



PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

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EXTRA! EXTRA! New Tabloid Breed is More than Screaming Headlines But could they be Blueprint to the Future?

The word tabloid has a romantic if sensational legacy in newspaper history. It conjures up images of wild headlines, street reporting, taut prose and exaggeration. It also usually invokes the past, a reference to broad-shouldered big-city tabs aimed at the working class—a vanishing breed of print.

Today, however, tabloid is coming to mean something else. A new breed of youth-oriented tabs is emerging in cities such as Philadelphia, Chicago, Washington, Dallas and Boston. And a second, new model of tabloid is being established in several cities aimed less at young people and more at stealing readers from the traditional broadsheets by offering them something quicker to read. Some newspaper executives, indeed, think audiences may soon prefer the size and even the style of tabloid to the “mainsheets” of the past.

All this at a time when many headlines suggest that newspapers are dying—not being born.

What are these new tabloids like? How does their journalism compare with the traditional broadsheet papers that came to dominate American journalism in the 20th century? Might these new tabloids suggest anything about the future of print?

A new study by the Project for Excellence in Journalism finds the answer may surprise traditionalists prone to dismiss the tabloids as just newspaper lite. A reader with 20 minutes will be more likely get a basic outline of the news about a broader range of topics—including foreign affairs, technology, science, faith and the top stories of the day—from the tabloids than the section fronts of the broadsheets.

Yet readers of the tabloids would be hard pressed to get much in the way of sourcing, impact or even more than one side of the story—even on the top stories of the day. Indeed, 74% of controversial stories offered just one side or mostly one viewpoint on things—and this doesn't include the very shortest items.

And despite their supposed youth orientation, the new tabs do surprisingly little to pioneer making news events more relevant to new audiences—fewer than one in ten stories even tried. This is basically the same percentage found in the section-front stories in the broadsheets.

Among other findings:

- The tabs offer little for anyone who wanted to learn about their own community. Only 22% dealt with their home town—compared with 53% of the broadsheets' section fronts.

- And only 17% of the tabloid stories, indeed, were even original reporting. The vast majority of stories were wire copy—72%. That compares with 93% original reporting in the broadsheet section-front stories.
- Not only are the new youth oriented tabloids light on tailoring their narratives to the young, only 16% of the stories in the youth-oriented tabloids are about the coveted 18-35 year-olds—and most of those are about celebrities.
- The Washington, DC Examiner, independently owned and aimed more at traditional newspaper readers, is something of a hybrid. It puts a higher emphasis on local news than the youth oriented tabs and offers more original copy and longer stories. Still, its content does not contain much more in the way of sourcing, context or multiple viewpoints than the youth tabloids.

The findings may help explain why a recent study conducted by the New York Times and Scarborough Research, a market research company, found that most of the readers of free-tabloids also subscribe to one or more pay-dailies. Consumers are adding the tabloid to their regular newspaper consumption, not replacing one with the other¹ (thought they may indeed be stealing time from one paper for the other).

At a time when the finances of the industry appear challenged by declining circulation and shrinking advertising, this might hint at something about the newspaper of the future. Combining the broader news summary of the tabloids with the depth of the broadsheets on the key stories of the day may point to a way for newsrooms with fewer reporters to continue to cover the waterfront—and in a way that may serve readers better than simply covering fewer things or making every story a little shorter.

Some might argue USA Today and many smaller papers have already moved in this direction, writing shorter stories and designing their front pages and section fronts to billboard what is inside. But their approach is still rooted mostly in stories of middle length, neither the 100 to 250 word summaries of the new tabloids that cut to the basics of the news, or the depth of the traditional big city broadsheets.

The findings also raise some questions about the efforts of the newspaper industry to try to reach out to the young. The new tabloids have done this mainly by investing in new design and format—shorter stories, more celebrity news, lots of small photos—but have devoted less energy and resources to the content of the news itself. Rather than do original reporting, framed for a younger sensibility, they are mostly trimming wire copy. They are not, in other words, pioneering ways to cover the news for a new generation, but mainly tinkering with ways of presenting it.

One of the findings of the Scarborough-New York Times research is, while readers of the free dailies do tend to be younger than those of the available broadsheets in town, “they are not overwhelmingly within the coveted 18-34 consumer category” and most of the drop in age is explained by the distribution of the tabloids at subway and bus stops.²

The new Project for Excellence in Journalism study examined seven papers—three commuter tabloids and one home delivery tab, plus three broadsheets—in three

¹ Mahoney, Kathleen R. and James H. Collins, “Consumer Newspaper Choice in Markets with Free Print Opinions: Are Free Daily Newspapers Competition or Opportunity for Traditional Paid Products?,” New York Times and Scarborough Research, November, 2005.

