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The Editorial Production Process and Editorial Values As Influences On The Opinions Of The British Press Towards Europe.

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Abstract: British newspapers have been criticised for their coverage of the EU and accused of contributing to the strength of anti-European opinion in the UK. Despite these claims, research by media sociologists and political communications scholars has commonly focussed on news reporting, overlooking editorial opinions on European issues. The article addresses this gap by presenting a sociological analysis of editorial journalism in relation to European integration at ten British national newspapers. The findings show that newspapers vary widely in the resources and roles they have assigned for editorialising on Europe, and provide an original insight into the common routines employed for producing editorial opinion. A model, entitled the editorial production process, is developed to illustrate the key stages of this routine. The specialist practices of editorial journalism are discussed through the identification of a set of editorial values used to select issues for comment.

Keywords:

Editorials, news production, EU journalism, routines, news values.

Introduction

The government, politicians, the European Commission, and pro-European sections of the press have regularly criticised British newspapers' contributions to the debate over Europe, and allege that their coverage is exceptional in its anti-European characteristics (Dougal, 2003; EU, 2007; Seymour, 2001). Such criticisms are typified by a statement from one of the Labour government's leading supporters of the EU, Peter Mandelson. In 2000 he accused newspapers of threatening the functioning of democracy and stated "that although he did not deny the right of the press to take positions on Europe...the British people and the democratic debate are starting to lose out from the nature of the coverage" (Reported in Greenslade, 10/07/2000). Scholars have also claimed that coverage of the EU is dominated by the Eurosceptic press (Anderson, 2004; Anderson & Weymouth, 1999; Cole, 2001; Morgan, 2004; Werder, 2002), and some go further in stating that British opinions on Europe are xenophobic (Anderson & Weymouth, 1999; Brookes, 1999; Cole, 2001; Morgan, 2004).

Despite these allusions to the opinions of newspapers, such assertions have predominantly been drawn from analyses of EU news coverage rather than of editorial opinion¹. At the core of these complaints are the opinions and positions taken by newspapers towards Europe and, even when news reporting is the subject of criticism, the underlying implication is that editorial opinions have infused the tone of articles. Although a handful of studies have proposed explanations for the characteristics of the coverage of Europe, none go further than making suppositions deduced from the content of coverage, and tend to point to the fairly obvious input of proprietors as the most significant determinants of such coverage (Anderson, 2004; Anderson & Weymouth, 1999). Despite the seriousness of the accusations levelled at the press and the potential implications for democracy, research into newspapers' positions and the factors that influence press opinions towards the EU remains scarce (Gavin, 2001). Thus the questions of how and why newspapers present opinions on European issues [Europe] have not yet been thoroughly researched.

The main body of sociologically based research into newspapers' arrangements for covering the EU has focussed on news gathering by Brussels based EU correspondents (Baisnée, 2002; Gleissner & de Vreese, 2005; Meyer, 1999; Morgan, 1995; Raeymaekckers, Cosijn, & Deprez, 2007; Statham, 2007, Forthcoming), and journalists' access to official EU information (Tumber, 1995). Given their focus on news, these studies provide limited insights into the organisational context in which newspapers produce editorial opinion on European affairs. In fact, studies of journalism to date provide little empirical evidence relating to the specialist journalistic activity of producing editorial opinion on any issue, not just that of European politics². Indeed, organisational studies have concentrated on front line reporters (Hirsch, 1977), with the result that little is known about the interactions between editorial and higher level journalists (Reese, 1991; Schudson, 2000). Whilst scholars have established that news values are a central organising concept of news production routines (Galtung & Ruge, 1965), and professional journalistic roles (Donsbach & Patterson, 2005; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Tumber & Prentoulis, 2005), they have not yet investigated the concepts that shape the routine production of editorial content. Similarly, organisational policies are known to play an important role in shaping news reporting (Breed, 1955; Gans, 1979; Sigelman, 1973; Soloski, 1989), but it remains unclear how journalists interpret editorial policies in relation to opinion-leading.

In addition to these gaps in knowledge of practice, editorial opinion [opinion] represents an area of research that can make an important contribution to our understanding of the relationship between the press and politics. Editorials are a distinctive format because they are the only place in a newspaper where the views of the paper as an organisation are represented. While traditional theories of the press pay limited attention to the editorial function, a relatively new strand of research in political communications offers a useful way of defining newspapers' editorial opinion-leading role. Highlighting the persuasive and evaluative functions of the media, scholars have drawn attention to newspapers' roles in providing opinion and pushing issues onto the agenda as independent political actors (Eilders, 2000, 2002; McCombs, 1997; Page, 1996; Price, 1992). In selecting and presenting issues according to their own agenda, free of the obligation to be objective, the editorial function enables newspapers to take on an active role in public deliberations of politics. This raises questions concerning which issues newspapers choose to present as important, and how they decide to present their evaluation of issues in this independent role.

