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**Tabloidisation of the Norwegian News Media:  
A Quantitative Analysis of Print and Online  
Newspaper Platforms**

**Celine Storstad Gran**

MSc in Media and Communications (Media and Communication Governance)

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# **Tabloidisation of the Norwegian News Media: A Quantitative Analysis of Print and Online Newspaper Platforms**

**Celine Storstad Gran**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The theoretical approach to this study assumes that tabloidisation is a result of the commercialisation of news media, where market pressures have led to changes in the content, presentation and style of news, with the aim of reaching a broad audience (McLachlan and Golding, 2000; Sparks, 2000). Further, the Internet has caused great challenges for traditional newspapers such as a decline in readership and advertising revenue, and has transformed how news is created and distributed (Bird, 2009; Sparks, 2000).

This study analyses tabloid characteristics in online news and compares them with the print platform of four Norwegian newspapers, seeking to understand whether newspapers are more *tabloid* online than in print. An extensive theoretical framework on tabloids, tabloidisation and the Norwegian media sphere and an established analytical framework on tabloidisation by McLachlan and Golding (2000) provide the basis for this study. A quantitative content analysis of 400 news articles from the Norwegian newspapers *Verdens Gang*, *Dagbladet*, *Aftenposten* and *Dagens Næringsliv* was conducted over a two-week period in July 2014, aiming to add empirical data to the existing literature. Tabloidisation is operationalised into the three levels: *range*, *form* and *style*. Four sub-questions are developed to guide the analysis and discussion, aiming to answer the research question: *to what extent is there a tabloidisation of online news, and how does it differ from the print news platforms of Norwegian newspapers?*

The main findings present evidence of tabloidisation in online news found in human-interest stories, personalisation and casual language. The range of online content is more tabloid than in print; it is instantaneous and entertainment-focused aiming to attract a wider audience, and arguably to enhance democratisation of a formally elite arena. Although online news holds a more international platform, it does not provide quality in-depth coverage of events. Pictures and headlines play a creative role to increase online click rates. Finally, the discussion of style suggests that online news should differentiate more from print news.

## INTRODUCTION

'I'm with you on the free press. It's the newspapers I can't stand'

By Tom Stoppard, Ruth in *Night and Day*, act 1 (1978)

In his 1893 study, John Gilmer Speed asked 'do newspapers now give the news?', and more recently, the concept of tabloidisation – also referred to as 'dumbing down' (McNair, 2000: 4) – has been widely discussed by media scholars (e.g. Bird, 2009; Esser, 1999; Sparks, 2000; Uribe and Gunter, 2004). Contemporary journalism has faced criticism for a long time. The need to identify high and low or good and bad, journalism reflects the fact that journalism changes with time and will continue to do so.

Norwegian news media is facing increasing commercialisation. The long-lasting tradition of a high print newspaper circulation is being challenged by a decline in readership and advertising revenue. Online media is replacing traditional media, and the impact of technology continues to change how news is communicated. Moreover, the most read newspapers in Norway experience a much greater readership online than in print. How does this development affect the way journalism is conducted? How does it affect the type of news we read? It was these questions that led to the researcher's desire to explore the theory of tabloidisation.

It is argued that tabloidisation is caused by an increased commercialisation of news media (Sparks, 2000). Tabloidisation has led to a process where quality media is moving towards the news values of tabloids, where serious, in-depth and objective journalism is replaced by entertainment and provocative content (Franklin, 1997). Behind this argument lies a deeper debate about the role of media in a democracy. On the one hand, tabloidisation is understood as a negative process that makes it impossible for citizens to exercise their democratic rights (Sparks, 2000). On the other hand, tabloidisation is argued to be a positive reaction towards the dominant elite, which only fulfils the interest of those already in power (Fiske, 1992).

This study is grounded in the theory of tabloidisation and based in the area of print and online media. Tabloidisation is operationalised into three levels, *range*, *form* and *style*, and which are employed to explore the types of tabloid characteristics of print and online newspapers. As such, the aim of this study is to provide an understanding of tabloidisation in Norwegian online news and to compare it to print platform news.

Tabloidisation is a process and should be studied over a long period of time, which is one important limitation of this research. Due to methodological decisions, the research of this dissertation was conducted over two weeks; thus, the findings cannot report anything about historical developments. However, this study provides evidence of current tabloid characteristics of online and print news which future research can build upon.

There are three main sections to this paper, which structurally answer the main research question. The first section provides a theoretical framework including a literature review covering theory on tabloids, tabloidisation, tabloidisation in relation to democracy and technology and the Norwegian media sphere. Further, this section outlines the conceptual framework, research question and sub-questions that are applied to this study. The second section outlines and justifies the choice of research design and methodology. Finally, the third section provides statistical evidence and a discussion of the main findings with which to answer the research question.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Literature review**

To date, there have been no academic studies of tabloidisation in online news or comparisons between print and online platforms of Norwegian newspapers. Therefore, a broad range of academic literature on tabloids, tabloidisation and the Norwegian media sphere provides the basis for this literature review.

### **Defining tabloid**

The concept of tabloidisation provides the foundation of this study. However, the meaning of 'tabloidisation' is quite complex, not least due to disagreements among scholars about what the term means. In order to understand tabloidisation, it is necessary to theorise the term 'tabloid'.

Originally, the word tabloid stemmed from a pharmaceutical trademark meaning 'medicines as a pill or tablet that are easy to swallow' (Esser, 1999: 291). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *tabloid* was applied to media and used as a term to describe newspapers that are easier or more practical to read than broadsheets (Esser, 1999). More recently, broadsheet and tabloid newspapers began to operate within similar formats (Bird, 2009: 41).

Accordingly, tabloid has become less to do with size and more with the form and style of news. For example, the Norwegian broadsheet newspaper *Aftenposten* adopted a tabloid format in 2005, but is still regarded as a broadsheet or quality newspaper.

The characteristics of the tabloid are many and difficult to narrow down (Glynn, 2000: 6). However, Fiske (1992: 48) offers a sophisticated suggestion capturing the overall characteristics of a tabloid:

Its subject matter is generally that produced at the intersection between public and private life; its style is sensational, sometimes sceptical, sometimes moralistically earnest; its tone is populist; its modality fluidly denies any stylistic difference between fiction and documentary, between news and entertainment.

In particular, the tabloid has developed a connotation to a type of content. It is argued that trivialisation is a defining concept for tabloid news, meaning that more attention is paid to national human-interest stories than international events (Bird, 2009: 42). Moreover, tabloid news is often regarded as *softer* than quality news. Although the meaning of 'soft news' is not often clearly defined in theory (Reinemann, *et al.*, 2011: 223), it is typically regarded as news stories such as sport, entertainment and human interest (Uribe and Gunter, 2004: 390). In contrast, quality news pays more attention to 'hard' content such as politics, business and economics (*ibid.*)

In addition to a type of content, tabloid describes a certain type of journalistic style. News articles are written in a sensationalist and emotional manner, with rather casual language and tone (Conboy, 2006). Also, sentences tend to be short and 'punchy', with a narrative rather than analytical textual angle (Bird, 2009; 42). Furthermore, visualisation is a concept describing tabloid news (Djupsund and Carlson, 1998: 102). Newspaper articles are dramatized with pictures and colourful content aiming to catch the reader's attention. Such dramatization techniques are primarily found in electronic news sources (Bird, 2009: 42). Furthermore, it is argued that tabloid news has a personalised focus, often emphasising the scandalous private lives of royals and other famous people (*ibid.*).

Finally, tabloid characteristics differ between countries. In a non-competitive, state-subsidised newspaper market such as Norway, there is a strong tradition of local and regional quality newspapers (Østby, 2007: 163). Norwegian newspapers are typically regarded as either tabloid or quality; however, the difference may sometimes seem unclear. For example, the most read Norwegian tabloid newspaper, *Verdens Gang*, combines soft and hard news in

its reporting (Allern, 2001b). Similarly, Gripsrud (2000: 291) argues that Norwegian popular tabloids often contain content of more or less important issues.

In summary, tabloid news is operationalised in this study as content containing an emphasis on soft news. The language is casual and sensationalist rather than analytical and factual, and often presented from a personalised angle. Further, visuals and headlines are often given priority over text. Tabloids are country-specific and must be understood in relation to a particular media sphere.

### **The process of tabloidisation**

As described above, the term tabloid is complex. Similarly, tabloidisation is criticised for not being clearly defined and lacking a debate about the true meaning (Bird, 2009: 42). However, tabloidisation has been widely used in previous research, suggesting that it is a 'direct result of commercialised media' (Esser, 1999: 291), causing a 'lowering of journalistic standards' (Gripsrud, 2000: 285) and that 'serious media are moving towards news values of tabloids' (Sparks, 2000: 8). Further, tabloidisation describes changes in the range, form, mode of address and market structure of news (McLachlan and Golding, 2000: 76).

It is argued that tabloidisation can be understood at a micro- and a macro-level. On the micro-level, it is acknowledged as a phenomenon that facilitates changes in the format of news, due to powerful commercial pressures and requirements. On a macro-level, it can be understood as a social phenomenon that drives major changes in a society as a whole (Esser, 1999: 293). The following will mainly explore tabloidisation on a micro-level, but also pay some attention to the democratic effects of tabloidisation (macro-level).

One of the indicators of tabloidisation is the shift in the aim of journalism. Sparks argues that 'the aim of serious journalism is to facilitate practical involvement and democratic participation. Tabloid journalism facilitates private enjoyment and pleasure.' (Sparks, 2000: 28). Further, it is argued that the boundaries between tabloid and quality journalism have disappeared (Sampson, 1996: 2). 'Infotainment' or 'newszak' have become the new values of traditional news, meaning that news has been converted into entertainment (Franklin, 1997: 4-5). Tabloidisation has resulted in an increase in soft news and a decrease in hard news, where contemporary journalism is moving away from in-depth investigative journalism towards lighter, easy-to-read news topics (Uribe and Gunter, 2004: 390). Moreover, entertainment, crime and sex are given priority over political and international news stories.

