

Dramatic conflict and journalistic narrative. A multimodal analysis of *The Newsroom* (HBO)

Conflito dramático e narrativa jornalística na ficção. Análise multimodal de *The Newsroom* (HBO)

https://doi.org/10.14195/2183-5462_44_6

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Submitted: 2024-01-08 | Accepted: 2024-05-31

Submetido: 2024-01-08 | Aceite: 2024-05-31

Abstract

The Newsroom is one of the most recognized journalistic referents of popular culture. This work seeks to identify the connection of audiovisual fiction with journalistic routines, news values and professional roles. For this, the research analyzes the multimodal discourse of this TV drama from a double diegetic perspective (intradiegetic and extradiegetic level). This work has adopted a narratological approach, the application of the code has been carried out in three significant scenes. From the verbal, kinesthetic and technical conventions, the positions of the dramatic conflict have been delimited. The results show that the main topic deals with the selection of information sources and news values. Additionally, the characters' actions show the confrontation and deliberation through the dominant roles of "watchdog" and "entertainer of public opinion".

Keywords

The Newsroom, TV series, discourse analysis, and journalism

Resumo

The Newsroom é uma das referências jornalísticas mais reconhecidas na cultura popular. Este trabalho busca identificar a conexão entre a ficção audiovisual com as rotinas jornalísticas, valores noticiosos e papéis profissionais. Para isso, a pesquisa analisa o discurso multimodal desta série de televisão a partir de uma perspectiva dupla diegética (através de uma abordagem narratológica). O código de análise permitiu analisar os aspectos jornalísticos em três cenas significativas. Através das convenções verbais, cinestésicas e técnicas, foram delimitadas as posições do conflito dramático. Os resultados mostram que o tema principal trata da seleção de fontes

de informação e valores noticiosos. Além disso, as ações dos personagens revelam a confrontação e a deliberação por meio dos papéis dominantes de “cão de guarda” e “entretendedor” da opinião pública

Palavras-Chave

The Newsroom, série, análise discursiva e jornalismo

1. Introduction

The first dramatic anthology on journalism, *The Big Story* (NBC, 1949-1957) initiated a reflection on the journalistic routine and its recreation in television fiction. The characterization of journalists in popular culture has been established based on their ethical role through characters such as heroes or villains (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). Various studies investigate the elements of reality that fiction recreates to exalt the social function of the journalist (Ghiglione & Saltzman, 2005; McNair, 2010).

Drama is an essential element in professional series. Regarding the fictional journalistic narratives, previous studies reflected on the connection between stereotypes and professional roles (**Novoa-Jaso, Sánchez-Aranda & Serrano-Puche, 2019**). Carlson (2016) argue that our perception of journalism is mediated by discourses internal and external to the profession.

In this way, classic stereotypes of fiction are identified with some of the roles of journalistic studies: participatory journalist, neutral journalist, watchdog, mobilizer, entertainer of public opinion, opportunist facilitator (Berganza, Lavín & Piñeiro-Naval, 2017; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018; Roses & Humanes, 2019).

The taxonomies that define journalistic routine and news values encompass a broad spectrum of academic research (Brighton & Foy, 2007; Cotter, 2010; Donsbach, 2004; Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Hanitzsch, 2019; Harcup & O’Neill, 2017; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Ryfe, 2017).

Audiovisual fiction plays a fundamental role in generating metajournalistic discourses (De Wulf Helskens, Van Leuven & Dhaenens, 2023). Professional tensions motivate reflection on journalistic principles in popular culture (Thomsen, 2018, Painter & Ferrucci, 2022).

The honorable vision of the profession is reflected in the television drama *The Newsroom* (2012–2014, USA, HBO). The story manages to transport viewers to the newsroom of a prime-time evening newscast. Several factors qualify this cultural artifact as an example of quality television drama. First, the importance of authorship (Lavery, 2010; Marc & Thompson 2008; Newcomb & Alley 1983) that responds to the personal style of the showrunner, Aaron Sorkin. Second, the public recognition and the influence on public opinion. The television series had two Golden Globe nominations for best television drama. The screenwriter repeatedly demonstrated his fixation on the journalist’s work in the series.

After the success of *The West Wing* (NBC, 1999-2006), Sorkin created the television series *Sports Night* (ABC 1998-2000), and *Studio 60 on the sunset strip* (NBC, 2006-2007). These shows immersed viewers in the television scenario to portray what happens behind the cameras.

