

ARTICLE

# WHAT MAKES AN ISSUE RELEVANT TO NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS?

## An empirical approach to criteria of editorial-worthiness



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**ABSTRACT** – Although journalism studies rely on a well-grounded debate about news values, there are fewer investigations about the values used to select a topic in newspaper editorials. By tackling the concept of editorial-worthiness, this article aims to empirically examine which editorial values influence how news organizations build their institutional opinions. Methodologically, we use content analysis to find out what makes a topic worth being addressed in 840 editorials published by *Folha de S. Paulo* and *O Estado de S. Paulo* (two Brazilian mainstream newspapers) in 2007 and 2017. Our results reveal that “topicality,” “the power elite,” and “conflict” are the most frequent editorial values in both organizations, showing some parallel with news values, although not a complete overlap. Lastly, our framework provides a key contribution to disclosing the similarities and singularities typical of different cultures concerning editorial journalism, offering the opportunity to think about journalism research and practice more broadly.

**Keywords:** Journalism studies. News values. Criteria of editorial-worthiness. Editorial journalism. Editorial values.

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## O QUE TORNA UM ASSUNTO RELEVANTE PARA EDITORIAIS JORNALÍSTICOS?

### Uma abordagem empírica sobre os critérios de editorialidade

**RESUMO** – Embora os estudos sobre jornalismo partam de um debate consolidado sobre valores notícia, existem menos investigações a respeito dos valores utilizados para selecionar um assunto em editoriais. Partindo do conceito de editorialidade, este artigo procura examinar empiricamente quais valores editoriais influenciam em como as organizações noticiosas constroem suas opiniões institucionais. Metodologicamente, usamos Análise de Conteúdo para descobrir o que faz um assunto ser abordado em 840 editoriais publicados por Folha de S. Paulo e O Estado de S. Paulo em 2007 e 2017. Os resultados mostram que “topicalidade”, “élites” e “conflito” são os valores editoriais mais frequentes nas duas publicações, mostrando algum paralelo com os valores notícia, embora não haja uma sobreposição completa. Nosso trabalho oferece uma contribuição crucial para revelar similaridades e singularidades típicas de diferentes culturas editoriais, oferecendo a oportunidade de refletir sobre pesquisa e prática jornalística de forma mais ampla.

**Palavras-chave:** Estudos de jornalismo. Valores notícia. Critérios de editorialidade. Jornalismo editorial. Valores editoriais.

## QUÉ DEBE TENER UN ASUNTO PARA QUE SEA DISCUTIDO EN EDITORIALES?

### Un enfoque empírico para los criterios de editorialidad

**RESUMEN** – Aún que los estudios sobre periodismo estén consolidados acerca de los valores noticia, hay menos investigaciones acerca de los valores que se usan para seleccionar un asunto en editoriales. Este artículo parte del concepto de editorialidad para analizar empíricamente que valores editoriales afectan como los media crean sus opiniones institucionales. Nosotros usamos análisis de contenido para averiguar lo que hace que un asunto sea tratado en 840 editoriales publicados por Folha de S. Paulo y O Estado de S. Paulo, dos de los principales periódicos de Brasil. Los resultados muestran que “topicalidad”, “élites”, y “conflicto” son los valores editoriales más frecuentes en los dos periódicos, revelando semejanza con valores noticia, aún que no haya superposición total. Nuestro trabajo ofrece una importante contribución para revelar semejanza y singularidad de distintas culturas editoriales, con la oportunidad de reflexionar acerca de la investigación y practica periodística de forma más amplia.

**Palabras clave:** Estudios sobre periodismo. Valores noticia. Critérios de editorialidad. Periodismo editorial. Valores editoriales.

## 1 Introduction

Around 2:30 AM on January 27, 2013, there was a fire at the Kiss Nightclub, located in the Brazilian city of Santa Maria, during a party organized by college students. After one of the bands performing that night let off fireworks inside the club, the flare then ignited flammable acoustic foam in the ceiling. The number of people inside the club exceeded the maximum capacity, and there were not enough emergency exits, which led to 242 deaths and 680 people

injured. This was the second deadliest fire in Brazil and the third largest tragedy in nightclubs in the world.

As expected, the event dominated news coverage in the following days, being the headline of Brazil's leading newspapers and TV news shows. However, when we look at the editorial pages of the mainstream publications in the country, the fire was not so frequently addressed. What explains that an event that receives high newsworthiness does not draw the same attention when newspapers present their opinions? To answer this question, we need to go beyond the debate on news values and explore what values explain the selection of news media's editorials.

The discussion concerning news values is well-grounded in journalism studies. A large array of theoretical and methodological tools has been developed to understand which requisites an event must fulfill to be newsworthy (Gans, 1979; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001; Traquina, 2005). Indeed, the news values proposed after the seminal study by Galtung and Ruge (1965) have been tested in different contexts (Bednarek & Caple, 2017; Brighton & Foy, 2007; Dalpiaz, 2011; Fontcuberta, 1993; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001, 2016; Preston, 2015; Silva et al., 2014). Nevertheless, informing is not the single role journalism plays, and opinion texts still suggest agendas and frames to the public, playing a significant role in helping people forge their positions (Eilders, 1999; Espinosa, 2003; Firmstone, 2019a).

