



# The news production process in the Brazilian journalistic coverage of the 2016 Rio Paralympic Games

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## Abstract

The Paralympic Games (PG) are the biggest showcase of disability. Thanks to their growing popularity, they are gradually getting a space in television and social networks and are conquering a space in the print and digital press. Therefore, it is important to guarantee the quality of the coverage of the event and of the messages that are sent about people with disabilities. It is also important to understand what factors interfere with this coverage and these messages. In this context, we developed a study that had as a goal to understand the process of news production about the 2016 Rio PG by Brazilian journalists. We used a descriptive, exploratory, and qualitative approach based on some attributes of the newsmaking and gatekeepers' studies. We conducted 15 interviews with journalists and editors who covered the event on site or direct from the newsroom. Our results indicate that the main factors that interfered and structured the journalists conditions of production and routines during the coverage of the 2016 Rio PG were: some business issues (prioritization of audience interests and the exclusivity of broadcasting rights); some logistical issues (limitation of coverage to contents that could be accessed from the newsroom; accessibility barriers for journalists

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with disabilities; transportation between arenas, and reduced teams of journalists); and journalists' level preparedness to cover the event. The interviews also revealed that the main news criteria for content selection were expected victories and medals, proximity, and curiosity. They said they emphasized content that valued athletes' sportsmanship and narratives of overcoming adversity.

### Keywords

Brazilian journalists, journalism, news values, Paralympic sport, sport

### Introduction

The Paralympic Games are the biggest showcase of disability. Thanks to their growing popularity, they are gradually garnering space in television and social networks, and are conquering, with difficulty, a space in the mainstream media. This is not by chance. The Paralympic Games are currently one of the world's most important multisport events. A total of 204 countries and more than 10,500 athletes and 70,000 volunteers participated in the most recent edition of the Olympic Games in Rio. During the Games, 8 million tickets to attend competitions were sold, and more than 21,000 mass media professionals were accredited. The Paralympic Games brought together 164 States, 4237 athletes and – just like the Olympics – 70,000 volunteers. The organizers sold 2.7 million tickets and accredited more than 6500 mass media professionals (International Paralympic Committee, 2019).

Paralympic sport is undergoing an intense process of mediatization on a worldwide scale. For example, while the 2004 Athens PG were broadcast in 80 different countries and had a cumulative TV audience of 1.8 million people, 12 years later, in the 2016 Rio edition, they were broadcast to 154 countries and had a cumulative TV audience of 4.1 billion people (International Paralympic Committee, 2019). The volume of news relative to the PG has also grown significantly in the countries that have hosted the PG (Pappous et al., 2011). This was quite visible, for example, in the UK coverage of the London 2012 PG (Jackson et al., 2014) and in the Brazilian coverage of the Rio 2016 edition (de Souza and Brittain, 2020; dos Santos et al., 2019; Hilgemberg, 2019).

Media conglomerates in different countries have been buying the broadcasting rights of the PG. For example, in Brazil, the Globo Organizations have invested in coverage the games since the 2012 edition. In Great Britain, *Channel 4* has not only bought the broadcast rights, but also produced and published extensive information and publicity material on the subject (Pullen et al., 2019; Silva and Howe, 2012). In Brazil, Paralympic sports have conquered space in high-impact sports news. For example, one of the most accessed sport information sites in Brazil, *Globoesporte.com*, now has a section exclusively dedicated to news on Paralympic sports (*Globoesporte.com*, 2020).

Measurements of worldwide television viewers set an audience record for the 2016 edition of the Paralympic mega event.<sup>1</sup> In Brazil, the cable channel *Sportv 2* had the highest audience index in its history during the broadcast of the opening ceremony of 2016 PG. The channel reached over 4.2 million viewers (UOL, 2016). The media's growing interest in the PG is consistent with recent decades' spectacularization of sport (of all sports, and specifically the Olympic and Paralympic Games), itself a consequence of the

enormous investments that many countries have made to improve their sports teams and garner positive coverage in the media, especially on television. This is clearly a global phenomenon dominated by northern countries, as David Rowe and his collaborators have pointed out (Rowe, 2003a, 2003b; Scherer and Rowe, 2013).