As Lorenzo-López (2017) notes, a distinctive feature of Sorkin's writing, consistent with his idealistic portrayal of characters, is his penchant to improve society through conflicts rooted in their workplace. Depretto (2018) highlights some characteristics of Sorkin's characters as intelligent and sometimes elitist protagonists. They possess remarkable skills for their work but also confront personal conflicts. These characters, described as well-intentioned, engage in a constant struggle with themselves, evident in their narrative arc that showcases their transformation (Depretto, 2018). In this sense, "Sorkin tries to create dramatic conflict through contradictory truths, because when he writes fiction, he is genuinely interested in the honorable and honest objectives of all the characters" (Lorenzo-López, 2024, p.74).

Sánchez-Baró (2015) highlights that the screenwriter uses the space and the movement of the actors as a vehicle for the transition between scenes and plots. In this strategy, the dialogue is essential. "The alternation between plots seeks unpredictability to keep the viewer's attention at all times" (Sánchez-Baró, 2015, p.140).

The didactic potential of *The Newsroom* can be seen in the transmission of good ethical practices (López-Gutiérrez & Gavilán, 2016). After their analysis of the female characters,

Painter and Ferrucci (2015) discuss the ethical implications of these characters and portrayals, especially as they relate to socialization and cultural conditioning of future journalists. Koliska and Eckert (2015) conduct a textual analysis of the first season of *The Newsroom*. They studied 90 US newspaper articles, revealing that journalists rejected the show's idealistic portrayal of their profession. Using new institutional theory and the concepts of "decoupling" and "coupling", the authors explain that journalists' negative responses aimed to protect their institutional myth, which legitimizes journalism to the public, by separating it from actual journalistic practices.

From the exploration of more than a thousand publications in the media, Peters (2015) observed the ability of this program to spark discussions about the mission of journalism. The production of *The Newsroom* generated a considerable public debate for the ethical mission of journalism. Peterlin and Peters (2018) study the conflicts of journalistic ethics featured in the first season. According to the authors, the series is a useful resource for enhancing journalism education through on-screen narrative ethnography, providing instructors with additional resources and creating a rich learning experience. Other studies underline the advantages of this television series for educational purposes (Painter & Wilkins, 2021; Nicolas-Gavilan, Ortega-Barba, & Galbán-Lozano, 2017).

Using qualitative focus group methodology, **Novoa-Jaso and Sánchez-Aranda (2023)** analysed fans' perceptions and emotional involvement with the series through four levels: transportation, identification, parasocial interaction and adoration. The results highlight the high identification of viewers with the content, the internalisation of ethical values, and an aspirational tendency. In line with the audience, **Novoa-Jaso and Serrano-Puche (2023)** conducted a survey with more than 700 fans of *The Newsroom* (HBO) in Spain. The study examines identification with favourite characters and recognition of journalistic features in audiovisual fiction. The roles most recognised by the audience were the participatory journalist, journalist as watchdog and citizen mobiliser.

In their article Lin and Lin (2022) studied how *The Newsroom* influences Chinese viewers' attitudes towards American politics and journalism. Structured interviews

were used and the results showed some scepticism towards real American journalism due to the perceived idealism of the show. Huerta and Pérez-Morán (2024) propose a textual and comparative analysis of the stylistic codes of *The Newsroom* and *The Wire* in their portrayal of journalistic activity. The main conclusion is that, although both maintain an important connection with reality, *The Newsroom* opts for an expressiveness that romanticises the exercise of the profession through sentimental emphasis.

Apart from the idealistic actions of the characters, there are elements of the journalistic routine that are rigorously evidenced through fiction. Given the variety of plausible elements that articulate a script, this paper seeks to identify the connection of audiovisual fiction with journalistic routines, news values and professional roles. The aim is to analyse the journalistic conflict in *The Newsroom* through a multimodal discourse analysis based on Gerard Genette's narratology proposal for literature (intradiegetic and extradiegetic discourse). The proposed analysis code underlines the adequacy of the journalistic conflict from a diegetic perspective.

2. An approach to diegetics from narratology for the study of characters

Narratives are increasingly sophisticated and are understood as multimodal texts that combine different modalities of perception (O'Halloran, 2016). Visual communication and non-verbal expressions are also an emerging field of television studies (Baumgarten, 2008). The multimodal theory proposes an approach to (audiovisual) discourse in which it is not seen as an isolated object of study but as part of a process (Williamson, 2005).

For Bateman and Schmidt (2012), the diegesis is what is understood as the 'world of the story'. Neumeyer (2009) distinguishes diegesis as an element of the story told directly by the characters. One of the authors who stood out the most in this perception was Gérard Genette (1980). Genette's relevance in this area is due to the distinction between the two narrative levels. The original diegetic level is understood as "intradiegetic", and the "extradiegetic" or "non-diegetic". The Theory of Cinema has established the necessary criteria for distinguishing these two proposals. Bordwell (1989) addresses the distinction between "film comprehension" and "film interpretation". The former, film comprehension, is intended to pick out meanings that are in some sense 'explicitly' recoverable from the work analyzed; the latter are further inferences made by the analyst to reveal more abstract, 'implicit' made meanings (Bateman & Schmidt, 2012, p.2).

