



**British digital tabloids in the twenty-first century:
Continuity or transformation?**

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Abstract

The growth of digitalization continues to lead to profound changes in the media field. Due to increased competition, media must compete more fiercely than ever for the attention of users and advertisers. The trend of tabloidization has also appeared in various media. Meanwhile, tabloids still thrive in the internet age. However, the development and transformation of British online tabloids in the digital environment remain unclear. Therefore, this thesis investigates the changes in British tabloid characteristics in the digital environment, examining how tabloids use new technologies to attract audiences while integrating these innovations with traditional features. This thesis focuses on the continuity, change, and presentation of British tabloids in the digital environment. This study is about digital tabloids in the UK.

Specifically, this thesis explores the digital strategies employed by the British tabloids, as well as how online tabloids interact with digital strategies and traditional features. Meanwhile, changes in the characteristics of online tabloids compared to print tabloids, and how they build communities through language are investigated. This research employs a mixed-methods approach, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. It involves conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with British tabloid journalists, performing content analysis on online and print tabloids, and conducting critical discourse analysis on online tabloids.

The results show that British digital tabloids actively embrace digital strategies, and the synergy of digital strategies and journalists' values and judgment influences the development of tabloids in the digital environment. The changing character of British tabloids in the digital environment is complex. It is a multitude of changes across multiple aspects. Also, digital strategies have both amplified and limited the development of tabloid characteristic. Meanwhile, British tabloids mainly continue to use many of the language strategies of traditional tabloids to construct an imagined community. We found that British tabloids use a combination of 'new and old models' to build readership. Overall, this thesis reveals that British tabloids have combined traditional characteristics with audience needs and the influence of digital strategies to achieve successful transformation.

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Table of Contents

British digital tabloids in the twenty-first century: Continuity or transformation?	1
Abstract	3
Acknowledgement	4
Table of Contents	6
List of Figures	10
List of Tables	11
Chapter 1 Introduction	12
1.1 Introduction	12
1.2 The importance of the topic	13
1.3 Why choose the British tabloids as the research focus?	15
1.4 Background	16
1.5 Definition of tabloid journalism, popular journalism and public interest journalism	18
1.5.1 The definition of tabloid journalism	18
1.5.2 The definition of popular journalism	19
1.5.3 The definition of public interest journalism	20
1.6 Research aims, motivations and research questions	21
1.7 Overview of the thesis	22
Chapter 2 Literature review	24
2.1 Introduction	24
2.2 The tabloid history of Britain	24
2.2.1 Commercial popular press	24
2.2.2 The influence of American newspapers on British newspapers	25
2.2.3 The origins of tabloids	25
2.2.4 The golden age of tabloids	26
2.3 Characteristics of tabloids	28
2.3.1 Tabloids construct communities through language	29
2.4 Tabloids in the 21st century	31
2.4.1 Tabloidisation	31
2.4.2 Digitalisation and online tabloid	36
2.4.3 Social media and tabloids	39
2.4.4 Tabloid variants	42
2.4.4.1 (sub)popular news website	42
2.4.4.2 Clickbait	43
2.4.4.3 Clickbait and tabloids	43
2.4.4.4 Viral News Websites	44
2.5 Tabloids and society	45
2.5.1 Tabloids and the issue of Inaccuracy and disinformation	45
2.5.2 Tabloids and ethical issues	47
2.5.3 Tabloids and democracy	48
2.6 Emotion and journalism	50

2.6.1 Emotion and traditional tabloids	51
2.6.2 Emotion and Social media	52
2.6.3 Digital tabloids and emotion	53
2.6.4 Emotion and viral news	54
2.7 The transformation of print newspapers towards the internet and digital strategy	55
2.7.1 The evolution of online news and media convergence	55
2.7.2 The digital strategy of online news	58
2.7.2.1 Online content strategy	58
2.7.2.2 Audience engagement strategy	60
2.7.2.3 The use of audience metrics	64
2.7.2.4 The use of search engine optimization	67
2.7.2.5 The development of artificial intelligence and journalism	70
Chapter 3 Conclusion and research gap	73
3.1 Conclusion and research gap	73
Chapter 4 Methodology	76
4.1 Introduction	76
4.2 Research design	76
4.3 Content analysis	77
4.3.1 Selection of newspapers	87
4.3.2 Samples and data collection	88
4.3.3 Time period	89
4.3.4 Data analysis	90
4.3.5 Independent samples t-test:	90
4.3.6 Reliability	91
4.4 Critical discourse analysis	91
4.4.1 Samples	92
4.4.2 Data analysis	93
4.5 In depth interviews	94
4.5.1 Data collection	95
4.5.2 Samples	96
4.5.3 Data analysis	97
4.6 Conclusion	98
Chapter 5 The digital strategies of online tabloids	99
5.1 Introduction	99
5.2 Findings: Theme 1 The change of tabloid strategy in the digital era.	99
5.2.1 The changes of content strategy	99
5.2.1.1 Digital tabloids need to adapt to multiple platforms	99
5.2.1.2 Audience focus	100
5.2.1.3 Visual Importance in the Digital Landscape	101
5.2.1.4 Storytelling	103
5.2.1.5 Hyperlinking:	104
5.2.2 The change of the homepage strategy	105

5.2.2.1	The importance of the homepage	105
5.2.2.2	A Visual media	106
5.2.2.3	Readability	106
5.2.3	The use of social media strategy in online tabloid	107
5.2.3.1	Social media strategy is important	108
5.2.3.2	Social media strategies.	108
5.2.4	The use of search engine optimisation in online tabloids	110
5.2.4.1	The Importance of SEO for online tabloids	110
5.2.4.2	SEO strategy in the newsroom	110
5.2.5	Audience metrics	112
5.2.5.1	Use of audience metrics	112
5.2.6	Changes in the way journalists interact with the audience	113
5.3	Analysis and Discussion	116
5.4	Finding: Theme 2 - News value and news judgment of digital tabloids	124
5.4.1	Changes in news value of digital tabloids	124
5.4.2	The impact of digital strategies on the news agenda	125
5.4.2.1	SEO influences the news agenda	125
5.4.2.2	social media influences the news agenda	126
5.4.3	Journalist's news judgment is paramount	126
5.4.3.1	SEO and journalists' judgment	126
5.4.3.2	Social media and journalists' judgment	127
5.4.3.3	Audience metrics and journalists' judgment	128
5.5.5.4	Adherence to the traditional gatekeeper role of UGC	129
5.5	Analysis and Discussion	130
5.6	Comprehensive discussion on two themes	136
5.6.1	Synrgistic effect of different digital strategies and journalists' values and news judgments	136
5.7	Conclusion	138
Chapter 6	The changing characteristics of online tabloids	140
6.1	Introduction:	140
6.2	Results of quantitative content analysis	140
6.2.1	The changes in range	140
6.2.2	The changes in style	150
6.2.3	The changes in form	155
6.3	Analysis and discussion	168
6.3.1	Changes to the tabloid form	168
6.3.2	Changes in the news type and news topic characteristics	172
6.3.3	Changes in style	176
6.3.4	Using Social Media Sources as News Sources	186
6.3.5	The continuation and change of tabloid in the digital environment.	191
6.4	Conclusion	200
Chapter 7	Online tabloids use language to build readership	201
7.1	Introduction	201

7.2 Partygate.....	202
7.2.1 Analysis and discussion.....	214
7.3 Prince Andrew's sexual abuse case.....	216
7.3.1 Analysis and discussion.....	229
7.4 Comprehensive discussion of the two events.....	231
7.5 Conclusion.....	235
Chapter 8 Conclusion.....	236
8.1 Introduction.....	236
8.2 Digital strategy for online tabloids.....	236
8.3 The continuation and change of tabloid characteristics in the digital environment.....	239
8.4 Online tabloids build communities through language.....	241
8.5 Original contribution to knowledge.....	243
8.6 Limitations and further development.....	245
Bibliography.....	247
Appendix.....	283
Appendix 1 Code book for content analysis.....	283
Appendix 2 Explanation of linguistic instruments and structures in Critical Discourse Analysis.....	291
Appendix 3 Interview questions.....	293
Appendix 4 The coding theme of the interview.....	294
Appendix 5 News Source.....	301
Appendix 6 Participant Information Sheet.....	308
Appendix 7 [British digital tabloid in 21century] Consent Form.....	314
Appendix 8 Ethics approval.....	317

