

THE JOURNALISM AGENDA GUIDE (JAG) PROPOSAL FOR APPLIED RESEARCH IN JOURNALISM (ARJ)

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ABSTRACT - This article proposes the Journalism Agenda Guide (JAG), a technical tool for managing journalistic content. Developed from an Applied Research in Journalism (ARJ) methodology, the Guide is based on articulating concepts of Agenda Setting, Journalistic Relevance (JR), organizational productivity and Semantic Resolution (SR). The basis of the Guide is the relation between the relevance of a theme and how much space it should occupy in the news, subject to a particular organization's production capacity. Incorporating the Guide as a tool for editorial management means adopting practices of accountability which affect both the ethical conduct an organization and its professionals adhere to and the sustainability of companies, becoming an important ally in the efforts to consolidate the credibility in journalism.

Key words: Journalism, Applied Research, Agenda Setting, Relevance, Semantic Resolution

GUIA DA AGENDA JORNALÍSTICA (GAJ) NA PERSPECTIVA DE UMA PROPOSTA DE PESQUISA APLICADA EM JORNALISMO (PAJ)

RESUMO - A artigo propõe o Guia da Agenda Jornalística (GAJ), um instrumento técnico para gestão de conteúdos jornalísticos. Desenvolvido a partir de uma metodologia de Pesquisa Aplicada em Jornalismo (PAJ), o Guia se estrutura na articulação dos conceitos de Agendamento, Relevância Jornalística (RJ), produtividade organizacional e Resolução Semântica (RS). O fundamento que está na base do Guia é a relação entre a relevância do tema e a proporção do espaço que deve ter no noticiário, condicionada à capacidade de produção de uma determinada organização. A incorporação do Guia como um instrumento de gestão editorial pode representar uma adesão a práticas de accountability que impactam tanto na conduta ética da organização e de seus profissionais quanto na sustentabilidade das empresas, haja vista tornar-se um importante aliado dos esforços de consolidação da credibilidade jornalística.

Palavras-chave: Jornalismo, Pesquisa Aplicada, Agendamento, Relevância, Resolução Semântica

GUÍA DE LA AGENDA PERIODÍSTICA (GAP) EN LA PERSPECTIVA DE UNA PROPUESTA DE INVESTIGACIÓN APLICADA EN PERIODISMO (IAP)

RESUMEN - This article proposes the Journalism Agenda Guide (JAG), a technical tool for managing journalistic content. Developed from an Applied Research in Journalism (ARJ) methodology, the Guide is based on articulating concepts of Agenda Setting, Journalistic Relevance (JR), organizational productivity and Semantic Resolution (SR). The basis of the Guide is the relation between the relevance of a theme and how much space it should occupy in the news, subject to a particular organization's production capacity. Incorporating the Guide as a tool for editorial management means adopting practices of accountability which affect both the ethical conduct an organization and its professionals adhere to and the sustainability of companies, becoming an important ally in the efforts to consolidate the credibility in journalism.

Key words: Journalism, Applied Research, Agenda Setting, Relevance, Semantic Resolution.

A lot of attention has been focused on the press during the political crisis in Brazil in 2015 and 2016. It has mostly been left-wing parties who have been criticizing its bias against the Worker's Party, against President Dilma Rousseff and the political affiliations it has maintained over the course of more than a decade of being in power. Mainstream media has allied itself with the opposition and was one of the catalysts of the political instability which culminated with the impeachment of the president.

During the crisis, the response from media sectors relied on a thesis. Their job is to specifically report on events of interest to the country. In other words, they do not create facts, just report them. They cannot be held responsible for any damages caused by reporting on crimes, violations and corruption committed by the government and its leaders.

At the center of this debate is the dispute for the public agenda. If the news on offer is not the most correct, then it is certainly its critics favour other issues for making up the agenda. However, the fact is that none of the sides, from a technical journalistic point of view, have any consistent parameters to base their positions on. This most probably occurs because journalism does not have the

clear tools capable of evaluating the relevance of the facts in order to justify the eventual or systematic presentation of the news.

This paper explores this inability and tries to answer the question: how can journalistic mediums use technically-guided methods to define their agendas and eliminate any suspicious agenda manipulation? The proposed solution to this problem is the Journalism Agenda Guide (JAG)¹.

