

Tabloidization and the Irish Press Media

An analysis of how the *Irish Independent* reacted to the introduction of Irish versions of British tabloids.

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Dedication

In loving memory of my mother Deirdre Kennedy Mooney, my aunt Nuala Kennedy O' Brien and my grandmothers Kathleen Mooney and Molly Kennedy. I am lucky to have known such strong women – I miss you all. RIP.

Abstract

The underlying theoretical assumption of this study is that tabloidization is the result of amplified market pressures such as increased competition. These market pressures dictate that a newspaper's content, layout and tone must appeal to the widest market possible in order to retain and gain readers and advertisers (McNair, 2001). This study examines tabloidization in the Irish press, prior to and following the introduction of Irish versions of British tabloids. Using the conceptual lens of tabloidization and the framework of McLachlan and Golding (2000), this research presents a content analysis of the *Irish Independent* during a one week period in the years 1986, 1996 and 2006. Discourse analysis is further utilised to support the results of the content analysis.

The findings demonstrate that over the period of analysis the *Irish Independent* has become more tabloidised in its range of topics, layout and use of language. However, there was no significant increase in presenting the main actor of each article in terms of his/her private life. The results also indicate that the extent of tabloidization varied over the period of analysis, with 1996 showing less markers of tabloidization compared to 1986 and 2006. This suggests that the newspaper may have reacted differently to the introduction of the tabloid *Irish Sun* in 1996, compared to the mid-market *Irish Daily Mail* in 2006. In conclusion, the results indicate that market pressures do result in changes to a newspaper's content, layout and tone, though these changes may not necessarily be in the direction of tabloidization.

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Introduction

The concept of tabloidization, often described as the 'dumbing down' of news (McNair, 2001:44), has been heavily dissected and debated recently (Biressi and Nunn, 2008; Sparks and Tulloch, 2000). It is argued that tabloidization trends have resulted in serious, objective journalism being replaced with a cultural form which is less about serious issues of concern and instead focuses on entertaining, thereby appealing to a mass market (Brookes, 2000). Respected reporters such as John Pilger contend that a generation of journalists now exists who believe racism, sexism, voyeurism, the ridiculing of people and fabrications are what the public want (1991). At the heart of this debate, critics suggest that the subsequent dearth of serious, accurate information, deemed necessary for citizens to make decisions of importance, is damaging the public sphere by causing a general apathy to political and social issues (McNair, 2001).

Since the late 1980s, the indigenous Irish newspaper industry has expressed concern over the impact of freely available British newspapers, and British tabloids in particular (Horgan, 2001). The total sales of British newspapers have increased substantially during the past twenty years, with tabloids such as the *Daily Sun* showing the greatest increase (Kelly and Truetzschler, 1997). British tabloids have further amplified their presence in Ireland by providing Irish editions of their newspapers. These have become progressively more popular, adding further competition to an already competitive newspaper marketplace, ensuring that the indigenous newspapers are under increased pressure to retain, and increase, their readership. Although the Irish press traditionally focused on serious journalism, over the last twenty years Irish newspapers have been accused of becoming similar to British tabloids (London, 2007). It is commonly believed that the moral, serious ethics of Irish journalism are slipping away, and instead a new type of journalism is replacing the hard news of the past with a type of news that focuses on sensationalism and entertainment (Seanad Eireann, 1995). Newspapers as respected as the *Washington Times* have suggested that Ireland "has become a vulgarized version of its British counterpart", where entertainment personalities are taken as seriously as public policy spokesmen (London, 2007).

The role newspapers play in providing information is well recognised. While many countries have seen a decrease in newspaper readership, with people turning to television to keep them informed, newspaper readership is still high in Ireland (National Newspapers of Ireland, 2008). This study aims to examine whether the introduction of Irish versions of British tabloids, especially the *Irish Sun* and *Irish Daily Mail*, have resulted in the indigenous press moving away from weighty news stories of politics and economics, to light-hearted topics of celebrity news and other staple topics of the tabloid agenda. It has been suggested that even organisations where commercial market criteria do

not apply, such as the BBC, have had to succumb to a certain amount of infotainment because the public has come to expect it (McNair, 2001). Therefore, it could be argued that these changes should be amplified in the competitive, commercial, Irish market.

It is maintained that the increasing presence and popularity of the British morning tabloids has affected the Independent Group (now Independent News Media) and its flagship *Irish Independent* (Horgan, 2001), in particular. Unlike many broadsheets, such as the *Irish Times*, who target ABC1 readers in particular, the *Irish Independent* has always attracted readers from a broad range of social demographics (JNRS, 2008). The introduction of Irish editions of British tabloids ensured that Irish readers had a far greater choice of newspapers, especially tabloid or mid-market newspapers which are not traditionally targeted at readers from the ABC1 demographic. This would indicate that the British tabloids were more likely to impact on the *Irish Independent*, rather than newspapers such as the *Irish Times*.

The presence of the UK tabloids and the introduction of Irish versions of them have resulted in heated debates about their effect on the Irish news-sphere. However, while this has been discussed by many people, organisations and public bodies, there has been little academic research carried out on the actual effect of UK tabloids on Irish newspaper content. It has been suggested that tabloidization of the press “trivialises serious issues, marginalises important information, and leads to mass apathy and cynicism” (McNair, 2001:44). With possible consequences such as these, it is necessary to see if UK tabloid values have impacted on the Irish press.

As the most popular daily newspaper in Ireland (Joint National Readership Survey (JNRS), 2008), the news provided by the *Irish Independent* plays a key informational role. This study will examine tabloidization, focusing on the content, style and language in the *Irish Independent*, prior to and following the introductions of Irish versions of the *Sun* and the *Daily Mail*. While newspapers have added numerous supplements dedicated to lifestyle, sports and other soft news items, this study will not analyse these as they clearly fall under a separate banner to ‘news’. Instead one week of the newspaper’s home or main news in the years 1986, 1996 and 2006 will be examined by conducting a content analysis, accompanied by supporting discourse analysis.

This research will look at how a rapidly changing market reacts to globalisation of the media industry. It will also prove valuable for investigating how media values might be exported and challenged in a new market. Set out in a number of sections, the study will firstly present a literature review of the current arguments on tabloidization and its role in the public sphere. The Irish newspaper market will also be discussed in order to document the key changes in the industry over

the past twenty years. A methodology chapter will also be presented, explaining the choices of methodology, the coding process and the benefits of content analyses. This will be followed by a findings and discussions chapter which will outline the findings and discuss the results in detail. Finally, conclusions drawn from the research will be offered.

Literature Review

It is argued that tabloidization should be studied with reference to the historical, cultural and commercial factors of the market in question (Esser, 1999). Therefore, this literature review will discuss the Irish newspaper market, as well as detailing tabloidization, its causes and effects. Although there have been no academic studies of tabloidization in the Irish press to date, the broad range of literature on tabloids and tabloid culture, and the limited number of academic work available on the Irish media provide the basis for this literature review.

2.1 Tabloidization

It is commonly accepted that as tabloids have changed and altered over the years (Rooney, 2000), so too have broadsheets (McLachlan and Golding, 2000). Critics have argued that the frontier between quality and popular papers has virtually disappeared in the UK since the 1980s, with broadsheets adopting more tabloid-like styles (Sampson, 1996). This assumption that the news media are becoming more tabloid-like has generated much debate, with academics regularly analysing the characteristics of changes found in the quality, quantity and the diversity of news' products (McLachlan and Golding, 2000; Biressi and Nunn, 2008). This process is predominantly referred to as tabloidization.

Esser (1999) has argued that tabloidization can be understood at both a micro- and macro- level. On a micro-level, tabloidization can be seen as a media phenomenon that involves the amendment of media formats because of commercial requirements and reader preferences (ibid.). On a macro-level, it is a social phenomenon "instigating and symbolizing major changes" in society (Esser, 1999:293). The following section will look at tabloidization in relation to the cause and processes of tabloidization (micro-level) and its effect on the public sphere (macro-level).

2.1.1 Defining tabloid

The concept of tabloidization forms the foundation of this research. However, tabloidization is difficult to define, not least due to the complexity in defining what a tabloid is. Nevertheless, in order to understand tabloidization, it will be necessary to first provide an awareness of what a tabloid is.

The word tabloid is often used in varying contexts. For example, tabloid is used to refer to the size and shape of a newspaper. However, as Sparks (2000) notes, not all tabloid sized newspapers are tabloid in the pejorative sense of the word. For example, although tabloid in size, *Le Monde* and the *Times* are seen to be the very opposite in terms of content or design. The word tabloid is also used in

discussions about television and radio (Biressi and Nunn, 2008). Therefore, while the use of the word tabloid in terms of size and shape is useful, especially in cases where a newspaper has attempted to make itself more accessible to its readers by altering its layout or shape, it does not provide an unmistakable definition of a tabloid.

Tabloid is also used to describe content and language. It is argued that tabloids devote relatively little attention to politics and economics, instead focusing on sports, scandal and popular entertainment (Spark, 2000). Similarly, tabloid is used to describe a certain type of writing, which tends to be casual, concise and sensationalist in both tone and language (Conboy, 2006). In contrast to this, the broadsheet media focus heavily on informing the public, using serious language and tones (McLachlan and Golding, 2000).

Tabloids are also country specific. For instance, in the highly competitive British newspaper market, tabloids, while focusing on celebrities and infotainment, also include 'serious' news, even if it is presented in a concise manner (Uribe and Gunter, 2004). In contrast, in the uncompetitive newspaper market in the USA, tabloids tend to shun news in the traditional sense of the word (Bird, 2008). Similarly, while the UK has three newspaper categories – serious, mid-market and tabloid, Ireland, with its history of broadsheet journalism, tends to classify newspapers as either broadsheet or tabloid (Horgan, 2001). This ensures that mid-market newspapers, such as the *Daily Mail*, are described as tabloids in Ireland.

As documented above, it is difficult to define tabloid. Although the word is used to refer to size, style, content and language, individually these defining factors do not provide a complete definition. Instead, it could be argued that the definition of tabloid, and therefore tabloidization, is country specific, dependent on cultural and economic factors of the media market.

2.1.2 Tabloidization and the tabloidization process

Like the word tabloid, there is no specific meaning for tabloidization. Although the term was initially used to describe a decrease in journalistic standards, it is now regularly applied to all types of popular media content including reality TV, talk-shows, celebrity magazines and even documentary (Biressi and Nunn, 2008). In relation to journalism, most studies define tabloidization in terms of a decrease in hard news, an increase in soft news and an emphasis on the private lives of both regular and famous people (Sparks, 2000). Other studies on tabloidization have included elements such as a feminisation of content (Pantti, 2005), changes in journalistic behaviour (Esser, 1999) and a dynamic layout (Schonbach, 2000).

It is argued that tabloidization causes a shift in the boundary of journalism, resulting in the serious press or media moving towards tabloid content and values (Spark, 2000). As noted, tabloids focus much of their attention on the personal and private lives of both celebrities and ordinary people (Bird, 2008). Serious political, economic and social issues that lack a sensationalist element are relegated to small updates, or even avoided completely (Sparks, 2000). Tabloidization results in a greater number of infotainment and 'soft news' stories found in the serious press. According to Franklin (1997:45), the "news media have increasingly become part of the entertainment industry instead of providing a forum for informed debate of key issues of public concern". For example, the divorce proceedings of Sir Paul McCartney and Heather Mills were widely covered by both the tabloid and serious press (cf. Addley, 2008 and Flynn et al, 2008). This shift towards entertainment and soft news has been described as newszak – "news converted into entertainment" (Franklin, 1997:5).

However tabloidization, in terms of a shift in the boundaries of journalism, is not simply limited to a decrease in serious news and an increase of soft news. Tabloidization may also result in decontextualisation and personalisation (Bird, 2000). In their study on UK tabloids and climate change, Boykoff and Mansfield (2008) highlight how tabloids frequently report climate change inaccurately, choosing what to report without providing context. For example, the introduction of carbon taxes was reported in the *Daily Mail* as "Brown prepares to put up tax on petrol" (in Boykoff and Mansfield, 2008: 3). The study highlighted the marked difference between newspaper reports and the scientific data available, with all tabloid newspapers reporting the scientific data inaccurately or without the necessary context for readers to understand the data (ibid.). Similarly, both Bird (2000) and Calabrese (2000) have noted how tabloidised articles often focus on an individual and provide limited context, which is essential for readers to develop an understanding of the situation at hand.

It is argued that the priorities of journalism also alter during the tabloidization process (Sparks, 2000). Instead of providing serious information for citizens, it is maintained that the media now prioritise profits over their public service function (McNair, 2001). Franklin notes that broadsheet newspapers now contain less news, especially investigative stories, foreign and political news (1997). It is argued that the decline in serious news reflects an increasingly competitive and changing market place (ibid.), where market principles have infiltrated "the previously protected (partially, at least) sphere of public information" (McNair, 2001:44). Competition among news media has increased, with ownership becoming more concentrated and media conglomerates amplifying in size and power. Market pressures dictate that newspapers focus on profitable stories which draw readers and, therefore, advertisers, and can be collected as inexpensively as possible (Sampson, 1996). As

investigatory and foreign news is expensive to collect, newspapers have reassigned their focus to cheaper options such as entertainment, lifestyle and columnists (Franklin, 1997), which draw higher advertising revenue (Sampson, 1996). There has been a “refinement of a commercialised journalism which prioritises the desires of advertisers to reach large audiences above all other concerns” (Conboy, 2006:207). In fact, it is argued that tabloidization is primarily the results of a commercial media, increased competition and the need to attract advertisers (Esser, 1999).