Taking a sociological approach this article addresses these concerns by establishing the organisational context and constraints in which editorial opinion on Europe is produced. As part of a wider study into influences on newspapers' opinions on Europe, the research drew on the work of Shoemaker and Reese (1996) to develop a model of potential influences which was used as a framework to guide the investigation (Firmstone, 2007: 40; Forthcoming)³. The model treats editorial content as a dependent variable that can be influenced by a range of factors operating at three different levels: internal organisational, internal individual, and external extra media. This article focuses on the findings with regard to the internal level, and explores organisational and individual based influences in relation to two questions: 1) what are the organisational roles and resources assigned to the production of editorials on Europe?, and 2) what routines do newspapers have for producing editorial opinion on Europe? In addressing the first question three aspects of organisational structures are investigated: leader-writing roles, editorial policies for allocating resources to leader-writing, and the composition of editorial conferences. Secondly, media routines are explored in order to map out the practices, patterns, and procedures that journalists follow to produce editorial content.

Research Design

In order to understand the factors that influence newspapers' opinion-leading, journalists who are directly involved in the production of opinion on Europe were interviewed. This elite and specialist group of journalists are the only journalists with first hand experience of the way in which a variety of influencing factors manifest themselves in the day-to-day production of editorial opinion. Twenty-seven journalists involved in the leader-writing and political reporting of Europe at ten British national newspapers were interviewed face-to-face using a semi-structured schedule (Statham, Firmstone, & Gray, 2003)⁴. Information was gathered on organisational structures and constraints with specific regard to editorial comment on Europe.

As detailed in Table 1, the interviews included ten Political Editors, six EU Correspondents and eleven Leader writers/Editors drawn from ten newspapers. The rationale analysing these is based on the distinctive nature of the British newspaper market where a national daily press of ten newspaper titles produced and edited in

London dominates the market (Seymour Ure, 1996). These national newspapers account for nearly seventy percent of the circulation of daily newspapers, where paid for local newspapers are in the minority (Sparks, 1999: 42). This national market is divided into three sectors based on the nature of contents, design and the social dimension of readerships, and there is relatively little crossover in readership between titles: there are five quality broadsheets (*Guardian, Independent, Times, Daily Telegraph, Financial Times*); two middle market titles (*Daily Mail and Daily Express* - note these are discussed as tabloids), and three popular/tabloid titles (*Sun, Mirror, and Daily Star*). With the exception of the *Daily Star*⁵, the research included all of these papers. In addition, to consider the potential differences in opinion-leading by newspapers produced outside London, the Scottish national daily the *Scotsman* was included. The selection allowed for comparative analysis on three levels: between different types of newspapers (broadsheet/tabloid), newspapers on contrasting sides of the political spectrum (left/right), and between pro-European and anti-European newspapers.

Roles And Resources

Prior to contacting journalists a substantial amount of research went into establishing the specific journalistic roles responsible for the production of editorial comment and news about Europe. Five different roles were identified: Leader writers, Commentators and columnists, EU Correspondents, Political Editors, and Specialist Correspondents. Newspapers publish comment (as distinct from news reporting) in two main forms: 1) editorials representing the 'voice of the newspaper' are written by anonymous Leader writers and published in the editorial column; 2) comment and analysis articles are written by a range of journalists including columnists, specialist Editors, news reporters, specialist reporters and guest writers. Two types of journalists commentate on Europe – those who write anonymous editorials on behalf of the newspaper and those who write their own opinion under their own name. To focus on newspapers' opinions, only comment journalists principally responsible for the production of editorials were selected for interview such as the Chief Leader writer (see Table 1 for details).

News reporting of Europe is divided between three types of journalists: 1) EU Correspondents based in Brussels, 2) Political Editors based at Westminster, and 3) Specialist Correspondents covering policy areas where the EU has competences such as Agriculture or Immigration. Due to the research focus on editorial comment in relation to European integration rather than specific policy orientated aspects of integration these specialist correspondents were not interviewed

-----Table 1 about here-----

This initial assessment of the roles and resources assigned to producing editorials suggests that leader-writing is a specialised area of journalism. All newspapers have at least one journalist specifically assigned to the daily role of writing editorials, which is completely separated from news reporting roles. This operational division supports findings from cross national comparative studies of journalistic practices. Although such studies have not examined editorial writing, they have established that a separation between the editing of news reports and news reporting is a characteristic of British journalism (Donsbach & Patterson, 2005; Esser, 1998; Kocher, 1986). This does not mean however that the positions and opinions

given in editorials do not feed into general news coverage. Indeed, studies of Brussels correspondents have pointed to the influence of editorial policy on news coverage (Baisnée, 2002; Morgan, 1995). The number and type of leader writers for producing editorials on Europe varies, and is differentiated on the basis of format tabloid and broadsheet. Broadsheets have significantly more journalists assigned to producing editorials than tabloids with broadsheet leader-writing teams varying in size from three to ten. In contrast, each of the four tabloids have only one leader writer who produces editorials on the entire news agenda. Tabloid leader writers fulfil a more generalised remit than at broadsheets where leader writers are allocated specialist roles on specific issues such as European politics. As a consequence, experienced experts in the field of European politics or foreign affairs most often write broadsheet editorials on Europe. This difference in leader writers' knowledge and experience of European affairs is likely to have a qualitative impact on the content of editorials published by newspapers operating in different market sectors.

Further variations are present in leader writers' access to news gathered by EU correspondents. With the exception of the *Scotsman*, all broadsheets have at least one Brussels correspondent: the *Times*, *Telegraph* and the *Independent* have one, the *Guardian* has two, and the *FT* has a team of at least five making its Brussels bureau one of the largest. In stark contrast, none of the tabloids has a dedicated Brussels correspondent. Instead, national political teams based at Westminster produce the vast majority of tabloid EU news coverage. Although these journalists occasionally travel to EU summits and events, they are not able to follow the activities of the EU institutions in the same way as correspondents posted in Brussels. In addition, national parliamentary politics is the principle focus of their reporting activities. Thus there are significant variations in newspapers' roles and resources for producing opinion on Europe.

