**News values go on holiday: the ideological values of travel journalism.**

**Abstract**

The ‘newsworthiness’ of news continues to be an issue of great importance within the field of journalism studies – as the recent publication of Harcup and O’Neill’s article ‘What is news? News values revisited (again)’ (*Journalism Studies*, 2016) attests. However, the question of what makes the news *the news* has been pursued, almost exclusively, in the context of mainstream news events and political reporting. The values that underpin other forms of journalism have as yet received little academic attention. This paper seeks to explore the ‘news values’ of British travel journalism. As a form of lifestyle journalism, travel features arguably lack the political relevance and importance of their ‘hard’ news counter-parts. Nonetheless, given its close alliance to the world’s largest industry (tourism), this paper argues that the underlying ideological values of travel journalism are significant and worthy of study for what they reveal of the representational and narrative features of the genre as well as the cultural and economic context in which it is produced. As an exploratory investigation the aim is to identify and compile a preliminary taxonomy of ‘news values’ specific to the genre of travel journalism.

**Key words:** news values, travel journalism, Harcup and O’Neill, discourse analysis.

**Introduction**

Travel journalism occupies a position at the intersection of a number of different competing imperatives within the broader profession. It is a form of journalism built on personal experience – it cannot lay claim to embody the profession’s core values of objectivity and integrity in the way that these values are absolutely constitutive of political reporting (Fursich 2002, 61; Cocking 2009, 57). Yet, travel journalism is by no means wholly uncritical or lacking in integrity – travel articles might sell us tourist experiences but they might also, for example, bring to our attention specific local cultural practices, environmental, health or poverty initiatives (McGaurr 2009, 51-53). Rather there are competing interests and ambiguity here - travel journalism is reliant on the tourism industry and public relations to fund travel experiences, yet as Hanusch found, journalists working in this area nonetheless grapple with ‘traditional journalistic ideals of independent, un-biased and critical reporting’ (2012, 2). The genre can be seen as an inherently ‘market driven type of journalism’ (Hanusch and Fursich 2014, 2). Its characteristic ‘blending of information with advice and guidance as well as with entertainment and relaxation’ (Hanitzsch 2007, 375) means that its content has great potential to influence our patterns of consumption. This is extremely significant in that the market driving this content accounts for 10% of the global GDP, it employs one out of every eleven people and is a key factor in socio-economic development around the world (<http://www2.unwto.org/content/why-tourism>). In 2015 more than 1.2 billion tourists travelled abroad (<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/01/19/travel/international-tourists-2015/>). In the UK the average number of holidays taken during 2014 was three per person, with an average of one (of the three) taken abroad (<http://abta.com/about-us/press/caution-remains-in-2014-but-brits-expect-to-spend-more-on-holidays-in-2015>). As Fursich and Kavoori noted, travel journalism is revealing of ‘the ideological dimensions of tourism and transcultural encounters, as well as the ongoing dynamics of media globalisation’ (2001, 150). Further they note that travel journalism maintains an ‘often privileged position in public discourse’ (ibid). In this way, travel journalism can be located within what Hartley refers to as journalism’s ‘textual system’, the most important feature of which is that it ‘counts as true’ (1996, 35; see also, Fursich and Kavoori 2001, 150). It is this potential for travel journalism to influence our collective imagination of the world, its economic power as a driver of consumer lifestyle choices and its ability to culturally ‘construct differing ideal types of tourists’ (Hanusch and Fursich 2014, 11) that suggests the endeavour of understanding its underlying values is vitally important.

As an emerging area of academic interest, primarily it is its representational characteristics – the ways in which other parts of the world are rendered meaningful for its readers (Fursich and Kavoori 2001, 167) – that has attracted scholarly interest. Studies in this area have sought to explore the ways in travel journalism operates as an important ‘site where meaning is created and where a collective version of the “Other/We” is negotiated, contested and constantly redefined’ (Fursich and Kavoori 2001, 167; see also, Fursich 2002, 58). For example, Buzinde et al examine the connections ‘between travel media, American mainstream news frames and global politics in the creation of meanings attributed to tourist destinations in the Middle East’ (2014, 207; see also, Santos, 2004; Daye, 2005; Voase, 2006). Studies such as these have, in the main, sought to examine how travel journalism represents – or as McGuarr notes, commonly *misrepresents* - specific localities and regions (2015, 39). These lines of enquiry are significant in that they reveal the use of specific modes of representation in content on specific regions, for example, the use of modes of representation that are redolent of Victorian ‘Arabist’ travel writing in British travel journalism on the Middle East (Cocking, 2009). Yet, what of the broader, ‘values’ on which travel journalism is constructed? Travel journalism encourages its readers to imagine different destinations, but it also exhorts them to ‘buy into’ travel experiences. Over and above the specific modes of representation through which a particular location is presented, how do the cultural and economic imperatives of travel journalism shape its form? The intention here is to make an initial and exploratory assessment of the “news values” that are in play in the production of travel journalism in British broadsheet newspapers. This takes place in three stages: a detailed textual analysis of a travel journalism article, a secondary textual analysis across a sample of fourteen articles from 2014-2016 and a contents analysis of a sample of one hundred articles from 2015-2016. The articles were selected from *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Telegraph* and *The Times*.