Thus, in recent decades, social scientists have conducted an increasing number of studies on the media's coverage of this mega-event and the portrayal of disability in said coverage. Most of these studies suggest that the PG do not receive the media coverage that a mega-event of such magnitude would merit (Chang and Crossman, 2009; Gilbert and Schantz, 2008, 2012; Hardin and Hardin, 2003; Pappous et al., 2010, 2011; Schantz and Gilbert, 2001, 2008, 2012; Solves et al., 2016, 2018; Thomas and Smith, 2003). Considering the news values of the Paralympic Games (Bruce, 2014; Golden, 2003; Howe, 2008; Silva and Howe, 2012), one would expect them to receive more media attention than they actually do. Studies on what the media disseminates are not sufficient to thoroughly understand the media coverage of Paralympic sports and of athletes with disabilities. We need to understand the basis for and the processes that lead to the distributed content. This basis is built on two strata: on the productive routines of sports news professionals who cover the PG; and the journalistic culture that leads these professionals to choose or reject certain stories and tell them in a certain way. That is, we leveraged the broad structure of gatekeeping and newsmaking studies and applied them to the production and dissemination of information about the Paralympic Games.

Tuchman (1973, 1978) has long demonstrated that facts become news through a routine process followed by media professionals to portray the reality they build and disseminate it to the public. According to her, this organization of newsrooms imposes a rhythm of work that affects three specific fields of journalistic work: space, time and sources, which then influence the outlet's agenda and its treatment of each topic.

Some years later, Fishman (1980) set out to study the routine methods of journalists to understand how the news is manufactured, through the study of other practices such as the rise of advertising media, newsroom editors and editorial sections. Arrueta (2010) analyzed two newspapers from San Salvador de Jujuy to understand the productive routines in 'periphery contexts'. The author concluded that newsworthiness in these contexts is the indivisible boundaries between the newspaper and its political-commercial strategies. Arrueta signaled that the notions of 'interesting' and 'significant' have no strict correlation with the demands of the public, but rather with the newspaper's strength and economic focus and the power relations that it establishes with institutional allies and non-allies, from a journalistic and political point of view.

In addition to the studies above, Rost and Bergero (2012) have also had a great impact on the whole field of journalism studies, and their work has recently been applied in research by Searles and Banda (2019) and Yaqub et al. (2020), among others. This theoretical framework, complemented by the sociology of professions and by the political economy of communication, has shown us how news production is an intertwined set of complex economic, ideological, and psychological factors from which the news arises. Analyzing these factors is essential if we are to understand how the constructed and disseminated images depict reality.

The objective of this research is not to unravel all the complex factors that influence the production of news, but to contribute to a better understanding of one of the main

elements of the array of forces that influence it: journalists' work in covering the PG, that is, the set of factors that influence how journalists treat the raw material (the events) of this mega-event and how they transform it into what we call news.

Some studies have sought to understand elements of the coverage production process of the PG. Golden (2003) and Solves et al. (2018) investigated what motivates and conditions journalistic production of this sports phenomenon. Golden (2003) signaled that Paralympic sports coverage was understood partly as social journalism and partly as sports journalism. Solves et al. (2018) pointed out that the coverage of the 2008 and 2012 PG in Spain was influenced by editors who did not recognize the sporting nature of the PG. Therefore, they thought that the PG did not require coverage like that of the Olympic Games. Both studies suggested that media professionals need to learn more about Paralympic sport and its peculiarities so that they can recognize the sportsmanship involved therein.

Howe (2008) conducted an ethnographic study of the 2004 PG media coverage in Athens, which revealed that the institutional and commercial interests of Paralympic sport management bodies interfered with journalists' work during the event. He found, for example, that these professionals were instructed, among other things, not to discuss controversies regarding doping and athletic classification of paralympians. Pullen et al. (2019) developed a study with Paralympic sport producers from *Channel 4*, identifying an editorial orientation aimed at normalizing disability in the socio-cultural sphere and tendency to refrain from reproducing stigma and taboos related to people with disabilities.

Considering the abovementioned context and theoretical framework, our study seeks to analyze some of the factors that interfered with the process of news production during the 2016 Rio PG. To that end, we explored the following specific objectives: (1) to identify news production conditions and productive routines; (2) to identify news criteria; and (3) to identify the news values practiced by sports journalists during the coverage of this sports mega event.

In order to discuss the newsworthiness of the facts and the news values, we used the understanding of Galtung and Ruge (1965), who see them as the criteria established by journalists for choosing social events that are qualified to become news. News values, according to these authors, include issues such as frequency, lack of ambiguity, meaning, unpredictability, threshold, continuity and reference to elite people (Galtung and Ruge, 1965). Complementing and updating this perspective, we also relied on Harcup and O'Neill's (2001) elaboration, for whom news values are social events concerning power elites, celebrity, entertainment, surprise, bad news, good news, magnitude, relevance, follow-up, and newspaper agenda. Based on these news criteria, we tried to understand why certain events of the 2016 PG became news and others did not, according to some Brazilian journalists.