Tabloidisation has not only resulted in increased softer news, but an increased personalisation of news (Bird, 2009). Tabloid news tends to be written from a personal angle, focusing on the private lives of people and scandalous events (Bird, 2009: 42). In fact, Sunstein (2001: 192) argues that the newspaper market is dominated by numerous versions of 'Daily Me', creating social fragmentation. Tabloidisation has changed what the media think voters need to know in order to evaluate a politician for public office (Kurtz, 1993: 143-147). News coverage of political debates tends to be more personalised, as image and style seem to dominate over political substance (Scammel, 1999: 721).

The process of tabloidisation also describes a shift within the news tastes of the audience (Sparks, 2000: 35). Issues of daily life are given priority over issues concerning the public sphere. In contrast to the objective and informative purposes of journalism, tabloid news elements are simply included to shock people and to provoke an emotional response (Kitch, 2009: 29). It is argued that this type of writing style only appeals to the public demand for sensationalism (Bird, 2009: 41). News stories tend to focus more on personal scandals and confessions, aiming for sympathy rather than informing the audience (Frankin, 1997: 8).

It is argued that tabloidisation changes the priorities of journalism (Franklin, 1997: 4). Newspaper readership is in decline and the traditional media faces strong competition from the Internet (Bird, 2009: 45). Market pressures leads to the production of news content based on the degree of 'saleability' (Esser, 1999: 291). Moreover, journalists seem to be more concerned with making a profit than fulfilling the obligations of public interest. As Hallin and Mancini (2004: 277) argue, 'commercialisation is shifting European media systems away from the world of politics and toward the world of commerce'. In-depth news is expensive to create, naturally resulting in more simple journalism. This trend can be described as 'churnalism', meaning that news is created by copying information from one news source, such as Google or Facebook, to another (Fenton, 2012: 4)

Tabloidisation is argued to be a spill-over of tabloid news values from the popular to the quality press (Esser, 1999: 293). Broadsheet or quality newspapers have adopted the news agenda of tabloids, resulting in more 'broadloids' (Franklin, 1997: 7). Moreover, quality news uses increased visuals, less text, more entertainment and emotion. However, popular journalism may be different from tabloid forms of journalism (Gripsrud, 2000: 291). Therefore, it is necessary to analyse both quality and tabloid newspapers when studying tabloidisation.

Previous studies have operationalised tabloidisation in order to improve the research field. Indeed, McLachlan and Golding (2000: 78) created a framework for analysing tabloidisation and operationalised the concept into *range, form, mode of address (style)* and *market structure*. In particular, they argue that tabloidisation indicates fewer international stories, more pictures, more human interest and entertainment stories and fewer political stories.

In the following sections, tabloidisation in relation to democracy and technology will be discussed, followed by an outline of some cultural specificities within the Norwegian media sphere.

### **Tabloidisation and democracy**

The disagreements among scholars about the effects of tabloidisation on democracy reflect the opposing views on the place of media in society (Peck, 2000: 232). Building on the notion of Habermas's public sphere, there has been a shift from *good* rational political discourse to *bad* 'melodramatic' journalism (Sparks, 2000: 24). In contrast, scholars argue that increased tabloid journalism is an oppositional reaction to the dominant order of the traditional elitist broadsheet journalism (Fiske, 1992).

One role of the media is to provide the public with quality information necessary to make rational decisions. It is argued that tabloidisation does not provide the audience with the necessary knowledge needed in order for citizens to exercise their democratic rights (Sparks, 2000: 28.) The modernist perspective on tabloidisation holds that tabloid content diverts from 'general truths, general principles, which could guide the formulation and implementation of the necessary regulation of social life' (Gripsrud, 1992: 89). Moreover, news media has been 'dumbing down', aiming only to provoke and entertain rather than fulfilling the public interest (McNair, 2000: 4).

In addition to not providing an arena for rational discourse, it is argued that tabloidisation has led to an emphasis on personal experience, only tied to the individual and not general institutions (Peck, 2000: 232). Tabloids news tends to focus on the private problems of royals rather than important societal issues (Franklin, 1997: 4). This 'systematic disinformation' is problematic as it fails to fulfil a necessary political understanding among citizens (Gripsrud, 1992: 91).

However, a problem with the Habermasian view of journalism is that it is grounded in a utopian journalistic 'golden age' that never really existed (Gripsrud, 2000: 287). The

postmodern view of tabloidisation embraces the populist dimension of tabloid news and sees it as a reaction against a formerly dominant media power. Indeed, the public sphere and the constituting media have always been elitist (Peck, 2000: 233). From this view, tabloid media fulfils a more inclusive and democratic role than quality media, by incorporating the voices of people who are not normally heard. Tabloids are for 'the people' and quality news works only as a 'power block' by those who are already in power (Fiske, 1992: 45-46).

Tabloidisation is tied to ethical and political concerns, which is something that has been around since the modern press (Gripsrud, 2000: 287). In order to avoid audience exclusion it is arguably necessary to maintain and improve quality journalism, but also welcome other categories of journalism. As Gripsrud (2000: 289) argues, 'brands, forms and concerns of popular journalism do have important ties to everyday lives, values and interest of ordinary people.'

### **Tabloidisation and technology**

One basic approach to this study is that tabloidisation is a direct result of the commercialisation of media, caused by capitalism and technology (Sparks, 2000: 8). Technology brings about changes that affect old media, and the press is being forced to adapt to new ways of working with and communicating news. It is argued that there has been an increase of serious, international news with the rise of the Internet (Bird, 2009: 45). However, the impact of the Internet has also led journalists towards a frantic search for techniques to prevent a decline in audience and advertising revenue (Christians, *et al.*, 2009: 227). Moreover, it is argued that the Internet has transformed journalism into something more negative than positive (Newton, 2009: 78).

Journalists benefit from technology in terms of cost-effective newsgathering, distribution of content and exhibition (Lokman, 2009: 53). They are able to work with a rapidity that was never possible with old media. Moreover, the rapidity of online distribution requires fast-made news, and deadlines become shorter as the Internet is always 'on'. This may lead to less in-depth investigative content and more *churnalism*. It is argued that online news devotes more time than ever to tabloid news stories (Bird, 2009: 45).

Furthermore, the Internet has caused a lowering of journalistic standards. The transformation from print to an online media sphere has resulted in a more visual and entertainment-oriented news media, aiming to attract young readers with a taste for popular news (Christians, *et al.*, 2009: 227). Traditional newspapers are no longer profitable

compared to online media, resulting in less rational discourse and more tabloid news. However, the process of adapting into a new media environment is still developing and may be understood as simply a transformation from one medium to another, where breaking news no longer exists (Christians, *et al.*, 2009: 235). In fact, online news media may even open up for more creative journalism among individual journalists (Deuze, 2009: 93).

The shift from print to online journalism has impacted the process of tabloidisation. Online journalism faces the same types of criticism that television and radio have historically experienced (Zelizer, 2000: ix). There will always be a different type of journalism to look down on. In order to draw any conclusions about the specific characteristics of the tabloidisation in online news, more research is needed.

### **The Norwegian media sphere**

Tabloidisation must be discussed in relation to the cultural specificities within a media sphere. Therefore, the following will provide an understanding of the Norwegian newspaper market.

Up until the 1970s, a strong political press dominated the Norwegian newspaper market. Since late 1970s, Norwegian journalists experienced an increased professionalization, resulting in a dissolving party press (Ottosen, *et al.*, 2012: 202-203). Also, newspapers have received state subsidies since 1969, in a bid to prevent newspapers from shutting down and in order to maintain diversity and local competition (Østby, 2007: 163). Although the strong political ties no longer exist, newspaper ownership is highly concentrated around a few, powerful owners. For example, the three media owners *Schibsted*, *Orkla* and *Amedia* together own 60 per cent of all Norwegian newspapers (Østby, 2007: 159).

In contrast to other competitive newspaper markets such as the UK, competition among Norwegian news is low. Moreover, the development of the typical tabloid newspapers has not grown as rapidly as the rates seen in other competitive markets. Nevertheless, Norwegian journalism has developed to become more market-oriented aiming for increased revenue. In fact, there is evidence of commercialisation in most media in Norway (Østby, 2007: 167). Newspaper owners are motivated by revenue on invested capital, and editors face high pressure to achieve a profit (Ottosen, *et al.*, 2012: 215). This market strategy is likely to lead to a commercialisation of newspapers, pressuring journalists to adopt tabloid forms of journalism.

Norway has a strong tradition of newspapers. *Adresseavisen*, established in 1767, is the oldest newspaper that is still being published. Furthermore, the Norwegian newspaper market has the highest number of newspapers and readership in the world (Østby, 2007: 158). As with any other newspaper market, Norwegian newspapers had to adapt to the online media sphere. In 1995, *Brønnøysunds Avis* became the first newspaper to establish an online newspaper platform. Already by the turn of the century, two thirds of all Norwegian newspapers published online news content (Ottosen, *et al.*, 2012: 217).

With the decline of print media, newspapers have been challenged economically. Some of the strategies applied have not only failed, but have created internal struggles. For example, many believed that the adaptation of online newspaper platforms would provide a broader and better choice for both readers and advertisers (Ottosen and Krumsvik, 2008: 28). However, the revenue of online advertising is smaller than for print, resulting in struggles between the print and online parts of the newspapers (Ottosen, *et al.*, 2012: 218).

Further, it is argued that the publishing strategies of online newspapers have failed. Norwegian online newspapers are criticised for publishing the same content online as in print. Ottosen and Krumsvik (2008: 29) argue that newspapers have more to learn about managing different types of content and presentation according to the type of publication platform. Publishing the same type of content may not be a problem in itself. However, such a strategy results in competition between print and online news of the same newspaper (Ottosen, *et al.*, 2012: 236). Nevertheless, it is argued that the online news platform is used to publish current events such as accidents, while print newspapers focus on more in-depth news stories (Ottosen, 2012: 218).

This literature review has operationalised tabloidisation as an increase in soft news and a reduction in hard news, increased personalisation, a more sensationalist style and increased visual layout. Furthermore, a commercial media and changes in technology have caused the process of tabloidisation (Sparks, 2000: 8). Finally, Norwegian print and online newspapers are facing a market-oriented development, which provides evidence of tabloidisation in the Norwegian newspaper market.

### **Conceptual framework**

Effects of tabloidisation can be studied in terms of audience impact and journalistic standards. However, this study is not aiming to analyse the effects of tabloidisation, as that

requires research and time that go beyond the limitations of this dissertation. Further, it is also recognised that tabloidisation should be studied over time (Esser, 1999). Nor is this study to explore historical developments; rather, it is to employ the concept of tabloidisation and to provide an understanding of tabloid characteristics in print and online news platforms of Norwegian newspapers through the use of content analysis.

