noticiosos. Jornalismo. Coberturas internacionais. Cobertura global. Personificação. Proeminência. Seleção de notícias.

PERSONIFICACIÓN Y PROMINENCIA EN EL PERIODISMO INTERNACIONAL, EL CASO DE LA COBERTURA PERIODÍSTICA DE AMÉRICA LATINA EN LA PRENSA ALEMÁN

RESUMEN – El objetivo de este trabajo es reevaluar, a través del análisis cuantitativo de contenido, el papel de los factores “personificación” y “prominencia” en la cobertura internacional, utilizando como caso de estudio la cobertura de noticias de América Latina en la prensa alemana de calidad. El corpus comprende 3.831 artículos publicados entre enero de 2000 y diciembre de 2014 en los principales periódicos: *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), el *tageszeitung* (taz) alternativo y, además, el semanario *Der Spiegel*, La revista política más relevante de Alemania. Los factores tienen pesos similares en todas las publicaciones, aunque FAZ tiene una cobertura menos personificada y más elitista, mientras que *Der Spiegel* tiene una intensidad de personificación más marcada. Además, en relación con los tipos de individuos analizados, la prensa tiende a retratar a las celebridades y los políticos, especialmente el ejecutivo, de una manera más personificada. Finalmente, los países en contra del consenso de Washington y / o con un alto grado de cobertura política son más propensos a tener una mayor intensidad de ambos factores.

Palabras clave: Factores de noticias. Valores de noticias. Periodismo. Cobertura internacional. Cobertura global. Personificación. Prominencia. Selección de noticias.

Introduction

Personification is the term used to describe the media strategy of setting individual actions or people in the foreground of reporting (Scherer, 2011, pp. 698–699). In this paper, the term goes beyond the typical definition within the field of political communication. Depending on the research area, personification could refer not only to campaign management, voter behaviour or the media coverage of the election

campaign but also to an essential element of journalistic selection and presentation (Schulz, 2011, p. 239). It is mainly related to a crucial stylistic tactic and can be created through selection or depiction. In general, events that can be represented by the fate or actions of persons are more likely to be selected for reporting by the mass media (Scherer, 2011, pp. 698–699). Journalists can even present occurrences that do not necessarily have people in the foreground in a personified manner. Media coverage generally discusses events based on the perspective of persons and their acts (pp. 698–699). Besides, reporting on social developments can be illustrated by describing individual fates, e. g., the life of an unemployed person during the outbreak of the Argentine economic crisis at the beginning of the millennium.

Furthermore, it is essential to consider that globalisation also has an impact on media structures, and international news coverage has been changing drastically to adapt to the modern media business. “Today, foreign news must leave the old ivory tower of intellectual and elite journalism and confront the diverse needs of the modern media market” (Holm, 2001, p. 125). Several studies have reported the impact of digital technologies on journalism (Paterson, 2007; Thussu, 2004). One of the most concerning results of this process is regarded to competitiveness. While providing self-produced international news continues to be costly (Hamilton & Jenner, 2004), just reproducing them on the Internet can be economical and more affordable for media enterprises (Boyd-Barret & Rantanen, 2004). Amidst the traditional media, even those who can still afford bureaus and foreign correspondents worldwide have endured substantial economic cutbacks (Boyd-Barrett, 2010).

According to Hafez (2005), the globalisation of international communication is advancing much slower and unclearly. In his book, *The myth of media globalisation*, the author argues that the global communicative networking and infrastructure, which is often misinterpreted as an intensification of the global informational knowledge, is a development that does not even reach all the running elites of nations worldwide and has not significantly altered important media sector such as the foreign reporting. Besides, the majority of the population has been engaging much more in their local, national or regional communication processes than exchange themselves across borders.

In the age of informational metamorphosis, unlike all favourable prognoses, the amount of social media systems free from

interventions is decreasing or, at best, stagnating. The academic concludes that a global communication system does not exist. Despite all information and news exchange, the media systems are still solidly in national control. News and information are uncontrolled domesticated since they are focused on a very restricted, generally, national audiences, which are not free from local interests, stereotypes and cultural bias (Hafez, 2005, pp. 221–229). Furthermore, one should not forget the role of global news agencies in transforming news into a global commodity to be sold in a mass scale (Rantanen, 2009), a process that has led to the homogenisation of the foreign-reporting (Boyd-Barrett, 1998; Paterson, 2011).

Due to the economic challenges imposed by this new media ecosystem, correspondents are searching for new tactics to report efficaciously, i.e., making the news more compelling and attractive to their national readers without increasing the costs of production (Scherer, 2011). One of these strategies always has been the personification; however, these tactics have changed in the last years, acquiring a new degree of complexity. Thus, it makes sense to reassess the discussion and reanalyse the relation between personification and foreign news. Personification can be an indicator of the commodification and commercialisation of journalism (Novais, 2010), i.e., the increase of soft news due to competitive pressures.

To review the importance of the factor in the international news coverage, we investigate the types of individuals depicted by the press (news factor eliteness), their grad of prominence and the intensity of personification in the prestigious German publications from 2000 to 2014, employing quantitative content analysis. We selected the prestigious national broadsheets since they are still capable of maintaining foreign correspondents in the region. Besides, to complement the results of the quantitative approach, we conducted a few interviews with those media professionals. Germany boasts one of the most substantial media markets in Europe (Vyslozil & Surm, 2019) and one classifies its media system under the “democratic corporatist” model, which possesses a long-established development of the mass-circulation press (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Besides, the country exhibits the most sizeable number of recipients who confirmed to “read international news very carefully” (29%), when compared to other European states such as the UK (19%), France and Spain, both with 16% (Pew Research Center, 2018). On top of that, our object of analysis – Latin America – is still deemed by recent studies on news

flow as a “consistent area of invisibility” (Tiele, 2010, p. 261), despite substantial political and economic changes in the last fifteen years (Cazzamatta, 2018). Furthermore, as discussed by the Ibero-American Institute in Berlin, studies in the field of international communication with a focus on Latin America is scarce (Göbel et al., 2009). The last studies dated more than thirty years back (Abram, 1980; Roemeling-Kruthaup, 1987, 1991; Wöhlcke, 1973). Among other publications (Cazzamatta, 2014, 2018), this article tries to fill this gap.