² Ibid.

cities across the United States: Boston, Washington, D.C., and Dallas.³ The three commuter tabloids are partially or fully owned by the major broadsheet paper in town and are aimed at younger readers. The mostly home-delivered tabloid, the Examiner, is owned by an independent chain, Clarity Media Group. (Note: because of the unique nature of this paper, references to “the tabloids” in the main analysis that follows refers to the three youth-oriented, newspaper-owned tabloids. The Examiner is referenced as a separate entity and is given a more complete analysis near the conclusion of the report.)

The study looked at two weeks of weekday coverage—two days each, Monday-Friday, randomly selected between April 15 and August 15, 2005, and overall coded 2,321 stories: 981 newspaper-owned tabloid stories, 634 stories from the independent Examiner and 706 broadsheet stories. Every story at least two paragraphs long in the tabloids was coded, as was every story of at least this length on the section fronts of the broadsheets.⁴

The Project for Excellence in Journalism, a research institute funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and affiliated with Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, designed and executed the study in its offices in Washington, D.C.

What’s in a Personality?

The personalities of the new tabloids stand apart from either the tabs of old or the broadsheets. They might be described as serious but impudent and a little harried, like a smart college kid on a caffeine high. Where the front pages of the old big city tabs, for instance, scream with one big headline—“Headless Body in Topless Bar?” may be the most famous New York tabloid headline—some of the new tabs feature multiple stories on Page 1 and often lead with national or international headlines, just like the broadsheets. But the front pages of the new tabloids also function like magazine covers, with lots of pictures and teasers to what’s inside the paper.

The headlines in the tabs also tended to be more sensational. When the Michael Jackson verdict was handed down on June 14th 2005, for example, all the papers studied put it on Page 1, but the tabloid headlines read “He Beat It,” “Free & Cleared: Jury Disliked Accuser’s Mother . . . Defense Lawyer Becomes Legal Star.” The straight but humorless Washington Post Headline typified the broadsheets: “Jury Acquits Jackson on All Charges.”

Inside, while the tabloid section format is traditional—national and world news first and sports, celebrity, and lifestyle “back of the book”—the design is sharper and rapid fire, with one-liners and short snippets sprinkled throughout and colloquial

³ In Boston we examined The Boston Globe (owned by the New York Times) and Boston Metro (owned 50% by the New York Times and 50% by Metro, an international chain). In Washington, we examined the Washington Post, the Washington Express (owned by the Post) and the Washington Examiner (part of the Examiner chain owned by Clarity Media Group.) In Dallas we examined the Dallas Morning News (owned by the Belo chain) and Dallas Quick (owned by the Dallas Morning News/Belo).

⁴ At first glance, it might strike some as unfair to the bigger broadsheets to compare the entire tabloid to merely the section front stories of the traditional, larger format papers. Yet we chose this comparison for a reason. The time it takes to get through the stories on the section fronts of a broadsheet is closer to that required to plow through the whole of the tabloids, though it would still take significantly longer. This comparison is actually the fairest one in terms of the consumer. It can be assumed then that, if a reader carefully selected their way through the entirety of the broadsheet, the options there are even richer.

phrasing—“Body & Soul”, “Wedding Stuff”, Tech Stuff” found in Quick, and “Home and Shopping,” “Look Out,” and “Careers” in the Express.

The Stories—Short Wire Copy versus Original Reporting

If one were to take 20 minutes to read the tabloid front-to-back on a commuter ride, what would one get, compared with trying to read the section-front stories of the local broadsheet? (It would take longer than 20 minutes to read the section-front stories in their entirety but seemed the most apt comparison--see footnote 4.)

The differences start with size: The tabloids are eight or nine inches shorter.⁵ The commuter tabloids average 20 to 30 pages each day, and into them are squeezed an average of 33 stories of at least two paragraphs, plus at least that many shorter items. That is nearly a third more stories than the average of 23 that make up the section fronts of the broadsheets. In words, though, the section-front stories in their entirety average three-times more than those of all the stories in the commuter tabloids (roughly 21,000 versus 7,000).

The Examiner tabloid sits somewhere in the middle, averaging between 45 and 55 pages, and twice as many stories, around 70, and 25,307 words per issue.

The biggest difference, however, is that the stories in the commuter tabloids are shorter.

Story Length in Words				
Words	Youth-Tabloids	The Examiner	Broad-sheets	Total
< 100	15%	15%	3%	11%
101 – 250	53	22	3	29
251 – 500	31	38	6	25
501 – 1000	1	23	57	24
1001 +	0	1	32	10

Nearly seven out of ten (68%) are 250 words or less, about three or four paragraphs—and that is not counting the items less than two paragraphs. Nothing gets much long treatment: only 1% (14 stories in all across nearly 1,000 studied in the three papers) were more than 500 words.