This is the case of newspaper editorials, aimed to present an organization's opinion on issues of public concern. Editorials are relevant because they dialogue directly with elites, intervene in political debates, and call on political actors to act in a particular way (Hallock, 2007; Izadi & Saghaye-Biria, 2007; Melo, 2003; Mont'Alverne et al., 2018). However, literature has shown that such pieces address a more limited selection of topics when compared to news (Billeaudeau et al., 2003; Firmstone, 2019a; Fogoaga, 1982; Lule, 2002; Meltzer, 2007; Ryan, 2004). Still, the requisites an event requires to be addressed in editorials are not evident in journalism scholarship. I.e., research has yet to comprehensively assess how news organizations build their positions and which aspects are relevant in editorials' production (Eilders, 1999; Firmstone, 2008; Marques & Mont'Alverne, 2021).

This article sets out to analyze the criteria aimed to drive editorials' writing and publishing in newspapers. More specifically,

departing from a model for carving out editorial values, we test such a model against empirical analysis. According to Marques and Mont'Alverne (2021), the concept of criteria of editorial-worthiness consists of (a) editorial values and (b) editorial factors, further divided into 25 items assigned to examining the elements influencing how news organizations build their opinions. However, notwithstanding the theoretical innovation, the authors and other scholars propose, the values and factors at stake still need empirical validation.

To overcome the little empirical research to date on the issue, we analyze 840 editorials published over two years (2007 and 2017) by two of the leading Brazilian quality papers: *Folha de S.Paulo* (FSP) and *O Estado de S. Paulo* (OESP). We argue that analyzing different periods may highlight some particularities regarding editorial characteristics throughout time (for example, to gather evidence for the stability of some editorial values).

This study contributes to the international community by helping to de-westernize journalism research, as strongly suggested over the last years (Cushion, 2008; Hallin & Mancini, 2012; Hanusch & Vos, 2019; Pfetsch & Berlin, 2015; Waisbord & Mellado, 2014). Journalism in Brazil combines elements from different media systems, such as separating news from opinion, strong ties between media elites and politicians or businesspeople, and high ownership concentration (Guerrero & Márquez-Ramírez, 2014). Such traits allow us to test the empirical validity of the criteria of editorial-worthiness in a context that mixes an authoritarian tradition in politics and news (Albuquerque, 2010) with attempts to replicate the mainstream American practice of journalism. There is another reason why this investigation is timely: our framework allows us to acknowledge the characteristics of published editorials even if we take into account news organizations from different countries and professional cultures (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2009; Willig, 2012).

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The next section discusses the concept of editorial-worthiness, departing from a parallel between editorial and news values. Then, we detail the research design, presenting our research question, data collection, and the operationalization of variables. After presenting the results, we review the research findings, as well as the theoretical and practical implications of our study to the research agenda.

## 2 Literature review

Newspaper editorials are unsigned texts intended to express institutional opinions about relevant public matters (Armañanzas & Nocí, 1996; Firmstone, 2019a; Hallock, 2007; Melo, 1985). Accordingly, editorials play a double role: they both guide readers (offering them an interpretation concerning the significant issues at stake in a given moment) and are responsible for building the public image associated with a media brand (Arbex Júnior, 1987; Artemas et al., 2018; Eilders, 1999; Firmstone, 2019a; Guerreiro Neto, 2016).

Besides summarizing the opinions a news organization holds, editorial texts emphasize actors and perspectives worthy of being addressed according to the perspectives of a newspaper's editorial board (Firmstone, 2008; Gronemeyer & Porath, 2015; Marques & Mont'Alverne, 2021). Accordingly, editorials are directly linked to the social status and credibility the public attributes to a media organization (Firmstone, 2008; Lule, 2002).

Usually, only trusted professionals are assigned to write editorials since this kind of content requires familiarity with the positions organizations historically adopt (Firmstone, 2008; Mont'Alverne et al., 2018; Oakes, 1964). Since the opinions expressed in editorials do not necessarily belong to the individual who writes them, one expects their production to be driven by principles aimed to ensure some coherence even if the editorial board changes over time. Therefore, newsroom managers assume that editorialists are aware of the differences between private opinions and the opinions an organization sustains through editorials (Meltzer, 2007; Oakes, 1964; Wilhoit & Drew, 1991).

To discuss the principles and rules guiding the construction of institutional opinions, we depart from a parallel between editorial and news production values. Thus, we deem it appropriate to discuss editorial-worthiness based on a brief recognition of newsworthiness.

