

THE IMPACT OF TABLOIDISATION ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS

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Assignment presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy (Journalism) at the University of Stellenbosch

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APRIL 2004

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this Assignment is my original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

ABSTRACT:

The advancement of news technology in the last few decades has lead to an information explosion of an unprecedented scope. Twenty-four hour a day news channels, electronic publications, the Internet, and a proliferation of print publications feed this media explosion.

Coupled with this has been the growth of a celebrity culture, where the lives of the rich and famous have been placed under intense scrutiny.

Commercial interests also have to be taken into account. It is conventional wisdom that sensational news sells newspapers. This news is not limited to celebrity news, but encompasses crime reporting as well as high profile scandals affecting ordinary people. As the news becomes more ubiquitous, the competition becomes tougher and the pressure to print what sells grows.

The other commercial pressure is that of the marketers of the entertainment industry who have a vested interest in having the stars of their movies, music and television shows enjoy a high media profile.

This study aims to determine whether the South Africa media has shown a trend towards reporting a more sensational and celebrity based form of news. It seeks to discover whether the South African news has become tabloidised.

This will be done by analysing the content and presentation of the front page of *The Cape Times*, a Cape Town based broadsheet, over the period of several years. This will be used as a measure to determine whether or not the content and form of the South African media is following a trend to tabloidisation.

ABSTRAK:

Die vooruitgang in mediategnologie aan die einde van die twintigste eeu het tot 'n oorvloed van inligting gelei. Nuuskanale wat vier-en-twintig uur per dag uitsaai, elektroniese publikasies, asook die Internet en die groei van die drukmedia het hierdie verskynsel ondersteun.

Tegelykertyd het die media in die jongste dekades meer begin fokus op die lewens van beroemdes.

Kommersiële faktore moet ook in ag geneem word. Met die groei van die media is meer druk geplaas op individuele nuusorganisasies om winste te maak. Dit is alombekend dat sensasionele nuus verkoop. Hierdie soort nuus is nie net gefokus op beroemdes nie, maar ook op misdaad en skandale deur gewone mense.

Bemarkingsamptenare van die vermaaklikheidsbedryf moedig nuus oor beroemdes aan, want dit help om hul produkte te verkoop as hul sterre dekking kry.

Hierdie studie wil vasstel of die media in Suid Afrika wel meer fokus op sensasionele nuus, ten koste van meer ernstige nuus. Dit wil vasstel of die Suid-Afrikaanse media die kenmerke van poniekoerante begin toon.

The Cape Times, 'n Kaapse koerant, se voorblad is ontleed oor 'n tydperk van enkele jare. Die nuusinhoud asook voorkoms van die koerant is bestudeer om vas te stel of die koerant in 'n poniekoerant ontwikkel. Hierdie koerant is gebruik as 'n voorbeeld van die Suid-Afrikaanse media.

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Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

The mid-1990s have been described as the “golden age of tabloid news” (Alter, 1994: 34). This trend was driven by such topics as the murder trial of American football star OJ Simpson, the political and sex scandals of United States President Bill Clinton and the ongoing trials of the British royal family (Alter, 1994: 34).

Internationally this has sparked a debate on the issue of the so-called tabloidisation of the media and its impact on both the public perception of news and the news media as well as its effects on journalistic ethics, obligations and practices (Evans, 1999: 27). CBS News president Andrew Howard sees “a growing tabloidization and trivialization of network news” which he ascribes to commercial factors (Kirtz, 1997: 13). Journalist EJ Donne believes that the independent tradition of journalists is being lost as American media ownership passes to “huge conglomerates” (Kirtz, 1997: 13). These conglomerates are interested in the news as a business and make decisions based on purely financial considerations. This would exacerbate the trend of tabloidisation, as the conventional wisdom is that the more sensational the news, the more it appeals to the public. According to Retief (2002: 14), media ownership by conglomerate means that the public are getting their news from very few sources and this undermines the principle of the “marketplace of ideas.”

Evans (1999: 27) cites law professor Louis Brandeis and businessman Samuel Warren as they were quoted in the *Harvard Law Review* of 1890:

“The press is overstepping in every direction the obvious bounds of propriety and decency. Gossip is no longer the resource of the idle and of the vicious, but has become a trade, which is pursued with industry and well as effrontery.”

This shows that the issue of sensationalism in the press is not recent.

Even further back in history the topic of sensationalism in the media has come under scrutiny. The invention of the telegraph during the American Civil War created a

faster way of disseminating news. Commenting on this development philosopher Oliver Wendell Holmes foresaw a golden age of communication that would “equalise and steady public opinion” (Altschull, 1984: 13). His contemporary Henry David Thoreau saw this technological breakthrough as merely a device to spread news that was not worth hearing. He predicted the birth of a sensationalist press obsessed with celebrity, predicting somewhat tongue in cheek that the first story that would come through on the cable from London would be the news that Princess Adelaide had the whooping cough (Altschull, 1984: 13). Thoreau might not have been completely correct in his prediction, but certainly showed foresight.

The tabloidisation debate also touches on what politician and journalist Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) called the “central tension in American press ideology” (Altschull, 1984: 107).

This is the tension that exists between the noble pursuit to inform and educate the public to the betterment of society and the commercial end of being a profitable publication in a free market economy (Altschull, 1984: 107). The slippery slope to tabloidisation is greased with money. Franklin noted that his publications would make more profits if he was more sensationalist in his reporting but declined to stoop “to the lowest common denominator.” Franklin described his newspaper as “ponderous and dull,” but promised his readers that he would try and inject some entertainment into his publication, as far as the “nature of the thing will allow” (Altschull, 1984: 107).

The South African press has not been immune to the trend. We too have had extensive coverage on the issues mentioned above – even though OJ Simpson for example was virtually unknown in South Africa prior to his trial – as well as of our own domestic gossip and scandals, such as the divorce of former president Nelson Mandela and the ongoing interest in the life of heart transplant pioneer the late Dr Chris Barnard.

1.2 Objectives of this Study

This study aims to establish whether the South African press has become “tabloidised,” or in other words, is showing visible signs of becoming more trivial and

sensationalistic in its format and content. This will be done through an analysis of the front page of a specific publication, *The Cape Times*, at various intervals. The methodology will be expanded upon in Chapter 3.

Before the specifics of the South African situation is studied, it is worth examining the following areas:

1. Definitions of tabloidisation. How tabloidisation has been defined and how it will be defined for the purposes of this study
2. An analysis of the role of the media in society, as well as in Africa specifically
3. A review of literature on the subject of tabloidisation

1.3 Defining Tabloidisation

Tabloid publications differ to the mainstream press in both format and content.

In format the tabloid newspaper is different from the more “serious” newspaper. They are smaller and more compact; they are published in the “tabloid” size, whereas most mainstream newspapers are published in the broadsheet size. Size does not however brand a newspaper as a tabloid. The *Mail & Guardian* is published in the tabloid size, but cannot be described as a tabloid publication, as its content is mainly serious political comment. Community newspapers published in Cape Town by the mainstream media are also published in the tabloid size, but would not be described as tabloid publications. Publications such as *The Cape Times* and *Cape Argus* are in the broadsheet size.

Tabloids are generally more colourful; make more use of graphics, photographs and bold headlines. Often the headlines are large and sensational. The stories are correspondingly short and to the point (Campbell, n.d.: n.p.).

Tabloids also exist in magazine form, especially in America, but also in the rest of the world. *The National Enquirer* is an example of an American tabloid magazine; it is also available in South Africa. Tabloid television shows made their debut in America

in the mid-1980s. American current affairs television programmes such as *Hard Copy* and *A Current Affair* could be described as tabloid due to their content. They mainly broadcast exposé's and celebrity scandal (Alter, 1994: 34).

The difference in *content* between a tabloid publication and the mainstream press is a more important distinction than *size*.

The *Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies* uses a definition of tabloidisation ascribed to Frank Esser in a study published in the *European Journal of Communication* in September of 1999. In his article "Tabloidization of News: A Comparative analysis of Anglo-American and German Press Journalism," Esser refers to tabloidisation as "news driven by reader preferences and commercial requirements." It is certain that by and large tabloids are in existence with the main aim to make money. As the news business at the tabloid end of the market is very competitive, making money can mean being more sensational than the competition. Esser's point that tabloid news is driven by reader preference is also important. If this is indeed the case one must respect the wants of the public, and therefore one cannot begin a study such as this with any form of prejudice against the genre (Watson and Hill, 2000: 307).