The knowledge generated by this study can help to build a better understanding of the news production process in Paralympic sports, adding some new insights to the scarce literature on this subject. This knowledge can help to inform the media in the coverage of Paralympic sports, which is especially important in countries like Brazil, considering that most of the population – including the journalists themselves – have very little contact with or knowledge about this kind of sport.

This study contributes to the still-emerging field of sociocultural studies on sports for people with disabilities in the global south. It puts Central European and North American

views on Paralympic sports journalism into perspective. In the global south, as Meekosha and Soldatic (2011) point out, we still suffer from marked cultural mediation in the concept of disability, as seen in the definition thereof in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, which has European parameters. Thus, in keeping with Antebi and Jörgensen (2016), we believe that a study like this in the Latin American media-sports context yields new ways to encode and recode the global concept of disability as it has been portrayed by the media. The findings of this research are another contribution to the process of deconstructing the portrayal of PWD as people in need of charity, an image which, according to Antebi and Jörgensen (2016), has historically existed around disability in Latin America and elsewhere.

It is no different in Australia (Ellis, 2009, 2014), nor in South Africa (Swartz, 2014). Disabled people have long been seen through medical parameters of understanding. That is, there is a focus on their supposedly pathological condition and on the need to 'fix' it through individual effort and medical procedures. Nonetheless, a change is taking place in these countries, both in Oceania (Ellis, 2014) and in Africa (Swartz, 2014), mainly due to the growing number of studies on disability in the social and human sciences.

This study is relevant because, as Swartz (2014: 2) points out, 'it is simply outrageous that most of what we know about disability issues across the world comes from wealthier countries, when by far the majority of disabled people in the world live in low and middle-income countries'. We present in this work, therefore, a sports journalism perspective on people and athletes with disabilities within the Brazilian context. According to the Brazilian last census, conducted in 2010, 46 million people (24% of the population) reported having some type of motor, sensory or intellectual difficulty. Of these 46 million, it is estimated that 12.4 million people (6.2% of the general population) have severe impairments that strongly interfere with their involvement in activities such as studying and working (IBGE, 2011).

## Methodology

Our study features descriptive, exploratory and qualitative approaches and was inspired by studies on newsmaking and gatekeepers (Wolf, 1987, 2001). We conducted 15 semi-structured interviews carried out after the mega sporting event, between October and November of 2016. Of the 15 interviews, eight took place face-to-face in the newsroom where the professionals worked, and the other seven were conducted by web conference.

The semi-structured interview script contained questions stemming from the four dimensions of the news production process, which according to Wolf (1987) are: (1) production conditions; (2) productive routines; (3) news reporting criteria; and (4) news values. For the author, newsmaking is a process with structural determinations that condition and configure the journalist's routine (axes 1 and 2 of the script). It consists of a set of elements, such as criteria and values conflicts (axes 3 and 4 of the script) between the professionals and institutions involved in the context. We took this theoretical framework as a starting point for broadly understanding the news production process.

To select the participants, we followed coverage of the event on some media outlets with national and regional reach (we followed the media in different Brazilian states). After the Games, we contacted the newsrooms of the outlets that covered the PG, and

**Table 1.** Presentation and description of study interlocutors.

Number	Name	Position	Media	Location	Holds broadcast rights
1	Fred	Editor	Regional 1	From the newsroom	No
2	Luiz	Journalist	Regional 1	From the newsroom	No
3	Rodrigo	Editor	Regional 2	From the newsroom	No
4	Sara	Journalist	Regional 2	From the newsroom	No
5	Mariana	Editor	Regional 3	From the newsroom	No
6	Antonio	Journalist	Regional 3	<i>On site</i>	No
7	Ícaro	Journalist	Regional 3	From the newsroom	No
8	Philipe	Journalist	Regional 4	From the newsroom	No
9	Fernando	Editor	National 1	<i>On site</i>	Yes
10	André	Journalist	National 1	<i>On site</i>	Yes
11	Vinicius	Journalist	National 1	<i>On site</i>	Yes
12	Francisco	Journalist	National 2	<i>On site</i>	No
13	Martins	Editor	National 3	<i>On site</i>	Yes
14	Jaciara	Journalist	National 3	<i>On site</i>	Yes
15	Jorge	Journalist	National 3	<i>On site</i>	Yes

invited them to participate in the study. Participants had to be journalists and/or editors in chief of the outlets that had participated in the coverage of the Rio 2016 PG on-the-spot or directly from the newsroom. Two editors and five journalists with national reach and five journalists and three editors from four different regional media outlets agreed to participate and were included in the research.