Routines: Four Stages Of The Editorial Production Process

The influences of internal organisational constraints on the production of opinion were explored through an analysis of routines for producing opinion on Europe. The following question prompted journalists to explain the routine at their newspaper and the personnel involved: "If the main lead editorial of the day is on European issues such as the Convention on the Future of Europe, who has taken the decision to lead on this topic, and who decides on its contents?". Evaluating journalists' responses identified a routine common to all newspapers for producing editorial comment: the editorial production process. The process is illustrated in the model in Figure 1 which shows the four key stages in the process: stage 1) issue is selected for editorial comment, stage 2) line and content are decided upon, stage 3) editorial is written by a Leader writer, and finally, stage 4) editorial is submitted to Editor for approval. In addition, four editorial values are shown as feeding into the selection process (Stage 1) in the bottom left of the model.

-----Figure 1 about here -----

Stage One: Applying Editorial Values

The first and most important stage in this process is the initial decision to select a topic for comment. With the exception of two tabloid newspapers (*Sun* and *Mirror*), this decision is made in the daily leader conference which is most often held

directly after the morning news conference. Each newspaper differs in the numbers and types of journalists involved in this meeting (between 4 and 10), the time of day the meeting takes place (usually mid-morning), the length of time the conference is held for (between 5 minutes and 1 hour), the way decisions are reached to select and produce opinion on an issue, the degree of discussion and consultation that takes place, and the method of reaching a consensus before the meeting concludes. Despite the variation in the number of Leader writers at broadsheets, the size of the conference at each of the broadsheets, apart from the *FT*, is much the same, with about six journalists in attendance. This includes the Editor, Deputy Editor, Chief Leader writer, a varying number of other Leader writers, and, in two cases, the News Editor (*Scotsman* and *Independent*). The heavy reliance of tabloids on the news agenda as the main motivation for editorials is illustrated by the shorter length or non-existence of leader conferences. The *Mail's* meeting is more in line with the format of a broadsheet leader conference, but the *Express* holds only a five-minute discussion. Neither the *Sun* nor the *Mirror* has an official leader conference with decisions about what issues the *Mirror* will comment being made jointly during informal discussions between the Editor and Chief Leader writer, and not involving a "great sort of *Guardian* style editorialising"⁶.

The concept of 'news values' is one of the most important theories that has been developed to explain commonalities in media content. While some scholars have examined editorial content to establish what issues are selected (on European issues see (Eilders, 2002; Voltmer & Eilders, 2003), few have looked at how selections are arrived at from the point of view of the journalist. Thus, the research aimed to establish if common motivations exist for publishing editorials on Europe and, if so, how judgements are influenced by these factors at each newspaper. This first stage of the editorial production process was examined in detail by asking journalists to discuss the three most important factors that led to their newspaper deciding to publish an editorial on a Europe, and to give examples.

Four common factors were found to motivate newspapers' decisions to publish editorials: 1) assessment of news values (topicality), 2) level of editorial importance, 3) impact on readers and the UK, and 4) salience in the wider media debate. These factors form a set of criteria that represent the editorial values Leader writers apply to judge an issue. They are shown in rank order of importance in the bottom left of Figure 1 above. This rank is based on the number of journalists who mentioned a factor as contributing to their selection of an issue and the order of importance they attached to it e.g. first, second or third mentioned motivating factor. Before moving on to discuss the other three stages of the production process, the dynamics of editorial values are described.

Editorial Value 1: News Value (Topicality)

The news value (topicality) of a European issue in the news agenda is one of the most important determinants of an issue being selected for comment, particularly at tabloids. Journalists from eight out of ten newspapers explained that the topicality of the issue was of the utmost importance, and that editorial comment on any issue, not just European issues, is usually made with reference to salient and prominent news stories. One EU correspondent, who requested to remain anonymous, gave an extreme example of the dependent relationship between editorial comment and topical news events. He recalled an instance when his newspaper contacted him and asked him to write a news article on a specific issue so that the paper could run an

editorial on the subject. The Leader writers wanted to publish an opinion on the issue, but felt unable to do this without a news story to tie the comment to. Whilst this is a rare occurrence, it demonstrates the perception among Leader writers that newspapers should be seen to be commenting on issues that are synonymous with news agendas. It also indicates the potential implications of EU newsgathering activities in Brussels and or Westminster on newspapers' opinions. In particular the reliance of tabloids on London based reporters as their primary source of EU news may result in both news and editorial agendas being more focussed on the domestic angle of European stories.

It is interesting that this motivating factor refers to evaluations of the news value of an issue in a different way than the application of news values by news reporting journalists. Editorial journalists select issues for comment based on their judgement of the newsworthiness of an issue or event that has already been selected for inclusion in the news agenda. This further highlights the important relationship between the production of EU news and opinion, and is evidence of a routine based relationship between the news agenda and opinion. The close proximity of the timing of news and leader conferences, and the fact that some journalists attend both conferences means that journalists have knowledge of their paper's news agenda when they discuss the editorial agenda.