This proposal recognizes the significant responsibility journalistic mediums have for selecting issues of public interest and presenting them to society, which does not include withholding proofs and explanations about what their job entails and how they perform it. Responsibility involves a set of expectations attributed either externally, defined by the law, or established voluntarily, to commit organizations and professionals in journalism to follow the rules of conduct (McQUAIL, 2003, p. 203). Once the social and moral values of media practice become responsibilities, then a certain level of accountability can be applied to how and why it is done; a commitment based on the idea of accountability itself (McQUAIL, 2003, FENGLER et al, 2014, BERTRAND, 2002; PAULINO, 2009).

Given these premises, the facts that make up the agenda now become an active job of selecting and editing to include some things, exclude others and place a level of hierarchy on everything. It is a necessary job, which is why its criteria should be demonstrated and justified, otherwise it would be considered arbitrary or deliberately manipulated in favour of beneficial or prejudicial interests. Both situations run a serious risk to journalistic credibility.

The Guide is a proposed solution of a technical nature, designed to systemize a set of criteria and procedures for measuring the relevance of issues and controlling their selection process. This tool is still a concept, designed to help news organizations and their professionals when making their agendas for the audience and society. It also aims to help society regulate and report cases where editorial decisions go beyond the intended technical parameters. It works on the idea of systemizing the outlines of a capable application tool, but since it is still a concept, it has not yet reached the level of maturity necessary for its effective use. In order for this to occur, tests and new developments will have to be done.

Before outlining the Guide, it is necessary to first outline the methodology. It is a proposal developed for Applied Research in Journalism (ARJ), and is used to design evaluation tools and

journalistic processes of quality, supported by the Program for Quality, Innovation and Technology in Research Applied to Journalism (Qualijor). The foundations of this project will then be presented in order to address the foundations and framework of the Journalism Agenda Guide (JAG).

1 Methodology for Applied Research in Journalism (ARJ)

This proposal for the Applied Research in Journalism (ARJ)² is designed to overcome a large trouble spot in the field³, according to Barbie Zelizer, who believes journalism has been addressed in “packages”, each one isolated from the other. This compartmentalization goes against the clarity of what journalism is by analyzing the activity in parts instead of as a whole (ZELIZER, 2010, p. 35). The Applied Research in Journalism (ARJ) proposal aims to promote the necessary articulation between both knowledge sets in journalism⁴.

In order to do this, we need to explain the classic distinction between two types of research:

Basic research consists of experimental works or developing theories mainly with the purpose of acquiring new knowledge about a phenomena and observable facts without considering any application or particular use. **Applied research** consists of carrying out both original works with the objective of acquiring new knowledge. However, it is mostly directed towards a specific practical objective. (MANUAL FRASCATI, 2002, p. 38)

Basic research in journalism is used for understanding an object and its multiple relations without necessarily trying to solve the practical problems it faces. Here, all the possibilities are open to investigation, whether reinterpreting, making discoveries, critiquing established paradigms, or other possible avenues often in clear opposition to inquiring about current technical paradigms.

Applied research “allows for the operational shaping of ideas” to “consider existing knowledge and develop it in order to solve specific problems” (MANUAL FRASCATI, 2002, p. 100). Applied Research in Journalism (ARJ) relies on a set of theoretical and methodological elements in order to understand and intervene in journalism scientifically. It stems from an initial understanding of what the activity is and what the problems that may arise within it are, which the conceptual and methodological systematization are applied to in order to offer a new solution.

The methodology for the Applied Research in Journalism (ARJ) in this paper is based on two principles: the Purpose Principal and the Complementary Principle. The Purpose Principle systemizes the roles that news organizations meet or are asked to meet by society by establishing agreements and conventions with society, effectively attributing a set of responsibilities to them. The Complementary Principle determines a set of categories that, even though they address different or specific issues, make up a specific configuration to give the Purpose Principal meaning and make it effective in journalism.

The Purpose Principal (PF) expresses the purpose for establishing parameters for all “journalism” organizations, as explained below:

- Journalism is about freely producing truthful and plural information on real facts transmitted through the use of technology in order to **compose an agenda** of themes that **are important to both public and private audiences**, restraining from reporting any news that might violate individual rights and collective freedoms already recognized as universal human values⁵.