In the broadsheets, almost all the section front stories, 89%, are more than 500 words. The Examiner stories fell in between—longer on average than the tabloids but shorter than the broadsheets.

In effect, the youth-oriented commuter tabloids offer something not seen anywhere in the broadsheets. These three or four paragraphs are not the “reefers” to longer stories seen in USA Today, or briefs of the sort seen on minor stories in the broadsheets. They instead offer all the basics of the news in summary, a kind of “mini-story.”

Just as defining, the youth oriented tabloids rely primarily on wire service copy—72% of stories in all. Just 17% (8% news stories and 9% columns) were original or staff written reports (10% were syndicated or advice columns). Those owned by the local paper in town rarely made use of sibling’s copy either.

In traditional broadsheets, by contrast, at least on the section fronts, nearly all the reporting (93%) was original staff written copy.

The Examiner again fell in between, with nearly a quarter of its stories staff written and another 13% original work from freelancers.

⁵ The average size of the tabloids we studied were about 11” x 13”, while the typical broadsheet in the United States is closer to 12” x 21”. The Dallas Quick and DC Express are roughly 10” x 12” while the Boston Metro is slightly larger, 11” x 15” and the Examiner a little different shape, 10.5” x 13”.

The News Agenda

When it came to story selection, or news agenda, the commuter tabloids offer greater breadth. Using their “mini-story” length, we were struck by the degree to which readers could get the basics of the news on so many fronts—a daily digest for citizens of the sort prepared in more specialized form for busy executives.

Part of this certainly was a heavier emphasis on celebrity and entertainment, roughly twice the quotient of celebrity stories (15% vs. 6%) than in the broadsheets (144 total stories versus 40 in the larger format papers). Here, the Examiner more closely resembled the broadsheets (7%).⁶ Even this number may undercount the full sense of celebrity news in the tabs, as it does not account for the prevalent use of one or two sentence items that were too brief to count as stories.

Story Topic				
	Youth-Tabloids	The Examiner	Broadsheets	Total
Elections	1%	3%	2%	2%
Government	8	10	14	10
Crime	13	10	13	12
Business	6	9	15	10
Domestic Issues	10	12	13	11
Science	4	1	1	2
Foreign Relations	7	5	2	5
Accidents/Disasters	2	1	1	1
Celebrity/Entertainment	15	7	6	10
Lifestyle	14	16	13	14
Defense/Military	4	5	3	4
Sports	17	20	18	18
Other	1	2	0	1

The tabloids also carry somewhat less government news. They ran 79 government stories (9% of the total) versus 98 in the broadsheets (16% of the total). Often the difference was in how much coverage the top story received. The broadsheets frequently treated them at greater length and with multiple stories. Consider the July 20th 2005 coverage of John Robert’s nomination to the Supreme Court. All the papers reported on it, but Metro and Express offered only wire copy—a single 252-word AP story in Metro and 2 AP stories in the Express that were roughly 200 words each. The Washington Post and the Boston Globe, on the other hand, each had multiple front page stories, averaging

⁶ We also looked at the topic differences as a percent of all words to see if there were meaningful differences between the two measurements. For all newspaper types the proportion of topics was strikingly similar whether based on total stories or total words.

more than 1,200 words each and all written by staff reporters. The Examiner fell in between, offering 3 AP stories on its page 10.

The tabloids also shied away from business news, which accounted for just 6% or

Geographic Focus				
	Youth-Tabloids	The Examiner	Broad-sheets	Total
Local	22%	32%	53%	34%
Other U.S.	23	17	9	17
National	13	14	18	15
Mix U.S./Foreign	6	6	5	6
International	14	11	5	10
Non-specific	23	21	12	19

62 stories, versus 15% of 109 on the section fronts of the broad sheets.

In the smaller topic areas, however, the tabloids generally offer a broader *range* of news. Science stories, for example, were given four times the portion of space as in broadsheet section-fronts stories or the Examiner (4%

for newspaper tabloids versus 1% for the others). Foreign relations, often covered in the inside pages of broadsheets, made up 7% of all stories in the newspaper tabloids versus 2% in the section-fronts. Both crime and lifestyle stories appeared with about the same frequency.

One thing the tabloids are not, however, is local. Readers are half as likely to find local news in these pages as on the broadsheets section-fronts. Just 22% of the stories in the commuter tabloids were about the local community, compared with 53% on the broadsheet section fronts. This likely is a function of the reliance on second-hand wire and syndicated material. The Examiner fell in between, 32%, but placed this coverage in the very front of the book.

