

MEDIA AND PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICIES:

an empirical analysis of the
Brazilian print media

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ABSTRACT This essay examines a subject rarely emphasized in the studies on public interest issues reported in the print media. Drawing on a review of the journalistic content produced by 53 newspapers from every state in the federation and 4 national weekly magazines, the paper analyzes a sample of 1,184 articles, editorials, columns, interviews, and reports on subjects of immediate interest to the media, journalism, and/or media companies. Throughout 2003, 2004, and 2005, news pieces were compiled containing keywords, including "media and democracy," "concentration of ownership," "television regulation." The analysis found that the print media provides insufficient and inadequate coverage of these issues, reserving more extensive coverage only to those questions nearest and dearest to it, such as the freedom of expression.

KEY-WORDS content analysis, print media, public communications policies, agenda-setting.

I. Introduction

The media have four capabilities, as traditionally identified by social scientists from different academic fields, which are especially relevant to the policy-making process, particularly in regard to journalistic activities: agenda-setting, framing, construction of information, and oversight or watchdog role.

To borrow from Bernard C. Cohen's celebrated axiom, the print media "*may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.*" Cohen's observation aptly summarizes the general view of the media's ability to influence which issues will dominate the agenda of decision-makers, opinion makers, and, very often, society as a whole,

through the content it chooses to publish and/or omit. With the rapid expansion in the potential areas of State intervention – due largely to the recognition of new orders of rights for citizens and future generations – it has become increasingly imperative to prioritize a select number of the demands put forth in the public sphere each day.

Even the most skeptical critics of the media's scope and reach as argued in agenda-setting theory will concur that, because choices are a necessary part of the relevant governing and public decision-making processes and because more than one selection criteria is required to this end, heightened focus by the media on given topics will contribute toward a specific issue's inclusion on or removal from the public agenda.¹ This is, very briefly, the assumption behind the agenda-setting hypothesis.

Yet, it is important to underline, the frequency with which the media reports on particular matters is just one of the factors shaping public policy. For instance, topics with a direct impact on the lives of voters are not significantly influenced by the volume of news coverage: even if one verifies a media's persistent failure to report on healthcare, voters have consistently made abundantly clear to their elected officials the issue's centrality to their lives.²

The Brazilian print media's grasp of public policy development is, in our estimation, still in its infancy. To be sure, the press effectively defines the lines separating the party, legislative, and presidential politics covered in the stories that inhabit the political pages of newspapers, where cabinet shake-ups, negotiations with elected representatives, and human interest matters involving "professional politicians" – to use a term coined by the German sociologist Max Weber – are guaranteed print space to the extent they are understood to represent elements of what we usually refer to as politics.

Similarly, the concept of political economy, which is guaranteed its own dedicated print space in the business/economy pages of newspapers, is equally well delineated in our view. Frequently, however, other public policy issues are not encompassed within the cognitive and meanings-based universe of the political arena. Rather, they appear scattered throughout newspapers, and are understood, to a greater or lesser extent, as *policies*, depending on the journalist covering the story and the central figures involved in the reported event. In this context, crime is only recognized as a public policy matter to the extent it migrates out of the local/crime pages and is assigned to more senior reporters – and

when the key figures in the story are state, local, or federal government officials directly engaged in the formulation of public safety/law enforcement policies – or to the extent experts specially devoted to the issue frame the problem as a social, cultural, political, or public health phenomenon. Absent these conditions, crime is invariably portrayed as an isolated act committed by individual X against individual Y. Where precisely is the policy dimension in this type of reporting?

Other issues may or may not be understood as public policy matters. Consequently, how an issue is framed can influence different stages in the meaning construction of policies by the various actors involved.

Different stages of public policy development require different levels of information (statistics, legislation, the positions occupied by key actors, best practices). The media can serve as a platform for investigating and providing this information, and, moreover, for ensuring publicity to alternative sources that may directly challenge the official data. Yet, they tend to exercise this function only infrequently.

