

Human Rights as a News Value

2.1 INTRODUCTION

For more than 50 years, journalists and journalism educators have used Galtung and Ruge's seminal conceptualisation of news values as a basis for reporting. The 12-point news values framework they devised was shaped following an analysis of the way foreign news was reported in their native Norway. However, despite the widespread use of their taxonomy, the application of Galtung and Ruge's news values remains problematic. One of the key aspects of their analysis is that it was based on reported events. Interestingly, most subsequent studies into news values have also sought to prescribe news values based on analyses of stories rather than taking on board practice-focussed issues such as news culture. This chapter argues that basing news values solely on reported events has the capacity to understate the journalistic endeavour, which primarily seeks to document and recount human stories. Therefore, to create a taxonomy of news values centred on human-focussed news values provides an opportunity to rethink the way stories are told. This approach places the subjects of the stories front and centre in the news production process. This radical departure from Galtung and Ruge's approach means that rather than news being constructed around abstract concepts such as consonance, meaningfulness and unambiguity, reporting using a human-focussed paradigm relates directly to the way the person, or people, telling the story are represented and framed within

the storytelling process. This is a significant change given that news attracts and captures an audience because people are interested in the lives of other people. Deuze (2014) argues that the production and consumption of news is a deeply social phenomenon that enables us to understand the world in which we live. The other significant factor driving a re-evaluation of Galtung and Ruge's work is that their taxonomy was developed at a time when the media landscape looked vastly different from today's global media environment. Although during the past 20 years there have been widespread calls to revise news values, given contemporary and rapid changes to journalistic practice due to the rise of social media, the news values concept has remained essentially paralysed and trapped in a 1960s, and irrelevant, news paradigm. Bell (2016) recognises this rapid change, saying:

The phone in our pocket is our portal to the world. I think in many ways this heralds enormously exciting opportunities for education, information, and connection, but it brings with it a host of contingent existential risks.

Bell's point is critical in the context of news production. One of the greatest risks in this dramatic change relates directly to the question, 'What is news?'. This chapter will argue that journalism for social change provides a platform for radically rethinking and reimagining Galtung and Ruge's news values model that for so long has provided a foundation for news reporting by examining news values in the context of a news environment that has become increasingly opaque, driven by algorithmic whims (Bell 2016). Therefore, this chapter proposes a series of news values that not only reflect the audience's desire for 'people-centred' stories but address the interactive, multi-platform and social media environment that drives the publication and dissemination of stories today.

2.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF NEWS VALUES

News is a nebulous concept. Academics and journalists have long sought to clarify the ambiguity of what defines news by developing criteria, called news values, to explain newsworthiness. Westerstahl and Johansson (1994) point out that these attempts to define news are not new. They argue that German author Kaspar Stieler introduced the notion of news values as early as the seventeenth century when he

highlighted proximity and importance of events as two criteria in the presentation of news. He also recognised the significance of dramatic and negative events such as war and crime (1994, p. 72). Lippman (1922) further developed this notion when he suggested a range of news factors that attributed newsworthiness to events. Bednarek and Caple (2014) argue that in journalism and communication studies, news values are typically defined as properties of events or stories or criteria or principles that can be applied by journalists to select events or stories as news. Richardson (2005) emphasises that the application of news values in news organisations usually stems from the newsroom culture. He recognises that news values are learnt by journalists as part of a ‘socialisation’ that takes place in newsrooms. A significant ‘X-factor’ in the debate about a ‘best practice’ concept of creating newsworthy journalism, is based on the fact that many see the news production process as a somewhat ‘mysterious event’.

Former *Sunday Times* editor Harold Evans goes some way to demystifying journalism by simply outlining what he sees as news. Evans says:

News is people. It’s people talking and doing. Committees, cabinets and courts are people; so are fires, accidents and planning decisions. They are only news because they affect and involve people. (1963, p. 64)

Although news is often about things and events it is the people behind the event, their thoughts and the way they are expressed that provide the character, colour and diversity that connects with an audience (Holmes et al. 2014, 30). Evans’ definition is significant because he recognises stories only as news when they include the voice and representation of humans. It is also important because it indirectly challenges the events-based news values criteria presented by Galtung and Ruge. Although Evans’ definition was presented some 2 years before the publication of Galtung and Ruge’s taxonomy of news values, it was in some way overshadowed by their presentation of news values. Galtung and Ruge’s study concluded that the more an event was understood without ambiguity, the more likely it was to be considered newsworthy. Interestingly, their research provides some concession that an events-based news paradigm is not complete. For example, they acknowledge: “It should be emphasised that the present article hypothesises rather than demonstrates the presence of these factors, and hypothesises rather than demonstrates that these factors, if present, have certain effects among the audience.”

They also recognised in point 11 of their taxonomy that the more an event is seen in ‘personal terms’ the more publishable it will become as a news item (Galtung and Ruge 1965, p. 68). It is this concession that will be explained and developed in this chapter.