This study is guided by an extensive theoretical framework on tabloidisation. In order to operationalise tabloid characteristics in this research, the pioneering study by McLachlan and Golding (2000) will be used as a guiding framework for analysis. Aiming to improve future research on tabloidisation, McLachlan and Golding carried out a quantitative analysis of the British press by focusing on four characteristics: *range, form, mode of address (style)* and *market structure*. This study will not look into tensions in the newspaper market (market structure), but focus on the three categories range, form and style.

*Range:* Tabloidisation of range indicates an increase in soft news and a decrease in hard news (Uribe and Gunter, 2004); an increase in human-interest stories and a decrease in political stories. Furthermore, space is devoted to national rather than international news stories (Uribe and Gunter, 2004).

*Form:* Tabloidisation of form indicates more space devoted to headlines and visuals, and less space devoted to text (Djupsund and Carlson, 1998; Uribe and Gunter, 2004).

*Mode of address/style:* Tabloidisation of style describes a tabloid language with a casual sensationalist tone (Conboy, 2006). It is also defined by a personalisation of news (Bird, 2009).

Journalism changes with time and so does the very meaning of tabloidisation (Sparks, 2000: 4). With the growing shift from print to online newspapers, has tabloidisation increased? Examining the tabloid characteristics in Norwegian newspapers will provide an understanding of tabloidisation in relation to the following research objectives.

### **Research objectives**

The overall purpose of this study is to explore tabloidisation in Norwegian newspapers, and to provide an understanding of the differences between online and print news platforms. As

discussed in the literature review, tabloidisation of print news has been studied for a long time. However, there is a lack of research on tabloidisation in online news and very limited research conducting comparisons on tabloidisation between old and new media (print and online newspapers). Therefore, the aim of this study is to enrich the literature on tabloidisation with an understanding of these themes.

Through a content analysis of the print and online news platforms of four Norwegian newspapers *Verdens Gang (VG)*, *Dagbladet*, *Aftenposten* and *Dagens Næringsliv (DN)*, this research will quantify and describe the characteristics of tabloidisation. Based on extensive theory on tabloidisation, the following research questions will guide the research:

### **Research question**

*To what extent is there a tabloidisation of online news, and how does it differ from the print news platforms of Norwegian newspapers?*

In order to answer the main research question, the following sub-questions are to be explored:

*Q1: What is the key evidence of tabloidisation (range, form and style) in online newspapers?*

In order to explore the differences between print and online news, it is necessary to provide an understanding of tabloidisation in online news. The question is relevant because there is very limited research to date on tabloidisation in online news. Also, it is necessary to compare tabloids with quality newspapers in order to get a proper understanding of tabloidisation (Uribe and Gunter, 2004).

*Q2: Is the range of content more tabloid online than in print?*

H0: There is no association between the type of newspaper platform and range of content.

H1: There is an association between the type of newspaper platform and range of content.

*Q3: Is the form of presentation more tabloid online than in print?*

H0: There is no association between type of newspaper platform and form of presentation.

H1: There is an association between type of newspaper platform and form of presentation.

*Q4: Is the writing style more tabloid online than in print?*

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no association between type of newspaper platform and writing style.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is an association between type of newspaper platform and writing style.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **Content analysis**

In order to explore the research question, extended knowledge about tabloid characteristics in newspaper texts is required. A quantitative methodology is employed in the research. In particular, a content analysis of four newspapers is conducted to improve the understanding of tabloidisation in Norwegian online and print news platforms. The following section will explain the reasons why this approach was chosen and will also discuss the limitations of the research design.

Content analysis is ‘a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication’ (Berelson, 1952: 18). The quantitative nature of content analysis allows the researcher to quantify and classify observed phenomena and draw causal relations from texts (Gunter, 2000: 55). As opposed to other qualitative methodologies such as interviews or ethnography, content analysis allows the research to be conducted through ‘objective measurements’, limiting potential bias in the study (*ibid.*). In content analysis, data is collected systematically and then described, organised and explored using statistical techniques (Gunter, 2002: 230). Finally, ‘content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use’ (Krippendorff, 2004: 18).

The key benefits of employing content analysis to this study are numerous. A necessary aspect is the ability to collect and analyse a large number of text (Krippendorff, 2004; McMillan, 2000). More importantly, the systematic character of content analysis allows for an objective and transparent coding as the same questions are asked of all texts (Gunter 2000: 55). The process of coding text is not driven by the researcher's intuition or subjective judgement, and is therefore less likely to bias the analysis (Berger, 2011; Gunter, 2000). This was important given the background of the researcher as a critical LSE media and communications student, and a current PR (public relations) and communications employee. Furthermore, the quantifiable aspect of content analysis is useful for an accurate representation of a complex body of messages (Kerlinger, 1986, in Gunter, 2000: 56). Finally, the ‘validity’ of the variables constructed by a thorough coding scheme, backed up by an

extensive literature review, and the ‘reliability’ of the coding process by using a second coder, both ensure a high degree of meaningful results that are ‘replicable’ and can be used in future research on tabloidisation (Krippendorff, 2004: 18).

Although there are many advantages to employing content analysis to this study, some limitations must be addressed. First of all, the embraced objectivity feature of content analysis must not underestimate the natural subjectivity among humans. Texts are ‘social realities in their own right’ as researchers are influenced by a set of values and beliefs that naturally affect the coding process (Gunter, 2000: 58). However, the coding of texts must be placed within a theoretical framework that helps the researcher make informed decisions (Hansen, *et al.*, 1998: 95). Clear recording instructions for coders with information on qualifications and operational definitions also increase the objectivity of the research (Krippendorff, 2004).

A second limitation relates to the ‘degree the quantitative indicators that this technique offers are read or interpreted’ (Hansen, *et al.*, 1998: 95). The descriptive attribute of content analysis allows for few inferences to be made about forces behind the process of tabloidisation or audience impact, as the ‘relationship between frequency ... and its wider social impact is complex’ (Hansen, *et al.*, 1998: 96). In order to create a meaningful analysis, the counting and quantifying must be grounded in an explicit theoretical framework (Gunter, 2002: 222). Finally, content analysis can prove difficult in determining a representative sample (Berger, 2011: 213).

Since the first quantitative newspaper analysis in 1893 asked ‘do newspapers now give the news?’ (Speed, 1893), content analysis has been widely used in studies of newspaper content. This study recognises that there are numerous previous studies on tabloidisation where content analysis is employed (e.g. Esser, 1999; McLachlan and Golding, 2000; Uribe and Gunter, 2004). Given the time frame and the goal of the study, a quantitative content analysis represents the most appropriate method for this research.

## **Methodology**

The following will provide a more detailed overview of the operationalised methodology used in this research, including the selection of media and newspapers, time period, sampling, coding and intercoder reliability.

### *Selection of media*

This research is grounded in the realm of both print and online media, as the aim of the study is to analyse tabloid characteristics in online news and to compare it with print news. Newspapers were chosen as a media source. Print newspapers have been analysed in several studies on tabloidisation. However, there is very limited research on the tabloidisation of online newspapers and no available research conducted examining a comparison between the two realms.

### *Selection of newspapers*

The four Norwegian newspapers *Verdens Gang (VG)*, *Dagbladet*, *Aftenposten* and *Dagens Næringsliv (DN)* are chosen for analysis as they have the highest online and print circulation (Medienorge, 2014). An analysis of tabloids only is likely to weaken the conceptualisation of tabloidisation and not provide robust results of how tabloids and tabloidisation are developing (Uribe and Gunter, 2004: 288) *VG* and *Dagbladet* are distributed nationally and known as typical tabloids. *Aftenposten* is a regional newspaper, while *DN* is a business newspaper. Both are known as typical quality newspapers.

### *Time period*

Content analysis is most useful when it has an historical or comparative perspective (Berger, 2011: 209). Most studies of tabloidisation have analysed news content historically over a longer period of time. However, the main aim of this research is to conduct a comparison between online and print news platforms.

Due to the characteristics of online newspaper articles, the sample size and time constraints, the sampling period was set to two weeks. Future researchers without the same constraints should aim for a longer sampling period. Online articles are challenging to sample historically as news sites have fast updates and change quickly. A rapid 'live' collection of data is necessary so as not to miss out on important front-page information (McMillian, 2000: 85). Such an approach may have its limitations in being more time consuming and less efficient – however, it was necessary for this research.

Aiming for a good level of comparison, every online article was collected between 12PM and 2PM every day – namely, online peak hours. Data was collected over a five-day week,

Monday to Friday. In order to avoid sampling issues such as weekend special editions, Saturday and Sunday are excluded from the sample.

### *Sampling*

The print articles for all four newspapers were gathered from the *Retriever* database, and online articles from the newspaper web pages using screenshot technology. As tabloidisation theory involves a complex set of content, the unit of analysis was decided to be the whole article rather than a word or a paragraph. In contrast to the print sample, the complexity of deciding unit of analysis for the online sample allowed for a more challenging and creative outcome (McMillian, 2000: 82; Riffe, 1998: 101). In order not to miss out on the important information, the online unit of analysis includes the front-page space devoted to the article. This was deemed necessary as readers chose to browse further based on the first impression on a webpage (Ha and James, 1998).

The sample had to be equally informative and not biased by preference of the coder (Krippendorff, 2004: 113). To get the desired sample size of  $n=400$  (200 online and 200 print), systematic sampling was employed. Such a technique is favoured in the analysis of regularly appearing publications such as newspapers (*ibid.*). Every third article was sampled, a number that would not leave too many top online articles out of the sample. Also, it reduced certain preferences and the potential bias of the researcher. A total of five news articles were sampled from each online and print newspaper every day, for five days, resulting in a total of 50 print articles and 50 online articles for each newspaper.

Advertisements, weather forecasts, obituaries and online pay-to-view articles were excluded from the sample to avoid irrelevant content (Hansen, *et al.*, 1998: 102).