Finally, every public policy implemented in a democratic regime presumes the actors responsible for that policy will be held to a certain standard of accountability. However, this presumption is only as credible as the extent to which the pertinent oversight bodies reside, also, outside the policy-making process. From the time the Federalists joined the debate on the American Constitution, therefore, the print media have been viewed as a vital oversight agent of elected government and other public actors seen to require “vigilance” (NGOs, private firms, etc.).³ In this sense, tracking not only the roll-out of official projects, but their continuity, proper execution, and outcomes, as well, is (or should be) a task news professionals pursue with zeal.⁴ Investigative efforts to uncover corruption scandals are often mentioned as “best practices” examples of this news media’s watchdog role, nevertheless, when our focus is the press coverage of general public policies, this function is played with much less intensity.

In sum, the print media play a central role in contemporary democracies through their close collaboration on the range of issues critical to public decision-making spaces, specifically by contributing to how these issues are addressed by the pertinent actors, providing contextualized information aimed at fostering reflection on those issues, and lastly, serving as gatekeeper for the measures undertaken by the agents charged with conceiving, implementing, and evaluating the corresponding policies.

The purpose of this rather lengthy preface was to guide us toward the central considerations of this paper. But before proceeding, two points: the media (and all the entities comprising this abstraction) are relevant actors in contemporary society and, as such, must be accountable and subject to oversight; further, communications are a key issue for present-day Nation-States and therefore must be the object of pertinent public policies. Yet, if these two premises are valid, a question then arises: how do the very news media which contribute to the oversight of public policies and agenda-setting of the key public issues react when the focus of attention falls on themselves (and the policies governing the sector)? In other words, how can we expect the gatekeepers to keep their gates? How can we expect the watchdogs to watch themselves?

The analysis below strives to provide answers to these questions. Drawing from a sample of articles, columns, editorials, interviews, reports, and news stories published in 2003, 2004, and 2005 on public communications policies and other topics pertaining to communications companies and the media, we sought to describe and analyze the editorial behavior of 53 newspapers representing every state in Brazil and 4 national weekly magazines on matters of direct interest to the owners and professional staff of those publications.

The study was performed by the Brazilian News Agency for Children's Rights (Agência de Notícias dos Direitos da Infância – ANDI), a non-governmental organization, under our scientific and research coordination. ANDI's primary activity involves monitoring 131 newspapers throughout 11 Latin American countries, nearly 50 in Brazil alone. The data compiled from these monitoring activities is crucial to the development of the Agency's other strategic objectives, including the mobilization and qualification of media actors.

The second section briefly introduces the research universe and methodological procedures employed; the next section discusses the general profile of the coverage; section IV delineates a number of specific cases considered especially pertinent to the survey; and the final section offers some general conclusions.

II. Research Universe and Methodological Procedures

Because the purpose of this analysis was to understand how the print media address issues related directly to media activity in

its various dimensions (journalism, the communications business, technology, relations with the State, public policies, entertainment, among others), our first task involved defining a set of keywords – approximately 100 – capable of contributing toward the most faithful representative sample of press content possible for the issue under consideration during the period covered.

To develop a suitable sample for analysis, the content was compiled using a method known as the composite month. For each of the years considered (2003, 2004, and 2005), 31 days were chosen at random, based on the representativeness of each month of the year (31-day months received more sample units than 28- or 30-day months) and of each day of the week (an effort was made to gather an equivalent number of news items for Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays). Our sample consisted, therefore, of 93 days. For the national weekly magazines, all the content published in the survey period was considered.

The publications were selected specifically to enable comparisons with previous analyses of the Brazilian News Agency for Children's Rights. To this end, the survey considered two leading outlets from each state of the federation – and more than two for larger states such as Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Minas Gerais, given their importance to the national debate – in addition to the four national weekly magazines.

Once the keywords, days, and publications used in the survey were determined, an electronic search was performed to generate a set of published reports, followed by a manual review, resulting in the 1,184 items ultimately analyzed for this study.

After defining the sample boundaries, a research tool containing the primary categories of the research study was developed and applied to each of the items compiled. The classification records were transferred to a database used to generate consolidated frequencies and cross matches founded on prior hypotheses. The results are laid out in the following analysis based on a methodological approach derived from “content analysis.”