Competitiveness is also an important spur in the tabloidisation of news. As publications compete in the free market for readers and viewers they are put under pressure to publish what sells, even if this means that what sells does not accord with high minded ideas of journalistic purists.

Commenting on the debate on tabloidisation in the American media an editorial in *Nation* magazine articulates the hypocrisy in the industry by calling tabloidisation "any particular debased practice that is typical of one's competitors" (Juicing the News, 1994: 111).

The term "yellow" journalism is also often used synonymously with tabloid journalism. The term was first used to describe the journalistic tactics used by Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst in the ratings battle between their publications the *New York World* and the *New York Journal* in the 1890s (Rampant Yellow

Journalism, 2003: n.p.). These tactics included banner headlines, wide use of illustrations and sensationalist reporting.

The term is derived from the name of a cartoon character featured in Pulitzer's *World*, *The Yellow Kid*. The character was so popular that Hearst at first tried to compete by publishing a rival comic strip. When this did not work, he offered the cartoonist more money to work for his newspaper. Pulitzer then counter-offered. The cynical cash-driven battle between the two for *The Yellow Kid*, seemed to embody all the worst excesses of the kind of journalism practiced by the two men. Contemporary commentators called this "yellow journalism" (Kanfer, 1995: 32).

Yellow journalism is not completely synonymous with tabloid journalism. The main point of difference would be the crusading tactics used by the yellow journalists. The public crusades embarked on by men such as Hearst and Pulitzer resulted in the exposure of public corruption, an end that could be seen as noble. By and large the tabloid press are not interested in any end other than to make money. Pulitzer was described as a social reformer, a man who believed in making profits, but used them as a guarantee of press independence (Squires, 1999: 6).

In any study of tabloidisation it is necessary to investigate this phenomenon in the United States and Great Britain, as they are two countries that have the largest English language press in the world. In Chapter 2, on the history of the tabloid, it will be shown that the tabloid has no real country of origin, but was brought into existence through an evolutionary process that involved the press in many countries. Both these two countries have contributed largely to the birth and current existence of the English language tabloid.

By studying tabloids in Britain and the United States we will see that a subtle distinction exists in the way the tabloid is defined in each country.

In America tabloidisation is seen as the selling out of the news to the lowest common denominator of public interest purely for financial gain (Juicing the news, 1994: 111). All that is considered to fall under the general topic of gossip would be considered tabloid news. The discussion of the private lives of politicians would fall under this

definition. The American media routinely has debates about the relevance of the private morals of politicians to the political debate. Until the sexual indiscretions of American president Bill Clinton were made public, the American tabloid press considered politics to be dull. In Great Britain the tabloid press get involved in political elections and consider the private lives of politicians to be fair game. The involvement of the press in elections in Britain have lead to charges that the British tabloid *The Sun* won the 1992 election for the Conservative Party by scaring readers about what the Labour party would implement if they won (Linton, 1996: 20).

In the United States the method of news gathering, as well as content of the news, shapes the definition, with media analysts focussing on this aspect of the phenomenon (Washington, 1999: 67). Paying newsworthy people for interviews, “staging” demonstrations to illustrate a point so that the point that is trying to be made by the news organisation is more striking, and entrapment are some of the methods that are employed by American tabloid journalism. These methods all have the effect of eroding public confidence in the truth of the message and therefore undermine the credibility of the particular news organisation and indeed the broader media. As Robert Lichter, director of the Center for Media and Public Affairs states: “If you set it up so people aren’t seeing what they believe they are, they may never believe you again” (Pauley, 1994: 63). People who are paid for interviews would have an incentive to make their stories more sensational.

Jane Pauley of American current affairs television show *Dateline* gives a good illustration of how journalistic ethics and methods can be eroded over a period of time. *Dateline*, a show broadcast by the national American broadcaster NBC, was widely condemned in the early 1990s when it was proved that the show had “staged” demonstrations that they used to prove that a certain make of General Motors car would ignite on collision due to the positioning of the vehicle’s petrol tanks. The programme attached igniters to the vehicles to make combustion more likely. They did not disclose this fact to their viewers (Pauley, 1994: 64).

In writing an article on the matter Pauley found that *Dateline* was not the first television programme to stage demonstrations. She quotes an article written by Walter Olson in the *National Review* in June of 1993 that the other two American national

broadcasters, ABC and CBS had used similar tactics in 1978 and 1980 respectively. In the CBS current affairs programme *60 Minutes* the producers rigged tests to show that certain Jeeps would roll over while negotiating bends and in 1978 ABC's *20/20* used igniters to prove certain Ford sedans were unsafe (Pauley, 1994: 63).

It should be noted that all three programmes are deemed as highly respected in America for their journalistic contribution. Many of America's most respected journalists like Dan Rather and Diane Sawyer have been anchors on these programmes.

Great Britain, which has a long tradition of tabloid press, sees the issue somewhat differently. Here, according to a study undertaken by Brian Winston of the University of Westminster in 2002, all news other than political news is seen to detract from the "important news" (Winston, 2002: 5). He defines tabloidisation as the "process of incorporating 'other' news into news bulletins to the point that it dominates." The news then pays little attention to politics, economics and society and more to sports, scandal and popular entertainment. Even issues such as crime and human interest, which in South Africa would be seen as legitimate areas for reporting due to the high incidence of crime, would be seen as the softening of the news (Winston, 2002:5).

Pauley blames the incidents of staging on the lack of experienced and professional journalists in the industry, the ignoring of policy in many news organisations and journalists being carried away by what they believe to be the justness of their cause (Pauley, 1994: 63).

It is also noted that with the media explosion that has occurred in the last decade the number of journalists who are considered to be experienced is dwindling. People who do not necessarily have the necessary grounding in journalistic ethics staff newsrooms. Lizette Rabe of the University of Stellenbosch says:

"Our country needs professional journalists who can act in a professional way according to the demands of our profession" (2002: 115).

It is also worth noting that there is no professional code of conduct for journalists as there are for lawyers or doctors, although there is a broadly accepted code of ethics, with individual publications making the code more explicit in their organisations (Leiter, et al, 1999: 70).

It is believed amongst journalists that if they were licensed and held to a specific code of conduct, press freedom would be impaired, as the institution authorised to issue a licence would have power over who could practice as a journalist. As it is up to individual news organisations and publications to come up with their own codes of conduct, a wide and varied interpretation of what is ethically acceptable exists (Leiter, et el, 1999: 14).

In South Africa mechanisms have been put in place to ensure that the press live up to their ethical obligations and the public is protected from media excess. The Press Ombudsman and Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa was brought into existence by the media to give the public a forum to complain to if they were offended by reporting in the print and broadcast media respectively (Retief, 2002: 201).

For the purposes of this study it is necessary to define what will be seen as tabloidisation. In order to later quantify whether the news is becoming more tabloid in South Africa, it is useful to look at not just a definition of tabloidisation but also a list of criteria. These criteria are an abbreviated list of what Campbell used to define the yellow press in his study *Yellow Journalism: Puncturing the Myths, Defining the Legacies* (n.d.).

The criteria are:

- Emphasis on banner headlines
- Above-average use of photography, illustration and colour
- Self-promotion of the publication
- Crusading journalism as seen in yellow journalism

- Short, condensed stories – Evans (1999: 27) notes that the founder of the *Daily Mail* in London, Alfred Harmsworth, reportedly urged his reporters not to write stories of more than 250 words
- Manufactured stories and interviews and use of anonymous sources
- A variety of topics covered on the front page

The definition of tabloidisation that will be used will be that of Winston (2002: 5). The study will look for a spread of “other” news, that is news that is not in the national interest, to the extent that it dominates.

The study will also measure the content and presentation of the newspaper studied against the criteria and definition listed above.

1.4 Media Theories

Several theories exist to explain the various philosophical approaches to the media:

These are:

1.4.1 Libertarianism

This is the dominant philosophy in Western media organisations. Libertarianism has existed since the early days of the press in the seventeenth century. In this view the individual, as an informed, intelligent being is the audience of the media. This individual is seen to be able to make rational decisions based on the facts presented by the media. The view is that no matter what the press might publish, truth will prevail, in what is termed “the market place of ideas” (Retief, 2002: 13).

1.4.2 Egalitarianism

This theory developed in the late twentieth century as a result of the increasing power of the media. As the communications industry exploded with the expansion of television coverage and the growth of the Internet, the media became owned by conglomerates. The idea that the media should have more of a social conscience was born due to the emphasis by the conglomerates on making profits and the increasing power of the media. Although egalitarians form part of a human rights culture, they emphasise the group rather than the individual that is celebrated in libertarianism.