Tabloidization also describes shifts in the boundaries of taste within media forms (Sparks, 2000). The purpose of tabloidized news is ‘less to inform than to elicit sympathy – a collective “Oh how dreadful” – from the readership’ (Franklin, 1997: 8). It is argued that news reports exploit personal tragedies, such as a tragic death of a child, for public spectacle, appealing to our morbid curiosities (ibid.). Similarly, recent trends have resulted in a genre of media content where people confess their deeply personal, and often complex, problems and are offered advice by unqualified or non-accredited people. In this sense, tabloidization can be seen as a type of feminisation (Pantti, 2005). Livingstone and Lunt (1994 in Pantti, 2005) note this confessional media culture could weaken patriarchal authority, allowing the individual and his/her experiences to be valued as valid information. However, this confessional culture is a particularly contentious feature of tabloidization, condemned as trivial or even degrading (Aldridge, 2001). It is argued that although this new emotionality may offer temporary and comforting communities of feeling, it “does not lead to collective political participation and moral action” (Pantti, 2005:374).

While much of the debate on tabloidization focuses on changes to content, Franklin has argued that recent trends in newspapers have resulted in the growth of broadloids (1997:7). These are broadsheet newspapers that appear to resemble tabloids in terms of style and layout, as well as content (ibid.). Tabloid staples such as banner headlines, alliteration and the use of puns have become common features of serious newspapers (ibid.). Similarly many traditional newspapers have increased their font size and number of pictures, and feature less text, shorter words, bigger pictures and colour pictures (ibid.). These new dynamic layouts and style changes can be considered a feature of tabloidization (Schonbach, 2000).

Tabloidization results in a broadsheet newspaper’s news agenda moving closer to that of the tabloids, with an increase in visual material, a shortening of articles, changes to editorial copy and a move away from hard news reporting towards softer items, features and columns (Sparks, 2000). Therefore, tabloidization could be described as an increased emphasis on entertaining, using emotive content, a dynamic layout, increased visuals and simple, easy-to consume articles

(Schonbach, 2000). However, cultural, historical and market pressures also need to be considered when examining tabloidization (Esser, 1999).

2.1.3 The Public Sphere, Democracy and Tabloidization.

As noted, studies have shown that the tabloidization process has resulted in the serious media moving towards the news values of tabloids (McLachlan and Golding, 2000). However, despite denunciation of tabloids, the extent and exact nature of these changes has been disputed by certain writers (Stothard (1997) in Aldridge, 2001; Sparks, 2000). Others have questioned whether these changes have possible damaging consequences for society (Brants, 1998), leading to suggestions that tabloidization damages the public sphere by “transforming journalistic culture from a source of mass enlightenment and civic empowerment to a cause of mass pacification and intellectual degeneration” (McNair, 2001: 45).

At a primary level the function of news is to provide us with an ongoing narrative about the world. From a modernist perspective, the media plays an important role in the democratic process, providing information for citizens necessary to formulate judgements and make informed decisions (ibid.). In fact, most people in modern democracies receive their news through the mass media, with the media acting as both an input and output of the political system (Klein, 2000). The media accomplish their input function by publishing facts and opinions of social relevance, indicating how the public feels about problems, people and decisions, while their output role is fulfilled by providing the public with information about decisions, political and social processes and the political system (ibid). This creates a mediated public sphere, a place where the public can access societal dialogues (Dahlgren, 1995). The result is a “mediated publicness”, a public life marked by a much higher degree of visibility (Örnebring and Jönsson, 2008: 25).

Tabloidization mitigates against the public sphere, by working in opposition to the creation of “general truths, general principles, which could guide the formulation and implementation of the necessary regulation of social life” (Gripsrud, 1992: 89). Bourdieu’s (1996 in Gripsrud, 2008) critique of journalism and its role in the public and cultural sphere highlights how journalism is losing its autonomy to economic and market principles. Instead, the public sphere becomes an “arena for spectacle, presented mainly as entertainment”, distracting “the public from matters of principle by offering voyeuristic pseudo-insights into individual matters” (Gripsrud, 1992: 90). Tabloidization places the emphasis on the sensational, the personal and the personality, rather than providing vital information necessary for the public sphere. Without an informed citizenry, “democracy is improvised and at risk” (Franklin, 1997:5).

While Habermas initially claimed there was one singular public sphere (1989), Fraser suggests there are a number of public spheres (1992). After all, there is always a central struggle for visibility, resulting in a mediated public sphere consisting of mainstream and alternative spheres (Örnebring and Jönsson, 2008:25). It could be argued that tabloids or tabloidised newspapers act as an alternative sphere, allowing marginalised and non-elitist groups to gain access and representation (Örnebring and Jönsson, 2008). Tabloids have been credited with providing “pleasures that are particularly pertinent to those who feel barred from participating in controlling discourse of any sort” (Fiske, 1989: 116). Those in favour of tabloid journalism argue that the traditional press attempt to reinforce consensus and dominant hierarchies (Fiske, 1992), ensuring an inherently elitist public sphere. In contrast, it has been suggested that tabloid journalism provides an alternative media sphere for public discourse, where traditional political reporting and criticism of political elites and processes can work alongside each other, thereby avoiding the deferent nature towards traditional authority that is frequently found in the quality press (Örnebring and Jönsson, 2008). This postmodern perspective “views the particularisation of public issues as a corrective to the universalising, impersonal, abstract modes of address and forms of information associated with traditional media” (Peck, 2000: 233).

Under these arguments, tabloidised journalism is a journalistic ‘other’. However, it is argued that there has always been an ‘other’, a type of journalism that appealed to a portion of the population, not typically targeted by traditional media (Örnebring and Jönsson, 2008). This has ranged from the penny press of the 1800s (Gripsrud, 2008) to modern day tabloids.

While tabloids are often viewed with suspicion in some countries, in others tabloids are seen “as one of the ways that news can be rescued from irrelevance to the lives of the mass of people who would otherwise reject it entirely” (Sparks, 2000:9). However, some suggest that this argument is only put forward by those who produce and profit from tabloidization (Gripsrud, 2008). While it is claimed that tabloid journalism provides an alternative public sphere for citizens, it could also be argued that this alternative sphere is provided by popular journalism, rather than tabloids. The confusion between the definitions of tabloid and popular journalism is at the core of this issue. Popular journalism provides news often necessary for citizens, such as local political or health news (ibid.). These types of journalism are educational and serious, but simultaneously not sufficiently highbrow to belong to the quality agenda (ibid.). In contrast, tabloid journalism focuses on the sensational, the celebrity and the often unnecessary, providing limited, if any, information needed for participation in the public sphere (McNair, 2001). Although popular journalism may be beneficial for the public sphere, these arguments demonstrate that tabloid journalism has little benefit to offer the society we live in.

2.2 Irish Media Sphere

With a history of broadsheet and serious journalism, Irish tabloids, in contrast with their UK counterparts, were a relatively late arrival to the newspaper market. The *Sunday World* was first published in 1973, and although tabloid in format, it was, and is, recognised for its investigatory journalism and its focus on Irish politics and issues (Horgan, 2001).

The original national Irish daily tabloid, the *Irish Daily Star*, was launched in 1988 and has a relatively high concentration of Irish news (Kevin, 2003). Although a British version of the *Daily Star* was previously available in Ireland prior to 1988, a collaboration between the Independent Group and United Newspapers (now Express Newspapers and the initial publishers of the *Daily Star*) launched an Irish edition and increased the readership from 47,000 prior in 1988 (Horgan, 2001) to 92,000 by 1999 (Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC), 1999 in Medialive, 1999). It was one of the first hybrid newspapers in Ireland, blending limited domestically generated content with whole pages of content from the British edition (Horgan, 2001). Although this formula was initially unsuccessful, the newspaper was redesigned in 1990, increasing its Irish content and although focusing on scandal, it avoided the sex scandals associated with the UK *Star* (ibid.). This documented that although some media values could be exported, others had to be changed and altered. For example, unlike in the UK, the nipples of the *Star* cartoon character were covered by stars in the Irish edition (ibid.).

However, the close relationship, in both proximity and language, between Ireland and the UK ensured that many Irish people, especially those in urban areas such as Dublin, were regularly reading British newspapers. There was particular interest in the British tabloid press, especially newspapers such as the *Mirror* and the *Sun*, which had relatively high circulation figures at 60,000 and 30,000 each respectively in 1990 (Barrett, 2000). These newspapers operated an aggressive marketing campaign, including low cover prices (Commission on the Newspaper Industry, 1996). By 1995, Irish newspapers' share of the market dropped to a low of 69 percent, a decrease of seven percent in five years. In part response to this and the increased presence of British newspapers, the Irish government set up a commission – The Commission on the Newspaper Industry – to examine the Irish newspaper sphere. However, while recognising the threat of British newspapers, the Commission suggested that the indigenous press were also responsible for their own declining readership (ibid.).

Although Independent News Media (INM) are part-owners of the only Irish daily tabloid, the *Star*, the media group were also most affected by the increasing presence and popularity of British newspapers, and especially the threat of the tabloid morning newspapers (Horgan, 2001). While its flagship newspaper, the *Irish Independent*, is the most read daily newspaper in Ireland (ABC, 2008),

its circulation decreased by nearly eight thousand from 1990 to 1993, leading critics to suggest that the UK tabloids were causing the decline (Horgan, 2001).

This interest in British newspapers, as well as the dramatic growth of the economy and the success of the *Irish Daily Star*, indicated that there was a demand for tabloids, and Irish versions of them. The *Irish Sun* was launched in the mid-1990s, taking most of its content from its British counterpart. UK titles increased their readership at a marginally higher rate than their Irish competitors during the 1990s, with the *Irish Sun* accounting for most of this growth. Its circulation figures increased from 30,000 in 1990 with the UK import, to 103,000 by 1999 after the introduction of the Irish edition (ABC figures in Horgan, 2001). Following the success of the other British imports, the *Daily Mail* launched a version of its mid-market newspaper in 2006. Introduced to directly compete with the broadsheet *Irish Independent*, the *Irish Daily Mail* marketed heavily and sold for substantially less than the *Irish Independent* (RTE, 2006)

Both the Irish editions of the *Irish Sun* and *Irish Daily Mail* have been changed and altered to make them more palatable to the Irish reader. Like the *Irish Star*, these are hybrid newspapers, containing much of the same content as the main UK edition, or the Scottish edition in the case of the *Irish Sun* (Burton and Drake, 2004). However they also include Irish news and editorial content, as well as Irish specific advertising. However, neither the *Irish Daily Mail* nor the *Irish Sun* are classed as Irish newspapers. This is because they do not meet the criteria set by the Commission on the Newspaper Industry (1996); most of the *Irish Daily Mail* or the *Irish Sun* content is generated in the UK, there are limited staff based in Ireland and much of the news does not concern Irish issues.

The editorial line also differs between the British and Irish editions. In the past, the British edition of the *Sun* has been described as anti-Irish (Searle, 1989). In fact, Searle (1989: 25) argues that the *Sun* regularly included articles, especially during the 1970s and 1980s, which caused an anti-Irish discourse in Britain. However, both the *Irish Sun* and *Irish Daily Mail's* editorial line has been altered for the Irish market and now tends to replace articles that could be seen as anti-Irish with ones more acceptable to their Irish readers. For example, the film, *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, was described as the most pro-IRA film ever by the *Sun* in the UK (Greenslade, 2006). Yet the *Irish Sun* hailed the film as an Irish success story, praising it for giving "the Brits a tanning" (Wells, 2005). Similarly, both versions of the *Daily Mail* also ran contrasting articles (Greenslade, 2006). The newspapers have recognised that some values cannot be exported. This is akin to the localisation of newspapers in Scotland which has seen the *Sun* and other London newspapers print Scottish editions to directly compete with local Scottish newspapers (Williams, 2003). Like the Irish editions, the Scottish editions also take a different editorial line to their London counterparts (ibid.)

British tabloids and their Irish editions now play a key role in producing news for the Irish marketplace. The Irish newspaper sphere is very competitive, with 13 national morning newspapers for a country with a population of four million. McNair (2001: 44) has argued that the 'dumbing down' of journalism is a consequence primarily of increased commercial pressures. Under this argument, when the importance of 'hard news' was the general consensus in the Irish press, it was much easier for the newspapers to apply higher standards of news values. The increased market pressures may have resulted in a tabloidization.

2.3 Conclusion

This literature review highlights that tabloidization describes a reduction in hard news, an increase in soft news, a dynamic layout, sensationalist language and an emphasis on the individual (Sparks, 2000). The process is the result of increased market pressures and can impact differently on varying media markets (Esser, 1999). Consequently, it could be suggested that the Irish newspaper market, with its high degree of competition, is particularly vulnerable to tabloidization.

