

A CROSS-CULTURAL DISCURSIVE APPROACH TO NEWS VALUES IN THE PRESS IN THE US, THE UK AND ITALY: THE CASE OF THE SUPREME COURT RULING ON SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

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Abstract

On June 26, 2015, the US Supreme Court ruled on the *Obergefell v. Hodges* case that led to the recognition of same-sex marriage in all fifty States, declaring it a constitutional right under the Fourteenth Amendment. The event received huge media coverage and soon became a major topic of animated discussions on digital media platforms.

In this context, our investigation will focus on the cross-cultural representation of the main actors and events concerning the US Supreme Court ruling in leading US, UK and Italian online newspapers. In line with Bednarek and Caple's (2012a, 2012b) approach to the analysis of media discourse, our analysis focuses on the discursive construction of newsworthiness (Bell 1991; Bednarek and Caple 2012a, 2012b, 2014, 2017; Caple and Bednarek 2016; Bednarek 2016a, 2016b) in the textual elements of the selected news stories. Our findings have confirmed Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts' (1978) claim on the cultural nature of news values, the analysis of which can be seen as a suitable instrument to draw a cultural 'map' of the social world. Indeed, our investigation has identified how different cultures tend to highlight different sets of news values in reporting a news story that has cross-culturally impacted on the different value systems of the countries represented in our corpus¹.

1. The *Obergefell v. Hodges* case: the context that led to the same-sex ruling

The long journey towards the recognition of same-sex marriage in the United States starts from the early 1970s, when on May 18, 1970, two University of Minnesota students, Richard John Baker and James Michael McConnell, applied to Hennepin County District Court (Minneapolis, MN) for a marriage licence². Clerk Gerald Nelson, however, denied the application, since the applicants were both men. Baker and McConnell,

¹ The authors would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their suggestions, comments, and guidance on early drafts of this contribution.

² The following reconstruction of the events that have led to the Supreme Court ruling is based on the timeline offered by the website ProCon.org (retrieved from <http://gaymarriage.procon.org/view.timeline.php?timelineID=000030>; last accessed: February 4, 2017), where news stories from different sources historically reconstruct the legal steps in the recognition of same-sex marriage.

by claiming that Minnesota law on marriage made no reference to gender, sued clerk Nelson, but the trial court agreed with the latter. The couple's case was dismissed again when Baker and McConnell went to the US Supreme Court.

However, the matter concerning legal recognition of civil marriage rights and benefits for same-sex couples became increasingly prominent in US politics following the Hawaii Supreme Court decision (1993) in *Baehr v. Lewin*, which challenged traditional marriage and raised the possibility that the State's prohibition of same-sex marriages might be unconstitutional. At the national government level, this challenge was met by strong restrictions to marriage to male-female couples, most notably through the enactment of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA; Clinton administration, first term, 1993-1997).

Given these restrictions, the Supreme Court's decision in *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health*, on May 17, 2004, thanks to which Massachusetts became the first US state to legalize same-sex marriage, represents a cornerstone in the fight towards the recognition of civil rights for same-sex couples. However, this provoked again a reaction from supporters of traditional marriage and, more specifically, from former US President George W. Bush, who announced a series of legal actions to reserve marriage rights and benefits to opposite-sex couples. Notwithstanding this announcement, we can notice a steady expansion of the recognition of same-sex couples' rights up until late 2014, when same-sex marriages had become legal in states that contained more than 70% of the US population. Even though legalization came through the action of state courts or, more frequently, as the result of the decisions of federal courts, they further highlighted the increasing urgency of the matter from a national government point of view.

In June 2013, the US Supreme Court's decision in *United States v. Windsor* struck down the restriction of the US federal interpretation of 'marriage' and 'spouse' to apply only to opposite-sex unions. Therefore, this represented one of the very first chinks in the US armour in helping the progress of lawsuits in federal courts that challenged state bans on same-sex marriage.

Hence, given the previous legislations in favour of same-sex couples, on June 26, 2015, the US Supreme Court in the case *Obergefell v. Hodges* was able to strike down all state bans on same-sex marriage, legalizing it in all fifty states and requiring states to honour out-of-state same-sex marriage licences. However, the landmark 5-4 decision split the court between the usual ideological lines and, in a rare occurrence, the four justices who disagreed with the majority authored dissents (Gerstein 2015). In particular, Justice Antonin Scalia argued that the decision represents a threat to American democracy, maintaining that (Supreme Court of the United States 2015):

The opinion in these cases is the furthest extension in fact – and the furthest extension one can even imagine – of the Court's claimed power to create "liberties" that the Constitution and its Amendments neglect to mention. This practice of constitutional revision by an unelected committee of nine, always accompanied (as it is today) by extravagant praise of liberty, robs the People of the most important liberty they asserted in the Declaration of Independence and won in the Revolution of 1776: the freedom to govern themselves.

