

Medical Issues in Italian Journalism: The Journalistic Coverage of “Stamina”

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Abstract

Covering science-medical news is of paramount importance for newspapers; at the same time it requires careful attention, because it represents a primary source for citizens, governments, public opinion. Through a qualitative content analysis, the paper analyses the way in which two Italian daily newspapers covered the most controversial medical case of the last years in Italy: the so-called “Stamina case”. The research shows that, also referring to science-medical news, journalists have to balance themselves between strict and rigorous reporting of events, and attracting and maintaining the readers’ interest.

Key Words: Science-medical journalism, hybridity, mediatic pillory, Italian newspapers, “Stamina” case

Introduction

Science-medical journalism is one of the most important genres in the wide scenario of journalistic phenomena; at the same time, it is probably the most complex (Levi, 2001; Seale, 2002), an “unfamiliar journalistic terrain” as the journalist Robert Whitaker (2009: 148) states referring to his personal experience. In fact, covering medical issues requires careful attention because of the very specialized and delicate contents that journalists have to manage – science-medical journalism “is a primary source for consumers to learn about personal health as well as medical developments and new research” (Hinnant, 2009: 692) –, not to say about human involvement or political, economic, judiciary, ethical issues related to science-medical news.

For these reasons, science-medical news traditionally belongs to the so-called “hard news”, that is news which deals with serious topics or breaking events (Bell, 2009; Boczkowski, 2009; Lehman-Wilzig & Seletzky, 2010; Prior, 2003; Tuchman, 1973; Zelizer, 2004). However, over the last three decades the coverage of medical news has concerned not only health reporting (Gastel, 2010), but also the topics related to lifestyle and fitness stories (Cole & Harcup, 2009: 111); at the same time, the genres of medical journalism have included “news stories, various types of feature stories (such as overview stories, narratives, and profiles), columns, and investigative stories” (Gastel, 2010: 473). As a consequence, today science-medical journalism is still considered “hard news”, but it can also belong to the so-called “soft news”, that is news “more personality-centred, less time-bound, more practical, and more incident-based than other news” (Patterson, 2000: 3-4).

Starting from this theoretical frame, the article aims to analyse the way Italian journalism narrates medical issues by examining a very emblematic case study: the so-called “Stamina case”, that is the most controversial medical case of the last years in Italy. The “Stamina method” is a therapy invented by Davide Vannoni, an Italian former professor of psychology, founder and president of Stamina Foundation. The project is a result of personal experience: in 2007, Vannoni has been hospitalized in Ukraine for a facial palsy by transplantation of stem cells, getting partial health benefits. When he came back to Italy, he decided to propose the treatment, even if he didn’t have the authorization by the national health system; thanks to the paediatrician Marino Andolina, the Stamina therapy started to be practiced in Brescia “Spedali Civili” hospital on patients (included several children) affected by serious neurodegenerative diseases (Ferrari & Molinari, 2011; Mandelli, 2014).

The research focuses on the two most important Italian daily newspapers (the *Corriere della Sera* and *la Repubblica*), which were chosen because of the need to have a homogeneous textual corpus, resulting from two different journalistic approaches (Agostini, 2004; Bergamini, 2013; Murialdi, 2006). We analysed all the articles dealing with Stamina published in printed editions of both newspapers from December 2009 (when the *Corriere della Sera* quoted Stamina for the first time, reporting the investigation started by Italian magistrate Raffaele Guariniello) to August 2014 (when the Turin Court accepted Guariniello’s request and ordered the attachment of Stamina cells from the Brescia “Spedali Civili” hospital).

The analysed corpus consists of 697 articles:

457 from the *Corriere della Sera* and 240 from *la Repubblica*. Referring to the articles' typology, it is important to underline that in Italian journalism there is no strong distinction between reports, opinion articles and journalistic analysis. As Hallin and Mancini (2004) state, the permanent tendency to mix up news and views is one of the peculiarities of the polarized pluralist model (in which Italian journalism has to be included).