Most scholars have devised news values reflectively using news analysis as a determinant for newsworthiness. Harcup and O’Neill (2001), who have both worked as journalists, provide some variation to this. However, their study, which sought to revise Galtung and Ruge’s seminal work, adopted an outsider content analysis approach. Harcup and O’Neill revisited Galtung and Ruge’s investigation of ‘how events become news’ by conducting a content analysis of 1276 news articles published as page leads in three daily newspapers in the United Kingdom in one month in 1999. In completing their study they recognised that Galtung and Ruge’s news values could only be identified in the sample by the ‘use of copious amounts of necessarily subjective interpretation’ (2001, p. 268). They argued that: ‘When dealing with something as “opaque” as news values, it appears there can be little escape from subjective interpretation’ (2001, p. 268). They concluded that applying Galtung and Ruge’s news values was problematic because using their taxonomy ultimately did not explain why a particular story was selected for its newsworthiness above other stories on the same day. Harcup and O’Neill recognise: ‘In short, despite the way it has been so widely cited, Galtung and Ruge’s taxonomy of news factors appears to ignore the majority of news stories’ (2001, p. 276). They argue that many news reports are in fact not events at all but include ‘pseudo-events’, advertorials and public relations spin. In 2016, Harcup and O’Neill revised their initial study and included an important disclaimer: ‘Any explanation of new values can only provide a partial explanation of what lies behind journalistic news decisions’ (2016, p. 2). They argue: ‘No theory of news values can explain everything, not least because arbitrary factors including luck, convenience and serendipity can come into play’ (2016, p. 3). Harcup and O’Neill’s (2016) list added five news values to their 2001 compilation: exclusivity, audio-visuals, shareability, conflict and drama. They included these news values based on the increasing role of social media platforms in the news publication process. However, the evolutionary nature, and contentiousness of news values (See Table 2.1), is recognised by Harcup and O’Neill:

Thus, we reiterate that the above news value taxonomy should be seen as a tool for analysis and further research – designed to provide discussion and, indeed, contestation – not something to be churned out as if it is the last word on the subject. (2016, p. 14)

Galtung and Ruge also recognised some contentious issues regarding news values in their study. The most significant of these relates to personification in news. They said:

The thesis is that news has a tendency to present events as sentences where there is a subject, a named person or collectivity consisting of a few persons, and the event is then seen as a consequence of the actions of this person or these persons. (1965, p. 68)

This notion of personification provides an important platform for firstly rethinking the importance of news values, and secondly reimagining news values. To do this, the news values suggested in this chapter have been constructed using both an ‘insider’ point of view as a journalist practitioner, and an ‘outsider’ perspective that takes into account cultural studies frameworks. One issue with previous models of news values has been the inflexibility of news values, with questions raised over the link between news values and subjectivity or whether news values can be universal or if they are medium-prescriptive. The model of news values proposed in this chapter transcends medium, culture, ethnicity and geographical constraints because the values themselves are built around the heart of what constitutes news and journalism—humans. This approach runs counter to the arguments of some scholars (Weaver et al. 2007) who contend that news values can be seen less as a reflection of the type of information that people want or need, and more of a reflection of the organisational, sociological and cultural norms of the person or company producing the news. However, if news values are constructed within a ‘social change’ frame, then the type and variety of information people need and want is central to this approach. The news values proposed in this chapter also do not perceive the audience as a passive recipient of news but rather acknowledge the audience as an active participant in the news production process. This is particularly relevant in the contemporary news ecology given the rise of social media as a journalistic platform and the role of the news consumer in sharing, critiquing and disseminating news.

Table 2.1 Three news values taxonomies that are widely used by journalists and journalism educators

<i>Galting and Ruge</i>	<i>Harcup and O'Neill (2001)</i>	<i>Harcup and O'Neill (2016)</i>
Frequency: The time-span needed for the event to unfold and acquire meaning	The power elite: Stories concerning powerful individuals, organisations and institutions	Exclusivity: Stories generated by, or available first to, the news organisation
Threshold: Events have to reach or pass through a certain threshold for them to be reported	Celebrity: Stories concerning people who are already famous	Bad news: Stories with negative overtones such as death, injury, defeat or loss
Unambiguity: The less ambiguous an event, the more likely it is to be reported	Entertainment: Stories concerning sex, show business, human interest, animals, an unfolding drama, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment	Conflict: Stories concerning conflict such as controversies, arguments, splits, strikes, fights, insurrections and warfare
Meaningfulness: The news is interpretable within the cultural framework of the audience	Surprise: Stories that have an element of surprise and/or contrast	Surprise: Stories that have an element of surprise, contrast and/or the unusual about them
Consonance: Relates to the predictability of events as a news story—what we expect to happen	Bad news: Stories with particularly negative overtones, such as conflict or tragedy	Audio-visuals: Stories that have arresting photographs, video, audio and/or that can be illustrated with infographics
Unexpectedness: Conversely, an event that is unexpected or unusual also has a high degree of newsworthiness	Good news: Stories with particularly positive overtones such as rescues and cures	Shareability: Stories that are likely to generate sharing and comments via Facebook, Twitter and other forms of social media
Continuity: This is the follow-up of an event or a news story that has already been published	Magnitude: Stories that are perceived as sufficiently significant either in the numbers of people involved or in potential impact	Entertainment: Stories about sex, show business, sport, light human interest, animals, or offering the chance for humour treatment
Composition: The way a story is constructed and presented contributes to the impact of the story	Relevance: Stories about issues, groups and nations perceived to be relevant to the audience	Drama: Stories concerning unfolding dramas such as escapes, accidents, searches, sieges, rescues, battles or court cases

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

<i>Galtung and Ruge</i>	<i>Harcup and O'Neill (2001)</i>	<i>Harcup and O'Neill (2016)</i>
<p>Elite nations: The more an event contains elite nations the more likely it will be published</p> <p>Elite people: The more an event contains elite people the more probable it will become a news item</p> <p>Personal: The more an event is presented as personal, focussing on individuals, the more likely it is to become a published story</p> <p>Negative events: The more negative the event in its consequences the more probable that it will be published</p>	<p>Follow-up: Stories about subjects already in the news</p> <p>Newspaper agenda: Stories that set or fit the news organisation's own agenda</p>	<p>Follow-up: Stories about subjects already in the news</p> <p>The power elite: Stories concerning powerful individuals, organisations, institutions and corporations</p> <p>Relevance: Stories about groups or nations perceived to be influential by, or culturally or historically familiar to, the audience</p> <p>Magnitude: Stories perceived as sufficiently significant in the large numbers of people involved or in potential impact, or involving a degree of extreme behaviour or extreme occurrence</p> <p>Celebrity: Stories concerning people who are already famous</p> <p>Good news: Stories with positive overtones</p> <p>News organisation's agenda: Stories that fit ideological, commercial agendas</p>