Given the heated debates surrounding it and the massive media coverage it received, we have decided to focus our attention on the US Supreme Court ruling on the

Obergefell v. Hodges case in the way the press reported this event. Additionally, given the worldwide resonance of the decision, and given the social nature of news values (see Section 2.2), investigating how they are enhanced in the US, UK and Italian press can help us see the different social construction of the event in the three cultures under investigation, thus highlighting the different cross-cultural ideologies embedded discursively in the news reporting.

2. Data collection and methodology

Our investigation, then, will focus on the representation of the main actors and events concerning the US Supreme Court ruling in leading US, UK and Italian newspapers. More specifically, the analysis will concentrate on the discursive construction of news values in the textual elements of the selected news stories. The aim of this contribution is to identify differences in terms of negativity, prominence, consonance, and personalization (among others: see Section 3 for a detailed description of the news values introduced in the framework of analysis by Bednarek and Caple 2012a) in the three countries and heritage news sources under investigation³.

In particular, our contribution is based on the analysis of the first article (June 26, 2015) published online by *The New York Times* (US_NYT), *The Washington Post* (US_WAP), and the *Los Angeles Times* (US_LAT) in the US; *The Guardian* (UK_Guardian), *The Daily Telegraph* (UK_Telegraph), and *The Times* (UK_Times) in the UK; and *la Repubblica* (IT_Rep), *Corriere della Sera* (IT_CorSer), *Il Messaggero* (IT_Mess), *il Giornale* (IT_Gior), *il Fatto Quotidiano* (IT_FaQuot), and *Liberio* (IT_Lib) in Italy⁴. The selection was made both on the basis of the online circulation of each newspaper⁵ in the respective countries and their widespread use of digital media, something that we will discuss later in this piece of research (see the Concluding remarks and *desiderata* section of this contribution).

³ Heritage news sources refer to traditional and well-established print and broadcast news media organizations (such as *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The New York Times*, *BBC* and *CNN*) that were developed before the advent of the Web 2.0 (Piazza, Haarman and Caborn 2015; Bednarek 2016; Bednarek and Caple 2017). In other words, these media outlets can be seen as off-line native organizations that later saw in the Internet a way to survive given their low product sales and advertising income from off-line contents. 'Digital native' sources (Bednarek 2016; Bednarek and Caple 2017), on the other hand, refer to online-only news media organizations (such as the *Huffington Post* and *Buzzfeed*).

⁴ The newspapers included in the corpus are also representative of different political and ideological stances. However, while the British press has been more accurately categorized as responding to specific political agendas (e.g. *The Guardian* has been traditionally seen as left-leaning, while *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* are classified as right-leaning; see Jucker 1992: Ch. 3; McNair 1994: 62; O'Driscoll 2003: 153; Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery 2013: 8-9), the Italian and, more specifically, the American press is more problematic to clearly categorise as manifesting its allegiance to specific political parties (also because each country has its own conceptualisation of what can be regarded as 'labour' or 'conservative' agendas). Therefore, for the purposes of this contribution, political stances will not be categorically taken into consideration in order to explain given phenomena since, as Baker *et al.* (2013: 8) argue, "[t]he political terms 'left' and 'right' are relative, multifaceted and therefore problematic [...] [since] within a newspaper there may be some columnists who have been chosen precisely because they represent an antagonistic view [...] [and] there are different ways of being 'left' or 'right'".

⁵ The data regarding the online circulation were retrieved, for the UK, from the *Audit Bureau of Circulations* (ABC: available online at <https://www.abc.org.uk/>); for the US, from the *Alliance for Audited Media* (AAM: available online at <https://auditedmedia.com/>); and for Italy, from *Alexa Internet* (available online at <https://www.alexa.com/>).

The articles selected for the investigation all belong to the same genre (i.e. news stories) in order to rule out the hypothesis that cross-cultural differences were due to the nature of the genre.

Additionally, the selection of the countries was based on the different legal steps each of them has taken towards marriage equality. Indeed, while the Marriage Act (2013) legalized same-sex marriage in England and Wales, in Italy a heated debate was occurring regarding the approval of same-sex civil unions at the time of the US Supreme Court ruling.

The analysis of the news stories has been performed by adopting a qualitative approach to the data collected. Thus, each news story has been manually annotated⁶ to highlight the news values enhanced in specific lexical items. Due to the differences in languages and cultures, the news values were annotated manually on the basis of a common categorization (see Section 2.2 for further information on the discursive approach to news values used in this contribution). This has allowed us to draw a common baseline in order to make a comparison between the different newspapers in the corpus under investigation.

2.1. *News values in the press*

News values have been traditionally described in terms of the factors that make a news story newsworthy, that is, as “the factors that take an event into the news” (Bednarek and Caple 2012a: 39). Thus, they have been considered as linked to news selection since, as Bell (1991: 155) argues, they are “values by which one ‘fact’ is judged more newsworthy than another”.