The passage from a diegetic to an extradiegetic dimension is not understood as a definite change. According to Van Dijk (2011), the production processes configure a cognitive structure. The author distinguishes three elements in the analysis of discourses: cognition (norms, values, and activities); context (mental models based on personal experience and society), and discourse (the relationship with the structures of society).

Studies on the theory of the script (Hicks, 1999; Vale, 1985; Field, 1996) allow us to observe the intradiegetic possibilities for the discursive analysis of audiovisual fiction. Seger (1990) emphasizes that the characters come from their environment. Casetti and Di Chio (1991) describe the "environment" in which the characters act (the setting in which they move) and, on the other, the "situation" in which they carry out their activities.

Dramatic conflict is one of the essential elements in the structure of a story. The battle is crucial in maintaining the interest in the story and the characters (Iglesias,

2005, p.81). It should be noted that various authors have proposed taxonomies for conflict analysis. One of the most recurrent and that provides a synthesis is the proposal of Mckee (2002) that differentiates internal, personal, and extrapersonal conflicts. Regarding the stages of the conflict Vale (1985) distinguishes the unaltered study, the disturbance, the fight, and the state of adjustment. According to Trottier (1998) the conflict in a narrative is the crisis, the point when all seems lost, or where the character faces a crucial decision. The dramatic language integrates a series of characteristics that reveal that it is made to be understood as a representation. This is manifested in need for internal coherence and in elements such as dialogues (Mckee, 2002, p. 54).

After knowing the essential modalities in studying the dramatic conflict, the trajectory of the actions guides how it is resolved. When determining the “character arc”, Iglesias (2005, p.55) points out that the change experienced can be physical, educational, mental, or emotional. This dynamic process in the characters allows us to introduce a parallel reflection regarding how the characters transmit these changes to the viewers and the ways in which they interact with the reality of the fiction.

3. Objectives and research questions

Once the foundational concepts explored in the narratology approach have been exposed, we proceed to outline the primary objectives and research questions of this paper:

- O1: Understand how the journalistic discourse and the context are articulated from the intradiegetic and extradiegetic dimensions.
- O2: Know what journalistic themes are associated with the dramatic conflicts present in the narrative of the television series *The Newsroom* (2012–2014, USA, HBO).
- O3: Analyze the meanings and signifiers around journalistic routines and news values represented in audiovisual fiction.
- RQ1: What are the dramatic conventions and the verbal and non-verbal elements that dominate the dramatic conflict in *The Newsroom*?
- RQ2: What journalistic themes were raised by *The Newsroom* series when presenting the dramatic conflict?
- RQ3: Are news values and routines a fundamental element to maintain the audience's attention?

4. Materials and methods

4.1. Intradiegetic and extradiegetic analysis: a code proposal

Considering the diversity of recognizable elements in a work of fiction and how they are articulated in the symbolic projection of the message, we present in this section the analysis code that we apply in this research. The methodological model that we offer aims to define the main issues of television drama analysis, taking into account the conventions in this genre and, specifically, the dynamics of journalistic practice.

The selection of the variables combines multimodal discourse analysis (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020), symbolic reflection (Chandler, 2006), and the narrative strategies that stand out in the story. That is related to the structure of cognition, context, and discourse (Van Dijk, 2011). The intradiegetic analysis integrates the dramatic conventions and non-verbal codes of dramatic action. Firstly, the activities of the characters will be analysed, the identification of the type of conflict according to Seger (1990): relational, situational, inner, paranormal, cosmic or social conflict. Secondly, the non-verbal codes will collect the visual and technical relationships from Brodwell's references (1989) to interpret audiovisual elements (type of shots and camera movements, kinesic actions, chromatic elements, emotional state of the characters and musical resources).

The extradiegetic analysis understands the meanings of the journalistic narrative. In this way, it will be analyzed how *The Newsroom* reconstructs elements such as journalistic themes, news values, professional roles, and aspects of the journalistic routine. This paper will follow the classifications proposed by leading authors in each of the studies mentioned areas.

The classification of news values will follow the taxonomy of Harcup and O'Neill (2017): celebrity; entertainment; surprise; bad news; good news; magnitude; relevance; follow-up stories; and newspaper agenda. The professional roles refer to the seven most common in academic research (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018; Roses & Humanes, 2019): participatory (active role in the development of the news); neutral (spectator of the informative process); educator (function of leader or audience guide), watchdog (monitoring function of the powers and elites); mobilizer (influencing public opinion and setting the political agenda); entertainer of the public opinion (generates attractive information for the most significant number of audiences); and opportunist facilitator (offers a positive image of political and economic leaders).