Methodology

3.1 Aims, Objectives and Research Questions

The study drew on the hypothesis that increased market pressures, in the form of Irish versions of British tabloids, have caused a tabloidization of the *Irish Independent's* main news section during the period 1986 to 2006. A number of aims, objectives and research questions were formulated to allow an examination of this hypothesis.

3.1.1 Aims

The aims of this study are:

1. To examine the concept of tabloidization and to further add to existing research
2. To discover if there has been a tabloidization of the Irish indigenous press due to the introduction of Irish editions of UK tabloids.

3.1.2 Objectives

To ensure that the aims are realised, it was necessary to formulate the following objectives:

1. To apply the concept of tabloidization to an Irish newspaper's news content by examining the emphasis placed on 'hard news' and 'soft news' prior to and after the introduction of Irish editions of UK tabloids.
2. To examine the style and layout of the newspaper and document if this has tabloidised over the period of analysis.
3. To examine if the language and tone in the *Irish Independent* has tabloidised, especially after the introduction of Irish versions of British tabloids.

3.1.3 Research Questions

A number of questions were derived from the aims and objectives.

3.1.3.1 Topics

Is there an increase in topics or content typically found in tabloid newspapers?

Is there an increase in the number of articles written about celebrities or entertainment?

Has the *Irish Independent* increased its crime coverage over the period?

Is there an increase in human interest stories?

Has there been a decrease in 'serious' news?

3.1.3.2 Language and tone.

Does the *Irish Independent* use language typical of broadsheet, mid-market or tabloid newspaper, and has this changed?

Are the articles written in a tabloid tone?

Does the newspaper portray public people in terms of the private or public life?

Has there been an increase in stories which focus on scandal?

3.1.3.3 Style

Has the layout become more tabloid-like?

Has the newspaper introduced an easier layout, with clear section headings, etc?

Has there been an increase in images or have these images increased in size?

Are graphs, graphics and subheadings used more often?

Have the headlines changed?

3.2 The research methods

Quantitative content analysis, combined with secondary qualitative discourse analysis, was carried out to analyse tabloidization within the *Irish Independent*. The analysis covered a 20 year period and focused on a number of indicators of tabloidization derived from the literature research.

3.2.1 Content analysis

The main methodology used in this study was content analysis, specifically adapted for academic communications studies. The method enables a systematic examination of the content in order to accurately assess the true extent of a phenomenon, in this case tabloidization, and its potential to influence or cause harm (Traudt, 2005). Using representative samples of content, coders are trained to use the category rules employed to gauge or reveal variations in content (Riffe et al, 2005). The data collected is then analysed to explain distinctive patterns and characteristics or to discover significant relationships among the content examined (ibid.).

The definition of quantitative content analysis can be summed up as:

...the systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication, which have been assigned numeric values according to valid measurement rules and the analysis of relationships involving those values using statistical methods, to describe the communication, draw inferences about its meaning, or infer from the communication to its context, both of production and consumption (Riffe et al, 2005:25).

Content analysis involves four main stages:

1. Identifying and defining the sample of media to be analysed.
2. Establishing the variables and categories of content.
3. Measuring the existence and occurrence of each of the categories within the sample.
4. Interpreting the results.

3.2.1.1 Population and sample.

Although the study aimed to examine tabloidization of the Irish press, it would have been very difficult to analyse all national newspapers in the timeframe available. Therefore, boundaries were set to determine the parameters of the investigation. The universe was thus defined as the *Irish Independent*, analysing a one week period (Monday to Friday) in the years 1986, 1996 and 2006.

The *Irish Independent* was selected because it has the highest circulation in Ireland (JNRS, 2008), indicating a large audience that could potentially be affected by the messages within its content. The years chosen offered an insight into the Irish newspaper market during three different periods. During the first period, 1986, the *Irish Independent* operated in a newspaper market that was free from Irish tabloids; though, as noted, copies of the British tabloids were available in the bigger cities. The second period, 1996, occurred after the launch of the *Irish Sun* and the final period, November 2006, followed the introduction of the *Irish Daily Mail*, launched in direct competition with the *Irish Independent*. Although the *Daily Mail* is typically classed as a mid-market newspaper, this study classes the *Irish Daily Mail* as a tabloid in line with the arguments made in the literature review.

A sample week was then selected from this population. In a competitive marketplace, with newspapers directly targeting readers, newspapers may make use of defensive tactics to maintain readership. As the *Irish Daily Mail* and *Irish Sun* were launched in the first half of the year, it was felt that the sample should be taken from the second half, allowing the *Irish Independent* sufficient time to become familiar with its new operating environment. It was hoped that this would give a more accurate representation of its content. The summer months and December were ruled out due to Dáil¹ summer recess and the approaching Christmas holidays respectively as it was felt these factors could distort the results. A week period was then chosen randomly from October and November. The sample week was the first full week of November (Table 3.1). It was felt that this period would provide an accurate reflection of general newspaper coverage. There was nothing deemed significant enough that could change the way its content would generally appear.

As the study aimed to examine the Irish news section of an edition, rather than just the articles, random sampling was decided against. It is argued that newspapers can vary vastly from day to day due to supplements, emphasis on certain areas e.g. sport on Mondays, and number of pages (Riffe et al., 1998). Therefore it was necessary to include each weekday (Monday-Friday) to ensure an accurate representation of the newspaper's weekly content.

¹ Irish parliament

The sample comprised of 15 newspaper issues of the *Irish Independent*. The recording units, defined as articles that fell under the home news banner or articles found on pages that focused on home news, were analysed. All supplements were excluded for analysis, as were the international and business news pages, sports, entertainment and other sections. This exclusion was applied as the main aim of study is to examine if, and how, the main news section has become tabloidised in an Irish newspaper, rather than examine if the newspaper has become tabloidised.

Table 3.1 Sample in study

Period	Days	Issues	Week
3-7 Nov 1986	5	5	1
4-8 Nov 1996	5	5	1
6-10 Nov 2006	5	5	1
Total	15 days	15 issues	3 weeks

Originally, the intention was to also examine the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent*, *Irish Daily Mail* and *Irish Sun* for a one-week period in April 2008. However, after conducting a pilot study, the length of time it took to analyse each newspaper became a concern. This was largely due to the quantity of units to be analyzed within each newspaper edition. It was decided to omit this study as this would only document how ‘tabloid’ each newspaper currently is, rather than documenting if tabloidization has occurred. In contrast, the *Irish Independent* study could verify if this process has taken place which would answer the primary research question.

3.2.1.2 The framework

McLachlan and Golding’s (2000) pioneering study, which carried out a quantitative analysis of tabloidization in the British press by using four operational characteristics, provided an example of how to study this complex area. The characteristics are range, form, mode of address and market structures.

1. Range: During tabloidization, it is argued that newspapers move away from ‘hard’ news towards ‘softer’ items (Uribe and Gunter, 2004). By assessing the volume and prominence of various areas of reporting, in terms of subjects, it should be possible to see if there has been a tabloidization of range (ibid.)
2. Form: It has also been suggested that tabloidization has resulted in simplified formats. By examining the layout, pictures, vocabulary, syntax and presentation, it will be possible to assess if this is taking place (ibid.)
3. Mode of address or style: The tabloidization process results in the press moving away from a self-consciously serious style and mode of address to a style and assumed relationship that is more casual in both tone and language (McLachlan and Golding, 2000). By assessing the

tone of the article and the representation of characters in terms of public or private life, it will be possible to examine if the style has tabloidised over time.

4. Market structure: Tensions, such as competition, in the market place affect the distribution and production decision of media organisations and may result in tabloidization (Uribe and Gunter, 2004). While the empirical research primarily focused with the first three factors, it is also necessary to take market structure into consideration during the discussion of the results.

3.2.1.3 Units of analysis: designing the codebook

Using the four operational indicators outlined by McLachlan and Golding (2000), a set of variables was formulated to make the hypothesis of this study measurable. The advantage of using existing measures from another study was that these variables had already been tested (Riffe, et al, 2005: 92).

To facilitate the measuring of variables, a codebook was created (see appendix 2). Variables were operationalised further by devising categories by which these variables could be coded, with each category assigned a corresponding number where necessary. Specific coding instructions, classification rules and explanations accompanied the variables. These were written with the aim of being as explicit and detailed as possible in order to achieve the most accurate, valid and reliable results.

3.2.1.4 The pilot study.

A pilot study, analysing the sample from 1986, was conducted in order to test the coding procedure. This was considered an adequate sample as it enabled the measurements to be tested, providing an opportunity to highlight any issues with the codebook that subsequently required alteration, amendment or addition. The pilot study showed it was necessary to extend the list of genres, actors and events, and provide extra clarification in terms of how to code language and tone. The pilot study also indicated how long each article would take to code, suggesting a timeframe required to conduct the research.

3.2.1.5 Conducting the research.

The codebook was used to analyse each article according to 26 variables. The data was recorded on the coding sheets by hand and then inputted into the computer statistics programme SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for interpretation and analysis.

The length of time it took to analyse each newspaper edition differed as the size and number of articles varied over the time period. However, on average one article took approximately six minutes, indicating that the analysis of all 782 articles took approximately 80 hours (see appendix 3 for an example of how the articles were coded).

3.2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

While the primary method of analysis in this study is content analysis, secondary critical discourse analysis was utilised to enable an understanding of if, and how, the news discourse in the *Irish Independent* has tabloidised since 1986. In particular it looked at how the *Irish Independent* uses language to create, support or reinforce certain discourses, in particular a tabloid discourse which is known for its sensationalism and lack of 'serious' news.

Discourse can be seen as a socially and institutionally originating ideology, encoded in language (Fowler, 1991). Foucault, one of the most influential writers on discourse, argues that discourses are "taken-for-granted truths or practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (1972: 49). A discourse organises and gives structure to the style in which a specific topic, process or object is talked about, in so much as it "provides descriptions, rules, permissions and prohibitions of social and individual actions" (Kress, 1985: 7).

Discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary discipline, incorporating analysis of a variety of contexts ranging from the cognitive practices of production and reception to the sociocultural scope of communication and language use (van Dijk, 1988). Drawing on poststructuralist discourse theory and critical linguistics, critical discourse analysis focuses on how knowledge, power, social relations and identity are constructed through texts, either written or spoken (Luke, 1997).

Newspapers, as a primary source of written text, are credited with being influential in constructing or supporting societal discourses (Conboy, 2008). However, news discourse can be described as a practice which far from neutrally reflecting social reality with empirical facts intervenes in what is called 'the social construction of reality' (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Although researchers have documented that news selection and presentation are often habitual and conventional, rather than deliberate (Schlesinger, 1978), the choice of word, phrase, or sentence structure is not neutral; instead language acts as "a highly constructive mediator" (Fowler, 1991:1). Conboy (2006:4) notes that the style and use of language in a newspaper is an editorial strategy, allowing a readership to be targeted, among other things. Under this idea, language is used to entice a certain reader, using a standard of English familiar to the reader (ibid.) which helps support discourses generally held by, or to create discourses that will appeal to, a newspaper's (desired) readership (Fowler, 1991).

However, each text's (article's) idiosyncratic features are reconstructed and reconstituted into distinctive readings by individuals according to their own subjectivity. Foucault defines subjectivity as "the process through which results the constitution of the subject, or more exactly, of a subjectivity which is obviously only one of the given possibilities of organising a consciousness of self" (1996:472 in Bayers, 2004:20). Foucault suggests that a person's subjectivity is shaped because they live within a particular social, political and cultural environment, assigning particular meaning to texts because of their cultural or political setting (1972). However, Bayers argues that people can choose which discourse to take up in experiencing the world, and themselves, and position themselves in those discourses (2004:22).

Newspapers provide a discourse or, at least, a reflection of societal discourses. Although, disputed by some writers, it is argued that broadsheet and tabloid newspapers have intrinsically different news discourses (Connell, 1998:11). The newspaper a consumer reads is, therefore, a choice, whether made consciously or subconsciously. Although readers of the *Irish Independent* may not have created the discourses present in their society or in the newspaper, they make a choice to read a newspaper that reinforces certain ideologies. Similarly, tabloids are credited with providing an alternative public sphere, allowing readers to receive an alternative discourse to the one provided by the political and economic classes (Örnebring and Jönsson, 2008). Conboy has argued that tabloids produce a particular discourse where nationalism, crime and celebrity play a key role, replacing 'serious' issues such as politics (2006).

The *Irish Independent*, as the newspaper with the highest circulation in Ireland (JNRS, 2008), plays an instrumental role in providing information to the Irish people. The critical discourse analysis provided by this study examines how the *Irish Independent's* news discourse, focusing on language and syntax, has changed from 1986 to 2006. A total of thirty articles were selected for examination, focusing on the two main news stories from each edition. The lead story of the newspaper and the article on the front page accompanied by the largest picture or was longest in length were classed as the main stories. This study looks at the language, choice of word, syntax and choice of stories in order to document how language can be used to create, support or reinforce a certain discourse.