When explaining why some events become news, Gans (1979) stresses that news stories must be relevant (involving public issues, especially the government performance) or interesting (e.g., people stories). De Vreese (2005) suggests internal and external factors influencing news production routines, such as the role of editors' preferences for some political leanings, the pressure politicians and other interest groups exert over news organizations, and the grammar of journalism as a professional activity (which requires reporters to

be attentive to elements like the number of people affected by an event). To summarize, a newsworthy event is generally relevant or interesting enough to have the potential of becoming news (Albæk et al., 2019; Harcup, 2019).

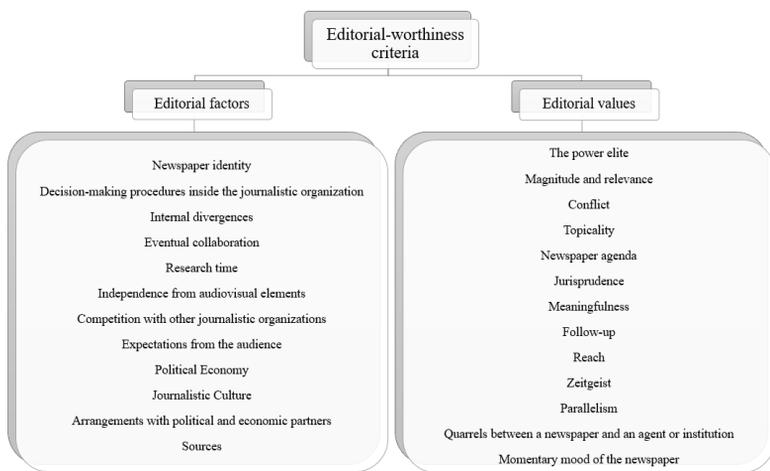
Considering this idea, we ask if and to what extent the making of editorials is affected by the same values influencing news making. From a theoretical and practical point of view, there are noticeable differences between editorial and news – for example, editorials comment on a narrower scope of topics than the news section, focusing more on politics or the economy, while news cover a broader range of aspects, including sports or entertainment (Marques et al., 2020; Orosa et al., 2013). This is also a sign of how selective editorials need to be, considering that only a few of them are published daily. Meanwhile, news organizations produce hundreds of stories in the same period. The issues discussed in editorials may reveal how news organizations express their priorities (Eilders, 1997). Accordingly, it is common for news organizations to use editorials to reinforce their principles and interests on some issues (Eilders, 1999; Firmstone, 2008), as well as to build their identity before the public (Baym, 2000; Golan, 2010).

## 2.1 What does editorial-worthiness mean?

The literature explaining editorials' production routines is relatively scarce. A clear systematization concerning why an issue is discussed in newspaper editorials has only emerged over the last decades. Firmstone (2008) lists four central values accounting for the selection of issues in institutional opinions: the news values themselves; the importance the editorial board assigns to a topic; the presumed interest of the audience; the broader media debate (i.e., the extent to which a topic is being reported or commented on in other news outlets). Another contribution comes from Marques and Mont'Alverne (2021). The authors developed the idea of criteria of editorial-worthiness, aimed to encompass a set of requisites an event must achieve to be discussed in editorials. By considering Firmstone and other authors (Bednarek & Caple, 2017; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001, 2016; Meltzer, 2007; Oakes, 1964; Wiggins, 1942), Marques and Mont'Alverne (2021) employed a deductive method to sketch the categories Figure 1 displays.

**Figure 1**

*Criteria of editorial-worthiness*



Source: Marques and Mont'Alverne (2021).

Marques and Mont'Alverne (2021) divide the criteria of editorial-worthiness into two dimensions: (a) editorial values – elements empirically identifiable by studying the texts themselves through their content – and (b) editorial factors – contextual and institutional aspects that cannot be verified by directly analyzing the opinionated pieces because they are linked to organizational idiosyncrasies or interests external to the journalistic field. Nevertheless, the authors do not discuss the challenges of empirically applying such values and factors.

We argue that the empirical distinction between editorial values and editorial factors asks for different research methods to test the concept of editorial-worthiness. I.e., editorial factors can only be observed by carrying out *in loco* analyses in newsrooms, using ethnographic approaches or interviews. Editorial values, in turn, are identifiable by investigating the texts using content analysis, for example. Therefore, this article empirically examines the editorial values proposed in the theoretical model presented above. Chart 1 describes the meaning of each editorial value shown in Figure 1.

**Chart 1***Editorial values*

Editorial value	Description
The power elite	Readiness to mention people holding prominent positions.
Magnitude and relevance	Coverage of an event due to its social relevance or amount of people affected by them.
Conflict	The existence of controversies draws the attention of newspaper editorials.
Topicality	This value considers the preference for dealing with events present on the public agenda at a given moment.
Newspaper agenda	An issue can be addressed in editorials mainly because it is important to the newspaper itself, even if it is not a "hot" issue.
Jurisprudence	Previous editorial decisions work as a guideline for later manifestations on related topics.
Meaningfulness	The tendency to prioritize subjects in which a newspaper has a higher chance of having its opinion publicly considered or respected.
Follow-up	Editorials may cover the same topic when controversies or events of social repercussion persist in the public debate over a long time and meet the newspaper's interest.
Reach	The primary geographic scope of a journalistic organization is also considered when deciding what editorials will address.
Zeitgeist	Depending on the transformations that each society undergoes over time, it may be no longer acceptable to defend specific arguments in public. The making of an editorial also considers the spirit of the time and the milieu where texts are published.
Parallelism	This editorial value has to do with the ideological adherence of news organizations to institutions or ideologies from other fields.
Quarrels between a newspaper and an agent or institution	The antagonism of a newspaper toward a specific authority or leader can be cultivated over the years, guiding the production of adversarial editorials.
The momentary mood of the newspaper toward people or institutions	The resistance of a newspaper expressed through editorials toward someone or something may also be temporary.