In the Journalism and Communication Studies literature, news values have been defined by Bednarek and Caple (2014: 2) as “properties of events or stories or as criteria/principles that are applied by news workers in order to select events or stories as news or to choose the structure and order of reporting”. Since they are generally referred to as ‘values’, van Dijk (1988: 119) underlines their location in social cognition, as “[t]hey are values about the newsworthiness of events or discourse, shared by professionals [...], and indirectly by the public of the news media”.

First introduced by Galtung and Ruge (1965: 65) in their foundational work on how events become news, news values are discussed through a metaphor, thus comparing the world to “an enormous set of broadcasting stations, each one emitting its signal or its program at its proper wavelength”. Therefore, in order to ‘pick up’ the right frequencies and maximize them in a given media outlet, the media industry follows certain values (*ibid.*: 70). However, Galtung and Ruge’s (*ibid.*) seminal work displays a number of shortcomings. In particular, as Harcup and O’Neill (2001: 265) argue, Galtung and Ruge’s (*ibid.*) approach to news values seems to imply that “there is a given reality ‘out there’ which the news gatherers will either admit or exclude” while, as previously argued, since they are first and foremost values, they offer a specific construction of a given reality. In the words of Vasterman (1995: n.p.):

⁶ Each researcher annotated the articles independently. Results were compared and discordances and incongruities were jointly discussed in order to aim at consistency of annotation.

[...] news is not out there, journalists do not report news, they produce news. They construct it, they construct facts, they construct statements and they construct a context in which these facts make sense. They reconstruct 'a' reality.

In this sense and, in a way, by overcoming the limitations of Galtung and Ruge's (1965) study on news values, Bell (1991) further explores them as a way to turn an event into news. This simple but powerful insight into the factitious nature of news values as a construction of newsworthiness allows the author to categorize them in three main macro-categories, that is, as values in the news text, values in the news process, and values in news actors and events.

Values in the news text (i.e. clarity, brevity, and colour: Bell 1991: 160) are those factors that are related to the quality and style of the news story that may affect its newsworthiness. In other words, "if a story's writing exhibits these characteristics, editorial decision-makers will favour it above a story which does not exhibit them" (*ibid.*).

Values in the news process (i.e. continuity, competition, co-option, composition, predictability, and prefabrication: *ibid.*: 158-160) are those factors that are related more closely to news gathering. That is, they can be seen as those factors that enable given events to be featured as news.

Finally, values in news actors and events (i.e. negativity, recency, proximity, consonance, unambiguity, unexpectedness, novelty, superlativeness, relevance, personalization, eliteness, attribution, facticity: *ibid.*: 156-158) are those factors that can enhance the newsworthiness of an event.

However, Bednarek and Caple (2012a: 40) define as news values only Bell's (1991) macro-category of *values in news actors and events*, since the other two macro-categories usually represent "general characteristics demanded of a news story in order to be included". Thus, as we can see in Table 1, Bell's (*ibid.*) macro-categories under which news values have been organized are re-labelled in the framework of analysis developed by Bednarek and Caple (2012a):

BELL'S (1991) CATEGORIES	BEDNAREK AND CAPLE'S (2012a) CATEGORIES
Values in the news text	News writing objectives
Values in the news process	News cycle/market factors
Values in news actors and events	News values

Table 1. Bell's (1991) macro-categories of news values and Bednarek and Caple's (2012a) corresponding categories

Therefore, in line with Bednarek and Caple's (2012a, 2012b, 2014, 2017) Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA), our approach to news values in the news stories under investigation will be restricted only to the ones identified by Bell (1991) as values in news actors and events.

2.2. The discursive construction of news values

As previously said, Bednarek and Caple's (2012a) view is particularly linked to their discursive approach to news values, which investigates (Bednarek and Caple 2012b: 104) "how newsworthiness is construed and established through discourse".

According to Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak (2011: 357), discourse as a social practice implies “a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and all the diverse elements of the situation(s), institutions(s), and social structure(s) which frame it”. However, Fairclough *et al.* (*ibid.*) maintain that this dialectical relationship goes both ways: discourse shapes and is shaped by the situation(s), institutions(s), and social structure(s). In this way, news values can be seen as discursively enhanced since they may be representative of specific social concerns that are ‘voiced’ in media discourse. Thus, a discursive perspective sees news values as a “quality of *texts*” (Caple and Bednarek 2016: 13, emphasis in the original), and their analysis can allow us to “systematically investigate how these values are constructed in the different types of textual material involved in the news process” (Bednarek and Caple 2012b: 104). This approach to news values allows the authors to highlight given textual traces, referred to as “pointers” to newsworthiness (Bednarek and Caple 2014: 11), that provide insights as to how news values are realized in news discourse, as we can see from Table 2 (Bednarek and Caple 2012a: 55-56; 2012b: 106).