List of Figures

Figure 6. 1	144
Figure 6. 2	144
Figure 6. 3	147
Figure 6. 4	147
Figure 6. 5	148
Figure 6. 6	148
Figure 6. 7	149
Figure 6. 8	150
Figure 6. 9	157
Figure 6. 10	157
Figure 6. 11	158
Figure 6. 12	158
Figure 6. 13	159
Figure 6. 14	159
Figure 6. 15	160
Figure 6. 16	161
Figure 6. 17	162
Figure 6. 18	163
Figure 6. 19	164
Figure 6. 20	164
Figure 6. 21	165
Figure 6. 22	165
Figure 6. 23	166
Figure 6. 24	166
Figure 6. 25	167
Figure 6. 26	167
Figure 6. 27	169
Figure 6. 28	188
Figure 6. 29	189
Figure 6. 30	190

List of Tables

Table 4. 1	81
Table 4. 2	83
Table 4. 3	84
Table 4. 4	85
Table 4. 5	86
Table 4. 6	86
Table 4. 7	87
Table 4. 8	87
Table 4. 9	97
Table 4. 10	98
Table 6. 1	141
Table 6. 2	142
Table 6. 3	143
Table 6. 4	145
Table 6. 5	146
Table 6. 6	147
Table 6. 7	151
Table 6. 8	152
Table 6. 9	153
Table 6. 10	154
Table 6. 11	155
Table 6. 12	156
Table 6. 13	162

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study mainly explores the development of tabloids in the digital age, including the changes and continuation of the characteristics and the usage of digital strategies. The process where specific journalism features are passed down by a mechanism comparable to "natural selection" might be characterized as evolution. Some subspecies of journalism are or may be on the verge of extinction, while others may be considered genetic mutations. Nevertheless, these factors all contribute to the vitality and ultimate resilience of journalism. Therefore, when examining the history of online journalism, it may be inferred that certain species within this domain may face extinction. In contrast, others may exhibit adaptive behaviors in response to their changing environment. New kinds of news may emerge as a result of extinction, and they may be more compelling and even powerful. (Siapera and Veglis, 2012, p.3). The transition from print tabloid to online tabloid resembles a process of biological evolution. We can see its progression from the era of printed tabloids, to the age of broadcast, then further into the era of TV culture, ultimately culminating in a transformation into the online tabloids. Tabloids are continuously evolving in response to changes in societal dynamics, business landscapes, and technology. They consistently seek opportunities for development within various shifts and transformations. In the words of Seton-Watson (1977,p.5), Britain might be the oldest of 'old, continuous nations', but in its tabloid representation it has been able to reformulate and reinvent itself at a remarkable pace to retain its authenticity in the modern world. The development of online journalism may be gradual, such as adopting the hyperlinked, interactive, and multimedia features of the internet or the shift to participatory and social media. News websites' initial reluctance to adopt these features has been gradually replaced by enthusiasm for these features. Almost all news websites have blogs, Facebook, and Twitter accounts. As a result, the intermittent relationship between new media and journalism has progressed from initial suspicion to a degree of close embracing. It is also evident that journalism is starting to adopt new traits in order to strengthen its existing ones while also creating new ones that are consistent with its changing environment. (Siapera and Veglis, 2012, p.1). Undoubtedly, tabloids have also been transformed and integrated into some of the most successful digital news outlets and social media developments in the world today. The exponential growth of digitalisation and the internet continues to bring profound changes in the media field, from content production to daily work, media, distribution strategies, and business models (Casero-Ripolles, 2012, p.152). The advent of digitisation presents many challenges for journalism, posing considerable challenges for tabloid media. Many believe the era of tabloid dominance appears to be coming to an end, as print circulation has declined and new online news websites such as BuzzFeed and the Huffington Post have attracted large audiences in the UK. However, tabloid news brands are flourishing online. The tabloids have successfully adapted to technology-driven changes in the consumption, production, and distribution of news in the

context of this online media system (Örnebring, 2008, p.772). Some media, like *MailOnline*, have transcended their national origins and become global media due to gradual internationalisation. Therefore, the tabloid, a cultural form established in print form, is being cleverly transferred to the digital age (Eldridge II, 2011, p.21). Bingham and Conboy (2015, p.231) say that there will always be an industry for news and commentary written in a tabloid style, and Alfred Harmsworth of the twenty-first century would probably look into fresh instruments to find the best way to write it. He would note appreciatively that the Daily Mail, with its hugely successful *MailOnline* website, has confidently adapted to changing circumstances.

1.2 The importance of the topic

Tabloids have always been the ghosts that haunt both the past and present of journalism (Conboy, 2021, p.1). Harmsworth founded the *Daily Mail* in 1896. According to Williams (1997), *the Daily Mail's* debut marked the start of a tendency in the UK press to divide between low-end tabloids and high-end elite newspapers. Since its relaunch in the 1930s, the *Daily Mirror* has represented the emergence of a truly British tabloid. It has embarked on a process that enabled it to establish itself as a popular organ of the day. At that point, all popular competitors copied its format, language and style (Bingham and Conboy, 2015). When *The Sun* first appeared in the 1970s, it completely reinvented what a British tabloid was. *The Sun* proves that it is still possible for a new tabloid to emerge and attract a large readership. Today, as tabloid sales decline, their culture continues beyond print: online, television. Other media forms—broadcast, magazines, and then the internet—have also embraced and adapted the tabloid's populist priorities, encompassing speed, brevity, accessibility, drama, and controversy. Tabloid values have taken over the media landscape, making popular media increasingly featureless and difficult to compete with imitators. Therefore, this process reflects the success of the tabloid model rather than its failure (Conboy, 2021).

Moreover, Conboy (2007) believes that tabloids can actually exist as a cultural phenomenon beyond form, so it is a matter of flow. The ability of tabloid culture to penetrate media boundaries is becoming increasingly apparent in today's world (Conboy, 2007). Setting aside desperation and criticism, Feeley (2012, p.470) contends that a more thorough examination of tabloids is necessary, given their persistent popularity in many forms and the profoundly transformational influence of their style on journalism. Harrington (2008) urges a reevaluation of a wider range of issues associated with popular journalism as a whole rather than merely recording its decline. He also describes how tabloids have gone from newspaper to radio and from sideshow to mainstream. This evolution means that tabloids cannot be easily discarded, and abandoning them would be an unfortunate refusal of the preferences and inclinations of most popular journalism consumers (Harrington, 2008, pp.269-270). Eldridge II (2021, p.17) also highlights that an excessive focus on the negatives of tabloids overlooks the broader

issue of what the tabloid genre has offered in the past and present, and how those aspects carry over into the digital space. In the digital age, the tabloid's primacy as a form remains alive, but it is only reimagined beyond the sensational appeal of print tabloids (Eldridge II 2021, p. 30). Even though the tabloid was the form of media in the 20th century, its ideals and style will continue to shape the 21st century. (Bingham and Conboy, 2015, p.232).

Changing digital media consumption patterns have allowed the public's desires and preferences to override the news's adherence to a set of practices that represent the public. This situation calls for journalism to play an increasingly interactive, even subservient, role in the media landscape. Today, public demand for entertaining and informative online content is constantly rising. The field of journalism has seen significant transformations and is expected to undergo more evolution in the future. Its most fundamental characteristic is its relationship with the audience, transcending its classification as a mere product or service. Tabloid journalism and its evolution towards a wider culture can be seen as a symbol of this. Historically, there was a trend from popular journalism to tabloid journalism, followed by the emergence of a wider tabloid culture. Tabloid culture is now the mainstream rather than the fringes (Conboy, 2021). Therefore, the success of the tabloid model in history, along with its continuous prosperity and expansion in today's media landscape, prompts us to think about tabloids in the digital space. As Conboy (2021, pp.1-2) argues, at this critical moment, a discussion of tabloids has been integrated into a broad discussion of new media formats and technologies, and it may be necessary to reassess the certain dynamics and complexity of tabloids. We should consider the digital manifestation of the tabloid. This is an issue that has sparked significant academic concern but has not been fully explored so far.