As far as methodology is concerned, we will carry out a qualitative content analysis (Altheide 1987; Altheide & Schneider, 2013; Corbetta, 2003; Macnamara, 2005), aiming to understand topics and trends shaping the way Italian journalism report on medical issues. In order to do that, we will answer three main questions:

1. How the "Stamina case" is covered in respect of the traditional comparison between hard news and soft news;
2. How journalists "manage" medical news;
3. How this coverage reflects the traditional differences between the two analysed newspapers.

The journalistic coverage of Stamina on Italian newspapers

Italian newspapers quoted Stamina for the first time in December 2009, when the *Corriere della Sera* reported that the Italian magistrate Raffaele Guariniello had started an investigation about the activities of *Stamina Foundation* (Pappagallo, 2009). However, it had been an isolated case, because in the following months no other article concerned this topic. The coverage became regular only three years later, due to the evolution of the judicial trials in which Stamina was involved (Giambartolomei, 2012; Pappagallo, 2012a), and it peaked in spring 2013, when several reportages realized by the popular television program *Le Iene* focused on the case, trying to expose delays, carelessness, responsibilities.

From August 2012 to August 2014, the coverage has ranged from the newspapers' national edition (159 articles on the *Corriere della Sera*, 141 articles on *la Repubblica*) to their local ones (298 articles vs 99 articles). Most articles are published on the *Corriere della Sera*'s local editions, and especially on the Brescia's one; according to us, it depends on the significant involvement of the Brescia "Spedali Civili" hospital in the "Stamina case" and, at the same time, on the newspaper's strong spread in Lombardia.

Over all the analysed period, the two newspapers' coverage has presented several analogies referring to the reported topics, but also important differences in respect to the way they were narrated. In

fact, the *Corriere della Sera*'s coverage has been generally informed by accuracy and fairness; rarely journalists took a stand and the only ones that offered opinions are columnists like Pierluigi Battista (2013) and Beppe Severgnini (2014) or physicians like Paolo Bianco (2014a) and Giuseppe Remuzzi (2013a). On the contrary, *la Repubblica*'s reporters and columnists frequently and explicitly stated their stance on the "Stamina case". Although the readers were duly informed about the facts, they could easily detect the journalists' stances and opinions, which were expressed very openly and in respect of all the judicial issues related to Stamina. According to Papuzzi (2010), this is the shift from an "objective journalistic style" (*Corriere della Sera*) to a "subjective journalistic style" (*la Repubblica*).

The topics on which the *Corriere della Sera* and *la Repubblica* focused are seven: a) judicial news; b) human interest; c) political implications; d) ethical debate; e) "mediatic pillory"; f) medical issues; g) scientific community's involvement.

a) Judicial news

Since the beginning, the *Corriere della Sera* and *la Repubblica* covered the "Stamina case" focusing especially on the judicial news related to it, as confirmed by their reports that ran parallel to the development of the legal process.

On the *Corriere della Sera*, these topics have represented the main narrative theme over all the analysed period. Every article often started with an outline of the situation (trials, investigations, judgements, etc.); this happened not only in the first articles, when journalists had to explain the case to the readers (Corcella, 2013a) but also in the most recent articles, when the readers were supposed to know it (Ripamonti, 2013b), up to the last articles published after the above mentioned decision of Turin Court (Toresini, 2014b). The interest about the judicial topics took shape also in the local editions, and it concerned especially the consequences on the Brescia hospital (Angelini, 2013b; Toresini, 2014a), and the related economic issues (Bazzi, 2013b; Toresini, 2013a). Finally, we have to observe that, while the *Corriere della Sera*'s reports narrated the judicial events, its columnists focused on the relationship between judicial issues and medical ones, aiming to highlight that judges' decisions had stood in for physicians' ones in the "Stamina case" (Bianco, 2013; Schiavi, 2013).