**The ‘news values’ of travel journalism**

The processes of news selection – how and why particular stories come to be featured in the news – have long garnered a great deal of academic interest. Galtung and Ruge’s ground-breaking taxonomy of ‘news factors’ first published in 1965 is an important founding stone for the field of journalism studies (Bro and Wallberg 2014, 447-448; Harcup and O’Neill 2016, 2). In asking ‘how do “events” become “news”?’ Galtung and Ruge drew attention to the professional and operational practices through which news is produced (1965, 65). Most significantly, they gave consideration to the issue of *how* events are covered; ‘research into the adequacy of the image the news media give of the world is of primary importance’ (1965, 64). These lines of enquiry remain productive and relevant areas of academic research (see for example, Harcup and O’Neill, 2016).

Clearly, the ideological imperatives of travel journalism - though arguably as potentially powerful as their ‘hard’ news counterparts – serve a very different purpose. They facilitate patterns of leisure time consumption rather than informing democratic participation. Additionally, the distinction Galtung and Ruge make between events happening in the real world and the kinds of coverage they attract is not applicable to travel journalism. Travel journalism content is rarely, if ever, based on unplanned and unaccounted for “happenings”, it is after all not “news” in the conventional sense but lifestyle content. These differences might suggest that the concept of news values is not one that is readily applicable to the genre of travel journalism. It is important note that since Galtung and Ruge’s seminal study it has been widely acknowledged that the distinction they draw between events happening in the real world and the selection of them as the basis for news stories is not as clear cut as it must have appeared. For example, Franklin et al note that: ‘news values are not a product of the selection of events but of the way in which events have been written about, or *constructed*, by journalists (2005, 174).

Whilst studies of news values often make reference to the selection process, it has been recognized that ‘any exploration of news values can only provide a partial explanation of what lies behind journalistic news decisions’ (Harcup and O’Neill 2016, 2). The study of news values is, after all, based upon the examination of news content – the stories that have been published in the news *not* those that have not been selected. Instead news values afford what Harcup and O’Neill refer to as an insight into ‘a shared shorthand operational understanding of what working journalists are required to produce to deadlines’ (2016, 1) – they do not provide the foundation for examining all of the vast array of influences that act upon the production of news content. Journalism of all forms is subject to considerable and sustained commercial pressures, editorial and proprietorial influences, deadlines, and the influence of advertisers. There are also considerable external influences and pressures such as the prominent and the long established role of public relations professionals and “spin doctors” where content is often ‘prefabricated in an appropriate news style’ (Bell 1991, 158; see also, Brighton and Foy 2007).

If, in fact, the study of news values provided definitive information on all aspects of the selection of news stories, it would be difficult to see how the concept might be applicable to a form of journalism which does not, even partially, rely on making judgements about pre-existing, ad hoc events and happenings. Travel journalism content is, after all, largely self- selecting, based on pre-prepared public relations material produced by or for travel companies (Hanusch 2012, 670). Yet, as has been widely acknowledged, public relations and press officers play an increasingly dominant role in producing and shaping news content (Brighton and Foy 2007, 8). Certainly, studies of news values do not attempt to separate out content that was prefabricated by public relations agencies from that which has been crafted by journalists. For example, Harcup and O’Neill’s 2016 study of news values acknowledges the role of marketing and public relations in producing pre-packaged news content but does not investigate the origins of content on which their analysis is based and thus makes no distinction between content produced by press officers or PR companies from that created by professional journalists (4). Arguably, what is evident in studies of news values is that there are prevailing values and that these are explicitly present regardless of the origins or iterations of the content. Ultimately, the ideological implications of news values are of more significance than their origins, as Bell notes they ‘reflect ideologies and priorities held in society’ (Bell 1991, 156). Further, as news values ‘are also ideological in the sense that they can work to reinforce other ideologies (rather than just an ideology of what is newsworthy) (Bednarek and Caple 2014, 137).

The comparison, then, between travel journalism and mainstream news reveals a spectrum - both forms of journalism make use of public relations derived content. One relies heavily on it whilst for the other it is one source of content amongst several. It is clear that travel journalism ‘operates within the broader ethical framework of professional journalism, but with specific constraints brought on by the economic environment of its production’ (Hanusch and Fursich 2014, 11). In this way, it is possible to conceive of not only the importance of examining the underlying ideological values of travel journalism (for what they reveal of patterns of leisure time consumption and of the narrative structure of this form of journalism) but also that the specificities of travel journalism are in fact amplified forms (or variations of forms) of practices common throughout the industry. This particularly significant in that ‘travel journalism arguably plays an important part in at least partly affecting the images people hold of foreign countries, particularly in light of the decline of foreign news’ (Hanusch 2011, 33). Consequently, ‘travel journalism – just like “serious” forms of journalism – warrants attention as documentation of the shared assumptions between journalists and readers about what representations are relevant from beyond their borders’ (Good 2013, 296). Conceptually, the analysis of news values is as appropriate and applicable here as it has proved to be in the study of mainstream news.