Around 55 years ago, the international news research identified four pivotal elements that have an impact on global news's selection: the relation to elite nations, the relation to elite people, negativity and attribution to personal actions (Galtung, 2015). We hypothesise that correspondents emphasise the factor personification to get non-elite nations covered. The lack of “economic proximity” or “power status” might be compensated by personification in some cases. In the next section, we are going to present the development of the news values research and the several definitions given during the process to the factor personification.

2 Theoretical Background:

Personification and the news value research tradition

The news values theory is one among other approaches to study journalistic news choice, inquiring how an event turns into news. This approach generally scrutinises the content characteristics of occurrences presented by the media to understand what makes an issue newsworthy. Westerståhl & Johansson (1994) identified the genesis of this research tradition in the historical work of the German linguist Kaspar Stieler from 1695. In his book regarding newspapers' uses and gratifications, the author referred – even if in a rudimentary form – to variables such as importance, proximity, drama or negativity (Stieler, 1695). The majority of the scholars, however, acknowledged Walter Lippmann (1998 [1922]) as the father of the research practice, considering that the author discussed primary factors such as sensationalism, proximity, relevance or facticity to explain the structures of news. Nevertheless, it was just in 1965 that the research field started to consolidate with the publications of Östgaard (1965) and Galtung and Ruge (1965) in the recently established *Journal of Peace Research*. Östgaard

came up with factors influencing foreign news based on the previous literature but without testing them empirically. The author identified mainly three elements – simplification, identification and sensationalism, which impact the global news flow. The dimension of identification was related not only to certain cultural proximity but also to the tendency of news' personification (Östgaard, 1965, p. 47). According to the study, the broader the chance of identification with the event, the more prominent will be the news circulation. [...] “[P]eople working for the news media write about other people say or do, about how they act and how they look, and even, sometimes, about what they think and what they feel” (p. 47). Furthermore, the intellectual pointed out that foreign reporting has the propensity of overemphasising the role of individual activities by prominent power figures (Östgaard, 1965, p. 55).

While Östgaard summarised facts debated in the literature without testing hypotheses, Galtung and Ruge evaluated several variables employing a quantitative content analysis of the coverage of three international crises (Cuba, Congo and Cyprus) by four Norwegian newspapers. The academics proposed a 12 factors¹ catalogue based on “nothing but common-sense perception psychology” (Galtung & Ruge, 1965, p. 66) to use their words. Regarding the question of personification, the authors discussed the media inclination of portraying issues as a consequence of the actions of a subject or collective (Galtung & Ruge, 1965, p. 68). This inclination was described as a result of the necessity of identification. The primary assumption regarded this specific news factor was: “The more the event can be seen in personal terms, as due to the action of specific individuals, the more probable that will become a news item” (p.68). By the time, prominence was not part of the catalogues, and the question was discussed in terms of “elite-people”. During interviews in Washington to comprehend the relationship between the press and foreign policy, Cohen (1993 [1963]) noticed, for instance, that the most common answer to the question of what does constitute news was “big names” or in the news factors' nomenclature “elite-people”. Regardless the significance of the work of Galtung and Ruge – the most quoted paper and the basis for several analyses since its publication – the study was criticised regarded its problems of operationalisation since a bunch of variables were founded in psychological understanding (Chang & Lee, 2010). Despite the solid theoretical foundation for international news, these analyses were

vague concerning universality and validation of their inferences (Severo & Beauguitte, 2018, p. 174).

Sande (1971) made an effort to test the hypotheses proposed by Galtung and Ruge, employing a combined analysis of media content and audience perception. Besides, the author suggested another interpretation of personification because of the operationalisation's difficulties of the Galtung and Ruge's definition. According to him, personification should be based on people's social role. It should "concern some actors not only as role players but also as human beings in a manifest way" (Sande, 1971, p. 229). Another milestone in the research's development was the work of Winfried Schulz (1976) – *Die Konstruktion von Realität in den Nachrichtenmedien*. The academic extended and adapted the catalogue from Galtung and Ruge and was the first author to operationalise the news factors empirically and measure their actual impact on journalistic choice. He also differentiated between the idea of news factors and news values. In his perspective, journalists associate news values to particular events because they express specific news factors which correspond to their selection's principles. Thus, news values are understood as an "indication of journalistic hypotheses of reality" (Schulz, 1976, p. 30). The associated news values to an event can be perceived in the degree of attention and relevance that its reporting receives in the media. Regarding precisely the question of personification, Schulz attributed levels of intensity from the highest (i.e. a person is an acting subject, cause or centre of the event) to the lowest (only impersonal, abstract issues are expressed in the event, and no names are quoted). Furthermore, the author also included the factor "prominence" (for non-political coverage) and personal influence (for the political news), operationalising them based on the scores mentioned above.