4.2. Justification of the object of study and selection of scenes

The criteria that have been taken into account for selecting *The Newsroom* in the empirical work respond to some relevant reasons. First of all, this television drama series is one of the most influential in the last decade that enjoys excellent popularity (Peters, 2015; Di Chio, 2022). Secondly, the trajectory of its showrunner, Aaron Sorkin, in elaborating journalistic dramas endorses his interest in this professional environment. Sorkin's experience underlines the configuration of characters in journalistic settings and the location of work contexts in the world of television. Finally, *The Newsroom* has inspired the creation of other series. In particular, we find a cultural adaptation in *Reporters* (2015, Sony Entertainment Television).

Table 1: *The Newsroom* fact sheet (Sorkin et al., 2012–2014)

<i>The Newsroom</i> (HBO, 2012-2014)	
Broadcast medium	HBO
Number of seasons	3 (S1, S2, S3)
Number of episodes	25
Duration	50 minutes (each episode)

First broadcast	June 24, 2012
Last broadcast	December 14, 2014
Showrunner	Aaron Sorkin
Producer	Alan Poul
Screenwriters	Aaron Sorkin, Brendan Fehily, Corinne Kingsbury, Ian Reichbach, David Handelman, Dana Ledoux Miller, Reichbach, David Handelman, Dana Ledoux Miller, Matthew Lopez, Camilla Blackett, Adam R. Perlman, Elizabeth Peterson, John Musero, Michael Gunn, Alena Smith
Cinematography	Todd McMullen, Barry Ackroyd
Characters	Will McAvoy: the anchor and managing editor of News Night. MacKenzie McHale: News Night's new executive producer Jim Harper: Assistant Producer Margaret Jordan: an eager, young associate producer Don Keefer: News Night's former executive producer Neal Sampat: writer of Will's blog and electronic media expert Sloan Sabbith: an economist with two Ph.D. Charlie Skinner: Atlantis Cable News (ACN) president Leona Lansing: CEO of Atlantis World Media (AWM) Reese Lansing: president of AWM

Source: FilmAffinity/ IMDb

To examine the connection between the dramatic conflict and the journalistic activity, researchers watched all 25 episodes of the programme. Subsequently, we identified the most significant scenes that raised the professional conflict (see table 2) according to the following features: recreation of real news stories, representation of news values, identification of journalistic roles and elements of the journalistic routine.

Table 2: *Presentation of the journalistic conflict in The Newsroom (Sorkin et al., 2012–2014)*

Presentation of the journalistic conflict in <i>The Newsroom</i> (2012–2014, HBO): significant scenes
<i>(The Newsroom 2012, episode no. 1, season 1): We just decided to (00:45:23- 00:46:15)</i>
<i>(The Newsroom 2012, episode no. 2, season 1): News Night 2.0 (00:07:55- 00:12:13)</i>
<i>(The Newsroom 2012, episode no. 4, season 1): I'll try to fix you (00:33:08-00:36:26)</i>
<i>(The Newsroom 2012, episode no. 4, season 1): I'll try to fix you (00:20:03-00:22:13)</i>
<i>(The Newsroom 2012, episode no. 5, season 1): Amen (00:52:44- 00:53:58)</i>
<i>(The Newsroom 2012, episode no. 7, season 1): 5/1 (00:30:15-00:32:43)</i>
<i>(The Newsroom 2012, episode no. 8, season 1): The Blackout. Part 1 (00:06:35- 00:09:10)</i>
<i>(The Newsroom 2013, episode no. 1, season 2): First thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers (00:26:02- 00:29:43)</i>
<i>(The Newsroom 2013, episode no. 2, season 2): The Genova tip (00:26:06- 00:29:58)</i>
<i>(The Newsroom 2013, episode no. 3, season 2): Willie Pete (00:25:05- 00:27:56)</i>
<i>(The Newsroom 2013, episode no. 7, season 2): Red team III (00:11:27-00:14:18)</i>
<i>(The Newsroom 2014, episode no. 2, season 3): Run (00:44:45- 00:46:13)</i>

Source: author's own

As we have seen, Aaron Sorkin's presentation of ethical dilemmas is a distinctive feature. Through an exhaustive selection, we have identified those situations where journalistic conflict reaches its maximum intensity. To verify the functionality of the proposed analysis code, we have selected three representative scenes of the plot from the first season of *The Newsroom*. The chosen scenes present the moment in which the dramatic conflict of the story unfolded:

Scene 1 (*The Newsroom* 2012, episode no. 1): *We just decided to* (00:45:23-00:46:15): Harper receives information from a confidential source. Journalists must analyze whether this is information of public interest (BP Gulf of Mexico disaster).