3.3 Evaluation of methods and limitations

As the foundation for content analysis is in scientific methodology, it has the advantage of being able to claim objectivity. This contrasts with qualitative methods which often rely on subjective interpretations by the researcher. The results produced by content analysis can, therefore, be regarded as more reliable than qualitative methods (Van Zoonen 1996: 69). Furthermore, using content analysis also facilitated gathering large amounts of data, enabling a greater range of

material to be analysed and consequently improving the ability to generalise the result. However, there are also disadvantages to content analysis. Its emphasis on manifest content prevents researchers from looking beyond explicit words and images and therefore impedes a deeper level of meaning, typically gained by reading between the lines (ibid.).

In contrast, the key contribution of discourse analysis is the “application of critical thought to social situation and the unveiling of hidden (or not so hidden) politics within the socially dominant as well as all other discourses” (Palmquist, 2001). However, it should be noted that language and discourse are not neutral or transparent means for describing or analysing the world (Luke, 1997). Discourse analysis does not present concrete answers based on scientific research. Therefore, the results of discourse analysis may be subjected to another deconstructed reading and counter-interpretations.

By utilising both qualitative and quantitative methods, it is hoped that the limitations of each method were lessened and the benefits of both were thus applied to the study. However, it should also be noted that the researcher lacked experience in both content and discourse analysis. Even though much study of both methods was undertaken to gain a fuller understanding of their delivery and structure, the author acknowledges that the data obtained could have a degree of error or bias due to this inexperience.

Findings and Discussion

The findings in this chapter present an indication of the extent of tabloidization in the *Irish Independent* throughout the period of analysis. These findings will be discussed by drawing on the literature review and on the operational characteristics of range, form and style (McLachlan and Golding, 2000). The structure of the media market in Ireland, especially in relation the introduction of British versions of Irish tabloids will also be considered.

4.1. Content Analysis

Although the *Irish Independent* has increased in size, there has been a decrease in the number of articles found in the main news section of the newspaper (See Table 4.1). Of the 782 articles analysed in this study, 652 were classed as news items, 124 as brief updates and six as investigative pieces.

Year	1986	1996	2006	Total
News story	221	215	216	652
Investigatory	6	0	0	6
Brief update	50	31	43	124
Total	277	246	259	782

Table 4.1

4.1.1 Range – changes to the content

Much of the tabloidization critique has focused on the inadequate coverage of serious news items and the increase in soft news which, it is argued, occurs during the tabloidization process (Sparks, 2000). By analysing the range of topics covered, it is possible to highlight if the *Irish Independent* has tabloidised.

Taking a decrease in political news coverage as a possible indicator of tabloidization, fig. 4.1 shows the average number of political news articles in the *Irish Independent* over the period. Although politics was the dominant article topic throughout the period of analysis, the result shows a reduction in political news stories of six percent, from just under 31 percent in 1986 to 24.7 percent in 2006.

As noted previously, a decrease in business and economic news is also seen as a marker of tabloidization (Sparks, 2000). Although the *Irish Independent* had an individual section dedicated to business and economic news during the periods analysed, these topics also feature in the main news section. Each of the three periods analysed offer an important, though varied, economic and labour

market, suggesting that the percentage of articles dedicated to these matters should be similar. The country was struggling with unemployment and emigration in 1986; the beginning of the Celtic Tiger was making its mark in 1996, resulting in immigration and increased spending power; and in 2006, the country was preparing for an economic downturn. However, while economic, labour, business or industry news accounted for 17.7 percent of news stories in 1986, this declined to 11.6 percent and 11.2 percent in 1996 and 2006 respectively (see fig. 4.1). This represents a decrease of 5.5 percent during the period of analysis.

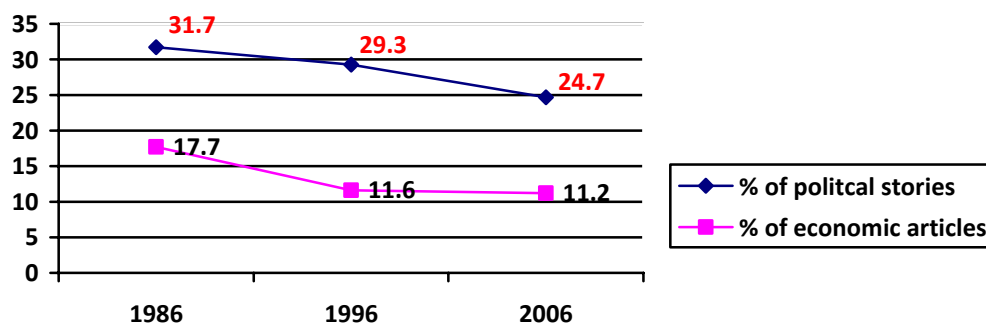


Fig. 4.1 Percentage of political and economic stories by year

In contrast to the decrease in hard news, there has been a large increase in soft news. This is particularly relevant when one considers that news items where celebrity formed the main topic amplified from one story in 1986 to ten news items by 2006. Although celebrity stories only accounted for 3.9 percent of the news items in 2006, the results show an overall increase in celebrity items in the main news section of 900 percent over the period of analysis. While five of the eleven celebrity items were classed as ‘brief updates’ over the twenty year period, celebrity articles were also some of the largest analysed. For example, an article entitles *Kennygate: neighbour sues chat host in €1.5m land row* (7.11.06) was the main article on page three of Tuesday’s *Irish Independent* in 2006. Focusing on a legal dispute between Pat Kenny, one of Ireland’s best known radio and television presenters, and his neighbour, the article and its accompaniments occupied over three-quarters of the editorial space on the page. Similarly, two days later, the newspaper ran an article on British model Kate Moss (*Kate redeemed as face of fashion after drug shame* (8.11.06)), which occupied half of page three, with an advertisement running on the other half. The prominence of these articles is significant when one considers that page three is usually one of the first pages a reader will see.

Similarly there has been an increase in entertainment stories over the periods of analysis. Entertainment stories were classed as articles which focused on events including film premieres or other entertainment staples such as television programmes. Although articles classed as

entertainment stories may refer to celebrities or even feature them in detail, the celebrity was presented in terms of their professional life. For example, *When a kiss is more than just a kiss* (3.11.86) details how a *Channel Four* programme presented by Paula Yeats is facing censorship. In contrast, the short front page story *Britney in divorce* (8.11.06) deals solely with singer Britney Spears’ personal life. Overall entertainment or social life articles increased from 11 (four percent of the total) in 1986 to 32 items (12.4 percent) in 2006.

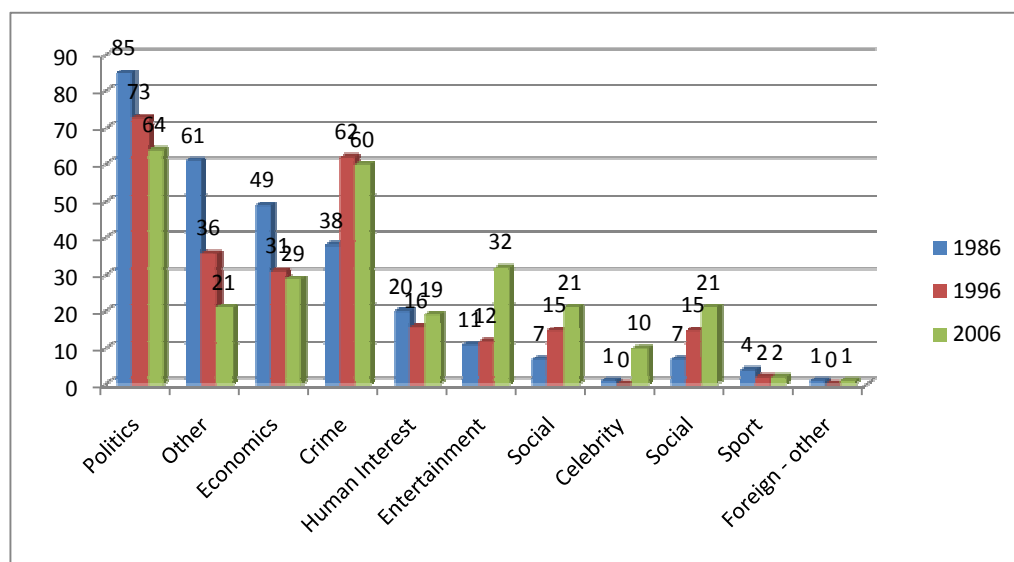


Fig. 4.2 Dominant topic of article by year.

In contrast, human interest stories have stayed relatively stable and have even decreased slightly, varying from 20 in 1986, 16 in 1996 to 19 articles in 2006. Conversely, McLachlan and Golding’s investigation into tabloidization in the British press found similar results (2000: 84). When combined, human interest, entertainment and celebrity stories account for 11.6 percent of articles in 1986, 11.4 percent in 1996 and 23.6 percent in 2006, indicating that soft news stories have doubled in the *Irish Independent* over the twenty year period.

Although crime news is not always necessarily soft news, for this study it was classed under the soft news category in line with the arguments of Uribe and Gunter (2004). There has been a rise in crime articles from 13.7 percent in 1986 to 25.2 percent in 1996. This lowered slightly to 23.2 percent in 2006. Although instances of crime reporting have increased by 11.5 percent during the period of analysis, crime rates remain low in Ireland (O’Connell, 2002).

When analysed together, the decline in hard news and the increase in soft news has been consistent over the period analysed (see fig. 4.3). While the decrease in *Irish Independent’s* political coverage in

1996 was only 1.4 percent, the reduction in its economic news substantially altered the figures for 1996, ensuring a 6.5 percent decrease in hard news. Similarly, although the *Irish Independent's* human interest and celebrity news, in reality, declined in 1996, the increase in its crime reporting resulted in an 11.3 percent increase in soft news totals. These are similar percentages to 2006; a decline in hard news of 6 percent and an increase in soft news of 10.1 percent compared to the same period in 1996.

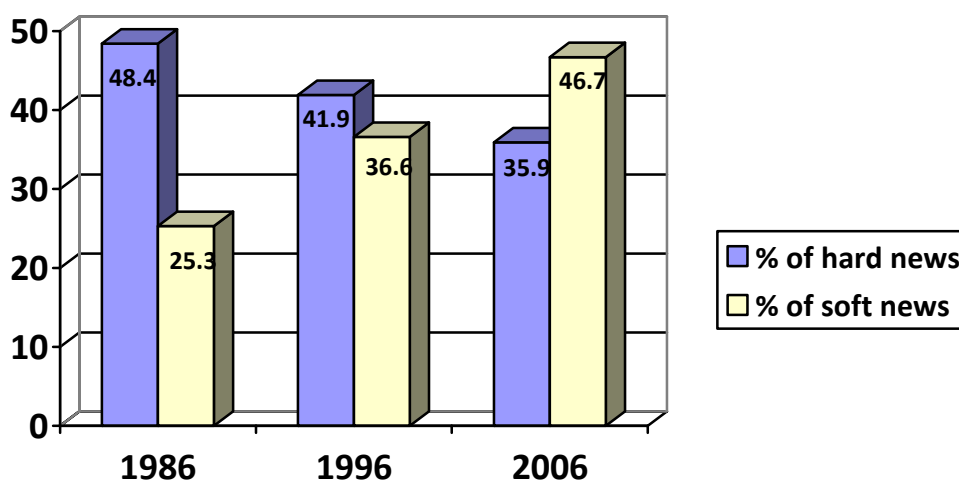


Fig. 4.3 Percentage of hard and soft news stories²

4.1.1.1 Discussion of range results

The literature review highlights how changes to the content of a media product are seen as a key defining factor of tabloidization. It is argued that the tabloidization of newspapers results in a decrease in hard news, in particular political, economic and international news (Uribe and Gunter, 2004). In contrast, ‘softer’ news items, especially entertainment, celebrity, crime, show business and human interest pieces, replace the once staple diet of serious news found in broadsheets (Sparks, 2000).

The *Irish Independent* has shown a decrease in political news of six percent. When combined with economic news, there has been a decline in hard news of 12.5 percent, a sizeable percentage. In contrast when combined entertainment, celebrity and human interest stories have doubled in the last twenty years. This rise can be attributed to the public interest in celebrities and the entertainment industry (McLachlan and Golding, 2000). When crime news is included, soft news has grown by 21.5 percent during the period of analysis. Although the results do not include

² A number of news stories not placed in the hard or soft news category. Please see appendix 4

international news articles, there is still a sizable difference between hard and soft news items. This would indicate that the *Irish Independent* has tabloidised.

Similarly, all investigative journalism articles were found in 1986. This is in line with general arguments that tabloidization results in investigatory journalism being replaced by a newszak type of journalism (Franklin, 1997: 8). As investigative journalism is expensive to collect, newspapers have reassigned their focus to cheaper options such as entertainment, lifestyle and columnists (ibid.).

This tabloidization of the *Irish Independent's* content appears to have taken place in a consistent fashion over the period analysed. Interestingly, the results appear to indicate that the *Irish Independent* reacted differently to the introduction of the *Irish Sun* and the *Irish Daily Mail*. After the introduction of the *Irish Sun* in 1996, the *Irish Independent*, as noted, increased the percentage of crime stories and decreased the number of economic stories, while keeping political and entertainment articles relatively similar to levels in 1986. However, after the introduction of the *Irish Daily Mail* in 2006, the *Irish Independent* decreased its political coverage and increased its celebrity and entertainment articles.