A few years later, Staab (1990a) used more or less the same methodological solution proposed by Schulz. However, the relevance of his work relies on the integration of a "functional model" in opposition to the "causal model" (Staab, 1990b). According to this perspective, journalists do not simply select an event because of their traits (news factors). On the contrary, they can also ascribe and emphasise news factors to an event in order to get it covered. Hence, the scholar does not comprehend news factors as an approach to explain news choice but as a tool to describe media reality. For instance, as discussed previously, correspondents are employing new strategies due to the current crisis of the press to make the

coverage more compelling without impacting the cost of production. Severo e Beauguitte (2018) argue in this direction and claim that personification “*has become one of the most widespread tactics*”. Our hypothesis related to Latin America is that correspondents reinforce and accentuate the factor “personification” especially in the case of countries whose press attention is low due to their minimal “powers status” or “economic proximity” to Germany (Cazzamatta, 2018). By stressing the role of individuals (with or without prominence), they might force the coverage of these “invisible” no elite-nations.

2 1 Hierarchy of influences on media content

Although this article focuses on the role of the factors “personification” and “prominence”, we do not claim that these variables are solely responsible for the Latin America’s news coverage in the German press. We demonstrated somewhere else that the main determinants of Latin America’s foreign reporting are “power status” followed by “economic proximity”, and one can explain the outliers² through “ideology” (Cazzamatta, 2018). One should be aware that newsworthiness is not always capable of predicting what will turn into news (Shoemaker, 2006). The newsworthiness is just one among other variables that can influence how much attention a story will receive by the press (Shoemaker, 2006). Accordingly, Staab (1990b) does not consider the news value approach as a theory to explain news selection, but as a useful instrument to describe the media reality. While it is common sense, that selection is necessary to reduce the complexity of the world, the principles for this procedure remain a matter of persistent debate. Other lines of research emphasise the role of communicators and journalists, namely the political stances of the “gate-keepers” or the editorial attitude of media institutions, newsrooms’ hierarchies, and patterns of newsgathering. Concerning the international news flow, censorship and the presence of reporters in a specific region would undoubtedly play a role in news selection. For instance, Westerståhl and Johansson (1994) included in their model the factor “access” as a conditional variable.

Based on the hierarchical model of Shoemaker and Reese (2014[1996]), Hafez (2002) modelled a “theory of international and intercultural representation processes in mass media”, focusing precisely on foreign-reporting. The author’s theoretical

matrix comprises not only the content structures, their causes and processes of development but also the social effects of international and intercultural communication (Hafez, 2002, 2005). In order to understand the causes and effects of the media textual structures, the author integrates the political and social systems and distinguishes between three levels of analyses. The first one (the micro-sphere) observes the impact of personal and professional socialization of correspondents on media texts, i.e., how the self-understanding of their professional roles influences the media content. Here the focus lies on the authors of the articles (the journalist as an individuum). In the second (meso) level, the author explores the text as a product of a media organization, i.e., processes of information within an organized social system. For instance, here one considers the routine of news production and the hierarchy inside the newsrooms. Another critical question in this level is the relationship between editorial news offices and news agencies. How many articles are produced indeed by correspondents or just retrieved from these global agencies? In a final step, the macro-dimension concentrates on the relationship between media and social systems, i.e., the interaction between politics, media and society. For instance, the analysis of national influences on foreign news as proposed by Novais (2007, 2010) could be placed inside Hafez's matrix within the macro level, i.e. how governments through news' management attempt to influence or control the media.

Despite all levels of influence on the media content, this papers focuses solely on the structural characteristics of foreign reporting and not on its formation's conditions. Oriented by this short literature review of the news value's approach and the question of personification, one formulates following research questions:

RQ1: Does the factor personification play a similar role to all analysed periodicals? The hypothesis is that the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* should exhibit the most vigorous intensity, considering its editorial line and storytelling style³.

RQ2: Which types of individuals (eliteness), i.e. quoted actors, are presented in the more personified way?

RQ3: Which countries are strongest marked by personification (elite-nation)? We hypothesise that the factor has a more substantial role amidst the "invisible" states with less power status or economic proximity and nations with a high amount of political (ideological) coverage.

3 Methodology

3 1 Unit of analysis

This research considered at first the two most crucial quality German dailies that boast the most sizable number of correspondents in the region, namely the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (liberal and politically broad) and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (economically liberal but politically conservative). Besides, we also incorporated the market-leading political magazine in Germany (*Der Spiegel*). In addition to these three well-established publications, we also included the alternative *tageszeitung* (*taz*) due to its capacity of agenda-setting.

A study, for instance, published by Mathes and Pfetsch (1991) corroborated a “spin-over” effect from the traditional to the alternative press, a counter-issues’ flow initiated mostly by the *taz*. Moreover, as observed by an ex-foreign correspondent in Buenos Aires, just the channel “*das Zweite Deutsche Fernsehen*” (ZDF) and the publications the “*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*” (FAZ), the “*Süddeutsche Zeitung*” (SZ), the “*tageszeitung*” (*taz*), “*Der Spiegel*” and “*Die Zeit*” cover the continent consistently (I. Malcher, personal communication, 12 February 2018). Among these media outlets, we chose just the print media, considering that their news values comprise the results of journalistic selection amidst a highly competitive market (Harcup & O’Neill, 2017). Besides, the press possesses a strong impact on members of the public sphere, mainly official states deputies, legislators, politicians and socially organised groups and other decisionmakers (Jarren & Donges, 2011, p. 262). The term “nationwide newspapers” refers to those outlets whose journalistic outputs are disseminated in entire Germany. One did not incorporate regional newspapers because their emphasis relies mostly on local occurrences rather than global issues (Pürer & Raabe, 2007). Last but not least, several studies demonstrated that the prestigious press also exercises the role of opinion leadership, among other small publications (Jandura & Brosius, 2011).