### *Coding*

A coding book contains a list of variables that are to be measured for each article, and the values and coding possibilities associated with these variables (Hansen, *et al.*, 1998: 116). Guided by extensive academic literature, and an analytical framework developed by McLachlan and Golding (2004), the codebook is designed to measure the variables associated with the three levels of tabloidisation: *range*, *form* and *style*. The categories are exhaustive and mutually exclusive (Krippendorff, 2004: 132). A total of 27 variables are developed to measure levels of tabloidisation in *VG*, *Dagbladet*, *Aftenposten* and *DN*. See Appendix A for the final coding book, with a definition of all variables and an example of one coded article.

A pilot study on a small sample of 40 articles was conducted and proved successful. Experiences from the pilot study were used to improve the definition of the variables' tone and language, visual place and headline place. The variable evaluation was removed, as the two coders decided it was too subjective.

In order to offer a sophisticated analysis, only the relevant variables within the categories *range*, *form* and *style* are addressed. These are *type\_story*, *int\_nat*, *type\_issue*, *photographs*, *video*, *visual\_place*, *headline\_size*, *headline\_place*, *text*, *language*, *tone*, *R\_W\_relation* and *actor\_rep*. The variables *language* and *R\_W\_relation* do not fit into the existing definition of *style*, and *type\_issue* does not fit into *range*. However, based on the theoretical assumptions drawn from the literature review, it is seen as necessary to include these variables.

### *Intercoder reliability*

Intercoder reliability (ICR) testing is necessary in order to 'demonstrate the trustworthiness' of the data in content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004: 212). A second coder was trained and given full instructions on the meaning of each variable. An ICR test was conducted for the pilot study of a random sample of 10 per cent, which led to some adjustments in the coding book. A new ICR test was conducted by the same trained second coder on 5 per cent or 20 articles of the total sample of n=400. See Appendix B for the ICR for each variable.

The Percent Agreement approach was used to check for intercoder reliability in the coding book (Lombard, *et al.*, 2002: 591). The ICR for this study resulted in 91 per cent, a desired score for content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004: 242). This result indicates that the coding book is well defined and that researchers can replicate the study. It does not, however, guarantee validity (Krippendorff, 2004: 213).

## **RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION**

The following documents the results from a content analysis of 400 newspaper articles (200 online and 200 print). The research was designed to analyse the concept of tabloidisation in Norwegian newspapers, to explore tabloid characteristics in online news and to compare them with print platforms news. The 400 articles were coded in SPSS and analysed using

descriptive statistics and inferences. In particular, data was analysed for percentages, frequency and Chi-square. See Appendix C for the complete SPSS output.

Much of the data of online news proved significant at a 1 per cent significance level ( $p < 0.001$ ), while most of the analysis for print and online comparisons proved significant at 5 per cent ( $p < 0.05$ ). This may indicate that the results that are significant at  $p < 0.05$  should be interpreted with greater caution (Field, 2005: 691).

Within the *range* characteristic, variables named *type\_story*, *int\_nat* and *type\_issue* were analysed. Within *form*, the variables *photographs*, *video*, *visual\_place*, *headline\_size* *headline\_place* and *text* were analysed. Finally, the variables analysed within *style* were *language*, *tone*, *R\_W\_relation* and *actor\_rep*.

With the aim of answering the overall research question – *To what extent is there a tabloidisation of online news, and how does it differ from the print news platform of Norwegian newspapers?* – the following sub-questions are also analysed:

***Q1: What is the key evidence of tabloidisation (range, form and style) in online newspapers?***

This question requires an analysis of online articles only ( $n=200$ ). A cross-tabulation and Chi-square test were conducted for all variables within *range*, *form* and *style*. The following presents the results from the analysis of variables that prove to have a strong association with the variable *news\_type* (quality or tabloid newspaper).

*Range*

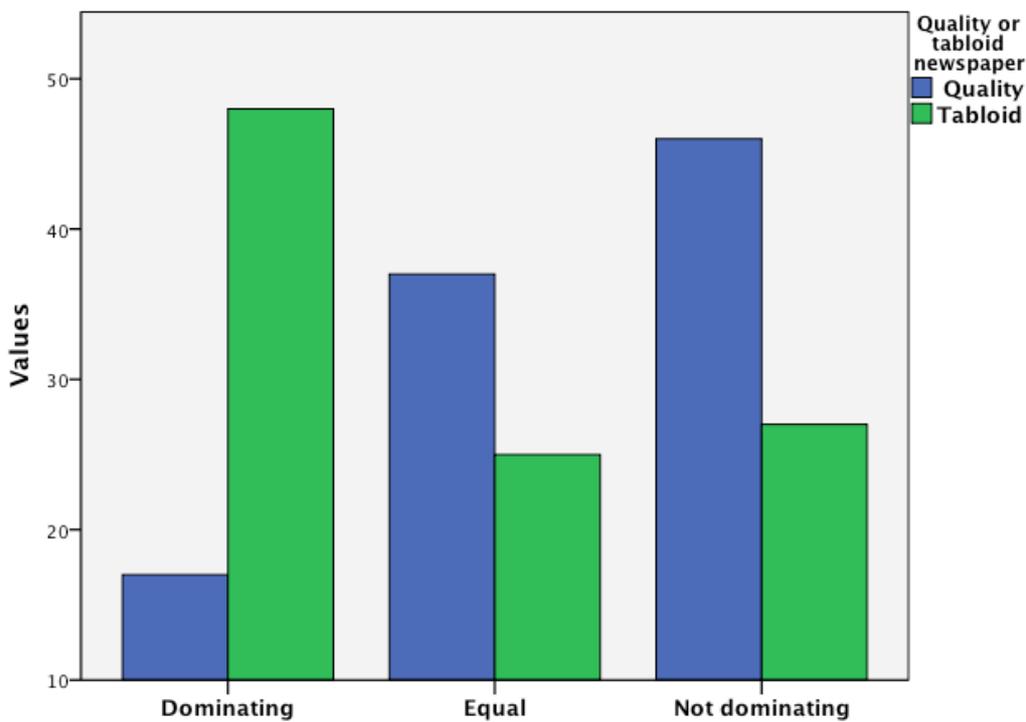
Variables *int\_nat* and *type\_issue* do not prove to have an association with *news\_type*.

1. Type of story is the only *range* variable that proves to be associated with *news\_type*. The Chi-square  $p$ -value  $< 0.05$  ( $p$ -value = 0.000) indicates that there is an association between quality or tabloid type of newspaper and type of story. Quality news has a higher percentage of hard news such as politics (9 per cent) and economics (31 per cent) than tabloid news. Further, tabloid news has a higher percentage than quality news of soft stories such as entertainment (20 per cent) and sport (11 per cent). However, 13 per cent of quality articles were human-interest stories, while only 11 per cent of tabloid articles were the same. Both tabloid (36 per cent) and quality (31 per cent) news proved to have a high percentage of stories such as crime, conflict or accident.

*Form*

Three variables within *form* – visual\_place, video and text – prove an association with news\_type. Photographs, headline\_size and headline\_place prove not to have an association with news\_type.

2. An analysis of the variables visual\_place and news\_type was conducted. The Chi-square p-value < 0.05 (p-value = 0.000) indicates that there is an association between quality or tabloid type of newspaper and visual domination in the article. Tabloids (48 per cent) are proved to use more dominating visuals than quality newspapers (17 per cent). The bar chart below (Figure 1) illustrates the results from the cross-tabulation and Chi-square test graphically.



**Figure 1**

3. Further, an analysis was conducted of the variables video and news\_type. The Chi-square p-value < 0.05 (p-value= 0.000) indicates that there is an association between the quality or tabloid type of newspaper and the use of video in the article. Overall, there are fewer articles with video (20 per cent) than without video (80 per cent). However, 31 per cent of tabloid articles were found to use video, in contrast to only 9 per cent of quality articles.

4. The third association within *form* was between text and news\_type. The Chi-square p-value < 0.05 (p-value= 0.026) indicates that there is an association between the quality or

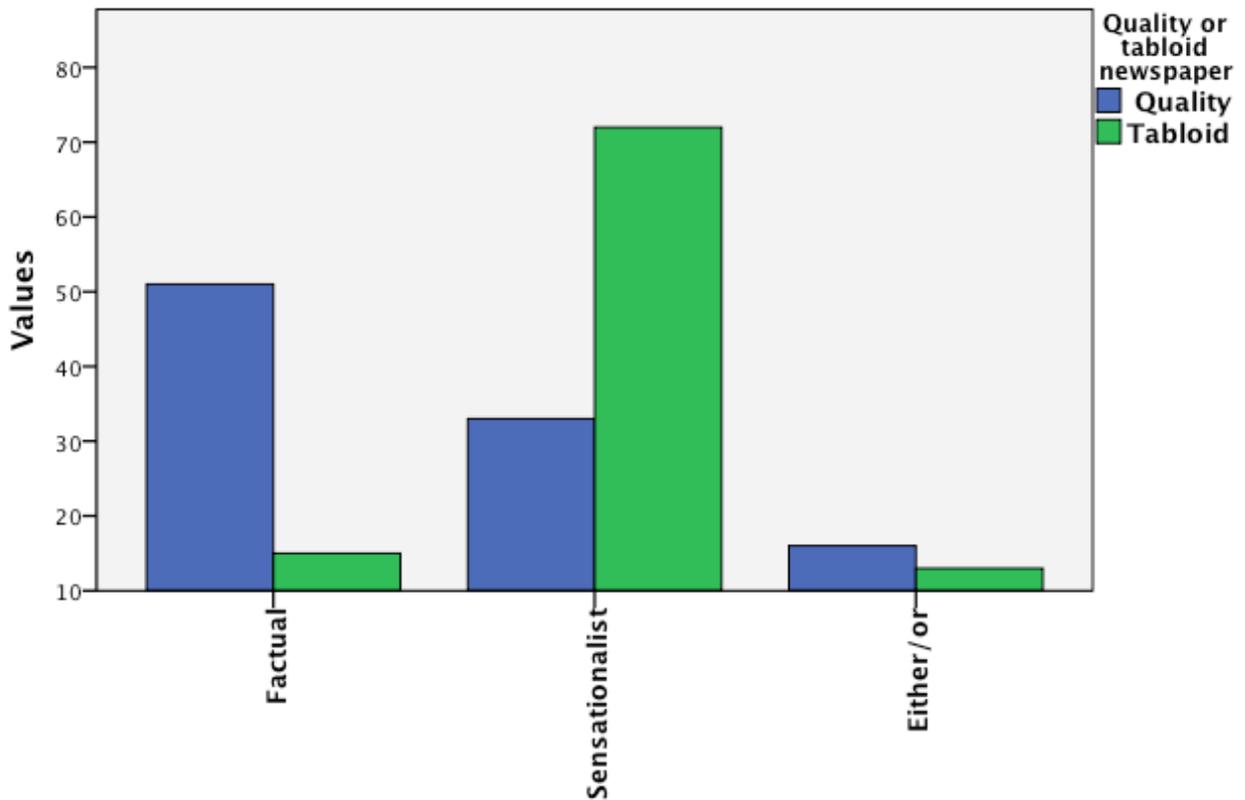
tabloid type of newspaper and the space devoted to text in the article. Quality news (45 per cent) shows a higher percentage of articles where text dominates compared with tabloid news (29 per cent).