Scene 2 (*The Newsroom* 2012, episode no. 4): *I'll try to fix you* (00:33:08-00:36:26): Unverified information (about Gabrielle Giffords) is being broadcast through other competing television channels. Journalists must decide whether to publish the news or be cautious (until it is verified).

Scene 3 (*The Newsroom* 2012, episode no. 5): *Amen* (00:52:44- 00:53:58): Sampat is outraged at not being able to locate an Egyptian reporter who was helping cover the protests against Mubarak.

These scenes will provide information about the diversity of codes that make up the audiovisual narrative (verbal and non-verbal). Therefore, the explanation will lead from the scheme proposed in the code (intradiegetic and extradiegetic universe of the story). The diegetic presents the set of all the elements (shown, referred to, or implied) that constitute the story's universe.

4.3. Application of the code

In this section we present the application of the analysis code (described in 4.1). This analysis allows us to determine how the television drama introduces news values, routines, and professional roles conditioned by issues such as professional hierarchy and consensus among journalists. Additionally, the genre and author conventions that intervene in the recreation of scenarios and work situations will be outlined. The researchers used *Transana 4.00* software in the data collection process, which specialized in qualitative data processing and video analysis.

This analysis starts from the premise that the audiovisual text allows to extract meanings and identify production decisions previously adopted by its creators. Therefore, we organize the information provided by the verbal codes in the narrative and observe how they complement the roles of the characters in the story. *The Interactional Discourse Lab (IDLab)* tool allowed the creation of bar graphs and dynamic maps of interactions. This software has been able to generate visible results of the interaction process that capture the main characteristics and attributes (verbal codes) of our study.

5. Results

5.1. Identification of the journalistic conflict

Considering the antecedents in semiotic studies (Fiske and Hartley 1979; Elam 1980), in this research, we distinguish journalistic conflicts based on the notions of “signified” and “signifier” that appear represented in the analyzed scenes. The signifiers describing the characters’ actions have allowed us to delimit the position that they adopt in the journalistic conflict.

As we saw in scene 1, the production assistant, Jim Harper received information from a confidential source. Thus, journalists had to analyze whether this was information of public interest. This fragment of the television series presents a conflict between the commitment to the public and the journalist’s commitment to the economic interests of the television network. From this interpretation (significant), the signifier refers to several journalistic issues through the characters: the journalist’s authority (McAvoy, Skinner), the defense of expert sources (Harper, MacHale), the respect for the anonymity of the source (Harper), the principle of confidentiality (Harper) and the fear of losing television leadership (Keefer).

In scene 2, we observed that unverified information was broadcast through a competing television channel. Journalists had to decide whether to publish the news or be cautious. Despite reporting different facts, the journalistic conflict was identical to scene 1. The signifiers can be seen in the (fictional) journalists’ attention to a heterogeneous public, verification of information sources (McAvoy, Harper, Jordan, McHale), and lack of time (Lansing) to offer news with context or accuracy in the information (Harper).

Scene 3 presented a dramatic situation in which an Egyptian journalist sent by Sampat had disappeared. The central conflict faced the professional responsibility (ensuring the safety of a war reporter) and the frivolity of the television medium, which adopts an attitude of the competing media. The signifiers appreciated were: the lack of measures to protect journalists in war conflicts, the journalist’s identification and sources (Sampat), lack of commitment, and sensitivity of other media communication with reporters (competing media outlets).

5.2. Intradiegetic analysis: dramatic conventions of the story and non-verbal codes

Different signifiers articulate the journalistic confrontation between professional interests (commitment to the audience and social responsibility) and the news corporation’s interests (economic interest and frivolity of the television medium). It is convenient to focus on how visual, verbal, non-verbal, technical, or kinesthetic codes emphasize these positions. Similarly, it is interesting to see which characters take action in the dramatic conflict. Table 2 collects the intradiegetic elements of the three analyzed scenes.

Table 3: Analysis of intradiegetic codes in *The Newsroom* (Sorkin et al., 2012–2014) (selected scenes)