The Quality of Knowledge

If the tabloids offer a broader though less local news agenda, what is it that readers get and what are they missing?

The trade off might be described as knowing a little about a lot of things, or a lot about a few.

To assess what one might learn, the Project examined a series of elements within each story. These included the number of sources used in the report, the range of viewpoints or perspectives offered in controversial stories, the presence of background information, and thoughts about the significance of the event further down the road.

By most measures the tabloids fall far behind in what their stories convey. It might be hard, indeed, for a citizen to form an opinion, change an opinion, or decide how to take action based on the information the tabs provide.

This is evident first in how many sources are cited in stories. Nearly a quarter (24%) of the commuter tabloid stories cited no sources at all. Readers simply must trust the paper, or the wire service, that such sources exist. Another third of the commuter tab stories offered just one source. Meanwhile, only 10% cited four or more sources.

(The Examiner resembled the other tabloids in this rather than representing a middle ground. Roughly a quarter offered no source, another quarter offered just one source, and less than two in ten, 18%, cited four sources or more.)

Number of Sources				
#	Youth-Tabloids	The Examiner	Broad-sheets	Total

Sourcing in the broadsheets was much deeper. Less than one in ten section-front stories (7%) cited no sources. The majority of stories in the broadsheet, 65%, had four or more sources.

0	24%	24%	7%	19%
1	32	25	9	23
2	23	21	9	18
3	10	11	11	11
4 +	10	18	64	29

In short, for those who want to know where information is coming from, or want many sources to help inform their thinking, the commuter tabloids may not suffice. Neither may the Examiner.

Tabloid stories did, however, usually provide some background on events. These stories offered more than disconnected factoids and the coders reported, impressionistically, that they could understand the basics of the events reported. Quantitatively, indeed, the tabloids were about as likely to include necessary background even in their shorter form as were the broadsheets. Some 80% of the tabloid stories included some background information, versus 96% for broadsheets. The Examiner was similar, 92%.

But when it came to offering an idea of what the event might mean in the long run, its future impact, the tabloids fell further behind. A slight majority of the stories (57%) offered no sense of what might happen next or the effect of events. This was also true of 58% of stories in the Examiner. Broadsheet readers, on the other hand, can normally expect to get some sense of this: 75% of stories suggested something about the future impact of the events described.

And what about getting multiple sides to a story? Relying on just the commuter tabloids won't give you much help here, especially compared with what one can gain from the full broadsheet report. To begin with, the vast majority of the tabloid stories (75%) do not introduce that there might be a controversy. They offer just the basic facts—this is what happened. Yet even in stories that did involve some sense of conflict or disagreement, fully 74% contained all or mostly one side of the story. Just 26% offered two or more points of view.

Range of Viewpoint For Stories with a Conflict (n = 736)				
Views	Youth-Tabloids	The Examiner	Broad-sheets	Total
All of 1	36%	49%	11%	27%
Mostly 1	38	28	49	41
2 or more	26	22	41	32

In the broadsheets roughly half of all the section-front stories (52%) introduced no conflict or sense that there could be multiple viewpoints. But in those stories that did involve some dispute, four-in-ten of these stories explored two or more points of view.

Just 11% offered only one side of the story. The rest (49%) offered different perspectives but a preponderance of one opinion.

One result of the brevity in tabloids was a lack of opinion that seeps in from the journalist. To measure this more fairly we removed columns, which are often read for the views they offer. Looking just at news stories, the tabloids and broadsheets were on par with each other. Roughly two-in-ten news stories had at least one opinion from the journalist (19% for tabloids and 21% for broadsheets). Broadsheets, in fact, showed a greater inclination toward including two or more statements of opinion—8% for broadsheets versus 3% for tabloids.

Aiming at Younger Audiences

A major aspect of new free tabloids, according to their own descriptions, was their orientation toward youth. Newspaper readership, like much news consumption, skews old. The average age of a newspaper reader is 53, according to the Carnegie Corporation of New York⁷. The only place people under age 30 gravitate to acquire news in numbers similar to their elders is online.⁸ Philip Meyer, the Knight chair and professor of journalism at the University of North Carolina, has calculated, only half facetiously, that with aging demographics and even older people buying the paper less often (a few times a week rather than every day) the rate of daily circulation was such that the last 7-day-a-week buyer of the paper would die in 2044.⁹

So to what degree do the tabloids aim their work at younger audiences compared to the traditional or old fashioned broadsheets? Clearly they do in look and format, but what about in the stories themselves?

To gauge this, we examined two elements of the news stories. First we looked at the age-range of the principal newsmaker. Then we looked for any kind of explicit reference to the impact of this story on the young demographic (considered roughly 18-35 year-olds).