Of the 15 interlocutors, two editors and six journalists covered the PG on-the-spot, whereas the others (three editors and four journalists) did so from the newsroom. In Table 1, we present a profile for each of the editors and journalists, using pseudonyms.

We performed a content analysis of the data (Bardin, 2009), using the components of Wolf's (1987) news production process as the categorical basis to organize and analyze the data.

## Research findings

### *Production conditions and journalists' production routines*

The main factors and routines that influenced and structured the journalists' production conditions during the coverage of the 2016 PG were related to business, logistics and the journalists' extent of preparation before covering the event. We will discuss each of them below.

#### *Business issues*

*Prioritization of audience interests.* Part of the Brazilian media did not believe in the audience potential of the PG. Apparently, their priority was not to produce information about the event, but to attract viewers. Some mass media groups only sought

accreditation to cover the event when they realized, the night of the opening ceremony, that there was growing public interest in the PG, as illustrated by the following statement made by an editor:

*MARTINS, national media editor: [ . . . ] Fox Sports, Bandnews, radio and TV got in touch the following day, on September 8th [the day after the opening ceremony], to know if they could still get accreditation.*

An editor for a regional outlet and a national journalist also mentioned the relevance of public interest in deciding to cover the PG.

*MARIANA, regional media editor: [ . . . ] on the day the Olympics ended, we started to notice a vocal movement on social networks [ . . . ], a demand for the press [to cover the event] [ . . . ]: 'Now we want to see what the coverage will be like in the Paralympics,' because there is this constant criticism that the coverage is much smaller [ . . . ]. The next day [ . . . ], I sent an email to our director saying: 'Look, I think we have to reconsider not sending anyone to the Paralympics, because there is already commotion and pressure on social networks!'*

*FRANCISCO, national media journalist: The element that helped me a lot was the mobilization of people demanding that the press cover the PG when tickets quickly started to be sold, when the arenas started to get crowded. Journalistic interest soared. It made my job much easier!*

In some newspapers, as in the cases reported above, coverage of the PG was also dependent on the public's interest and pressure to learn about the event.

**Exclusivity of broadcasting rights.** Exclusive broadcasting rights are another factor that influenced portrayals of the PG, as well as everyday aspects of journalistic coverage. Of our study participants, two editors and five journalists mentioned that the exclusivity of broadcasting rights affected the routine and conditions of journalistic production. The account of the journalist André, who worked for one of the outlets with broadcasting rights in Brazil, in contrast to the account of the journalist Antonio, the only journalist from a regional press outlet with on-site coverage, demonstrates distinct space and time conditions in the logistics of organizing news production during the PG.

*ANDRÉ, national media journalist: There were two mixed zones [ . . . ]. One was for people who would appear on air after the event [ . . . ]. We were the only Brazilian broadcaster there. The other had a lot of broadcasters scattered around, but that zone didn't have access to the swimming pool, where the athletes passed by.*

*ANTÔNIO, regional media journalist: The Globo TV network companies and the EBC<sup>2</sup> took up a lot of the athletes' time there. Sometimes they would spend forty minutes on TV before getting to the papers and the websites. Sometimes they'd get there and be tired of answering the same things or would have to go to the medal ceremony. There was not enough time for us.*

Seven interlocutors mentioned that the athletes devoted a considerable amount of their post-game time with journalists from outlets that owned broadcast rights. Only later, often quite tired from the sporting event and from talking to journalists who represented



broadcast rights holders, would they talk to other journalists. The distinction between the space and time allotted to some television media and what was left to other outlets, including the press and websites, is related to the fact that the former had signed commercial agreements with the institutions that regulated the PG. That is, they were business partners. Other media that did not invest money in the business were left out, even though they had the potential to generate audience, meet the events' advertising quotas and contribute to the mega-event's visibility in parts of the country where they aired.

### *Logistical issues*

*Limitation of coverage to the content made available in the newsroom.* A logistical issue that affected the conditions of news production was that in some cases it did not occur on site. That is, it came straight from the newsroom, based on news produced by national and international agencies, the BPC itself, the Local Organizing Committee and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC). Two regional editors and two regional journalists who participated in our study and covered the PG from the newsroom stated that this disconnection rather limited direct access to athletes and their perspectives.

*SARA, regional media journalist: We had a hard time not having them [the athletes] available to be interviewed. Then the time passed. It passed and we just let it go.*

*FRED, regional media editor: If we had had a reporter there, we would have gotten more information about the athletes from the state of Paraná. We would have had more information about our local athletes, [ . . . ] If we had had a journalist there, we would have been able to interview her [a local medalist]. She won on Sunday night? We would have interviewed her at the latest on Monday morning.*

Difficulty in accessing the athletes (the event's protagonists) limited the journalists' work and their ability to explore issues related to those sports and the factors that may have influenced their performance.