Dramatic conventions of history	
Character actions	
<p>Character Confrontation Scene 1: Confrontation between Harper (Assistant Producer) and Keefer (Producer) Scene 2: confrontation between McAvoy (news anchor) and Lansing (owner of the television network) Scene 3: internal confrontation of Sampat (computer professional)</p>	<p>The deliberation process The characters reflect before making a decision (conflict resolution) Scene 1 and 2: McAvoy</p>
Type of dramatic conflict	
Scenes 1, 2 and 3: Inner Conflict: When a character is unsure of themselves (McAvoy and Sampat) Relational conflict: focuses on mutually exclusive goals between protagonist and antagonist	
Nonverbal codes of the dramatic action	
Visual and technical staging elements (figure 1)	
Interactions between the characters and their journalistic role	
Verbal codes (figure 2)	
Type of shots and camera movements	
Scenes 1, 2 and 3: Medium short and medium long shots that bring us closer to the faces of the characters. Horizontal pan (camara movement): Character Tracking "Zoom in" on the characters' faces. Short medium shots Eye Level Shot Low-angle shot from the character's perspective	
Kinesic resources	
Scene 1: McAvoy (newscaster) demonstrates analytical skills and authority Scene 1 and 2: Mechanism of triangulation of glances: complicity is transmitted Exchange of looks, gestures, and dialogues between the characters with a prominent professional role (producer, chief director, and newscaster)	
Emotional state of the characters	
Scene 1: insecurity, tension and relief (Harper); hostility, tension and acceptance (Keefer); confusion, amazement, insecurity, desire and acceptance (McAvoy) Scene 2: astonishment, satisfaction, relief (Skinner); anger, tension, misunderstanding, frustration (Lansing); confusion, serenity (Will McAvoy); tension, relief, satisfaction (Don Keefer); confusion, astonishment, satisfaction (McHale) Scene 3: anguish, confusion, sadness, anger (Sampat)	
Sound and musical elements	
Degree of synchronization of the music with the image: synchronous articulation (Scene 1 and 3)	
Lighting and chromatic elements	
Artificial lighting Color pattern: symbolic Front light (angle), diffuse (intensity) Scene Locations: Newscaster's Office, Newsroom, and TV Set Neutral backgrounds in the characters of McHale, Keefer and Harper centralize the emotional reaction of the characters (scene 1). Neutral backgrounds (scene 2) Dark backgrounds and shadows (scene 3)	

Source: author's own

The emotions of the characters enhance the dramatic conflict. As can be seen, medium and short shots make it possible to see the emotional response. The main character McAvoy (scenes 1 and 2) and Sampat (scene 3), must resolve the conflict. They adopt an inner perspective (decision of the character and personal dilemma). An example of the significant frames appears in Figure 1.




<p>SCENE 1</p> <p>The Newsroom (HBO), Episode 1 (Season 1) <i>We just decided to</i> (00:45:23- 00:46:15)</p>			
<p>SCENE 2</p> <p>The Newsroom (HBO), Episode 4 (Season 1) <i>I'll try to fix you</i> (00:33:08-00:36:26)</p>			
<p>SCENE 3</p> <p>Scene 2: The Newsroom (HBO), Episode 5 (Season 1) <i>Armen</i> (00:52:44- 00:53:58)</p>			

Figure 1: Visual codes of dramatic action. Stills from *The Newsroom* (Sorkin et al., 2012–2014) (selected scenes)
Source: author's own

The intradiegetic elements tell us about the expressive functions in the scene. Therefore, these resources adopt an emotional tone in resolving the dramatic conflict. Once it is fixed, generally by one of the main characters (chief editor, presenter of the news), there is a change in the characters involved. Moreover, the verbal elements have been collected qualitatively using the Interactional Discourse Lab tool. The bar graphs show the number of interventions of the characters in each scene. This collection of information emphasizes oral fluency and participation.

Likewise, the interaction graph provides complementary information. As described in the IDLab presentation, “the graphs represent the amount of interaction between speakers. From one node, each outgoing arrow represents the frequency at which the next node appears. The tables show the estimated value and the lower and upper values of the 95% confidence interval”. Therefore, this allows us to observe which members of the organization chart of the television series have the most prominent leader (in the conversation). In scene 1, the leadership of McAvoy (news anchor) stands out. In the other two scenes, the intervention of different professional roles is notable. In this way, scenes 2 and 3 demonstrate a greater interaction between the fictional journalists. The head of the news network gains more notoriety in scene 2, where he interacts with various characters. Scene 3, which focuses on Sampat, also shows balance with the verbal interventions of the rest of the team.