Referring to *la Repubblica*, its coverage of judicial topics can be split into three different phases:

- 1) From August to October 2012, the main topic was represented by the investigation

conducted by the Italian magistrate Raffaele Guariniello about the activities of *Stamina Foundation*. The articles reported the contrast between Vannoni, who repeatedly stated that his treatment was “no charge” and the money he received was “donations”, and several former patients that argued there was a definite price list (De Riccardis, 2012; Giambartolomei, 2012);

2) From November 2012 to June 2013, news coverage blended judicial and political topics¹;

3) Started from July 2013, judicial topics became current news again: *la Repubblica* offered many information about the patients’ appeals to Administrative Tribunals (Foschini, 2013), the beginning of the trial against Vannoni (Martinenghi, 2014), the notices of investigation against managers involved in the Stamina’s supposed fraud (Giustetti, 2013b), finally the above mentioned decision of Turin Court (Cravero, 2014).

Finally, we have to notice that both newspapers wondered in depth about the foundation’s activities and its controversial president (Bocci, 2013d; Corcella, 2013b; Crosetti, 2013); at the same time they reported the wide debate on constitutional right of health care that had took shape (Bazzi, 2012; De Riccardis, 2012b; Pepe, 2014). The way in which they narrated these topics confirms the different attitude of the two analysed newspapers to take a stand.

b) Human interest

Overall the considered period, on both newspapers the coverage of judicial news has blended with the news-value of human interest (Gans, 1979).

In *la Repubblica*, it happened frequently, and especially if patients were children: in fact, the newspaper reported always in depth their personal histories and their families’ hopes. In this way, the coverage appears strongly “personalized” (Bell, 1991; Hartley, 2013) and the Stamina method could be easily identified with patients like Celeste, Ginevra and Daniele: much-suffering children that, thanks to the treatment, “could smile again” as stated in several articles (De Riccardis, 2012a; Giustetti, 2012a; Vincenzi, 2012).

Also the *Corriere della Sera* focused on human interest (Angelini, 2012a; De Santis, 2013; Rodella, 2013), but in this case personal histories emerged only due to their unquestionable involvement in judicial news. The “distance” between journalists and news was confirmed also in respect of very touching situation, such as when Pope Francis phoned up the parents of a

terminal hill child aiming to aid and comfort them (Vecchi, 2013).

On the contrary, we note several analogies between the two analysed newspapers when the patients’ personal histories became part of a wide narration, which topic was represented by community involvement: in fact, a lot of articles reported the pro-Stamina initiatives, from the appeal to Pope Francis and to the President Giorgio Napolitano (Anonymous, 2013b; Martinenghi, 2013b) to the patients’ demonstrations in front of the Italian Parliament (Conca & Mari, 2013; Frigniani, 2013).

c) Political implications

During the considered period, both newspapers reported Stamina’s political implications, especially focusing on the responsibilities of the involved Institutions. However, in respect of this topic the differences between the two newspapers increased considerably, and they did not refer only to the way in which the topics were narrated, but above all on the topics themselves: in fact, the *Corriere della Sera* reported the political implications of Stamina especially referring to a local perspective, while *la Repubblica* appeared more interested to a national perspective.

From the first point of view, the Brescia’s edition of the *Corriere della Sera* analysed in depth the involvement of “Regione Lombardia”² in the “Stamina case”, aiming to highlight its potential responsibilities (Angelini, 2014; Anonymous, 2014c, 2014d). Once again, the newspaper preferred to explain the situation, without taking a stand. On the contrary, *la Repubblica* clearly disagreed with the local management of Stamina, as confirmed by the articles which covered the actions proposed by Italian Pharmaceutical Agency against the President of Lombardy’s Health Commission, who blamed on the Agency for the case’s management (Anonymous, 2013c), and the one proposed by the Democratic Party against the Lombardy’s Assessor of Health, Mario Mantovani (Anonymous, 2014b).