Source: adapted from Marques and Mont'Alverne (2021).

At this point, it is relevant to highlight the similarities that editorial values share with news values. Indeed, Firmstone (2008) and Marques and Mont'Alverne (2021) suggest that some news values may also work as editorial values. This means that news and editorial values are somewhat linked to general rules driving journalism practices. To illustrate, the values listed in figure 1 concerning news values are: "The power elite," "Magnitude and relevance," "Conflict," "Topicality," "Meaningfulness," "Reach," and "Follow-up."

Accordingly, previous studies focused on the work of editorialists who served mainstream newspapers (Guerreiro Neto, 2016; Meltzer, 2007; Mont'Alverne et al., 2018) revealed their mechanisms to decide if a topic should be tackled in editorials are similar to news values. However, such professionals also stated that sometimes not all newsworthy events are necessarily editorial-worthy – mainly because opinionated pieces might require a more prominent element of conflict. Plus, some editorial values are uniquely tied to a newspaper's opinions and interests. This is the case for: "Newspaper agenda," "Jurisprudence," "Zeitgeist," "Parallelism," "Quarrels between a newspaper and an agent or institution," and "Momentary mood of the newspaper."

To the best of our knowledge, no work to date has proposed empirically approaching the idea of criteria of editorial-worthiness with the detailed framework that this manuscript presents. We then underline the importance of this article as a first approach to this vital question concerning journalism studies, exploring the opportunity to grasp how editorial values have been applied in the real world. Since this is an exploratory article, we pose the following research question:

RQ: Which editorial values are present in editorial texts published by two Brazilian mainstream quality papers?

### 3 Methods

To test the prominence of the editorial values empirically, we use content analysis to assess 840 editorials published in 2007 and 2017 in two leading news organizations in Brazil: Folha de S.Paulo (FSP, n=333) and O Estado de S. Paulo (OESP, n=507). The time-lapse

of ten years allows for a more profitable comparison regarding the newspapers' emphasis over time and the stability of the editorial values in different periods.

There are some reasons for selecting these two publications and the sample this research encompasses. First, both news outlets prize the separation between news and opinion, inspired by the American model of journalism (Lage et al., 2004; Silva, 1990). Second, FSP and OESP have national reach and address political and economic elites (Azevedo, 2016; Lattman-Weltman & Chagas, 2016). Another characteristic of FSP and OESP is their role as agenda-setters for other Brazilian newsrooms – a phenomenon the literature has called *intermedia agenda-setting* (Azevedo, 2018). Moreover, previous findings advocated that both newspapers follow specific procedures to build their institutional opinions (Guerreiro Neto, 2016; Mont'Alverne et al., 2018), which helps to explain the disparity regarding the number of editorials published by each newspaper: OESP usually publishes three editorials per day, while FSP publishes two pieces.

Folha de S.Paulo and O Estado de S. Paulo present a fair amount of trust by Brazilians – more than 55% of them declare they trust these organizations (Newman et al., 2021). Furthermore, they have historically taken a relevant place in the Brazilian landscape (Lattman-Weltman & Chagas, 2016), influencing significant events in the country's democracy in the last 30 years, such as elections and presidential impeachments (Albuquerque, 2019; Marques et al., 2021; Matos, 2008; Mourão, 2019; Nava & Marques, 2019). OESP has had a history of clearly stating its political opinions since its founding. After the military dictatorship, OESP usually endorsed presidential candidates from the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB)<sup>1</sup> (Mont'Alverne, 2020). FSP has a different approach when it comes to supporting candidates. It avoids doing so because it claims to be a nonpartisan organization (Azevedo, 2016; Mont'Alverne et al., 2018), even though the newspaper chose Marta Suplicy as the best option in the 2000 Mayoral elections in São Paulo<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, FSP defended former President Collor's resignation in 1992<sup>3</sup>. Some years later, in 2016, FSP claimed for Rousseff's resignation<sup>4</sup>, but the then-president stayed in charge until being impeached by Congress. Her vice-president, Michel Temer, took her place and, after a series of corruption scandals, was also asked to be ousted by the newspaper's editorials in 2017 (Matos, 2008; Marques et al., 2020; Mont'Alverne, 2020).