Editorial Value 2: Judging The Level Of Editorial Importance Of Europe

In conjunction with news values the level of editorial importance attributed to European issues is a strong motivating factor at eight out of ten newspapers. However, decisions about editorial importance operate as a motivating factor in a significantly different way to news values. Judgements regarding the topicality of a European issue are based on common journalistic perceptions of news values. In contrast, judgements about the level of editorial importance in European issues are based on a variety of factors that are determined by specific organisational circumstances. Four main motivating factors contribute to the levels of editorial importance of an EU issue: three individual based motivations (the collective interest of the leader-writing group, the interests of individual journalists within the group, the interests of the Editor), and one motivation linked to editorial policy (the interest of the newspaper as an organisation). These factors differ in the strength of their influence on the formation of levels of interest in commenting on Europe at each organisation and, as the following discussion indicates, the interplay between them is complex.

The *Mail* provides a good example of when all four elements of editorial importance combine to produce a high level of interest in pursuing a particular opinion-leading strategy towards Europe. There is a longstanding consensus in the personal opinions of key political staff against the EU, individual journalists hold passionate opinions against the EU, the *Mail* has been under the Editorship of a strong and imposing Editor, Paul Dacre, who is well known for his fervent views against Europe since 1993 (Hagerty, 2002), and the paper has run editorial campaigns against Britain's involvement in the EU for many years. Overall, the importance of promoting anti-European opinion is considered as part of the newspaper's identity: "In a sense it's in the bloodstream of the paper...It's what makes the Editor tick, it makes that whole kind of entity of the *Mail* tick. It's about standing up for sovereignty for this country, not being sucked into this amorphous superstate, having control crucially of our own economy"⁷. A similar situation exists on the opposite side of the debate at the *Mirror*. The *Mirror* had the same pro European Editor from

1995 until 2004 whose opinion towards Europe was described by the Brussels Correspondent as “very, very warm towards Europe”. There is no friction or conflict between the relatively small group of key political staff who share the same positive view on Europe. In addition, the fervently pro-Euro views of the *Mirror*’s Chief Leader writer were a recurrent theme, and his personal decision that the *Mirror* should pursue a pro-Euro campaign contributes to the high level importance of the specific issue of the Euro.

A consensus and strength of personal opinions among leader-writing journalists also exists at the *Telegraph*, *Independent*, *Times*, and the *Sun*. For example, the *Times*’ EU Correspondent suggested that whether an issue ‘strikes chord’ with the leader-writing team is the third most influential motivating factor for selection after the importance of the subject (topicality) and the impact on Britain. He used the issues of the Convention and CAP reform to demonstrate this point: “Whether it’s a subject that people have a particular personal interest in on the paper. So agricultural reform, the *Times* would write a leader on it and they did,and the person who wrote it is a critic of the CAP. On the Convention...the Editor is or was very interested in the Convention”. Although *Independent* journalists did not articulate their views on Europe in the same passionate or enthusiastic way as tabloid journalists from the *Mirror* and the *Mail*, they were ideologically in favour of the EU. The Editor’s commitment to promoting quality coverage of Europe is also a key reason for the high editorial importance attributed to Europe in the *Independent*’s editorial policy.

While a consensus in the attitudes of journalists results in a consistent level of editorial interest and approach to Europe, disagreements between key leader-writing and political journalists can have the opposite effect. Although both the *FT* and the *Guardian* have made official policy decisions to support monetary union, the interviews revealed that internal wrangling between senior editorial staff over the editorial view of the papers has continued. The importance of giving opinions on Europe at the *FT* is heightened by the high level of interest among the specialist journalists who belong to the leader-writing team. However, these journalists have strong, and often conflicting, opinions on Europe that prevents a consensus being reached, particularly on the Euro. Similarly, the *Guardian*’s Political Editor explained that on the subject of the Euro ‘the office is divided’ and that overall the paper takes a ‘Gordon Brown position’ i.e. is in favour of joining the Euro in principal, but only if the economic conditions are right. The following comments from the Chief Leader writer confirm the ambiguity in the editorial line: “Most people assume we’re committed to Europe. But actually we’ve ducked and weaved a lot over the years. Particularly on the question of the single currency we have sat on the fence”.

As indicated above, individual journalists play a dominant role in shaping the level of editorial importance attributed to Europe at the majority of newspapers, and often take the lead in editorial policies to campaign on specific issues. This is particularly clear at the tabloids, the *Sun* and the *Mirror*. Given his statements both within the newspaper and in the wider public domain, the *Sun*’s Political Editor, Trevor Kavanagh is one of the most outspoken British journalists on the issue of Europe. This view was corroborated by other journalists who often commented on Kavanagh’s prolific output of articles and commentary on Europe. Some even suggested that he is “obsessed” with Europe and that he “hardly seems to do anything else [apart from comment on Europe] these days”. Indeed, the oral evidence Kavanagh submitted to a Treasury Select Committee on the issue of public opinion on Britain joining the Euro in 2003 provides an informative insight into the

importance of opinion-leading on Europe to the *Sun*. On the specific subject of the paper's editorial intentions in the event of a referendum on the Euro, he clearly stated that the *Sun* would campaign against Britain's entry to the Euro: "We have declared that we would fight it very strongly." (Stationary Office, 24/04/03). The *Mirror's* Chief Leader writer was particularly keen to dispel what he considered to be untruthful arguments against the Euro: "I don't feel like I'm a great flag carrier for the Euro, I just think it's right and I hate the antagonism to it, which is based on rubbish. And I think it will be terribly, terribly damaging to future generations if we're not in the Euro". Individual journalists also make significant contributions to the importance with which Europe is treated at broadsheets. For example, the *Guardian's* opinion on European issues is of such importance to the paper's Chief Leader writer that he negotiated an agreement with the Editor (on taking up the position) that he would be responsible for writing the majority of the paper's editorials on EU issues.