NEWS VALUES	EXAMPLES
NEGATIVITY	<i>terrible news, a tragedy, distraught, worried, breaking our hearts, killed, deaths, bodies</i> , etc.
TIMELINESS	<i>breaking news, today, yesterday</i> , [use of tenses that express that an event has only just happened, is still ongoing or will happen in the (near) future], etc.
PROXIMITY	[geographical names or cultural references]
PROMINENCE / ELITENESS	<i>pop star, celebrity bad boy, President, MP</i> , etc.
CONSONANCE	<i>legendary, notorious, a flood of immigrants, yet another personal scandal</i> , etc.
IMPACT	<i>a potentially momentous day, a terror that took their breath away, thousands of people</i> , etc.
NOVELTY	<i>a very different sort of disaster, a new discovery, unusual</i> , etc.
SUPERLATIVENESS	<i>they were petrified, a giant storm, a tragedy of epic proportions</i> , etc.
PERSONALIZATION	[an ‘ordinary’ person telling their story]

Table 2. Summary offered by Bednarek and Caple (2012a: 55-56; 2012b: 106) of the linguistic cues that can be used in order to construe news values

The list of pointers to newsworthiness should not be restricted to the examples given in Table 2: furthermore, certain textual devices can “simultaneously construe more than one news value and hence contribute significantly to rendering the story newsworthy” (Bednarek and Caple 2012b: 106).

Additionally, Bednarek and Caple (2014: 6) argue that “an analysis of how news values are discursively constructed in texts should be both ‘manual’ and ‘multimodal’”, since “only through close analysis of texts can we find out what values are emphasised (foregrounded), rare or absent (backgrounded)” (*ibid.*).

Thanks to the analysis of how news values are discursively constructed, we can thus gain “first insights into a conventionalised repertoire of rhetoric of newsworthiness”

(Bednarek and Caple 2014: 14). Therefore, if “every journalist and every editor will have a different interpretation of what is newsworthy” (Rau 2010: 15), the analysis of news values in media discourse can help researchers identify “what kind of discursive devices are repeatedly used [...] to construct different news values” (Bednarek and Caple 2014: 16) and, consequently, they can take us to the backstage of the news production process.

From this observation, we must also underline that these are values and, as such, “[t]hey are not neutral, but reflect ideologies and priorities held in society” (Bell 1991: 156). Indeed, Cotter (2010: 8) refers to them as “ideological factors”, since they can be used to reinforce “an ‘ideology’ about what counts as news” (*ibid.*: 67) and “*other* ideologies (rather than just an ideology of what is newsworthy)” (Bednarek and Caple 2014: 3, emphasis in the original). Thus, news values can be seen as those factors that are enhanced in news stories to reinforce ideologies and ‘make sense’ of given events, in line with the value system of a specific cultural environment. In this view, news values construct a cultural ‘map’ (Hall *et al.* 1978) of what counts as news. In the words of Hall *et al.* (*ibid.*: 54-55):

An event only ‘makes sense’ if it can be located within a range of known social and cultural identifications. [...] The social identification, classification and contextualisation of news events in terms of these background frames of reference is the fundamental process by which the media make the world they report on intelligible to readers and viewers. This process of ‘making an event intelligible’ is a social process – constituted by a number of specific journalistic practices, which embody (often only implicitly) crucial assumptions about what society is and how it works.

The analysis of news values can thus be seen as uncovering the cultural assumptions that the media industry embodies in reporting specific events in a given society. Retrieving their discursive construction may be metaphorically associated with the operation of linking different points on a cultural map to connect them and reconstruct the social contours of the representation of specific actors and events.

In line with the previous observations and the methodological framework adopted here⁷, in the following section we will apply this model of analysis to the news stories in the corpus under investigation.

3. Discursive cross-cultural identification of the news values in the US, UK and Italian press

Given the methodology previously introduced and used in order to analyse the news values highlighted in the news stories under investigation, in the following section, we are going to comment on the specific realizations of the news values as enhanced in reporting the US Supreme Court ruling on same-sex marriage in the different context of the US, UK and Italian press.

Figure 1 below shows the overall distribution of the news values retrieved in the

⁷ The methodological framework adopted here is based on the one introduced in Bednarek and Caple (2012a) and further explored and used in Bednarek and Caple (2012b, 2014).

data under investigation. We will, however, comment on them individually in the next sections.