**Framing the analysis**

Travel journalism tends to make strong use of visual images. And yet, there is little in the existing literature on travel journalism that addresses its visual characteristics (an exception being Good 2013). There is also little in the literature on news values that addresses the visual aspects of news content (as acknowledged by Tunstall 1971, 21 and Harcup and O’Neill 2001, 265). However, recently Caple and Bednarek have undertaken several studies of news values that have sought to consider to the role and usage of visual images in mainstream news media content (2013, 2015). Their perspective is borne out of consideration for the ways in which news values are also manifest in news photography and how our understanding of news ‘texts’ emerges from the interpretative interplay between text and image (2013, 9). It is their contention that the analysis of news values requires a greater acknowledgement of the broader discursive context of the language of news stories. Thus, they argue for:

an *explicitly discursive* approach to news values…we go *beyond* language and aim to systematically categorise a wide range of semiotic devices that are used to construct newsworthiness in the press, including news photos/footage, layout and typography. Our ultimate aim is to establish a framework that can be used to analyse how specific events, or issues or news actors are constructed as newsworthy, for example through the foregrounding of particular news values (13).

For Bednarek and Caple, their approach emerges out the interdisciplinary theoretical perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It shares in the broad endeavour of CDA to analyse discourse in order to ‘uncover the (re)production of ideology’ (2013, 2). However, their approach is ‘multimodal’ in that they ‘investigate how semiotic systems other than language construct news values and how they interact with linguistic resources’ (2014, 6). They term their approach discursive news values analysis (DNVA). Given the focus here on the ideological power of travel journalism – and bearing in mind its characteristic use of visual content – the association of news values with this form of discourse analysis provides a productive basis upon which to consider devising a methodological approach. In terms, though, of identifying and analysing news values in travel journalism there are some further considerations that need to be taken into account. The first consideration pertains to the sequence of analysis. Bednarek and Caple frame their analysis around ten news values derived from Bell (1991) (2015, 5). In the context of mainstream news journalism, there is broad consensus amongst researchers as to what the news values are and even where researchers have sought to employ different terms for news values in practice there is considerable commonality in terms of definitions (Caple and Bednarek 2013, 5). There is, however, no literature on news values in travel journalism. Therefore, in developing a form of DNVA for the purpose of analysing news values in travel journalism the intention was to focus firstly on one newspaper article in order to produce an initial list of news values. This analysis is based on the lead article in *The Sunday Telegraph’s* ‘Discover’ section, from 15th March 2015 (1-3). The article is titled ‘Back in the spotlight’ and focuses on the Caribbean island of Puerto Rico. The list of news values identified in this article were then, an approach akin to that used by Galtung and Ruge, presented as a ‘hypotheses’ (64, 74-75) and explored further with reference to fourteen travel journalism articles taken from *The Guardian*, *The Independent, The Telegraph* and *The Times* from 2014-2016 (Table 1 below). Finally, an axial coded content analysis was undertaken using a sample of one hundred articles from the same newspapers from 2015-2016 (Table 2 below). This is not an extensive empirical study but rather an initial, exploratory survey.

**Identifying “News” Values**

Like most lead travel features, the *Sunday Telegraph’s* article on Puerto Rico is headed by a large (in this case half-page colour) photograph of the location[[1]](#footnote-1). A beautiful beach scene with a small boat is moored off a short wooden jetty on a serene sea and the sun setting behind a vivid green palm tree. Typical of images that accompany travel journalism of this kind, the emphasis here is on the rich beauty of the scenery, uncluttered by people. The image certainly correlates with the ‘longstanding visual and literary themes in European representations of Caribbean landscapes as microcosms of earthly paradise’ (Sheller 2004, 23). Underneath the photograph, the headline: ‘Back in the spotlight’. The image has been composed in such a way that the setting sun shines down like a spotlight onto the jetty, directly above the word ‘Spotlight’. The photograph is visually stunning and immediately draws one’s eye but complete signification is obtained by interpreting the image and headline (text) together. It seems they reveal several news values specific to travel journalism. Firstly, **Appeal** – travel journalism cannot rely on capturing the reader’s attention through shock, awe or the desire (or sense of moral obligation) to be politically informed. Rather, travel journalism must appeal to us on very broad terms and an image which is the very essence of Western conceptions of tropical island paradise - accompanied by a headline which alerts us to the fact that this hitherto forgotten paradise is now once more available to us - does precisely that. Our interest is sustained and further indulged by the opening lines of the first two paragraphs of the article:

This isn’t Puerto Rico’s first moment in the sun. Back in the Sixties, the island found itself fleetingly one of the most fashionable destinations in the Caribbean…Back then, John F Kennedy and Joan Crawford frequented what is now Ritz-Carlton’s newly luxurious Dorado Beach resort…’ (O’Flaherty, *The Sunday Telegraph*, 15th March 2015, 1)

These lines bring context to the paradisiacal image: Puerto Rico may not be as familiar to us as some of the other more popular Caribbean islands but reassurance comes in the form of a reference to its illustrious past and arguably the phrase ‘newly luxurious’ denotes a further sense of appeal. These signifiers of timeless luxury not only form the basis of the article’s initial appeal, they also appear to lay the foundations of another news value specific to travel journalism: **Cultural Frame**. If travel journalism has to work hard to draw its readers in, a following priority is to contextualise the destination. For example, beyond the opening paragraphs of the article, we quickly learn what there is to see and do in Puerto Rico. We are provided with a cultural frame through which to see Puerto Rico:

Wandering around dive bars and antique shops, you might find yourself wondering why we don’t paint our buildings emerald green, cerulean blue and canary yellow in Britain…If you are looking for the usual paradise island pursuits, they are all here. The St Regis Bahia Beach Resort (001 787 809 8000; stregisbahiabeach.com) has been the go-to, family-orientated five-star resort in these parts since opening five years ago. It’s on the edge of the El Yunque rainforest, with its driving and hiking trails and copious waterfalls (you can swim in the pool beneath the La Mina falls). (O’Flaherty, *The Sunday Telegraph*, 15th March 2015, 1)

The second and third pages of the article feature a series of photographs of beach and harbour scenes, the 17th century old town of San Juan, restaurants and hotels, and some works of art of large mirror images of bananas and pineapples. In considering how news values may also strike a significatory presence in visual images, this collection of photographs very much adds to the **Cultural Frame**. It visually summarises how Puerto Rico should be seen; it locates it within a cultural frame of reference we are familiar with. In a sense, it is possible to see this news value as being akin to John Urry’s conception of the ‘tourist gaze’ – a ‘socially organised and systematised’ gaze through which tourists encounter destinations (2005, 1). However, whereas Urry sought to explain tourist modes of behaviour, here the news value of the **Cultural Frame**, is providing the reader with a way of conceiving of the destination. Of course, it is possible that someone might read an article on a specific destination, understand it through a particular cultural frame and then purchase that holiday experience and enact that cultural frame, effectively adopting a particular ‘tourist gaze’.

In this sense, the **Cultural Frame** is similar to the news value of “consonance”. The former affords us an imagined ‘tourist gaze’ but in doing so it inevitably draws on our preconceptions of places; Bell defines consonance as ‘the compatibility of a story with preconceptions about the social group or nation from which the news actors come (people have a mental script for how certain kinds of events proceed)’ (21). Related to the **Cultural Frame** is **Identification**. Broadly, this is analogous to Galtung and Ruge’s “meaningfulness” or Harcup and O’Neill’s news value, “relevance”(2001: 263/279). Meaningfulness and relevance are essentially about the ways in which audiences relate to news stories. In the context of ‘hard’ news these processes of identification might manifest themselves in the form of issues that specific groups within society relate to (i.e., changes to taxation) or more localised issues (i.e., flooding or a council election). Here **Identification** is about placing the reader in the destination, enabling them to feel as though a particular holiday experience has been created uniquely for them. For example, the composition of the photographs in the Puerto Rico article seem to invite the reader to feel as though they are present in every scene. We are at turns walking along the deserted beach, looking up at the vibrant 17th Century architecture and gazing out at the crashing waves from a shoreline restaurant (2-3). Similarly, the accompanying text exhorts us to feel as though we are actually there with the inside knowledge on the best of Puerto Rico has to offer:

If you want a temporary base on Vieques with a pool, cocktails and your own big bathtub, the W is the place. It also has one of the biggest car rental lots next door; very handy – you can pick up your red Jeep and head off, and off road, with a picnic to all the most beautiful and isolated beaches along the south coast (O’Flaherty, *The Sunday Telegraph*, 15th March 2015, p. 3)