Based on these two measurements, the new free, commuter tabloids appeared only slightly more geared to the young reader than the broadsheets. The bigger difference seemed to be in their choice of who to highlight.

In all, 16% of the free tabloid stories focused on someone roughly between the ages of 18 and 35. This was true of 10% of the broadsheet stories. (A majority of the stories in both formats, 52% for tabs and 58% for broadsheets, did not center the story around any single person but rather on an issue, event or institution.) In the tabloids most of these 18-35 year-old newsmakers are celebrities such as pop star Justin Timberlake, Comedy Central’s Dave Chappelle and singer Amerie. While the broadsheets have their share of young stars featured on their Style or Culture page-front, they offered more serious youth news. Consider, for example, the front page of the business section in the Dallas Morning News on May 25 2005, which carried a story about two local college-aged entrepreneurs who created a wireless fetal heart device that monitors babies during birth.

Broadsheets even went a little younger. They were more likely to write a story around a child under 18—5% versus 2% for the newspaper tabloids—such as the Boston Globe’s story on local mid-teens who spend their summer evenings on the streets watching neighborhood drug addicts rather than taking part in organized programs.

Beyond just highlighting

	Youth-Tabloids	The Examiner	Broad-sheets	Total
Child (Under 18)	2%	3%	5%	3%
Young Adult (18-35)	16	15	10	14
Middle Age (36-60)	19	15	18	17
Elderly (61 or older)	7	7	6	7
Don’t Know	5	3	3	4
None	52	57	58	55

⁷ “Carnegie Reporter,” Carnegie Corporation of New York, Volume 3/No. 2, Spring 2005)

⁸ Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, “Pew Research Biennial News Consumption Survey,” June 8, 2004

⁹ “A Bright Future for Newspapers,” Paul Farhi, American Journalism Review, June/July 2005.

youth in the news, we looked at the extent to which the papers also tried to make some explicit connection about why the story might matter to 18-35 year old readers. Here the free tabloids and the broadsheets were similar, with neither offering much direct connection at all. Just 8% of these tabloids and 9% of broadsheet stories clearly tied the story to youth.

Youth Impact				
	Youth-Tabloids	The Examiner	Broad-sheets	Total
Youth Impact Explicit	8%	2%	9%	7%
Youth Impact Implied	7	7	5	6
No Youth Impact	85	92	85	87

In other words, despite the birth of the new commuter tabloids as a way to make readers out of the young, the content, at least of the papers in Boston, Washington, DC and Dallas, suggests the differences may be more in design than in the way the news itself is covered.

There is little effort to explain what various news events—be it a Supreme Court nomination, the local education bill or even technology advancements—mean for young people.

This may have other implications. Since the tabloids appear to be staffed largely by editors who are taking wire copy and trimming it down, they may be in a limited position to explore other ways to attract new readers. They may not have the capacity to experiment with what other kinds of news the traditional sources are not covering; to expand the type of sources referenced in stories; to assign, and craft stories in a way that explores the implications of the news on younger readers. In short, they may be doing less than they might otherwise to experiment with ways in which narrative structure, language or other narrative elements might attract younger readers.

This may explain the Scarborough findings that rather than attract new readers or especially young ones, the commuter tabloids are adding something to the experience of existing readers.

The Examiner

So where does the Washington Examiner, the independent tabloid, fall? As mentioned above, it has more pages and more stories than the other tabloids. It also does not make the same appeal to younger readers with cover pictures of celebrities. While its cover often includes a large photograph and teases to inside stories, the majority of those stories are local, national, or international news stories (though it also, at times, features sports figures).

Interestingly, on June 14th 2005, the day all the papers reported on Michael Jackson’s acquittal, the Examiner had a photo and headline of the event (“Jackson beats rap”) on its cover, but it was not the largest or most prominent photo that day. The Examiner featured instead a photograph of a young Brazilian child eating a mango who was living in an area threatened by the construction of a road (headline: “The simple life threatened”).

Inside Examiner resembles a broadsheet. The pages in the front sections—which lead with local stories—feature fewer ads and more stories. Pages often include 6 or 7 short stories and no ads, or 3 longer stories and no ads. The Examiner also includes fairly lengthy opinion columns and editorials, much longer than those presented in the 3 other tabloids. In fact, the opinion sections of the Examiner, including a two-page section

called “American Conversations,” resemble the opinion and editorial sections of many major broadsheets.

How about the content of the stories? Is it as prone to wire copy brevity as the newspaper-owned tabloids? In targeting current readers who want a quicker read, does it choose stories more in line with the broadsheets or the other tabloids? And how much information does it bestow?