*Accessibility issues faced by journalists with disabilities.* There was also a factor that affected news production and routines of journalists with disabilities. Although pointed out by only one of our interlocutors, who uses a wheelchair, we would like to emphasize it, since it contradicts the spirit of inclusion defended by the entities involved with Paralympic sports. According to this journalist, the structure and logistics in terms of accessibility for the work of journalism professionals with disabilities was precarious, which hindered their work.

*FRANCISCO, national media journalist: I use a wheelchair [ . . . ]. I noticed that the organizers did not go to the trouble to, for example, bring the athletes closer to my microphone, because I'm at a lower level than the other guys [ . . . ]. In many venues, I did not have the basic set-up [ . . . ]. What is basic set-up? It means arriving at any venue and having a table there with a lower electric outlet [so that I can reach it] for me to work. The reporters without disabilities had that possibility. Those who were wheelchair users did not.*

The fact that the other interlocutors did not mention this logistical issue is also worth noting, given that the main actors of the event were people with some kind of disability.



The following statement by Antonio exemplifies his and other journalists' failure to notice this issue:

*ANTONIO, regional media journalist: Oh, the conditions were very good.. The press area in the media center was the largest and had the whole set-up, plugs for computers, televisions, coffee, bathrooms, a complete set-up. [ . . . ] So it worked really well. I have nothing to complain about.*

The failure of journalists without disabilities to notice accessibility issues indicates that there are few journalists with disabilities working in the field. Perhaps a more constant presence in the field, having more contact with other people involved, can increase people's awareness of accessibility issues.

*Transportation between arenas and reduced teams of journalists.* The organizational structure and transportation logistics for travel between arenas were also mentioned by four journalists as issues that interfered with news production during the productive routine of the PG coverage. Nonetheless, journalists considered the PG's media structure and transportation logistics to be more efficient than those of the Olympic Games.

*JACIARA, national media journalist: [ . . . ] Transportation for people in the Olympic Park was ok. [ . . . ]. You could get from one arena to the next in 10 minutes on foot, at most. So there were no major difficulties. At the Olympic Games it was a little harder, because there were more sports, and therefore, there was also a need for a greater number of facilities outside the Olympic Park.*

*FRANCISCO, national media journalist: The distances between the arenas over there are huge. The same thing happened at the Toronto Pan American Games. So wheelchair users wasted a lot of time going back and forth. It comes down to improving with each Games [ . . . ]. The agenda needs to be planned very early on to have success with this issue.*

In addition to the travel time spent between arenas, two of these four journalists also mentioned the quality of their coverage was limited by a lack of teammates. The interviewees Francisco and Antonio, for example, were accompanied only by a photo reporter.

*FRANCISCO, national media journalist: There are issues that are not up to me to decide. I am a reporter. I am not an economist. I am not a newspaper manager. The team was significantly reduced to cover the PG. [ . . . ]. [There] was me and a photo reporter.*

*ANTONIO, regional media journalist: I was the only journalist for the newspaper [ . . . ] I had to go for a story. I would bet on a different story or follow some local athlete [ . . . ]. In fact, I always bet on two stories a day, because if one failed, I had another.*

As the PG is a multisport mega-event, with various competitions taking place simultaneously in different arenas, the number of journalists sent for on-site coverage proved to be decisive for the type of approach and the breadth of what was possible to cover during the PG.

### Journalists' level of preparedness for covering the event

*Last-minute preparation versus long-term preparation.* Journalists' level of preparation was a major factor affecting the news production conditions for our study's interlocutors.

*ANTONIO: I did it on my own. As I had some basic knowledge [ . . . ]. I spent a few hours per day reading a lot of materials and researched a little about Paralympic sports and related topics. This was the preparation that I had.*

*ÍCARO, regional media journalist: I had a better preparation for the Olympics, because I spent four years dealing with Olympic sports [ . . . ]. Nobody in the newspaper specialized in Paralympic sports. My co-worker became that figure because of a great report that he produced before the Paralympics.*

As opposed to the interviewees mentioned above, six other journalists said that they spent a long time preparing the team of journalists. In addition to learning about the athletes who would be competing, they also received guidance on how to treat and approach athletes with disabilities and information on functional classification in Paralympic sport.