The statistics and rankings of UK online tabloids illustrate that online tabloids have become an essential part of the entire UK news online media landscape. Despite occasional data fluctuations, tabloids have consistently maintained a leading position in terms of audience size in recent years. Based on data from Ipsos Iris, Press Gazette made an exclusive list of the top 50 news websites in the UK. The BBC continues to hold the position of the largest news brand in the UK regarding audience size. *Mail Online* secures the second place (49% audience share) right behind the BBC. *Sun Online* ranks third, reaching 24.3 million individuals with a coverage rate of 48%. *The Mirror* ranks fourth (22.9 million people, with a coverage rate of 46%), and *The Independent* ranks fifth (21.1 million people, with a coverage rate of 42%). However, audience data provider Pamco recently positioned *The Sun* as the most widely read commercial news brand, with the highest print and online readership from January 2021 to December 2022. Pamco also estimates that *Sun Online* has a monthly readership of 31.1 million and a weekly readership of 21.9 million. However, the latest digital data from Ipsos Iris shows that *Mail Online* outperformed *The Sun Online*, garnering 601.6 million page views in May of 2023, while *The Sun* achieved 353.1 million views. In the UK online audience ranking, the two often swap positions and maintain close competition.

Recent data shows that these tabloids rank second only to BBC News, securing positions

within the top five overall. These two online tabloids separately reach half of the UK online population. Therefore, the leading online tabloids have an absolute influence on the online news market in the UK, so exploring online tabloids is valuable for the development of the UK news industry. Nowadays, the leading online tabloid news brand boasts a substantial audience, indicating the success and influence of its audience strategy in the digital environment.

1.3 Why choose the British tabloids as the research focus?

Tabloids are very unique in British culture, and were formed within a certain international context. Since at least the 19th century, British journalism has emulated the practices of American tabloids, such as the adoption of populist reporting and a heightened focus on entertainment matters, human emotions, and scandals. (Ponce de Leon, 2002) An example is the introduction of 'new journalism' from across the Atlantic. In 1896, Hamsworth founded the *Daily Mail*, which incorporated some characteristics of 'new journalism' pioneered by Pulitzer and Hurst. This included a bold visual style on the front page, and increased the investment in technology and publicity (Conboy, 2002). Historically, British tabloids have excelled in audience engagement, exemplified by the new journalism of the 1930s. This relied on integrating other features, such as technology, market economy and democratic politics with mass participation. Moreover, British tabloids exhibit unique content and style, although they are also controversial. Critics argue that the triviality, naked populism, and sensationalism of tabloids are the opposite of serious journalism. They contend that British tabloids' coverage of public affairs tends to be simplified, personalised, and dramatic, which seriously conceals its public information content (Sparks, 2000, p.15). However, the advantage of this style is that tabloids make news easy to understand and accessible to most people. Although it is usually regarded as destructive, emotion can play a core role in public participation, mobilising interest and providing an emotional carrier for debate. From this perspective, tabloids have democratic potential (McGuigan, 2000, p.5).

Furthermore, British tabloids not only cover politics and public affairs but actively shape political events and campaign. They openly present their views on who to vote for, and engage directly with political events and people. This uniqueness is not found in tabloid newspapers in many other countries (Johansson, 2007, p.23). The distinctiveness of this characteristic becomes evident when contrasted with American supermarket tabloids, which primarily concentrate on entertainment, gossip, human-interest stories, occult phenomena, and similar topics, showing limited attention to politics (Bird, 1992, p.8).

Lastly, British popular tabloids have historically dominated the newspaper market. In some European countries, tabloid circulation remains limited in comparison to broadsheet or 'serious' newspapers (Johansson, 2007, p.22). In the UK, online tabloids have occupied almost the entire British online news market and have a wide audience. If audience size indicates the

significance of online newspapers, then popular online tabloids undoubtedly occupy a central role within UK online newspaper journalism. What is more, both online tabloids have a great influence on public opinion and social cultural trends. Therefore, the focus of this thesis is on UK digital tabloids.

1.4 Background

The landscape of news production has changed thoroughly in the past twenty years. The emergence of the internet has greatly enhanced the commercialisation of the media market. This change is ascribed to the diversion of advertising income toward digital media platforms (Croteau and Hoynes, 2013), the competitive landscape created by freely available online content, and users' decreased inclination to purchase content (Newman et al., 2019). These developments have increased competitive pressure on news organisation (Carlson, 2017). Also, the digital environment provides a significant change in both the way news content is delivered to readers and the way it is consumed. The advent of Web 2.0 has given rise to the creation of many apps and websites that facilitate user-generated content creation, distribution, and sharing. This phenomenon has played a significant role in fostering a culture of convergence. (Peña-Ferández, Lazkano-Arrillaga and García-González, 2016, p.28). Therefore, the internet offers users the potential to access, create, transmit (often freely) content, and engage with other audiences, thereby challenging the traditional news media's monopoly over news production and distribution. Tabloid newspapers, such as *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* target audiences seeking infotainment content and provide them with free news offerings. Without implementing paywalls, tabloid newspapers depend on a large audience to generate advertising revenues and provide free content for their readers (Tong, 2023, p.26). Therefore, news organisations compete with various groups, including ordinary people and big technology companies, to get the audience's attention.

As mentioned above, the media industry around the world is undergoing more intense commercialisation due to increased competition from the internet and social media, and newspapers should now compete more aggressively than ever for the attention of readers and advertisers. Creating compelling and useful content may have a greater impact on news website than any other factor (Google, 2010). In the news environment, journalists attempt to use new narrative and technology to narrate the stories. Digital media can reuse traditional media as a unique form in the digital world (Canavilhas, 2012, P.355). This relates to the way that traditional media extend their content onto online platforms. Meanwhile, for news organisations to increase the visibility of their content and reach their audience, they have to run 'on-site' channels, such as their own website or app, and 'off-site' channels provided by digital intermediaries, such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. In recent times, social media platforms like Facebook have heightened the competitive strain on newspapers even more. If newspapers want to survive, they must appear on social media and deliver content that complies with social media attention requirements. (Steiner et al. 2019). The news selection

logic of social media (Jürgens and Stark, 2017) shows a strong preference for popularity. This selection logic encourages content that garners greater attention in the form of user reactions, a common feature of tabloids (Conboy, 2021). Social media platforms prefer content that draws users' attention and can reach specific target groups. This makes social media very attractive to advertisers (Cornia, Sehl and Nielsen, 2016; Croteau and Hoynes, 2013). Moreover, the influence of Google's traffic also cannot be ignored by media organisations, and they need to continue to optimise their content for search engines (Sweney, 2014). In the increasingly fierce competition, the effective use of search engine optimization in newsrooms is useful to attract more readers (Galitsky and Levene, 2004).

Furthermore, entertaining, emotional, sensational, and shocking visual content (tabloid-like content) tends to be the most effective in generating high traffic and eye-catching content. Therefore, audience preference for tabloid content is believed to drive the tabloidisation of online content. Other media types, especially premium media, are increasingly adopting the characteristics of tabloid journalism, becoming tabloidised. As Harrington (2021, p.125) emphasises, tabloidisation is a survival strategy in response to changes in the media landscape. In fact, the degree of tabloidisation of a newspaper is closely related to its degree of commercialisation (Karlsson, 2016) and its positioning to reach the largest possible audience. However, due to highly commercialised and competitive markets, an extreme manifestation and consequence of tabloidisation is 'clickbait.' At the same time, as reader preferences shift and advertising revenue keeps falling. Media organisations are investing in viral websites as potential sources of revenue to reverse business downturns like BuzzFeed that publish compilations of highly clickable content rarely covering news events. These changes have forced tabloids to enter viral news websites. Clickbait and viral news websites can also represent an extreme phenomenon of tabloidisation, surpassing the niche market of tabloid media (Basto, 2017).

Therefore, these phenomena illustrate that in the digital environment, those traditional characteristics that made tabloids unique have become so common that they have diluted the characteristics that once made tabloids such a formidable popular media genre (Eldridge II, 2021). The tabloidisation of broadsheets and the news phenomenon of clickbait and viral websites have taken over the tabloid market niche. In the fierce market competition, the development of tabloids seems to be more difficult. Eldridge II (2021, p.19) suggests that *MailOnline* is an exact reproduction of what tabloids popularized, amplified, and digitalized in a way that results in high ranks in search results when SEO is used. Basto (2017, p.219) contends that the advent of social media could potentially endanger tabloids, pushing them toward extreme tabloidisation or transforming them into viral websites. Therefore, scholars tend to argue that online tabloids should become even more tabloid in a social media, audience-measured environment.

1.5 Definition of tabloid journalism, popular journalism and public interest journalism

For this study, tabloid journalism, popular journalism, and public interest journalism are all important concepts. Therefore, we define these key terms.