### *Style*

Three variables within *style* – language, tone and actor\_rep – prove an association with news\_type. R\_W\_relation did not prove an association.

5. The variables language and news\_type prove to have a strong association, with a Chi-square p-value  $< 0.05$  (p-value = 0.000). Overall, 79 per cent of the newspaper articles are written in middle-class language. However, more quality newspapers articles (15 per cent) compared to tabloid articles (2 per cent) are written in a highly sophisticated language. In addition, tabloids (22 per cent) prove to have a higher degree of tabloid style language compared to quality news articles (3 per cent).

6. Similarly to language, an analysis of the variable tone prove to have an association with news\_type (Figure 2), with a Chi-square p-value  $< 0.05$  (p-value = 0.000). As much as 72 per cent of tabloid articles were written in a sensational tone, while only 33 per cent of quality articles were the same. In contrast, 51 per cent of quality news articles were written in a factual tone, while only 15 per cent of tabloids were the same.



**Figure 2**

7. Finally, an analysis of the variables news\_type and actor\_rep was conducted. The Chi-square p-value < 0.05 (p-value = 0.003) indicates an association between the quality or tabloid type of newspaper and the representation of the main actor in the articles. Moreover, there is a greater percentage of representation of the main actor in relation to public life in quality articles (43 per cent) compared to tabloid articles (21 per cent). Further, a representation of the main actor in relation to a scandal, both in private or public life, is more significant in tabloid articles than quality articles. For example, 16 per cent of tabloid articles represented the main actor in relation to scandal or sensation in public life, while only 6 per cent of quality articles did the same.

***Q2: Is the range of content more tabloid online than in print?***

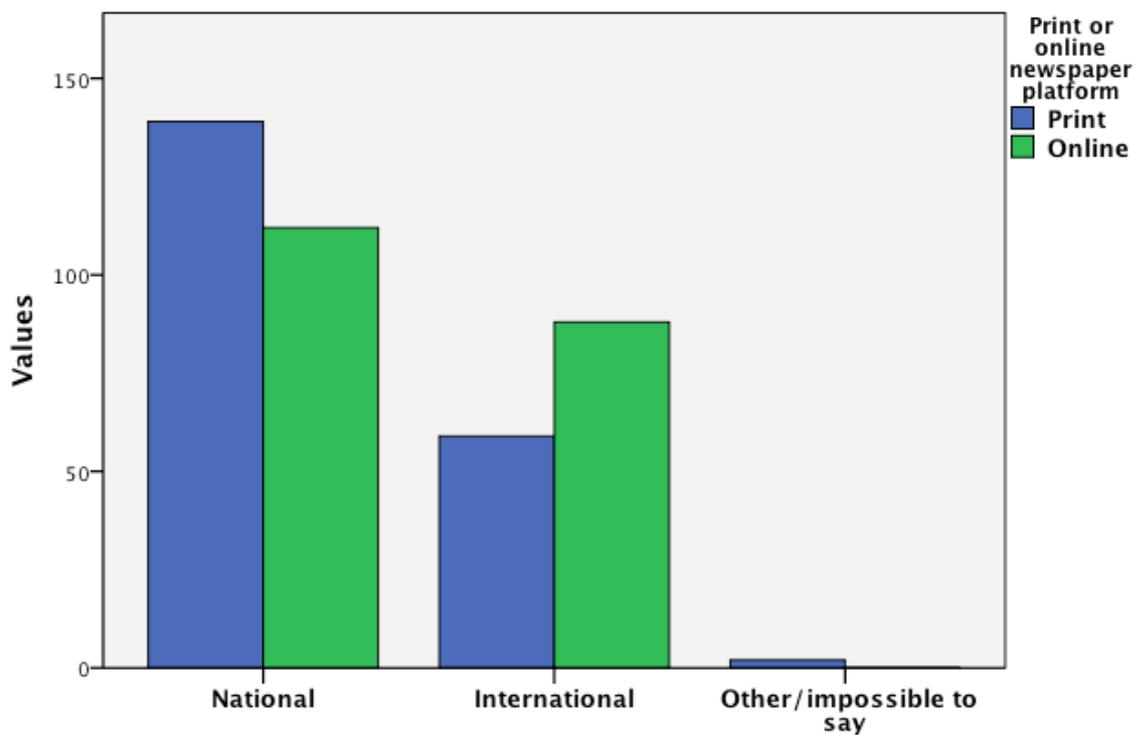
Ho: There is no association between type of newspaper platform and range of content.

H1: There is an association between type of newspaper platform and range of content.

A cross-tabulation and Chi-square test of the variables type\_story, nat\_int and type\_issue (explanatory) and platform (response) was conducted.

The first indicator of *range* was the proportion of space devoted to soft and hard news. An analysis of `type_story` and `platform` was conducted. The Chi-square p-value  $< 0.05$  and the null hypothesis can be rejected, as there is a strong association between the type of story and newspaper platform (p-value = 0.002). Soft news, such as human interest (15 per cent) and sport (13.5 per cent), prove to be more significant in print than online news stories. Further, hard stories such as politics (10 per cent) and economics (20 per cent) also prove to be more significant in print than online. However, there are a higher percentage of stories such as crime, conflicts and accidents (33.5 per cent), and entertainment (11 per cent) in online news compared to print news.

The second indicator of *range* was the amount of national and international news stories. The variables `nat_int` and `platform` were analysed. The Chi-square p-value  $< 0.05$  and the null hypothesis can be rejected, as there is a strong association between the newspaper platform and national or international news stories (p-value = 0.005). A total of 69.5 per cent of the print articles were national, while 56.0 per cent of online articles were national. Further, 44 per cent of online articles were international, while only 29.5 per cent were the same for print articles. Figure 3 shows a bar chart illustrating that print news has fewer international stories compared to online news.



**Figure 3**

The final indicator of *range*, *type\_issue*, did not prove an association with the newspaper platform, as the Chi-square p-value  $> 0.05$  (p-value = 0.525).

**Q3: *Is the form of presentation more tabloid online than in print?***

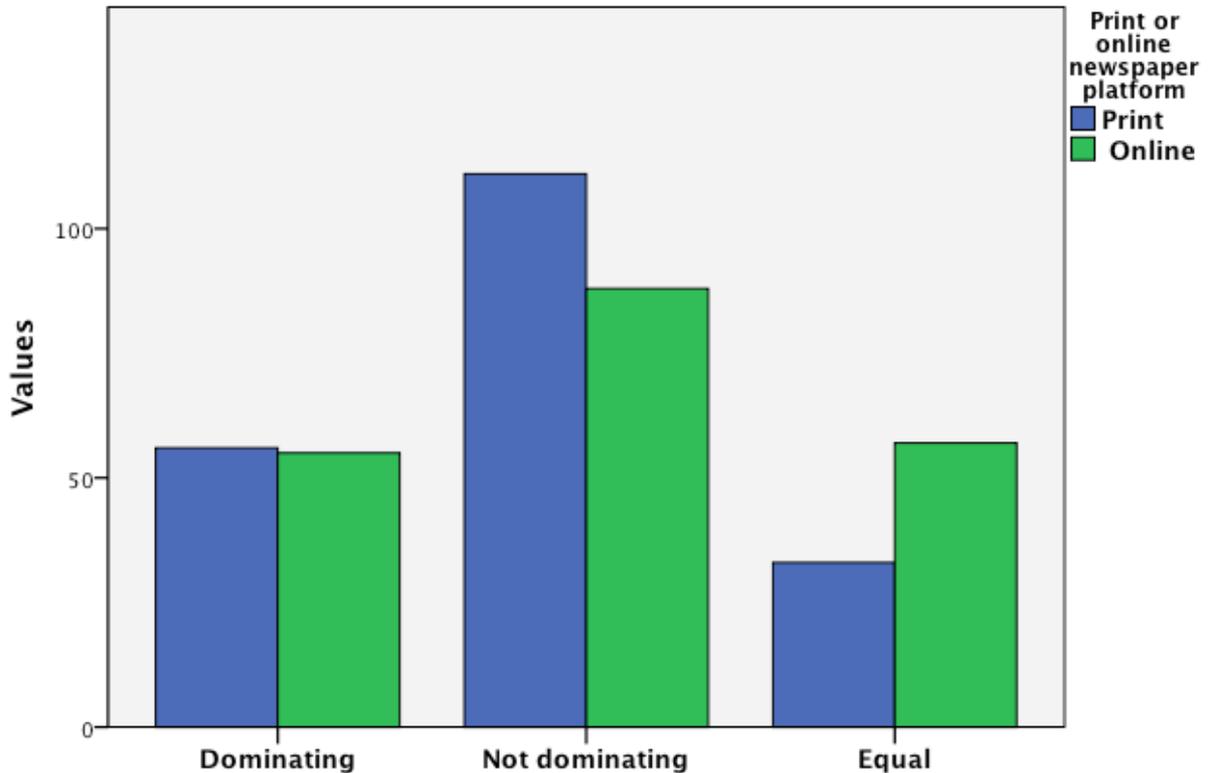
Ho: There is no association between type of newspaper platform and form of presentation.

H1: There is an association between type of newspaper platform and form of presentation.

A cross-tabulation and Chi-square test of the variables *visual\_place*, *pictures*, *headline\_place* and *text* (explanatory) and *platform* (response) was conducted. In addition, a frequency table of *headline\_size* was analysed.