Before keep walking, it is important to underline some conclusions presented by the NewsWatch Canada's researchers, Scott Uzelman, Robert Hacket and Jackie Stewart, in the article “Covering democracy's forum: Canadian press treatment of public and private broadcasting”. They explicitly affirm that few people have studied the news media's coverage about media issues. To reach this conclusion, the authors

have searched important academic data basis, which, frequently, present communication researches' results, among them *Social Science Abstracts* (1983-2004), *Communication Abstracts* (1977-2004), and *Sociological Abstracts* (1963-2005).

Yet, accordingly the Canadian study (UZELMAN, HACKET, and STEWART, 2005), even among the few researches that actually present some discussions on news media's coverage about media issues, there is a clear concentration on the so called metacoverage – i.e., the studies that seek to analyze the news media's coverage on how the media themselves have covered an specific issue (for instance, how dailies newspapers have reported on how they covered the Iraq war?).

III. Profile of the Coverage

It is difficult for any organization to produce transparent and accurate information on issues that directly affect the organization itself, its activities, and its future direction. This applies to mass media firms, as well. However, there is a profound distinction between print media corporations and other businesses: for if providing general information on the state of the world is not the inherent purpose of the latter, it is the driving mission of the former.

Yet, as the data below reveal the media report on themselves and their activities only selectively, avoiding the thorny issues that are vital to the development of contemporary democracies. Therefore, by relying predominantly on the media to construct essential public sphere information, contemporary democracies have tied themselves into a Gordian knot: scrutiny of a crucial pillar of the democratic system – the media – falls overwhelmingly to the media themselves.

Publications Surveyed

A thorough analysis of the publications, which to varying degrees devoted coverage to public communications policies and related issues, provides the first important indication of just how influential vested interests are.

The three-year sample of newspapers found that overall coverage of communications-related issues fell far short of reflecting the media's importance to present-day democracies. Each newspaper published a daily average of 0.19 stories – or 1 full article, column, editorial, interview, or report every 5 days.

The analysis of the national weekly magazines, based on a sample universe encompassing all the content published in the survey period, revealed an average of 0.43 pieces per week – or 1 full report every two weeks. When Carta Capital, the magazine responsible for 50% of the weekly's coverage and which is not connected to traditional media corporations, was removed from the equation, the average dropped to 1 full story per month.

Imagine for a moment the wider consequences of any other key democratic institution, such as the executive branch, receiving a similar level of coverage.

In contrast to the findings of previous analyses conducted by the Brazilian News Agency for Children's Rights, the leading national dailies (Correio Braziliense, Folha de São Paulo, Jornal do Brasil, O Estado de São Paulo, and O Globo) accounted for a significant portion of the media-related stories: 22% of all the sample pieces and 28.3% of the newspaper content. Each of the major dailies contributed, on average, 4.4% of the published reports, while the two leading financial journals (Gazeta Mercantil and Valor Econômico) accounted for 2.1% of the total and regional newspapers, consistently more represented in content analysis studies of other key social questions, for a mere 1.12%.

The national weekly magazines accounted for 22.4% of the coverage, with Carta Capital alone contributing 50% of the stories, as mentioned above.

The analytical and comparative surveys, which will require further refinement over time, lead us to the following conclusion: outlets belonging to conglomerates with a broad array of media interests (TV and radio broadcasting stations, newspapers, magazines, Internet branches) tend to publish fewer pieces on public communications policies than competitors not affiliated to large groups characterized by a cross ownership corporation model. Media outlets that own, at a minimum, a television broadcasting station accounted for 1.47% of the published content each; outlets affiliated to conglomerates with a radio, but not a television, broadcasting concession contributed, on average, 1.61% of the total each; for their part, outlets not connected to a radio or television broadcasting concession published an average of 6.2% of all the news items.

Media outlets without a broadcasting concession dedicated proportionally more of their coverage (70.4%) to reporting on stories other than the top media-related events of the survey period (such as the discussions surrounding the establishment of the Federal Council

of Journalists – CFJ⁵ and the National Film and Audiovisual Agency⁶ – Ancinav, or the expulsion of New York Times correspondent Larry Rother). This would indicate a greater emphasis on solid and consistent reporting of public communications policies and proportionally less on reactive coverage of headline stories. By contrast, only 56% of the pieces published by media outlets owned by broadcasting groups did not center on the top media-related stories of the survey period. Additionally, media outlets unaffiliated to large conglomerates carried a higher percentage of divergent opinions (19.7%) in relation to the overall average (15.7%), while also providing twice as much coverage to issues associated with communications infrastructure and 2.75 times more to the relationship between the media and politics.