1.5.1 The definition of tabloid journalism

Tabloid originates from the term "tablet". It is important to realize that the term "tabloid" has an obvious and common-sense meaning: it initially refers to the specific size and shape of a newspaper. Generally, it refers to half a broadsheet. (Gripsrud, 2000; Spark, 2000; Bird, 2009; Popović & Popović, 2014; Bingham & Conboy, 2015). Spark (2000, p.15) points out that the tabloid press on newsstands can be identified as genuine tabloid newspapers, sold alongside more serious publications. Their agenda focuses on scandal, athletics, and entertainment, while they still contain some aspects of the news value of the serious press. However, tabloid journalism extends beyond the newspaper format and involves selecting and presenting news in a certain way (Skovsgaard, 2014). Bingham and Conboy (2015, p.2) broadly define the term 'tabloid' to include any newspaper that adopts the populism, accessibility, and simplicity of Harmsworth's world, regardless of page size or printing style. Popović & Popović (2014, p.13) describe that the literal meaning of 'tabloid journalism' in relation to newspaper size quickly shifts to editorial and presentation style descriptions, which in turn expanded to non-print formats such as television. Therefore, the tabloid is also often used in discussions on television and broadcast. For example, the term 'tabloid television' now reflects the shift in meaning from a specific paper format to meanings related to the connotation of form and content, rather than indicating half the size of a TV screen (Gripsrud, 2000, p.289). Therefore, tabloid journalism is not a judgment on a specific type of media output but rather on the content it fills.

I employ two complementary definitions: one emphasizing the primacy of tabloid content, and the other focusing on tabloid style. I integrate these definitions to formulate a comprehensive understanding of tabloid journalism. The first definition, proposed by Spark (2000), illustrates that tabloid journalism focuses less on politics, business, and society, and more on entertainment such as sports, scandals, and popular culture. It places a relatively high emphasis on celebrities and ordinary people and their private lives, while allocating less attention to political processes, economic progress, and social transformations (Spark, 2000, p.10). The second definition, suggested by Bird (2000), portrays tabloid journalism as a 'storytelling' style of reporting. This style emphasizes individualized personal narratives and substitutes analysis and rational description with visual imagery and sensationalism, necessitating the increasing use of dramatic techniques such as photo enhancement and reenactment (Bird, 2000, p.215).

Meanwhile, the definitions of tabloid journalism by Johansson (2020), Popović & Popović (2014), and Skovsgaard (2014) align with both Spark's and Bird's views. They think that tabloid journalism uses sensationalism in reporting news and has a populist nature. They pursue gossip and kitsch and focus on sex, crime, and celebrities. They allow social affairs to give way to bizarre scandals, use taboo topics to peer into people's privacy, and often circumvent journalistic ethics (Johansson, 2020; Popović & Popović, 2014; Skovsgaard, 2014; and Paletz; 1998). At the same time, these definitions all emphasize that while tabloid journalism has many forms, it is often seen as the counterpart to "quality" or "serious" journalism. It has been described as being contrary to journalistic ideals of objectivity and careful judgment. There is an opposition between the serious business of reporting to citizens about the public's welfare and the profitable business of attracting an audience using sensational entertainment (Spark, 2000, p.10). The former is presented as serious, while the latter is tabloid. Therefore, tabloid journalism can also be perceived as an "other" to journalism, coexisting alongside official discourse and more respected forms of journalism (Johansson, 2007, p.16).

1.5.2 The definition of popular journalism

The meaning of 'tabloid journalism' is now so widely used that it is difficult to distinguish it from 'popular journalism' (Gripsrud, 2000, p.289). In fact, tabloids can be seen as prime examples of popular journalism where people are unable to make a meaningful distinction between 'information' and 'entertainment.' (Hallin, 1992; van Zoonen,1998b) Conboy (2006, p.1) points out that tabloids have gained significant power through the development of their language and its connection to popular print culture that has evolved over the centuries. Therefore, Gripsrud (2000, p.291) suggests that the area of popular journalism includes the subcategory of 'tabloids,' which encompasses many other forms of popular culture. I make a distinction between tabloid journalism and popular journalism.

Conboy (2006) suggests that popular journalism is a particular variant of popular culture. Popular journalism consistently professes devotion to ordinary people, aiming to represent their lives. The people are crucial to the popular press, whether from a political or influential stance (Conboy, 2002, p.1). Popular journalism has consistently been one of the realms within social communication that provides deep insights into the dynamics of contemporary life. It reflects the tastes of the masses because the press of popular culture aims to shape their desire for profit. It shows how ordinary people are represented as readers in popular journalism's "audience design" (Conboy, 2007, p.3). In addition, in terms of crucial definitions of "popular" within popular journalism, Williams (1976) summarizes three areas of controversy over the term 'popular' that contribute to the intricacy around the term and its diverse range of items. Firstly, politically, it refers to a culture created from the people's perspective rather than those seeking authority over them. Secondly, It can be seen as less than the quality of elite or high culture products. Thirdly, it can indicate being popular or favored among many individuals (Williams, 1976, p.19). Whether popular journalism focuses more on information

or entertainment, popular participation in both aspects of cultural discourse is of similar importance, as both aim to allow ordinary people to explore and discuss contemporary global events beyond their direct, personal experience. When it comes to matters of interest to "the people" and "power groups," the way in which popular journalism negotiates these issues for the benefit of ordinary people gives popular journalism its political importance (Conboy, 2007, p.2). Contemporary popular journalism sheds light on contemporary forms of civic engagement by embedding a sense of community into its texts, contributing to its social and commercial appeal (Conboy, 2007).

1.5.3 The definition of public interest journalism

The definition of public interest journalism stresses civic responsibilities that are widely valued by the media, regarding the 'public' as the 'god-term of journalism' (Carey, 2007, p.12). Journalists defend their actions, advocate for their craft, and argue their case regarding the public's entitlement to information, their function as public representatives, and their ability to communicate with and represent the public (Carey, 2007, p.12). Meanwhile, public service broadcasting is the prime embodiment of public interest journalism, at least in theory but not always in practice. Public interest journalism requires a healthy resistance to the predatory environment of business and political power (Harrison, 2019, p.11). Meanwhile, society continues to support the monitoring and reporting of the activities of public bodies, not just those at the central government level but also those at the local level. This coverage area constitutes public interest journalism, which has always been one of the most vital responsibilities of journalism, bringing indisputable public interest (Cairncross, 2019, p.1). Additionally, public interest information aims to foster informed and active citizenship (Cairncross, 2019).

Moore (2007) points out that public interest journalism comprises two components. The first role is to act as a watchdog, investigating the actions of the powerful and revealing instances of fraud, deception, corruption, mismanagement, and incompetence. This watchdog function is crucial not just for ensuring that people in authority are held responsible, but also because it makes those in authority aware that they are being held accountable. The second element of public interest journalism is often considered more crucial in many aspects. It entails the responsibility to inform, interpret, and analyze. Public interest reporters seek, digest, and extract information to assist the public in forming views and making decisions. For example, should I provide a triple immunization to my child? Will Iran develop a nuclear arsenal? If yes, what should we do? Our world is increasingly interconnected and complex, which requires news media to truly seek to explain rather than intimidate or bully (Moore, 2007, p.33). In general, public interest journalism offers several public benefits, among which are promoting good citizenship, community development, public accountability, and democratic legitimacy by encouraging informed participation in the democratic process (Barnett et al., 2002, p.345).

1.6 Research aims, motivations and research questions

The primary objective of this thesis is to explore the development and manifestation of tabloids (specifically, *MailOnline* and *The Sun Online*) in the digital environment. This includes how the tabloids have changed in the digital environment, how far they have retained their traditional characteristics in the digital space, and how they have achieved a successful transformation. While the development of tabloids may be significantly influenced by changes in business, audience structure, and technology, this thesis places particular emphasis on the impact of technology on digital tabloids. In essence, it explores how tabloids utilise new technologies and integrate them with traditional features and conventions. Although some aspects of traditional tabloids have been met with criticism, many scholars have acknowledged the success of the tabloid model in attracting audiences and the profound influence of tabloidisation on the contemporary journalism landscape (Conboy, 2021; Eldridge II, 2021; Johansson, 2007). However, there is limited knowledge within the academic field regarding the development and transformation of tabloids within the digital environment. This thesis perceives the development of tabloids as an evolutionary process. Historically, traditional forms have consistently adapted to technological developments and developed into new forms. Undoubtedly, the most contemporary form (tabloid journalism) will similarly adapt and integrate within new technological dynamics. Therefore, this thesis aims to explore how tabloids have transformed into digital media, and how their characteristics have changed when combined with digital strategies.