As a move from serious or hard news to soft news is seen as a marker of tabloidization, the findings presented above indicate a tabloidization of the *Irish Independent's* news content. Since this tabloidization has occurred at a consistent, though varied, pace, it could be argued that market pressures, in the form of competition from the new tabloids, impacted on the news content in the *Irish Independent*. However, while there has been an increase in tabloid topics, it should also be noted that there has also been dramatic changes to Irish culture and society over the twenty year period. The power of the Catholic Church has reduced significantly, ensuring that many topics which were taboo twenty years ago are now spoken and written about openly (Burton and Drake, 2004). The increase in certain topics could be attributed, at least partially, to a changing country.

4.1.2 Form

By examining the use of photographs, graphs, headlines, subheadings, and the length and position of articles, it will be possible to distinguish if the form in the *Irish Independent* has tabloidised.

The *Irish Independent* has changed its layout and design over the past twenty years, including the introduction of a compact (or tabloid sized) version of the newspaper in 2004 (Guider, 2004) although this was not analysed in this study. By 1996, there were clearer sections and a new font style and size. In 2006 all pages, except the front page, were labelled with unambiguous section headings such as news, international news, sport and classifieds. This ensured that 90.3 percent of

articles analysed in 2006 were found on a page that was sectioned as news. The remainder were situated on the front page.

There were also further dynamic changes to the *Irish Independent's* form including an increase in the use of graphics from two and four occurrences in 1986 and 1996 respectively, to 12 uses of graphics in 2006. This indicates that by 2006 graphics were being used at least twice per newspaper to accompany a story (fig.4.4).

Fig. 4.4 Use of graphics

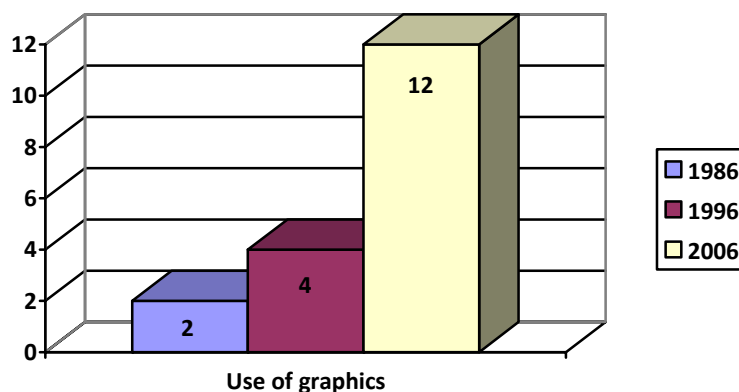
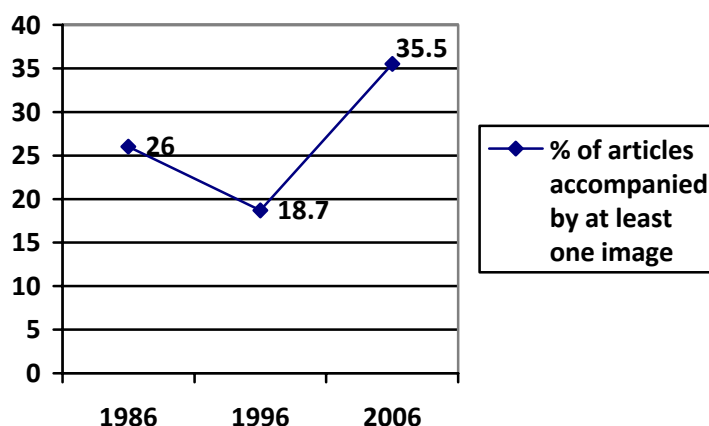


Table 4.2 also shows that the use of images to accompany articles also increased over the period. Photographs and images are seen as a tabloid staple and their (over) use in broadsheets is often viewed with suspicion (Becker, 2008: 85). This study analysed the images that accompanied articles rather than stand alone images. The number of articles accompanied by at least one image varied from 26 percent in 1986, 18.7 percent in 1996 and 35.5 percent in 2006 (fig. 4.5). This represents an increase of nearly 10 percent over the twenty year period, and an even larger increase of 16.8 percent from 1996 to 2006.

Fig. 4.5 Percentage of articles accompanied by at least one image.



There were also changes to the size of the images used. By 2006, the use of single images categorised as much larger than the article grew by over three percent. Similarly, the frequency of articles accompanied by more than one image grew by 9.5 percent during the analysis period,

though it should also be noted that there was a decrease in articles with more than one picture in 1996 (3.7 percent).

Use of images * Year Crosstabulation

Count		Year			
		1986	1996	2006	Total
Use of images	No pictures	205	200	167	572
	Picture much smaller than article	33	19	27	79
	Picture smaller than article	7	6	9	22
	Picture about the same size as the article	6	7	14	27
	Picture larger than article	8	4	4	16
	Picture much larger than article	4	1	12	17
	More than one picture (small images)	1	1	0	2
	More than one picture (medium or combined sizes)	13	7	24	44
	More than one picture (large sized)	0	1	2	3
	Total	277	246	259	782

Table 4.2 Use of images and their sizes by year

Equally, the type of headline also changed vastly over the twenty year period (fig. 4.6). In 1986 small headlines were most frequent, accounting for 39.7 percent of articles analysed. This changed to medium sized headlines in 1996 (42.7 percent) and 2006 (41.7 percent). There was also a sizable increase in the employment of very large and large headlines in the period. In total the use of very large or large headlines increased from 26 percent in 1986 (22.4 percent in 1996) to 35.5 percent in 2006, an increase of nearly 10 percent. Although there was a slight decrease in 1996, the increased use of larger headlines during the twenty year period would indicate that the newspaper is moving towards a more tabloid style.

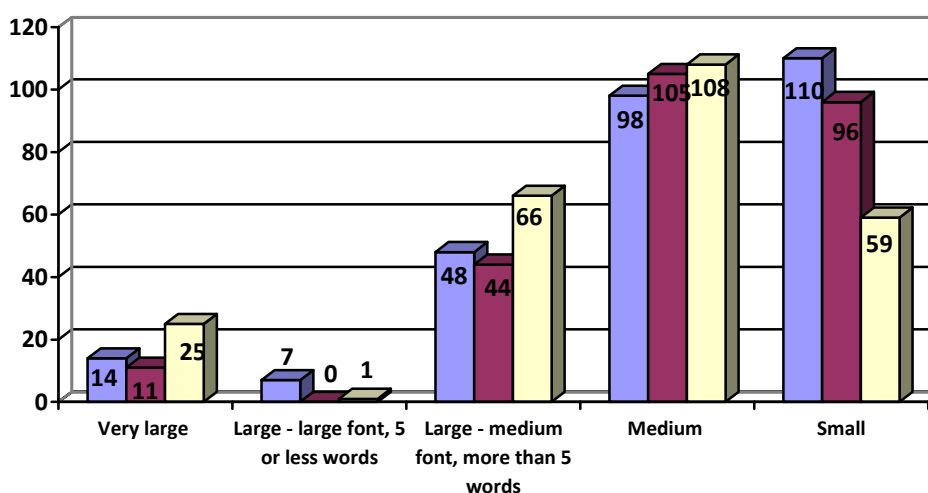
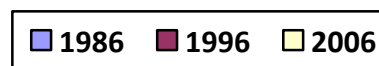


Fig. 4.6 Number of articles with headline type by year



The use of subheadings also increased slightly, though the rise was not as remarkable as the changes to headline style. By 2006, 10 percent of articles in the period used were utilising subheadings. This compares to 6.1 percent in 1986 and 5.7 percent in 1996.

There were also significant changes to where articles appeared and their size (table 4.3). While articles have lengthened in size, in line with the increased number of pages in the newspaper, articles now appear on the less prominent left-hand side page more often. In 1986, the most common article size and placement was a small article on a right hand side page, other than page 1 or 3 (36.5 percent). In contrast, in 1996 and 2006, the changed to a long article on a left hand side page (other than page 2) at 23.6 percent and 28.2 percent of articles analysed respectively. This would indicate that right-hand side pages, viewed as more important than left hand pages, were being used for advertisements. Conboy argues that tabloidization has resulted in a “refinement of a commercialised journalism which prioritizes the desires of advertisers to reach large audiences above all other concerns” (2006:207).

Length of article and page it is found on * Year Crosstabulation

Count		Year			
		1986	1996	2006	Total
Length of article and page it is found on	Lead story on front page	5	5	5	15
	Long article on front page	11	6	5	22
	Short article on front page	22	9	15	46
	Long article on page 2 or 3	16	12	11	39
	Short article on page 2 or 3	9	14	6	29
	Long article on other left hand side page	23	58	73	154
	Long article on other right hand side page	69	44	46	159
	Short article on other left hand side page	21	47	71	139
	Short article on other right hand side page	101	51	27	179
	Total	277	246	259	782

Table 4.3 Length of article and placement in the newspaper

In fact, in 2006, 55.6 percent of articles analysed were found on left hand-side pages while only 28.2 percent of articles appeared on right hand-side pages (fig. 4.7). This contrasts with 1986 and 1996 where 61.3 and 38.6 percent of articles were found on right hand-side pages. In reality, 1996 shows the most even distribution of articles on left and right hand side pages (excluding pages 1, 2 and 3) at 42.7 and 38.6 percent respectively.

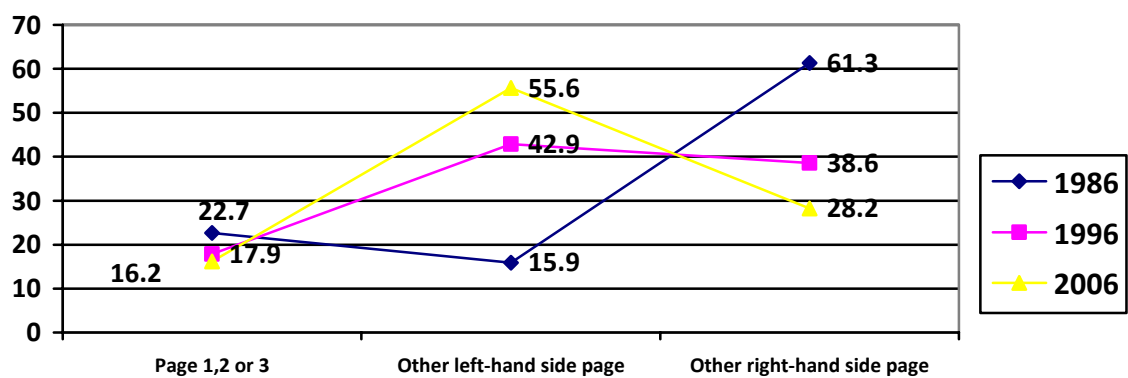


Fig. 4.7 Placement of article by page and year

4.1.2.1 Discussion of results - Form

The results indicate that the *Irish Independent* has tabloidised over the period of analysis and now resembles Franklin’s broadloid (1997), rather than a traditional broadsheet newspaper. Tabloid staples such large headlines and an increased number of pictures have become common features of the *Irish Independent*. Similarly, there newspaper now uses graphs and subheadings to ensure a more visual newspaper. The newspaper’s layout has also changed, with longer articles and clearly defined sections. Similarly, there has been a move towards placing articles on the left-hand side page.

However, it appears that the newspaper reacted differently to the introduction of the *Irish Sun* and *Irish Daily Mail*. After the introduction of the *Irish Sun*, the *Irish Independent* shows a decrease in the number of images, large headlines and subheadings used. Similarly, the use of more than one image to accompany an article decreased in 1996. This period also showed the most even distribution of articles on left and right hand side pages (excluding pages 1, 2 and 3). On the other hand, there has been an increase in the use of graphics, large headlines, images, subheadings and changes in the position of articles when the results from 1986 and 2006 are compared, indicating that the *Irish Independent’s* layout has become far more tabloidised over the period analysed. This suggests that the newspaper utilised an increasingly serious layout after the introduction of the *Irish Daily Sun*, replacing it with a more tabloid layout and style after the introduction of the *Irish Daily Mail*. However, further research is required to validate this theory.

4.1.3 Changes to the mode of address (Style)

Changes to the type of language, tone and method of presentation used can be seen as markers of tabloidization (McLachlan and Golding, 2000). This section presents the results of an investigation of these indicators.

An increased emphasis on individuals and their private lives is seen as a marker of tabloidization (Sparks, 2000). However, over the twenty year period, the main actor in each article tended to be represented in terms of their public life (66.4 percent in 1986, 65 percent in 1996 and 55 percent in 2006). The percentage of actors represented in terms of their private life fell from 3.6 percent of representations in 1986 to 1.6 percent in 1996, increasing to 3.9 percent in 2006 (table 4.4). There was also a decrease in the number of people represented in terms of scandal or problems in their private life by nearly four percent over the period of analysis. However, representation of actors in terms of scandal or problems in the public life grew from 12.6 percent in 1986 (15 percent in 1996) to 17.8 percent by 2006. This growth could be attributed to the tribunals of inquiry, set up during the 1990s and 2000s to investigate corruption in Irish society, which feature heavily in Irish news.