The aim here, in part at least, is consumption and the more the reader might see themselves as participating in (buying into) a specific holiday experience, the better. Consequently, the signifiers of **Identification** seem to be cast in very broad terms: the reference above to a pool, cocktails and a big bathtub undoubtedly has very wide appeal. In this particular article **Identification** is denoted through signifiers of ‘authenticity’. This holiday experience is all about luxury, uniqueness and exclusivity: ‘the seafood at Bili in Esperenza is as good, if not better, than anything you’ll get on the Med’ (3). This resonates with Dean MacCannell’s concept of ‘staged authenticity’. His seminal study of tourist sights and behaviour centres on tourists’ desire to ‘see live as it is really lived’ (1973, 592) and the ways in which this desire is catered for (and exploited) by the tourism industry. However, in addition to the difference in context (here textual, in MacCannell’s case real life cultural practices), the concept of authenticity itself is somewhat different. It is perfectly possible to find travel features that promise ‘the real’ or ‘the undiscovered’ and in this sense are making use of signifiers of authenticity that are very similar to MacCannell’s notion of staged authenticity in as much as they promise us ‘the back stage’. Nonetheless, in the case of the article on Puerto Rico, it offers us not so much ‘the real’ but ‘the really luxurious’. Despite the broad basis of **Identification**, like **Appeal**, only specific elements within a newspapers readership will identify with a particular article. Equally, it seems possible to be drawn to a particular article (**Appeal**) without identifying with it (**Identification**). For example, reading about a mountain climbing holiday might be of interest but it might not be something that one identifies with in the sense of actually consuming such as holiday experience.

A further news value of travel journalism is, perhaps most obviously, **Positivity**. It is the antithesis of the ‘hard’ news ethos of ‘if it bleeds it leads’ which Bednarek and Caple identify in their list of news values as “negativity” - a term also deployed by Galtung and Ruge (1965) in their original study; similarly Harcup and O’Neill use the term “bad news”(2001). If negativity is very much the essence of ‘hard’ news, so **Positivity** is the essence of travel journalism. It should be noted that in their 2016 study Harcup and O’Neill identify “good news” as a news value (2). However, “good news” is defined by them primarily in terms of positive ‘overtones, such as rescues and cures’ (ibid). In this sense “good news” is concerned with positive outcomes to inherently newsworthy stories – arguably a rescue operation would feature in the news regardless of outcome. By contrast, **Positivity** seems to be an intrinsic quality of travel journalism. It encourages readers to think about how they will spend their money on their leisure time and consequently it must be inherently positive, particularly given its close association with the tourism industry. The buoyant, glossy nature of visual and textual content offers up landscapes, cultures and countries as commodities for tourists to identify with and ‘buy into’. This is not to suggest that the decidedly favourable stance of this feature with its emphasis on luxury and tranquillity lacks criticality (or indeed, that travel journalism does as a genre). There are several references to some of the more negative aspects of this holiday experience. For example, the old town of San Juan (with Unesco World Heritage Site status) is presented as a ‘joy to explore’ providing ‘some behemoth of a cruise ship isn’t docked’ (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 15th March 2015, 1). Similarly, the molecular cooking at the Dorado Beach Resort is described as being sufficiently novel to distract one from ‘the woman from Arkansas at the next table, making a video call to her friend while blowing smoke from an electric-blue vape pipe’ (2). The infrequency of such references mean that they do not in any way undermine the overall (positive) tone of the feature. Rather, they help add credibility – if the journalist is willing to make comments about the ‘risible’ check in times at hotels (3), then the enthusiasm with which they write about their experience of Puerto Rico can be perceived as authentic, arguably leaving the reader feeling that if they were to book this holiday experience it would live up to the journalist’s claims.

Further, at heart, travel journalism is writing about destinations and experiences worth travelling to and paying for. Travel journalism must create an inherent sense of difference between what might be termed ‘at home’ and ‘out there’. The signifiers of this news value can arguably take many forms – for example, destinations can be presented as exotic, unique, exclusive, adventure filled etc. Similarly, as Hamid-Tuksoy, Kuipers and Van Zoonen note, this can also lead to an ‘*Othering of the locals*’ [original emphasis] (2013, 256) based on romanticised clichés and the reproduction of cultural stereotypes (see also, Bryce, 2007). However, in the article on Puerto Rico, the dichotomy between ‘at home’ and ‘out there’ is less amplified and presented in different terms. With its emphasis on luxury and exclusivity it is signifiers of these commodities that provide the contrast with home, rather than, for example, a form of otherness derived from Puerto Rico’s cultural heritage. The news value **‘At home/out there’** juxtaposes ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’, presenting itself in this instance through the contrast of Western modernity (‘Puerto Rico is the 51st American state in all but name’, 1) with luxury and a sense of the unspoilt being accessed through exclusivity:

…these beaches really are isolated – only Sun Bay has anything you could describe as facilities (a café, lavatories and paved car park). But that’s the beauty of this part of Puerto Rico. Its raw…This is the Caribbean without all the edges sanded off. (p.3)

Two further news values appear to be **History** and **Timeliness**. Though, the extent of historical detail in the article on Puerto Rico is somewhat limited. As mentioned above, there is a very brief mention of colonial architecture but no references to its colonial and cultural heritage i.e., Columbus’s discovery of it in 1493 or its pre-colonial Taino population. Rather, historical details are presented in a form consistent with the overall emphasis on luxury and exclusivity in that we learn of its glamorous 1960s past as a destination of choice for ‘high-society “snowbirds” from the north-eastern United States…’ (1). Conversely, there is a strong element of **Timeliness** to the article on Puerto Rico, driven by fashion and popularity. This return to popularity is very much inferred by the headline of the article: ‘Back in the Spotlight’. Signifiers of timeliness are present in many of the passages of the article, where accounts of hotels, restaurants and bars are framed in terms of their contemporariness, their cutting-edge-ness:

Now it’s is enjoying a tourist renaissance: local chefs have developed innovative, sophisticated new styles; chic hotels are opening up; and for New Yorkers in particular – taking advantage of low-cost, three-hour domestic flights to San Juan – Puerto Rico has become a favourite weekend-break destination. It’s fitting: the island has all the palm fronds, golden sand and surf of the best of the Caribbean, but with a quirky, urban twist. (1)

Of their original 1965 list of ‘news factors’, Galtung and Ruge stated ‘No claim is made for completeness in the list of factors or ‘deductions’ (64). Certainly, the same claim must be made here. The seven news values for travel journalism identified above, should not be seen as complete or absolute, but as ‘hypotheses’ to test in the following exploratory textual analysis (Table 1) and contents analysis (Table 2).

**Table 1.** Textual and Visual examples of news values in travel journalism.

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News value Examples

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**Appeal**

Definition: drawing readers in by

appealing to broadly leisure values Textual: ‘I’m on the deck of my swanky over-water villa. Above me is a cloudless sky, beneath me a Tiffany-blue lagoon where stingrays play tag and a damselfish nibbles on an emerald-green anemone. So far, so Maldives. Except that I’m in the Caribbean, and, remarkably, given that we’ve spent the past 15 years drooling over photos of hotel suites on stilts dotted across a mirror-calm ocean, this is the first over-water accommodation in the region’ (“Dip a toe in the high life”, *The Times*, 4th December 2016). This passage summarises the charm of the destination, helping to draw the reader into the article.

Visual: “Atacama Desert: Trip of a Lifetime” (*The Telegraph*, 10th March 2015) includes a striking image of the Atacama’s, red desert scape. It is redolent of adventure and adventure and consequently immediately draws attention.

**Cultural Frame**

Definition: contextualising a destination

or holiday experience. Developing a strong

sense of how it is to be perceived by the

reader.Textual: “China in style: From Yangtze cruises to golden beaches and buzzing cities” (*The Independent*, 27th February, 2015), gives a strong indication in the headline as to how readers should perceive of this experience. This is further emphasised in the opening paragraph: ‘New wealth, newly unleashed creativity, new China. The ever-growing mega-rich strata of Chinese society has an increasing hunger for travel, leading to a swathe of luxurious hotel openings and upmarket experiences across this vast, diverse country. And UK tour operators are raring to share them with British travellers.’

Visual: “Tenerife: A new air-route to unspoilt beaches, fishing villages and hiking trails” (*The Independent*, 31st March 2015) contains a series of photographs which visually denote how this holiday experience should be perceived of. The beach is far from overcrowded and overdeveloped; a photograph of Mount Teide further adds to impression that this is a Tenerife that offers outdoor pursuits and one that is devoid of crowds.

**Identification**

Definition: enabling the reader to image

themselves participating in a particular

holiday experience Textual: “Namibia: Trip of a Lifetime” (*The Telegraph*, 15th May, 2014) presents the holiday experience very much in terms enabling the reader to image themselves there. For example, ‘Most people opt to combine wildlife and landscape, and the best way to do it is by driving yourself. The road network is extensive and well maintained (and you drive on the left).’

Visual: ‘Where casinos have no clocks, nightlife has no limits, and Sin City stays wide-awake until dawn’ (‘Las Vegas city break guide’ in *The Telegraph*, 15th October, 2015) – the sentiments alluded to in the title of this articles very much confirm our expectations of Las Vegas. The article includes a photograph of an Elvis look-alike standing in front of a pink Cadillac and a sign saying ‘Welcome to fabulous Las Vegas, Nevada’. This very much draws on our broader cultural understanding of the city as do the other images, which include desert-scapes and the blurred lights of the city at night.

**Positivity**

Definition: the holiday experience has to

be presented in positive terms Textual: “The big weekend: Sarajevo” (*The Times*, 4th December, 2016) like most travel features, includes many examples of Positivity. ‘There’s snow on the mountains around Bosnia and Herzegovina’s capital right now, but the city’s youthful, fearless outlook, which translates into lively bars and a pulsating live-music scene, means there’s plenty to keep visitors warm’.

Visual: “10 of the best UK campsites for last-minute bank holiday trips” (*The Guardian*, 18th August, 2016). The emphasis here is very much on inspiring readers to embark on weekend camping break at short notice. The visual images of the campsites that accompany the article can be seen as signifiers of the news value of Positivity. Showing each site’s aesthetic qualities, the images resonate with the text, both urging readers to visit one of the locations listed.