Thus, the selection of periodicals considered three pivotal elements: readership’s size, impact on others communicators (intra-media agenda setting) and finally, political scope. The above-described publications exhibit the sizable sales volume and broader readership amidst the quality newspapers in the country (AWA, 2014; IVW, 2014). Concerning sales, *taz* is an exception. Nonetheless,

we still considered it to enlarge the political scope of our analysis (Noelle-Neumann et al., 2002, p. 435; Pürer & Raabe, 2007, p. 15). Lastly, we understand these outlets as “leading media” as discussed by the “hypothesis of coordination”, i.e., they have an impact on the coverage of other smaller publications (Brosius et al., 2009, p. 164)

3 2 Sample

Every article from the printed version of the above-described publications concerning the twenty Latin American states was selected, totalling a fifteen years corpus constituted by stories published between January 2000 and December 2014. At first, we listed every single contribution to systematise the central unit of analysis (21,929 articles). We excluded the news items from *SZ.de*, *FAZ.NET*, *taz.de* and *Der Spiegel Online*. This decision was based on a study that compared newspapers and their online versions among 18 European states. According to the results, 70% of the most relevant online news derives from their remarkably similar printed version (Wurff, 2008, p. 70). The instruction for the search criteria consisted of every mention of the word “Latin America” or its twenty countries and their respective capitals. The terminologies could appear not only in the headlines but also in the first paragraphs. It was also necessary to pay attention to the respective nations’ adjectives and its German declination to fine-tune the search criteria. *SZ* and *FAZ* have an online archive, while the databank *LexisNexis* supplied the contributions from *taz* and *Der Spiegel*. To guarantee that every single country would have the same probability of being included in the study, we had to draw a sample of 25% of the published texts within every single nation.

Besides, we set aside small texts (less than 150 words) because they show almost no news factors. Each n-4th printed articles (25% of the total) of a nation within the specific periodical was then chosen, according to the rotation principle. The prerequisites for a so-called layered sampling were accomplished since we were aware of the population’s distribution from the previous listing. The final sample comprises 3.831 articles. Lastly, we ran a Holsti coefficient reliability test considering a sampling of 5%, and the results showed a 94.3% overlap between the two coders.

3 3 Definitions of the coded categories

In order to study the actors of Latin America's foreign reporting and its grad of personification and prominence, we coded the types of individuals and the intensity of the two news factors as defined below.

3 3 1 Types of individuals

Official state representatives are actors who stand for the state or belong to the executive, legislative or judicial powers. Accordingly, this category includes individuals such as presidents, ministers, authorities, judges, mayors, as well as officially described functions.

Organised social groups are associations characterised by a fixed program or structure. Under this definition, one considers opposition parties, trade unions, NGOs, companies, financial institutions, corporations, social movements and guerrillas, banks, as well as universities, research institutes and churches. Representatives of such organisations as the pope or the chairman of a corporation should be coded here.

Non-organised groups are private individuals, ordinary people, who are not to be coded as representatives of the two former described categories. It is about regular citizens such as workers, farmers, homemakers and students.

Prominent personalities and celebrities refer to well-known individuals who cannot be classified within the previous categories. Examples include historical figures, famous former politicians, artists, actors, or directors.

Supranational organisations include, for instance, the United Nations (UN) and its sub-organisations such as Unesco, Unicef and other Latin American alliances.

3 3 2 Personification

In this paper, we measured personification based on Schulz (1976) and Staab (1990a)

0. Not identified. Not to be classified. People, names or titles are not mentioned at all in the stories, and it is mainly a matter of mere facts.

1. Low. Persons are named, but without relevance for the main event. The focus of the articles lies in simple processes and abstract facts.

2. Medium. At this intensity level, a described person is even in the foreground, but the main event revolves around abstract processes, or it can be expressed through the action of described persons. A person's behaviour or statement illustrates a described situation.

3. Large. One or more persons (no groups) are at the centre of the action. The event revolves around a few or a few described people. Individuals are the cause of the contributions or are the focus of the articles (e. g. Fidel Castro's disease and speculations about his state of health).

3 3 3 Prominence: the degree of actors' awareness.

Different from Schulz (1976, p. 135), we did not distinguish between "prominence" in the case of apolitical news and "personal influence" for the political coverage. The degree of a person's notoriety (i.e. the prominence), which is closely related to his or her political, cultural or social power was coded in the same way independently of the covered areas. Each individual, whether in political or non-political reporting, received points from zero to three according to his degree of fame - (0) ordinary and unknown people, (1) regional, (2) national and (3) international figures or politicians, artists or representatives of economic enterprises and organisations.

0. No prominence. Unknown people such as students, farmers, homemakers, workers.

1.Low. Regional exposure – politicians, businesspeople, manufacturers, producers, industrialists, employers, artists, athletes, religious leaders, lecturers, scientists who are known primarily at the regional level. Someone recognised in a particular scene.

2. Medium. National fame – same actors described above perceived especially at a national level. Candidates for presidential elections are also considered to be nationally known.

3. Biggest. International profile – same described actors, who are recognised especially on a global level.

9. Not to be classified. If the actor is not a person, for instance, just an institution or corporation without a representing individuum.