From the second perspective, *la Repubblica*’s columnists wondered about the Brescia “Spedali Civili” hospital, where the therapy was practiced without control or authorization by the national health system, and the Italian Pharmaceutical Agency, who would be at fault because of a lack of control (Giambartolomei, 2012). In respect of the two Ministers of Health involved in the “Stamina case”, *la Repubblica* clearly agreed with the second one, Beatrice Lorenzin, especially when she stated that, in absence of scientific evidences, the treatment could not be practiced in a public hospital.

¹See paragraph c).

²According to Italian law, the health management is under the control of local authorities, in particular the Regions.

“She doesn’t say his name”, Michele Bocci (2013e: 21) wrote, “but it’s clear that she disagrees with the former Minister Renato Balduzzi about the case’s management”. On the contrary, *la Repubblica* totally disagreed with the former Minister Renato Balduzzi, and in several articles stood up against him. In particular, he was criticized because he had authorized the treatment only for those patients who already underwent treatment (Bocci, 2013a). When the Parliament didn’t ratify these measures ordered by the Minister, *la Repubblica* reported widely the news (Bocci, 2013b).

However, *la Repubblica*’s most critical approach in respect of the institutional management of Stamina emerged in an article written by the columnist Piergiorgio Odifreddi, an important mathematician who often takes position about scientific issues in Italian public debate. In fact, he argued that Stamina Case is a “re-release” of the “infamous Di Bella case”³ and, one more time, “because of the Parliament’s obscurantism, Italy is the laughing stock of scientific community” (2013: 41). Also in the *Corriere della Sera* several articles quoted the “Di Bella case”, but the approach is different: Adriana Bazzi (2012) and Luigi Ripamonti (2013a), for example, clearly aimed to explain in which way the two cases can be compared rather than to take a stand or blame someone.

Even though the *Corriere della Sera* chose a journalistic approach more objective than *la Repubblica*, this trend failed in those articles written not by newspaper’s reporters, but by columnists, especially when they are physicians. For example, referring to the mistakes in Stamina’s institutional management, Paolo Bianco stated (2013: 25) that “containing Italian drift needs to hold firmly the helm during the storm. In journalism, in politics, in medicine, in science, in law. Holding firmly the helm means governing”.

d) Ethical debate

Both newspapers covered Stamina also in respect of its ethical implications. However, the articles focused on these topics were not so many and, above all, they did not concern the conflict between faith and reason, or between Catholicism and laity (those are, in Italy, two of the most important questions involved in the debate about scientific topics). The only exception was represented by an article written by science-medical journalist Riccardo Renzi (2013b) and published in the *Corriere della Sera*. Talking about the analogies

between the “Stamina case” and the above-mentioned “Di Bella case”, he argued that both cases had demonstrated that “science rarely fit in with faith” (2013: 47).

In respect of the coverage of ethical issues, the differences between the *Corriere della Sera* and *la Repubblica* tended to disappear; according to us, it happened because the subject itself forced journalists to take a stand.

The coverage of the *Corriere della Sera* concerned principally three topics:

1) The lacks of physicians’ professional ethics, especially referring to the responsibilities of the “Ordine dei Medici”, that is the professional association of Italian physicians (Bazzi, 2014);

2) The frailty of Italian society against the power of “dynamic judges” and “shallow media” (Severgnini, 2014: 1);

3) The short circuit between science, politics and ethics (Pilotti, 2014).

In all these cases, reporters and columnist invoked all involved the people to respect the ethical values on which a democratic society should be grounded.