Judging Editorial Importance: Relevance To Campaigns And Marketing Strategies

Moving on to consider the fourth element of editorial importance, European issues are of interest (or not) to newspapers as organisations in two main ways, both of which can be considered as part of a newspaper's editorial policy. First, giving opinion on Europe is part of the marketing strategy of several (pro-European) newspapers (*FT*, *Independent*, *Mirror*). Second, four newspapers had policies to run campaigns on European issues (*Independent*, *Mail*, *Mirror*, *Sun*). The research defined a political campaign as representing a purposive editorial policy to publish specific articles or arrange some other agenda setting activity in order to accomplish a set aim. These campaign strategies ranged from running extra articles and editorials to high cost, high profile strategies such as launching nationwide votes⁸. In the case of the *Independent* and the *Mirror*, these campaigns are also part of their marketing strategy. A pro-European identity and campaign in favour of a closer relationship between Britain and the rest of Europe has been an important feature of the *Independent* since its launch in 1986. Journalists considered that the paper's campaign feeds into its news values and perceived a direct link between the assignment of higher news values to European stories and the campaigning strategy. Indeed, filling a specific gap within the range of opinion on Europe in the British press was seen as one of the paper's unique selling points: "We campaign with a small c on Europe. We do this European coverage [a dedicated news page for Europe] and we try to give the paper a European taste and try to satisfy the readers taste for European news and views, so we try and do that very strongly"⁹. Similarly, a positive 'big campaign' on Europe was deliberately adopted as a distinct part of the *Mirror's* identity and as a marketing tool to give the paper a unique angle over its main competitor, the *Sun* by the Chief Leader writer: "When I came back in 1993, after a few months we were talking about what the big campaign should be and I said Europe is the big campaign for the *Mirror*. It differentiates us from the other tabloids, particularly the *Sun*, it is a young persons issue."

The *FT* provides an example where the editorial importance of Europe is of an outstandingly high level, but where the paper does not run campaigns. The unique status of Europe within the newspaper's agenda is primarily derived from its market position as an elite newspaper aimed at a readership of businessmen, economists and other elites based across Europe. Although two separate editions are published, the

FT Europe and the *FT* London, both editions are compiled in London and, in practice, feature broadly the same material with editorials for both editions decided on and written by the London based leader-writing team (Firmstone, 2004). In comparison to the other newspapers that have nationally based readerships, the level of editorial importance in Europe at the *FT* is exceptionally high: “Europe matters to the *FT* regardless – Europe is there and exists, it’s a fact of life to us and has been for thirty years.”¹⁰ Further, one *FT* journalist implied that it was in the financial interests of the paper to be supportive of the EU because the more successful the EU, the more potential readers the *FT* would have in Brussels¹¹.

The *Mail* and the *Sun* have long running policies to campaign against Britain’s involvement in the EU which heighten the level of editorial importance associated with commenting on Europe. The *Mail* has run ongoing campaigns on a variety of European issues, including “red tape, Brussels bureaucracy, that whole thing about unnecessary directives coming down from Brussels, and of course the Euro, which has been going on for the last ten years”¹². Indeed, *Mail* journalists considered that their recent unprecedented and highly costly campaign to demand that the government call a referendum on the EU Constitution had been very successful, and claimed that it had set the political agenda for opposition to the Constitution in the UK. Similarly, the *Sun* has pursued a long running editorial policy to campaign against the Euro, the social chapter, corruption in the EU, and also launched a vigorous campaign against the EU Constitution demanding that the British government put the issue to a referendum.

These four elements of editorial importance can also be evaluated in order to explain particularly low levels of editorial interest in Europe, such as that at the *Express*. Despite taking a broadly pro-European approach at the time of the research, editorial interest and enthusiasm among individual journalists/the Editor for either news or comment on European issues was not evident to any extent. Neither did the paper run any campaigns on Europe. The explanation for this came from the perceived lack of interest among readers and a general concern that readers should not be subjected to comment on issues that they can not see as having any relevance to them and may turn them away from the paper. In other words, refraining from commenting on Europe was seen as important to the marketing success of the *Express*.

Editorial Value 3: Perceptions Of Readership Interest

Returning to the discussion of editorial values, leader conferences are motivated to select certain types of EU issues for comment by journalists’ perceptions of the interest of their readers in Europe¹³. Judgements regarding the importance and relevance of a European issue to readers were of particular concern for anti-European newspapers, with journalists from the *Mail*, *Sun*, *Telegraph*, *Times* and the *Scotsman* all judging that an EU issue would have to have an impact on the UK for them to publish an editorial on it. This is important when it is considered that the interest of tabloid readers was thought to be limited to European affairs that directly affect their lives. Such readers are thought disinterested in issues with which they cannot identify. In general, British readers were perceived to be more concerned with the EU in terms of Britain’s relationship with Europe than the EU itself. Therefore, it is expected that European issues that can be presented from a domestic angle are assigned greater editorial importance than issues about the EU itself. Conversely, the perception of an

unusually high level of interest in European issues among *Independent* and *FT* readers, adds to the importance of commenting on EU issues.

