

Journalism: then and now



Is the divide between the British Tabloid and the serious, quality press narrowing? If so why?

There are many debates concerned about the state of British newspapers today. Most recently, traditional news values have seen to become more reformed and revolutionized. The dominance of celebrity and social news, the blurring of the boundary between news and reality shows and other popular culture; and the advent of citizen journalism may all suggest that the nature of 'news' and 'news values' are evolving; and that traditional models of the news process are now only partially relevant. Replaced, are new sorts of values called the 'tabloid news values'. Tabloid news values, in the press, "are a question of both the angle and interpretive framework of the journalist". (Colin Sparks, 2000) News wins over that appeal to "broad sectors of the public, scandals, crime, sports and pop culture will be given very high priority relative to items about politics and public affairs" (Sparks, 2000). Equally, the stories will be highly personified and they will impart sensations and emotions. The presence of the 'tabloid news values' in the British papers today is due to several factors such as advertisements and media ownership; which results a hierarchy in the profession involved in the making of newspapers - journalism. However, it can be argued that the divide between tabloid newspapers and broadsheets are/are not narrowing, considering the dramatically changed features they include. In this assignment, I aim to distinguish if broadsheets are looking similarly like tabloids and if the 'quality' press is focusing only on public interests. I intend to use relevant examples to assist my points of arguments, besides using academic sources which will finalize my findings towards this topic.

It has been said that Broadsheets newspapers went through a process labelled 'tabloidization'. Tabloidization is the term used to express tabloid style papers. It is, as stated by Pete du Pont " a shift by the media away from government and foreign affairs" to a more entertainment-style of journalism that focuses on " lifestyle, celebrity, entertainment and crime/scandal" (du Pont, 1998). Ken Sanes (1997) in his article, " The News Media's Effort to Hide from Significant Truth" (Transparency website) identifies a possible argument which explains the cause of tabloidization. He states that the people who own the newspapers are responsible for the happening of this process. du Pont agrees with Sanes and claims that owners of the newspapers themselves are primarily to blame and that he sees this as the " corporate ownership theory." (du Pont, 1998) The newspapers are owned by well-known people such as Rupert Murdoch, Scott Trust, Tony O'Reilly and it is thought that the news journalists follow orders that are sent directly from these owners in order to " shape the news" (du Pont, 1998) accordingly. The result is a news media, which " manipulates information... to push the political agendas" (du Pont, 1998) of the newspapers. The problem lies in the fact that the agendas of these newspapers are based on marketing themselves and their products, or more simply put on money. " Covering up the news that may be detrimental to the economic health and/or reputation of the company" (Sanes, 1997) can also be seen a part of this marketing. This is where tabloidization is seen to come in play. In order for the owners to push their own interests or to draw the attention away from the news that may prove to disadvantage them, the newspapers have created " a news media that concentrates on attracting audiences" through stories about " sex, scandal and Hollywood" (Pete du Pont, 1998).

" In 1995 the editor of the Guardian invented the word 'broadloid' to describe a broadsheet newspaper with a tabloid editorial approach." (Peak and Fisher cited in Bromley, 1998). Bob Franklin (1997) determines to prove that both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers are impossible to differentiate and thus compares them to achieve his hypothesis. Franklin found that Broadsheets have degraded by the significant tabloid values they introduced to their paper. He defines a broadsheet as " a large format newspaper, written and distributed for a national audience on the basis of a national news agenda." Franklin also believes that " Broadsheet news values traditionally favour a mix of politics-plus-diplomacy-plus-war with sport on the back page; broadsheets aim at in-depth and comprehensive coverage; and are written using moderate and emotionally controlled language (assumedly) typical of the middle classes. Broadsheets tend to lead on the 'issue', or the substantive consequences, of a story rather than first-hand human interest approach more typical of tabloids; they tend to be 'print heavy' rather than the more pictorial tabloids; and are less inclined to use more ethically dubious reporting practices, such as doorstepping or paying sources for stories." (Franklin, 1997) His statement reflects an appreciated view on Broadsheet newspapers as he claims that it is valuable newspaper which, by far, determines a person's status in society. Through his argument, it can be said that he does not accept the reason that Broadsheets would possibly merge into tabloids-style papers.