Egalitarians do not exclude the possibility of government regulation of the press, although their first choice is self-regulation of the press (Retief, 2002: 17).

1.4.3 The Developmental Model

In this view the press is seen as a valuable resource to a country and should be used to develop the people of the country. This view is opposite to libertarianism, as it requires the press to support government initiatives, rather than act as the fourth estate in challenging government. The view is that the rights of the individual and the freedom of the press are minor when compared to social ills, such as poverty and disease. This model can limit press freedom and lead to government intervention in the press (Retief, 2002: 17).

1.5 Western versus African news values

Many media practitioners in the West see the central role of the media as that of government watchdog – the fourth estate. It sees its role as the protector of democracy and the critic of government. This is the classic libertarian view of the media (Retief, 2002: 20).

In this view the media is seen as an objective outsider whose role is to inform, expose its public to the issues of the day and let them decide what they regard as truth. In this view the freedom of the press is sacrosanct and though commercial interests are tolerated, government intervention is not. A belief also exists that in “the marketplace of ideas” the public will invariably find its way to the truth. The emphasis in the libertarian model is on the freedom and rights of the individual (Blankenberg, 1999: 42).

African media commentators such as Ngaire Blankenberg have seen this view as idealistic in the African context. They argue that a libertarian Western media is a luxury that Africa, with its limited resources, cannot afford. In this paradigm, the media must play a central role in the betterment of the community, or in other words follow a developmental model. The media must not simply inform, but must actively encourage projects that will improve the lot of the people. Resources such as a printing press or a broadcast infrastructure must be used for the good of society, as

they are so rare. The emphasis here is on the collective rather than the individual (Eko, 2000: 85).

The following points are a summary of Blankenberg's view on how the African media should function. He calls this his liberatory model (Blankenberg, 1999: 42), which requires the media to:

- Act as a facilitator in and of the public's participation in the political system
- Be a mediator to resolve conflict and bring people together
- Be a catalyst for critical consciousness
- Be a storyteller that weaves together the experiences and traditions of the community to create a common culture. For example this would include supporting what South African President Thabo Mbeki calls his African Renaissance, which is loosely regarded as the final step of liberating the African people of colonial rule and reinforcing the African cultures
- Conscientise people so that they understand the power dynamics in which they find themselves

In Blankenberg's view the media must be a part of the community and biased in its favour. This is contrary to the libertarian model in which objectivity is seen as a virtue. This paradigm also asks that the journalist is held accountable to his or her community rather than the commercial interests of the publication. The journalist must consider the impact of the story on the society, rather than just publish and be damned (1999: 42).

There is a contrast in the way the African model views freedom versus the Western model. In the libertarian model the media feels that it must present all views and ideas in the most objective way and that the public must then choose the view they agree with. The liberatory view criticises this as putting no obligation on the journalist to judge the merits of each view (Blankenberg, 1999: 42). It also accuses Western media of a class bias, that it transmits the view of the dominant ideology or the middle class and neglects the views and needs of the poorer classes.

The liberatory view attempts to put the media into an African perspective and deal with the unique circumstances of a continent that is just emerging from centuries of colonialism and oppression. It fails however to come up with practical ideas on how to implement this philosophy. What and who is the community? To which community should journalists be responsible and is this really possible in a globalised media? If media should not be governed by commercial or government considerations how then must the media be run? These questions are not answered. The journalist is also asked to perform a function that is more reflective of what a social worker does, than a purveyor of news.

In an article published in the *South African Journal of Sociology*, authors Arnold de Beer and Elanie Steyn describe news in a Western model as being primarily conflict driven. In this Western view, they argue that the most important attributes of news are “timeliness, unexpectedness, predictability, proximity, conflict and unusualness” (De Beer and Steyn 1996: 90). They accept the value of this kind of news in enforcing change, but argue that it causes a biased reporting of Africa, as the only newsworthy events in Africa would then be issues such as war, famine, corruption, unrest and other forms of conflict. They argue that operating with this kind of news value system causes the journalist to focus only on events as they happen, and not on the issues that create events, or the aftermath of events.

Due to the perceived biased reporting on African events, postcolonial Africa developed a more developmental approach to newsgathering (De Beer and Steyn, 1996: 90). The authors describe developmental news as news that informs and educates its consumers on topics that are of material benefit to them, that is news that will improve the conditions of their lives. Topics of interest would include education, health and general social development. The authors state that a developmental approach would also mean that the media should support government initiatives rather than use the traditional Western approach of confrontation and question.

Even though the principles of the developmental approach to media might seem in the social interest it lead to misuse and control of media organisations by government. The concept was also not embraced by African media practitioners (De Beer and Steyn, 1996: 90). The authors concluded that a third alternative to the Western and

developmental model was required (De Beer and Steyn, 1996: 90). This third alternative proposed by the authors is an amalgamation of the two approaches and includes informing and educating, holding government accountable by playing the watchdog role and setting the agenda for public debate.

The Western libertarian model would facilitate the growth of the tabloid press, with its emphasis on independence of the media and its acknowledgement of the business interests that must be considered by the media. The developmental or liberatory approach favoured by African media commentators would be in opposition to the growth of a tabloid press, as this would then be interpreted as the misuse of a valuable public asset for purposes of entertainment.

1.6. Review of Literature of Tabloidisation

No studies could be found to establish whether there is a growing trend in the South African media towards tabloidisation.

Brian Winston of the University of Westminster in Great Britain did an applicable study on British trends in 2002. In *Towards Tabloidization? Glasgow Revisited 1975-2001*, Winston compared the content and presentation of news bulletins on three major British television channels at intervals between 1975 and 2000.

Winston found that there has been a decrease in the number of reports on foreign news and an increase on local interest stories. More stories on labour relations were broadcast in 1975, whereas in 2000 the emphasis was on economic news. Crime reporting had increased. Winston concludes that there is no proof that there is a trend towards tabloidisation. He further states that the change in the content of television news is the same as that in the broadsheet newspapers and is more indicative of a change in public priorities than tabloidisation (2002: 5).

Winston also looked at the length of news items. As previously noted the length of news reports is an indicator of a trend towards tabloidisation. He found that they had actually increased (2002: 5).

He notes a change in presentational style, with more live transmissions from news hotspots and more use of graphics.

In short, Winston's study found no evidence of tabloidisation in the mainstream television news in Great Britain (2002: 5).

Chapter 2

2.1 History of tabloids and the yellow press

Tabloids have existed in one shape or another for almost as long as the mainstream media.

As early as 1679 a newspaper called *Domestick Intelligence, Or News from both City and Country* was published in Great Britain and published content that would today be described as tabloid news. The publication focussed on local and sensational news. The other significant feature of this newspaper was that Benjamin Harris, who would one day publish the first newspaper in the United States, published it (Stephens, n.d.: n.p.)

The yellow journalism that is synonymous with tabloid journalism was first seen in the 1890s.

William Randolph Hearst arrived in New York in 1895 and started the *New York World*. Soon Hearst and fellow media legend Joseph Pulitzer were involved in a battle for readership between their respective publications the *New York World* and the *New York Journal*.

It is even argued that William Randolph Hearst was instrumental in the start of the war between Spain and America over Cuba. Both Hearst and Pulitzer accused Spain of sinking the American battle ship the *Maine* in the Cuban Harbour (Evans, 1999: 27). This report proved to be untrue. Hearst sent photographer Frederic Remington to cover the situation in Cuba in 1897. When Remington reported that all was quiet Hearst reportedly told him: “You furnish the pictures and I’ll furnish the war” (Campbell, n.d.: n.p.).

The tactics employed in yellow journalism included banner headlines and an over-the-top use of illustrations. Indeed, it is part of tabloid lore that the headlines are most important because they are often more important than the story. Yellow journalism was also characterised by a blatant self-promotion of the publication, and the

newspapers of Hearst and Pulitzer often crowed about their successes (Campbell, n.d.: n.p.).

They also believed in aggressively pursuing the news, even if this incurred costs. In a common piece of self-promotion Hearst once boasted:

“The reason old journalism does not like the *Journal* is that the *Journal* gets the news, no matter what it costs” (Campbell, n.d.: n.p.).

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic in Great Britain, Alfred Harmsworth, later Lord Northcliffe, established *The Daily Mail* in 1896. This was the first national daily newspaper in Great Britain to focus on news other than politics and crime and set the pattern of reporting for today’s British tabloids (Up to a point, 1996: 73).

Harmsworth’s paper was unusual in that it set out to cater to the interests of the working classes and women. His paper included features on gardening, gossip and tips on dressmaking and housekeeping. He believed that news should be compact and quick to read and referred to his publications as the “busy man’s paper” (Up to a point, 1996: 73).