The six categories of the Complementary Principle are:

- **Theory:** a systemized knowledge set of theoretical reference for understanding journalism, shaping the research problem with the proposed solution;

- **Ethics:** normative reference for conduct in journalism as it applies to peers, involved people, information sources and other responsibilities upheld in documents, or not, based on democratic societies;

- **Technique:** a set of professional procedures which make up the arsenal of journalists and organizations’ work, mainly the procedures within a problem and its objective solution to any given applied investigation;

- **Processes:** a set of integrated activities for screening news content in order to promote truth in journalism;

- **Technology:** a set of *hardware* and *software* needed for journalism, most often technological resources for improving support techniques and processes;

- **Sustainability:** the capacity of news organizations to build and maintain a solid operation for the present and the future, including the public’s continued recognition of its credibility.

The Complementary Principle uses these categories for its articulation. Any movement in any one of the categories must

be supported by the others. In other words, an innovation in one category will require the others to adapt in order to keep activities organized for expression in the Purpose Principle.

The Journalism Agenda Guide (JAG) is a tool used in the Technique category because it has a set of concepts and support procedures for editorial decisions on regularity and effectiveness when choosing the relevance of content which will then be selected and placed in hierarchy. The Guide will be presented in detail within the scope of this category. Before this presentation, it is necessary to begin with the Technique category in order to present concepts that will be the base for the techniques that make up the proposed tool.

2 Theoretical Category: Agenda Setting, Relevance and Semantic Resolution (SR)

The Theoretical Category articulates three concepts which the Journalism Agenda Guide (JAG) is base. The first, Agenda setting, is the theoretical base that shapes the problem needing to be resolved and a viable solution. The other two categories, Journalistic Relevance (JR) and Semantic Resolution (SR) make up the technical-conceptual base of the Guide because they are essential towards running the proposed procedures that make up an agenda. Without these concepts, The Guide would not have the proper designs.

2.1 Agenda setting

At the heart of the debate on the media's coverage of the opposition to president Dilma's government and the Labor Party lays the dispute for the public agenda. Journalism mediums offer content, themes and attributes that are considered very important. Certain sectors see this content as being deliberately selected for political interests that go against those of the governing party, trying to maintain political tension and bring an early end to the government.

The key question in this article illustrating this problem is how one decides how important the issue of corruption is prior to the impeachment. For example, how it dominated media agenda compared to other moments in the country's recent history and other social, economic and educational issues which go unnoticed

in the news even though they are important towards overcoming the current crisis. In other words, this is a reflection of what the guiding rule or principle is behind choosing a theme, and to what level they are explored, therefore serving as a base for the agenda.

The dispute within the media for the public agenda comes from the effect of agenda setting where

“agenda setting is a theory about transferring the salience of media images about the world to the images in our heads. The central idea is that the elements prominent in media images become prominent in the audience’s image. Those elements emphasized in the media agenda end up becoming equally important to the public”. (McCOMBS, 2009, p. 111)

The media agenda has a powerful influence on the public agenda, varying between the need for guiding or the level of familiarity for the people with the issues the media deals with (McCOMBS, 2009, p. 89-110). In addition, there is a game of mutual influences between political, public and media agendas (TRAQUINA, 2001, p. 25) which highlights their interaction and the need to be evaluated on a case by case basis to see how and at what level these salience transferrals occur.

The central question that emerges for discussion here is how news organizations’ agendas are formed. Understanding this mechanism is essential for analyzing the responsibility organizations have and, consequently, identifying competing aspects for agenda setting. For the purpose of this article we shall look at three aspects:

- Events momentum:

The events have their own momentum for how the multiple aspects which they are interrelated to combine. As much as they want to, wish to and even manage to control them at some level, it is only partial and limited. The events’ own momentum is an external aspect which news organizations – and any other social actor – do not have the full power to either control or monitor. Despite its own momentum, however, many events, especially political ones, are potentially foreseeable due to institutional planning. This predictability of the controllable aspects of events helps the organizations plan their coverage.

- Production Routines or Production Processes:

All mediums define routines that shape a set of articulated procedures for realizing their product. Planning is what accounts for the dynamics of facts as no newspaper has an unlimited capacity to produce news. For this reason, each one needs to establish a working plan which is compatible with its processing capacity. The routines or

processes administer the installed capacity in a medium to produce news for editing. This is an organization's internal management process for productivity and managing its activities to access events. Normally, this occurs by allocating teams to go to areas where regular events have some journalistic value mixed with an abundance of potential newsworthy facts (for more on the impacts of routines and production processes on producing content, see McCOMBS, 2009, p. 157-158; GANS, 1980, 87-88; ALTHEIDE, 1976, 61-95; WOLF, 1992, p. 173ss; MOLOCH, LESTER, 1993, p. 44-46).