Representation of main actor * Year Crosstabulation

Count		Year			
		1986	1996	2006	Total
Representation of main actor	Public life	184	160	142	486
	Scandal or problems in public life	35	37	46	118
	Private life	10	4	10	24
	Scandal or problems in private life	21	7	10	38
	No representation	0	0	4	4
	N/A	27	38	47	112
	Total	277	246	259	782

Table 4.4 Representation of main actor by year.

Language is also noted as one of the key signs of tabloidization within newspapers (Conboy, 2006). The newspaper has shifted from the serious English, typical of broadsheet newspapers, to a style of English that is more likely to be found in mid-Market newspapers. By 2006, the use of a mid-market newspaper style of English had increased by nearly 9 percent, showing a trend towards a simpler, concise, emotive style of English. However, it should also be noted that the use of mid-market English fell in 1996 (see table. 4.5). This would indicate that there were vast changes in the newspaper’s use of English in the period 1986-1996 and from 1996-2006.

Use of language * Year Crosstabulation

Count		Year			
		1986	1996	2006	Total
Use of language	High standard of english	174	180	140	494
	Good standard of english, some tabloid	102	65	118	285
	Mostly tabloid	1	1	1	3
	Total	277	246	259	782

Table 4.5 Use of language by year.

Similarly, over the period of study, there were also changes to the tone journalists used. For example, 92.7 percent of articles were written in a serious tone in 1986. This contrasts with 88.3 percent in 1996 and 85.7 percent in 2006. The use of a familiar, provocative or emotive tone increased from 10.5 percent in 1986 (7.3 percent in 1996) to 13.1 percent in 2006.

4.1.3.1 Discussion of results – mode of address (style)

The results of this research indicate that one of the key indicators of tabloidization, an increased emphasis on an individual in terms of scandal or their private-life, is not prevalent in the *Irish Independent*. This suggests that certain market-values, such as the obsession with the private lives of public individuals, are not exported as easily as others.

Nevertheless, the results indicate that the tone in the *Irish Independent* has tabloidised over the period of analysis, with a trend toward simpler, sensationalist or emotive language. However, 1996 showed less tabloid-like qualities compared to 1986 and 2006, utilising both a serious style of language and tone. In contrast, the results from 2006 indicate a move towards a tone and style of English typically found in mid-market newspapers. This suggests, once again, that the *Irish Independent* reacted differently to the introductions of the *Irish Sun* and *Irish Daily Mail*.

4.1.4 Content Analysis Conclusion

The results of the content analysis indicate that the range, form and style of the *Irish Independent* have become increasingly tabloidised over the period of analysis. However, this tabloidization does not appear to have taken place at a consistent pace. Although news content has tabloidised at a stable rate, the results point out that tabloidization in terms of individual story topic varied over the periods analysed. The form and style of the newspaper tended to be more tabloid-like in 1986 and 2006, with 1996 showing less tabloid qualities. This suggests that the newspaper employed a more serious layout and tone after the introduction of the *Irish Daily Sun*, changing to more a tabloid-like form and tone after the introduction of the *Irish Daily Mail*.

4.2 Discourse analysis

It is argued that postmodern theories conceive of every reading of reality and consequently reality, itself, is a text (Palmquist, 2001). In line with this, “all discourses are textual, or expressed in texts; intertextual, drawing upon other texts and their discourses to achieve meaning; and contextual, since they are embedded in historical, political and cultural settings” (Lupin, 1994, cited in Bayers, 2004:22). This study examines how the language in articles (texts) can be drawn upon to create (textual) or support (intertextual) the discourses of modern western society (contextual).

Although Connell has argued that the news discourse in tabloids and broadsheets are similar (1998: 11), other authors have suggested that there are distinctive tabloid and broadsheet news discourses (Conboy, 2006; Sparks, 2000). Using drama, sensationalism and colloquial language, it is argued that tabloid newspapers focus on a news discourse of celebrities, sex, sleaze, national interest, and crime (Conboy, 2006). Politics and other ‘serious’ topics are reduced to infotainment - entertaining articles which neglect to detail the serious issues behind the article topic (Franklin, 1997). It could, therefore, be suggested that a tabloid news discourse is a sensationalist one. In contrast, a broadsheet news discourse (or traditionalist news discourse) is seen as a rationalist discourse, based on providing people with background information, explanation, aggregation and civic correlation (Connell, 1998: 13). The tabloidization process is credited with changing rationalist news discourse to sensationalist news discourse.

The discourse analysis in this study focuses on the 30 main articles in the *Irish Independent*, analysing 10 stories per year. The analysis will examine if, and how, the newspaper has altered its use of language over the twenty year period, focusing on changes in words, syntax and tone. The results should provide an indication of the extent to which, if any, the news discourse in the *Irish Independent* has tabloidised by looking at how politics, crime and nationality is presented.

4.2.1 Presenting Politics

The political stories in 1986 tended to be very serious and factual in tone, topic and style of language used, though there were some signs of tabloidization. For example, in *Garrett seeks SF boycott in Dáil* (3.11.86), the then Taoiseach³ and leader of the Fine Gael⁴ party, Garret FitzGerald, is referred to casually by his first name in the headline. By referring to him as Garret instead of his official title, An Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald, an illusion of familiarity is created, placing the politician, at least rhetorically, in the vernacular world of the readers. While he is referred to by his full name in the rest of the article, the use of his first name in the headline conveys a tone of informality. According

³ Irish equivalent of Prime Minister

⁴ An Irish political party

to sociolinguistics, this type of casualness appeals to males as they tend to bond with lower socio-cultural patterns of language (Trudgill, 1995). Although the article deals with Sinn Fein's decision to no longer boycott the Dáil, the headline focuses on Mr. FitzGerald, using a familiar personality to draw in the reader. As Conboy notes, a marker of tabloids is how they build on an image of a particular politician, exploiting this image "for the related entertainment factor it can provide" (2006: 153). Similarly, *Younger Kennedy back in Boston Seat* (6.11.86) places its initial emphasis on US politician Joseph P. Kennedy, presenting him as a hero-like figure, who has regained a traditional Irish-American seat. The subheading, *A political dynasty reclaims its heritage*, reinforces this depiction of Kennedy. However, the headlines in both articles are factual, rather than sensationalist. Mr. FitzGerald 'seeks' a boycott, he doesn't 'demand' one. Similarly, Mr. Kennedy is 'back' in the (Kennedy) seat, he doesn't 'seize' it. The articles also delve deeper into the political issues which promoted the stories, a trait Conboy argues tabloids avoid (2006: 153). Instead it is contended tabloids, while placing much emphasis on political figures, ignore the political issues that are necessary for readers to understand the complex political matters at hand (ibid.).

By 1996, the language used in the headlines tends to be more tabloid-like. Although the headlines avoid the puns traditionally associated with tabloids, they include dramatic (*Landslide sweeps Clinton back in* (6.11.96)) or sensationalist elements (*Court fiasco puts Owen's job on the line* (8.11.96)) and tabloid words such as 'hitch' (*Prisoners have to be freed, rearrested in legal hitch* (6.11.07)). However, the language in the articles tends to be formal. For example, the article *Court fiasco puts Owen's job on the line* (8.11.96), resign is used rather than quit.

The '*Snake in the grass*' *Finlay hits back at lawyer* (7.11.96) shows how a newspaper can utilise language to create certain political discourses. Journalists may believe that they report unbiased facts, in a language which is designed to be unambiguous and agreeable to their readers. However, Conboy has shown that the style of language a newspaper employs is a highly conscious decision, made to appeal to their desired readership and to ensure maximum profits (2006). The *Irish Independent* was traditionally a Fine Gael newspaper, though it switched allegiance to Fianna Fail in 1997. However, in 1996, the newspaper, although its allegiance to Fine Gael was lessening, had not yet declared its support of Fianna Fail⁵. The 1996 article, '*Snake in the grass*' *Finlay hits back at lawyer* (7.11.96), deals with former Taoiseach, and member of Fianna Fail, Albert Reynolds' libel action against the *Sunday Times* for calling him a "gombeen man"⁶, among other things, in an article published in the Irish edition of the *Sunday Times*. The article depicts Albert Reynolds and his counsel in a negative light. It states that in "one of the most systematic and wounding attacks

⁵ Irish political party

⁶ Derogatory term. Similar to idiot.

uttered in the English High Courts”, Albert Reynolds’ counsel described a Labour party press officer as “a chicken”. The language in the article indicates that Reynolds and his counsel are in the wrong, especially for attacking the Labour press officer. Although the use of English is generally high, it is also sensationalist, which along with the quotes from Reynolds’ counsel creates a dramatic story (7.11.96). The use of drama, sensationalism and hyperbole are the main rhetorical tricks which the popular press use to make the news more exciting (van Dijk, 1991:210). Even the choice of ‘hits back’ rather than a more neutral ‘responds’ is a marker of increased tabloidization in the newspaper.

By 2006, only three of the main stories were political, all of which examined negative political issues. The headlines for these stories featured tabloid tools such as alliteration (*FG Furore over claim it’s okay to drink-drive* (8.11.06)) and rhyming (*Defiant Saddam to face the hangman* (6.11.06)).

As in the majority of the political articles analysed, both *Defiant Saddam to face the hangman* (6.11.06) and *Bush the war casualty as America bites back* (9.11.06) place the emphasis on an individual. In the article on Saddam Hussein, he is referred to informally as Saddam. Garret FitzGerald’s first name was used in the 1986 article to demystify the then-Taoiseach, ensuring that the people felt he was a ‘one of their own’. However, it could be argued that Hussein’s first name was used as a mark of disrespect. In fact, the article cannot be described as objective. Hussein is described as a ‘defiant’ ‘despot’. The guilty verdict is deserved by the ‘dictator’ and his ‘henchmen’. This is reinforced by the opening lines of the article which read “Iraqis sang, danced and unleashed celebratory gunfire yesterday as Saddam Hussein was sentenced to death”. The semantics of this syntax is clear – the Iraqi people are happy that Hussein is to be hanged. In fact, the sentence and article does not indicate that anyone, other than the convicted men, are unhappy with the sentence.

While Saddam Hussein is the key focus of the above article, the attention is not unmerited. It does, after all, deal with the sentence imposed on him by a Baghdad court. In contrast, the article *Bush the war casualty as American bites back*, does not solely concern President George Bush but rather deals with the US elections. However, as noted above, an individual’s name can be used to draw in readers, bridging the gap between a reader and the world outside of their lived experience (Conboy, 2006: 22). This type of personalisation is often provided without contextualization (Curren et al, 1980 in Macdonald, 2000), preventing the reader from developing a greater understanding of issues.

This article is rich with also sensationalist language and phrases – ‘dramatically’, ‘abruptly quit’, ‘thumping’, ‘on a knife-edge’ and ‘on the brink’ – encouraging the reader to continue reading. These phrases and words are common expressions found in the colloquial speech patterns of the readers, a

trait tabloids sometimes use (ibid.). However, it should also be noted that English tabloidese is often designed only to be read (Waterhouse, 1989).

4.2.2 Depicting us and them

It is argued that vernacular print languages formed the identities, at least partially, of people in a given region, providing the foundation for a shared sense of belonging (Poole, 1999: 68). Tabloids utilise this relationship between language and belonging effectively, placing emphasis on national issues, and national identity in particular, by feeding into established ideas of national discourse. As Conboy notes, “tabloids provide an explicit sense of place, a textual locus for a popular national community”, while also policing the boundaries of national identity and creating a discourse that ensures the differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are clear (2006: 9). An imagined homogenised community is created by utilising language which evokes nationalistic sentiment. This has been described as a ‘nationalised syntax of hegemony’ (Billig, 1995: 166).

Discourses are intrinsically political; this is because their creation involves the formation of antagonisms and the establishment of political frontiers between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ (Howarth, 2000:9). A binary division of readers (insiders) and non-readers (outsiders) exist in the *Irish Independent*. This could further be developed into three categories: readers (insiders), other Irish people (neutral or insiders) and outsiders. The use of binary divisions, supported by words such as ‘us’ and ‘our’, play an important part in the linguistics of consensus, creating an illusion of similarities between readers (Conboy, 2006: 16). These binary divisions portray the world in terms of simplistic archetypes, reducing outsiders to a single representation.

In Helen warns other: Avoid Saudi, (4.11.86) the religious police who expelled the Irish nurse from Saudi Arabia are described as “fanatical”, inflicting “lashings” on Irish people whose only crimes amounts to being at a party. The tone of the article develops an us-them binary, where we, and the people, who were expelled are presented as ‘normal’, rational people, while those who run the Muslim country depicted as irrational fanatics. This current form of ‘banal journalism’ (Sonwalkar, 2005) is hegemonic. It assumes, and presents, one view of global events (ibid.), a Western/Northern view. ‘They’ are unstable and prone to violence while ‘we’, the industrialised West, “are typified by order and stability, a higher form of civilization” (Dahlgren, 1982). According to Sonwalkar (2005), banal journalism notes the ‘us’ daily in media content, without most of us realising that there is a reality out there that is seldom considered newsworthy.