By the 1930s he was competing with other titles such as the *The Daily Express* and *The Daily Herald* that were even more aggressively targeting the working class. Indeed Harmsworth’s paper showed many of the traits of the yellow press - short stories, a wide range of topics - yet he shied away from an over-emphasis on violence and sex in order to maintain his female readership (Up to a point, 1996: 73).

Harmsworth first used the term tabloid in the New Year’s edition of the *New York World* of 1901. He had been invited to edit this important edition by Joseph Pulitzer. The masthead featured these two slogans: “The busy man’s paper” and “All the news in sixty seconds.” Under the masthead he stated his approach to the news:

“I claim that by my system of condensed or tabloid journalism hundreds of working hours can be saved each day” (Up to a point, 1996: 73).

The word “tabloid” is derived from the word tablet and essentially means small tablet. In other words it is part of the nature of a tabloid that the news it presents is condensed (Up to a point, 1996: 73).

In 1911 *Motion Picture Story Magazine* introduced a column called *Answer Man*. This gave readers the opportunity to ask questions to and of their favourite celebrities. The response was overwhelming, showing an early interest by the public in the antics of the famous. In today’s tabloid industry reporting on the famous is an important part of the genre (Flanagan, 2001: 157).

In 1923 *Time* magazine was established by Henry Luce and Briton Hadden and the news magazine, as we know it, appeared. *Time* magazine at its inception was also open to criticism regarding its ethics. It is believed that journalists who presented copy that did not accord with the political views of Luce had their stories changed to suit his politics (Evans, 1999: 27).

In the 1930s photographs began to appear in magazines. The placement of photographs in magazines allowed the tabloids to present the public with sensational covers and is an important milestone in the development of tabloids. The 1930s also saw the world’s first media frenzy created by the kidnapping of the child of aviator Charles Lindberg and the resultant “trial of the century” of his kidnapper. Lindberg would later accuse the media of being responsible for the death of his child and many people agreed with him (Evans, 1999: 27).

Technological advances in photography and the speeding up of the printing presses as well as the invention of the typewriter and the fall in the price of paper fuelled the expansion of the popular press (Campbell, n.d.: n.p.).

In the 1950s gossip magazines came into being. These magazines sought to expose the scandals of movie stars who at the time were being strictly controlled by the big movie studios. The movie bosses did all they could to prevent their stars being portrayed as anything other than wholesome, all-American roll models. *Confidential* magazine was a successful magazine with a readership of four million a week and focused exclusively on the private lives of movie stars. The movie studios flooded

Confidential with lawsuits. To stay out of court the magazine made an arrangement with the moguls to clean up their stories. The result was a decline in readership (Gossip, Scandal and, n.d.: n.p.).

Generoso Pope founded *The National Enquirer*, today's most successful tabloid magazine in the United States in the 1950s. It became America's first nationally syndicated tabloid magazine (Pondillo, 2002: 150). Initially the magazine dealt in gory stories of death, murder and mutilation. Pope felt that the same impulse that drew people to the scene of an accident would make them buy his magazine (Flanagan, 2001: 157). It was standard practice to purchase autopsy photographs from police officers and splash them over the front cover of the magazine.

With the disappearance of the newsstand from American society in the 1960s the newspaper distribution channels changed. People now bought their magazines at the supermarket till areas or checkouts, where mostly female potential readers would see them. Pope realised that he could not have his magazine with its front page of death and gore in the family supermarkets of America and changed his formula (Pondillo, 2002: 150).

In 1968 he began hiring writers from the mainstream press. Pope changed his formula to what is the current popular conception of tabloid press. His stories were about self-help tips, aliens, UFOs and stories of the bizarre. A major turnaround came when the *Enquirer* ran a negative story on former American first lady Jackie Onassis in 1969. At the time Onassis was still considered to be America's sweetheart and the press refrained from criticising her in any way. The resultant boost in circulation convinced Pope to invest time and resources in celebrity gossip. His instruction to his photographers was that wherever Onassis found herself in the world he wanted a photograph (Pondillo, 2002: 150).

Pondillo cites writer Bill Sloan, who in his book *I watched a groundhog eat my baby – A Colourful history of Tabloids and Their Cultural Impact*, credits this statement by Pope with the invention of the paparazzi (2002: 150).

The best selling issue of the *Enquirer* ever was the issue with a photograph of a dead Elvis Presley in his coffin. The tabloid news hierarchy was simple. The cover formula is: “Young is better than old. Pretty is better than ugly. Anything is better than politics. Nothing is better than the celebrity dead” (Flanagan, 2001: 157).

During the murder trial of OJ Simpson in the 1990s *The National Enquirer* succeeded in establishing more credibility amongst its readership as well as the mainstream media. George Kennedy, professor of Journalism at the University of Missouri School of Journalism said:

“The *New York Times* found itself having to credit *The National Enquirer* (Rivers, 2001: n.p.)”

The *Enquirer* succeeded in sourcing a photograph that showed Simpson wearing a pair of shoes that he had said he never owned. These shoes had left bloody prints at the scene of the crime. This piece of evidence was quoted extensively in the mainstream media. It was also used in a civil prosecution brought by the families of the accused and was cited as one of the reasons why the civil trial was decided in favour of the plaintiffs (Rivers, 2001: n.p.).

Today *The National Enquirer* is part of a stable of tabloids that are owned by American Media Limited and run by Harvard educated Steve Coz (Flanagan, 2001: 157). American Media Limited claims a weekly readership of 45 million for all its tabloid titles combined. Further *Enquirer* successes was the exposure of the fact that politician Jesse Jackson had fathered an illegitimate daughter (Pass the Pulitzers, 2001: 33). The slogan on the *Enquirer's* delivery vans read: “Get it first. Get it fast. Get it right” (Pass the Pulitzers, 2001: 33).

The 1960s was the decade of the Watergate scandal. The impeachment of an American president as a direct result of the press fulfilling its watchdog role was a highpoint in journalistic history. From a journalistic point of view Watergate led to a more confrontational style of reporting that today characterises the tabloid press (Rivers, 2001: n.p.).

In the 1970s and 1980s the American tabloids were calling themselves “family weeklies.” They were publishing stories on science; religion and education that they hoped would bring them a broad family readership (Flanagan, 2001: 157). The content of the tabloids then were very much what can be seen in South Africa’s *You* magazine.

According to Bill Sloan, who has written for several tabloids, including *The National Enquirer*, circulation has been in decline since the 1980s. He ascribes this to an over reliance on celebrity news (Rivers, 2001: n.p.).

In its article “Pass the Pulitzers”, *The Economist* (2001: 33) holds the view that the presidency of Bill Clinton played a big role in the merging of the tabloid media with the mainstream media. The stories of Clinton’s womanising were great tabloid fodder, but also a legitimate area for the mainstream media to investigate as it became a major political story and a matter of national interest. Bill Sloan however believes that Clinton’s presidency, as well as the previously mentioned emphasis on celebrity reporting, caused a decline in tabloid readership, as the mainstream press were “out-tabloiding the tabloids” (Rivers, 2001: n.p.).

In 1997 Princess Diana was killed in a motorcar crash with several paparazzi in pursuit of the car that she was in. In the wake of this tragedy the tabloidisation debate reached fever pitch. Many ordinary people joined in the condemnation of the tabloid industry and indeed blamed it for the death of the princess. This echoed the outcry of the Lindberg kidnapping in the 1930s and, as in the case of Lindberg, the outrage soon died down. Before long the tabloids were back to their old tactics (Flanagan, 2001: 157).

2.2 What does tabloid journalism do to the media?

There are conflicting views as to whether or not tabloid journalism serves a constructive function in the media and society as a whole.

Alter (1994: 34) feels that as the tactics and news values of the tabloid press become used more frequently in the traditionally conservative media, the distinction between

believable media sources and the sensationalist media becomes hard to see. Viewers and readers are being exposed to the same stories regardless of whether they are reading a broadsheet or a tabloid. In his view this causes the public to start disbelieving both the tabloid press as well as their usual sources of news. This then impacts the credibility of all the news and the marketability of news as product. In other words “tabloid excesses are bad for business” (Alter, 1994: 34).

On the plus side Alter also sees tabloidisation as “democracy at work.” He argues that if the public were not interested in tabloid type news, it would not be around. Or in other words “the public is getting what it wants” (Alter, 1994: 34). He also argues that the stories told in the tabloid press create a common discourse amongst people in a multi-cultural society like America. When people of varying backgrounds and cultural identities can share a common topic of conversation, a “shared experience” is created. Gossipy news thus performs the same function in society as sports.