Last, we acknowledge that investigating two newspapers is not enough to generalize our findings to other contexts. Notwithstanding, our option for two elite-oriented publications is a starting point to test the empirical validity of the editorial-worthiness criteria proposed by the theoretical literature. Due to their similarities, including how they share the main topics discussed in editorials, as previous works indicate (Marques et al., 2020), we could expect FSP and OESP to share the editorial-worthiness criteria. On the other side, editorials are a space that organizations can use to reinforce differences compared to competitors, resulting in different criteria to produce these pieces.

The corpus encompasses a week of each month of 2007 and 2017. I.e., we considered editorials published in 24 weeks. This procedure offers a more representative sample since it is not limited to periods taken over by a specific issue, allowing us to evaluate ordinary coverage. We chose these two years because 2017 was the last non-electoral year completed at the time when our classification was carried out, and 2007 since it marks ten years before 2017. Chart 2 presents the weeks we examine in both publications. All editorials published on these dates were analyzed.

## Chart 2

### *Weeks considered for empirical analysis*

2007	2017
From 01/01/2007 to 07/01/2007	From 02/01/2017 to 08/01/2017
From 12/02/2007 to 18/02/2007	From 13/02/2017 to 19/02/2017
From 19/03/2007 to 25/03/2007	From 20/03/2017 to 26/03/2017
From 23/04/2007 to 29/04/2007	From 24/04/2017 to 30/04/2017
From 07/05/2007 to 13/05/2007	From 01/05/2017 to 07/05/2017
From 11/06/2007 to 17/06/2007	From 12/06/2017 to 18/06/2017
From 16/07/2007 to 22/07/2007	From 17/07/2017 to 23/07/2017
From 20/08/2007 to 26/08/2007	From 21/08/2017 to 27/08/2017
From 03/09/2007 to 09/09/2007	From 04/09/2017 to 10/09/2017
From 08/10/2007 to 14/10/2007	From 09/10/2017 to 15/10/2017
From 19/11/2007 to 25/11/2007	From 20/11/2017 to 26/11/2017
From 24/12/2007 to 31/12/2007	From 25/12/2017 to 31/12/2017

We built a codebook to identify editorial values in the texts comprising our sample. The editorial values listed in chart 1 were transformed into variables to verify their presence or absence. We decided to merge some of them into the same variable to make possible our article's empirical operationalization (namely, when the differences among the editorial values were more theoretical than empirical). This is the case for "Magnitude and Relevance," which encompasses two other variables: "Meaningfulness" and "Reach." "Political parallelism" also combines "Historic of quarrels" and "Momentary mood" since they are all values associated with organizations' assessment of political actors that rely on endorsement or rejection toward them or their ideas. In other words, we combined editorial values when we identified some overlap regarding their attributes. Also, two editorial values previously presented in Chart 1 – "Newspaper agenda" and "Zeitgeist" – could not be evaluated directly from the texts, given they are contextual elements that cannot be directly assessed (which led us to exclude them). This is one of the shortcomings we found regarding the editorial values proposed by Marques and Mont'Alverne (2021), suggesting that their model needs adaptations to be operationalized empirically.

The classification procedure was carried out by four coders specifically trained for this study – all of them are familiar with the literature on editorial journalism. Chart 3 displays which variables they coded, which editorial values the variables encompass, and the results of the reliability tests we run.

### Chart 3

#### *Variables and reliability level*

Variables	Reliability level (Krippendorff's alpha)
Theme	0,84
Specific theme	0,75
Magnitude and relevance (Meaningfulness and Reach are merged with this one)	0,81
Follow-up	There were not enough occurrences to apply the reliability test
Topicality	0,28
The power elite	0,77
Conflict	0,55
Jurisprudence	There were not enough occurrences to apply the reliability test
Political parallelism (Historic of quarrels and Momentary mood are merged with this one)	0,49 (support to an actor or party) and 0,57 (opposition to an actor or party)

Some of the variables presented a low rate of confidence, such as “Topicality,” “Conflict,” and “Political parallelism.” This can be explained due to the number of texts we used for the reliability test. Since we considered about 3% of our sample in Krippendorff's alpha test (Lacy et al., 2015), few disagreements between the coders had a significant impact on the results. Since we present an exploratory analysis with a newly developed theoretical framework, we argue that our results are still relevant to journalism studies. Specifically about “Topicality,” coders struggled to reach an agreement on whether or not there was an event triggering the editorial. We believe this happened due to the nature of journalistic content. That is, different events or issues are often mentioned in texts, even if they are not necessarily the main reason for publishing the editorial.

Furthermore, to find out whether the editorial values at stake could eventually be generalized to more than a single news organization, we applied the chi-square test to investigate if and to

what extent there is an association between an editorial value and a specific newspaper. After that, we calculated the standardized residuals (to measure how strong is the difference between observed and expected values in a chi-square test) to assess if their frequency is significantly different in each news outlet. Finally, when we found a strong association between an editorial value and a publication, we also ran the Cramer's V test to gauge how strong such an association is (Field, 2005).