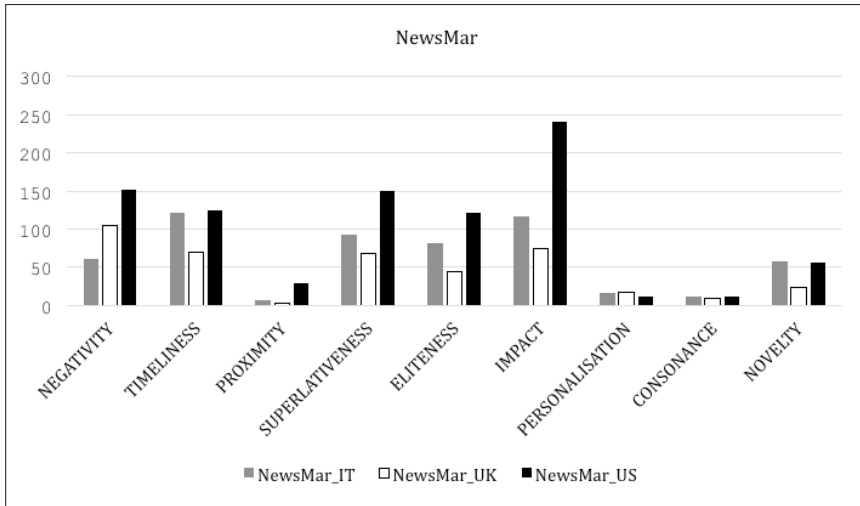


Figure 1. Distribution of news values in NewsMar

As can be seen in Figure 1, while some news values are equally distributed in the news stories and countries under investigation, others seem to be particularly enhanced in specific social contexts. However, the equal distribution of some of them does not mean that they foreground and pinpoint the same issues and world views in the US, UK and Italy. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, we will comment on them and offer a wider overview of the different or similar way specific news values are enhanced in the corpus under investigation.

3.1. Negativity

In line with previous studies (Glasgow University Media Group 1976; Bell 1991), Bednarek and Caple (2012a: 42) argue that “[n]ews stories very frequently concern bad happenings such as conflicts, accidents, damages, injuries, disasters or wars”. More broadly, negativity thrives on conflictual aspects of news stories. Table 3 below shows the distribution of the news value in the news stories under investigation:

IT							UK				US			
CS	FQ	Gi	Li	Me	Re	Tot.	Gu	Te	Ti	Tot.	LAT	NYT	WaP	Tot.
10	6	1	23	19	2	61	23	53	28	104	56	33	63	152

Table 3. Negativity in NewsMar

As we can see from Table 3, negativity is particularly enhanced cross-culturally in all the news stories under investigation. However, each newspaper uses it to highlight given aspects of the news story. Indeed, the Italian press (see example 1 below) generally uses negativity so as to present the event as a resolution of an injustice (with the exception of the *Messaggero*, which focuses on the opposite sides in the debate before the Supreme Court, and *Liberio*, which employs it to argue that other events are more

relevant and newsworthy (ISIS attacks) and to focus on the opinions expressed by the dissident judges):

(1) Il giudice Anthony Kennedy, scrivendo a nome della Corte, ha detto che le persone omosessuali che intendono sposarsi «non devono essere **condannate** a vivere in **solitudine**, **esclusa** [sic] da una delle più antiche istituzioni della civiltà»⁸.

(IT_CorSer)

In the UK press, while *The Times* enhances negativity so as to make a comparison between the event and past human right victories (e.g. the abolition of racial segregation) and *The Guardian* focuses on the dissenting judges opposing the sentence and its legal limitations, *The Telegraph* is more explicit in using negativity in order to negatively evaluate the event as a revolution imposed undemocratically on people, a crusade against those opposing gay marriage (see example 2 below), and LGBTIQ+ people as emotionally immature:

(2) Conservatives **lost** the **battle** over gay marriage, and liberals won – with a little help from **activist** judges. Hopefully they will be generous **in victory** and not **persecute** religious people.

(UK_Telegraph)

Finally, as for the US press, negativity is particularly linked in all the news stories analysed to the dissenting opinions of the Supreme Court judges: their opposing views are constructed discursively in a constant battle between the two sides.

3.2. Timeliness

Timeliness entails that “[m]ore recent events are often more newsworthy” (Bednarek and Caple 2012a: 42), more relevant to readers/viewers. Therefore, it can also be constructed in discourse to project the temporal deictic centre to that of the viewers/readers⁹. Table 4 below shows how the news value of timeliness characterizes the reporting in the three countries differently.

IT							UK				US			
CS	FQ	Gi	Li	Me	Re	Tot.	Gu	Te	Ti	Tot.	LAT	NYT	WaP	Tot.
17	15	15	16	31	28	122	16	19	35	70	41	42	42	125

Table 4. Timeliness in NewsMar

As we can see from Table 4, timeliness is equally enhanced in all the news stories under investigation, specifically to highlight the historical moment represented by the event. However, a particular mention should be made in the case of *la Repubblica*,

⁸ Translation: “Justice Anthony Kennedy, writing for the Court, said that gay people who intend to get married ‘should not be condemned to live in solitude, excluded from one of the oldest institutions of civilization.’”