Here, as the number outlined higher suggests, the Examiner looks to be something of a hybrid between the traditional broadsheets and youth-oriented tabloids. The stories themselves tend to be longer than the other tabloids but shorter than the broadsheets. More than a third (37%) were 250 words or less but another 25% were over 500 words such as the 1122-word interview of Jack Valenti that ran June 14th 2005. And unlike the other tabloids, the Examiner does more of its own reporting. Close to a quarter of its stories (22%) were staff written, including a local hostage situation which was doubled bylined in the Examiner by two staff reporters. The Express, on the other hand, carried a short AP article about the event. The Examiner also relies on a good amount of freelance reporting—13% of all stories—something that was rare in either the commuter tabloids or the broadsheets.

When it comes to story choice, the Examiner again fell on both sides of the line. On the one hand, just 7% of its stories were about celebrity and entertainment news—closer to the broadsheets. And roughly twice that, 13%, were about government, again similar to the broadsheets. Take, for example, coverage of the launch of an investigation into war crimes in Darfur. In the Examiner, the article was featured on the cover of the June 6th 2005 edition (along with a recent victory by the Washington Nationals baseball team) with a 498 word AP story on page 13. In contrast, the coverage in the other Washington tabloid, the Express, was so slight—a brief AP mention—that it did not even qualify as a full story in this study.

Business affairs coverage in the Examiner, on the other hand, more closely resembled that of the other tabloids (9% versus 6% for the other tabloids and 15% for broadsheets). In most other areas, the paper fell somewhere in between the other two forms.

Is the Examiner more devoted to local affairs? It offered more local coverage than the other tabloids, 32% versus 22% for the others, but still fell short of the broadsheets (53%).

While story choice, localism and reporting style is a crossbreed, however, the quality of knowledge offered appears much more at the level of the other tabloids.

Looking at the number of sources, the Examiner closely resembled the other tabloids. Roughly a quarter (24%) offered no source, another quarter offered just one source and 18% offered four or more.

The Examiner also resembled the other tabloids in its propensity for fact-only stories and for, in stories that do involve controversy, offering mostly one side: 76% did not go beyond the basic facts. Among those with a viewpoint, 49% offered just one side—an even greater percent than among the other tabloids (36%).

While its inclusion of some background information was standard, 92% of all stories, discussion of future implications was, as in the other tabloids, more often absent than not (58% contained not mention of future impact).

Perhaps surprisingly, the Examiner covered younger-aged newsmakers at roughly the same rate as other tabloids (15% versus 16% in other tabloids and 10% in broadsheets.) But they were much less likely to include some explicit mention of the story's impact on this age group--a mere 2% of their stories.

Methodology

The print media—tabloids and broadsheets—were subject to a specific methodological approach regarding sampling and selection and coding. In all, the study examined some 2,321 stories. This included 981 newspaper-owned tabloid stories, 634 independent-owned tabloids stories and 706 broadsheet stories.

Sample Design

Seven different newspapers were monitored for 10 days. This included four free, daily tabloids and three daily broadsheet newspapers. The papers came from three cities across the U.S. Individual cities were selected to present a meaningful assessment of the content and an ability to compare tabloid and broadsheet coverage. The city selection was based on several factors. First, it needed to house both a daily broadsheet and a free commuter tabloid. Next, we looked for a diversity of tabloid owners. Third, back-issues of the paper needed to be available either on hard copy or through Lexis-Nexis.

Operative Dates

Random sampling was used to select a sample of individual days for the study. By choosing individual days rather than weeks, we hoped to provide a broader look at news coverage that more accurately represented coverage over time. To account for variations related to the different days of the week, the 10 days that were sampled included 2 of each day of the week Monday - Friday. Dates were chosen from April 1, 2004 to August 15, 2005. One issue of the Examiner (May 13) and one issue of Quick (May 26) are missing because back issues were not available from the news organization.

The following dates were generated and make up the 2004 sample.

Thursday, April 28

Friday, May 13

Wednesday, May 25

Thursday, May 26

Monday, June 6

Tuesday, June 14

Monday, July 18

Tuesday, July 19

Wednesday, July 20

Friday, August 5

Story Procurement, Selection, and Inclusion

Stories were procured via hard copies of daily publications, supplemented by Lexis-Nexis.

For tabloids: All stories that were two paragraphs or longer were selected for analysis. Calendar, job and other such listings were omitted from inclusion as were letters to the editor.

For broadsheets: All stories that were two paragraphs or longer and appeared on a particular newspaper's front page (Page A1), on the first page of the Local/Metro section, on the first page of the Business section, on the first page of the Style/Culture section or on the first page of the Sports sections were selected for analysis. The stories were coded in their entirety, including any jumps to inside pages.