About our variables, it is worth mentioning that "Theme," "Specific theme," and "Magnitude and relevance" are categorical ones, while "Follow-up," "Topicality," "The power elite," "Conflict," "Jurisprudence," and "Political parallelism" are dichotomous. The unit of analysis is the editorial, meaning that each variable can be coded once in each text. Furthermore, the variables were coded for all editorials in the corpus, and there is no hierarchy concerning the main editorial values in a piece. We present the details of each variable in the codebook in our supplementary material, which is available to the reader. Moreover, we understand that an issue does not necessarily meet all the criteria of editorial-worthiness to be addressed in editorials. In addition, some of them may be more relevant than others, depending on a newspaper's interests and ideologies, for example.

The following section starts by detailing the main themes of the editorials in our sample. We also categorized their specific themes regarding "Politics" since quality papers focus on political coverage over other issues (Eilders, 1999; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Coding the theme and subtheme of each text allows us to identify when the editorial value "Follow-up" is present since it underlines if the same topic continues to be addressed over time.

## 4 Results

When it comes to the themes editorial pieces discuss, both newspapers clearly emphasize "Politics," which accounts for more than 85% of the texts. The results show that "Economy" comes in second place in the publications under analysis. "Social Issues" is the third topic more frequently discussed by FSP. However, in OESP's case, more editorials debated "Other topics" instead of "Social Issues." The

chi-square test pointed to no significant association between a theme addressed in editorials and a specific newspaper, suggesting that both FSP and OESP follow similar patterns regarding the issues their editorials deal with.

**Chart 4**

*Theme*

Issue	FSP		OESP	
	N	%	N	%
Politics	283	85	451	89
Economy	25	7,5	33	6,5
Social Issues	17	5,1	10	2
Other	8	2,4	13	2,6
Total	333	100	507	100

The results displayed in Chart 5 reveal a statistically significant association between a newspaper and the specific themes regarding “Politics” it discusses. However, the diversity among the specific themes addressed by both publications is not prominent since there are no topics intensely overrepresented or underrepresented in the sample, as can be seen by observing the standardized residuals. To illustrate how similar both publications have been concerning the specific issues in “Politics” they address, consider that the two most frequent subthemes are “Economic policies” and “Other public policies” – e.g., environmental or educational policies.

## Chart 5

### *Specific theme<sup>5</sup>*

The specific themes in Politics	FSP			OESP		
	N	%	SR	N	%	SR
Institutional norms	18	5,4	-2,3	60	11,8	1,9
Political game	20	6	-1,2	46	9,1	1
Elections	3	0,9	-0,1	5	1	0,1
Economic policies	62	18,6	-1,2	121	23,9	1
Other public policies	91	27,3	1,7	102	20,1	-1,3
Assessment of political agents and institutions	7	2,1	-0,5	14	2,8	0,4
Corruption and investigations	36	10,8	0,6	46	9,1	-0,5
International policies	39	11,7	1,1	43	8,5	-0,9
Political ideology	6	1,8	-0,1	10	2	0,1
Other	1	0,3	-0,7	4	0,8	0,6
Total	283	85	--	451	89	--

Chart 6 presents the frequency of the editorial values and their association with each publication. Only the dichotomous values are shown in Chart 6. The percentages are relative to the number of editorials analyzed in each newspaper. Chart 6 does not include all editorials values studied because those coded as dichotomous variables are not comparable with categorical variables. According to the results, “Topicality” and “The power elite” are among the most important elements to explain the requisites an event must fulfill to be commented on in editorials. Furthermore, the recurrence of “Topicality,” “The Power Elite,”

and “Jurisprudence” is not associated with a specific newspaper, meaning that such values are routinely employed independently from the news outlet under analysis.

### Chart 6

#### *Editorial values<sup>6</sup>*

Editorial value	FSP			OESP		
	N	%	SR	N	%	SR
Follow-up*	10	3	-1,9	36	7,1	1,6
Topicality	205	61,6	-0,1	314	61,9	0
The power elite	221	66,4	-0,2	345	68	0,2
Conflict**	171	51,4	-2,1	334	65,9	1,7
Jurisprudence	9	2,7	0,7	9	1,8	-0,6
Parallelism (positive)*	56	16,8	-1,5	116	22,9	1,2
Parallelism (negative)*	149	44,7	-1,5	277	54,6	1,2

“Jurisprudence” is an editorial value present in only a few texts. However, every time FSP and OESP mentioned an opinion defended by the newspaper in previous editorials, they reinforced it.

Furthermore, the association between “Follow-up” and each newspaper is statistically significant; the same happens to the association between “Parallelism” and each publication. Notwithstanding, the standardized residuals point out that these editorial values are not overrepresented or underrepresented in the sample<sup>7</sup>. This does not mean that FSP and OESP are aligned with the same parties or political actors, but that they express agreements or criticism towards them following a similar frequency.