Editorial Value 4: What Opinions Are The Other Papers Giving?

The fourth and final 'editorial value', salience in the wider media debate, is an external influence that motivates newspapers to comment on Europe. Although not all newspapers mentioned 'other media' as a factor in their decision on whether to write an editorial on Europe, it is evident from comments made throughout the interviews that journalists were aware of where their newspaper fits in to the wider media debate. Journalists from two pro-European newspapers explicitly commented on how their judgements are influenced by the tone of opinion-leading and treatment of Europe in news coverage by other newspapers (*Guardian* and *Independent*). They felt that their newspaper's editorial voice should respond and retaliate to negative coverage of the EU because they have a duty to take part in the national debate in a proactive and positively orientated way.

Returning To The Editorial Production Process: Stage Two - General Content And Line Decided

Once the decision has been reached in a leader conference to select an issue (application of editorial values in Stage 1), the production process goes through three further stages before the editorial is ready to be published. In the second stage the general content and line is decided. Although the Editor takes the final decision, decisions are reached through a consultative process in the leader conference at the vast majority of newspapers. However, there are significant variations in terms of how well defined and known the 'line' of a newspaper is on Europe, how democratic the collective editorial decision making process is, and, as noted earlier, what consensus there is on issues related to European issues within the team. The majority of Leader writers explained that, on the topic of Britain and Europe, there is little need for long discussion about the line because the newspaper's general line is already understood. Particularly in the case of the Euro, the view was expressed that journalists knew what the paper's line was, either for or against, and they therefore knew what kind of editorial to write. For example, "Ultimately the decision on content is always the Editor's; he's the last call for recourse. But content depends on the man who is writing the damn thing, which is me!....And I may not write what the boss wants and then there'll be a great big almighty row at the end of the day, so bits might be put in, other bits might be taken out. But to a large extent in the *Mail* given that the view is fairly well known [on European issues], it's me that decides how to express it."¹⁴ Thus, editorial policies operate in a similar way to news policies since lines are not explicitly communicated to journalists and are learned through experience, (Breed, 1955; Sigelman, 1973; Soloski, 1989). However, at some newspapers the Euro is subject to regular discussion and, at the *Guardian*, newspaper wide consultation, although this unusually democratic approach has not resulted in all leader-writing journalists adopting a position synonymous to the opinion of the newspaper.

Stage Three: Article Written By Leader Writer

Two important influences occur during the third stage of the editorial production process where the Leader writer writes the editorial: 1) the degree of consultation with other journalists, and most importantly, 2) the leader writer's perception of their professional role¹⁵. Editorials are often written without consultation with other journalists, but some Leader writers talk with the author of the initial news story that they are commenting on, or with a journalist from whom they want to get some further background information and this demonstrates a further link between the paper's EU newsgathering activities and opinion-leading.

Professional role orientations have a significant impact on the way that editorials are written because Leader writers consider editorials to fulfil an additional role to that of informing the public in which editorials are written in such a way as to attempt to influence the political debate over Europe by influencing public opinion and/or the opinions of politicians¹⁶. Some Leader writers perceived that influencing readers and public opinion is an indirect way of exerting pressure on the government, while others targeted their opinions at both readers and politicians. For example, the *Mail's* Chief Leader writer suggested that by stimulating their readers and, by association, public opinion against Europe, he could force the government to take notice of the *Mail's* opinions on Britain and Europe. While he believed that his newspaper is also capable of directly influencing the government, he maintained that the paper's main target is its readers' opinions. Further, as the *Guardian's* Chief Leader writer explained, his editorials are written for the readers, but he also sees them as a medium through which he can address the *Guardian's* opinions directly to political actors: "You're not solely addressing them [Tony Blair and other politicians], it's not like the reader is invited to be a spectator. My conversation is with the readers, but it's done by addressing the government and if necessary addressing particular ministers."

These findings support the need for researchers to look more closely at the actions of the media as independent political actors (Eilders, 2000, 2002; McCombs, 1997; Page, 1996), especially when the perceived success of some newspapers in reaching their target is considered. Several journalists were conscious that politicians monitored their editorials and provided examples to demonstrate that politicians often acknowledge their opinion. For example, the *Times's* Chief Leader writer explained how the Foreign Secretary had commented on detailed aspects of the paper's opinion towards Europe. Of course, the fact that newspapers' comments are 'received' by political actors does not establish whether or not they influence the actions of policy makers. However, journalists' experiences indicate that editorials enable newspapers to access the political system, and several journalists believed that newspapers' political agendas can, and have, had an effect on the political process: "I argue that two people read it [an editorial about Europe], Blair and Campbell, and that's the only two people who are relevant. And Yelland knew that and Kavanagh knew that. They [the Sun] were affecting [government], not by having seven million readers reading it, but by having two people reading it, and they were changing the policy of the government"¹⁷.

Stage Four: Article Submitted To The Editor For Approval

In the final stage of the production process editorials are submitted to the Editor for approval before being finalised and published. In some newspapers this is just a formality and articles are rarely changed. However, at others where the Editor

operates a more ‘hands on’ style of management, changes may be suggested, or the article rewritten before it is approved.