Sources: Galtung and Ruge (1965, pp. 65–68) and Harcup and O'Neill (2001, p. 279; 2016, p. 13)

2.3 RETHINKING THE JOURNALISM PARADIGM

Today's journalism industry has an evolving complexion that bears little resemblance to the media landscape that formed the basis of Galtung and Ruge's (1965) study. Hermida (2010) describes the current media climate as 'ambient journalism', which has a character and form that are radically different from previous incarnations of journalism that have existed in the so-called post-1900 modern journalism era. Hermida says:

A future direction for journalism may be to develop approaches and systems that help the public negotiate and regulate the flow of awareness information, providing tools that take account of this new mode for the circulation of news. (2010, p. 304)

Hermida argues that part of this change is for journalists to act as 'sense-makers' and not just reporters of news. Hargreaves (2003) concurs with Hermida's notion of ambient journalism by highlighting that news in today's world has an unprecedented ubiquity. Whether it is on computers, public billboards, trains, aircraft or mobile phones, news now has a pervasiveness that has influenced how it is consumed and also how it is produced, including the news values that drive it. Hargreaves (2003) argues that journalism entered the twenty-first century trapped in a paradox of its own making. He points out that the current media climate has produced a bizarre situation whereby:

We have more news and more influential journalism, across an unprecedented range of media, than at any time since the birth of the free press in the eighteenth century; yet journalism is also under widespread attack, from politicians, philosophers, the general public, and even journalists themselves. (2003, p. 2)

This accurate portrayal of the state of contemporary journalism is both a problem and an opportunity. Although it is true that journalism is facing unprecedented challenges, it is also true that the current media climate is providing an opportunity to reimagine journalism, its role, its relevance and its processes. Jensen argues that the moral and social responsibility intrinsically linked to the practice of journalism is also being challenged:

The press has the power to stimulate people to clean up the environment, prevent nuclear proliferation, force crooked politicians out of office, reduce poverty provide quality health care for all people and even to save the lives of millions of people as it did in Ethiopia in 1984. But instead, we are using it to promote sex, violence, and sensationalism and to line the pockets of already wealthy media moguls. (in Phillips 2000, p. 185)

Jensen's argument is important when considering human rights and human rights journalism. However, if journalism is viewed as a construction of influence and tool for bringing about social change, then understanding the relationship between journalism and human rights, and the way human rights is reported, is critical. Jensen's view is supported by Curtis who says:

Now our presenters plead with us to send in our photos and videos. They proudly present it as a new kind of open democracy. But in reality it's something very different. Because the journalists don't understand what's going on in today's complex, chaotic world, they have to revert to the old habits of finding someone in authority who will tell them. But this time, it's not the politicians – it's us, the audience, that they've turned to. The only problem is that we don't have a clue what's going on. Particularly because the journalists have given up on their job of explaining the world to us. (in Meikle 2009, pp. 194–195)

These arguments demonstrate a failing media and a journalism industry struggling to understand its role and purpose in the world. It's a scenario that raises important questions about the quality of reporting. Curtis' scenario is profound. Too often this crowd-sourced approach is dominating the way news is gathered in current news contexts. However, Curtis' point, that the crowd is clueless, is particularly relevant to human rights. This issue of who is a voice for human rights will be explored in greater depth in Chaps. 7 and 8, where the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), celebrity and the use of non-expert comment in human trafficking narratives will be investigated. However, what needs to be emphasised is that the traditional models of news values presented by Galtung and Ruge and Harcup and O'Neill do not address issues such as sources in the newsgathering process, and that is tremendously problematic. Reframing news values by focussing them on people immediately addresses these flaws in those taxonomies.

Both Hargreaves and Jensen describe journalism as an industry caught at a complex crossroads with competing interests, values, and engagement with technology and new forms of storytelling blurring the understanding of the role of journalism in a contemporary context, and contributing to cynicism about the industry. Deuze (2005) examines the relationship between what he calls new media and multiculturalism as a mechanism to rethink journalism. He argues that multiculturalism is one of the foremost issues in journalism, where media professionals are confronted by their real or perceived responsibilities in contemporary society. This, he points out, shifts the focus and news values of today's media professionals (2005, p. 425). Bierhoff (1999) describes multicultural society as an 'orientation point' for journalists: 'Race, language, ethnic background, all these factors are present and potential battlegrounds and generate a constant stream of events' (1999). Deuze's and Bierhoff's analyses provide an excellent framework to re-examine news values. Deuze argues that the relevance of media and multiculturalism can be framed around three central issues:

1. The knowledge of journalists about different cultures and ethnicities.
2. The way story participants are represented.
3. The perceived social responsibilities of journalists in a democratic and multicultural society.