Further, Colin Sparks (2000) believes that newspapers carry responsibilities towards the public interest. Their responsibilities are primarily to warn and protect the public. They are held through the media, where economy and

political information are published to the public. " The quality press provides this kind of information in abundance." (Sparks, 2000) This is crucial to Sparks that newspapers use this strategy, as the public " are expected to exercise informed choices about how, and by whom, their society is being governed."(Sparks, 2000) In other words, Sparks informs us that it is crucial that the public discover the norms and values of their society. The media portrays this to them in order to help them live a less complex lifestyle, with an easier decision to make when following, perhaps economic and/or political ideas.

On the other hand, Franklin believes that the quality press has transformed into the popular press through the four ways he states. First, broadsheets now " contain less news, especially foreign news, parliamentary news and investigative stories", preferring photographs to these expensive reporting formats. Second, " views have increasingly replaced news", with broadsheets choosing to fill the pages emptied of international and investigative reporting with engaging opinion from columnists. Third, he suggests that broadsheets are increasingly " allocating a high news priority to stories which until recently would have been dismissed and disdained as merely tabloid stories". Fourth, broadsheets are increasingly likely " to include many editorial features which previously were the exclusive preserve of the tabloids" (Franklin, 1997).

To conclude the meanings of Franklin's ideas, he is clearly stating that quality papers do focus on public interest but carry no political or foreign news as they switched to tabloids formats. Through his claim, it can be said that he sees Broadsheets as virtually tabloid paper.

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Richard Addis, the former Daily Express editor suggests broadsheets are " a master class in daily journalism delivered in a thoroughly post-modern or post-ironic way" (Addis, cited from the Guardian, 2008). Dominic Ponsford, editor of Press Gazette agrees with Addis and comments that broadsheets are " a tidy, spacey, pacey and coherent package... a paper positioned upmarket from the tabloids" (Ponsford, cited from the Guardian, 2008). Broadsheets tended to have better written articles; with much less scandal and gossip, much less sensational headlines and people depended upon them for getting their quota of what could now be called 'serious news'.

However, when talking of tabloids newspaper; the term " tabloid" refers both to a specific type of newspaper, and to a specific paper size. Newspapers introduced the term when they started halving the broadsheet size. News tabloids " are originally presented highly compressed and compacted news", as opposed to the more detailed and lengthy news in broadsheets. Tabloid newspapers were best known for a lower type of journalism that dealt with sleaze, corruption, sex scandals, celebrity gossip and sports. Nevertheless, the lines between the types of newspapers have blurred. Anthony Sampson, a member of the Scott Trust who owns the Guardian said: " the frontier between qualities and popular papers has virtually disappeared" (Bromley, 1998)

Furthermore, Ian Connell follows to argue both Franklin and Sparks views. He declares that Broadsheets have not 'dumbed down'. Connell says Franklin's study was not a complete comparison between the popular and the quality press. " The misrepresentations have arisen, I think, because neither has compared like with like."(Connell, 1998) Connell's quote shows he has a

different perspective and interpretation into the debate of tabloidization. Connell compares both papers to see if Franklin's views are somewhat arguably acceptable. He believes that "there are substantial amounts of quality news in both broadsheets and tabloids" (Connell, 1998) This quote is a directly opposing Franklin's idea that international news has, yet, disappeared in the quality press. Connell also argues that Sparks ideology to tabloid papers, it that they reject any sort of international news. However, in his study, Connell claims that tabloids have much public interest stories and that some international news, still virtually exist. "The Financial Times and the Economist. Together they contributed 36.4% of the international items." (Connell, 1998) Connell may agree with Franklin about sensational and gossipy news which appears in tabloids but does not see this present in broadsheets.