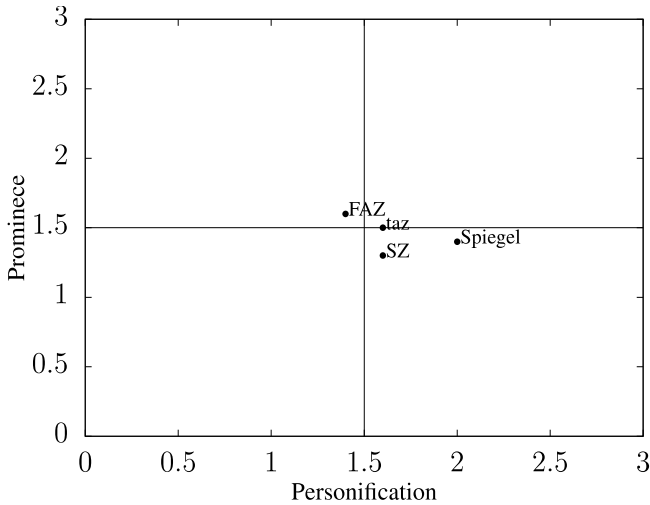
3 4 Qualitative expert interviews

Strictly speaking, one can provide through content analysis solely an overview of the content structures of reporting. However, based on these content characteristics, it is possible to make some inferences on communicator and recipients, even if several scholars pointed out the limitations of such analytical inferences (Früh, 2011, p. 44; Rössler, 2005, p. 32). One understands journalism as a social system, and thus its foreign reporting can be impacted by various mutual variables of influence (Weischenberg, 1994) and the content of foreign news is determined to a large extent by professional and institutional principles. Thus, we complemented our empirical analysis with eight semi-structured expert interviews with German correspondents to contextualise and interpret the results. During the coding process, we catalogued the journalists who contributed more often for the analysed media outlets. One considered at least one permanent or freelance contributor of the four examined publications. Since the findings of the press content analysis are, as discussed above, partially restricted, the interviews could clarify the production's procedures of Latin America's news coverage. On account of our budget, the dialogues were conducted either by email or Skype, according to the professionals' preference. To assure the findings' comparability, one designed an interview manual with five dimensions. Concerning the factor "personification", the questions were not explicitly formulated to avoid socially desirable responding (Flick et al., 2017). The discussion related to the news factor occurred within the examination of the Latin American Image and selection of stories and events. The interviews' process occurred between February and March 2018. The Skype conversations took between 40 and 80 minutes, and the written answers comprised between three and six pages. After authorisation, we recorded the Skype conversations and transcribed them with the assistance of F5 program. Even though all correspondents are fluent in Portuguese and/or Spanish, one conducted the interviews in their mother tongue (German). The examination of the interviews was based on the three step's methods of qualitative content analysis proposed by Mayring (2010), i.e., paraphrase, generalisation and reduction.

4 Results

Regarding the personification, in only 9.55 % of the contributions, we did not identify any mention to persons at all. The factor, regardless of its intensity's level, varies between 86.40 % (FAZ) and 94.60 % (taz), depending on the publication. Looking at its intensity, *Der Spiegel* has the highest personification average (2.0), which corresponds to the results of other studies, such as Africa's foreign reporting (Mükke, 2009, p. 147). That is related to the journalistic style of political magazines in general. The publication's correspondent explains its profile: "The *Spiegel* works as a news magazine, i.e., focusing on stories about people, telling their stories, and there are a bunch of well-known and fascinating characters in Latin America" (J. Glüsing, personal communication, 23 February 2018). Within the FAZ reporting on Latin America, abstract economic developments predominate, and the newspaper, therefore, has a low-intensity level of the factor (1.4), as Figure 1 illustrates. That was expected since many articles reported on the developments and course of the Latin American stock exchange, sometimes also without comments of specialists. The SZ and the taz exhibit the same intensity of personification, both with an average of 1.6. Since we are dealing with prestigious newspapers, the intensity of personification does not vary so much as could be in the case of tabloids. Still, the FAZ exhibits the smallest level, as expected, because financial dailies are inclined to represent news regarded collective actors, i.e. corporations. Besides, when analysing the factor's usage according to the authors of the articles, we noticed that the global news agencies show a smaller coefficient average (1.1) compared to the foreign-correspondents (1.6), travelling journalists (1.5) or editorial offices (1.5). That seems plausible since the wire services usually "limit themselves to the dissemination of pure news" (J. Oehrlein, personal communication, 22 February 2018), without so many reportages and background information. This result can be understood as an indicator of Staab's thesis, i.e., journalists and correspondents emphasise the factor after the selection of a specific event. The factor is not necessarily responsible for the selection of the portrayed event, but the correspondents can stress it. Furthermore, over the years, the average of personification did not change substantially, varying from 1.4 (2001–2002) to 1.7 (2007–2009 e 2011).

Figure 1: Levels of personification and prominence according to the publications.



Source: own authorship

To explore the level of prominence, we analysed the notoriety of every individual. In total, we coded 11.109 actors (maximum of three per article), among them 7,874 were related to persons. Within this amount, 36.8% had none prominence whatsoever, 12% showed a low level, 18.1% a medium and 33.1 % a higher grad of prominence. Regardless of its intensity, the factor “prominence” marked 63.2 % of all coded individuals. Concerning the number of contributions, the factor appeared in 94.4 % of the articles. In other words, only 5.6% of the texts showed all three coded actors without prominence. Besides, the intensity varies within the publications. The factor is often very pronounced in the FAZ and taz reports, with an average of 1.6 and 1.5 respectively. Both dailies tend to depict mostly the elites of the financial and/or political ruling class. For SZ (1.3) and *Der Spiegel* (1.4), this element seems to be less influential, although the difference between them is not significant.

Table 1: Types of actors according to the publications.