On the contrary, the coverage of *la Repubblica* aimed to avoid unproductive oversimplification between “stem cells yes” and “stem cells no”, which would damage the patients, the involved Institutions, the Italian scientific community, finally the Italian international reputation (Strippoli, 2013). This aim emerged clearly in an article entitled *I limiti della scienza intrappolata tra ragione e umanità* (*The limits of science entrapped between reason and humanity*). Here, the reporter Michela Marzano (2012: 35) argued that “choosing Stamina therapy represents a real ethical dilemma”, which opposes the patients’ families (they “don’t bear their children suffer” and “want to give them a ghost of a chance”) to medical ethics (whose most important value consists of *primum non nocere*). The answer suggested by Marzano refers to the idea of “compassion”: “maybe it doesn’t justify the choice, but it allows to understand the situation in which people are involved, and to try a solution that respects their humanity”.

e) “Mediatic pillory”

In spring 2013, the popular television program *Le Iene* covered the “Stamina case” in several reportages in which it argued that the infusion of stem cells would had resulted in significant improvements in few weeks in the status of various neuro-degenerative diseases; due to these “evidences”, *Le Iene* exposed Italian Institutions, and especially the Minister of Health Balduzzi, because they didn’t authorized the treatment.

³ Luigi di Bella was an Italian medical doctor and physiology professor. In the late 1980s, he created a purported treatment for cancer that caused an international controversy. Following national exposure in 1997 and 1998, several cancer patients from around Italy travelled to his clinic seeking access to a “miracle cure”. In 1998 Italian Minister of Health declared his treatment to be without scientific merit.

After the broadcasts, both newspapers covered the wide debate arisen in Italian public opinion, and in which were involved physicians, academic professors, intellectuals and exponents of the entertainment industry. The first one who took a stand was the Italian popular singer and celebrity Adriano Celentano (2013: 11). In a letter sent to the *Corriere della Sera* he accused Minister Balduzzi because he “had stopped the ONLY therapy able to result in improvements of several ill children”; Celentano also called “wicked deed” the investigation started by Raffaele Guariniello, and stated he had felt disgusted and ashamed due to the coolness that Balduzzi showed during the television broadcast. Finally, he supposed that the “Stamina case” could be one of the reasons of Beppe Grillo’s electoral achievements⁴.

After the publication of Celentano’s letter, the *Corriere della Sera* reported several feedbacks about it, especially those ones deriving from involved persons like Minister Balduzzi (Di Frischia, 2013) and Davide Vannoni (Angelini, 2013a). However, the most significant stance came from the media columnist Aldo Grasso, who criticized the way in which mass media covered the “Stamina case”. At first (2013a), he argued that the “Stamina case” is a controversial subject, which media should manage very carefully so as to avoid “another Di Bella case”; in a following article (2014), starting from the coverage of Stamina proposed by *Le Iene*, he argued that “funny” journalistic inquiries represented just the opposite of good journalism and accused the television broadcast by many of scientific disinformation.

Media carelessness was also the topic of several articles published on *la Repubblica*, which coverage concerned both *Le Iene* and the other television broadcasts focused on the “Stamina case”. The media columnist Antonio Dipollina (2014a: 51) asked to remove from television the debate about Stamina because “it’s a very difficult topic and it shouldn’t go on air”. At the same time, the newspaper reported in depth that three distinguished Italian scientist (first of all, the senator for life Elena Cattaneo) blamed television programs like *Le Iene*, because they contributed to create “the Stamina blunder” (Bocci, 2014: 19). In a letter sent to the *La Stampa* newspaper and quoted by *la Repubblica* (Bocci, 2014: 19), the three scientists wrote that “*Le Iene* is moral responsible because its message is more efficient than thousand sorcerers’ one”. Covering this initiative *la Repubblica* wished Stamina could go less on air and more in the Institutions (Dipollina, 2014b). Finally, the above-mentioned Piergiorgio Odifreddi (2014: 24) took part in

the debate, stating that television broadcasts like *Le Iene* had “actively contributed to produce confusion about Stamina”; he also hoped that the scientific debate could set back “where audience doesn’t prevail on rationality”.

f) Medical issues

The coverage of the Stamina case proposed by the two analysed newspapers appeared very in depth referring to its judicial, political and ethical issues. On the contrary, we have to notice a lack of information referring to the medical ones, and it is a real paradox because the “Stamina case” belongs firstly to scientific-medical news.