**‘At home/out there’**

Definition: blending senses of sameness

and difference in order to ensure that the

holiday experience or destination

appears to be appealingly ‘different’ but

with the reassuring features of ‘home’. Textual: No point delaying the inevitable. In the heated bathroom, I clothe myself in merino wool, then hop into the ice room and shiver violently as I zip up the bag. A couple of reindeer skins and a mattress do not disguise the fact that the bed is a block of ice. Frankly, it’s flipping cold: -6C, and too much for exposed fingers. No chance of reading, then, so lights off. The room is utterly black and the silence is total — a noiselessness that whines in your ears. This place is as still and dark as a grave. (“A frosty reception all year round”, *The Times*, 4th December 2016). This passage blends familiarity and difference, the exoticness of everyday activities in an ice hotel in a way that piques curiosity but also reassures.

Visual: “Chiatura’s Soviet cable car system: rusty red but not quite dead” (*The Guardian*, 1st September 2016). A photograph of a rusting but still in service 1950s cable car dangling over the town of Chiatura, Georgia. The familiarity of a cable car in an ‘Alpine-esque’ setting is juxtaposed with the otherness of the decaying – known locally as “metal coffins” – cable car.

**History**

Definition: historical details (in some form)

provide a further sense of context and

cultural capital Textual: “The Maharaja’s Express: Great Train Journeys” (*The Telegraph*, 28th April, 2014). The news value of history is a very strong presence in this article. Historical details create context and help sustain interest and curiosity. For example: ‘Among pale hills enlivened by the occasional explosion of mauve bougainvillea is what was the old capital before Jai Singh II created Jaipur from 1727’.

Visual: “Athens city guide: where to stay, eat, drink and more” (*The Guardian*, 14th September 2014) under its title this article features a large photograph of the Acropolis. The image completely encapsulates the historicity of Athens. The composition ensures that modern day Athens only encroaches in somewhat blurred form in the top-right background. The signification is that the traveller will encounter ancient Athens, little touched by modernity.

**Timeliness**

Definition: event based, season based

or in the form of rising popularity, style or

fashion Textual: “Lets go snow-boarding – in West Yorkshire” (*The Guardian*, 29th January, 2015). The essence of this article is timeliness: there is a very limited time frame for snow-boarding in West Yorkshire and in this sense the news value of timeliness features very prominently in this article.

Visual: “What's the deal: The Independent's travel team battle it out to find the best northern lights break” (*The Independent*, 31st August 2016). This article features a spectacular photograph of the northern lights just below its title. Arguably such a signifier could also be viewed as servicing the news value of appeal, but the publication of this article at the end of Summer means that it denotes timeliness too, fitting with the general sense that Autumn and Winter are approaching.

**Table 2.** Percentage of content identified as signifiers of specific news values

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Newspaper | *The Guardian* | *The Independent* | *The Telegraph* | *The Times* | Total across sample |
| Appeal | 25 | 25 | 25 | 25 | 100 |
| Cultural Frame | 17 | 15 | 15 | 12 | 59 |
| Identification | 25 | 25 | 25 | 25 | 100 |
| Positivity | 25 | 25 | 25 | 25 | 100 |
| ‘At home’/’Out there’ | 15 | 17 | 12 | 12 | 56 |
| History | 10 | 15 | 5 | 3 | 33 |
| Timeliness | 7 | 17 | 10 | 5 | 39 |

It is clear that signifiers of the seven news values identified initially in the article on Puerto Rico (above) can be found in the primary sample of fourteen articles (Table 1). It is also evident from the contents analysis undertaken on the second sample of one hundred articles that these news values are commonly present in travel journalism in British broadsheet newspapers (Table 2). It is important to reiterate that this is an initial study and that no claim is being made as to the entirety of news values in travel journalism. As with the news values of ‘hard’ news, not every travel journalism article will contain all seven news values, there is variation in their form and presence. In addition, news values are often present in ways that overlap and interlink. However, of the seven news values identified **Appeal**, **Identification** and **Positivity** appear to be always present, whilst the presence of other news values, the **Cultural Frame**, **‘At home’/‘Out there’**, **History** and **Timeliness**, is much more varied (Table 2). This contrasts with studies of mainstream news values which find more variation in the presence and absence of all news values. It could be inferred from this that the prevalence of the news values **Appeal**, **Identification** and **Positivity** indicates that such categories are very board, perhaps too board – particularly when consideration is given to the extent to which they overlap. That said, if the subjectivity and fluidity of such categories is acknowledged it is possible to deploy them productively in order to explore the semiotic devices, visual and textual, used in the ideological encoding of travel journalism content. For example, Harcup and O’Neill find that the news value of ‘relevance’ is present in 209 articles out of a sample of 711 (2016, 9). Yet, it is safe to say that the newspaper editors of the newspapers in their sample would argue that all 711 articles are relevant, similarly the readerships of these newspapers would no doubt interpret relevance differently again. Of more significance than the blurred or disputable boundaries of such a category is the ways in which ‘relevance’ is foregrounded in specific narratological and semiotic structures and what this indicates in terms of how the readerships of the newspapers in the sample are being positioned ideologically. In this sense, the real significance of **Appeal**, **Identification** and **Positivity** being always present in travel journalism content is not the porous nature of these categories but that their presence reveals distinctive narratological features and indicates the ways in which these features are informed by commercial and cultural imperatives. After all, travel journalism exhorts us to buy holiday experiences. Related to this, it is possible to see the variations in the presence of the other news values - the **Cultural Frame**, **‘At home’/‘Out there’**, **History** and **Timeliness** – also in terms of commercial and cultural imperatives. Many travel experiences are seasonal and many become subject to other external factors. For example, an airline offering a new destination, the opening of a new museum or the end of a conflict enabling a destination to be safely visited once more.