The significant of technology in the development of journalism cannot be ignored. The study of new media inevitably involves technology and its role in sociocultural transformation. Online journalism research is no exception; Many scholars have highlighted technology-driven online journalism research (Domingo, 2006). As Steensen (2011, p.314) points out, technology-oriented studies focus primarily on the characteristics of new media and track their influence on journalism. Therefore, this study will explore changes in tabloids' characteristics by using digital strategies. The first research objective is that we need to explore how journalists use digital strategy to engage audiences in a competitive digital environment. Therefore, this present research explores the extent to which tabloid journalism is utilising these new features. Examining these digital strategies is complex due to their synergistic effects and because journalists use them in various ways. In addition, a discussion of these strategies will also reflect the impact of technology on journalistic practice, values, and news decision-making. Therefore, this leads to the first research question.

1. What changes have taken place in the audience strategy of online tabloids? How do online tabloids use digital strategies to attract audiences in this digital environment? What are the changes in the news values, news practices, and news selection of digital tabloids?

As posited by Siapera and Veglis (2012, p.1), to explore new forms of news, one can examine the main genetic characteristics of previous products, as well as new features that have already emerged and their combinations, in order to provide information about new species. Therefore, I need to learn how their traditional features continue in the digital space, how it has changed, how new features are manifested and how the characteristics of the tabloid are integrated with digital strategies. I need to understand whether the characteristics of tabloids are amplified by the wave of digitalization and tabloidization. As a result, the new format that tabloids have developed in the digital environment can be determined. Therefore, the following presents the second research question:

2. In the digital environment, what changes have taken place in the characteristics of online tabloids? How do these characteristics change? Are online tabloids using new technologies to amplify their traditional features and become more tabloid or create something new?

Until now, existing journalism studies have studied tabloids primarily using a singular methodology, either qualitative or quantitative. However, in order to fully understand the development and manifestation of tabloids in the digital environment, this thesis needs to study not only changes in the characteristics of tabloids on online platforms, but to also study how they build communities for maintaining audience relationships. At the same time, we also need to explore the digital strategies employed by the tabloids since the development of digital tabloids hinges on the synergy between digital strategies and traditional characteristics to a certain extent. We cannot rely solely on quantitative or qualitative data to fulfill our research aims. We must expand our investigation to include in-depth, semi-structured interviews with tabloid reporters and both quantitative and qualitative analysis of tabloid texts.

1.7 Overview of the thesis

Chapter two reviews the relevant literature and the theoretical foundations relevant to the development of this thesis. Firstly, historical developments and the characteristics of traditional tabloids are reviewed. Secondly, this chapter discusses the evolution of tabloids in the 21st century, and the role of emotions in contemporary journalism. Lastly, this chapter examines the characteristics of online news, media convergence and different digital strategies.

Chapter three summarises and points out research gaps according to the literature review.

Chapter four introduces this study's research design and methodology, describing a mixed methods approach comprising content analysis and in-depth interviews as the primary method,

supplemented by qualitative critical discourse analysis as the secondary method. I introduced the collection of samples from two online and print tabloids and how to analyse and compare their content. Additionally, we also introduce the use of Partygate and Prince Andrew's sexual assault cases as case studies and conduct critical discourse analysis on these two events. Finally, the process of conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews is described, from recruiting participants to the collection and coding of data and identifying themes.

In chapter five, we analyse and discuss how online tabloids use digital strategies to attract audiences. At the same time, a description is made of the impact of digital strategies on tabloid news value, journalistic practice, and journalistic decision-making. Finally, the thesis illustrates the impact of combing a synergy of different digital strategies and the journalists' judgment on online tabloids.

In chapter six, the characteristics change and manifestation in the range, style and form of online tabloids are analysed and discussed. Furthermore, we combine the impact of digital strategies on tabloids from the previous chapter with the specific changes and presentation of tabloid characteristics in this chapter to reveal how the characteristics of tabloids are integrated with digital strategies. Simultaneously, we discuss the insights gained from the interviews with the Daily Mail and The Sun reporters.

In chapter seven, two case studies help us discover how tabloids construct imagined communities as a supplement to the changes in the traditional characteristics of tabloids. We use CDA to analyse two events (the Partygate and Prince Andrew's sexual abuse case). This chapter explores how digital tabloids build communities, reach a consensus with the audience, what ideologies they express, what kind of role emotions play in online tabloids, and what social dynamics and realities they reveal.

In Chapter eight, conclusions from the analysis carried out in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are set out. Further, this chapter discusses the contribution and limitations of this thesis and suggests potential future work.

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises four main sections. The first section explores the historical development and characteristics of traditional tabloids. The second section introduces the tabloids in the digital environment, discussing their evolution in the 21st century. At the same time, this section introduces the important concept of tabloidisation and digitisation. The third section focuses on the role of emotions in contemporary journalism. Lastly, the fourth section illustrates the characteristics of online news and media convergence. More importantly, focusing on the use of digital strategies and multi-platform distribution.

2.2 The tabloid history of Britain

2.2.1 *Commercial popular press*

Since the mid-19th century, the emergence of a range of new technologies has made the collection, printing and dissemination of news more efficient than ever before. With the elimination of taxes and duties on the press, the production of newspapers and magazines became a more profitable activity, which led to the development of Sunday newspapers. For this reason, it was not until the mid-19th century that popular newspapers became a part of British printing culture (Conboy, 2006).

As early as the 19th century, experimental publications entered the tabloid genre, aiming to cater to popular tastes (Greenberg, 1966). In Conboy's (2006, p.3) analyses of commercialising the popular in Britain, he points out that since then, language became the radical political choice, and these newspapers reflected many of the idealized voices of the working class. The main task of any popular newspaper has been to capture market-oriented idioms and successfully cater to its readers. Similarly to Conboy's point of view, Berridge (1978) suggests that newspapers are increasingly targeted at the bottom of the social economy as time goes by. In order to attract audiences to the maximum extent, these new publications use the language of readers and express it in a stylised public idiom (Berridge, 1978, p. 256). Furthermore, Williams (1976, p.25) emphasises the importance of rhetoric in the popular press. He believes that popular news originated in the 1830s and even earlier in *The Sunday* newspapers of Britain and shows that rhetoric played an essential role in its content and mass appeal to become a truly mass form of communication.

In the second half of the 19th century, mass-circulation newspapers with huge volumes of material covering crime, scandal, love stories and sport emerged (Johansson, 2020). Jackson

(2018) points out that the term new journalism became commonplace in Britain in the 1880s by analysing Newnes' early publications. By the last decades of the 19th century, mass commercial publishing was moving from Sunday markets to weeklies and dailies. Jackson (2018) stresses that one of the most influential and successful experiments was George Newnes' penny weekly tit-bits, launched in 1881. The magazine attempted to develop what has been identified as a 'compassionate intimacy' (Jackson, 2018, p.54).

2.2.2 The influence of American newspapers on British newspapers

Wiener (1988) chronicles how the influence of a more advanced business newspaper in the United States had a decisive impact on British newspapers, suggesting that the development of the press newspaper market in America attracted the attention of British newspaper owners and promoted the development of British popular newspapers. Conboy (2006, p.4) believes that Werner's view is correct from the technical development perspective, but modern British tabloids' development path is more complex and influenced by society. Moreover, Ponce de Leon (2002) believes that since at least the 19th century, British journalism has followed the example of American tabloids, for example, by adopting populist reporting and exposure and increasing coverage of celebrity issues, human feelings, and scandals.

Since the 1830s, business news has flourished in the United States. Engel (1996) describes the mass circulation of newspapers as cheap, competitive, rude, sensational, obscene and insulting. The sensationalism effect began to spread widely in the mainstream popular penny press of the 1830s. At the same time, 'yellow journalism' was born, which brought about great changes in layout, making newspapers easier for readers to digest. Even the most trivial stories would stand out. It also developed a clear textual appeal. Yellow journalism, in opposition to the abuse of civilians, demonstrated a flaunting sympathy for the weak (Motto, 1961). In tracing the history of tabloids, Johansson (2020, p.4) acknowledges the influence of popular American newspapers and believes that these cheap 'penny newspapers' prefer a more relaxed and lively style of journalism. The language used is close to oral language, which is easy for readers to understand. The insistence of penny newspapers is that ordinary people have the right to know, and penny papers can incorporate this insistence into the method to attract the audience (Crouthamel, 1989).