An examination of a selection of comparative cases better illustrates the results above. Among the major dailies, *O Estado de São Paulo* (with 7.8% of all the published content) ran 2.6 times more pieces than *O Globo* (a publication controlled by a holding with a significantly more diversified range of communications businesses than those of *O Estado de São Paulo*'s parent company the Grupo Estado). Similarly, among the national weekly magazines, *Carta Capital* also published 2.6 times more stories than *Época*. Outside the Rio-Sao Paulo corridor, the situation is further complicated insofar as the long-standing connection between the political realm and media ownership has conspired to constrain the coverage of public communications policies. For instance, while *A Tarde*, a local newspaper published in Salvador, Bahia, accounted for 2.7% of the sample pieces, its direct competitor, *Correio da Bahia*, controlled by a local political group and a media holding, only contributed 0.8% of the total.

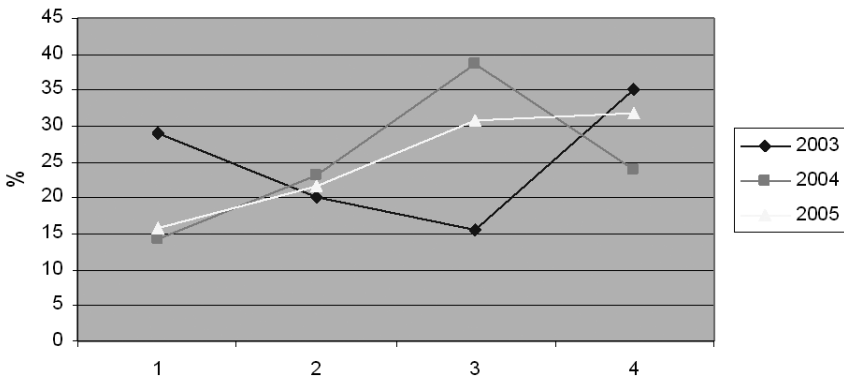
The data, therefore, appears to indicate that outlets not affiliated to political groups and/or controlled by holdings with significant cross-ownership tend to report more extensively on public communications policies than those subordinated to larger political and business groups. Why? The immediate interests involved and the prospect of being steered by issues that run directly counter to those interests appear to be two of the most likely and empirically provable possibilities. It is important to underline, therefore, that regulatory frameworks that forbid cross ownership help to warranty a more plural and accountable media, since newspapers, TV stations, radio stations, Internet providers owned by different groups integrate some kind of “media system of checks-and-balances”.

It is useful to underline that researches conducted internationally have reached similar results. For instance, a studied conducted by professor Sanghee Kweon, from Southern Illinois University, on the coverage of three American weekly magazines underscored the changes observed on the stories about media mergers, since the advance of the media conglomerates (KWEON:2000). Professor Kweon's conclusions show that the news media have positively biased the coverage about media mergers. The news stories that involved media firms, specially, were more *pro* merger processes than those which have discussed other business sectors' mergers. Not surprisingly, LEE and HWANG (1997) have reached similar conclusions, according to them: "Our findings suggest that conglomerate ownership could force a leading news magazine to show favoritism toward the products of its parent corporation".

Time Periods Surveyed

The graph below shows the inconsistency of the print media's reporting on public communications policies. Rather than receiving dedicated daily coverage, the issue appears only in special instances in which emblematic stories momentarily capture the attention of newsrooms. In the last quarter of 2003, the headlines were dominated by the Gugu-PCC affair. The incident involved an interview TV personality Gugu, host of a Sunday afternoon variety program on the SBT network, conducted with two alleged members of the First

Three months periods text distribution



Capital Command (Primeiro Comando da Capital – PCC), a criminal organization founded within Sao Paulo’s penitentiary system, that was later revealed to be a hoax. The third quarter of 2004 was marked by two major discussions: the proposed establishment of Ancinav and the CFJ. Both ideas blossomed and fizzled in the same cycle. Finally, the third and fourth quarters of 2005 were occupied by the debate on the adoption of the Brazilian digital TV standard.