The use of language to create/support the idea of Irishness can also be seen in *Now it's legal: Jason is an Irish citizen* (8.11.96), which was accompanied by the subheading *One of our own*. Again the

first name is used, helping to establish the naturalness of the soccer player's presence on the front page of the newspaper. 'Our' Jason is described as a soccer 'whizkid' who swore an oath of allegiance to Ireland so that he can continue to play soccer for a country he has never lived in.

Another sports story appeared in 2006 entitled *Mob Rules - Future of test series in doubt* (6.11.06). Again, language is used to subconsciously create an 'us' and 'them' binary. The Australian players behaved so 'disgracefully' in the test match that an Irish player was 'knocked unconscious', resulting in the Irish manager having to 'lash out' during a press conference. 'We' did not behave outrageously but the Australians did, reducing the game to 'madness', bringing 'new and deeper shame to the International Rules series' and ensuring that the future of test matches 'hangs by a thread'. Again, an us-them discourse is created, where the Irish are presented as righteous and the Australians are presented as barbarians.

The article makes use of sensationalism and also includes a pun - 'Mob Rules' - a play on the Aussie Rules football game, ensuring a tabloid discourse surrounds the article. As Conboy notes, puns are prominent among the rhetorical devices deployed by tabloids (1996:19). The contextual use of the word 'mob' results in the reader drawing on images from movies and other medias where mobs are portrayed as 'gangsters' and 'hooligans'.

This article also shows further signs of tabloidization. The articles in 1986 and 1996 tended to employ techniques of reporting, providing background information, such as why the nurse was in the Middle-East and details of the number of Irish people working there (*In Helen warns other: Avoid Saudi*, 4.11.86) or reasons why the soccer player needed a visa, rule changes in FIFA and the court proceedings (*Now it's legal: Jason is an Irish citizen*, 8.11.96). In contrast, the 2006 article, *Mob Rules - Future of test series in doubt* (6.11.06), provides little context and instead employs a narrative structure. Narrative structures, which generally consist of 'stories', 'characters' and conventional plot structures are considered a sign of tabloidization (Connell, 1998: 12). In this article, we have a plot in the shape of a battle (the match) between two sets of characters - the good guys (the Irish players) and the bad guys (the Australian players). The story also ends conventionally – good overcomes evil because the Irish manager gives moral guidance to the Australian players during the press conference.

4.2.3 Crime and Punishment

In *Hunt for canal bank killer of gentle young man* (7.11.86), the headline could be considered emotive, especially due to the nouns such as 'killer', 'gentle' and 'young'. However, the use of this emotive headline could be attributed to space. Headline writing is an art constrained by space and

typography, ensuring that different registers of language may be used in the headline and accompanying story (Waterhouse, 1989). In this case the article tends to be factual, although it did place significant emphasis on the murder victim's job as a church chaplain.

However, by 2006, the crime reporting became even more emotive. In *Shot boy's mother appeals for the madness to stop* (7.11.06), we are told how 'little Jordan' was shot by a 'gunman' who 'began firing indiscriminately at his (Jordan's) home with a hand-held machine gun'. Although the young boy was not seriously injured, the shooting had sent 'shockwaves' through the community. The 'madness' was a result of the long-running 'murderous feud' which continues in Limerick city. His mother does not simply 'ask', she 'appeals'. Similarly, *Tiger raid nightmare for workers in key posts* (10.11.06), accompanied by the sub-heading "Drug thugs behind spate of recent abductions in capital" is rich with language aimed at causing fear or anger. "Hardened criminals and drug-addict thugs" have "burst into the home" of a number of post-office workers, carrying out "tiger kidnappings" with "sawn-off shotguns and a handgun". Post office workers are so scared that some "workers may have to leave their jobs over fears that their family will be targeted". Fowler's (1991) ideas of agent ('thugs'), action ('tiger raid') and affected/patients (post office 'workers') can be used to show how a tabloid discourse is employed in this article. Less sensationalist, and by default less tabloid, language could have been used to describe the situation. For example, the 'thugs' and 'hardened criminals' could have lawbreakers, offenders or simply criminals and the less emotive word, employee, could have been used instead of 'worker', as this calls to mind images of hard-working honest people.

Although the reporting in both articles appears to be about recent crimes, the text suggests that there are many different topics. For example, in *Shot boy's mother appeals for the madness to stop* (7.11.06), the headline indicates that the article deals with an appeal by the mother of an injured child. However, an analysis of the text indicates that far more comes into play. Again, this article is lacking in context - it references an 'on-going feud', though we are not told what caused the feud. There are suggestions that the police and government aren't doing enough – after all a child has been shot on their watch. This is a long-running pattern of language which draws on reader's previous and contextual knowledge of the 'feud' with the newspaper using the same language in each article to reemphasise the issue. This formulaic patterning provides a cohesive effect, where the recurrent patterns result in a set of stylistic 'templates' to homogenise the discourse (Fowler, 1991: 1). This style of reporting also creates an us-them dichotomy where us 'ordinary citizens' are terrorised by deviant 'thugs'.

4.2.4 Discourse analysis conclusions

The findings represented above indicate that there has been a tabloidization of the *Irish Independent's* news discourse over the period of analysis. It appears that the *Irish Independent* is using more muscular, simpler, less formal language, similar to the mid-market *Daily Mail* and *Express* which adopt a style that is more like spoken English, but is not tabloid in the typical British sense. This use of colloquial language allows the newspaper to give the impression that they are like their readers and are therefore likely to share similar ideologies. Similarly, tabloid tools such as puns and alliteration have increased. However, it should also be noted that personalisation, a trait of the tabloids, ran across all time periods analysed.

However, it should also be noted that only thirty articles were examined at in this study. Therefore the extent to which the news discourse of the *Irish Independent* has tabloidised would require further study of a larger sample number.

Conclusion

Tabloidization is a notoriously difficult concept to examine (Esser, 1999), partly due to the lack on consensus over its definition. However, this study drew on the work of a number of writers who have argued that tabloidization describes various processes, including an increased emphasis on entertaining and sensationalism (Sparks, 2000), a reposition from hard news toward softer items (Franklin, 1997), the employment of a dynamic layout with increased visuals, and the utilisation of simpler language (Schonbach, 2000). Using the conceptual lens of tabloidization (McLachlan and Golding, 2000), the results presented in this study clearly illustrate that the tabloidization has occurred in the *Irish Independent*. Most indicators of tabloidization have been realised, ranging from a reduction in hard news stories, an increase in tabloid style staples such as larger images and headline, and a shift towards uncomplicated and sensationalist language.

It could be argued that this tabloidization occurred because of increased market pressures, in particular the introduction of the *Irish Sun* and *Irish Daily Mail*. As noted previously, the *Irish Independent* were most likely to be affected by the new tabloids due to its wide appeal. Not only has the introduction the *Irish Sun* and the *Irish Daily Mail* resulted in increased competition to gain and retain readers, the *Irish Independent* also needs to attract and retain advertisers. Rooney (2000) has contended that the editorial material in newspapers must now appeal to the widest audience possible in order to attract advertisers of mass-consumer goods, while Sampson (1996) has argued that the desires of advertisers, and advertisers' desired consumers, now play a key role in the decision making process over news content. Under this idea, the increased commercial pressures could account of the tabloidization seen in the *Irish Independent*. However, it should also be noted that there has been dramatic changes to Irish culture and society during the period of analysis, which might explain some of the changes in the news content.

The results also indicate that the *Irish Independent* employed a more serious form and mode of address after the introduction of the *Irish Sun* (compared to same period in 1986) while moving towards an increasing tabloid style of range, form and style after the introduction of the *Irish Daily Mail*. This indicates that the introduction of new tabloids does not always result in tabloidization. A further analysis of the *Irish Independent* six months prior to the introduction of the new tabloids would support (or disprove) this thesis.

This research documents tabloidization in the *Irish Independent*, thereby giving some indication of tabloidization in the Irish newspaper-sphere. However, in order to fully understand if Irish broadsheets have tabloidised, it would also be necessary to undertake a content analysis of the *Irish*

Times and *Irish Examiner*. Similarly, the further support the results of this study, a discourse analysis of an increased number of articles is necessary.

As the most popular newspaper in Ireland, the *Irish Independent* plays a pivotal role in providing information necessary for the smooth-running of the public sphere. However, this study has shown a decrease in 'hard' news in the main news section of the newspaper. Similarly, there has been a shift towards a tone and style of language that is typical of mid-market newspaper, while the layout is progressively tabloid in style. Although there is little doubt that the news content, style and tone of the *Irish Independent* has tabloidised, at least from the results of the small sample in this study, the extent to which this tabloidization could affect the public sphere is unclear. As noted, tabloid journalism is frequently viewed as lowering the standards of public discourse (Örnebring and Jönsson, 2008). However, while tabloidised journalism is viewed as a threat to democracy because it ignores "the real political issues in favour of superficial political scandal" (Örnebring and Jönsson, 2008: 23), others have suggested that tabloidised journalism allows access to those who typically feel excluded from democratic process (Sparks, 2000). Without fully understanding the impact of the tabloidised journalism on the public sphere, it is difficult to understand the importance of the results above. In this regard, further study examining the relationship between tabloids, tabloidization and the public-sphere is necessary.

Nevertheless, the results presented in this study clearly show an increasingly tabloidization of the *Irish Independent* during the period where British tabloids introduced *Irish versions*. If Bunce is correct when he claims that the media are putting democracy in danger by restricting the flow of information essential to political discourse and citizen participation (1997 in Spark, 2000: 5), these results do not bode well for the Irish public-sphere.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Explanation of words and abbreviations

ABC:	Audit Bureau of Circulation
Dáil:	First house of governance in Ireland. The parliament.
Fine Gael:	Irish political party
Fianna Fail:	Irish political party
Gombeen Man:	An insult. An idiot.
INM:	Independent News Media – largest media conglomerate in Ireland.
Tánaiste:	Second in command to the prime minister
Taoiseach:	Equivalent to Prime Minister
TD:	Member of the Dáil (parliament)

Appendix 2**Codebook****ID variables****V1 Article number**

1,2,3....

V2 Day

1,2,3...31

V3 Month

1,2,3.....12

V4 Year

1. 1986
2. 1996
3. 2006

V5 Page

1 (front page)

2

3....

Presentation variables**V6 Genre**

1. News story
2. Investigatory
3. Brief update

V7 Length

Cm2

V8 Salience

- 1 Lead story central position on front page
- 2 Long article on front page
- 3 Short article on front page
- 4 Long article on page 2 or 3
- 5 Short article on page 2 or 3
- 6 Long article on other left-hand side page
- 7 Long article on other right-hand side page
- 8 Short article on other left-hand side page
- 9 Short article on other right-hand side page

V9 Position

- 1 Main article on page
- 2 Top
- 3 Middle
- 4 Bottom
- 5 Left hand side

6 Right hand side

7 Side columns or brief articles

Range - Content variables

V10 Topic

Rule: This variable measures the dominant topic of an article. If two or more topics are devoted the same amount of coverage, then the emphasis of the headline determines the coding.

1. Irish political story
2. Irish economic or labour story
3. Irish health, education or science story
4. Irish business story i.e. about an Irish business
5. Irish corruption/tribunal story
6. Irish religion story
7. Irish tragedy e.g. car crash, missing person
8. Irish disaster e.g. bus crash
9. Crime and violence e.g. drugs, gangland killings, murders
10. Social issues
11. Story focused on ordinary Irish person/people e.g. man wins lotto, woman gives birth to triples
12. Irish environment or energy story
13. Irish agriculture/fishing story/food industry
14. Irish military story
15. Sporting
16. Irish event – cultural, music, literacy
17. Irish event – other e.g. gardening show
18. Irish law/court story
19. IT or Internet story eg. Social networking

20. Irish TV celebrity story (factual TV)
21. Irish TV celebrity story (fiction)
22. Irish radio celeb story
23. Irish musician/band story
24. Irish 'it-girl' or 'it-boy' story, socialite
25. Irish model story,
26. Irish author story,
27. Irish film or documentary maker story/story about a film
28. Irish chef story
29. Other Irish celeb story

30. British celebrity in Ireland story (e.g. international celebrity visiting Ireland, celebrity in Irish film etc)
31. Well known British person story in Ireland
32. British TV celebrity story (factual TV)
33. British TV celebrity story (fiction)
34. British radio celeb story
35. British musician/band story
36. British 'it-girl' or 'it-boy' story ,
37. British model story,
38. British author story,
39. British film or documentary maker story

40. British actor story
41. Other British celeb story
42. Royals

43. Well known International person story

44. International celebrity in Ireland story (e.g. international celebrity visiting Ireland, celebrity in Irish film etc)
45. International TV celebrity story (factual TV)
46. International TV celebrity story (fiction)
47. International radio celeb story
48. International musician/band story
49. International 'it-girl' or 'it-boy' story ,
50. International model story,
51. International author story,
52. International film or documentary story
53. International chef story
54. Other international celeb story

55. Northern Ireland – Troubles – Politics on peace agreement, official politics, political parties
56. Northern Ireland – Troubles – emphasis on deaths
57. Northern Ireland – Troubles – emphasis on police or paramilitary groups e.g. IRA, UDA, attacks, bombings etc
58. Northern Ireland – Troubles – event/angle not based in Ireland e.g. IRA bombings in UK
59. Northern Ireland – economy or business
60. Northern Ireland – crime or social issues
61. Northern Ireland – well known person

62. Health - international
63. British sport story
64. British political story
65. British economic/business story
66. British tragedy or disaster
67. British corruption story
68. Story on ordinary British person
69. International sport story
70. International political story
71. International economic/business story
72. International tragedy or disaster or aid
73. International corruption story/crime
74. Story on ordinary international person
75. Terrorism
76. War
77. Other
78. Northern Ireland – not related to Troubles
79. Immigration in Ireland/citizenship/deportations
80. Emigration from Ireland/visa
81. Immigration/Emigration in Britain
82. Immigration/Emigration elsewhere
83. EU Politics
84. Infrastructure/construction
85. Housing/property/mortgages
86. British crime/social problems

87. NI – Construction
88. Irish language
89. Weather
90. Northern Ireland – other
91. Travel/transport
92. Other British story
93. Irish star abroad
94. Smaller crimes and blue collar crimes
95. Consumer issues
96. Irish actor
97. Other story focused on media

V11 Actor

This variable indicates the actor who is given most attention in an article. If two or more actors are given the same amount of coverage then the actor mentioned in the headline, or if no actor is mentioned in the headline, the actor mentioned first in the article is coded.