2.2.3 The origins of tabloids

Hamsworth founded the *Daily Mail* in 1896. It borrowed some characteristics of the 'new journalism' of Pulitzer and Hurst, used bold visual style on the front page, and increased the investment in technology and publicity. The *Daily Mail*, with its concise and fascinating reporting style, emphasising sports, crime, and humanity, quickly became a newspaper with a huge circulation (Conboy, 2002). As Williams (1997) describes, the introduction of the *Daily Mail* was seen as the beginning of a trend in the UK press to polarise between low-end tabloids and high-end elite newspapers". The *Daily Mail* has been a commercial success, and

the revolution of Harmsworth indicated the coming of the century of tabloids (Williams, 1997, p.56).

Introduced by Alfred Harmsworth, the term 'tabloid,' a contraction of 'tablet' and 'alkaloid,' was modeled after a pill manufacturer (Örnebring and Jönsson, 2004, p.287). The word 'tabloid' originally meant half a broadsheet newspaper, but tabloid news meant much more than just a newspaper. It also had to select and present news in a certain way, as will be discussed in the next section (Skovsgaard, 2014).

2.2.4 The golden age of tabloids

Although the Americans first produced the daily newspaper that we recognise as the first to embody the value of modern tabloids, the British pioneered the format (Conboy, 2006). The *Daily Mirror* in 1903 was the first newspaper to try to make ordinary public newspapers in the form of tabloids. Targeted at female readers, it introduced illustrations and American-inspired comic strips. Few newspapers could compete with it for its playful outlook and focus on fresh photography and illustration. It also connected its language to its popular readers and targeted the lower end of society (Engel, 1996). In addition, in the 20th century, newspapers, such as the *Daily Express*, copied the Mail's successful model of combining a gossip column with a human story. At the same time, they introduced American technology to encourage street sales and used banner titles to emphasise the instant visual appeal (Bingham and Conboy, 2015). However, Johansson (2007) argues that while the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* target the lower middle class, they are built on a conservative, neutral emotional foundation. By contrast, the *Daily Mirror* has preserved its radical status, providing readers with a firmly working-class identity (Johansson, 2007, p.16). Bingham and Conboy (2009, p.639) suggest that the *Daily Mirror* first defined and dominated the tabloid market in a language that was particularly appealing to the proletariat. Generally speaking, in the 20th century, various newspapers changed one after another, forming a booming market for mass daily newspapers.

In the 1930s, there was a fierce publishing war among the major British dailies in order to compete for the working-class readers. Conboy (2006) suggests they all targeted different working classes in different languages and pages, which led to the further development of a more precise, simpler, more populist style and business model for the readers. For example, the *Daily Herald*, with a solid working-class pedigree, used idioms to express workers' voices and interests. The *Daily Express* revolutionised its layout and introduced its version of a tabloid. In 1935, the *Daily Mirror* was reissued, becoming the first newspaper to adopt the recognised style of a tabloid (Conboy, 2006, p.7). Johansson (2007, p.16) describes that exciting news stories began to appear on the front page of newspapers in pursuit of greater sensational effect. Additionally, Edelman (1966) believes that the success of the reissued *Daily Mirror* was based on the New York Daily Mirror model. It was relaunched as a tabloid

with a strong emphasis on sensationalism and a striking headline. Conboy (2006) illustrates that compared with the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mirror* has larger fonts, darker colors, shorter articles, and less content and is beginning to make a more strident proletarian voice than any other newspaper. From then on, the *Daily Mirror* embarked on a journey to establish it as the defining popular organ of the day (Conboy, 2006, p.7).

During this era, apart from advocating for the working class and implementing alterations to the layout, font, and style of the daily newspaper, there was a complete transition towards entertainment-oriented content (Conboy, 2006). This transition was accompanied by a strategy to attract the public as part of a cultural and business proposition. According to Bakhtin (1981), the new journalism of the 1930s serves as an excellent illustration of how to include other aspects like technology, a market economy, and democratic politics with widespread involvement. The dialogue between readers and popular newspapers—whether direct, as in the letter's pages, or indirect, as in the textualization of the readership in the layout, language, and advertising—became a crucial and dynamic element in the justification of their appeal to the general public and, consequently, their commercial success.

In the 1970s, the appearance of *The Sun* redefined the British tabloid. With the rise of *The Sun*, the close relationship between the entertainment industry, consumerism, and tabloids became more and more prominent. Taylor (1992, p.50) suggests that *The Sun* provided further development for the unique status of tabloids in British culture. The first 'third-page girl' in 1969 was a symbol of this transformation. Similarly, Johansson (2007, p.18) calls *The Sun* the 'Rottweiler of British journalism'. She contends that *The Sun* deviated from traditional newspaper norms by delivering a significant quantity of explicit pornographic stories to its readers, constituting a crucial characteristic of the publication.

Additionally, Johansson suggests that *The Sun* positioned television as the newspaper's core interest. Conboy (2006) also believes that *The Sun* strengthened its brand position in the public mind by skillfully using TV advertisements, but he emphasises that the appeal of *The Sun* was still based on language identification with working-class readers and their interests. By the end of the 1970s, all the popular newspapers in Britain turned to tabloid form, and the competition for readers was increasingly fierce. *The Sun* placed TV at the heart of its news coverage (Conboy, 2006, p.8).

In the 1980s, the colonial rule of the tabloids became increasingly apparent. As broadcast time increased, channels proliferated and competition intensified, tabloid values were increasingly introduced into television. The doubling of news coverage of the entertainment industry is clear evidence of how the new business landscape pushed news programming into the tabloid realm. However, while the tabloids themselves covered all of this extensively, they were in a weak position to comment on and explain other media content (Conboy, 2015). In addition, in the 1980s, British tabloids gained notoriety for particularly ruthless reporting. Like the

tabloids in the United States, British tabloids also took the lead in the fierce pursuit of celebrities and other public figures (Chippendale and Horrie, 1992).

The historical development of tabloids shows that they are constantly evolving with social, business, technological, and economic progress, and ceaselessly seeking development space in all kinds of changes. In the words of Seton-Watson (1977, p5), Britain might be the oldest of 'old, continuous nations,' but in its tabloid exhibition, it is able to reformulate and reinvent itself at a wonderful speed to retain its authenticity in the modern world. Therefore, there is no reason why the most contemporary form (tabloid journalism) should not adapt and integrate within new technological dynamics.

2.3 Characteristics of tabloids

Fiske (1992) put forward a more nuanced suggestion, which grasped the general characteristics of tabloids. He mentioned that tabloids typically generate content at the intersection of public life and private life. Its tone is spectacular, occasionally sceptical, and occasionally ethically sober. It maintains a populist tone while seamlessly erasing stylistic distinctions between fiction and documentary and between news and entertainment in its presentation (Fiske, 1992, p.48). Moreover, when summarising the characteristics of tabloids, Conboy (2006) suggests that tabloids are now seen as drawing upon and amplifying all the following features of popular journalism over the years: sensationalism, emotive language, the bizarre, the lewd, sex, cheque book journalism, gossip, police news, marriage and divorce, royal news, celebrities, political bias and any form of prurience which can be included under the general heading of human interest (Conboy, 2006, p.12).

Specifically, on the characteristics of the content of tabloids, Sparks (2000) investigates the role of tabloids in a series of national contexts. He tries to clarify the different usages of tabloids. He believes that the characteristics of tabloid content are that they pay less attention to politics, the economy, and society and more attention to sports, scandals, and mass entertainment. It concentrates on the private and personal lives of common people and celebrity (Sparks, 2000, p.10). Moreover, Johansson (2007) describes that one feature of tabloid content is its ability to stir up controversy, providing readers with a daily portion of news and entertainment and shocking and sensational reporting. In addition, in terms of style, news articles are written in a sensational and emotional way, using rather casual language and tone (Conboy, 2006).