*FERNANDO, national media editor: We had a video conference every week and at least once a month. I went to Rio, so that we could discuss all these things, both technical and journalistic issues.*

*JORGE, national media journalist: Well, since last year I had been following the athletics team more closely. I went to the Doha World Championship last year with 'National 3'. This year the plan was to follow the sport and I did so. So I already knew more or less what I was going to find.*

The above statements reveal that some of the journalists prepared for the coverage by accessing technical guidelines for the coverage and information specific to Paralympic sport and athletes. In addition, previous long-term experience with this type of coverage provided some journalists with easier journalistic working conditions.

### News criteria and news values in the context of the 2016 PG

Various interviews revealed that the main news criteria for the selection of the contents to be portrayed during the PG were one or more of the following items: expected victories, victories, and medal count. These criteria are recurrent in coverage of other sports (Mezzaroba and Pires, 2011). They represent the predominant symbolic capital of sports, the merit of the achievements (Bourdieu, 1983). They are also hegemonic in their relationship with the media (Sanfelice, 2010). Seven interviewees talked about the criterion 'expected victories'.

*MARIANA, regional media editor: It was exactly the same process with the journalists sent to the Olympics. Usually the day before, at the end of the day, we would define what was going to be the topic for the next day. So, for example: 'Daniel Dias is going to compete for his fifth gold medal. So, go there and follow him!'.*

Six interlocutors mentioned victories and medals as important criteria.

*FRED, regional media editor: When you have a case like Daniel Dias [ . . . ]. The guy surpassed 20 medals! This guy has to be on the news!*

*ÍCARO, regional media journalist: We had a team inside the newsroom [ . . . ] which is the sports team [ . . . ] that was attentive to the facts [ . . . ]. We will register every Brazilian's medal! Then we would cover the medals!*

The newsworthiness of certain content was also based on the criterion of 'proximity'. Eleven participants commented that they tended to prioritize content that highlighted national athletes and/or had a connection with the city where the media outlet was located.

*FRED, regional media editor: The 'close-to-home' aspect first, and then the victories [ . . . ]. For example, I know that Daniel Dias [ . . . ] will surpass 20 medals [ . . . ] So of course you have to follow this guy, do you understand? This comes down to performance! [ . . . ] The aspect of proximity, especially, whether the athletes are from here or not, and their performance, right?*

*FERNANDO: It was the top criterion for covering the events [ . . . ] Ah, now there is a Brazilian in the pool! Now there is a Brazilian on the track! [ . . . ] So we had to keep doing these maneuvers depending on the presence of Brazilians.*

The news criteria also included general information on Paralympic sport, such as explanations of the athlete classification system for each sport. This information, however, was often reported only out of curiosity and was not seen as a fundamental element for understanding the sport and the dynamics of the different Paralympic modalities. Five of our interviewees mentioned something to this end:

*ÍCARO, regional media journalist: They were really stories of curiosity [ . . . ]. My subjects were very much like, for example, 'oh, let's explain the classes [ . . . ] the classification of athletes [ . . . ]. They were really much more out of curiosity. It was covering complementary stories'.*

Regarding the news values, the interviewees revealed that they sought to reinforce content that valued the athletes' sportsmanship. According to nine of them, the coverage of Paralympic sports should be thought of and produced in the same way as any other elite sports competition, where those involved usually strive for excellence in their performance.

*LUIZ, regional media journalist: I think the most important thing about Paralympic athletes is to show that they are athletes, and not that they are disabled, right? I think the most important thing is this: that despite their disability, they are elite athletes, top athletes. I think we tried to convey this message!*

*MARTINS, national media editor: We are committed to highlighting high performance. We want to overthrow that idea, a kind of prejudice, that it [Paralympic sports] is not elite sports*

*because it is done by people with disabilities. We always tried to avoid portraying the Paralympians as poor little things [ . . . ], as victims that overcome difficulties.*

While seeking to value athletes' sportsmanship, five journalists said that they also considered the drama inherent in the lives of athletes with disabilities as a news value.

*PHILIPPE, regional media journalist: Doing Paralympic articles involves two stories, right? First, the athlete's story within the sport. Then, their story of overcoming adversity. There is always a more dramatic appeal when you talk about Paralympic athletes!*

Another news value used by the journalists was the 'narrative of overcoming'. This kind of narrative was characterized by stories related to the difficulties faced by athletes as results of their impairments. According to five of the study's interlocutors, this approach allowed the journalists to tell unusual and surprising stories that tended to attract the audience's attention. Some of them also stated that leveraging the narrative of overcoming as a news value follows the same logic that applies to other sports such as soccer and Olympic sports.