If the 1990s were indeed the golden age of tabloids, it coincided with the fall of Communism and the spread of democracy in the former Eastern Bloc. This created a news vacuum that was filled with sensationalist news (From Containment to, 2000: 100). The 24-hour news channels such as CNN were established at the same time and the Internet was showing remarkable growth. These news channels had to be filled with something, and if no “hard” news was available, the channels used tabloid news to fill the news bulletins. At this time Australian media tycoon Rupert Murdoch began running tabloid talk shows such as *Hard Copy* in America, which brought tabloid reporting out of the supermarkets and newsstands and onto television (Alter, 1994: 34). These developments as well as the globalisation of the entertainment and media industry have created a more “industrialised” form of tabloidisation than had been seen before (From Containment to, 2000: 100).

A parallel can be drawn with the South African situation. Since the establishment of the press in South Africa there have always been major political issues that had to be addressed: the Boer wars, South Africa breaking away from the Commonwealth, the Second World War, the rise of Apartheid and opposition to it. With the advent of democracy in South Africa a similar vacuum was thus created.

With the end of the Cold War the political climate and discourse has changed and this has resulted in marked changes in the reporting of news. The world was during the decades of the Cold War in a constant state of tension with the threat of nuclear war hanging over its head. The Cold War was also fought on several fronts, therefore the affairs of every country was relevant to the West. With the end of the Cold War a vacuum was created. The political urgency was lost. The West was no longer interested in the problems of countries that did not have a direct bearing on their own issues (From Containment to, 2000: 100).

Journalists try to justify the publishing of tabloid news by attempting to put a sociological slant on their stories. From this perspective the OJ Simpson story is about spousal abuse and race, and the Lorena Bobbitt incident is about feminism (Alter, 1994: 34).

The focus on the fallibilities of celebrities in the tabloid media serves the function of humanising people who the general public are encouraged to worship as if they were modern deities. The stars involve themselves in the pursuit of publicity by hiring publicists to have flattering stories published about them in popular magazines. There is a view that gossip about very famous, rich and beautiful people empowers ordinary people. It is healthy for the public to understand that no perfect people exist and that all people, no matter how powerful they appear to be, have problems and shortcomings in their lives (Flanagan, 2001: 157).

Chapter 3

3.1 Introduction

In order to establish whether the South African media is showing signs of tabloidisation, the phenomenon has to be quantified by gathering and interpreting data. This will be done by using a methodology that is a combination of that used by W Joseph Campbell in his study of the American “yellow press”, *Yellow Journalism: Puncturing the Myths, Defining the Legacies* (n.d.), and Brian Winston’s analysis of the British television news *Towards Tabloidization? Glasgow revisited, 1975-2001* that was published in 2002.

3.2 Methodology

For the purposes of this study it will not be possible to study a whole field of subjects. This would be time-consuming and possibly too complex to arrive at a meaningful conclusion. Therefore the study has to be more focussed and defined. It was decided to take just one print publication - *The Cape Times* - as a sample.

The Cape Times was chosen due to its longevity - it was first published in 1876 - and its reputation for being a quality broadsheet.

Campbell’s study focussed on addressing the myths of yellow journalism and assessing whether or not the characteristics of yellow journalism could still be seen in the American press. To assess this he did a content analysis of the front pages of seven leading newspapers in America over a period of 100 years from 1899 to 1999.

In his 2002 study Winston analysed news bulletins from three television stations in Great Britain, namely BBC, ITN and C5, at various times, spanning the years 1976 to 2001. Winston studied the content and presentation of these bulletins to establish whether a trend to tabloidisation can be distinguished. Winston looked at the topics being covered, as well as the length of time assigned to reports, the use of illustration in reports as well as any change in presentation techniques over the time period. He divided stories into various topics, such as politics, industrial and foreign news. He calculated the percentage frequency of his various news categories to the total news bulletins (Winston, 2001: 1).

It is useful to study the front page of a newspaper, as it is the “face” of the newspaper, in effect its “shop window.” The stories that an editor and his staff choose to put on the front page reflect what the editorial staff believe are the most important stories of the day. In a free market economy, they would also consider whether the readership would agree with them and show this by buying their publication. The front page is a major factor in the commercial viability of the publication, as people will buy the newspaper mainly on what the front page is carrying. The front page thus sets the tone of the newspaper in content. It will also set the tone in presentation, as the rest of the paper will reflect the same presentational standards.

The front page of a newspaper that aspires to educate its readership on the issues of the day as *The Cape Times* claims in its website will thus be a finely balanced view of newsworthiness as well as commercial viability (Whitfield, 2003: 2).

In this study the front pages of *The Cape Times* in four separate months were studied. Although the newspaper was circulated on Saturdays during the years of 1976, by May 1995 it was only published on weekdays. Hence for the purposes of comparison only 22 copies were studied in each respective month. The four months that were chosen for study are January 1976, May 1994, May 1995 and May 2003. The criteria that were used in analysing the pages were those listed in Chapter 1 as criteria for tabloidisation. These criteria are derived from those used by Campbell in his study (n.d.). To refresh:

- Emphasis on banner headlines
- Above-average use of photography, illustration and colour
- Self-promotion of the publication
- Crusading journalism as seen in yellow journalism
- Short, condensed stories
- Manufactures stories and interviews with anonymous sources
- A variety of topics on the front page

These criteria deal with the presentation as well as content, whereas the definition used by Winston is mainly related to content.

The first three months were chosen due to historically significant events that took place in South Africa. A recent month was necessary to study the current situation and May of 2003 was chosen, mainly to tie in with the month used in the years 1994 and 1995.

January of 1976 was the month when the first television broadcast took place in South Africa. The introduction of television was a major milestone in the development of the communication industry in South Africa. The introduction of such a formidable competitor into the media industry would cause a natural tendency in the print media to re-evaluate its strategy in order to compete with a widely accessible and entertaining medium. The pressure put on the market by the introduction of this powerful medium could create the commercial stress that could lead to tabloidisation.

1976 was also the year of major uprisings in the country. The events of June 1976 were still to happen, but the stresses in the country were building up and must have had an influence on the media.

April of 1994 was the month when the country held its first democratic elections, a major event in the history of South Africa. It was a time when the media as well as the rest of South Africa were experiencing a major adjustment. By May, the month chosen for study, the new president of the country had been elected. In the wake of this, debates regarding the role of the media in Africa, and by extension a new South Africa, begun.

I chose a year later as the next month to consider. This was done to see whether democratisation would lead to a shift in media priorities. Pressures that had existed in the country due to the political situation would have diminished, and the media would have experienced a year of change and readjustment. Ownership of the media would have been under discussion and realignment.

Jan Hofmeyr in a 2003 article in *Ecquid Novi* that addresses the issue of trust in the media by the South African public quotes Guy Berger as saying that black media ownership is improving. Hofmeyr also note that the print media has seen a decline in circulation since 1993 (2003: 319). The drop in circulation of print media would cause a natural commercial pressure to become more sensational.

It must be said that various dates could have been chosen. It is not an exact science to determine when the pressures to sensationalise the media would have been greatest. The news is unpredictable and ever changing. Almost any month that one can mention would have its own big stories and possible media pressure points.

3.3 The Cape Times

Frederick York St. Leger established *The Cape Times* in 1876. On its website the newspaper speaks of its “fearless commitment to human rights.” In his book *The Cape Times - An informal history*, journalist Gerald Shaw relates an incident in the history of the newspaper that reflects the pressures on publications to become more populist (1999: 218).

A report presented in 1967 by the head of a local advertising agency, Arthur Bernstein, advised the *Times* to go downmarket in a bid to increase circulation. The report cited the success achieved by this approach by the *Cape Herald*. In discussing the report, the leadership of *The Cape Times* declared:

“We are prepared to sacrifice commercial interests of *The Cape Times* if we think our policy is correct” (Shaw, 1999: 218).

The Cape Times’ website acknowledges a drop in circulation after 1994. The newspaper ascribes this to a traditional white readership that want to avoid the realities of a post-Apartheid South Africa. A drop in circulation would be the kind of commercial pressure that would make a publication vulnerable to tabloidisation. If readers do want to avoid the hard realities of South African life, how better to do this than through the sensationalism brought by the tabloid press? If that is what the readers want and it would boost circulation and maintain the commercial viability of

the publication, *The Cape Times* might be tempted to choose that alternative in order to survive commercially.

The Cape Times today sees its mission to:

“Provide a service to people: to give them information on which to base their decisions” (Whitfield, 2003: 2).