Since the beginning of the coverage, in fact, journalists had to extricate themselves in a jungle composed by technical terms and extremely rare diseases’ denominations. Having to attract the readers’ interest, they decided not to explain what the Stamina method is, which diseases could be treated, if there are some health risks. For these reasons, in the first months they preferred to focus their reports on the human interest involved in such “science-medical drama”, highlighting that Stamina was not a “medical treatment” but an “expanded access” (Anonymous, 2012; Pappagallo, 2012b).

Starting from Autumn 2012, the coverage focused more specifically on Stamina’s medical issues, but both newspapers reported these topics in addition of judicial news: therefore, medical issues emerged only when reporters had to cover the evolution of criminal investigation or the development of Minister of Health’s approval procedure (Angelini, 2012b; De Riccardis, 2012b; Natali, 2013b). It happened, for example, in an article wrote by Elena Dusi: she started explaining the Stamina therapy, especially focusing on its uncertain results; then she reported the Italian Pharmaceutical Agency’s concerns about the inconsistency of scientific evidence, the methodological shortcomings and the lack of publications; finally, she remembered that the scientific committee established by the Minister Lorenzin explained the same doubts. At the end of the article, Dusi argued that “there are many grey areas”.

The coverage proposed by the *Corriere della Sera* presented several analogies in respect of *la Repubblica* (focus on human interest, hybridity between medical issues and judicial ones, etc.), but also several significant differences. The first one concerned a different approach in respect of this topic: science-medical news about Stamina was covered as a part of a wide discourse focused on stem-cells (Natali, 2013a). The second difference referred to the way in which the *Corriere della Sera* covered the medical issues: in this case, in fact, it often took a stance and normally it endorsed the reasons of medical science rather than the patients’ distress. According to the physician Paolo

⁴ Beppe Grillo is the charismatic leader of the Five Star Movement, an Italian political party which is expression of the so-called “anti-politics”.

Bianco (2014b: 19), “medical science is not object of ‘wisdom of the crowd’”, and it can’t become “a ‘media suk’ in which the therapies’ producer talks to the consumers through television or the Net”. The science-medical journalist Riccardo Renzi (2013a: 51) invoked more transparency in a contest like biomedicine in which “data transparency and results transparency should be taken from granted, a moral obligation on behalf of scientific knowledge’s universality”.

g) Scientific community’s involvement

The last topic on which the two analysed newspapers focused concerns the involvements of the scientific community, which had risen up against the way in which the “Stamina case” was faced: “without trials, misleading hopes are nurtured” (Schiavazzi, 2012: 19).

Referring to this topic we have to notice several analogies in the journalistic coverage: both the *Corriere della Sera* and *la Repubblica* took the stand of scientific community and they reported in depth the reason of its censure. However, *la Repubblica* preferred to cover this topic more in depth than the *Corriere della Sera*, as confirmed by many of articles focused on it.

On *la Repubblica*, in fact, several articles explained distinguished scientists’ concerns about Stamina: Angelo Vescovi (who was the first scientist, in Europe, to transplant stem cells) warned against “the test-tube Rambos” (Schiavazzi, 2012); Umberto Veronesi (one of the most famous Italian physicians and former Minister of Health) argued that it was necessary to reach a compromise between solidarity toward patients and science strictness (Veronesi, 2013); the Turin School of medicine accused Vannoni of being a “science enemy”, because he had refused to discuss his therapy with the scientific community (Giustetti, 2014: 4); the director of the Rome “Bambino Gesù” children’s hospital urged the parents not to trust in a “new Di Bella” (Dusi, 2013a: 22); the Nobel prize for medicine Shinya Yamanaka explained the international scientific community’s concerns because Italy allowed not tested medical treatments (Anonymous, 2013a). Above all, the distinguished scientific review *Nature* hurled abuse at the Stamina method and its management by Italian institutions (Dusi, 2013b).