*FRED, regional media editor: There is a lot more emphasis on personal life, on the person's career: [ . . . ]. It's impossible for you not to talk about, for example, Alex Zanardi, right? The guy was an Indy driver; then in an accident within his category, he lost both legs! [ . . . ] This thing about overcoming gets really repetitive. It's become a cliché in the Paralympics. But what will you use to tell their story if it's not about overcoming?*

For the interviewee above, the narrative of overcoming associated with Paralympic sport is an inevitable cliché. According to him and other respondents, the life stories of Paralympic athletes tend to be filled with emotion and constitute a great opportunity for news production. For example:

*RODRIGO, regional media editor: The values of humanity and overcoming, a lack of support, in short, all these things came to light when you cover this type of event [ . . . ]. This kind of coverage is full of emotion. It's touching, so it's very easy to do Paralympic journalism!*

Thus, as demonstrated above, the news values practiced by our interlocutors tend not to fall squarely on the side of sportsmanship or narratives of overcoming, but somewhere in between.

## Discussion

The data reveal tension and the exercise of power in media production. That is, the news production process is a space of disputes (Tuchman, 1983; Wolf, 1987). The journalism produced by the outlets covering the PG in our study was mainly guided by marketing interests. The late decision to cover the PG and to send only a few journalists for on-site coverage indicates the still low commercial impact of Paralympic sport in the Brazilian journalistic context. Nevertheless, the fact that some companies bought broadcasting rights reveals an incipient marketing process of Paralympic sport in Brazil (Marques and Gutierrez, 2014).

Limited media budgets, as well as pressure regarding what aspects of PG should be covered in Brazil, were also evident in Spanish journalistic practice. In the Spanish case, as Solves et al. (2018) revealed, covering the PG was difficult because, to keep costs low, only a few journalists were sent to the event. According to the authors, this is an example of how the Paralympics are undervalued in the news framework.

The late decision by some media conglomerates to cover the PG indicated that this was done mostly because of the public interest, which began to appear shortly after the Olympic Games. Thus, for these conglomerates, they only covered the PG because the games met the ‘social significance’ news criterion, which, as Galtung and Ruge (1965) explain, is met when the public pays attention to a particular event or subject. Social networks dynamics have shown that sizeable audiences may come to view the PG as entertainment. Moreover, magnitude and entertainment are also news values indicated by Harcup and O’Neill (2001).

The data reveal the media and journalistic marginalization of the PG compared to the Olympic Games. The PG had a significantly lower number of on-site reporters than the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. This situation, observed by the study’s interlocutors, suggests that news content on the PG has news value due partially to social significance, entertainment, magnitude and power (sports) elites, according to the news typology proposed by Galtung and Ruge (1965) and Harcup and O’Neill (2001).

The data may imply that the Brazilian media, as in the case of the Spanish media (Solves et al., 2018), does not seem to understand the PG as a genuinely athletic and competitive event like the Olympic Games. Paralympic sport still appears to be a poor agenda, that is, undervalued in sports journalism in Brazil, as well as in Spain (Solves et al., 2018) and Portugal (Novais and Figueiredo, 2010).

Paralympic sport’s lack of prestige in the media has led to predominantly from-the-newsroom coverage, which has not allowed for interviews of the primary sources of sport experiences, that is, the athletes (Borelli and Fausto Neto, 2002). Newsroom coverage demonstrates that the outlet did not regard the PG as having enough news value (e.g. magnitude and relevance). This scenario represents an obstacle to one of the International Paralympic Committee’s main goals (2015): to promote the Paralympic movement and sports through the athletes’ experience.

Journalists’ last-minute preparation for covering the PG suggests that, if we use the typology of Galtung and Ruge (1965) and Harcup and O’Neill (2001), the Paralympic mega-event has no news value for frequency or follow-up and is not part of newspapers’ agendas. This, in turn, may have led to errors in the news production given the lack of information and knowledge about Paralympic sports and the reality of Paralympic athletes.

Accessibility problems in the organization of the event created barriers for reporters with disabilities. This showed an ignorance of the reality of PWD or the event organizers’ lack of commitment to adapt the environment and to guarantee good working conditions for journalists with disabilities who would be covering the event.

The prioritization of media rights holders in the context of the 2016 PG reinforced how the entertainment news value is hegemonic in the relationship between media and sport (Moragas, 1999, 2007), and in this case, specifically in Paralympic sports journalism. According to our participants, the time devoted by the athletes to the rights-owning

television media, right after competitive events, reaffirms, as Marin (2008) points out, how the human and sportsmanship dimensions of the protagonists of the sport spectacle (the athletes) are reified and commodified. Even when exhausted after an event, athletes would spend almost an hour answering journalists exclusively from media companies who had paid for the right to their images.