Gans (2004) argues that one of the shortcomings of traditional journalism research has been the emphasis on journalism as a professional occupation in an industrialised and corporate framework, rather than focussing on the overall purpose of journalism. Hartley (2007) points out that if journalism is to be considered a human right it is important to theorise journalism as a craft and to extend what should be considered journalism beyond the 'democratic process' model (2007, p. 10). Hartley (2007) recognises that the notion of what constitutes journalism needs to take on board what it means to be human, highlighting people's private lives and experiences and acknowledging the humanity of those lying outside favoured gender, ethnic, national, age or economic profiles. What Hartley is proposing is not merely a theoretical construct but a step towards producing more inclusive, relevant and accessible journalism. Deuze expands on Hartley's notion by suggesting multiculturalism as a useful construct for ensuring diversity in journalism. He argues:

One may therefore expect today's journalism to develop equivalent cultural or multicultural sensibilities. This in turn problematizes journalists' role perceptions in contemporary society: an active awareness of multicultural sensibility contradicts a cherished independence of special interests. A valued detachment of society, however, may result in disconnections with certain publics and oversimplified representations of social complexity. (2005, p. 454)

Therefore, the modern journalist's personal value system is not only challenged by these issues but the news value system also needs to be challenged. A human-focussed set of news values is an important step forward in reflecting the diversity of stories in the world in which we live.

2.4 HUMAN-FOCUSSED NEWS VALUES

The importance of journalists in representing people has been at the core of the profession for hundreds of years. Since the time of the French Revolution, journalists have been pillars of influence, while at the same time being derided by leaders for daring to challenge authority. Hargreaves highlights:

The journalistic lesson of the French Revolution is that at moments of national crisis, journalists often find themselves torn between their professional role as detached observers of events and their engagement as activists. (2003, p. 43)

Importantly, he believes that a professionalised news media, working independently, is crucial to stable, democratic government (2003, p. 44). However, a news media, working independently, is also crucial to ensuring that human rights and issues of fairness and justice are reported and exposed. Interestingly, it was this sense of justice that drove the journalists of the French Revolution to report fearlessly, and in essence, these values are still important if journalism is to create social change today. Cottle says that reporting these social and complex issues is important because people's lives depend on them. He argues:

We also inhabit a world increasingly defined and shaped by global crises. From climate change to the global war on terror, from financial meltdowns to forced migrations, from pandemics to world poverty and from humanitarian disasters to the denial of human rights, these and other global crises represent the dark side of our globalised planet. (2009, p. 309)

Cottle goes on to argue that although journalism studies have advanced and ‘come of age’ within the academy, researchers of journalism, with few exceptions, fail to take seriously global issues and threats theoretically, methodologically or substantively. He says:

Today’s global threats go to the core of contemporary arguments about global cosmopolitanism and a possible emergent global public sphere, and should compel concerted responses from researchers working in the field of journalism studies. (2009, p. 310)

The news values proposed in this chapter endeavour to contribute to these contemporary arguments by acknowledging the critical role journalism plays in a world gripped with change. Despite the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations (UN) in (1948) the notion of human rights journalism is relatively new. Although news media has always represented issues of human rights, studies into the explicit connection between UN-sanctioned human rights and the media have remained almost non-existent. In the report *Speak Up, Speak Out: A Toolkit for Reporting on Human Rights Issues* the importance of the relationship between media and human rights is emphasised:

Both professional journalists and citizen reporters and human rights activists who do ‘advocacy journalism’ are in a unique position to shed light on human rights violations. Their reporting can put pressure on governments and international organisations to take action. It can also help inform the public about their rights and how to access remedies for violations of these rights. (Internews 2012, p. v)

This report recognises that there is a degree of altruism that goes with human-focussed reporting. This notion of altruistic journalism expands on Hartley’s view that journalism needs to be viewed as a craft. However, for journalism to have a meaningful impact, it must not only be looked at in terms of a craft, but it should also be looked at as a ‘calling’. This notion of exploring journalism as a ‘calling’, outlined in Chap. 1, is not new. In 2002 the *Boston Globe*’s investigative reporter Wil Haygood said the sense of ‘calling’ was pivotal in him pursuing stories and striving to get them published. He said: ‘To me there is always a story behind the story, as old fashioned as that sounds’ (in Ha 2002).

Haygood's approach to journalism is important and reinforces the views of human rights journalists outlined in Chap. 1. Rather than seeing journalism as the production of popular content, this approach seeks to look deeply at issues. It seeks to unpack the complicated, speak to a broad contingent of sources and to seek truth and authenticity at all cost, so that the public benefits.

Shaw (2012) says the theorisation of human rights journalism has centred on three key concepts:

1. The role of the journalist in exposing human rights abuses;
2. The importance of free speech; and
3. The role of human rights journalism as a normative practice based on respect for human dignity.

Shaw recognises that, surprisingly, the third concept is rarely explored in studies on human rights and journalism, making the issue significantly 'under-researched'. Cottle supports this view by lamenting the lack of journalism scholarship related to human rights-based issues and global crisis:

Where are the studies today of journalism and the United Nations and international governance; journalism and international law or the universalizing discourse of human rights; journalism and internally displaced peoples and transnational migrant flows; journalism and ecology; journalism and energy and food crises; journalism and new wars; journalism and financial meltdowns – all conceived as global issues and approached internationally and transnationally as well as a nationally? (2009, p. 311)

Cottle ultimately calls for journalism to 'come of global age' and to explore the crossroads between journalism, these global issues and how these issues are ultimately represented, or should be represented, in the global media. The reality is that human rights are rights that are inherent to all human beings, regardless of a person's nationality, gender, ethnicity, religion, language or skin colour. Their importance to journalism and the practice of reporting is immense because human rights are interrelated, interdependent and indivisible (Shaw 2012, p. 4). However, the exploration of these important concepts cannot occur in isolation. It must coincide with discussions about the role and meaning

of journalism. This chapter explores this point further by proposing a framework for human rights reporting in a contemporary news environment. It will do that by proposing human rights be considered as a 'news value', in a radical departure and rethink of the news values paradigm.