Therefore, also referring to this topic *la Repubblica* assumed a critical approach, highlighting faults and mistakes in the Stamina’s management. This approach got stronger after the statement of the distinguished medical review *Nature*, which at first accused Stamina of plagiarism (Dusi & Martinenghi, 2013), then stated its concerns about Stamina’s efficacy and safety (Anonymous, 2014a). *la Repubblica* certainly agreed with these doubts, and the newspaper gave its

best to avoid the “scientific Far West” dreaded by scientific community (Bocci, 2013c: 20). In this perspective, Vannoni became “Stamina’s sorcerer” and the newspaper warned against some “miraculous treatments” that attract desperate sick people (Corsetti, 2013: 1). At the same time, columnists explained to their readers the “ten rules not to fall into a trap” suggested by the scientist Elena Cattaneo (2013: 1). On the contrary, few articles explained Stamina’s reasons. Its defence was normally committed only to Davide Vannoni himself, and it focused especially on Stamina’s economic issues (“I’m not looking for easy earnings”, Vannoni argued; “I aim to nurse free”) (Martinenghi, 2013a: 3).

In respect of *la Repubblica*, the *Corriere della Sera*’s coverage presented two faces. On one hand the newspaper reported in depth doubts and concerns expressed by *Nature* (Bazzi, 2013a; Toresini, 2013b), aiming that Italian Institutions could accept its request: “Stem-cell fiasco must be stopped” (Remuzzi, 2013b: 56). In this perspective columnists like Aldo Grasso (2013b) and Luciano Pilotti (2014) argued that the management of Stamina had affected negatively the Italian reputation in scientific community, especially because of the way in which mass media had covered the case: with no questions and no doubts.

On the other hand, the *Corriere della Sera* tried to highlight the important results achieved by other Italian researches in the field of stem-cell: “A medal has always two sides”, Mario Pappagallo (2013: 25) wrote referring to Angelo Vescovi’s scientific discovery. “Italian scientific research, which international scientific community blamed because of the Stamina therapy, scores a result which will open perspectives and hopes. It’s always stem-cells”.

Conclusions

As mentioned in the paper’s introduction, science-medical journalism has a long history and today still represents an important issue covered by the press. The research we presented in this paper certainly confirms it: in fact, the two analysed newspapers reported in depth the “Stamina case”, covering all the involved issues. However, the most interesting results emerging from our research concern the way in which the two newspapers covered the “Stamina case”, especially in respect of the idea of science-medical journalism as “primary source for consumers to learn about personal health as well as medical developments and new research” (Hinnant, 2009: 692).

However, before focusing on this topic, we need to answer the three questions we posed at the beginning of the article.

(1) *How the “Stamina case” is covered in*

respect of the traditional comparison between hard news and soft news. According to academic literature, the most important differences between the two typologies concern *timeliness*, *seriousness* and the *frame*. In respect of the first parameter, Shoemaker and Cohen (2006) define hard news as “urgent occurrences that have to be reported right away because they become obsolete very quickly”. Referring to the second parameter, Patterson (2000: 3-4) states that “hard news refers to coverage of breaking events involving top leaders, major issues, or significant disruptions in the routines of daily life”. In respect of the third parameter, Curran *et al.* (2010) argue that it is not only the topic of a news that makes it a ‘hard’ or ‘soft’ one, but also the framing of an event or topic linking it to the public good, to policy issues or to society at large.

Applying these parameters to the newspapers we analysed, our research shows that the “Stamina case” belongs to “hard news”: due to the topic (in fact, it refers to “urgent occurrences”, which involve “major issues”), as well as due to the frame in which it takes shape. In fact, covering the Stamina case both newspapers talked about *what is the public good* (in an ethical and judicial perspective), *which are the policy issues and in which way the Italian institutions manage them* (focusing on political management’s virtues and vices), *who are the people involved and where/when the human interest takes shape* (reporting patients and families’ hopes, disappointments, failures, but also covering the wide debate that involves the whole civil society).