- Editorial Project:

This is representative of the concept of journalism and, consequentially, of the newspaper's journalism, using explicit social and journalistic values to guide its activity. It outlines the newspaper's thematic design and the forms used to approach it. This set of definitions shapes the general lines of news operation for all reporting. It is important to point out that the editorial project is a document of journalistic nature and therefore must be in line with the limits that the news institution defines for its practice. Within these limits, the organization is able to function. The editorial project has the guidelines for supporting the decisions for managing its activity. One of the limitations these documents have is that they often present generic guidelines which are not specific enough for specific procedures and do not follow internal evaluation processes for regulating and clarifying its use.

The news agenda of a media agent is formed out of the basic articulation of these three aspects. The most decisive one is the Production Routines or Production Processes, which ensure the regular channels for newsgathering. The editorial project is a reference document which is not directly applicable in the working field, even though its definition is derived from it. The intrinsic relevance of events is only considered outside of regular channels in exceptional cases, and within regular channels to select between available facts. This is well laid out by the concept of newsworthiness which expresses the relation between the journalistic value of the facts and the capacity an organization has to acquire them for their reports (WOLF, 1992, p. 168-169; ALTHEIDE, 1976, p. 112, 128, MOLOCH, LESTER, 1993, p. 44).

It is important to highlight that the general selection of facts are taken from a narrow range of reality which could lead to an inability to reach the facts outside these channels. When these channels act upon certain issues, like reporting on corruption against the government,

the already narrow range gets even narrower still, making the news agenda concentrate on the terms highlighted in these channels.

The news organizations' responsibility for selecting and putting together an agenda is clear because the facts depend directly on the agenda's capacity for acquiring them and making them news. Organizations often never discover an enormous variety of other themes and facts due to the difficulty in monitoring all reality. Other facts that are discovered are cast aside by an organization's internal criteria, whether editorial or operational. Therefore, the agenda has a strong component for selecting productivity organizations, whether editorial or operational without excluding the possibility of other types of non-justifiable criteria unrelated to journalism. Obviously, these types of criteria, like political and economic interferences for example, are improper and must be challenged, different from editorial and operational criteria which are necessary and manageable for organizations.

Taking on this responsibility means offering answers to problems such as the lack of transparency the available agenda selection criteria have in society, the technical inaccuracies which are not capable of demonstrating the base for editorial decisions on agenda setting, and the process limitations which operate in predetermined environments and do not explore new avenues of coverage. In order to address this, it is necessary to use clearly defined methods and criteria to get to the heart of the matter, which is the lack of techniques for managing agendas. These techniques are what make up the Journalism Agenda Guide (JAG).

Two other concepts need to be addressed in the theoretical category: semantic resolution and relevance.

2.2 Relevance

The idea of Journalistic Relevance (JR) - which this article is based on - comes from Sperber and Wilson (1995, p. 122). Using their foundations as a building block, Guerra highlights that relevance is the ability that information has to provide effects in some "cognitive sense" which the audience may act on depending on its reception (GUERRA, 2008, p. 185). Relevance is a value which the audience recognizes because of previous abilities which define and generate expectations of information which they prefer.

However, when you think of audiences and their expectations,

you need to think about two levels of expectation: the private level, where spontaneous preferences for tastes and interests are naturally cultivated by members; and the public one, where formal categories related to citizenship, rights and duties are what matter. The same individuals are represented here, but they act in two different skill groups. The categories at the private level are of their own right because they are built on experience and direction of the world. The public ones, however, define the responsibility upheld by the democratic state of rights which requires minimum preparation but is not always accessible to everyone, even though they are all asked to respect the law and key political decision making processes, like elections.

Whether the individuals command the political skills necessary for a democratic system or not, whether related to questions about processes or merit in debate, the fact is that they are all connected to their rules, objects and institutions. The principle that promotes commitment in journalism with the required requisites for audience expectations is 'public interest'. However, this expression is extremely inaccurate for filtering uncountable facts that could have different levels of accuracy. That is why it is necessary to try and sift through all the facts in order for this Guide to be supported.

This sifting is produced using a Relevance Matrix⁶ which arranges newsworthy material into three categories according to indicators of relevance. The more newsworthy a fact is, the higher the tendency to consider it more important. The first category contains the classic newsworthy bits, like those that point to the relevance of an event. The third category contains newsworthy bits selected by the editorial project which defines a newspaper's proposal.