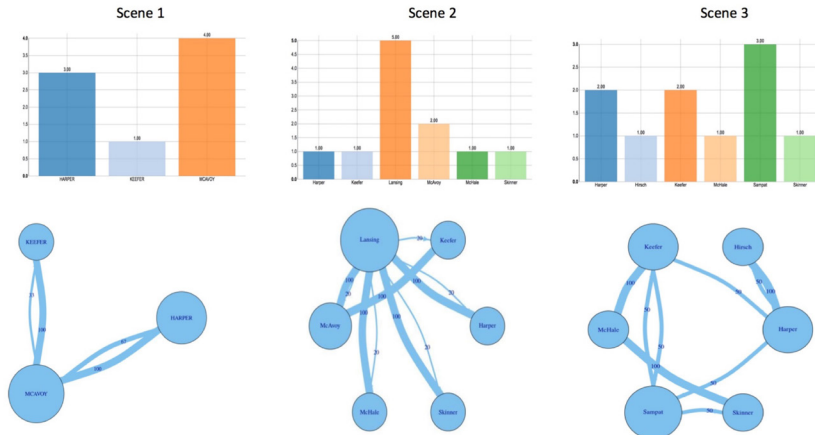


Figure 2: Verbal elements of dramatic action in *The Newsroom* (Sorkin et al., 2012–2014). Speaker Engagement Overview
 Source: Created with *The Interactional Discourse Lab (IDLab)* tool

5.3. Extradiegetic analysis

The extradiegetic level includes the construction of the story, guided by a generic “voice” that communicates with the viewer and presents a variety of meanings that the viewer can interpret depending on their greater or lesser proximity to the journalistic field. Regarding the journalistic themes, we appreciate that the dominant topics in the analyzed scenes are: the treatment of information sources, labor relations in news television, infotainment, professional roles conflicts, the relevance of audience ratings, and ethical values. Moreover, the most prominent news values (criteria for selecting news events) are: relevance, exclusiveness, and magnitude.

Table 4: Elements of extradiegetic analysis in *The Newsroom* (Sorkin et al., 2012–2014)

News event	Journalistic themes	News values	Elements of the journalistic routine	Journalist's role
SCENE 1: BP Gulf of Mexico disaster (April 20, 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Treatment of information sources - Labor relations in news television - Infotainment in television - journalism Professional roles conflicts Relevance of audience ratings Ethics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negativity/bad news Exclusiveness Relevance Magnitude 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information search Information Verification Access of the information Verification of sources Journalist's own initiatives Research content Nature of media events: spontaneous Collection of data included in the information Interpretation of the journalist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educator Watchdog Mobilizer

<p>SCENE 2: Tucson shooting in which Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords was injured (January 9, 2011)</p>	<p>Treatment of information sources Labor relations in news television Infotainment in television journalism Professional roles conflicts Relevance of audience ratings Ethics Manipulation of information</p>	<p>Exclusiveness Relevance Elite/power</p>	<p>Information Verification Access of the information Verification of sources Journalist's own initiatives Nature of media events: spontaneous Collection of data included in the information Dissemination of information</p>	<p>Educator Watchdog Mobilizer Entertainer of public opinion</p>
<p>SCENE 3: Protests in Egypt against Mubarak (Egyptian Revolution 2011)</p>	<p>Treatment of information sources Labor relations in news television Infotainment in television journalism Professional roles conflicts Relevance of audience ratings</p>	<p>Conflict Drama news tracking Relevance Magnitude</p>	<p>Journalist's own initiatives Research content Nature of media events: spontaneous Analysis of information from other media (competition)</p>	<p>Participatory journalist Watchdog</p>

Source: author's own

Concerning the news content, we observe that fiction reconstructs real events through the dynamics of fiction narratives. The coverage proposal is evidenced in the characters' actions, those that demonstrate: the journalist's initiatives, research, analysis of information from other media (competitors), and other issues related to newsmaking.

As for the journalistic roles that the characters adopt, we appreciate that the "watchdog" and "entertainer of public opinion" are visible in all the scenes analyzed. This presence of the roles is explained through the dramatic conflict. The adversary of journalistic work is reflected in the logic of television, focused on economic issues (through characters like Keefer and Lansing).

However, it is necessary to underline the presence of other positive roles assumed by the team of journalists: mobilizer of public opinion; this is demonstrated in the search for social change through verified information; educator (the one who guides the audience) or journalist as a participant in the information process.

6. Discussion and conclusions

Taking as case study *The Newsroom*, this work has explored the connection between audiovisual fiction and journalistic practices, in order to investigate how the series incorporates journalistic routines, news values, and professional roles. Employing a narratological approach, the study has focused on the multimodal discourse within the program, adopting a double-diegetic perspective that encompassed both the in-

tradiegetic and extradiegetic levels. By applying this framework to three key scenes, the analysis has revealed the ways in which the series utilizes and reimagines journalistic conventions. We now turn into the implications of these findings, exploring the significance of this connection for both fictional storytelling and the public's perception of journalism.