Notwithstanding their potential relevance, none of these agenda issues could be construed as integral to the broader discussion on the permanent set of media-related topics (such as the regulation of content or ownership) to which print space could be devoted consistently throughout the calendar year. Instead, headline-grabbing stories, largely removed from the industry’s workings, accounted for a significant portion of the published content, and, in fact, ended up imposing a certain logic of their own on the coverage. Issues including the renewal of concessions/broadcasters’ licenses, adherence to concession rules by radio and television broadcasters, among the many others which could have occupied the print media’s day-to-day reporting, appeared less frequently.

Geographic Distribution of the Sample

Another way to analyze the balance or imbalance of press coverage is to examine content distribution by the locality of publication of the surveyed outlets. The data indicates a sharp concentration – the most significant identified in any ANDI survey yet – in the state of Sao Paulo, where, despite its marginally greater share of sample outlets, the volume of published content was almost a full 7 times higher than the national average.

By contrast, although the Northeast accounted for a greater percentage of the total sample publications, because of the large number of states located in the region, it was disproportionately underrepresented in this category, a result, perhaps, of the close association between newspapers and local political groups.

Table 1: News Content by Region of Publication Origin

Region	Southeast	Northeast	Center-West	South	North	National	Total
%	32.3	17.6	10.6	9.2	7.9	22.4	100.0

Another approach to determining the geographic distribution of the sample pieces is to analyze the localities reported in the survey content. Of the stories centered on a specific locality,⁷ 79% addressed Brazilian reality exclusively, 7.2%, the international setting, and 13.8%, a combination of the two. The national media devoted limited attention to the international setting, even though communications regulations in virtually all of the advanced democracies are more consolidated than in Brazil and, as such, provide a rich source of experiences (and agendas) for the wider conversation on public communications policies.

Finally, an overwhelming proportion of the media's coverage (80%) of Brazilian reality addressed the national setting, while the remaining 20% concentrated on specific regions, states, and municipalities, suggesting a disconnect between the broader communications debate and the related local issues.

Commercial Television: The Center of Attention

Public communications policies encompass a wide range of sectors, including television and radio broadcasting, which may be community-based, State-run, or privately operated. The explicit mandate in the 1988 Brazilian Constitution requiring the establishment of three communications systems (public, State, and private), in addition to the not insignificant difference, for example, between a commercial network and an educational network, point to the importance of reserving specific spaces for different ends.

Despite the complexity of Brazil's media setting, however, the editorial coverage of public communications policies by newsrooms focused predominantly on commercial television. Important sectors, such as newspapers, radio broadcasting, and cable television, received significantly less coverage than commercial TV broadcasting. With regard to the individual subsystems, the media devoted less attention to the educational, community, and institutional segments than to privately operated/commercial operations.

This would appear, on the one hand, to place the print media in the comfortable position of spotlighting a "competing" medium: television. Further, it does not seem merely coincidental that newspapers controlled by media groups with TV broadcasting holdings were found to provide less coverage of the industry. On the other hand, the limited plurality of considerations on the different systems precludes development

of a broader agenda devoted to the possibilities of communications. Discussion of the potential access and scope of community, university, institutional, and educational systems is, after all, central to what is generally referred to as the democratization of communications. Yet, the issue clashes directly with the private interests that dominate the sector. Finally, it is important to note that the segments and systems cited in the news pieces were calculated using a multiple choice variable approach. Consequently, all the categories mentioned in a given story were entered in the survey results.

Table 2: Segments or Sectors Cited*

Segment	%
Television	59.0
Newspaper	18.6
Radio	18.6
Internet	14.5
Film Industry	13.9
Publicity/Advertising	9.0
Other Telecommunications Segments (mobile telephony, etc)	7.6
Cable	5.0
DTH	1.9
MMDS	0.8
Others	4.4
Media and/or Communications in General	17.5

*Multiple choice variables used, thus sum total may exceed 100%.