Similarly, Skovsgaard (2014, p.202) characterizes tabloid journalism as a style that emphasises personalisation and sensationalism. In addition, the strong visual effect of the form is the concept of describing tabloid news (Djupsund and Carlson, 1998, p.102). Bird (2009) analyses the form of tabloids and illustrates that tabloid headlines are eye-catching, big,

and dramatic, and news stories are dramatised with pictures and interesting content. The photos in the tabloids are big enough to arouse emotion, and the pages are colorful and illustrated to attract readers' attention. Also, sentences tend to be short and powerful with a narrative rather than an analytical perspective. Moreover, Johansson (2007) studies the pages of *The Mirror* and *The Sun* and argues that the frequent interweaving of light and colourful news, such as the gossip column, ensures the readers' reading journey is lively and ensures their attention. This form is in step with the journalistic style, which is characterised by its ability to arouse people's emotions without restriction (Johansson, 2007, p.89). Similarly, Magin et al. (2021) also point out that tabloid journalism has historically been linked to a variety of traits, such as an emphasis on "soft news." Soft news is usually characterized as covering particular subjects like 'human interest, sports, incidents, crimes, and natural disasters, as well as emphasizing sensationalism, scandalization, emotion, negativity, personalization, visualization, eye-catching headlines, vibrant images, and a narrative style of reporting.' (Bird, 2009; Klein, 1998; Reinemann et al., 2012).

2.3.1 Tabloids construct communities through language

In the course of their history, tabloids have been very successful in constructing communities. Many scholars have discussed tabloid audience strategies. This is also a distinctive feature of traditional tabloids. By examining the history of tabloids, it becomes evident that language plays a vital role in the construction of community. Tomlinson (1997) points out that tabloids are highly focused on a popular language that expresses the UK national community, thereby maintaining their market share. Tabloids simulate a community through rhetoric that attempts to capture readers' language and tastes (Tomlinson, 1997, p.77). By using a range of distinct and recognisable dialects, tabloids enable readers to use the newspaper as a textual bridge between their own experience of the culture that they live in and their attitudes (Conboy, 2006, p.11).

Bell (1984, pp.145-204) describes newspaper language as an experiment in audience design, and the tabloids' particular understanding of the characteristics of their ideal reader clearly support this claim. Conboy (2006) describes that tabloids use idioms and public language, with the idiom/style embodied by tabloids contributing to national audience building. Also, using a set of specific languages is an editorial strategy that makes it possible to target the readership. The language of popular British tabloids accurately predicts assumed social class, reader income, and aligns with advertising and news content (Conboy, 2006, p.10).

Conboy (2006) delves into the rhetoric within tabloid language. He analyses the rhetorical patterns of tabloid language, and states that language is used consistently across the newspaper to create a customized lexicon and writing style for their target audience. 'This systematic use of language is referred to as rhetoric; not a high-flown, abstract style but a set of language devices used with the deliberate and consistent aim of confirming the existence of a national tabloid readership' (Conboy, 2006, pp.14-15). Furthermore, he illustrates that the

rhetorical devices in the tabloids try to capture readers' speech and tastes, undoubtedly wanting to align with the readers' shared experience (Conboy, 2002). It is a series of languages tabloids use to effectively inscribe a readership in their pages using metaphor, irony, alliteration, rhyme, or parallelism (Van Dijk, 1991, p.47). This rhetoric obtains coherence through repetition in various parts of the tabloid newspaper. This recognition of the common language for idealised readers of lower socioeconomic status is combined to serve a wider range of normative functions. This language style forms an important part of the ideological pact with the reader (Hodge and Kress, 1993, p.211). The patterns of these characteristics play an essential role in providing ideological cohesion, which is important for establishing any newspaper's editorial identity. For tabloids, this identity is based on populism aimed at their target audience. Additionally, dualism is the core of tabloids' descriptions of news, which can expand from trite and sensational topics to more serious political issues. Fairclough (1995) stresses that this style enables readers to understand complex social and political issues in their own way. Beyond the content of these newspapers, their style creates a distinctive 'common idiom' (Hall, 1978) that links them to all aspects of the daily life of their readers. Street (1997) argues that rhetoric can be interpreted as belonging to the people. The capacity to convincingly represent the voice of the people is crafted through the art of rhetoric. The privilege to speak on behalf of the people isn't merely granted by a set of formal political regulations.

In addition, many scholars describe that tabloids, in their orientation, are against authoritarianism and power in society, aligning themselves with the ordinary people. As Fiske (1989) suggests, tabloids are always eager to show that they are on the side of the individual against power groups, which is also the appeal of popular culture to consumers. In analysing the definition of groups in tabloids, Johansson (2007, p.98) also points out that the tabloids portray themselves as crusaders against social injustice. The attacks on perceived wrong-doings of the establishment are always carefully presented as defences for the readers' interests. Therefore, buying tabloids goes beyond the simple act of reading but requires participation and emotional input. Furthermore, Johansson (2007) affirms the role of melodrama and humour in tabloid texts. She uses cultural and literary theories to understand how these newspapers communicate with readers, exploring the text and visual elements of tabloids, and illustrates that from a stylistic aspect, significant, dramatic headlines and visual displays promote emotional appeal. In addition, she highlights that humour is a popular strategy for tabloids to attract audiences. Jokes can also enhance the persuasiveness of political information because inviting people to laugh together is tantamount to inviting people to agree with the views of the newspaper (Johansson, 2007, p.89).

Johansson (2007) analyses how tabloid editors connect readers' interests to form a community. She points out that one of the most apparent strategies of tabloids, encouraging readers to participate in the content, is a gesture akin to friendship. It reassures readers that newspapers not only speak on their behalf and through them but also take practical actions. For example, the headline of letters to the editor in *The Sun* is "a page to tell the British what you think,"

which treats readers as the whole of the UK, and the letter section of the tabloid is also eye-catching (Johansson, 2007, p.98). Similarly, Bingham and Conboy (2015) introduce the emergence of the letter page in tabloids since the mid-1930s, and he describes that the language on this page is one of the most explicit descriptions of the supposed community of tabloids, providing an ideological link between newspaper organisations and their readers. Furthermore, Purehouse (1992) also points out that readers experience the appeal of sociability, collective identity, and clarity through tabloids. They read tabloids with the aim of 'seeking safety' because the reading of tabloids provides the warmth of human interaction, belongingness, and security. Tabloids are social interaction resources that foster a feeling of belonging to a broader community.

We can see that constructing communities has been a traditional feature of tabloids, with a primary focus on audience relationships. This audience community, known as an 'imagined community,' is built through participation in print culture. However, with the emergence of Web 2.0, the media is becoming more individualised, and journalism is beginning to address this as communities break down into groups of individuals. Therefore, this research will explore how tabloids build communities in the digital environment.

2.4 Tabloids in the 21st century

2.4.1 Tabloidisation

In the previous section, we introduced the characteristics of tabloids, which played a pivotal role in attracting a significant readership (and revenue) in the 20th century, further defining tabloids as a popular newspaper (Conboy, 2006). The concept of tabloidisation is inseparable from tabloid's characteristics.

The expansion of tabloid journalism is directly related to the concept of tabloidisation. At the end of the 20th century, the tabloidisation of news affected the media landscape for the first time, resulting in various transformations in media production and content (Barnett, 1998). In the 1990s, there was a discussion about the threat posed by tabloids to democratic journalism. These criticisms contend that the triviality, naked populism, and sensationalism of tabloids are the opposite of serious journalism. What makes this debate even more dynamic is the realisation that the values of tabloids are extending to 'High-quality' newspapers. In the early 1990s, this process was referred to as 'tabloidisation' (Conboy, 2021). High-quality newspapers in Britain lowered their standards under the pressure of the tabloid press. At first, the 'quality' newspaper ignored the substantive issues of tabloid journalism and went on to criticize tabloids. Finally, the broadsheet also began publishing the same type of news (Bromley, 1998).