Actor /individuals	SZ	FAZ	taz	Spiegel
States representatives	32.3%	37.5%	34.8%	31.3%
Social organised groups	24.7%	29.1%	25.2%	20.9%
No organised groups (ordinary people)	21.2%	14.1%	18.1%	23.4%
Celebrities	16.7%	12.6%	17.4%	20.7%
Latin American regional organisations	0.5%	1.8%	0.8%	1.0%
Western international organisations	4.6%	5.0%	3.7%	2.7%

Source: own authorship

One can consider all analysed publications as elite-centred since ordinary citizens do not play a significant role in their respective coverage, as demonstrated in Table 1. Besides, FAZ shows the most substantial amount on states representatives (political elite) and socially organised groups (in that case, corporations and business enterprises). The magazine *Der Spiegel* distinguishes itself through the most substantial importance given to celebrities, which is also related to its journalistic style. Although the analysed media outlets show a more or less similar pattern of personification and prominence, the coverage of the financial oriented FAZ tends to be less personified and more elitist. On the other hand, *Der Spiegel* is marked by a vigorous intensity of personification (RQ1).

4 1 Prominence according to the types of individuals

Through the intensity's average of both news factors, it was possible to compare the degree of prominence among the types of actors. As expected, the "official state representatives" have the most vigorous intensity of prominence, followed by "prominent personalities and celebrities" with an average of 2.3 and 1.94, respectively, as shown in Table 2. State representatives are usually heads of government or foreign ministers (46.06%) who are internationally known or national politicians who are famous throughout the nation (14.52%). Among "prominent personalities and celebrities", 37.06 % referred to international names such as the Nobel Prize winners (Gabriel García Márquez, Octavio Paz) or

historical figures (Che Guevara or Simón Bolívar) and 28.11% to other national celebrities and artists.

Table 2: Level of prominence within the types of actors.

	Total number of actors	Average of prominence intensity	Average of personification intensity
Celebrities	1.743	1,94	1.88
States representatives	3.875	2,3	1.62
No organised groups (ordinary people)	1.981	0,04	1.57
Social organised groups	2.909	1,18	1.39
Latin American regional organisations	119	1,00	1.32
Western international organisations	482	0,94	1.23

Source: own authorship

Other studies referred to the factor “prominence” as a focus on elites (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Grant, 1985). Indeed, Hafez (2002, p. 71) observed that there is considerable overlap between the news value’s theory and other studies concerning the main characteristics of international news coverage. However, independently of the nomenclature, the results show that foreign reporting concentrates mostly on a small prominent circle of people. In the political field (political prominence), the coverage usually focuses on top politicians (Mükke, 2008, p. 139), i.e., figures of world politics or presidents, followed by national politicians such as ministers and secretaries of state. In the case of personification, celebrities tend to be portrayed in the most personified way, followed by states representatives. It was common to read profiles of head of states such as Lula, the Castros Brothers, Chávez, Morales, the Kirchners, among others. Around 90% of the state’s representatives regarded the executive, while people related to the legislative or judiciary were almost absent. That is related to the process of information-gathering abroad. The newspapers are mostly reliant on official sources (coded by us as “state representatives”) since they fulfil the criteria of credibility, authority and availability through their departments

of press relations (Ginneken, 1998). In general, celebrities and politicians (mostly among the executive) are portrayed in the most personalised way (RQ2). That explains why the area of “domestic politics” shows one of the highest intensity on personification, as we are going to demonstrate in the next section.

4 2 Personification and prominence in the covered areas

Generally speaking, small and medium levels of personification dominate Latin America reporting, regardless of portrayed country or area of coverage. However, if one first verifies the personification according to subject areas, the high-intensity levels of the factor appear in “celebrity, style and gossip” (2.1), followed by “domestic policy” (1.79) and “foreign policy and international affairs” (1.59). The degree of personification is high in the sector “celebrity, style and gossip” because of its focus on fashion, beauty, gossip and prominent personalities, although the grad of prominence is not extremely high (0.87). That is because the press reports mostly on Latin American celebrities, that are not necessarily well known globally (except gossips related to football stars). Commenting about Colombia’s foreign reporting, the correspondent of the SZ quoted several figures who were responsible for attracting considerable press attention. “Colombia has produced diverse characters as Gabriel García Márquez, Pablo Escobar, Ingrid Betancourt, Shakira and Tirofijo” (P. Burghardt, personal communication, 11 March 2018). In the case of “domestic and foreign policy”, many contributions deal with elections’ results and campaigns as well as with polemical statements by left-wing presidents such as Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales and the Castros brothers. “*Chávez, you can always write about Chávez*”, commented the *Spiegel* correspondent, “*and also the Castros in Cuba*” (J. Glüsing, personal communication, 23 February 2018).

Table 3: The intensity of the factors “personification” and “prominence” within the subject areas of reporting.

	Average of personification (0-3)	Average of prominence (0-3)
Celebrity, style and gossip	2.10	0.97
Domestic policy	1.79	1.76
Culture & society	1.71	1.20
Foreign policy & international affairs	1.59	1.99
Crime & delinquency	1.48	0.59
Social & social order	1.46	0.68
Environment & environmental policy	1.43	1.04
Research & technology	1.33	0.40
Disasters & accidents	1.03	0.50
Economy & finance	0.95	1.50

Source: own authorship

Accordingly, the subject areas of “domestic policy” and “international affairs” exhibit the most substantial intensity of prominence with an average of 1.76 and 1.99, respectively. Here it is possible to talk about political prominence since heads of state and governments mostly dominate the political reporting. In other words, the political status of an individual is decisive for the process of news selection (Mükke, 2009, p. 139). The sector of “economy and finance” also boasts an average of 1.5, which makes sense considering that the financial reporting is mostly dominated by economic ministers, central bank chairmen and other spokespeople of international banks, companies and organisations.

