Call for papers

What's (the) News? Values, Viruses and Vectors of Newsworthiness

13-14 December 2018
Third biennial conference of the Brussels Institute for Journalism Studies (BIJU)
Department of Applied Linguistics
Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Belgium

Deadline for proposals: 30 June 2018

<u>**Plenary speakers**</u>
Monika Bednarek (University of Sydney, Australia)
Tony Harcup (University of Sheffield, UK)

Steered by what Kovach & Rosenstiel describe as our 'awareness instinct', exchanging 'news' fulfills basic human needs for information, orientation, and connection. The entanglement of 'news', understood as recent and current public information, and the development of journalism (as a profession), renders the question what 'is' or 'becomes' news highly relevant for the study of journalism. One particularly influential approach to 'newsworthiness' in journalism studies emerged from Galtung and Ruge's 1965 seminal study on 'news values' in (foreign) news reporting. The core question of this study was which criteria journalists apply in the news selection process. The authors contend that (negative) events having to do with conflict, elites or change in the daily lives or the immediate environment of the audience are likely to become news. Especially if they have some magnitude and if they are recent, unexpected and/or if they can be linked to individual people. Since then, numerous scholars taking sociological or critical cultural approaches to 'news values', and selection and journalistic routines in general, have revisited their ideas, and refined and complemented them.

These insights have been applicable to a lesser or greater extent throughout the whole history of journalism, yet, the digital era and the advent of social media more specifically have altered vectors – understood both as agents and carriers – of newsworthiness significantly, reshaping how 'news' is conceived, the way it comes about and is exchanged. Within a networked, globalized environment, the range of sources that are available to journalists or that are able to trigger 'news' on a day-to-day basis has expanded considerably, while a plethora of newcomers (e.g. citizen journalists, alternative, grassroots and partisan media outlets) in or at the margins of the journalistic field challenge traditional conceptions of 'newsworthiness', as well as the relationship between 'journalism' and 'news' *per se* (e.g. in 'slow journalism' and 'constructive journalism' movements). Even if the position of these newcomers along traditional news media's status as primary definers of 'the news' may still be subject to debate, it is hard to deny the impact of digitization and social media on contemporary audiences' daily 'news diet'.

Amongst others, search engines, (automated) news aggregators, and social media platforms, and their underlying algorithms, have become key to understanding how news emerges and circulates nowadays. Social media allow to register which stories are clicked, liked or shared most and thus to examine which topics and approaches raise the highest interest of the audience. Journalists are expected to develop a feeling for 'shareability' and to produce texts and visuals which will 'go viral'. The focus in the selection process seems to have shifted ever more from what journalists deemed fit

to publish towards what the audience is expected to appreciate most. Moreover, as clicks, likes and shares are monitored automatically, news stories which receive the most attention of readers are moved up higher in the news flow, so that they are picked up even more often. This presentation process often happens without human intervention, thus leaving the selection entirely to the appreciation of the audience. Furthermore, these developments have also led to highly customized news packages – 'me media' – and the related issues of the 'filter bubble' and 'echo chamber'.

However, it is still the journalist (or is it the 'news worker') who decides what shape the story will take and which aspects will be accentuated. The topic of news values can therefore also be approached from a linguistic/discursive side. The main question then is how news workers construct an event as interesting or relevant, i.e. how they use language to make certain events newsworthy, especially on the internet media platforms. And taking into consideration the importance of visual resources on these platforms, an analysis of verbal text will in many cases have to be replaced by or complemented with a multimodal analysis.

We invite participants to engage in a critical discussion of newsworthiness. Possible questions which can be addressed are: are there topics which are newsworthy by nature, which elements arouse most interest in human psyche, which stories and/or sources do journalists and their audience find worth sharing, how do news values vary between media types and news beats, how can journalists or news workers construct issues or events as interesting, what is the relation between newsworthiness and publishing platforms.

Inspirational literature:

Bednarek, Monika & Helen Caple (2017). *The Discourse of News Values: How News Organizations Create 'Newsworthiness'.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Harcup, Tony & Deirdre O'Neill (2017). What is news? News values revisited (again). *Journalism Studies*, 18 (12). pp. 1470-1488.

We welcome submissions from all relevant disciplinary backgrounds approaching topics including but certainly not limited to:

* News values in the selection of news
* News values in the production of news
* The linguistic or multimodal construction of an event as newsworthy
* The relation between publishing platforms and newsworthiness
* What makes news 'go viral'
* Algorithms and automation in the presentation of news
* Methodological approaches to the study of newsworthiness

We welcome both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and analyses at process, product/text, and/or audience level.

All papers will be published (after the authors' consent) in the electronic proceedings of the conference and we are planning to publish a selection of the papers in a volume and/or a special issue.

Junior researchers are warmly invited to participate.

The venue for the conference will be the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (https://www.naturalsciences.be/en) Vautierstraat/Rue Vautier 29, 1000 Brussels, near the Brussels-Luxembourg station, a lively neighbourhood with lots of hotels and restaurants.

Conference fee (including pre-conference reception, lunch, coffee):

€ 150 (regular participants), € 75 (PhD students).

Dinner will be organized on Friday 14 December and charged separately.

Please send a proposal of no more than 300 words (excluding selected references) together with your affiliation and a short biography (c. 100 words) to **whatnews@vub.be** by **30 June 2018**. Decisions will be announced by 15 August. Questions about any aspect of the conference should be addressed to **whatnews@vub.be**.

For updates on the practical organization, please check our website

http://www.vub.ac.be/en/events/2018/whatnews.