The second category is where the aspects that are of interest to the Guide are best framed. It contains a selection of themes selected around the editorial profile of a newspaper or politicians and the issues of interest they intend to cover. These issues should be analyzed for their relevance in four agendas (public, political, audience and media) and use specific methods elaborated for the purpose of generating the Journalistic Relevance Factor (JRF). The JRF, which will be more thoroughly explained in the Technical category, expresses a relevance suggested from the expectations in relation to the issues taken from the four agendas. The lower the JRF is, the larger the suggested relevance for the issue is and, consequently, the greater the appeal for its agenda setting. The JRF indicates the relevance of issues performed in conjunction with these four agendas mentioned.

2.3 Semantic Resolution (SR)

The concept of semantic resolution was proposed by Fidalgo (2004) for digitally-produced news, especially for *open source* sites. But, its potential can be extrapolated from the digital environment, as we shall propose. The basic principle of the concept is that the more news that is produced on a certain event, the larger the Semantic Resolution tends to be, in other words, the level of information is higher. This happens because new content is continually being added to existing content, filling up gaps in understanding. This helps filter and refute as well as build new information. Together, they elevate the level of objectivity and plurality of certain information about objective facts of coverage and the actors they imply.

According to Fidalgo,

Depending on **the relevance and interest** of the event being told, the news will increase in number and detail, therefore giving a more detailed view of the event. Just like a digital image increase the graphic resolution, for example, the number of pixels per square centimetre, a determined event will also receive larger news coverage the larger its semantic resolution is, constituted by the plurality and diversity of news on the event. (Fidalgo, 2004, s/p)

The author clearly highlights that the increase in the number of news reports is related to the relevance and interest that particular event has; clearly alluding to semantic resolution and relevance which are important to consider in the Guide. The concepts of Journalistic Relevance (JR) and Semantic Resolution (SR) are dependent on one another. The more important the facts, the more need for greater semantic resolution, and vice versa. Different levels of relevance demand different quantities of news reports. The Journalism Agenda Guide (JAG) is based on this principle, using a method for selecting and planning coverage.

3 Technical Category – Journalism Agenda Guide (JAG)

The Journalism Agenda Guide (JAG) is a tool for building a set of technical references for selecting issues to make up an organization's journalistic agenda. It should not be seen as a tool to determine or define the agenda in any way, but instead be seen as a tool to help professional insight for systemizing references for

editorial planning. What it does not suggest is that, once done, it can simply be ignored. Decisions may be made outside of the standards, but with due technical justifications, obviously.

The initial principle found in the guide is the concept of Semantic Resolution (SR) proposed by a Semantic Reference Resolution Index (SRRI). The index does not just measure the Semantic Resolution for its high or low resolution (lower or higher number of news reports), but considers the number of news reports in two other components: the Journalistic Relevance Factor (JRF) and the Journalistic Productivity Index (JPI).

The JRF is a numeric valor that expresses the relevance of an issue by monitoring the four agendas previously mentioned for the following quantifying elements:

- Political agenda: this is quantified by surveying the priority level of an issue, considering the expectations of political actors like the government, parliament and others;

- Public agenda: this is quantified by surveying the priority level of an issue, considering the expectations of civil society, its various sectors and groups represented within;

- Audience agenda: this is quantified by surveying the priority level of an issue, considering the expectations of the audience of any given newspaper;

- Intermedia agenda: this is quantified by surveying the priority of an issue, considering the agenda of other journalistic mediums and selected social networks.

A number of methodologies could be applied to all these surveys such as: opinion polls and surveys, document research in studies and relevant technical reports, available data base research, especially public ones, among others. The objective is to build a diagnosis on the issues and level of concern the different agendas raise. In this diagnosis, parameters of relevance would be extracted for cross-matching information from studies and data bases with the expectations from the interviewed actors. This type of survey should definitely be regular so that it is constantly up-to-date with the country's situation and, consequently, with the concerns expressed by different agendas.

A range of issues and concerns and their level of priority should be taken from each one of these agendas, as they are capable of generating indicators of relevance per issue which, when confronted and compared to other agendas, should result in the Journalistic

Relevance Factor for each one of them. The JRF will indicate levels of relevance between issues which will then be used to define the SRRI. Obviously, the concept for the JRF is much easier to explain than it is to build as it requires resources and maintains a certain level of complexity and sophistication.