Table 3: Subdivisions of the Public, State, and Private Systems*

System	%
Private/ Commercial	59.0
State	7.5
Educational	3.7
Community	2.9
Institutional (Legislative TV, Government TV, TeleSur, etc.)	1.8
Cultural	1.2
University	0.6
Segmented: Religious	0.5
Segmented: Labor Unions and Professional Associations	0.3
Others	0.3
Not Identified	20.7
Not Applicable	12.1

*Multiple choice variables used, thus sum total may exceed 100%.

What are people watching on TV? The same old fixation...

As we have seen, the print media's editorial content focuses primarily on commercial television. However, by itself this finding tells us little about the primary issues addressed in the coverage. The question then becomes what is being discussed in the print media's reporting that relates principally to television, as a medium, and to the private sector, as a potential media system?

On this point, we found marked limitations in the print media's reporting: content issues (quality, for example) accounted for more than 50% of the coverage. To be sure, these issues are of great significance to the Brazilian public sphere. Yet, they represent the tip of a much larger iceberg. Other issues cited above, such as the media's relationship with the political arena (4.6%), with democracy (1.8%), and with power (0.3%), were broadly neglected. In addition, the

Table 4: Which of the following key issues is cited as a central theme?

Central Theme	N	%
Content Issues (entertainment, journalism, publicity)	594	50.2
Structural, Market, Regulatory Issues (except content regulation)	139	11.7
Technological Issues	139	11.7
Free Electoral Airtime	71	6.0
Media and Politics	54	4.6
Intellectual Property	36	3.0
Rights and Freedoms	23	1.9
Media and Democracy	21	1.8
General Communications Issues	19	1.6
History of Communications and/or of a Sector/Segment/System	18	1.5
General Discussion of a Media Sector/Segment/System	16	1.4
Issues of State Bureaucracy related to Communications	16	1.4
Professional and Labor Issues	9	0.8
Education and Communications	5	0.4
General Law of Communications	4	0.3
Media and Power	3	0.3
Others	17	1.4
Total	1184	100.0

percentage of the coverage devoted to structural and regulatory issues (concentration of ownership, system of concessions, among others) – which help explain many of the content-related problems identified by the media – was similarly meager (11.7%). A major imbalance, therefore, was identified between the composition of the reporting on public communications policies and the key communications issues of the day – an imbalance identified, moreover, within an already scarce body of coverage.

Consequently, the current setting severely handicaps the capacity for the vital agenda-setting required to bring about changes in the Brazilian media's scenario. There is a general absence of discussion on media education (0.4%), the general law of mass communications (0.3%), the control of media outlets by politicians and their relatives (0.4%), and the structure of ownership in the industry (0.3%). By providing incomplete coverage, the question becomes: is the print media fulfilling its role as watchdog over public policies, specifically, in this case, communications policies?

IV. A Description of Specific Issues

We now turn to an examination of a selection of specific stories drawn from the coverage in order to better understand how the sample publications addressed the broader issue considered here during the survey period.

Cases

A small number of specific stories, as mentioned above, reported during the survey period accounted for 40% of the coverage. As argued before, despite the relevance and, consequently, the media's obligation to report on these stories, stimulating reflection on the overarching issues that encompass and explain them is crucial.

Notwithstanding the point above, the following question bears consideration: how were the cases outlined below covered? A brief analysis of the list of issues (Table 5) indicates that those falling further to the left on the spectrum of media interests – such as the closure of community radio stations or the bill to regionalize programming – received less coverage than the CFJ, Ancinav, and digital TV debates.

Nonetheless, the following argument could be raised: perhaps

issues such as the proposed CFJ were addressed in such a way as to stimulate reflection on communications regulations, generally, and the media, specifically, irrespective of any clear-cut bias for or against the Congressional bill in the print media pieces. Yet, this was not the case: a detailed examination of the coverage revealed that nearly 80% of the content on the CFJ bill was unequivocally opposed to its passage and did not reserve equal print space for “the other side,” a basic standard, it should be noted, of good journalism.

Two concepts frequently invoked in the coverage were censorship (15% of all the content employed the term) and freedom of expression (10.7%). However, an analysis of the data reveals an ideological bent to their use. Invariably, the terms were employed as catchphrases, devoid of context, of adequate explanation, rather than as concepts with broad historical meaning to democratic systems. A mere 0.3% of the stories offered a more in-depth discussion of censorship, the same percentage, coincidentally, as focused on freedom of expression. As concerns the coverage of freedom of expression, discussion of other rights – to a voice, to information, to communication – was neglected. In other words, important elements such as context, divergent opinions, and construction of the debate were largely left by the wayside.