The first indicator of *form* was the domination of visuals in the article. The Chi-square p-value  $> 0.05$  and the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, as there is no association between the *visual\_place* and *platform* (p-value = 0.339). However, an analysis of the number of pictures proves that the null hypothesis can be rejected, as there is an association between photographs and *platform* (p-value =  $0.000 < 0.05$ ). Online newspapers (4 per cent) have fewer articles with no pictures than print news (30.5 per cent).

To what degree the headline dominated the article was the second indicator of *form*. The Chi-square p-value  $< 0.05$  and the null hypothesis can be rejected, as there is an association between *headline\_place* and *platform* (p-value = 0.011). The percentage of dominating headlines is very similar for print (28 per cent) and online (27.5 per cent) articles. However, more print articles (55.5 per cent) prove to have *not dominating* headlines than online articles (44.0 per cent). The bar chart below (Figure 4) illustrates the findings from the cross-tabulation and Chi-square. In addition, a frequency table of *headline\_size* shows that 184 of 200 online articles have large headlines in the main article ( $33+22+29=184$ ), and 60 of 200 online articles have large headlines on the front page ( $33+20+7$ ). Out of the 200 print articles, 61 have large headlines.



**Figure 4**

The third indicator of *form* is the amount of space devoted for text. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected, as there is no association between text and platform (p-value = 0.234 > 0.05).

***Q4: Is the writing style more tabloid online than in print?***

Ho: There is no association between type of newspaper platform and writing style.

H1: There is an association between type of newspaper platform and writing style.

A cross-tabulation and Chi-square test of the variables language, tone, R\_W\_relation and actor representation (explanatory) and platform (response) was conducted to test the hypothesis.

All the four indicators for style prove not to be significant. The null hypothesis for all variables cannot be rejected, as there is no association between style and platform (Chi-square p-values > 0.05). See Appendix C for the p-value for all variables.

## **Discussion**

The following section discusses the main findings from the analysis and considers findings in relation to the overall research question. The findings reflect the four sub-questions that were designed to explore the overall research question.

Main findings from the analysis:

- 1) Evidence of tabloidisation in online news is found in human-interest stories, personalisation and casual language
- 2) Online news content is not softer or harder, but more international, instantaneous and entertainment-focused
- 3) The form of print and online news is quite similar, but the online front page allows for tabloid use of pictures and headlines
- 4) There is no association between the online/print news platforms and style.

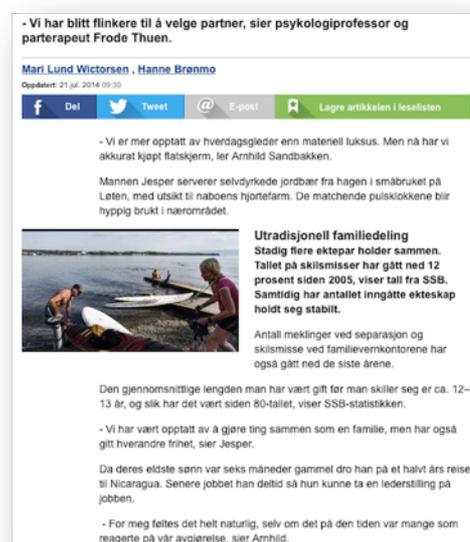
### ***FINDING 1: Evidence of tabloidisation in online news is found in human-interest stories, personalisation and casual language***

Due to some limitations with the employed methodology, the findings cannot discuss historical developments of tabloidisation in online newspapers. However, it can describe the tabloid characteristics in online news and explore the differences between types of newspapers.

Not very surprisingly, there exists a difference between tabloid and quality online news reflecting the characteristics of print newspapers. Overall, softer news stories are found in tabloids and more hard news is found in quality newspapers. Tabloid articles are dominated by visuals rather than text, and the language and tone are more casual and sensationalist in tabloids compared to quality news. The degree of personalisation in relation to scandals is also found more in tabloid than quality news. However, there is some evidence of tabloidisation in online news that is discussed below.

Human-interest stories are found to be similarly represented in both tabloid and quality online news. A total of 11 per cent of tabloid articles and 13 per cent of quality articles were

human-interest related. Moreover, what was once known as a tabloid story is very well represented in quality newspapers. The similar amount of human-interest stories suggests that both tabloid and quality news aim to appeal to a large audience, through the use of stories that reflect issues of daily life (Sparks, 1992). In order for online newspapers to reach high clicking rates, or high 'salability' of news, it is necessary to publish news stories that are likely to be read by a large number of people (Esser, 1999: 291). To illustrate, a screen shot of a human-interest story in *Aftenposten* (21.07, article 231) is presented below. The story issue is concerned with a decrease in the number of divorces over the last 12 years. It was presented as the main article on top of the front page.



Although the representation of human-interest stories is similar, there is a greater amount of entertainment and sport in tabloid news compared to quality news. Similarly, there is a higher percentage of hard news such as politics and economics in quality compared to tabloid news. This suggests that one cannot draw any general conclusions about a spill-over of soft news on quality content, as theory suggests (Uribe and Gunter, 2004). Moreover, tabloidisation of online news may not be concerned with an increase in soft and a decrease in hard news, but an increase of *catch-all* stories with a personal appeal. In fact, tabloidisation of online news has led to greater emphasis on news stories about personal experiences tied to the individual (Peck, 2000: 232). For example, the articles about a decrease in divorce, or someone ill with cancer, are stories most people can relate to and therefore want to read about.

As theory suggests, tabloidisation leads to an increase in the personalisation of news (Bird, 2009). The analysis indicates that there are a higher percentage of personalised stories, both

in relation to private and public life, in quality compared to tabloid news. A total of 66 per cent of all quality online articles had a personalised angle, and quality articles about private lives in relation to scandals were found more often than quality stories about private lives in general. This means that personalisation, as a tabloid characteristic, has become an established style in quality news. Indeed, news about business or economics typically focuses on a person in business when presenting a broader story. Although the research design sets limitations for exploring the development of personal representations, this finding suggests that there is evidence of a focus on individuals and people's private lives in online news. This 'Daily Me' trend can lead to social fragmentation, as news is transformed into a public discourse of personalisation (Sunstein, 2001: 192). One may argue that an overuse of personal news stories may only appeal to the human superego or emotional sympathy. The news story illustrated below is about criminals who found a way to break into online bank accounts; however, this is outweighed by collective sympathy for Mr Jørgensen (66) who personally experienced this crime (*DN*, 18.07, article 176).



Finally, evidence of tabloidisation is found in language. The use of sophisticated language by quality news is found in only 15 of the articles. Most common is a form of middle class Norwegian, found in 82 per cent of the quality articles and 76 per cent of the tabloids. This supports the theory that tabloidisation leads to a more casual language, with short and punchy sentences and fewer sophisticated words (Conboy, 2006; Bird, 2009). Through the use of this language style, online news in general may appeal to a broad audience. As the theory suggests, elite newspapers create a power block between people and those in power (Fiske, 1992). With a common, rather than a sophisticated use of language, fewer people may experience this barrier between the writer and the reader (*ibid.*). Moreover, not only online

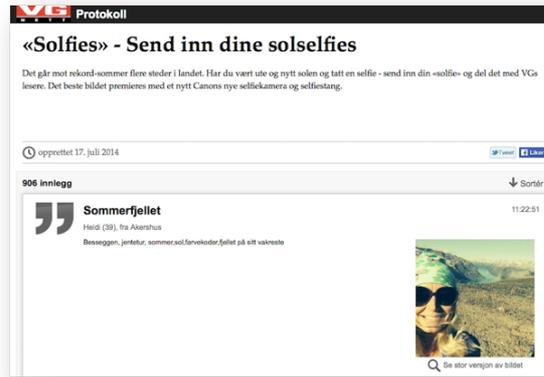
tabloids, but also quality online newspapers are aiming to reach a broad audience by not eliminating readers through the use of sophisticated language that may only appeal to the well-educated of a society.

***FINDING 2: Online news content is not softer or harder, but more international, instantaneous and entertainment-focused***

The hypothesis about the online range of content being more tabloid than print is not necessarily incorrect; however, it does not provide the most valuable answer. In some ways, print news content is both softer and harder than online news content. For example, the analysis found that 27 per cent of print news stories were sport related, while only 15 per cent of online stories were the same. Also, 10.5 per cent of print stories were about politics, but only 6 per cent of online articles were the same. This finding provides more evidence for the theory that audience decline in traditional print news has resulted in less rational discourse (Christians, *et al.*, 2009). Also, it supports the argument that online newspapers have failed to focus on in-depth journalism (Bird, 2009).

Therefore, when comparing print and online news, a traditional discussion of hard versus soft news may not be an intelligent approach. Print and online news have a common goal: increased readership and advertising revenue. However, the commercial approach for reaching that goal is arguably driven by different news content strategies. The online news platform is used to publish stories about current events, and print news platforms place a focus on more in-depth news stories (Ottosen, *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, the online world is always 'on', and tabloid instant news stories are likely to result in high clicking rates. With a total of 33.5 per cent of all online news, instant news stories such as crime, conflict and accidents prove to be much more typical online rather than in print.

Although print news has more softer news stories than online news, such as human-interest, sports and culture, online news has a greater emphasis on entertainment. Aiming to attract a young audience, online newspapers have become more entertainment-oriented (Christians, *et al.*, 2009: 227). For example, the analysis found that both quality and tabloid online newspapers often speak directly to the readers and encourage them into entertaining two-way communication. An example from *VG* (24.07, article 324) is illustrated below. Here, the newspaper asks people to join a competition by uploading their 'solfies' (sunny selfies).



Therefore, one can argue that the concept of infotainment or newszak has increased with online newspapers. This means that newspapers were found to publish more entertainment-oriented news content on the online platform than the print platform. One may argue that the focus on entertainment in online news is a result of the two-way communication between writers and readers. Here, the gap between the sender and receiver is not as vast as in traditional news, and opens up for a more laid-back tone of communication. Further, this finding suggests that the elitist type of news may disappear with the increase of online news, and that tabloidisation results in more democratic journalism (Fiske, 1992). However, an increased focus on infotainment does not necessarily fulfil the public interest or provide citizens with the necessary democratic knowledge, which news media should provide (Sparks, 2000).