The Journalistic Productivity Indicator (JPI) considers an organization's production capacity for a certain period, expressed by the number of news reports, the space they occupied or available distribution time, among other applicable measuring units. For the purposes of this study, we shall consider the number of news reports.

The Semantic Reference Resolution Index (SRRI) suggests an amount of news to be produced using the Journalistic Relevance Factor per issue and the Productivity Index of a particular organization. It intends to administer the number of news to be produced per issue, using its relevance (the more important it is, the more news reports there are) and news organizations' installed production capacity.

The Journalistic Agenda Guide follows these steps:

3.1 Defining the Journalistic Productivity Index (JPI)

The **Journalistic Productivity Index (JPI)** defines the average installed capacity of an organization, considering the amount of news reports. It can be measured per edition, per week or per month. For the purpose of this article, we will consider the title of an illustration, a weekly JPI of 800 reports, which means an average weekly production capacity of 800 news reports (Total from Column B – Table 1).

3.2 Definition of issues and application of the Journalistic Relevance Factor (JRF)

After applying the methodologies to prospect issues and the level of relevance taken from each individual agenda, two important pieces of information towards writing the Guide are achieved: the table menu (Column A - Table 1) which is a list of issues deemed important enough to be covered by the news, and the Journalistic Relevance Factor (Column C – Table 1) which is the numeric value expressing the suggested relevance of issues which produces a certain level of hierarchy among them.

3.3 Definition of the Journalistic Productivity Index (JPI) per issue

The definition of JPI per issue represents the amount of news produced for each issue according to an organization's installed production capacity. If an organization's JPI is 800 news reports, and the menu of options of coverage is composed of ten issues, then each issue would have a quota of 80 weekly news reports (Column B – Table 1). But, the Journalistic Relevance Factor is not considered in this value.

3.4 Acquiring the Semantic Reference Resolution Index (SRRI)

Applying the Journalistic Relevance Factor to the Journalistic Productivity Index ensures that the number of news reports per theme takes the prospective relevance of consulted agendas into consideration. This way, the theme's relevance is ensured and then measured by the JRF with the number of news reports it should have, which gives us the (SRRI).

The Semantic Reference Resolution Index will recommend the number of news reports about a theme in proportion to its prospected relevance (Column D – Table 1). This calculation is a weighted average based on the following formula:

$$[JPI (\text{theme}) \times JRF / (\sum JRF)] \times \text{No. of Themes} = \text{SRRI}$$

JPI (theme) – Journalistic Productivity Index per theme (Column B)

JRF – Journalistic Relevance Factor of each theme (Column C)

$\sum JRF$ – sum of the Journalistic Relevance factors (total – Column C)

No. of Themes – the number of themes being covered (Column A)

SRRI – Semantic Reference Resolution Index (Column D)

Table 1 – Components extracted from the Semantic Reference Resolution Index

A	B	C	D
Theme	JPI (theme)	Relevance Factor (JRF)	SRRI*
1	80	7	142
2	80	6	122
3	80	5,5	111
4	80	5	101
5	80	4	81
6	80	3,5	71
7	80	3	61
8	80	2,5	51
9	80	2	40
10	80	1	20
Total	800	Σ 39,5	800

*Values rounded up.

Source: author.

Column D in Table 1 shows the Semantic Reference Resolution Index which recommends the number of news reports needed for each theme according to its relevance and the installed production capacity of the newspaper. So, Theme 1, which had the highest JRF, reached the highest SRRI, an expected news reports per week, the semantic resolution is ideal for exploring the topic, in comparison to other themes and respective relevance factors. The SRRI is a sign, or a target, which suggests a proportion of content distribution according to its relevance. If this system was used for managing themes it would also be able to compile other Guides to consider sub-topics while adopting tolerance margins to ensure the flexibility of its application.

Table 1 was based on the random values for exemplifying the application of the proposed method for making up the Journalistic Agenda Guide. It determines the relations between installed production capacity, theme menu and relevance. Together, these elements propose the Semantic Reference Resolution Index.

The Journalistic Agenda Guide is a tool that organizes the relation of themes that a newspaper intends to report on. It is capable of guiding coverage using the Journalistic Production Indicator, the Journalistic Relevance Factor and the Semantic

Reference Resolution Index. The contributions the Journalistic Agenda Guide would give to technical categories of journalists' work and their organizations would be:

1) Establishing clear criteria, taken from different agendas, and the method for operating them which should guide the journalism selection process, treatment, exposure and justification of the distributed news;

2) Establishing the SRRI as a parameter for studying different themes from an organization's planned agenda, to ensure a minimum amount of attention is given to each theme or major highlight and in what proportion. This means however the proportion in news production of various themes determined to be important by avoiding that some dominate the news at the cost of excluding others, according to the proposed relevance.