Also, according to the standardized residuals displayed in Chart 6, the single editorial value suggesting a more significant association with a specific newspaper is “Conflict.” The data for FSP indicate that this news organization addressed fewer conflicts than expected in its editorials. This result might be linked with the

newspaper editorial board itself. Accordingly, FSP's opinion editors recently acknowledged that the editorials the newspaper publishes tend to have a more informative tone (Mont'Alverne et al., 2018), while OESP's editors consider such opinion pieces as opportunities to present a strong statement about the issues under analysis (Guerreiro Neto, 2016).

Nevertheless, "Conflict" is quite a common feature in both newspapers' editorials if we consider specifically its frequency. This is aligned with interviews and ethnographies that previous works conducted with editorialists. Such professionals said that a newspaper would not present its opinion on an issue when there is no controversy about it (Firmstone, 2008; Guerreiro Neto, 2016; Mont'Alverne et al., 2018). I.e. generally, newspapers do not use editorial texts to present their opinions on undisputed topics.

Regarding the editorial value "Magnitude and relevance" (Chart 7), the chi-square test revealed a significant association between the scope of an issue under debate in editorial texts and the newspaper. However, the value for Cramer's V is meager, suggesting that the differences among the publications are not significant. The standardized residuals reinforce this finding: according to them, only FSP published more editorials with an international reach than expected. Nevertheless, when looking at the overall results, one can observe that FSP and OESP prioritize topics of national scope. In other words, editorials from both newspapers emphasize topics with national reach, not being restricted to the state where their newsrooms are located. This variable was coded in all editorials.

**Chart 7***Magnitude<sup>8</sup>*

	FSP			OESP		
	N	%	SR	N	%	SR
Local	31	9,3	-1,1	65	12,8	0,9
National	229	68,8	-0,7	375	74	0,5
International	73	21,9	2,3	67	13,2	-1,9
Total	333	100	--	507	100	--

Besides comparing the frequency of editorial values appearing in each newspaper, we have also checked if there were significant differences in the year when the editorials were published (chart 8). We present the data aggregating both newspapers since our previous tests did not show that their behavior changed over time when we examined them separately. Considering FSP and OESP together, the single editorial value presenting a significant association with the year was “Political parallelism” (specifically, the support for a political actor or a party). None of the other values presented evidence of changes according to the period when the editorials were published.

**Chart 8***Political parallelism x year<sup>9</sup>*

	2007			2017		
	N	%	SR	N	%	SR
Political parallelism (positive)	66	15,6	-2,2	106	25,4	2,2

The standardized residuals also revealed that, in 2007, both FSP and OESP editorials supported fewer political actors or parties than expected, but the opposite happened in 2017. Since “Political parallelism” is directly connected to both newspapers’ relationships with political actors, this change might be related to the parties or representatives in office at a given moment. For example, in 2007,

Brazil had a leftist government, and literature has shown that the Workers' Party (PT) has regularly received negative coverage in the press (Azevedo, 2018; Nava & Marques, 2019). At that time, the country had just found out about a political scandal involving the government – the so-called “Mensalão,” a votes-for-cash scandal that sent several political leaderships to prison and that has been weaponized by the adversaries of the Workers' Party since then. The scandal galvanized an editorial coverage more critical toward the then-leading authorities at the time. In 2017, however, PT was no longer in power, and Michel Temer led some elite agreement around the center-right government after the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff (the former President from PT) (Albuquerque, 2019; Marques et al., 2021). Once more, our results show that FSP and OESP were in sync. After Rousseff's impeachment, Temer was seen as someone capable of ending the political crisis and approving reforms defended by the organizations. However, this does not mean that both organizations necessarily share the same opinions when Brazil faces a crisis (Marques et al., 2020).

Last, the fact that there is no association between most of the editorial values and the year when the texts were published indicates that they have been stable in FSP and OESP over the years we consider. Therefore, the editorial values we investigate are relevant to explaining news organizations' editorial choices.

## 5 Discussion and conclusions

The article aimed to empirically test the idea of editorial-worthiness criteria by examining the editorial values in texts published in two Brazilian quality papers, FSP and OESP. A significant part of the editorial values theoretically proposed in the literature was observed in our sample. In most cases, the recurrence of the values at stake was not associated with a specific newspaper, suggesting that editorial values are not necessarily dependent on the idiosyncrasies of a particular news organization. At the same time, we also found limitations in Marques and Mont'Alverne's (2021) model, especially concerning the empirical operationalization of the editorial values. Some editorial values are very similar, leading us to collapse them into some categories when possible, requiring further organization.

Our results also revealed the stability of editorial values over time since most of them are not significantly associated with

the year when the editorial pieces were published. This means that FSP and OESP tend to employ the same editorial values for different periods, coherent with the conclusions of previous works on editorial journalism about the prominence of long-term editorial values (Firmstone, 2008; Mont'Alverne et al., 2018).

At the same time, we acknowledge the importance of considering the particularities of each newspaper. This can justify why only the variable “Political parallelism” presented a significant association with the year when the texts were published. This value is directly linked with opinions a news organization holds in a particular political or economic context – and there were significant changes in the Brazilian political scenario between the years our sample comprises (Azevedo, 2016; Mourão, 2019; Pimentel & Marques, 2021).