Article 19 of the UDHR states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression: this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. (UN 1948)

The notion of news values centred on human-focussed indicators such as human rights, has never been proposed. However, the significance of human rights-related issues permeates so much of who we are and what we do. Human rights are universal values and standards of behaviour that are designed to protect people, so that everyone can live free from fear and abuse. Although journalism and communication scholars and journalists have long emphasised the importance of people in news reporting there has never been an attempt to develop a news values paradigm using people as the focus of a model like this. This model is critical in describing the news reporting process because, rather than using the outsider reflective methodology based on news stories and journalistic outputs (and working backwards), this model adopts an insider approach and seeks to establish news values through the eyes of the journalist. It is therefore a bottom-up approach that describes newsworthiness and considers newsroom mechanics, news culture and editorial processes. Gans (2004) identifies newsworthiness as an important issue. He says:

The deadline and other commercial pressures under which journalists work keep them so busy that they rarely ask whether the information they supply is what an informed citizenry needs, or whether they can do much to create such a citizenry in the first place. (p. 10)

Gans' point and the approach used in this chapter are significant, given that many of the driving factors influencing news production in a contemporary context have changed dramatically in the past decade, in response to the digital disruption. This new values model was originally

developed to explain the critical role of human rights as a source of news but has been expanded to include all news production. Although human rights is often seen as a framework to describe justice and to benchmark equality, it can more broadly be broken down into three key areas: law, ethics and governance. A content analysis of any mainstream news publication or website reveals that these themes are evident in the narrative structure of most stories. Often these stories are further broken down into classic moral-based narrative structures, for example, David and Goliath, good versus evil, reluctant or unsung hero and the Good Samaritan. The danger of this narrative stereotyping is that it risks trivialising and over-simplifying complex stories. In the case of reporting human rights, this is particularly problematic. Hargreaves (2003) describes the changes in contemporary newsrooms as a revolution. He is right, and such revolutionary changes also produce revolutionary spin-offs. One of these spin-offs has necessitated a reimagining and rethinking of news values that are pivotal in the construction and identification of newsworthiness. However, news values in a contemporary context should not just relate to the notion of news but rather must also recognise the platform of expression and the sophisticated two-way relationship that now exists between the journalist and the news consumer. An Indian magazine editor says:

‘Journalism with a human touch’ means more than writing about people behind the story and the story behind the people. The human touch signifies compassion, a deep sense of fairness, a concern for human dignity, a crusading temperament. (in Shaw 2012, pp. 40–41)

It is for this reason that human-focussed news values make sense. These news values focus on the centrality of the human in the storytelling process and include:

1. Human rights
2. Human condition
3. Humanity
4. Humanitarian issues
5. Human interest
6. Human response.

See Fig. 2.1 summarising human-focussed news values.

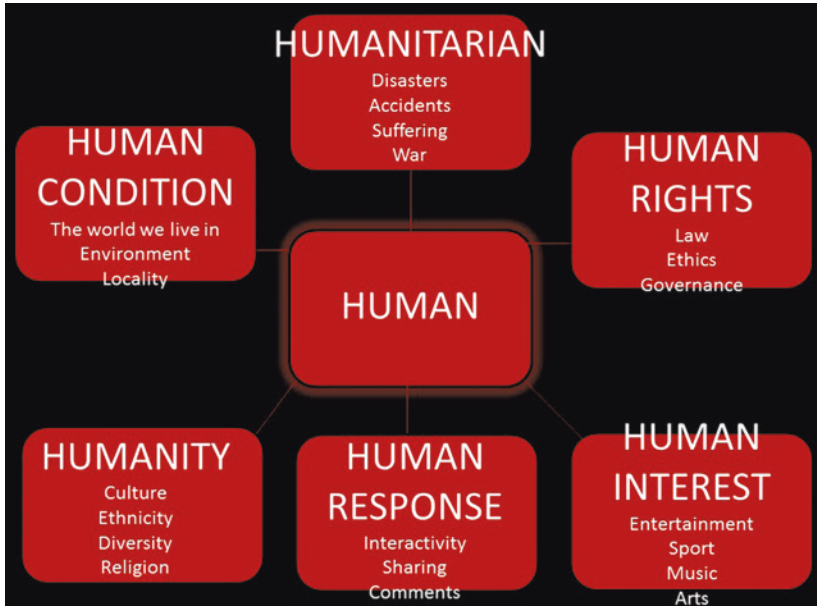


Fig. 2.1 Human-focussed news values

2.4.1 *Human Rights*

The idea of using human rights as a news value is not new. Shaw (2012) says that his conception of human rights journalism is journalism with a human face that cares for people. Lovasen says the connection between journalism and human rights is important:

[It] has clear values of humanitarianism, truth, holism and empowerment. It has its orientation on peace rather than war, on truth rather than propaganda, on people rather than elite, on solution and transformation rather than victory. (2008)

However, simply adding human rights to existing lists of news values risks diminishing its value. Including human rights in a news values taxonomy requires a complete rethinking of how news is conceived, gathered, reported and presented. It also involves contextualising human

rights in a manner relevant to a news production process. In recent global history, the notion of human rights and human rights rhetoric was used as a propaganda tool during the Cold War (Green 2008, p. 25). Green argues that human rights can be divided into three groups: civil and political rights such as freedom from torture or slavery; economic, social and cultural rights such as the right to education; and collective rights such as the right to self-determination. Using this as a generic framework, he demonstrates that human rights as a news value has the capacity to include coverage of a myriad of events related to law, ethics and governance. The UN argues:

The tradition of human rights brings legal tools and institutions - laws, the judiciary and the process of litigation – as a means to secure freedoms and human development. Rights also lend moral legitimacy and the principle of social justice to the objectives of human development. It also directs attention to the need for information and political voice for all people as a development issue –and to civil and political rights as integral parts of the development processes. (in Green 2008, p. 26)

The important aspect of this UN appraisal of human rights is that human rights as a news value is not just centred on ‘rights’ but on broader human issues such as justice, legislation, crime, law and politics and recognises the journalist’s role as an arbiter of accountability in reporting these issues. Recent studies into the relationship between human rights and journalism have shown there has been a proliferation of human rights-based journalism since 2000. International media NGO Internews has identified ten reasons for human rights-increased newsworthiness. Internews argues that a changing global political scene and an increasing awareness and interest in social and cultural issues, has helped facilitate this change. It points out that a decrease in state control over media, a proliferation in organisations that promote human rights, greater UN exposure of human rights issues, the expansion of social media as a tool for activism and for promoting human rights, an increasing interest in key human rights areas, such as child rights and poverty, and greater diversity of ethnicities in international newsrooms have contributed to human rights issues receiving increased news value (Internews 2012, P. 60). How these changes have played out in global newsrooms has varied. Shaw says:

The accountability principle resonates with the social responsibility role of the journalist as a duty bearer to report, interpret and disseminate information honestly to fellow global citizens, in ways that would make them understand not only the ‘how’, ‘when’, ‘where’ and ‘what’ of events, issues and processes, but...the ‘why’ – so that they would be able to make informed decisions when holding the state (national and global) and other duty bearers to account. (2012, p. 234)

Therefore, although human rights have long been used as a news values frame, often its key role as a source of news stories has been overlooked or the human rights news value has been classified under other news values classifiers such as conflict or meaningfulness. However, a standalone news value for human rights is long overdue.

2.4.2 *Human Condition*

The place of people in the world, where we live and how we engage with the world from a local, national and global perspective is a crucial factor in defining news delivery. The idea of a universal human condition generalises global narratives, while bringing local narratives into sharp focus. Traditionally in journalism, proximity has been used as a news value to help define and refine news. Conley and Lamble (2006) argue that the farther away something is, the more significance, drama, or human appeal it must display if it is to make a local news list. However, in an increasingly globalised world with globalised media, limiting newsworthiness to a locale is becoming increasingly redundant. The complexity of the human condition is recognised by Hess (2013) who suggests that a ‘sense of place’ helps to conceptualise individuals’ physical, psychological and/or social connections to a particular geographic territory without necessarily locating them within these physical spaces. Therefore, having a news value that centres on the human condition—that is, shedding light on people in a community, or their sense of community, the environment and people’s relationships with the environment and their relationships with others—in these contexts is critical. Noah Rosenberg founder of online long-form news site *Narratively* argues that stories do not have to be prescribed by a list of news values but rather by telling everyday stories that define, symbolise and reflect the human condition. He says:

The idea is that every story has the space and time it needs to have an impact. We try to avoid the breaking news cycle and focus on powerful, human interest stories that are all around us but not getting the exposure they deserve. (in Gordon-Webster 2014)

This news value also correlates with notions of hyperlocal journalism. The editor of the *West Seattle Blog* says: ‘We listen. When readers start to ask about a particular type of thing we hadn’t been covering...that’s a signal to us that it’s time to start covering. But that means you have to have a relationship with the community’ (Sonderman 2012). Hyperlocal journalism succeeds not just by *saying* that they target a specific undeserved community, but by ‘giving that community a unique, organic solution to its unique information needs’ (Sonderman 2012). Sonderman (2012) and Metzgar et al. (2011) point out that media characterised as hyperlocal has been described as a blend of civic, community, state-wide public affairs, and alternative newspaper movements combined with the interactive and broadcasting abilities accompanying digital platforming. Central to the success of this brand of journalism is an understanding of the human condition as a news value. Metzgar et al. go on to define hyperlocal journalism as:

Geographically-based, community-oriented, original-news reporting organizations indigenous to the web and intended to fill perceived gaps in coverage of an issue or region and to promote civic engagement. (2011, p. 774)

Tailoring news to a human condition news value involves understanding the information needs of a targeted and specific audience. The production of relevant and illuminating news content in an accessible format is critical. Understanding hyperlocal opens a door to a wider universal human condition that connects multiple hyperlocal communities as part of a global community network. The importance of the human condition is reinforced by Hess and Waller who say:

We contend that to be local is to have a grounded connection with, and understanding of, a physical place and its social and cultural dimensions that is practical and embodied. Importantly, it involves an investment of time, requiring that one maintain a prolonged and continual presence in that place. We have also argued elsewhere the need to reintroduce the importance of geography – the physical site – in discussions about space and place and its relationship to local news in a globalized world. (2016, p. 197)

The human condition as a news value requires an understanding of the complex interplay between people and their sense of belonging and place. Ultimately this news value entails producing stories that are crafted, shaped and presented in a relevant way and format for a target audience and a target community.