4 3 Personification and prominence according to countries

If one also observes the degree of prominence and personification amidst the countries, it is evident that the news factors play a significant role among the nations against the Washington consensus, notably Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia. That is not surprising since the reporting of these states focusses considerably on the polemical statements of their presidents. On the other hand, personification plays a less critical role for the “elite nations” within Latin America, i.e., countries such as Brazil, Mexico and Argentina with stronger “economic proximity” to

Germany (Cazzamatta, 2018). The coverage of these three countries is marked by a substantial financial coverage and small focus on domestic politics (at least until 2014) and thus exhibits a small number of “states representatives” as portrayed actors. Hence, the small prominence and personification, factors that are remarkably strong in general within the political coverage. With the election of Lopez Obrador in Mexico and Bolsonaro in Brazil, the amount of political coverage might have increased considerably, but it is still early to analyse its impact in the long run.

Table 4: Intensity of “personification” and “prominence” within the countries.

Countries	Average of personification (0-3)		Average of prominence (0-3)
Venezuela	1.82	Latin America	2.08
Nicaragua	1.77	Venezuela	2.07
Bolivia	1.72	Ecuador	2.02
Honduras	1.72	Honduras	1.85
Peru	1.72	Bolivia	1.82
Cuba	1.69	Nicaragua	1.77
El Salvador	1.69	Uruguay	1.60
Chile	1.66	Cuba	1.58
Dominican Republic	1.63	Peru	1.54
Paraguay	1.62	Chile	1.54
Colombia	1.61	Brazil	1.46
Guatemala	1.61	Panama	1.44
Costa Rica	1.57	Paraguay	1.43
Ecuador	1.5	Argentina	1.41
Haiti	1.48	Colombia	1.39
Mexico	1.46	Haiti	1.29
Argentina	1.45	Costa Rica	1.28
Latin America	1.44	Mexico	1.26
Brazil	1.36	El Salvador	1.01
Uruguay	1.31	Dominican Republic	0.93
Panama	1.23	Guatemala	0.83

Source: own authorship

Besides, in the case of the countries against the Washington consensus, the disputes with the USA are also relevant. It is therefore not surprising that the personification's factor is more strongly present in such countries. Venezuela exhibits the highest intensity level with an average of 1.82 because of its President Hugo Chavez. The articles not only emphasise his left-wing orientation – “Chavez probably does not even know what exactly his socialism of the 21st century should be” (FAZ, 12.01.2007) – but also his peculiar behaviour for a head of state: “President Chávez brings Merkel closer to Hitler” [...] (SZ, 13.05.2008). The conflict with the US also plays a crucial role: “But President Hugo Chávez does not give up so easily, especially when it comes to annoying the USA” (SZ, 26.10.2006).

Nicaragua (1.77) boasts the second most intense level of personification. Here the influence of the Venezuelan foreign policy seems to be decisive. “The rich uncle from Caracas: Nicaragua with its potentate Daniel Ortega also receives generous support, as does Ecuador of Rafael Correa and Bolivia of Evo Morales [...]” (SZ, 08. 10. 2012). The German press paid attention to this country mostly during the presidential elections, exploring the figure of Daniel Ortega and the memory of the Sandinista revolution, which was responsible for the conspicuous personification. The ex-Sandinista came to the foreground not only when he lost the presidential election in 2001 against the liberal candidate Enrique Bolaños but also when he regained power in 2006 and was re-elected in 2011.

Subsequently, Bolivia, Honduras and Peru (1.72) share the third place of personification's degree. In Bolivia, the figure Evo Morales was responsible for part of the press coverage. The correspondent Ingo Malcher commented, for instance, the media appeal of exciting personalities such as Evo Morales. “He is a fairy tale, and we (journalists) are storytellers by profession. Of course, we love the fairy tale, the coca farmer from the lowland Chapare region who had nothing, who founded a union, suddenly became president and that was in a completely democratic legitimate way, that was a beautiful story” (I. Malcher, personal communication, 12 February 2018). The Bolivian president belonged to the left-oriented governments of Latin America and was mostly described concerning his political stance against the Washington consensus.

In addition to Bolivia, Honduras also shows a high degree of personification, which can be explained by its event-centred reporting, focused mostly on the figure of President Manuel Zelaya and the coup d'état in 2009. The press also noted the connection with the former Venezuelan head of state Hugo Chávez and Honduras's membership in the Bolivarian Alternative Alliance of Our Americas (ALBA) from 2008 to 2010. "Zelaya made himself even more unpopular with his opponents because he increasingly followed the unruly Venezuelan Chávez and his regional alliance Alba" (SZ, 30. 06. 2009). The personalised figure of Chávez played a role in the coverage of other countries, such as Bolivia, Honduras or Ecuador. It seems that the entire governments of such nations were concentrated only on the figure of their president. Besides, the political analogy between Zelaya's and Chávez was emphasised continuously.

In the case of Peru, the intensity of personification is closely linked to the figure of the ex-President Alberto Fujimori. If one observes the reporting flow of the country over the years (2000–2014), the peak of media attention lies in the year 2000, when Fujimori massively manipulated the elections and his opponent Alejandro Toledo boycotted the run-off. The media attention of Peru is more or less stable in the year 2000. In April, Fujimori won the elections through strong falsification, which led to massive national and international demonstrations and his resignation in November 2000. The transitional government and the new elections in April 2001 still found some attention in the German press before the continuing Argentinean economic crisis replaced the interest in Peru (Karnofsky, 2007, p. 225). Then Fujimori attracted the media attention in 2007 again, when human rights violations and accusations of corruption were made against the exiled ex-president. Peru's political development during this period was only considered marginally. It seems that the figure of Fujimori per se has substantial news value.