(2) *How journalists “manage” medical news.* According to academic literature (Dentzer, 2009; Nelkin, 1996; Schwitzer, 2008), science-medical news is very hard to report because of several reasons: lack of time, space and knowledge; competition for space and audience; difficulties with terminology; problems finding and using sources; problems with editors and commercialism (Larsson *et al.*, 2003). Our research confirms this structural feature of science-medical journalism: due to difficulties and risks related to science-medical journalism, covering the “Stamina case” the two analysed newspapers referred rarely to medical issues, preferring to focus on the other involved topics (judicial, political, economic, ethical, etc.). To be more precise, both newspapers covered the medical issues when these ones could be explained using another journalistic genre’s specialized dictionary.

When it was not possible – that is when, having to report medical news, journalists were forced to use its specialized dictionary – both newspapers tended to focus on personal histories of patients and families: in this way, the news-value of human interest becomes the

perfect tool to explain medical news to the readers attracting them and maintaining their general interest about the news (Dahlgren & Sparks, 1992; Deuze, 2005; Hallin, 1992; McManus, 1994, Van Zoonen, 1998). For the same aims, often the journalistic coverage appeared strongly personalized around its “main characters” (Davide Vannoni, patients, judges, Minister Balduzzi and Minister Lorenzin, etc.), and focused on the news-value of conflict (Papuzzi, 2010; Sorrentino, 2010) between two different subjects (Vannoni vs scientific community; Vannoni vs national health system; patients vs Institutions; judges vs Institutions, etc.)

(3) *How this coverage reflects the traditional differences between the two analysed newspapers.* In the wide scenario of Italian journalism, the *Corriere della Sera* and *la Repubblica* traditionally belong to two different models of journalism (Bergamini, 2013; Murialdi, 2006). According to Agostini (2004: 138), the first one has to be considered as a ‘daily newspaper-institution’, that is a newspaper in which “identification with the readership, agreement with ideas and views, are less strong than the importance of tradition”. On the contrary, the second one represents the main Italian example of the ‘daily newspaper-agenda’, which “offers the sense of belonging to wider areas, communities and continuities that could not be kept within the lines of a political party”, and its newsworthiness is not based “just on political positions, but also on cultural, leisure and, generically, intellectual ones”.

Our research confirms the traditional difference between the two newspapers, which takes shape not in respect to the reported topics but referring to the way in which they are narrated. The *Corriere della Sera* covered the “Stamina case” with accuracy and fairness, separating news from views and, generally, leaving its readers to come up with their own interpretations of the reported facts. On the contrary, even though it offered a comparable coverage of ‘what happened’ (even if there was less attention on the local perspective in respect of the *Corriere della Sera*), *la Repubblica* always suggested ‘what it meant’, often taking a stance. We have to notice that it happened especially when the coverage of Stamina involved judicial, political, economic, ethical issues; to do that, *la Repubblica* often focused on the Stamina case in an historical perspective: in fact, it covered the news highlighting similarities and differences in respect to other famous and controversial medical cases documented by Italian journalism (first of all, the frequently quoted Di Bella case), aiming to avoid that the Stamina case should become a new grey area in Italian scientific debate.

The last topic emerged from our research concerns the idea of science-medical journalism as

primary source. According to academic literature (Dentzer, 2009; Hinnant, 2009; Larsson et al., 2003; Nelkin, 1996; Schwitzer, 2008), in fact, science-medical journalism carries out two different functions: on one hand, it represents the tool which allows citizens to learn about personal health as well as medical developments and new research; on the other hand, the coverage of medical news can influence physicians, governments, public opinion. For these reasons, science-medical journalism is often criticized when it is misleading, inaccurate or speculative.

Our research confirms this scenario, especially when the two analysed newspapers' coverage focused on the "mediatic pillory" developed after some television

broadcasts about Stamina. In those cases, reporters and columnists of both newspapers argued that journalists have to manage very carefully science-medical news, avoiding both worthless and detrimental spectacularization and misleading, inaccurate or speculative analysis.

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