2.4.3 *Humanity*

Understanding the diversity of humanity is important in the storytelling process. This news value brings the aspirations and concerns of individuals into focus through a diversity of voice that collectively speaks to a unified humanity in an interconnected world. Therefore, in an increasingly interconnected world, culture, ethnicity, and religion combine to form a critical news value under the banner of humanity. This diversity of voice, experience and representation is significant in reflecting social, political and economic complexity. In 2016, the Managing Director of ABC Australia called for greater diversity of voice at the public broadcaster. In an email to journalists, staff were asked to reflect on a variety of questions including:

1. Who are the voices we constantly hear on air? Who could we find who might be fresher or could add some different views?
2. Do our experts include a decent balance between men and women? Do they contain a healthy mix of ethnicities and accents? Could we set ourselves a target for finding X number of new voices during this campaign?
3. How do we make sure that we're not basing our scripts and interviews on old ideas and assumptions about the average Aussie?
4. Do we sound like we know that our listeners are people of differing ages, education, affluence, religious beliefs and sexualities? Are people with disabilities being heard? (Knott 2016).

These questions not only pose a rethinking of content but put the diversity of humanity at the centre of the newsgathering process and elevate it to a news value. The success of online publications such as Brandon Stanton's *Humans of New York* demonstrates that humanity as a news value has traction with audiences. Bow-Bertrand (2015) describes *Humans of New York* as a 'humanitarian and artistic project' that combines portraits and short biographical snapshots that

contextualise and linguistically shape the subjects. Bow-Bertrand argues:

Stanton captures the contours of humanity – in both beauty and ugly interior and exterior...Viewers are frequently surprised by the unrehearsed integrity and deeply personal tales that Stanton ekes out from his subjects. Tales of forbidden love, secret hopes, broken deals. Perfectly in tune with the reality of any human's life. (2015)

Emerging journalistic platforms such as this, and changes in editorial direction such as those outlined by Australia's public broadcaster, have reinforced the importance and power of humanity as a news value. The importance of humanity as a news value has also been demonstrated in two key human rights examples in Australia. In 2014, the Australian Government changed the guidelines on reporting asylum seekers in government-controlled detention centres by restricting the news media's ability to name or publish photographs of asylum seekers in Australia. These restrictions, which were criticised by NGOs and human rights groups, were largely seen as an attempt by the government to de-humanise the issue of asylum seekers and boat arrivals in Australia. Ostensibly, what the government attempted to do was to remove the humanity—that is, the people—from the storytelling process. However, the Australian government's strategy in 2015 included legislation making it a criminal offence for whistleblowers working in detention centres to leak information about asylum seekers to the media. The restrictions, which were met with widespread outrage from human rights and media advocates, such as the International Federation of Journalists, meant a person could be jailed for leaking information. Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance CEO Paul Murphy said:

The role of the media is to scrutinise the powerful and hold them to account. The Australian public has a right to know what the government is doing in our name. It is not justifiable in any circumstances to thwart legitimate public interest reporting on suspected infringement of the human rights of a refugee or asylum seeker. On the contrary, the public has a right to know how Australia's obligations under Australian and international legal instruments are being met. (2015)

It also highlights the importance of humanity in these stories. Without a human voice, a human experience, a human insight, the newsworthiness of important stories is greatly diminished. Mawson (2015) says:

In Australia, our Government does its best to keep refugees out of sight and mind by locking them up on far-flung Pacific islands and just flat-out refusing to talk about them. And when ministers do talk, it's usually in three-word slogans like "Operation Sovereign Borders" and "Stop The Boats" that divorce the issue from its global context.

The strategy employed by the Australian Government is no mistake. It is a deliberate attempt to stymie the news value and newsworthiness of the asylum seeker/refugee narrative, and is an important example in justifying and explaining humanity as a news value.

2.4.4 *Humanitarian Issues*

The notion of humanitarian concepts and ideals as a news value is critically important in a globalised world. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2016) defines humanitarian as being concerned with or seeking to promote human welfare. The way in which humanitarian issues are framed and reported in the media has vast consequences. If reporting humanitarian issues is conducted in an ill-conceived manner it can perpetuate stereotypes, stigmatise people, culture and ethnicity, over-simplify complex stories and sensationalise issues to the point of making them trite (Downman 2013). But reporting humanitarian issues objectively and ethically can enhance understanding of issues and negate the cons so often associated with this type of reporting. Identifying humanitarian issues as a news value is to signal their importance and newsworthiness. A humanitarian news value relates to both macro and micro issues. If it is to be applied at a macro level it could include the coverage of natural disasters, accidents, epidemics, plagues, human migration and war. At a micro level it could include issues such as domestic violence, foster care, adoption and public housing. Shaw, in his research on distant wars, argues that the way distant humanitarian events are presented and framed by journalists can influence the way these issues are perceived. He points out:

Mass media have the power to manipulate public opinion to the extent that it has become widely accepted that the event or issue that is constantly in the media domain at any given time is automatically considered to be the most important item occupying the minds of the public. (2012, p. 84)

The reporting of humanitarian events has the capacity to incite social, political and economic change, while providing depth to complex issues.

Acknowledging humanitarian issues as a news value has the capacity to promote an ‘active citizenship’ which is important for seeking and securing solutions to pervasive problems of powerlessness and a lack of freedom (Green 2008, p. xiv). Active citizenship is an important ingredient in journalism for social change:

Because people working together to determine the course of their own lives, fighting for rights and justice in their own societies, are critical in holding states, private companies, and others to account...Active citizens, of course, are not limited to people living in poverty. Members of the middle class often play a vital role in supporting grassroots organisations, helping them deal with those in power, and challenging entrenched attitudes and beliefs among elites. (Green 2008, pp. 12–13)

This is important because it reinforces the notion of media as an active agent in shaping local, national and global affairs. The consequences of humanitarian issues in the globalised world are interconnected. Green says:

Ending inequality’s ‘lottery by birth’ is perhaps the greatest global challenge of the twenty-first century. And it is one that concerns all nations, since in a globalised world, poverty and suffering do not remain confined within borders, but spill over in the form of conflict, migration and environmental degradation. (2008, p. 3)

The reach of humanitarian issues is vast. Humanitarian issues have the capacity to undermine society and its institutions, undermine social cohesion, limit the impact of economic growth, transmit disadvantage from one generation to the next and ultimately impinge on people’s ability to reach their potential. Therefore, the importance of human welfare issues is immense and is highly newsworthy.