Discussion

The examination of the routines and practices followed by leader-writing journalists has identified a set of editorial values and established the central role played by key individual journalists in shaping editorial opinion. Editorial values guide the selection of editorial issues in a significantly different manner to the way in which news values operate in the selection of news. In the process of identifying and developing a model of the editorial production process the research demonstrated that although news values constitute one of the most important editorial values, journalists’ judgements of the level of editorial importance attributed to an issue motivate their decisions to the same extent. Two other criteria contribute to selection process to a lesser extent: the interest of a newspapers’ readership, and its relevance to the European coverage in other media. While journalists’ application of news values relies on common profession based understandings, editorial values, and particularly judgements of editorials importance, are determined by newspaper specific factors and are not simply an extension of news values. The motivations of editorial values are far removed from those normally associated with news values since they are less related to assessments of what is of interest to readers, and more concerned with the interests of individual journalists and the editorial policies of a paper.

Judgements relating to each editorial value differ between newspapers, and each value carries more or less weight in the decision making process according to the level of importance that a newspaper assigns to it. Thus, editorial values are not universal because they depend on a dynamic set of newspaper specific circumstances. Some similarities can be seen in the influences on the decision making practices for newspapers that share similar views, whether for or against, on European issues. Overall, it is also clear that the combination of factors that influence judgements of the editorial value of an issue is more complex at broadsheets than that at tabloids.

Individual leader-writing journalists occupy a position of influence within newspapers that imparts them with the opportunity to make a significant contribution to editorial opinions towards Europe in three key ways: determining the level and qualitative nature of opinion by providing resources for producing editorials; shaping coverage through their personal attitudes and values towards Europe; and fulfilling specialist leader-writing roles. First, leader writers shape the visibility of EU issues by taking key decisions regarding selection through their participation in leader conferences (mainly broadsheets) or consultations with the editor (tabloids). Second, particularly at broadsheets, some journalists are considered as ‘experts’ on European affairs and their opinion, experience, and personal attitudes towards European issues make a major contribution to the content of opinions published in the name of their newspaper. Following discussion with colleagues, one Leader writer is primarily responsible for an editorial, and their personal attitudes and values towards Europe are a key determinant of how an editorial is written, as is demonstrated by this quote from the *Mail*’s Chief leader writer: “I couldn’t write leaders for the *Guardian* for example, it has a totally different view and anything I wrote would be a horrible pastiche in itself. I think readers can spot when you’re simply spinning a line, you’ve got to more or less believe it, and I’m sure every other leader writer has told you much the same”. Third, in fulfilling their professional role orientations, leader writers

make active attempts to influence politicians and public opinion. In this sense, individual journalists play an important role in shaping editorial content. Moreover, in cases where such attempts to influence are part of focussed editorial campaigns, individual journalists can be pivotal in formulating the subject and the style of campaigning policy. This role perception corresponds with that of American leader writers who have been found to “see themselves as influencing public officials and other citizens in their reaction to social and moral issues” (Hynds & Archibald, 1996:19). Overall, the influential role attributed to individuals by the findings of the research concurs with Shoemaker and Reese’s observation that “it is possible that when communicators have more power over their messages and work under fewer constraints, their personal attitudes, values and beliefs have more opportunity to influence content” (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996: 91).

Further, the findings underline the need for further research into newspapers’ editorial values since the study has established that these values are structured by the opinions of elite journalists in positions of power who have so far been overlooked in the discussion of the press and public opinion. In view of the fact that the practical application of editorial values has significant consequences for the potential agenda-setting role of newspapers, and the associated influence on public opinion, a fuller appreciation of editorial values and the journalists involved in determining such values is worthwhile. On the basis of the findings it seems possible that key journalists at some newspapers may have an equal or greater influence on editorial opinions than proprietors. Certainly, in the day-to-day production of opinion, individual journalists have greater opportunities to directly shape newspapers’ opinions than is attributed to them by studies of news production which see individuals as ‘replaceable cogs in the wheel’ and suggest that “news changes very little when the individuals who make it are changed” (Golding & Elliot, 1979:209). These findings suggest that the opposite is true of opinion-leading, and that a newspaper’s style of giving opinion on Europe may alter if key individuals involved in its production, such as leader writers, change. Finally, further investigation of the editorial values applied by newspapers in relation to other political issues would make a valuable addition to our understanding of the media’s motivations to take up partisan positions.

Notes:

1. For exceptions see (Firmstone, 2003, 2007, Forthcoming).
2. See U.S studies (Endres, 1987; Hynds & Martin, 1977).
3. The research was part of a PhD project conducted in parallel to the EU FW6 Europub.com project (HPSE-CT2000-00046). Funding support from Europub.com and ESRC Constitution project (RES-000-23-0866) is gratefully acknowledged.
4. Conducted in 2003.
5. The *Star* was excluded on the grounds that its focus on popular and celebrity stories results in a low proportion of political coverage.⁷
6. Political Editor, *Mirror*.
7. Political Editor, *Mail*.
8. The *Mail*’s campaign for a referendum on the EU Constitution, launched 12/06/03.
9. Leader writer, *Independent*.
10. Associate Editor - Comment, *FT*
11. Brussels Bureau Chief, *FT*.