Finally, El Salvador and Cuba (1.69) share the fourth place of the most significant personification's level among all the countries. El Salvador is responsible for only 1% of Latin American reporting (Cazzamatta, 2018), but it is among the nations with a high degree of personification. The highlight of the country's attention was a massive earthquake in 2001, and

the press reported accordingly personalised to illustrate the lives and situation of the victims. In the case of natural disasters, personification is not necessarily associated with prominence, because the life of the ordinary citizens comes to the foreground. Nevertheless, the German press usually focuses on prominent politicians from El Salvador, namely the left-wing candidate Mauricio Funes, who won the 2009 election.

El Salvador rarely appeared in the German press; however, in 2009 a former Marxist rebel of the National Liberation Front Farabundo Marti (FMLB) won the presidential election. It was the first time in two decades that a left-wing president was elected, awaking the press attention. Since the left-wing wave in Latin America and the past of the candidates or their involvement with the guerrillas had considerable news value, this election in El Salvador received more attention than usual. Different from El Salvador, Cuba ranks in the fourth place of press attention, just after Brazil, Argentina and Mexico (Cazzamatta, 2018). The interest in the figures and personalities of the Castro brothers is responsible for the enormous intensity of personification within the Cuban reporting.

“Controversial personalities usually met the interest of the editorial offices when they made a name for themselves for some reason” (J. Oehrlein, personal communication, 22 February 2018). The *Spiegel* correspondent, for example, explains his choice of topics as follows: “I love to write about people, about interesting people, curious ones and there is a bunch of them in Latin America” (J. Glüsing, personal communication, 23 February 2018). Since the factor has high news value, political reporting remains very personified, which may lead to decontextualisation. The more polemic and controversial the figure of the president, the more likely it is to report on a nation's domestic politics. It is therefore not surprising that the countries with the highest personification intensity (Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Honduras) also show a significant number of political coverage. The role of members of parliament and other less prominent politicians, as well as political processes and developments, are instead in the background and are given minimal attention. It seems that a controversial figure of a president is the most crucial factor for political coverage.

5 Conclusion and discussion

Personification is a typical method used by communicators to make news more compelling for the audiences. As Staab (1990a) discussed, they can even ascribe the factor to an event or emphasise it to get it covered. This strategy, investigated for more than 50 years within the news values' theory, is still in vogue and widespread among journalist and correspondents. Nonetheless, the intensity of personification and even prominence is contingent on editorial decisions.

The factor personification appeared independent of its intensity in 90.5% of the contributions. Only 9.5 % of the articles did not mention a person at all. Small (37.80 %) and medium (40.41%) levels dominate most of the articles. Under the publications, *Der Spiegel* shows the most substantial intensity's level, what was expected, considering the journalistic style of the magazine, which boasts more space for interviews and the depiction of personal fates. The economically oriented FAZ, on the other hand, has the lowest value because the newspaper sometimes reports on economic developments without quoting any individuals or corporations' representatives. Its coverage is the less personified but the most elitist with the strongest prominence among the actors. Although the analysed periodical are more or less similar concerning the importance given to both factors, one can still note different editorial choices (RQ1).

Besides, the personification is dominant in the area of "celebrity, style and gossip", which often reports on the lives of celebrities, their fashion and rumours. The tendency is followed by "domestic policy" and "foreign policy and international affairs". Under the types of individuals, celebrities and politicians (mostly head of states) tend to be presented in a more personified way (RQ2). Left-oriented presidents (e. g. Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales or the Castro brothers), ex-revolutionary leaders who became presidents (the former Marxist rebel of the National Liberation Front in El Salvador, Mauricio Funes, and the Sandinista Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua), ex-dictator (Alberto Fujimori or Augusto Pinochet) and overthrown presidents (Manuel Zelaya in Honduras) received the most significant personified depictions.

Observing the intensity of the news factor personification within the countries, Venezuela took the first place, followed

by Nicaragua. In the third place are Bolivia, Honduras and Peru followed by El Salvador and Cuba. On the other hand, nations with a more extensive media attention and better thematic diversity (Brazil, Mexico and Argentina), i.e., a smaller focus on politics, reveal a weaker degree of personification (RQ3). The relation between personification and prominence and the dominance of political coverage is intelligible. Problematic here is the ultimate focus of the political reporting on the figure of the head of states, that might lead to the contextualisation since political developments and the actions of the legislative and judiciary play just a marginal role. Further analyses should investigate if this level of personification related to Latin America's news coverage can be replicated in other Europeans media systems and if the overall intensity of its usage changed in the case of Brazil after the political turmoil initiated in 2016.

NOTES

- 1 Frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity and composition (independent of cultural boundaries), in addition to the reference to elite nations, to elite people, personification and negative occurrences, this last four saw as culture-tied.
- 2 It refers to countries that receive more coverage than statistically expected, according to their power status and economic proximity to Germany.
- 3 The weekly is famous for its investigative and critical journalism and the publication of various political scandals. Besides, the publication exhibits a typical journalistic style, merging facts and interpretations and presenting political developments oriented on personal stories (Pürer & Raabe, 2007). Indeed, one of the principal critics related to the periodical is its massive orientation on the factor personification (Meyn, 2012)

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RESEARCH FUNDING: this article received financial support from the DAAD/Cnpq partnership [290017/2014-9].