Following to this, Connell states that broadsheets are not becoming 'broadloids' and disagrees with Franklin as oppose to his argument that "more broadsheet items were published without illustration", as broadsheets have began to use more pictures (Franklin, 1998) His statement here contradicts what he later claims that "politics was the most frequently occurring main topic in the UK press". (Franklin, 1998) As known, broadsheets contain more political and foreign news while tabloids tend to mention politics through human interest stories. Connell's observations explain that a traditional content is carried by broadsheets, yet they may use tabloid style to twist those traditionally written articles. In contrast, Franklin declares that "the style and formats of broadsheets are changing" (Franklin,

1998) but he appears to note only on the use of tabloid style language in the headlines of the 'quality' papers.

A comparison in the change of some British newspapers may help to conclude whether broadsheet have become 'broadloid'. Martin Conboy states that " newspapers which use the tabloid size but do not use its language, such as... The Independent and The Times... demonstrate that it is the language which is more important in the make-up of a tabloid than the format itself." (Conboy, 2006) However Sanes defences and believes that " tabloids have not come close to providing the range of material now regularly offered by the broadsheets." (Sanes, 1997)

In 2003 The Independent started concurrent production of both broadsheet and tabloid compact editions, carrying exactly the same content. This paper is seen the most colourful paper among the other broadsheets. Articles include international and political news, but a great quantity of human interest subjects are varied in the news section. However, there is often some clearly identical language and format to tabloid style, with the use of pictures, pun headline and speech bubbles, which all indicate a tabloid style paper. The Sunday Times did likewise, but with less apparent success, with " readers vocally opposing the change" (Sanes, 1997). The format is big in size but the inside includes many adverts, which is seen to be the great values of a tabloid. They contain illustrations and big attractive picture nearly in every page but do not include much of the human interest topics. Yet most of the human interest stories and celebrity gossip are seen to be found in the news review, which makes this paper, indeed, 'broadloid'.

When the Independent launched its new tabloid format, it was a shock for the Guardian's creative team, renowned for its strong design ethos and forward-thinking approach. Plans for its own reformat were thought about intensively. 'We'd always been the British paper that took design most seriously,' claims Mark Porter, the Guardian's creative director. 'We've always had a reputation for that and I suppose we always liked to think we were the most innovative British paper.' The Guardian had regained its laurels. Within two years, it was back on top with a new design and format: the 'Berliner' format – a midway size paper between a broadsheet and a tabloid. As the pressure to follow the crowd increased, Mark Porter spent a long period of time experimenting with a tabloid Guardian, but it soon became clear that it wasn't possible to convert a broadsheet newspaper to tabloid without radically changing both the journalism and the design. "The idea that you could was absurd," he says. 'It wasn't going to be that straightforward and the editor, in particular, was very concerned that if we went down that route we would be forced, even if we didn't want to, to change the journalism and the way we presented the stories. Harcup and O'Neil (2001) suggest "that celebrity has become a major factor in determining whether a news story is selected for inclusion in a newspaper", and thus is the result of defining if a broadsheet becomes broadloid. They also conclude that "The UK press seems obsessed with celebrities such as TV soap stars, sports stars, film stars, and, of course, royalty", (Harcup and O'Neil, 2001) which may well predict the upcoming future of broadsheets. However, Porter was looking to create a newspaper where the pictures worked just as hard as the text, offering an alternative way for time-pressed readers to engage with the paper.

The main motivation cited for the shifts in the analyzed papers above are " that owners use human interest topics and illustrations to make the paper appealing to the readers", (Sanes, 1997) The Independent only needs to transform the language in order to become a tabloid paper. Conboy would probably disagree because the language shows a distant style to tabloids. Bromley believes that " owners bring in tabloid values to the quality to attract more readers" (Bromley, 1998). I would disagree as there are still people who carry more interest to broadsheets than tabloids. However, since the transformation of many broadsheet newspapers occurred, " it gave the readers the choice which content they desired to read." (Sanes, 1997) It is presumably hoped that many readers will find the smaller formats of a tabloid, more convenient, in fact " it remains to be seen how this shake-up will affect the usage of the term 'broadsheet'" (Sanes, 1997).