Finally, the process of tabloidisation has led to a focus on national rather than international news (McLachlan and Golding, 2000). The World Wide Web gave rise to hope of a more in-depth coverage of international news (Bird, 2009). The findings suggest that with online news, international news coverage has increased. There are more international news stories online than in print. A total of 88 of all online articles had an international focus, while only 59 of print articles were the same. At this point, print news is understood to be more tabloid than the online samples. However, the findings do not indicate that the type of international news is in-depth coverage of important events. In fact, more political and economic content were found in print news. Due to the global feature of the World Wide Web, online news platforms are international in nature. However, it is also instant and requires quick deadlines for publishing content. This indicates that the trend of 'churnalism' exists in Norwegian online newspapers, and that newspapers may copy stories already in circulation and flourishing in international social media and on other news sites (Fenton, 2012).

***FINDING 3: The form of print and online news is quite similar, but the online front page allows for tabloid use of pictures and headlines***

As a visual platform in nature, online news is assumed to be more tabloid than print news through a more dominant use of visuals. However, no association between the type of newspaper platform and dominant use of visuals is found. What the findings do tell us is that almost every online article has one or more pictures included. More print articles were found without any pictures at all. This provides more evidence to the theory of visualisation (Djupsund and Carlson, 1998). As readers are used to visual messages from television and social media, such as Facebook and Instagram, online newspapers use pictures to catch readers' attention. Moreover, one can argue that the use of pictures in online newspapers is even more important than for print news. This suggests that the use of pictures is more *tabloid* online than on print.

As the methodology section states, the online newspaper front page is of significance because that is where readers decide to click further or leave the news page. Therefore, the amount or the dominant use of visuals in the main article is not necessarily of importance. Rather, the picture on the online newspaper's front page plays an important role, as it is likely to draw readers to the articles. Again, high clicking rates lead to increased advertising revenue, and the use of visual content can contribute positively to the process of attracting young readers (Christians, *et al.*, 2009).

To illustrate, on the next page is a screen shot of the front page of both *DN* (left-hand side, 22.07) and *Dagbladet* (right-hand side, 22.07) which shows that every front-page article has a picture attached to it.



Furthermore, online headlines are more dominating than print headlines. While only 61 of all print articles were found to have large headlines, 184 online articles were found to be the same (headlines in the main article), 60 of which were found also to be large on the front page. One interesting observation, which cannot be concluded quantitatively from the content analysis, is that some online newspapers use a standard headline size. Therefore, one may assume that it is the front-page headline that plays an important role. Similarly, in terms of picture use, front-page headlines are used as a tool to be creative and to catch readers' attention. In order to explore this further, an analysis of the differences between print and online front pages is necessary.

There proved not to be an association between the dominant use of text and newspaper platform, suggesting that tabloidisation of online news has not led to less space devoted to text. In contrast to print articles that are written and published, online articles can add more text as more information is known. Therefore, online articles may have the benefit of being experienced as large. An important methodological note is that text was not counted, but evaluated in relation to headlines and visuals. A different result may have occurred had the research been conducted numerically.

Finally, the analysis and discussion of headlines and visuals provides evidence that online news content should not be studied without examining front pages (Ha and James, 1998). If so, important information about how newspapers draw readers' attention will be lost.

***FINDING 4: There is no association between online/print news platforms and style***

The analysis proves that there is no association between the variables within the style of news and the type of news platform. One may argue that the reason for this is that much of what is published online and in print is similar. As seen in the analysis above, online news is more international, instantaneous and entertainment-oriented than print news. Therefore, the similarity is not necessarily found in the type of content, as argued by Ottosen and Krumsvik (2008: 29). However, the online writing style may still be culturally similar to traditional news. Whether this is something good or bad for the development of news is left for future discussions. However, one may suggest that the two platforms should present news differently in order to avoid competition between the online and print platform of a newspaper, as theory suggests (Ottosen, *et al.*, 2012). The online platforms allow for a more personal and direct communication with the reader. In order to maximise their potential,

online newspapers should consider a publication strategy that takes advantage of such characteristics that does not exist in traditional newspapers.

In summary, tabloidisation of online news has led to quality news adapting tabloid characteristics such as catch-all human-interest stories, personalisation and casual use of language. Furthermore, online news content provides more international news stories, but not necessarily in-depth quality content. Moreover, online content is more tabloid than print content in terms of instant news stories with a focus on entertainment. The use of visuals are not more dominating online than on print, but the discussion finds that pictures and headlines on the online front page play a creative role in increasing click rates and attracting readers to the articles. Some of the tabloid characteristics in online news suggest that the online platform is lowering the traditional elite standards of news. Finally, the discussion of style suggests that online news should use its potential to differentiate from print news.

### **Future research**

This study has a number of limitations. In relation to the employed methodology, some issues occurred with the sampling of online articles. The information collected from the newspaper front page was seen as valuable and necessary; however, it provided some difficulties with sampling historical articles. It is recognised that tabloidisation is a process that occurs over time, and should be studied with historical reference. This proved impossible with the employed methodology. However, future research on tabloidisation in online news should be studied over a longer time period. Another limitation stems from the research design. The quantitative nature of content analysis did not leave room for discussions of differences between online and print platforms that go beyond what is coded and counted. Moreover, an additional qualitative method may have provided more valuable findings. More qualitative research should be conducted on the field of visual and headline placement on online front pages, and how this affects the audience. The coding book could also be strengthened and redefined, and more articles and newspapers analysed.

This research focused only on a general comparison between online and print news platforms of newspapers. For more valuable findings, future research should differentiate between tabloid and quality newspapers in such an analysis.

An increased commercialisation of all Norwegian media should encourage scholars to look further into the process of tabloidisation in Norwegian newspapers (Østby, 2007). This research explored online news sampled from online newspapers; however, future research

should also study tabloidisation of news content published by newspapers in social media, such as on Twitter or Facebook. Moreover, one should look into the direct relationship between the writer and reader in social media, and how this two-way communication influences the presentation of news.

## CONCLUSION

This dissertation explored the concept of tabloidisation through a content analysis of the print and online news platform of four Norwegian newspapers; *Verdens Gang*, *Dagbladet*, *Aftenposten* and *Dagens Næringsliv*. The main aim of the study was to analyse tabloid characteristics in online news and compare them to print platform news. An extensive theoretical framework provided the basis for this study, including theory on tabloids, tabloidisation, tabloidisation in relation to democracy and technology, and the context of the Norwegian media sphere. For a conceptualisation of tabloidisation, the much-cited analytical framework of McLachlan and Golding (2000) was employed. A quantitative content analysis of 400 newspaper articles was conducted over a two-week period in July 2014, and data were analysed in SPSS using descriptive statistics and inferences.

Through an analysis of the levels of tabloidisation, *range*, *form* and *style*, the study found that quality online newspapers have adopted the tabloid use of catch-all human interest stories, a personalisation of content and casual language. Furthermore, a comparison between online and print news platforms found that print news is both softer and harder, but online news places a greater emphasis on current events such as crime and accidents, and is also more entertainment-focused. Pictures and large headlines are used more in online than print news, suggesting that a creative use of online front-page sites works as a technique for increasing click rates. No association is found on the analysis of style. The theoretical discussion suggests that online news uses several techniques to reach a broad audience, which may lead to a lowering of the distance between people in general and the formerly elitist type of news. However, the rapidity of online content is likely to result in less rational discourse. Finally, the discussion suggests that online news should take advantage of its characteristics such as a personal two-way communication between reader and journalist, in order to differentiate from print news.

Journalism changes with time, and the process of tabloidisation changes with it. This study provides evidence that tabloidisation is a dynamic concept that changes within different media areas. With an increased commercialisation of Norwegian news media, it is necessary to study the development of tabloidisation in newspapers (Østby, 2007). The findings provide

an understanding of current tabloid characteristics in Norwegian online and print newspapers, and also suggest that future studies on tabloidisation should be conducted over a longer period of time as the historical nature of this field is important.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### *Coding book*

**Unit of analysis print:** whole article

**Unit of analysis online:** whole article + front page information

**Data collection print:** from Retriever

**Data collection online:** screen shot on web page, between 12.00-14.00 pm

**Articles are coded in the following order, for all ten days:**

- Verdens Gang (VG), Dagbladet, Aftenposten and Dagens Næringsliv (DN)
- Online, print

## DESCRIPTIVE VARIABLES

The first variables aim to measure the identity of each article. This information is purely descriptive and helps locate and differentiate the articles.

### **V1 Coder ID**

1. CSG (Celine Storstad Gran)
2. JN (Jenny Nygaard)

### **V2 Article number**

1,2,3...400

### **V3 Platform**

1. Print
2. Online

### **V4 News\_type**

1. Quality
2. Tabloid

**V5 Newspaper**

1. Verdens Gang (VG)
2. Dagbladet
3. Aftenposten
4. Dagens Næringsliv (DN)

**V6 News\_tot**

*For print articles:*

1. Print:Verdens Gang (VG)
2. Print: Dagbladet
3. Print: Aftenposten
4. Print: Dagens Næringsliv (DN)

*For online articles:*

5. Online:Verdens Gang (VG)
6. Online: Dagbladet
7. Online: Aftenposten
8. Online: Dagens Næringsliv (DN)

**V7 Date**

- |                                |                                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Mon. 14 <sup>th</sup> July  | 6. Mon. 21 <sup>st</sup> July  |
| 2. Tue. 15 <sup>th</sup> July  | 7. Tue. 22 <sup>nd</sup> July  |
| 3. Wed. 16 <sup>th</sup> July  | 8. Wed. 23 <sup>rd</sup> July  |
| 4. Thur. 17 <sup>th</sup> July | 9. Thur. 24 <sup>th</sup> July |
| 5. Fri. 18 <sup>th</sup> July  | 10. Fri. 25 <sup>th</sup> July |

**V8 Page**

*For print articles only.* This variable measures the page number of the whole article.

1. Page 1
2. Page 2 or 3
3. Page 4 or 5
4. Page 6 or 7
5. Page 7 or more

**V9 Section**

Place the article in the most relevant section of newspaper. Examples on “other”: magazine, housing, blog etc.

1. Main news
2. Culture
3. Finance and economy
4. Sports
5. Other

## **PRESENTATION VARIABLES**

These following variables V10 and V11 aim to measure purely descriptive information about the presentation of the article.