The newspaper sees interpretation of events as part of that service. *The Cape Times* is thus following the libertarian view of the media, which is to educate people and expose them to the marketplace of ideas so that they can make their own choices.

3.4 Analysing Content

In analysing the content of the newspaper, news stories were divided into various categories. Some of the categories are subdivided to make the nature of the story clearer. Every article was slotted into a category based on its content. In the 1976 newspapers it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between an article and a teaser. The layout of the newspaper did not conform to today’s norms where teasers are generally grouped at the side or top of the newspaper. In 1976 teasers were placed all over the front page and sometimes included longer sentences than is the norm today. It was decided to classify all copy that is printed in bullet form as a teaser. Teasers were not counted as an article. Where more substantial information is included the item was counted as an article.

3.4.1 Politics

This subject deals with matters of a political nature. During 1976 political reporting was focussed largely on regional conflicts involving South Africa, such as the wars in Angola and the former South West Africa (now Namibia). It was therefore decided to create a separate category for regional politics. The level of reporting on international politics is one of the indicators of tabloidisation; therefore this was also created as a separate category.

Winston used the decrease in coverage of international stories as an indicator of tabloidisation. It is particularly relevant to make this distinction in the South African context, as prior to 1994 the media and public of South Africa were in the midst of a political crisis of global importance and hence would be preoccupied with its own internal affairs.

3.4.2 Local Issues

These are stories that deal with matters of interest to the local community and generally these stories deal with matters such as gambling legislation, traffic issues or local events.

3.4.3 Economy

Two broad sub-categories emerge as one reads the articles. Economic reporting generally deals with matters of trade or labour issues. A general category was also used for stories that did not fit into the other sub-headings.

3.4.4 Health

In recent years reporting on health matters has involved two major themes. The one is the level of service delivered by government, with the press playing its libertarian role of watchdog. The other is the spread of disease. The spread of HIV/ AIDS is a major theme of health reporting, but other diseases such as SARS, also receive extensive coverage in today's reporting.

3.4.5 Tourism

This has become a major news category in recent times, due to the impact of tourism on not only the South African economy, but also many other economies in the world.

3.4.6 Crime

This has always been a topic of interest to the media. Crime is generally covered under the headings used in the table, that is violent crime such as murder or rape, crimes involving children, and high profile crimes involving people of high social standing. Corruption has become a major topic for reporting. The final heading dealing with crime that affects legislation was included as this is becoming more frequent in South African newspapers.

3.4.7 Sport

Sport has always been extensively covered in South African newspapers due to the politicisation of sport in South Africa, as well as the general public interest. In recent times sport has been associated with scandals involving doping or cheating. In the 1970s and 1980s sport was a political issue due to the sport boycott imposed on South Africa because of its racial policies.

In the early nineties sport was seen as something that could bring about reconciliation in a post-apartheid South Africa. The view was that uniting people in support of a national team would build patriotism and bring the many South African cultures closer together. An example of this approach would be the reporting of South Africa's victory in the 1995 Rugby World Cup.

A general category was also included as many sporting events are covered on the front page for purely sporting interest.

3.4.8 Disaster

Disasters such as death, fires and extreme weather conditions are often covered on the front pages of newspapers.

3.4.9 Human Interest

This category covers stories that have little effect on the lives of people but are interesting to read.

3.4.10 Environment

In the 1970s the environment was not covered at all as a topic of interest to readers. In the environmentally aware twenty first century it is becoming an increasingly important area of reporting.

3.4.11 Humour

Humorous stories are often used as filler on the front page.

3.4.12 Entertainment

This topic dealt with all areas of the entertainment field, including reporting on cultural events and celebrities.

3.4.13 Science

This category is for the coverage of all matters relating to science and technology

The above categories covered all the stories that were analysed.

3.5 Analysing Presentation

Headlines, lead photographs and the number of reports on the front page were also analysed. The depth of coverage given to a story was also analysed, specifically over how many days the story was carried and were any supporting stories added to the main story.

Chapter 4

4.1 Analysis of Information

In this chapter the news content and presentation will be analysed.

The number of stories that were found in the categories listed in Chapter 3 on the front page of *The Cape Times* in the relevant months will be tabulated.

The figures in the table will then be analysed. The table will list the categories previously outlined on the left.

The sub-categories identified will then be listed in the second column. The number of stories falling into each category will then be listed in the next column. The amount of headlines in the specific categories in the period studied will be listed in the next column and the number of lead photographs for the category are listed in the last column.

The last row totals up the number of stories covered in the twenty-two days covered as well as the total number of photographs used and headlines used in the time covered.

4.2 January 1976

The following copies of *The Cape Times* were analysed in the month of January:

Thursday 1st,

Saturday 3rd,

Monday 5th,

Tuesday 6th,

Wednesday 7th,

Thursday 8th,

Friday 9th,

Saturday 10th,

Monday 12th,

Tuesday 13th,

Wednesday 14th,

Thursday 15th,
Friday 16th,
Saturday 17th,
Monday 19th,
Tuesday 20th,
Wednesday 21st,
Thursday 22nd,
Friday 23rd,
Saturday 24th,
Monday 26th,
Tuesday 27th.

No edition was specified on the front page.

As previously noted, this was the month that television was introduced to South Africa. Six months later, in June, South Africa would be in the midst of the Soweto uprisings. In the rest of the world the first videocassette recorders were being put on the market and the communist leader of the Peoples' Republic of China, Mao Tse-tung, died. Apple Macintosh computers were launched and the first artificial gene was made.

4.2.1 An Analysis of News Content on the front page of *The Cape Times* in January of 1976

Main Category	Sub-Category	Number of Stories	Headline	Lead Photograph
Politics	International	7	0	0
	National	8	0	1
	Regional	57	15	3
Local Issues		4	0	0
Economy	Trade	0	0	0
	Labour	0	0	0
	Other	2	0	0
Health	Service Delivery	0	0	0
	Spread of Disease	0	0	0
Tourism		0	0	0
Crime	Violent	7	0	1
	Involving Children	0	0	0
	With Social/Legal Implications	0	0	0
	High Profile	10	0	0
	Corruption	0	0	0
Sport	Scandal	0	0	0
	Reconciliation	0	0	0
	General	27	4	6
Disaster		25	1	4
Human Interest		26	0	6
Environment		0	0	0
Humour		5	0	0
Entertainment	General	42	2	1
	Death of a Celebrity	1		0
Science		0	0	0
Total		221	22	22

4.2.2 Analysis of table 4.2.1

57 stories on regional politics were seen on the front page of the *Times* in 1976, this represents 25% of stories covered on the front page of the newspaper. These stories dealt mainly with the conflict situations in Angola and South West Africa (now

Namibia). The government response to the conflict, numbers of casualties and troop movements were covered. A broader Cold War perspective was reported. Given the implications for the country both externally (involvement in a conflict affecting many countries as well as South Africa's reputation abroad) and internally (South African casualties in a war), it is hardly surprising that this was the issue of highest importance in that time.

The Angola story was covered over several days and often had secondary stories on the same matter. On one particular day 5 stories on the front page were dedicated to regional conflicts.

The international stories that were covered included reports on Northern Ireland and the resignation of the Italian government. Only the Northern Ireland situation garnered more than one report. All reports were short.

The second biggest story was the television switch-on. 42 stories in total were dedicated to this subject, representing 19% of the front-page stories of the month. This accounted for almost all the entertainment reports. Television highlights were listed on the front page almost every day; these were not counted as articles. They were categorised as teasers. Due to the previously noted social and business implications of the television switch-on, this reporting cannot be regarded as "frivolous".

The sports reporting focussed on the Cape to Rio yacht race, horseracing and cricket. There was a decidedly political slant on sports reporting. The coverage focussed on the uproar that was caused when the organisers of the race wanted to ban the race finish in Rio due to political reasons. The race itself was extensively covered. The announcement that cricket in South Africa would be racially "mixed" as well as a threat by the Labour Party in New Zealand to stop an All Black rugby tour of South Africa also received front page coverage. Horseracing was extensively covered due to the upcoming Met.

Disaster stories (11%) and human-interest stories (12%) were also extensively covered. None of these individual stories were consistently covered.

Only one story was covered that could be called salacious, which was the story of a Tokai man who was using his home to run a brothel. One report concerning the romance between former Miss World, Anneline Kriel, and singer Richard Loring was published. Crime stories that were covered dealt in violent crime as well as several stories on theft.