⁹ The semantic-pragmatic notion of ‘deictic projection’ (Lyons 1977) can be defined as a “shift in points of view” (Chovanec 2014: 36). In other words, deictic projection entails that “[s]peakers, or writers, do have the option of transferring the deictic centre to the hearer’s, or reader’s, spatio-temporal situation in which the text will be encountered” (Brown and Yule 1983: 53).

where special emphasis is placed on Obama's previous political victories, and the event is thus used to present Obama as a man of action:

(3) Il presidente statunitense – che **ha già incassato** successi sul trattato di libero scambio e sulla sanità **negli ultimi tre giorni** – **ha tenuto** un discorso per congratularsi con gli attivisti “e con gli americani tutti [...]”¹⁰.
(IT_REP)

The American press, on the other hand, uses timeliness to construct discursively the future consequences and impact of the event through ‘tense’ (see example 4 below):

(4) Though the court's 5-4 opinion is tightly focused on the question of same-sex unions, its broad wording and soaring rhetoric **will reverberate** beyond the two-decade-long battle for marriage equality and almost surely **lead to** the striking down of any remaining laws that directly discriminate against people based on sexual orientation.
(US_LAT)

3.3. Proximity

The news value of proximity is particularly linked to the fact that “[w]hat is newsworthy usually concerns the country, region or city in which the news is published” (Bednarek and Caple 2012a: 42). The relevance of geographical closeness may explain the imbalance of the distribution of proximity in the three subcorpora, as the news value is present in the US articles and hardly used in the remaining ones.

IT							UK				US			
CS	FQ	Gi	Li	Me	Re	Tot.	Gu	Te	Ti	Tot.	LAT	NYT	WaP	Tot.
3	0	0	3	0	0	6	3	0	0	3	16	11	2	29

Table 5. Proximity in NewsMar

As we can see from Table 5, proximity is not particularly enhanced in the Italian and UK subcorpora. The only peculiarity in the Italian press is represented by *Libero*, where proximity is used so as to make reference to more newsworthy events near Italy that should have been covered (i.e. ISIS attacks in Tunisia and Lyon):

(5) Tendenza che porta a riflettere su quanto l'opinione pubblica sia sensibile a certi temi piuttosto che ad altri, e a come su internet sia più “figo” parlare delle nozze gay piuttosto che di stragi terroristiche che avvengono **a due passi da casa nostra**¹¹.
(IT_Lib)

In the case of the American press, proximity is discursively realized in the use of pronouns (more specifically, the use of the pronoun ‘we’).

¹⁰ Translation: “The US President, who has already succeeded on the Free Trade Agreements and on the healthcare system in the last three days, has held a speech to congratulate activists and all Americans [...]”.

¹¹ Translation: “This trend forces us to reflect on public opinion's sensitivity towards certain issues rather than others, and how on the Internet talking about gay marriage is ‘cooler’ than discussing terrorist massacres that have taken place just around the corner from our houses.”

3.4. Superlativeness

Superlativeness seems to be linked to the fact that “news stories usually focus on maximizing or intensifying particular aspects of an event” (Bednarek and Caple 2012a: 44). In this way, given aspects of an event are maximized or intensified to enhance their newsworthiness. Therefore, superlativeness may provide a useful indication of the angle chosen for the report.

IT							UK				US			
CS	FQ	Gi	Li	Me	Re	Tot.	Gu	Te	Ti	Tot.	LAT	NYT	WaP	Tot.
19	12	10	12	18	21	92	12	26	30	68	51	45	54	150

Table 6. Superlativeness in NewsMar

Table 6 shows how the closer the event is to the culture where it has taken place, the more superlative pointers are used in presenting different aspects of the event. Indeed, while in the Italian and UK press superlativeness is mainly realized in expressions linked solely to the historical significance of the event, in the US press superlativeness is used to describe the tone of the debate among justices (see example 5 below), the crowds enthusiastically celebrating in different parts of the US and the number of people involved in the celebrations.

In the corpus under investigation, pointers to superlativeness also embody nuances of the news value of impact (more specifically, when referring to the national implications of the Supreme Court decision). Thus, superlativeness and impact seem to be realized discursively as one in our data (see example 6 below):

(6) In four separate and **blistering** dissents, conservative justices heaped scorn on the majority opinion. “This court is not a legislature [and] our Constitution does not enact any theory of marriage,” said Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr., who took the **rare** step of reading his dissent in court.

(US_LAT)

(7) Same-sex marriages are now legal **across the entirety of the United States** after a **historic** supreme court ruling that declared attempts by conservative states to ban them unconstitutional.

(UK_Guardian)

3.5. Eliteness

The news value of eliteness entails that “[s]tories about ‘elite’ individuals or celebrities are more newsworthy than stories about ordinary people” (Bednarek and Caple 2012a: 43). Eliteness, however, can also play an important role in the selection of given sources over others in terms of “attribution” (Bednarek and Caple 2012a: 43; see also Bednarek 2016a). Indeed, socially validated authorities have better chances to see their ‘voices’ being represented in the media.