The covered content prioritized possible victories, reports of victories and the number of medals won by Brazilian athletes. This logic reveals how in the Paralympic news production the meritocratic logic also prevails. This data portrays how the journalism dedicated to Paralympic sport reproduces the predominant symbolic capital of the field of sports, which according to Bourdieu (1983), is victory and positive results. The coverage of the Brazilian journalists who participated in our study was associated with the news values of 'good news' and the interests of the power-holding elites, per the theory of news practice outlined by Galtung and Ruge (1965) and Harcup and O'Neill (2001). There was not much room, for example, for news about the athletes or teams that had been defeated. This criterion was applied even when dealing with athletes who had social significance in specific Brazilian regions. This scenario allows us to reframe Bourdieu's (1983) idea of how it is possible to be a sportsman: you can be a Paralympic sportsman if you attain success. If you fail, you won't have enough symbolic capital to become sports news.

Other news elements underlying the news coverage of the PG were athlete's presumably dramatic life stories. These stories, according to the journalists, were interesting aspects of Paralympic sport. They comprise what Harcup and O'Neill (2001) regarded as one of the news values: entertainment. According to the authors, entertainment involves, among other things, human interest or drama. Such stories enable, through narratives, the transformation of athletic performance into extraordinary human actions.

The strategy of adopting narratives of overcoming and the element of surprise in journalism help build sports idols, heroes, and behavioral models (dos Santos and Medeiros, 2009). The use of these news mechanisms was also present in the Spanish context, which highlighted narratives related to the personal life of athletes based on discourses of adversity, triumph over adversities, and perseverance (Solves et al., 2018).

Sport becomes a spectacle and is a preferred format for mass media because it 'offers, in return, a ready-to-go show. The stage, the script, the actors, the spectators, and even the (tele)consumers are guaranteed in advance, which facilitates its transformation into a product easily sold/consumed on a global scale' (Pires, 2002: 90).

From the perspective of the interviewees, Paralympic sports deliver not only the show, but also the drama. They provide the news producers with spectacular life stories focused on disabilities and on athletes' overcoming of disabilities and hardships. These stories result in scripts that are the envy of any theater, film or sports producer. These data indicate that the news production of Paralympic sport in Brazil is subject to the process of 'infotainment' (Baym, 2008). Specifically, as dos Santos et al. (2017) state, this is the transformation of sports journalism into a mere piece of entertainment.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the magnitude and relevance of the PG as an elite mega sports event, these Games are not yet on the agenda of Brazilian media and journalists. In the case of the

2016 Rio PG, they partially attracted the media in Brazil because the country was hosting the event and because there was a demand by the public to be informed about it.

According to our interlocutors, the main factors that affected the news production process related to the PG were: (1) business issues (work routines based on audience interests and the exclusivity of broadcasting rights); (2) logistical issues (limitation of coverage to content that could be accessed from the newsroom, lack of accessibility for journalists with disabilities, difficulties getting from one arena to another, reduced teams of journalists); (3) level of preparation to cover the event (last-minute preparation vs long-term preparation).

Also, according to our participants, the content covered was chosen primarily based on the criterion of athletic merit (expected victory, victories, and medals won). The proximity of the competitors and some Paralympic specificities, such as athletes' classifications and disability typology, were also important criteria.

The prevailing news values in the coverage of the 2016 PG, per our study's interlocutors, were the athleticism and the hardships overcome by the Paralympic athletes. Regarding athleticism, the narratives were restricted almost exclusively to the expected and actual results. Athletes who were not seen as possible medalists and/or who did not win medals were rarely interviewed and rarely appeared on the news. As for the athletes' life stories, the emphasis was more on dramatic aspects related to their disabilities and overcoming problems related thereto than on their athletic background and achievements.

This study has contributed to the knowledge of the productive routines of Brazilian sports journalists and the journalistic culture that influenced these professionals' work during the PG in Brazil. While our empirical data is limited to the experience of only a few interlocutors in the particular context of the study, our findings might help to understand how Paralympic sport is covered and disseminated in other similar contexts. Further studies are needed to deepen our knowledge of this process. Such studies could follow the production of PG news inside the newsrooms. If applied in different contexts, these studies could contribute to a better understanding of the modus operandi of journalistic production in Paralympic sport.

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## Notes

1. See information at: <https://www.paralympic.org/news/rio-2016-paralympics-smash-all-tv-viewing-records> (accessed 21 December 2017).
2. Brazil Communication Company.

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