2.4.5 *Human Interest*

Issues of human interest have long been considered an important news value, particularly in the construction of soft news and features. Conley and Lamble (2006) observe that human interest is often broadly based and can involve coverage of entertainment, the arts and even sport. They argue: ‘Human interest is probably linked more to unusualness than to other news values, and more to entertainment than other media functions’ (p. 96). Gillman (2011) says the human interest news value is a

paradox because it can include both stories of ordinary people and issues that are deemed socially interesting or important. She points out: ‘Human interest news stories also tend to give us glimpses into the experiences of other people, to publicise their achievements or difficulties, enabling us to compare and measure our own status and well-being’ (2011, p. 248). The rise of celebrity journalism and the celebritisation of reporting has had a massive impact on human interest as a news value. Studies in the United States have found that about 25% of all American television commercials feature celebrities. This obsession with A-list celebrities such as the Kardashians, Justin Bieber and Brangelina has filtered through to their representation in the media too. However, celebrities don’t have to be A-list stars and can include ‘familiar strangers’ whose private and public lives are intriguing (Bainbridge 2011, p. 216). This expands the human interest to a broad range of people including criminals, victims of crime, lawyers, police and even justice advocates. Turner views the media’s obsession with celebrity as a negative ‘towards a culture that privileges the momentary, the visual and the sensational over the enduring, the written, the rational’ (2004, p. 4). Although this might be true, there can be no denying that celebrity news attracts enormous human interest and is one of the key drawcards for luring traffic onto news sites. Bainbridge argues:

Celebrities’ increasing dominance of the mediasphere, and their increasing proliferation, particularly through YouTube, Twitter and reality television series, means that they are important objects of study for the ways in which they are transforming the mediasphere, for good or ill, and as an indication of how the mediasphere might function in the future. (2011, p. 221)

However, human interest is not limited to only celebrity reporting. In this contemporary set of news values human interest is viewed as lifestyle activities that relate to recreation and leisure. This can include diverse fields such as entertainment, music, travel, sport and film. The proliferation of celebrity-based ‘soft news’ and the traffic these kinds of stories generate demonstrate that this is an important news value in attracting and satisfying audiences.

2.4.6 *Human Response*

A critical element within the new newsroom ecology is the human response. Audiences are no longer passive recipients of news but prosumers who are critical in the sharing of news stories. Hargreaves argues:

The global nature of the new communications network means that individuals can consume journalism made all over the world, and discuss it, interactively across national boundaries. Journalism today is a two-way street, or rather a multidirectional process in a boundaryless space, rather than the one-way street of the traditional newspaper or television news bulletin. (2003, p. 242)

This two-way street has taken on a new-found complexity. Readers are no longer anchored to an online news site but share stories through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. They are also breaking stories on their own Facebook and Twitter accounts that are in turn picked up and transformed into stories for news outlets. The relationship between news outlet and news consumer was once based on the consumer being passively dependent on the news outlet. Nowadays, it is more symbiotic and the two feed off each other. This human response impacts the kinds of stories that are published and has resulted in a new level of engagement between news outlet and consumer. Bell argues:

Our news ecosystem has changed more dramatically in the past five years than perhaps at any time in the past five hundred. We are seeing huge leaps in technical capability—virtual reality, live video, artificially intelligent news bots, instant messaging, and chat apps. We are seeing massive changes in control, and finance, putting the future of our publishing ecosystem into the hands of a few, who now control the destiny of many. (Bell, 2016)

This new relationship has seen news organisations respond in various ways. Firstly, it has seen the emergence of so-called ‘clickbait’, seemingly inane and meaningless stories designed to lure news consumers to news sites. Digital natives such as TMZ have mastered and maximised the use of celebrity clickbait as a way of attracting and securing a massive international audience. Secondly, reader interactivity has prompted the use of listicles, numerical lists of ‘facts’ designed to be read and shared by news consumers. BuzzFeed’s business model was built on the back of these lists, which have been used to drive traffic to their news site. Adding the human response as a news value is critical because, as the two previous examples have shown, the human response now influences the type and manner of ‘news’ coverage many of the digital news natives are providing. It is also important to note Bell’s use of the word ‘ecosystem’ to

describe this new form of news delivery. A key aspect of these systems is that they are in a constant state of change. This explains the emerging digital news media market in which the way news is presented and the kind of news that is presented are impacting the way news is delivered. These challenges and changes are directly contributing and affecting the content of news and the notions of newsworthiness that coexist with that.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The human-focussed news values proposed in this chapter provide an important framework for constructing news and for framing newsworthiness. As journalism scholars have long recognised, people play an important role in the news construction process. Although previous news values taxonomies have mentioned the role of the human in the news construction process, no list of news values has ever used people as the basis for constructing news values. Instead, news values have been based on ‘abstract’ concepts that are often difficult to define, and which are open to interpretation. This new list of news values seeks to place humans at the centre of the news production process, and in so doing focus on the rights, place and diversity of humanity in the world. The new news values proposed in this chapter also reflect contemporary changes and challenges to the global media industry. For example, they consider digital interactivity and sharing and allow for the application of experimental news practices such as gamification and experiential news production. Ultimately, if these news values are embedded in the news-gathering and news production process, we have the capacity to improve our understanding of each other, and human rights issues in the world.

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