Table 7 below shows the distribution of eliteness in the three subcorpora. A closer analysis of elite people in the news articles will reveal differences in the discursive construction of newsworthiness in the three countries.

IT							UK				US			
CS	FQ	Gi	Li	Me	Re	Tot.	Gu	Te	Ti	Tot.	LAT	NYT	WaP	Tot.
10	9	3	11	26	22	81	11	19	14	44	44	44	33	121

Table 7. Eliteness in NewsMar

Table 7 shows some level of variability in the discursive distribution and enhancement of eliteness in the three subcorpora. This variability is also testified in the different cultural realizations of eliteness in the Italian, UK and US press. Indeed, in the Italian press eliteness is linked to the Supreme Court but, more specifically, to the role played by Obama (see example 8), also used to enhance superlative aspects of the event by quoting his statement. In the UK press, eliteness is realized in the accessed voices of local authorities and officers (see example 9), and in the two sides of the battle: the conservatives (seen as the losers) and liberals (seen as the winners). If in the UK press different voices are represented as sources of eliteness, in the US press this news value is realized in the Supreme Court judges, who are repeatedly assigned a key role in reporting the event (see example 5 above).

(8) “L’amore è amore – ha detto **Obama** – è stata una conquista straordinaria, persone comuni possono fare azioni straordinarie. L’America dovrebbe essere fiera di loro. Oggi abbiamo reso la nostra Unione un po’ più perfetta”¹².

(IT_Rep)

(9) **Texas attorney general Ken Paxton** issued a long statement suggesting he would attempt to fight the legalisation of gay marriage by asserting the “religious liberties” of clerks and officials.

(UK_Guardian)

3.6. Impact

The news value of impact is particularly linked to the fact that “[t]he effects or consequences of an event are aspects of a story that are newsworthy, especially if they involve serious repercussions or have a more global impact” (Bednarek and Caple 2012a: 43). Since there may be different groups of viewers/readers, with different interests and expectations, “[m]inority relevance is much less emphasized” (van Dijk 1988: 122) while effects on relevant social classes are much more newsworthy. This is also linked to the local and global impact of given events: the more global the relevance, the more newsworthy the event.

As shown in Figure 1, impact is the most frequently enhanced news value in the whole corpus, and also the one which is more frequently used in the US subcorpus, as we can see from Table 8:

IT							UK				US			
CS	FQ	Gi	Li	Me	Re	Tot.	Gu	Te	Ti	Tot.	LAT	NYT	WaP	Tot.
25	12	10	18	25	26	116	18	22	34	74	85	68	88	241

Table 8. Impact in NewsMar

¹² Translation: “‘Love is love’ – Obama said – ‘It was an extraordinary achievement; ordinary people can do extraordinary things. America should be proud of itself. Today we made our Union a little bit ‘more perfect’”.

Impact thus seems to represent a cross-cultural news value in the reporting of the Supreme Court ruling which is, however, construed differently in the newspapers under investigation. Indeed, while all of them highlight the historical moment represented by the sentence, *il Fatto Quotidiano* is maybe the only newspaper underlining the key role played by social media (and the hashtag #LoveWins) in the impact of the news story. *Libero* (see example 10), on the other hand, uses impact to criticize the popularity of the event, since it argues that more significant news stories should have been reported. The UK press specifically focuses on the joyous celebrations after the Supreme Court ruling (e.g. scenes of happiness, rainbow lights shining on the White House, etc.), with the only exception of the *Telegraph* (see example 11), which looks at the consequences of the event through a personal angle of the dangerous change taking place in American society, while also underlining the controversy between the two sides of a ‘war’ metaphor between dissident judges. Finally, as for the US press (see example 12), impact is both construed by highlighting the nationwide effect of the sentence, making a parallel with previous rulings that only applied to single states, and with reference to the reactions of elite individuals:

(10) Un moralismo che rischia di **diventare ridicolo**, ma d'altronde si sa: è più **fashion** condividere sulla propria bacheca post con **bandiere multicolori** che urlano la nostra (presunta) apertura mentale, piuttosto che le **immagini di turisti uccisi** dalla follia dell'Isis¹³.

(IT_Lib)

(11) Putting aside the rights and wrongs of the **Court's decision**, this represents an extraordinary **extension of judicial reach**.

(UK_Telegraph)

(12) The decision, which was the **culmination** of decades of litigation and activism, set off **jubilation and tearful embraces across the country** [...].

(US_NYTimes)

3.7. Personalization

Personalization refers to the fact that the personal or human side of an event is more newsworthy than an abstract concept. Thus, “[n]ews stories that are personalized attract audiences more than the portrayal of generalized concepts or processes” (Bednarek and Caple 2012a: 44).