In response to the first research question (**RQ1: What are the dramatic conventions and the verbal and non-verbal elements that dominate the dramatic conflict in *The Newsroom***), we can conclude that the characters' actions underscore a journalistic controversy through verbal and non-verbal elements. In the characters' actions, the confrontation and deliberation adopting the resolution of the dramatic conflict is evident. The music and visual elements have recurrent narrative functions, and there is a synchronous articulation. The analysis of the formal factors has allowed us to appreciate a great diversity of visual, graphic, and sound codes that are part of the formal analysis of the content. In the moments of greatest tension in the scene, this is understood as a link with the viewer through emotions. As for editing issues, the technical elements combine medium and short shots, primarily focusing on the faces of the characters and monitoring their emotional behaviors. The kinesic resources demonstrate the reflexivity of the characters. The story does not develop ethical decisions in an isolated manner, the main character requires the assessment of the newsroom.

Regarding the second question that guided this research (**RQ2: What journalistic themes were raised by *The Newsroom* series when presenting the dramatic conflict?**), findings indicates that the main themes that the television series identifies in the dramatic conflict are: the verification of information sources, the conflict of interest between journalists and media corporation, and the influence of political power. In addition, the television series offers information on labor relations in news television, infotainment in television journalism, professional roles conflicts, the relevance of audience ratings, and ethical values. In this regard, the series presents intriguing potential as a pedagogical tool for examining media-related ethical issues (Painter & Wilkins, 2021; Peterlin & Peters, 2018). Through an entertaining format, it showcases the professional challenges and ethical dilemmas that journalists face in their daily work. The story's coherence invites a plausible recreation of the characters in the events and the settings. Besides that, leadership in fiction newsrooms corresponds to the classic terminology of workers in newsrooms: chief editor, newscaster, and reporter. It should be noted that the journalistic themes are also evident in the verbal discussion of the participants (intradiegetic level). In sum, the series grounds professional and ethical discussions in real-world scenarios, allowing viewers to grapple with the nuances of journalistic ethics in a practical context, which offers several advantages for educational purposes (Nicolas-Gavilan, Ortega-Barba, & Galbán-Lozano, 2017).

Finally and addressing **RQ3 (Are news values and routines a fundamental element to maintain the audience's attention?)**, *The Newsroom* makes visible elements of the journalistic routine and the selection of news values through the characters' actions. The challenges of news coverage are evident in the characters' actions, which demonstrate the journalist's initiatives, research or analysis of information from other media (competition), and other issues related to newsmaking. In doing so, the series contributes to extend the representation of the journalistic profession in popular

culture (McNair, 2010), in a format that is becoming more and more popular, such as serial fiction (De Wulf Helskens, Van Leuven & Dhaenens, 2023). Similar to previous research (Huerta & Pérez-Morán, 2024; Lin & Lin, 2022), this study finds that *The Newsroom* presents a somewhat idealized portrayal of journalism. This is relevant because fictional representations of journalism can be considered a form of meta-journalistic discourses. Scholars like Carlson (2016) argue that our common perception of journalism is shaped by discursive processes that involve both journalists and people outside the field. Ferrucci (2018) adds to this idea by saying that creators in the entertainment industry also play a role in shaping this perception (as non-journalistic actors). This highlights the importance of considering popular culture when we study how the public views journalism as a profession (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015).

Regarding the journalistic roles that the *Newsroom*'s characters adopt, we appreciate that the "watchdog" and "entertainer of public opinion" are prominent in all the scenes analyzed. This presence of the roles is explained through the dramatic conflict. The adversary of journalistic work is reflected in the logic of television, focused on share and economic issues (in characters like Keefer and Lansing). Within the broadcast media, the inherent tension between journalistic principles and commercial pressures is arguably more pronounced compared to other journalistic subfields (Thomsen, 2018). This is shown in the series' portrayal of journalism, which prioritizes these tensions in a way that may not be as readily apparent in fictional representations focusing on print media or digital media, where other aspects of the profession take center stage (Ferrucci & Painter, 2017; Painter & Ferrucci, 2022).

Finally, it is convenient to underline the limitations of this research. This study carried out the application of the analysis code in a small sample (three scenes from the television series). This decision was fundamentally due to the methodological model and the theme of the case study. In this way, the selected scenes of *The Newsroom* (2012–2014, USA, HBO) evidenced the journalistic dynamics and allowed to describe the proposed variables in depth.

The analysis code proposal has been considered a contribution that could be applied to other journalistic television series. Therefore, future research can replicate the methodological scheme and make a comparison with the journalistic vision of *The Newsroom*. In addition, from discourse analysis, it will be possible to investigate new variables for the intradiegetic and extradiegetic dimensions.

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Conflict of interest | Conflito de intereses

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Os autores não têm conflitos de interesses a declarar.

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How to cite | Como Citar

Novoa-Jaso, M. F., y Serrano-Puche, J. (2024). Dramatic conflict and journalistic narrative. A multimodal analysis of The Newsroom (HBO). *Media & Jornalismo*, 24(44), e4406.
https://doi.org/10.14195/2183-5462_44_6

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