Our results also show a meaningful overlap between editorial and news values – another original implication of this study. If the steps to produce an editorial do not necessarily follow the same rules as the news-making process, some values are shared by both opinionated and informative sections. Nevertheless, there is a limitation to how broad the overlap is since we have not tested all news values (for a review of news values, see Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). In other words, the results of our investigation allow us to question the premise that newspaper editorials adopt a different approach from news sections. Scholars such as Eilders (1999) emphasize the principle that editorials would be granted thematic autonomy if compared with the news. I.e., the author contends that since editorials are strictly opinionated pieces, media organizations are free to address any matter they want to, despite the news agenda. Notwithstanding a “de jure” autonomy, the overlap between editorial and news values suggests that things are different “de facto.”

One question arises from our results: why do news organizations not take advantage of editorials’ freedom to tackle issues different from those driving news coverage? Is this behavior due to economic or political pressure? Or is it just due to organizing journalistic work in the context of each newsroom? Future research devoted to investigating the topic through in-depth interviews with editors could disclose the motivations for thematic alignment between news and editorials. In any case, we want to speculate on what may be causing this approximation.

A relevant body of work on Journalism studies argues that transformations in the communication markets have forced media

companies to mirror editorial opinions and what the audience wants. Metaphors featuring journalistic activity for several decades (such as the idea of a “wall”) have been associated with a logic linked to the past since the claimed separation between commercial and newsroom functions would now be featured by a shorter wall, a wall with holes, a line, a blurred line, and so on (Artemas et al., 2018). Thus, one cannot dismiss the argument that the criteria of editorial-worthiness take into account the ideological and political leanings reflecting the primary audience of each news outlet. Consequently, if editorials used to be a format in which a newspaper displayed its independence from the government (Firmstone, 2019b), perhaps this independence from governments is becoming a kind of dependence on what readers want.

In fact, the alignment between editorial opinions and the readers’ expectations has already been diagnosed in the Brazilian landscape. Lattman-Weltman and Chagas (2016) argue that some national quality papers have become more partisan (associating themselves with right-wing political ideologies) over the recent years, seeking to foster a more loyal readership. This topic is worth addressing, especially considering that such political leanings grew during center-left governments in the Brazilian case.

In a landscape where the audience distrusts institutions such as the media (Kim & Ahmad, 2013; Mourão et al., 2018; Toff et al., 2020), opinions might be what distinguishes media organizations among themselves, and newspaper editorial texts might gain new relevance. Therefore, future works investigating this aspect might reveal the impacts of changes the journalism industry has faced. They might also examine if those challenges are incorporated in opinionated sections. Accordingly, interviews with editors would help us understand how some editorial values – such as “Jurisprudence” – are deduced by journalists (or even imposed on them, depending on the news organization).

We also need to underline some limitations of our article. First, the article was challenged by the results of intercoder reliability for some variables, which requires part of the findings to be cautiously analyzed. Moreover, we do not intend to generalize our findings, given that the results we found might not be the same if we had selected other news organizations. We contend, however, that our study points out that both newspapers share similar editorial values and that these have remained stable over

time. Further studies could refine the empirical categories and coding process. In addition, new investigations could take into account to what extent the editorial values change depending on the hierarchy of each editorial (whether it is the main one or the secondary ones).

Lastly, we must remember that other aspects may also influence practices in editorial journalism, such as the market (concentration of media ownership), the journalists' professional or educational background, as well as their corporate codes of conduct. In fact, the many ways news outlets and their professionals understand journalistic roles (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017) may suggest adopting different editorial behaviors. A comparative approach using the categorization we suggested could underline the similarities and singularities typical of journalistic cultures, indicating what kinds of adaptations the idea of criteria of editorial-worthiness must undergo to be fostered. I.e., comparing news outlets from different media systems (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012; Hallin & Mancini, 2004) would allow us to find out how suitable editorial values are to different cases, as well as to illustrate how a specific value has been more emphasized than others.

## NOTES

- 1 Political party that ruled Brazil from 1995 to 2003 and was the main opponent of the Worker's Party in Presidential elections until 2018.
- 2 For more details, see <<https://acervo.estadao.com.br/noticias/acervo,20-anos-de-decisao-no-segundo-turno-em-sao-paulo,7192,0.htm>>.
- 3 For more details, see <<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-12-30-mn-2585-story.html>>.
- 4 For more details, see <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-37237513>>.
- 5 Caption:  $p < 0,05$ ; Cramer's  $V = 0,174$
- 6 Caption: \* $p < 0,05$  \*\* $p < 0,001$

- 7 If the standardized residual is less than -1,96, the observed frequency in each cell is less than the expected frequency, while if it is more than 1,96, the observed frequency is higher than the expected frequency.
- 8 Caption:  $p < 0,05$ ; Cramer's  $V = 0,12$
- 9 Caption:  $p < 0,05$

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