12. Political Editor, *Mail*.
13. Interview question: "How interested do you think your readership is in politics?" and "How interested do you think your readership is in European politics?"
14. Chief Leader Writer, *Mail*.
15. Whilst beyond the remit of this article, it would be interesting to explore this group of journalists in greater detail, for instance examining their career paths.
16. A few journalists did not share this perception and didn't approve of using editorials to have 'private conversations' with specific actors, particularly politicians.
17. Chief Leader Writer, *Mirror*.

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Table and Figure to be included in the text

Table 1 Journalists Interviewed From Each Newspaper Shown By Newspaper and Journalist Type

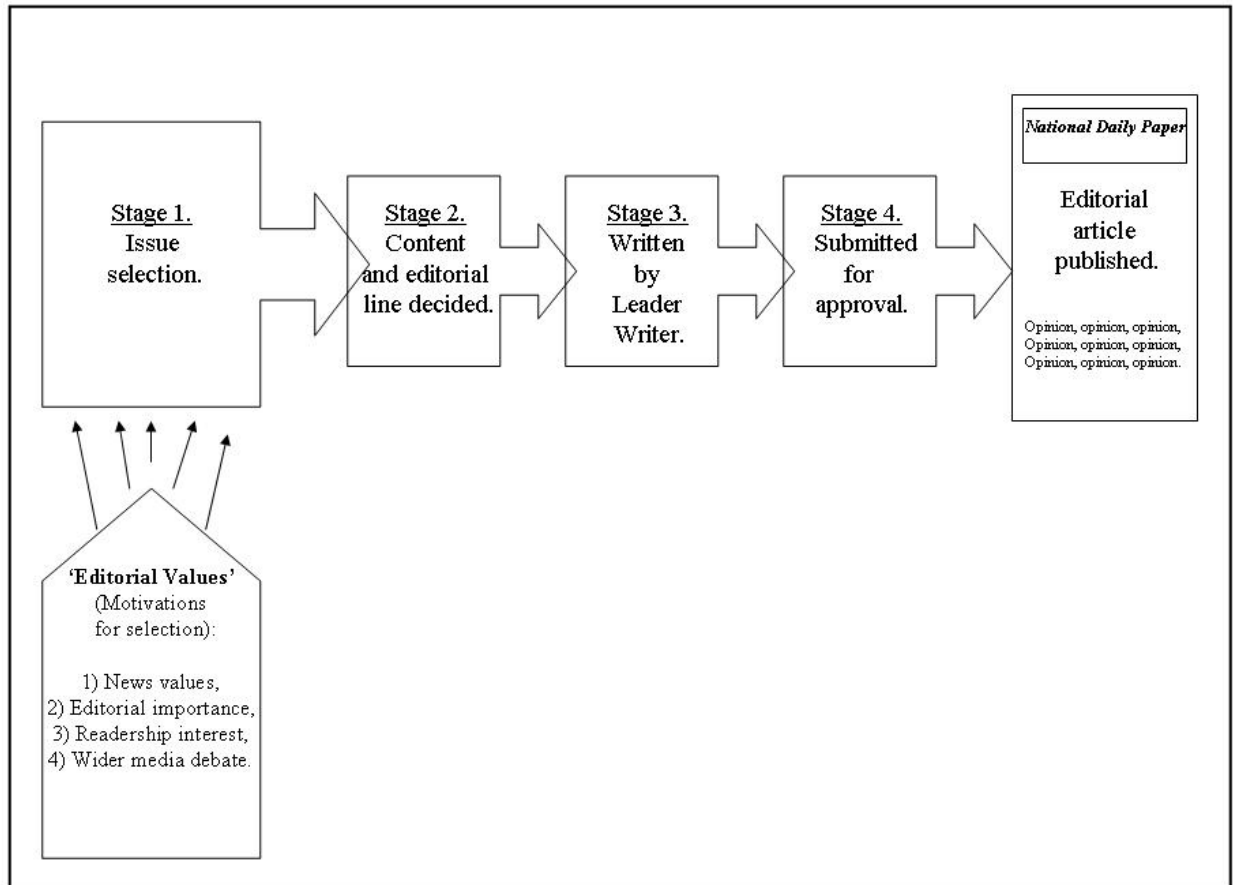
Newspaper	Newspaper type	Total number of interviews	Leader writers/ Editors	EU Correspondents	Political Editors
<i>Times</i>	Broadsheet – Right	4	2*	1	1
<i>Telegraph</i>	Broadsheet – Right	3	1	1	1
<i>Guardian</i>	Broadsheet – Left	3	1	1	1
<i>Independent</i>	Broadsheet – Left	4	2*	1	1
<i>Daily Mail</i>	Tabloid – Right	2	1	N/A	1
<i>Express</i>	Tabloid – Left	2	1	N/A	1
<i>Sun</i> **	Tabloid – Right	1	Declined to take part.	N/A	Political Editor declined to take part. Anonymous senior journalist spoke ‘off the record’.
<i>Mirror</i>	Tabloid – Left	3	1	1	1
<i>FT</i>	Broadsheet – Elite	3	1	1	1
<i>Scotsman</i>	Broadsheet (Outside London)	2	1	N/A	1
Total		27	11	6	10

Note: N/A = newspaper does not have an EU correspondent.

*= The Deputy Editor of the *Independent* and the Managing Editor of the *Times* were interviewed in addition to interviews with a Leader Writer from both newspapers.

** = The *Sun* newspaper denied the author access to *Sun* journalists. See (Firmstone, 2007) for details.

Figure 1: The Editorial Production Process



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