The Journalistic Agenda Guide will generate implications not only in the Technical Category but also in the categories of Ethics, Processes, and Technology and Sustainability, briefly summarized ahead:

4 Ethics Category

The editorial decisions are set in the criteria contained in the Guide, both in relation to evaluating relevance and the volume of material produced for each theme. This procedure avoids any discriminatory selection on the part of the professionals, they need to make and justify their decisions using the technical tools available. Once they have gone through the criteria evaluation and are ready to present publically through accountability resources (McQUAIL, 2003; FENGLER et al, 2014), the organizations could show that they have met their responsibilities. In doing so, they could move away from hypotheses which they sometimes intentionally use for writing news. Their decisions could be set by the criteria and not by what is convenient at the time. However, there would still be requirements remaining for controlling the instrument itself in order to ensure that the indicators used in the Guide were technical and obtained and applied correctly.

The tool does not prevent nor avoid the intentional distortions and manipulation of news by journalists who break the ethical standards of the profession. After all, there have always been and always will be those who want to make money at any cost both by being corrupt and violating the

rules which are respected by the majority of social actors. This happens not only in journalism, but also in law, medicine, engineering and any kind of professional practice. In these cases, the path for complicating the action of wrongdoers is technical and procedural sophistication which requires that professionals justify their decisions by registering and documentation, capable of being controlled and checked whenever necessary. If used, the JAG is a tool which could reduce, prevent or make fraud in journalism difficult to accomplish – but by no means can it eliminate it completely.

5 Processes Category

The planning for journalism processes must go through some changes in the Journalistic Agenda Guide. Current logic says that in most cases routines are defined and the range of themes addressed will appear in the proportion that they occur in their limits. In the Guide's logic, the themes will be addressed according to the demands of prospected relevance, and the strategies for covering must be planned in accordance with them. This could lead to reducing or abandoning the number of routine channels a conventional *modus operandi* has. In the least, it could lead to exploring greater coverage possibilities within them or within a slightly broader range. Certainly the exploration of new fronts of coverage which have been invisible up to now or unexplored because they are capture together with the social actors who make up part of the differentiated agendas, who do not use or circulate the normally frequented routines in the press. Revising processes can also lead to revising production indicators between processes and productivity. A change in the processes has a strong impact on internal management of an organization and that is why it should be very carefully planned out.

6 Technology Category

The technology category can offer support for defining the Relevance Factor using systems and machines for surveying and processing data compatible for being monitored and used by different themes. These data can be processed in computer support systems capable of working on an infinite number of variables at the same time, whether structured data or not. This is a strong trend in data journalism which would be important for the Guide to operate effectively.

7 Sustainability Category

Adopting techniques for supporting editorial decisions and the consequent adoption of transparency as a resource to justify decisions which have been made is an important step towards ensuring credibility and sustainability of an organization over the long term. In a work discussing experiences of accountability in Europe Fengler states that investing in quality and transparency is a possible advantage in the competition between newspapers (FENGLER et al, 2014, p. 10). The loss of credibility shatters the public's trust and, in a competitive and diversified environment of information sources for society, organizations might not be able to recover from it (MEYER, 2007, p. 15-42). That is why the study titled "Openness & Accountability: A Study of Transparency in Global Media Outlets" conducted by the International Center for Media and the Public Agenda (ICMPA) states:

Newspapers, broadcasters and the now-ubiquitous new media all must depend on the trust and respect of their readers if they want to survive as serious providers of news and information. One of the best ways to earn that trust, along with consistently good performance, is the kind of transparency that lets consumers in on the often tightly held little secrets of journalism – how we do what we do, and why we do what we do. (ICMPA, 2007)

The media that adopt the tool and have their decision making processes monitored and regulated could gain increased and strengthened credibility, increasing the power of their agenda, to the detriment of media that choose to remain immune to any processes of accountability to their audience and society. Meyer (2007) points out this difference as an essential aspect for producing quality journalism that aims to survive for the long haul.