Coding Process

General practice called for a coder to work through no more than seven days/issues from any newspaper outlet during a coding session. After completing up to seven days/issues from one publication, coders switched to another text-based media outlet, and continued to code up to seven days/issues.

Working with a standardized codebook and coding rules, coders generally worked through each story in its entirety, beginning with the Inventory Variables—source, dateline, length, etc. Then, stories were coded for content variables—topic, big story, number of sources, young demographic impact, principal newsmaker age group, journalist opinion, range of viewpoint, background, and future implication and impact. In all cases, coders worked with a defined set of rules per variable.

Of particular note:

Journalist Opinion: This measures the presence of journalist's unsupported opinion and speculation, in a story. Columns, editorials and reviews and other opinion-based items are coded non-applicable.

Journalist's speculation/opinion is a statement of relationships that have no source or reporting as the basis for the opinion/speculation. If a journalist has first-hand knowledge about an event, a statement about that event would not be opinion (e.g., a reporter saw the aftermath of a car bomb). However, it must be clear that the reporter had first-hand

knowledge and the statement should be something that could be confirmed. Predicting the future, for example, would be speculation because it cannot be confirmed at this point in time.

Easily verifiable factual statements are neither opinion nor analysis. This includes statements about such things as addresses, ages, publicly-revealed agreements and statements, and historical happenings. If it is unclear whether an unsourced assertion/paragraph is opinion or a statement of fact that needs no verification, the decision is based on whether the assertion of fact could be easily refuted or verified by a person or reference material easily available to the journalist or audience members.

Range of Viewpoint: Coders were instructed along the following lines:

Examine the story to see if it has explicit disagreement or conflict over an event or issue. Disagreement involves representatives from at least one position explicitly (not implied) stating that representatives of other positions are incorrect/wrong, acted improperly/inappropriately, or acted immorally. If not, code it “non-applicable/non-controversial” below.

If there is disagreement or conflict, identify the number of paragraphs or assertions for various sides. Then apply the proportions in the subcategories below.

Many of the paragraphs or assertions stories may not take sides. When measuring % of opinions, only consider those portions of the story where opinions are being expressed; do not automatically credit the reporting to one side or the other.

Some stories may include more than one example of conflict or disagreement (e.g., a story summarizing multiple events in Iraq). In such stories, a particular side of one of the conflicts must reach 66% to be coded “mostly one opinion.”

“Refused to Comment Rule” in effect: if, in a given news story, the “other side” refused to be quoted, that is, the reporter explicitly states that the other side refused to be quoted, then that attempt should be quantified/coded as a source at the appropriate level.

Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability measures the extent to which individual coders, operating independently of one another, reach the same coding decision. Tests were performed throughout the project: no systematic errors were found. Senior project staff made all final decisions on both the content and intent variables.

At the completion of the general coding process, each coder, working alone and without access to the initial coding decisions, re-coded publications originally completed by another coder. Inter-coding tests were performed on 8% of all cases in connection with inventory variables, and agreement rates exceeded 99% for those variables. For the more difficult content variables, 8% of all publications/sites were re-coded, and intercoder agreement rates were as follows:

Story Origination: 93%

Geographic Focus: 83%

Story Topic: 89%

Number of Sources: 84%

Young Demographic Impact: 87%

Principal Newsmaker Age Group: 85%

Journalist Opinion: 89%

Range of Viewpoint: 85%

Background Information: 96%

Future Implications or Impact: 82%

Tabloid Study Topline

Total n = 2,321

Note: Totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Number of Stories per Paper in Sample

Outlet	# of stories
Boston Metro	321
Boston Globe	222
DC Express	367
DC Examiner	634*
Washington Post	270
Dallas Quick	293**
Dallas Morning News	214
Total	2321

* One day, May 13, missing from sample

** One day, May 26, missing from sample

Story Origination

Story Origination	Newspaper- Owned Tabloids (Quick, Metro, Express)	Independent Tabloid (Examiner)	Broadsheets (Washington Post, Boston Globe, Dallas Morning News)	Total
Staff News	8.3%	15.8%	72.7%	29.9%
Staff Column	8.7	5.7	20.5	11.5
Wire News – Affiliated	14.9	3.2	2.8	8.0
Wire News – Unaffiliated	56.3	51.3	0.6	38.0
Combo Staff and Wire News	0.6	1.6	0.3	0.8
Syndicated Column – Affiliated or Unaffiliated	5.8	4.6	0	3.7
Non-Staff/Non-Wire (Freelance)	0.9	12.9	1.8	4.5
Q+A/Advice Column	4.1	3.0	1.0	2.8
No Source/Can't Tell	0.5	2.1	0.3	0.9