Newspapers, however, have always used free subscription trials and other promotions, with advertising platforms such as new or expanded feature sections, and with better home and newsstand distribution in order to sell a successful paper. However, " struggling publishers often seek the quickest method to cut costs and increase circulation without harming ad revenues" (McLahlan and Golding, 2000) Many in Britain see their salvation in changing formats; they believe that switching to a more compact one, such as the tabloid format, may lift circulation by attracting disaffected newspaper readers. " Several important broadsheets across Britain have recently converted themselves into tabloids" (du Pont, 1998) and the format have proved popular in the year following the transformation.

Advertisements are necessary in the production of newspapers. " The popular press, it is conventionally reckoned that only 20 percent of revenues come from advertising... the quality press, on the other hand, receives 60 percent of its revenues from advertising". (Sparks, 2001)

Advertising agencies give broadsheets their money as they believe " the popular press target the working class", (Sparks, 2001). This is the only strategy they could possibly use with tabloids as it enables them to advertise in certain papers to target 'their' specific customers. On the other hand, the quality papers aim at the middle and upper class. As a result, their pages include highly paid advertising products. In other words, if selling luxury goods, advertisers will pay much more to get to people who can afford high profile adverts. Alternatively, if selling ringtones, advertisers will not pay as much as they aim at vast readership.

Notably, they follow this process as the middle/upper class people are able to afford those high-priced advertising products. Conversely, Spark argues that poorer readers are excluded from having niche newspapers aimed at them, unlike richer people. He follows to explain that " democratic inequality based on income" (Sparks, 2001) is the reason for the major barrier between the quality papers; as the tabloids do not carry the power of press freedom.

It can be said that corporate ownership have played a role in the process of 'tabloidization' and thus involved bifurcation in newspapers. When it comes down to it, the underlying goal of any corporation is to make profits. That is the nature of the business world. Marketing has become a large part of the news. Also what underlies this argument was the deregulation of television in

the 1980's. Robin Anderson (1995) states: " Before deregulation, corporate speculators did not purchase stations solely for the purpose of commodity trading. After deregulation, however, speculators who had no interest or experience in the media bought and sold stations simply to make a profit. Corporate investors would often cut corners to make a profit 'by' cutting news departments, and giving into advertiser demands (Anderson, 1995). Deregulation here is what allowed the corporations to purchase the T. V. networks. This makes it a major contributor to tabloidization, even if it was an indirect one. In fact, not just in T. V networks does this happen but " newspaper proprietors were also accused of treating their titles as business properties with 'a social purpose'". (Greenslade cited in Bromley).

Bromley believes the problem with 'broadloid' is from magazines. Magazines " began to pursue an editorial mix of sex, celebrity and sleaze in a far more aggressive way."(Bromley, 1998) Market competition, advertisements and ownership are affecting the state of the media. There is a clear sign that 'broadloid' is taking place. The format may be reducing to one of a tabloid but the content's majority contains hard news. However, it is seen that money is making owners revalue the 'public interest'.

In conclusion to my analysis above, it can be notified that broadsheets have not seen to dramatically change as Franklin argues, conversely, it merely depends on the readers to the type of news they choose to read. Arguably, there is, yet a division between the tabloid and broadsheet newspapers, but this division lies under the use of language and format; the papers chose to present. Whether tabloidization started all the above arguments, or vice versa, it is a question that we may never know the answer to. Perhaps,

finding the answer to it may be the key to finding the true answer to what caused 'tabloidization'. Whether we know where it came from or not, the fact that 'tabloidization' is here; still remains and it appears to compete and challenge the success on British newspapers.