Final Considerations

The Journalistic Agenda Guide proposal aims to offer a tool for referencing and setting parameters for editorial decisions when selecting themes to make up an organization's journalism agenda. The Guide establishes a method for working through which operates technical criteria for measuring the relevance of themes according to the level of priority perceived by agendas and the level of concreteness

of facts that justify this priority, demonstrated through documental research in reports, studies and data bases.

Incorporating a method and its justification possibilities it ends, becomes a fundamental tool for organizations' credibility and for evaluating their performance. From a credibility point of view, using a foundational and justified method minimizes criticisms of editorial decisions based on the convenience of the moment. From a performance evaluation point of view, it gives organizations and critical sectors the ability to evaluate both the tool itself and its correct and proper application.

Such an instrument would become a tool for editorial planning for regular use in making journalism agendas and mainly in situations of crisis in which the media need to be able to demonstrate their independence and impartiality when reporting on the news. Furthermore, the Guide is also a reference tool for evaluating, questioning and highlighting abuse and excess which has been committed. Without any resources like this, the affirmation of a journalism that just "reports on facts with impartiality" is nothing more than a simple rhetorical resource devoid of any technical base.

Nonetheless, there are definitely some holes which still need to be filled in order for the Guide to be fully operational, it needs to deal with complex questions like the survey of themes with particular agendas and how the themes are distributed within the content. But the challenging questions do not invalidate the tool's general concept; they only indicate the need for new movements in order to ensure the precise results that are intended.

Furthermore, using the tool and incorporating its premises requires an ethical position for the desire to always produce better journalism. That is why it might be interesting for those organizations and professionals who are driven by these challenges. But, not for those that come to journalism a space to realize their particular interests. The tool would create difficulties for these groups, which could be avoided by their non-incorporation to work processes or even by its manipulation, in case incorporated. These decisions are far from the ethical commitments required for journalism.

What would be the advantage of a tool like the one proposed in this paper? It would be its technical and ethical differentiation from journalistic organizations and professionals. Incorporating the tool and its proper use could result in increased credibility for journalism and its users. Whoever works like this could also submit to external

inspections and validations along the lines that the partners of the Institute for Verifying Communication (IVC)⁷ are submitted to in order to verify audience and circulation indexes. By doing this, it would elevate the standard of its performance quality and blacken the name of those organizations and professionals which did not adopt a similar position.

If an instrument such as this one existed, and were to be applied to a politic crisis like the one occurring in Brazil since 2015, it would mean that technical debates would have more space in a field where politics seems to dominate every space of thought in journalism and its practices. The lack of a technical debate shows the organizational and professional fragility that compromises both media performance and that of its critics. As a result, it cannot clearly indicate the situations in which the lack of technical justification could suggest or report criteria of a non-journalistic nature.

*This paper was translated by Lee Sharp

NOTES

- 1 The Guide proposal was developed by author research carried out in the Program of Research Quality, Innovation and Applied Technology in Journalism (Qualijor), the efforts of which lead to developing tools for quality evaluation for producing diagnostics and solutions for problems which have been diagnosed. The project is built on the program, "Quality in News Organizations: an initial panorama", it is funded by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq).
- 2 An excerpt from the text presented on this topic intended for the Applied Research in Journalism with small newsroom changes, as provided in the article "Qualijor – a management system for editorial quality in news production", presented in "XVI Rede Jortec Round Table – Forms of production, finance, interaction and avaliation in digital journalism" at 13th National Meeting of Journalism Researchers at the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul (UFMS), November 4 to 6, 2015.
- 3 Other analyses, exploring different biases for the problem can also be cited in Guerra (2008) and Medistch (2001).

- 4 The goal for realizing the Applied Research in Journalism is to contribute towards important ideas already expressed by other authors such as Meditsch (2004), Machado (2004, 2014) and Franciscato (2006).
- 5 This definition is in line with the perspective of Normatives of Journalism (CHRISTIANS et al, 2009; MARINHO, 2015, p. 36; KOVACH, ROSENSTIEL, 2001) or of the Mediation Paradigm (GUERRA, 2008), two terminologies for characterizing the model of modern journalism establishing the contemporary ethical and technical base for the field.
- 6 For more on the Relevance Matrix, see Guerra and Barreto (2013), Feitoza (2016).
- 7 “The IVC medium audit means understanding advertising and big brand agencies that develop their media plans and verify audiences using information from our data banks. The IVC name gives credibility to editors and producers as well as allowing advertisers to obtain comparison criteria within a common standard” (Instituto Verificador de Circulação).

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