Geographic Focus

Geographic Focus	NP-Owned Tabloids	Independent Tabloid	Broadsheets	Total
Local	21.8%	32.0%	52.5%	34.0%
Other U.S.	22.7	16.9	8.5	16.8
National	12.9	13.7	17.7	14.6
Mix U.S./Foreign	5.9	5.7	4.8	5.5
International	13.7	11.0	4.8	10.3
Not Applicable/No Specific Location	22.9	20.7	11.6	18.9

Story Length in Words

Story Length	NP-Owned Tabloids	Independent Tabloid	Broadsheets	Total
Less than 100 words	15.1%	14.5%	2.5%	11.1%
101 – 250	53.0	22.4	2.8	29.4
251- 500	30.5	38.2	5.5	25.0
501 – 1000	1.4	23.3	56.8	24.3
1001 or more	0	1.6	32.3	10.3

Story Topic

Story Topic	NP-Owned Tabloids	Independent Tabloid	Broadsheets	Total
Government	9.2%	12.6%	15.6%	12.0%
Crime	13.4	10.1	12.5	12.2
Business	6.3	8.5	15.4	9.7
Domestic Issues	9.7	11.5	12.6	11.1
Science	3.7	1.3	1.3	2.3
Foreign Relations	6.7	5.0	2.3	4.9
Accidents/Disasters	1.9	0.5	1.0	1.2
Celebrity/Entertainment	14.7	6.6	5.7	9.7
Lifestyle	13.6	16.4	12.9	14.1
Defense/Military	3.6	5.4	2.5	3.7
Sports	16.5	20.0	18.0	17.9
Other	0.8	2.1	0.3	1.0

Number of Sources

Number of Sources	NP-Owned Tabloids	Independent Tabloid	Broadsheets	Total
No Sources	24.1%	23.8%	7.2%	18.9%
1 Source	32.3	25.2	9.1	23.3
2 Sources	23.3	21.3	8.6	18.3
3 Sources	9.9	11.4	10.6	10.5
4 or More Sources	10.3	18.3	64.4	29.0

Young Demographic Impact

Young Demographic Impact	NP-Owned Tabloids	Independent Tabloid	Broadsheets	Total
Demographic Impact Explicit	8.3%	1.9%	9.2%	6.8%
Demographic Impact Implied	6.9	6.5	5.4	6.3
No Description of Demographic Impact	84.8	91.6	85.4	86.9

Principal Newsmaker Age Group

Principal Newsmaker Age Group	NP-Owned Tabloids	Independent Tabloid	Broadsheets	Total
Child (Under 18)	1.7%	2.7%	4.8%	2.9%
Young Adult (18-35)	16.1	14.8	10.1	13.9
Middle Age (36-60)	18.8	14.7	18.1	17.4
Elderly (61 or older)	6.8	7.1	5.9	6.6
Don't Know/Can't Tell Age	5.1	3.3	3.3	4.0
No Principal Newsmaker	51.5	57.4	57.8	55.0

Journalist Opinion

Journalist Opinion	NP-Owned Tabloids	Independent Tabloid	Broadsheets	Total
No Opinion Present	64.2%	64.2%	61.0%	63.2%
One Statement of Opinion	11.9	7.6	8.4	9.7
Two or More Statements of Opinion	3.2	3.5	7.5	4.6
Not Applicable (Opinion Piece)	20.7	24.8	23.1	22.5

Journalist Opinion – Excluding Opinion Columns and Editorials (n = 1,798)

Journalist Opinion	NP-Owned Tabloids	Independent Tabloid	Broadsheets	Total
No Opinion Present	81.0%	85.3%	79.4%	81.6%
One Statement of Opinion	15.0	10.1	10.9	12.5
Two or More Statements of Opinion	4.0	4.6	9.8	5.9

Range of Viewpoint

Range of Viewpoint	NP-Owned Tabloids	Independent Tabloid	Broadsheets	Total
All One Opinion	8.9%	11.8%	5.4%	8.6%
Mostly One Opinion	9.5	6.8	23.5	13.0
Two Views Present	6.3	5.4	18.6	9.8
More Than Two Views	0.2	0	0.7	0.3
Not Applicable/Non- Controversial	75.1	76.0	51.8	68.3

Background Information

Background Information	NP-Owned Tabloids	Independent Tabloid	Broadsheets	Total
Presence of Background Information	80.2%	91.8%	96.3%	88.3%
No Background Information	19.8	8.2	3.7	11.7

Future Implications or Impact

Future Implications or Impact	NP-Owned Tabloids	Independent Tabloid	Broadsheets	Total
Presence of Future Implications or Impact	43.5%	42.1%	75.1%	52.7%
No Future Implications or Impact	56.5	57.9	24.9	47.3