Headlines for the month dealt mostly with the Angolan situation (68%). Lead photographs bucked the trend slightly with a greater emphasis on sports (27%), disaster (18%) or human interest (27%). The Angola situation only received 14% of the lead photographs. This indicates that although the big stories for the month were political, the editorial staff chose to feature photographs that would be more commercially appealing, hence the prominence of sport and human interest.

On average 10 reports a day were published on the front page. On average 2 photographs were published on the front page.

No banner headlines were recorded, but communists were repeatedly referred to in headlines as “reds.”

The presentation of the newspaper is markedly different from what is common today. Teasers were spread all over the front page and in various formats. In some cases the teasers were very similar to report and in some cases they took the form of bullet point summaries. There was little use of colour.

4.3 May 1994

The following copies of *The Cape Times* were analysed in the month of May:

Monday 2nd
Tuesday 3rd
Wednesday 4th
Thursday 5th
Friday 6th
Monday 9th
Tuesday 10th
Wednesday 11th
Thursday 12th
Friday 13th
Saturday May 14th
Monday May 16th
Tuesday May 17th
Wednesday May 18th
Thursday May 19th
Friday May 20th
Saturday May 21st
Monday May 23rd
Tuesday May 24th
Wednesday May 25th
Thursday May 26th
Friday May 27th

No edition was specified.

1994 was a big news year. In South Africa the aftermath of the April elections was being felt. Nelson Mandela became the president of the country. Internationally the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians was heating up and a ceasefire was declared in Northern Ireland. A bloody civil war in Rwanda was being fought with an eventual death toll of 500 000 people. North Korea was suspected of violating international nuclear conventions and Los Angeles suffered a devastating earthquake.

This was also the year that the OJ Simpson trial hit the news. Another big “tabloid” story that broke in 1994 was the story of Olympic ice-skater Tonya Harding, who hired a man to disable her rival Nancy Kerrigan on the eve of the winter Olympics. It was also the year that former American First Lady Jackie Kennedy Onassis died.

4.3.1 An Analysis of News Content on the front page of *The Cape Times* in May of 1994

Main Category	Sub-Category	Number of Stories	Headline	Lead Photograph
Politics	International	2	0	0
	National	60	18	9
	Regional	0	0	0
Local Issues		7	2	0
Economy	Trade	0	0	0
	Labour	1	0	0
	Other	4	0	0
Health	Service Delivery	0	0	0
	Spread of Disease	1	0	1
Tourism		0	0	0
Crime	Violent	7	0	1
	Involving Children	2	1	0
	With Social/Legal Implications	1	0	0
	High Profile	1	1	1
	Corruption	2	0	0
Sport	Scandal	4	0	0
	Reconciliation	4	0	0
	General	10	0	3
Disaster		9	0	2
Human Interest		9	0	4
Environment		0	0	0
Humour		3	0	0
Entertainment	General	0	0	1
	Death of a Celebrity	1		0
Science		0	0	0
Total		128	22	22

4.3.2 Analysis of Table 4.3.1

In the post-apartheid, post-Cold War South Africa the emphasis has shifted from a regional focus to a national focus. The big story of the month was the recent elections

(46%) and this event is covered extensively as befits a matter of such significance in South African history. The elections are headline news for 10 consecutive days. Another topic of national political interest is followed up on. This is the story of the arrest of AWB members for alleged bombings. The story is not followed up on daily however.

Crime (in total 10%), sport (8%), disaster (7%) and human interest (7%) are the next most important categories.

On the crime front, the “Station Strangler” story is written about, but not sensationally or on consecutive days. Two corruption stories are covered.

In the professional age of sport the stories that make the front pages are becoming increasingly scandalous, such as the admission by former Pakistani cricket captain Imran Kahn that he tampered with the ball during matches and the arrest of international football star Bruce Grobbelaar on drunken driving charges. The death of Formula One racing driver Ayrton Senna and the arrest of tennis star Jennifer Capriati are also featured on the front page. Sport stories are for the first time written from a reconciliation angle. In other words sporting events are seen as opportunities to bring the many different cultures in South Africa together in support of a national team, thus encouraging patriotism, whereas previously not all South Africans supported national teams due to the segregated nature of sport in the country. This is a stark contrast to the more political coverage given to sport in 1976. Specifically covered during this time is the soccer match played at the inauguration of new President Nelson Mandela between South Africa and Zambia.

Photographs relating to the soccer match between Manchester United and Chelsea in the FA Cup Final match are the lead photographs on two consecutive days.

Banner headlines are used more often. The events inspiring the banner headlines are however deserving of this distinction. The biggest font headline is “SA's great day”, and accompanies the story on Nelson Mandela’s inauguration.

International stories making the front page are the Arab–Israeli issue and the death of British Labour Part leader John Smith, as well as the deteriorating health of Jackie Onassis. None of these stories receive prominence and none are followed up on consecutive days. The stories on Jennifer Capriati and Bruce Grobbelaar are given more space.

More stories with a local interest (5%) are featured prominently on the front pages. These relate to issues that might have a serious impact on the local economy or social services, such as gambling, the RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme) and housing, and reflect a change of focus in the public mindset from issues of national concern to more local matters.

A marked decrease in the *number* of stories covered on the front page, in comparison with 1976, is noticed. In 1976 an average of 10 stories a day was covered on the front page. This has decreased to an average of 6 stories a day on the front page. An average of 2 photographs on the front page still applies with a slight increase in the size of photographs.

4.4 May 1995

The newspapers analysed in May 1995 are the following:

Tuesday May 2nd,

Wednesday May 3rd,

Thursday May 4th,

Friday May 5th,

Monday May 8th,

Tuesday May 9th,

Wednesday May 10th,

Thursday May 11th,

Friday May 12th,

Monday May 15th,

Tuesday May 16th,

Wednesday May 17th,

Thursday May 18th,

Friday May 19th,

Monday May 22nd,
Tuesday May 23rd,
Wednesday May 24th,
Thursday May 25th,
Friday May 26th,
Monday May 29th,
Tuesday May 30th
Wednesday May 31st

No edition was specified on the front page.

The major international news events of 1995 were the Oklahoma City bombing in America, an earthquake in Japan and the spread of the Ebola Virus. The OJ Simpson trial was in full swing in America.

In South Africa the major event of the year was South Africa's victory in the Rugby World Cup.

4.4.1 An Analysis of News Content of the front page of *The Cape Times* in May of 1995

Main Category	Sub-Category	Number of Stories	Headline	Lead Photograph
Politics	International	9	0	2
	National	32	7	3
	Regional	1	0	1
Local Issues		7	2	0
Economy	Trade	3	0	0
	Labour	4	0	0
	Other	4	0	0
Health	Service Delivery	2	0	0
	Spread of Disease	2	0	0
Tourism		3	1	0
Crime	Violent	1	0	0
	Involving Children	1	0	0
	With Social/Legal Implications	1	1	0
	High Profile	4	0	0
	Corruption	2	2	0
Sport	Scandal	2	0	0
	Reconciliation	4	0	0
	General	25	7	12
Disaster		3	1	1
Human Interest		7	0	2
Environment		5	0	2
Humour		2	0	0
Entertainment	General	1	0	0
	Death of a Celebrity	1		0
Science		0	0	0
Total		126	21	23

4.4.2 Analysis of table 4.4.1

National politics again dominated the news. This time the issue receiving coverage is the violence in Kwazulu Natal. This story is covered on and off throughout the month.

The other story that is covered extensively during the month is the Rugby World Cup and the fact that South Africa would be playing in the final.

International stories that made the front page were the war between Serbians and Croats in the former Yugoslavia. This story was on the front page thrice in the month, and on two consecutive days. The lead photograph is a picture of two soldiers in the conflict. A short human-interest story on the Oklahoma City bombing is reported on the front page once and a trade dispute between Japan and the United States is reported once. A short report on an earthquake in Russia also makes the front page, as well as election results in France.

The Rugby World Cup receives extensive reporting – everything from the matches, the organisation of the event, players and the tourist implications are dealt with. The Springboks' victory over defending champions Australia receives the banner headline of the month: "Boks' finest hour."

Crime is reported extensively. The focus is now on violence and corruption.

For the first time in the course of this study it is noted that environmental issues are reported on the front page. One story deals with an oil slick and another with a perlemoen smuggling ring.

An average of 6 stories are covered on the front page daily and an average of 2 photographs a day are printed on the front page.