1. Taoiseach
2. Tánaiste
3. ROI Government/Cabinet
4. Department for xy or representative from department
5. Minister/junior for xy/Chief Whip
6. Opposition or other leader/deputy leader
7. Opposition spokesperson for xy/chief whip
8. Opposition party/other political party
9. ROI Politician or former politician
10. NI government/politicians
11. British government/opposition
12. US government or official
13. International government/member of parliament
14. Pressure groups, trade unions, organisations, representative bodies etc
15. Ordinary person
16. Garda spokesperson, customers, guards, soldier, prison officer, DPP
17. Official spokesperson/other official/Chairman of other institution
18. Bishop, Priest or other religious figure
19. Irish business or business person/chairman of business
20. British business person
21. International business or person
22. Irish TV celebrity (factual TV)
23. Irish TV celebrity (Fiction or reality TV)
24. Irish Actor
25. Irish radio celeb
26. Irish musician/band
27. Irish 'it-girl' or 'it-boy', socialite
28. Irish model,
29. Irish author or journalist,
30. Irish film or documentary maker
31. Irish sport star
32. Irish chef
33. British celebrity in Ireland story (e.g. British celebrity visiting Ireland, celebrity in Irish film etc)
34. British TV celebrity (factual TV)
35. British Reality TV celeb
36. British TV celebrity (fiction)

37. British radio celeb
38. British musician/band
39. British 'it-girl' or 'it-boy',
40. British model,
41. British author,
42. British film or documentary maker
43. British sport star
44. British actor
45. Member of Royal family
46. Other well known British Person or official
47. Ordinary British person
48. International TV celebrity (factual TV)
49. International Reality TV celeb
50. International TV celebrity (fiction)
51. International radio celeb
52. International musician/band
53. International 'it-girl' or 'it-boy',
54. International model,
55. International author,
56. International film or documentary maker
57. International sport star
58. International chef
59. International ordinary person
60. Other well known International Person
61. Other
62. No actor
63. Terrorist
64. Other well known Northern Irish person
65. Unnamed source
66. Immigrant
67. Emigrant
68. Judge/lawyer
69. Scientist/expert/doctor/vet
70. County or city councillor
71. Employee or previous employee
72. Support organisation
73. NI police
74. Public official/government body
75. Ordinary person from NI
76. Planners, builders etc
77. Diplomat/embassy
78. EU Politician or official
79. British actor
80. Other expert
81. Other well-known Irish person
82. Known criminal
83. Bank
84. Media organisation
85. University or educational institute

V12 Event

1. Court case or appearance,
2. Parliamentary event,

3. Press conference,
4. Inquest,
5. Launch or publication, opening, announcement,
6. Inquiry/enquiry,
7. Sporting event,
8. Party or other type of entertainment event such as fashion show or pageant, awards show,
9. Film or music festival, concert, play.
10. Personal life e.g. wedding, funeral, divorce, pregnancy,
11. No event, unknown
12. Opinion poll/survey
13. N/A
14. Meeting, committee, conference, summit, talks
15. Cultural event or exhibition
16. Other event
17. Ard Fheis
18. Deportation
19. Strike, possible strike or labour event
20. Investigation
21. Arrest
22. Election/opposed election
23. State or presidential visit
24. Crash or accident
25. Murder, crime
26. Tribunal
27. TV programme/film
28. Report/survey
29. Closure
30. Protest
31. Fundraiser

V13 Type of story

This variable asks to coder to decide which category below the story most fits into.

1. Human interest or focus on a human angle
2. Entertainment or socialising
3. Political
4. Social
5. Economics, labour, business or industry
6. Sport
7. Other
8. Crime
9. Serious Crime
10. Celebrity
11. EU Politics
12. Foreign other

V14 Type of issue

This variable looks at whether the article focuses on a positive, neutral or negative issue.

1. Positive
2. Negative
3. Neutral
4. Ambivalent. Good to some, bad to others

V15 Tone/evaluation

This variable examines whether the journalist took a positive, negative or neutral tone when carrying out the reporting

1. Positive
2. Negative
3. Neutral
4. Ambivalent

Formats

These variables attempt to see if the newspaper in question has attempted to make the stories easier to understand by its format.

V16 Size of newspaper

1. Broadsheet
2. tabloid

V17 Section

1. No section heading
2. home news section
3. news section
4. Other section

V18 Visuals

1. No picture
2. Picture much smaller than article
3. Picture smaller than article
4. Picture about the same size of article
5. Picture larger than article
6. Picture much larger than article
7. More than one picture (small picture)
8. More than one picture (medium or combined sizes)
9. More than one picture (large)

V19 Use of language

1. High English – no slang, use of longer words
2. English typically found in a mid-market newspaper
3. Mostly tabloid English, shorter words, simply and concise vocabulary and syntax.

V20 Graphics

This variable examines whether the article makes use of graphics to help explain the situation

1. No graphics
2. Graphics

V21 Headlines

1. Very Large headline – More than five words, large font
2. Large headline – five or less words but large font
3. Large headline – More than five words, medium sized font
4. Medium headline – less than five words, medium sized font/five or more words and small/medium font
5. Small headline – more or less than five words, small font

V22 Sub-headings

1. No subheading
2. Subheading

Mode of Address or style

Much of the critique of tabloidization argues that the style and assumed relationship between reader and writer uses a more sociably causal tone and includes calls to action, while traditional journalism was/is serious and detached from the reader in tone and focuses on facts. Similarly, it is argued that tabloids focus more on the private lives of individuals, rather than the public lives.

V23 Tone

1. Serious and factual
2. Provocative or friendly dyadic relationship between reader and writer. Emotional or sensationalist.
3. Ambivalent

V24 Call to action - reader

This variable examines whether the newspaper directly speaks to readers e.g. together we must put a stop to this

1. Directly speakers to readers
2. No direct speech to readers

V25 Call to action - government or officials on behalf of readers

This variable examines whether the newspaper directly speaks to government or officials e.g. Please end these problems, minister.

1. Directly speaking to government
2. Directly speaking to official
3. No direct speech to government or officials

V26 Representation of main actor

This variable examines whether the main actor is portrayed in terms of their public or private lives. If both are equally present, choose the one mentioned in headline or closest to beginning.

1. Main actor represented in terms of public life – job etc.
2. Main actor represented in terms of scandal/problems in public life – corruption, terrorism, crime etc.
3. Main actor represented in terms of private life – family etc.
4. Main actor represented in terms of scandal/problems in private life – affairs etc.
5. No representation
6. N/A

Appendix 3: Example of how an article was coded

Article: *Crucial final talks ahead of first North deal deadline* (10.11.06).

The following was handwritten into a coding sheet:

v1	v2	v3	v4	v5	v6	v7	v8	v9
748	10	11	3	5	1	73	7	1
v10	v11	v12	v13	v14	v15	v16	v17	v18
55	10	15	3	3	3	1	3	1
v19	v20	v21	v22	v23	v24	v25	v26	
1	1	3	1	1	2	3	1	

The letter V stands for variable while the number in bold is the variable number. The other number represents the categories in the code book. The numbers indicate the following:

ID variables

V1 Article number

748

V2 Day

10th

V3 Month

November

V4 Year

2006

V5 Page

5

Presentation variables

V6 Genre

4=News story

V7 Length

73 cm2

V8 Salience

7 Long article on other right-hand side page

V9 Position

1 Main article on page

Range - Content variables

V10 Topic

55. Northern Ireland – Troubles – Politics on peace agreement, official politics, political parties

V11 Actor

10. NI government/politicians

V12 Event

14. Meeting, committee, conference, summit, talks

V13 Type of story

3. Political

V14 Type of issue

3. Neutral

V15 Tone/evaluation

3. Neutral

Formats

V16 Size of newspaper

- 3. Broadsheet

V17 Section

- 3 News section

V18 Visuals

- 10. No picture

V19 Use of language

- 4. High English – no slang, use of longer words

V20 Graphics

This variable examines whether the article makes use of graphics to help explain the situation

- 3. No graphics

V21 Headlines

- 3 Large headline – More than five words, medium sized font

V22 Sub-headings

- 3. No subheading

Mode of Address or style

V23 Tone

- 4. Serious and factual

V24 Call to action - reader

- 5. No direct speech to readers

V25 Call to action - government or officials on behalf of readers

- 6. No direct speech to government or officials

V26 Representation of main actor

- 7. Main actor represented in terms of public life – job etc.

Appendix 4 – Crosstabulations

Type of story * Year Crosstabulation

Count		Year			
		1986	1996	2006	Total
Type of story	Human interest/ focus on human angle	20	16	19	55
	Entertainment/socialising	11	12	32	55
	Political	83	70	61	214
	Social	7	15	21	43
	Economics, labour, business or industry	49	31	29	109
	Sport	4	2	2	8
	Other	61	36	21	118
	Crime	29	52	51	132
	Serious crime	9	10	9	28
	Celebrity	1	0	10	11
	EU Politics	2	2	3	7
	Foreign - other	1	0	1	2
	Total	277	246	259	782

Use of graphics * Year Crosstabulation

Count		Year			
		1986	1996	2006	Total
Use of graphics	No graphics	275	242	247	764
	Graphics	2	4	12	18
	Total	277	246	259	782

Use of headlines * Year Crosstabulation

Count		Year			
		1986	1996	2006	Total
Use of headlines	Very large headlines	14	11	25	50
	Large headline - large font, five or less words	7	0	1	8
	Large headline -medium font, more than five words	48	44	66	158
	Medium headline	98	105	108	311
	Small headline	110	86	59	255
	Total	277	246	259	782

Sub-heading * Year Crosstabulation

Count

		Year			
		1986	1996	2006	Total
Sub-heading	No subheading	260	232	233	725
	Subheading	17	14	26	57
	Total	277	246	259	782

Representation of main actor * Year Crosstabulation

Count

		Year			
		1986	1996	2006	Total
Representation of main actor	Public life	184	160	142	486
	Scandal or problems in public life	35	37	46	118
	Private life	10	4	10	24
	Scandal or problems in private life	21	7	10	38
	No representation	0	0	4	4
	N/A	27	38	47	112
	Total	277	246	259	782

Tone used in story * Year Crosstabulation

Count

		Year			
		1986	1996	2006	Total
Tone used in story	Serious and factual	246	228	222	696
	Provocative or friendly or emotional	29	18	34	81
	Ambivalent	2	0	3	5
	Total	277	246	259	782

Length of article and page it is found on * Year Crosstabulation

Count		Year			
		1986	1996	2006	Total
Length of article and page it is found on	Lead story on front page	5	5	5	15
	Long article on front page	11	6	5	22
	Short article on front page	22	9	15	46
	Long article on page 2 or 3	16	12	11	39
	Short article on page 2 or 3	9	14	6	29
	Long article on other left hand side page	23	58	73	154
	Long article on other right hand side page	69	44	46	159
	Short article on other left hand side page	21	47	71	139
	Short article on other right hand side page	101	51	27	179
	Total	277	246	259	782

Page where found * Year Crosstabulation

Count		Year				
		1986	1996	2006	Total	
Page where found	1	37	20	22	79	
	2	8	7	0	15	
	3	46	19	20	85	
	4	0	38	21	59	
	5	56	43	19	118	
	6	28	37	36	101	
	7	22	28	16	66	
	8	0	25	27	52	
	9	46	18	12	76	
	10	0	7	22	29	
	11	22	4	12	38	
	12	12	0	8	20	
	13	0	0	6	6	
	14	0	0	9	9	
	20	0	0	15	15	
	22	0	0	5	5	
	23	0	0	9	9	
	Total		277	246	259	782