IT							UK				US			
CS	FQ	Gi	Li	Me	Re	Tot.	Gu	Te	Ti	Tot.	LAT	NYT	WaP	Tot.
3	2	2	9	0	1	17	9	5	3	17	3	5	3	11

Table 9. Personalization in NewsMar

As Table 9 shows, the news value of personalization is rarely used in all three sub-corpora, and it mainly refers to the reactions of ordinary people celebrating the ruling

¹³ Translation: “A moralism that may become ridiculous, but then again, you know, it is more popular sharing on our timelines posts with multi-coloured flags that scream our (alleged) open-mindedness, rather than the images of tourists being killed by the ISIS’ madness.”

and, especially in the Italian press, the personal/emotional response by former US President Barak Obama (see example 8)¹⁴.

3.8. Consonance

The news value of consonance concerns “[t]he extent to which aspects of a story fit in with stereotypes that people may hold about the events and people portrayed in it” (Bednarek and Caple 2012a: 41), thus confirming van Dijk’s assumption (1988) that news values are located and respond to a social cognition, which builds on expectations and ways of perceiving specific events.

Given the importance and ‘novelty’ of the US ruling, the news value of consonance is rarely used in all newspapers, as we can see from Table 10, and is mainly a reference to ‘traditional’ marriage:

IT							UK				US			
CS	FQ	Gi	Li	Me	Re	Tot.	Gu	Te	Ti	Tot.	LAT	NYT	WaP	Tot.
0	0	2	1	5	3	11	1	7	1	9	0	4	8	12

Table 10. Consonance in NewsMar

3.9. Novelty

The news value of novelty entails that “[n]ews stories are frequently about happenings that surprise us, that are unusual or rare” (Bednarek and Caple 2012a: 43). In other words, the more unexpected, the more newsworthy the event is.

As we can see from Table 11, novelty seems to be particularly enhanced both in the IT_NewsMar and US_NewsMar:

IT							UK				US			
CS	FQ	Gi	Li	Me	Re	Tot.	Gu	Te	Ti	Tot.	LAT	NYT	WaP	Tot.
0	0	2	1	5	3	11	1	7	1	9	0	4	8	12

Table 11. Novelty in NewsMar

The even distribution of novelty in the subcorpora is, however, due to the fact that in all the news stories marriage is defined through the use of expressions (e.g. same-sex marriage, gay marriage, etc.) construing a ‘new’ marriage in contrast with the traditional view of heterosexual marriage. However, an exception can be identified in *la Repubblica*, where novelty is realized in the way the Obama administration’s support for the sentence is reflected in the rainbow lights shining on the White House:

(12) **Matrimoni gay** legali in tutti Usa: Casa Bianca **arcobaleno** su Twitter¹⁵.
(IT_Rep)

¹⁴ A previous study (Venuti *et al.* 2012) on a cross-cultural comparison of TV new programmes found a limited use of ordinary people by Italian TV outlets in comparison to UK ones.

¹⁵ Translation: “Gay Marriage legal in all US States: Rainbow White House on Twitter”.

4. Concluding remarks and *desiderata*

Our investigation is part of a wider independent research project (Fruttaldo and Venuti forthcoming; Venuti and Fruttaldo 2017) based on the cross-cultural analysis of news values in the press. More specifically, the aim of our research project is to demonstrate how given news values (Bell 1991; Bednarek and Caple 2012a, 2012b, 2014, 2017) are disseminated and ‘picked up’ by readers in their experience of reinterpreting given news stories online.

Indeed, if, as Bell (1991: 156) argues, news values “[...] are not neutral, but reflect ideologies and priorities held in society”, analysing whether and how readers reinforce and reinterpret these ideologies may help researchers see what values are foregrounded or backgrounded in the media outlet and how readers react to specific events.

In this contribution, however, our specific focus has been that of analysing whether, from a cross-cultural point of view, the analysis of news values can help researchers identify differences (and similarities) in the construction of newsworthiness in the social contexts where given news stories are issued. Our case study is based on the lack of cross-cultural analyses of news values in the press. Indeed, as Bednarek and Caple (2014: 17) argue, their theoretical framework is useful to “[...] uncover whether news outlets from different countries construct the newsworthiness of one event using the same news values”.

We have therefore seen how the Italian newspapers tend to represent the event in terms of the news values of Eliteness (in particular, by presenting the event as a success for the Obama administration), Impact, and Timeliness, while the UK press strongly underlines the news values of Negativity (in particular, in *The Telegraph*), Impact, and Timeliness/Superlativeness; finally, the US press strongly enhances the news values of Impact (specifically, focusing on future consequences), Eliteness (in this case, the judges involved in the US Supreme Court ruling were particularly foregrounded), and Negativity (explicitly linked to the opposing sides in the judges’ ruling). The discursive analysis of news values thus represents a useful tool in ethnographic research in order to draw a cultural map of specific media outlets, uncovering those processes of entextualization (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Briggs and Bauman 1992; Silverstein and Urban 1996) governed by journalists in the creation of ‘a’ reality.

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