### **V10 Space**

*For print articles:*

This refers to the approximate space on a page devoted to the coded article. Space includes texts, visuals, illustrations etc. Imagine a tabloid sized newspaper being divided into six, and write down the approximate size of article.

1. Up to 1/6 of a page
2. 1/6 to 1/3
3. 1/3 to 1/2
4. 1/2 to 1 page
5. 1 page
6. 2 pages
7. 2+

OR

*For online articles:*

This refers to the approximate space devoted to the main article, not on the front page. Space is coded as small if the article has 1-4 paragraphs. Space is coded as medium if the article has 5-9 paragraphs. Space is coded as large if the article has 10 or more paragraphs.

8. Small
9. Medium
10. Large

## **V11 Position**

*For print articles:*

This variable measures the position of the article on the newspaper page(s).

1. Main article over two or more pages
2. Main article on one page
3. Top on page
4. Middle on page
5. Bottom of page
6. Right hand side of page
7. Left hand side of page
8. Side column

OR

*For online articles:*

This variable measures the position of the article on the newspaper front page.

Columns refer to the main news section on the web page, not sidebars or commercial space.

9. Main story on top of web page, occupying all columns of page
10. Main story on top of web page, occupying less than all columns of page
11. Other story on top of web page, occupying all columns of page
12. Other story on top of web page, occupying less than all columns of page
13. Other story, occupying all columns of page
14. Other story, occupying less than all columns of page

## **TABLOIDIZATION VARIABLES**

The following variables aims to measure the three operationalized levels of tabloidization; range, form and style.

### **1) Range (content variables)**

The first tabloidization level of measurement is *range*. Tabloid news is argued to be soft compared to quality news, with a lack of international focus. In addition, this research has included the variable type of issue to evaluate whether tabloidization has led to more negative news stories. The following variables aim to measure the type of

story, topic, international or national news type and type of issue by the journalists who reported on the story.

**V12 Type\_story**

The coder should decide what category the article best fits into. The “other” category should not be used unless the articles does not fit into any of the below categories. If an article is split even between two categories, the headline should decide where the article belongs.

Examples on human interest: cancer story, ways to lose weight, parenting etc.

Examples on culture: film actor, art, music festivals

Examples on entertainment: competitions, social media, humour

1. Politics
2. Economics, finance or business
3. Crime, conflict or accident
4. Culture
5. Human interest
6. Sports
7. Entertainment/Social
8. Other

**V13 Topic**

This variable measures the topic of the article. If an article is split even between two categories, the headline should decide where the article belongs.

1. International political story
2. International story about a politician
3. International economic or business story
4. International business man or woman story
5. International health story
6. International crime story. In example: robbery, drugs, violence and corruption
7. International murder story
8. International story about a criminal
9. International social issues story. In example: poverty
10. International religious story
11. International conflict
12. International terror story
13. International war

14. International accident
15. International Internet/IT story
  
16. International social media story
17. International human interest story
18. International weather story
19. International film story
20. International music event. In example: concert, festival
21. International sports story
22. International fashion story
23. International event
24. International culture story. In example: art
25. International royal story. In example: the royal family of Monaco.
26. International TV celebrity
27. international film-actor
28. International musician or band
29. International model
30. International author
31. International chef
32. International journalist
33. International it-person or fashionista
34. Other international figures/celebrities story
35. Norwegian political party story
36. Norwegian parliamentary story
37. Other Norwegian political story
38. Norwegian politician story
39. Norwegian economy or business story
40. Norwegian business man or woman story
41. Norwegian education or educational system story
42. Norwegian international students' story
43. Norwegian health or health system story
44. Norwegian travel or transport story
45. Norwegian Internet/IT story
46. Norwegian social media story
47. Norwegian social issues
48. Norwegian crime story
49. Norwegian terror story

50. Norwegian accident
51. Norwegian murder story
52. Norwegian story about a criminal
53. Norwegian religious story
54. Norwegian human interest story
55. Norwegian weather story
56. Norwegian film story
57. Norwegian sports story
58. Norwegian sports story about international performance
59. Norwegian fashion story
60. Norwegian music event. In example: concert, festival
61. Norwegian culture story. In example: art
62. Norwegian royal family story
63. Other Norwegian events
64. Norwegian TV celebrity
65. Norwegian film-actor
66. Norwegian musician or band
67. Norwegian model
68. Norwegian author
69. Norwegian chef
70. Norwegian journalist
71. Norwegian it-person or fashionista
72. Other Norwegian figures/celebrities story
73. Other Norwegian story
  
74. Consumer issues story
75. International technology story
76. Norwegian technology story
77. International food story
78. Norwegian food story
79. Other international story
80. International travel or transport story
81. Norwegian real estate story
82. Food story

**V14 Nat\_int**

International or national news story. The main plot of the article should decide what

category the article fits into the most.

1. National
2. International
3. Other/impossible to say

#### **V15 Type\_issue**

This variable aims to measure whether the article issue is negative, positive or neutral. In example: a car crash or death can be coded as “negative”, a wedding or a survival can be coded as “positive”. However, it all comes down to the specific article. The article should be coded as neutral only if the issue is either/or. If it is impossible to place the article into any of the three alternatives, code “other/impossible to say”. Please note that the type of issue does not measure whether the coder likes the article or not, but whether the issue is positive or negative. Therefore, type of issue must be evaluated objectively.

1. Positive
2. Negative
3. Neutral
4. Other/impossible to say

#### **2) Form**

The second level of measurement is *form*. The following variables aim to measure visuals, headlines and text used in the article. Tabloid news articles are typically dominated by many pictures, sensational headlines and less space devoted to text. The following aims to measure this through the variables photographs, graphics, video, visual\_place, headline\_size, headline\_place, headline\_colour and text.

Due to different publication platforms, online news articles are naturally different from print news articles. Therefore, it is important that the coder evaluate the article in reference to the type of newspaper platform (print or online).

#### **V16 Photographs**

Type the number of **photographs** in the article. For online articles, this includes the front page and main article. Front-page photograph should be counted only if it differs from the article picture.

0. No pictures
1. One-two
2. Three-four
3. Five-six
4. Seven or more

**V17 Graphics**

Type the number of **graphics** (i.e. illustrations, visuals etc., not photographs). For online, this includes the front page and main article. Front-page graphics should be counted only if it differs from the article picture.

0. No graphics
1. One-two
2. Three-four
3. Five-six
4. Seven or more

**V18 Video**

For online articles only. Is there a video (one or more) accompanying the article?

1. Yes
2. No

**V19 Visual\_place**

This variable measures whether visuals dominate the article as a whole. Visuals include photographs, graphics and/or video. The space devoted to visuals must be evaluated by comparing visuals to text and headline.

1. Yes
2. No
3. Equal

**V20 Head\_size**

The coder should judge size of headline by what is recognized as normal use of headline size for each newspaper.

*For print articles:*

In example: a one page print article has a large headline if the headline stretches over the whole article and occupies much space.

1. Small
2. Medium
3. Large

OR

*For online articles:*

Both headlines on front page and in article must be evaluated.

4. Front page large, article large
5. Front page large, article medium
6. Front page large, article small
7. Front page medium, article large
8. Front page medium, article medium
9. Front page medium, article small
10. Front page small, article large
11. Front page small, article medium
12. Front page small, article small

**V21 Head\_place**

This variable measures whether headline dominates the article. The space devoted to headlines must be evaluated by comparing headline to text and visuals. For online articles, this variable measures headline in article only and not front page. This is because the front page is dominated only by headlines and visuals, and little text

1. Dominating
2. Not dominating
3. Equal

**V22 Head\_colour**

Is any colour used on headline?

*For print articles:*

1. Yes

2. No

OR

*For online articles:*

3. Yes on front page, no in article
4. No on front page, yes in article
5. Yes on both headlines
6. No on both headlines

### **V23 Text**

This variable measures whether text dominates the article. The space devoted to text must be evaluated by comparing text to visuals and headline. **Note: for online articles**, this measures the text in the article and not the front page.

1. Dominating
2. Not dominating
3. Equal

### **3) Style:**

The final characteristic of tabloidization is *style*. Tabloid news typically has a different mode of address, or style, compared to quality news. Meaning that the overall tone of the article is more casual and sensational rather than serious and factual, and that the relationship between the reader and writer is more direct. Also, a personal focus, especially on people's private life, is typically found in tabloid news. The following aim to measure this through the variables language, tone, R\_W\_relation, actor\_rep

### **V24 Language**

1. High Norwegian- use of long sentences with sophisticated words, no slang
2. Norwegian- common, middle-class language
3. Tabloid Norwegian- use of short sentences with simple vocabulary and slang.

### **V25 Tone**

This variable describes the overall tone of the article.

1. Informative/factual/serious
2. Sensationalist/emotional/provocative
3. Either/or

**V26 R\_W\_relation**

Reader-writer relationship

1. Writer speaks directly to reader (call to action)
2. Writer do not speak directly to reader

**V27 Actor\_rep**

This variable measures the portrayal of the main actor in the article. If an article is split even between two actors, the headline or the beginning of the article should decide which actor to code. If the article does not include a main actor, type alternative 5.

1. The main actor is represented in relation to public life. In example: work
2. The main actor is represented in relation to a scandal or sensation in public life. In example: crime, earnings etc.
3. The main actor is represented in relation to private life. In example: family
4. The main actor is represented in relation to a scandal or sensation in private life. In example: wedding, love problems, weight problems, drugs etc.
5. No representation of main actor

**Example of a coded article:**

Dagens Næringsliv, 16<sup>th</sup> July (number 119).

<b>V1</b>	<b>V2</b>	<b>V3</b>	<b>V4</b>	<b>V5</b>	<b>V6</b>	<b>V7</b>	<b>V8</b>	<b>V9</b>	<b>V10</b>
1	119	1	1	4	4	3	3	1	6
<b>V11</b>	<b>V12</b>	<b>V13</b>	<b>V14</b>	<b>V15</b>	<b>V16</b>	<b>V17</b>	<b>V18</b>	<b>V19</b>	<b>V20</b>
1	2	39	1	2	1	0	999*	1	3
<b>V21</b>	<b>V22</b>	<b>V23</b>	<b>V24</b>	<b>V25</b>	<b>V26</b>	<b>V27</b>			
1	1	3	2	3	2	5			

\* Missing value. No video in print article.

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