**Conclusions**

There are several further observations to make. The study of news values in this context does not bring greater transparency to the selection process. As has been acknowledged here throughout, travel journalism content is largely self-selecting: travel companies regularly approach newspapers with offers of travel experiences their journalists can part-take in, often with public relations materials supplied for them to derive their content from. That said, public relations plays an increasing role in generating media content of all kinds and it is most productive to conceive of news values as an assessment of the constituent elements in play in the construction of content rather than as a criteria for (even partially) informing selection. Conceivably, it would be possible to make a case for using the term ‘marketing values’ rather than ‘news values’. Yet, ‘marketing values’ seems to delimit consideration of the broader cultural and ideological values of travel journalism – there is more than a financial consumption based imperative here. Likewise, in the context of mainstream news, arguably the term ‘news values’ does not explicitly refer to the impact of marketing and PR values in shaping content. Nonetheless, it is understood and accepted in that context as a term that in referring to professional journalistic values acknowledges of the impact of marketing and PR on news content (Harcup and O’Neill 2016, 1). Given the widespread understanding of the term and the breadth of what it encompasses in the context of mainstream news, it seems appropriate and productive to make use of it in the context of travel journalism too.

Further, analysing the news values of travel journalism from a DNVA perspective could also facilitate the exploration of the extent to which specific news values tend to be foregrounded primarily in marketing and public relations packages as opposed to those that tend to be derived principally by travel journalists. Such studies would undoubtedly lead to a much fuller understanding of the origins of travel journalism content as well as the cultural and economic influences that shape this content. Additionally, the study of the news values of travel journalism from a DNVA perspective informs an understanding of the narrative devices, structures and visual elements of the genre. There is an established correlation between the narrative structure of news stories and conventional news values – for example the structure of a news story might be seen to be developed around the news value of “bad news” (Harcup and O’Neill 2016) in that this is understood by journalists and their readers to be more important that “good news”. A similar correlation seems to operate in the context of travel journalism. Travel journalism cannot rely on the shock value of its content, nor is it on the front page of newspapers. Thus, the textual and visual signifiers of news values such as **Appeal**, **Identification** and **Positivity** tend to be foregrounded at the beginning of articles: travel journalism has to draw its readers in and its warm, admiring tone is very effective at commodifying destinations.

In acknowledging the ways in which the news values of travel journalism illuminate the narrative building blocks of the genre it is evident that they also facilitate an understanding of the relationship between journalists, the editorial perspective of the papers they write for and their readerships. For example, in the article on Puerto Rico (discussed above) it is possible to interpret the journalist’s comment about the seafood at Bili in Esperenza as contributing to the news value of **Identification**. Pursuing this further, it is also revealing of the journalist’s imagined sense of readership - specifically, the class stratification of the readership. In Bourdieusian terms we can see that reference has been made to specific cultural practices (i.e., eating out on holiday, eating seafood near the sea etc.), ones require an appreciation of a particular notion of taste - that the seafood at Bili is better than anywhere in the Mediterranean. In turn, this is derived from identifying with a particular form of habitus (essentially middle class, educated, cultured etc.) in order that we appreciate the nature of the journalist’s observation. Thus, in this context news values inform an understanding of perceptions of social stratification and the patterns of consumption that are being associated with specific social groups. In this respect, further research in this area could involve the comparative analysis of broadsheet and tabloid newspapers in order to assess whether this might reveal different news values or perhaps different inflections of the same news values – such that they might be indicative of the cultural values of their respective readerships. Overlaid and interdependent with the ways in which travel journalism engages with and (re)produces ideological assumptions about leisure time consumption are its presentation of specific touristic cultural practices. Again, it seems the news values of travel journalism reveal much about a shared, imagined sense of what we see and do when we travel. They provide insight into how its content is shaped by the cultural and economic drivers that underpin the genre. These news values tell us something of the processes of interpellation through which the reader is appealed to – that is, how an article seeks to pique our interest, hold it, and encourage us to commit imaginatively, financially and culturally to particular travel experiences.

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1. Most of the photographs and text referred to here from O’Flaherty’s article can also be found in an online version accessible at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/caribbean/puerto-rico/articles/Puerto-Rico-the-Caribbean-without-all-the-edges-sanded-off/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)