4.5 May 2003

The following newspapers were analysed in the month of May 2003:

Thursday May 1st,

Friday, May 2nd,

Monday May 5th,

Tuesday May 6th,

Wednesday May 7th,

Thursday May 8th,

Friday May 9th,
Monday May 12th,
Tuesday May 13th,
Wednesday May 14th,
Thursday May 15th,
Friday May 16th,
Monday May 19th,
Tuesday May 20th,
Wednesday May 21st,
Thursday May 22nd,
Friday May 23rd,
Monday May 26th,
Tuesday May 27th,
Wednesday May 28th,
Thursday May 29th,
Friday May 30th

No edition is specified on the front page.

In the wake of the terror attacks in America on September 11, world news is dominated by the “War on Terror” declared by the American President George W Bush. The war in Iraq is the major event in the world. Another issue receiving international attention is the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe. The food shortages faced by that country as well as the political suppression and economic challenges are headline news. The spread of the SARS virus also receives prominence. South Africa reflects on almost a decade of democratisation.

4.5.1. An analysis of news content of the front page of *The Cape Times* for May 2003

Main Category	Sub-Category	Number of Stories	Headline	Lead Photograph
Politics	International	5	3	1
	National	11	3	1
	Regional	0	0	0
Local Issues		16	6	2
Economy	Trade	0	0	0
	Labour	0	0	0
	Other	4	1	0
Health	Service Delivery	0	0	0
	Spread of Disease	4	0	0
Tourism		0	0	0
Crime	Violent	6	0	2
	Involving Children	1	0	0
	With Social/Legal Implications	3	1	1
	High Profile	3	2	1
	Corruption	0	0	0
Sport	Scandal	1	1	1
	Reconciliation	0	0	0
	General	15	2	8
Disaster		3	1	2
Human Interest		23	1	2
Environment		2	0	0
Humour		6	0	0
Entertainment	General	0	0	1
	Death of a Celebrity	0		0
Science		1	1	1
Total		104	22	22

4.5.2 Analysis of table 4.5.1

Even though the most items appearing are in the category of human interest, which makes up 22% of the news, this is a misleading statistic, as the human-interest stories tend to be steep stories that are covered at the bottom of the front page. The only

human-interest story that receives prominent coverage is the story of Lucky Sindane who claimed to be a white man who had been kidnapped in infancy by black people and had spent his childhood in a black township.

In this year the news focuses on issues of local interest, and these stories make up 15% of the news. This is closely followed by national political issues, which make up 10% of the front-page coverage. Some of the issues covered include the conversion to card driver's licences and the resultant congestion caused by late applicants, as well as the introduction of the new plastic bag legislation. Both these issues are matters of national policy, but also have a huge local impact as they affect the practicalities of everyday life.

International politics make up only three stories (2%). Three of these are headline stories about the situation in Zimbabwe, which has international as well as regional significance. The Israeli-Palestinian question is also dealt with in a short story on the front page.

Sport takes up 14% of the news. The issues are general sport stories such as the visit by the England football team to South Africa and the football friendly between South Africa and Jamaica. The appointment of Corné Krige as Springbok World Cup captain is headline news, possibly because he is a local Western Province player.

Sporting scandals continue to be prominent news. This trend was seen in the previous months analysed. Stories that made the front page include athlete Elana Meyer's surprising positive doping test. The remarks attributed to new South African cricket captain Graham Smith about fellow cricketer Lance Klusener, wherein Smith allegedly accuses Klusener of being a disruptive influence on the team, are reported.

Crime makes up 5% of the stories, with the conviction of Luyanda Mboniswa for the murder of former first lady Marike De Klerk being featured in two lead stories and photographs. Also included in this category are stories relating to terrorist attacks. The suicide car bombings in Saudi Arabia as well as the civil action brought by a British family against the insurers of Planet Hollywood make the front pages.

An average of 5 stories are covered on the front page of the newspaper and 2 photographs are published on the front page.

Chapter 5

In order to assess whether or not the above information is evidence of tabloidisation we need to evaluate the results against the definition and criteria set out in previous chapters.

5.1 Analysis of News Content

In order to put the information gathered into context, the specific categories that were used in Chapter 3 will be condensed into more broad categories and compared over the periods mentioned.

The traditional “hard” news of politics were grouped under one heading, rather than split into sub-sections. Categories that could be considered by Winston’s definition to be “other” news, but do have impact on the daily lives and choices of readers, such as economics and health, are excluded completely from the following comparison. Stories that are regarded as “soft”, that is human interest and sport, were compared against political stories.

The results were as follows:

The figures listed under the year heading are the total number of stories in the categories listed in the first column. These figures are then calculated as a percentage of the total stories used in the month of the year analysed and listed in the adjacent column.

5.1.1 A comparison of front-page news stories for the period 1976-2003 (dealing with specific months)

	1976	% Of news	1994	% Of news	1995	% Of news	2003	% Of news	Total Stories
Politics	72	42	62	67	42	50	16	26	192
Sport	27	16	18	19	31	37	16	26	92
Human Interest	26	15	9	10	7	8	23	38	65
Entertainment	42	24	1	1	2	2.5	0	0	45
Humour	5	3	3	3	2	2.5	6	10	16
Total	172		93		84		61		410

5.1.2 Analysis

5.1.2.1 Politics

There is a definite decrease in political news seen from 1994, where political news made up 67% of front-page news, compared to just 26% in 2003. This is a reflection of the changing political climate nationally, regionally and internationally. In 1976 South Africa was in the midst of regional conflicts that had a broader Cold War significance, and in 1994 the country was entering the final stages of democratisation.

5.1.2.2 Sport

Sport reporting increased steadily from 1976 to 1995, with a drop in 2003. The decreased percentage of sports coverage is however still greater than the percentage of sports reporting in 1976.

5.1.2.3 Human Interest

Human interest reporting decreased steadily from 1976 to 1995, and then increased to 38% in 2003.

5.1.2.4 Entertainment

Entertainment reporting was only significant when television was introduced in 1976 when it accounted for 24% of front-page news. In other years entertainment news was insignificant.

5.1.2.5 Humour

These stories are being published on the front page more frequently in recent times than in the previous years.

5.1.3 Analysis of News Presentation

The other area that needs to be considered is the presentation of the news. As per the criteria that were established, the following was studied:

- Number of stories covered on the front page
- Number of photographs published on the front page

5.1.3.1 Comparison of the presentation of the front page over the period 1975-2003

Year	1976	1994	1995	2003
Number of front page stories	10	6	6	5
Number of photographs	2	2	2	2

5.1.3.2 Analysis of Table 5.1.3.1

The number of news stories that are covered on the front page of the *Times* has dropped from an average of 10 to an average of five.

Chapter 6

6.1 Conclusion

It is not easy to draw definite conclusions as to whether the press in South Africa has become tabloidised.

A decrease in political coverage within the bounds of this study would be enough to make the claim of tabloidisation credible. However it should be noted that by far most of the stories covered by the newspaper are topical and in the public interest.

There is no significant coverage of entertainment, which is a point against the tabloidisation charge.

There is however a significant increase in human interest stories which would show a clear trend away from political news and thus towards tabloidisation. These stories are however most often presented as filler stories and purely for the human-interest angle. They are not sensationalised in any way. There is no specific instance of a story of little intrinsic news value being given an excessive amount of coverage.

When looking at the presentation criteria the case against tabloidisation becomes stronger. It is clearly shown that the trend is to show a smaller variety of news and stories on the front page. This is in contradiction to the criteria of yellow journalism used by Campbell, which shows that the tabloid press generally have a wide variety of stories on the front page.

The number of photographs that are featured on the front page was also studied and it was found that that has remained constant since 1976. This again argues against the tabloidisation charge, as tabloids generally focus on illustration and photography.

In conclusion it is thus fair to say that *The Cape Times* has not become tabloidised. Even though the content has become less political in focus, this is a reflection of the present day world news situation. Presentation has remained within the accepted standard of broadsheet dailies. There is a greater use of colour and graphics in line

with modern presentational standards, but the number of photographs and the use of banner headlines have not increased.

When this study was initiated, it was with the mindset that tabloids are recent phenomena. However it can be seen that the tabloid press has existed in one form or another for as long as the so-called legitimate press.

It was also a key learning that powerful figures in journalism, such as Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, might very well be regarded today as purveyors of tabloid news.

It was also a discovery that presentation could be an indication of tabloidisation and that tabloids exist in different forms, depending on the country in which they are published.

It is noted that South Africa now has a number of tabloid newspapers, *The Daily Sun*, *Die Kaap Son*, *Die Noord Son* and *The Sunday Sun*. Even though a perusal of these publications did not form part of the study it is interesting to note that the newspapers seem to be surviving commercially. Its content is purely sensational, dealing with newsworthy people and sex scandals, as well as the South African staple of sport.

Chapter 7

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