Table 5: Stories Emphasized in the Print Media Coverage

Cases	No.	%
CFJ	89	7.5
Ancinav	85	7.2
Adoption of the Brazilian Digital TV Standard	82	6.9
The “Quem Financia a Baixaria É Contra a Cidadania” Campaign	62	5.2
TV Rating System	38	3.2
Expulsion of NYT Correspondent Larry Rother	32	2.7
Gugu (PCC affair)	28	2.4
Regulation/Ban on Alcoholic Beverage Advertising	21	1.8
BNDES Loans to the Media	19	1.6
Closure of Community Radio Stations	9	0.8
Bill on the Regionalization of Programming	10	0.8
Gag Law	5	0.4
None of the Cases Cited Discussed	704	59.5
Total	1184	100.0

Pinga-Fogo

Pinga-Fogo is a kind of meeting to debate diverse issues. An examination of some of the issues present and absent in the reporting provides a clearer picture of the coverage considered in these pages. Media corporate social responsibility appeared in 0.8% of all content. Indeed, this important international trend toward transparency in business and management and social accountability received no significant coverage from the print media. In our view, this is an area that offers ample fodder for further investigation and pressure. For increasingly, companies, including media firms, define themselves as socially responsible entities. It is up to the print media to ascertain whether this assertion is more than mere rhetoric.

Issues of diversity, so dear to a country like Brazil, received little attention: less than 2% of the news stories addressed gender, race/ethnicity, and persons with disabilities. On a positive note, however, 14.4% of the diversity-related content focused on regional, local, and cultural issues.

The coverage displayed serious deficiencies in linking the discussion on communications to the development process (1.4%). Additionally, pressing questions such as the presence of religion in the media sector (0.5%) were not explored.

It is important to note, however, that efforts to contextualize the issues considered were identified: 30% of the content cited statistics, while 35% referenced legislation.

Finally, 15.7% of the pieces carried divergent opinions, a higher percentage than in other analyses conducted by ANDI. Nevertheless, given the many points of contention pervading the issue, there is a clear need for progress and improvement in this area.

V. Conclusion

The discussion presented in this article – for which only tentative remedies are offered – constitutes a major challenge to contemporary societies, namely, are the news media in their role as primary watchdog and agenda-setter for the public debate capable of reporting on themselves? The survey found that 0.5% of the sample stories considered this question, suggesting the actual capacity for such self-examination.

Whether we like it or not, the media are a principal instrument of accountability in contemporary society. Additionally, they serve to ensure greater transparency from governments, channel the demands of minority groups, and provide citizens with information on issues related to the *res publica*. However, this is precisely why the media are themselves a central issue for society, and why they must be investigated, placed on the public agenda, entered into the docket, and debated. Who will carry out this task?

The initial hope was that the print media would provide an affirmative answer to this query. However, the complex relationship between the field of journalism and the private companies under which the profession operates does not offer an amenable environment to this end, as the data presented in the survey confirms.

“Who is watching the watchdogs?” therefore is a question to which there is still no clear or satisfactory response. Yet, glimpses of light here and there indicate that a possible answer may in fact lie in “the watchdogs themselves.”

NOTES

- 1 Agenda-setting theory was initially developed by McCombs and Shaw (1990).
- 2 For more on some of the dynamics that inform agenda-setting, see Soroka (2002).
- 3 For more on the watchdog role in journalism, see, Waisbord (2001).
- 4 For data on the coverage of public policies in general, see Canela (2005).
- 5 The National Federation of Journalists has proposed, inspired in Brazilian Bar Association model, the creation – which should be approved by the National Congress – of Council that would regulate the journalists.
- 6 The Ministry of Culture presented a model of independent regulatory agency that would be responsible for the audiovisual content regulation.
- 7 Of the sample content, 82.8% focused on a specific geographic location – that is, the news pieces reported on events in a particular country, state, or city. The remaining stories addressed more conceptual questions related to public communications policies.

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