In journalism research, tabloidisation often refers to the tabloid's values and content spilling over into quality media (e.g., Bromley, 1998; Esser, 1999; Franklin, 1997). Esser (1999) illustrates that although tabloidisation is understood to originate from the modernisation of commercial publishing, it is an intrinsic part of the process of media change, a shift from the broadsheet to the tabloid (Esser, 1999, p.291). Therefore, tabloidization denotes a convergence trend. Due to greater competition and commercialization in the media industry, other media kinds, particularly high-quality media, are rapidly adopting the features of tabloid journalism. Therefore, the term tabloidisation refers to the process by which the media integrates content features borrowed from tabloids, including sensational news, the private lives of public figures, and the humanistic perspective of public attention. In fact, tabloidisation can be seen as a multi-faceted process, including structural changes within the media market as well as changes in style and content. Additionally, Paletz (1998, pp. 65-68) defines four trends in tabloid journalism that affect themes: content priorities, presentation, journalistic technology, and ethics. Bird (2000, p.41) describes an "increasing emphasis on the personal" as one of the main features of tabloidisation, along with stylistic features such as increased visual material, reduced sentence complexity, and trivialisation of content. Similarly, Johansson (2020, pp.7-8) points out that, unlike descriptions of specific content types, tabloidisation focuses on development over time and is often associated with the transformation of journalism. The news media have increasingly turned to sensationalism, entertainment, and 'voicing' populism at the expense of issues of public concern. 'Infotainment' and 'soft news' and other phrases are frequently used similarly when referring to tabloidization (Johansson, 2020). Reinemann et al. (2011) propose the basic dimensional combination of themes, concerns, and stylistic characteristics to distinguish between softer and harder news. They suggest that 'softening the news', 'tabloidisation', and 'increasing infotainment' can be regarded as synonyms (Reinemann et al., 2011, p.234).

Today, the term tabloid is used as shorthand for media content that combines sensationalism and brevity in its appeal to the audience. The debate over this issue has been extended to a broader discussion about the shifting center of gravity in journalism and the media landscape as a whole (Johansson, 2020). As Rowe (2011, p.463) points out, the process of tabloidisation has deviated far from the original model of journalism. 'Tabloidisation is a complex conceptual process as it encompasses a range of technological, economic, social, cultural, political, ideological and ethical issues' (Rowe, 2011). Furthermore, the ability of tabloid culture to penetrate media boundaries is becoming increasingly apparent in today's world (Conboy, 2007).

Different scholars hold varying views on tabloidisation, with the primary criticism aimed at the concept of 'media centrism' and its impact on citizens. Media centrism is a viewpoint that positions the media as a central player in societal matters and recognises its substantial impact on shaping public opinion, cultural values, and political discussions. On the one hand, the term tabloid has become a media centric moral panic that expresses concern about the decline in professional standards. The problem encapsulated by tabloids is now considered to have

infected the entire market. Some scholars have used terms such as ‘infection’ (Conboy, 2011, p.208) to emphasise the negative social impact of these transformations. As fears spread, the perception of the accelerated tabloidisation of quality newspapers has become a moral panic in the elite news media, politics, and academia (Gripsrud, 2000). Therefore, in related debates, tabloidisation has primarily manifested itself as a phenomenon affecting media (Bingham and Conboy, 2015; Esser, 1999; Magin and Stark, 2014). Meanwhile, Sparks (2000) argues that tabloidisation means that previous high standards are being destroyed by sensationalism, obscenity, triviality, malice and simplicity. Scholars tend to use the term ‘decline’ to describe tabloidisation. Sampson (1996, p.4) suggests that the line dividing tabloids and quality journalism has vanished. 'Infotainment' or 'newszak' has emerged as the prevailing ethos within traditional news, signifying a transformation of news into entertainment.

However, Conboy (2021) argues that scholars have exaggerated this trend because the procedure is connected to more complicated changes rather than just the tabloids. New technology and broader societal change have caused a dynamic structural restructuring of the whole media industry (Sparks, 2000). As this panic increases, the perceived process of tabloidisation has begun to move beyond descriptions of specific types of news into hybrid descriptions of the trivialisation of media content in general (Turner, 2005, p.76). By the early 2000s, tabloidisation had become a key professional and critical term. At the same time, due to this cultural shift, the tabloid format began to become the standard length for newspapers. For editors at some elite media publications, ‘compact’ has become a euphemism for avoiding references to tabloids. They also reject the view that a format change necessarily means a decrease in the standard of quality newspapers, although these newspapers require more visual and rhetorical methods to survive (Brin and Drolet, 2008). However, it is possible to see changes in newspaper format as an adaptation to evolving social culture rather than as a futile survival strategy for newspapers (Brin and Drolet, 2008, pp.390-391).

On the other hand, some scholars have critiqued tabloidisation for its impact on the democratic public sphere. Conboy (2021) indicates that people are also anxious about the impact of tabloidisation on audiences. The tabloid may be a commercialised conduit for popular culture, but it constitutes a political minefield. This means a deterioration of the public sphere, where citizens are deprived of vital information to participate in the democratic process. For example, Sparks (1992) analyses the perceived effects of tabloid style and the tabloid's treatment of traditional public affairs news, such as information on political and social issues. He suggests that the coverage of public affairs by British tabloids tends to be simplified, personalised, and dramatic, which seriously conceals its public information content. The implication is that tabloids substitute emotion for reason and feeling for analysis, therefore undermining the ability of citizens to understand and sequentially control the world. The public has to rely on lower-value tabloid news. Tabloidisation has led to an increase in soft news and a decrease in hard news. Meanwhile, Franklin's (1997) work gave examples of the newspaper giving more attention to the reportage of scandals and misconduct as *The Mirror* increased its reporting on the personal lives of politicians. Bird (2009, p.41) suggests

that tabloids tend to focus on people's private lives and scandalous events, leading to the vulgarisation of news content. This kind of writing style will only appeal to the public's need for sensational style.

Eldridge II (2021, p.17) believes these negative views tend to ignore the broader contribution of tabloids to public discourse. Indeed, other media scholars have identified the advantages of tabloid features. Gans (2009, p.17) agrees tabloidisation can expand and better inform the news media's audience, thus potentially contributing to the strengthening of the news media and democracy. Similarly, Brichta (2011) explores audience reception of tabloids, demonstrating that emotionally framed modes of reception invited by tabloids promote emotional sharing, which makes news easier to obtain and understand, and relatable. In addition, tabloids arouse readers' emotions, allow them to vent them, and encourage readers to express their views and participate in important social issues (Brichta, 2011). Similarly, Macdonald (1998) suggests that the goal of tabloidisation is to enable citizens who do not care about politics and current events to understand and be interested in politics, allowing them to voice readers' concerns in democratic debates. In some cases, the sensational and emotional style of popular news could contribute to building another public sphere. Based on the concept of public sphere theory, McGuigan (2000) analyses the tabloid in public life and points out that emotion is usually the structural agent of tabloid discourse. Although it is usually regarded as destructive, emotion can play a core role in public participation, mobilising interest and providing an emotional carrier for debate. From this perspective, tabloids have democratic potential (McGuigan, 2000).

As indicated above, academics engaged in discussions about tabloidization not only examine the shifts in the quality and variety of information offered by the media but also consider whether these changes may have adverse effects on society (Blumler, 1999; Brants, 1998). While much of the academic literature tends to emphasize the transition away from quality journalism, a number of research studies have also identified the recent increase in the prevalence of tabloid-oriented content and values (Bingham and Conboy, 2015; Magin and Stark, 2014; Uribe and Gunter, 2004). In the 21st century, the online technique has brought about a radical change in journalism, which has altered both the production mode and consumption mode of news. It has also brought about various changes in the form and content of broadsheet newspapers and tabloids.

Nowadays, scholars have different opinions on the influence of the tabloidisation process. McLachlan and Golding (2000) present a comprehensive examination of tabloidisation that incorporates different levels of analysis: range, form, mode of address, and market structure. Less space is dedicated to information in range, which is generally regarded as a shift in content (Rooney, 1998). and less focus on 'hard' and foreign news (Winston, 2002). The change in report format means using a simple format that can be measured by an increase in visual effects and a decrease in the text (Djupsund and Carlson, 1998). Mode of address means the tone and style of tabloids, and market structure refers to the changes connected to

the market as newspapers move toward tabloidisation (McLachlan and Golding, 2000). According to their results, newspapers often feature more photos and text, place a greater focus on human interest stories, feature more entertainment-related items and fewer political/parliamentary stories. Concerning tabloids, Uribe and Gunter (2004) analysed the contents of British tabloids by using a tabloidisation conceptual approach and the framework of McLachlan and Golding (2000). They found that tabloid news became more tabloidized in its form and style. Compared with 1991, the tabloids in 2001 were more visual, with less text and fewer headlines. In terms of style, the personalised style of the *Mirror* has been significantly increased. However, the range of its content remains the same. At the same time, tabloids coverage can be described as soft news dominated by home stories with plenty of headlines, visual effects, and personalised reporting angles (Uribe and Gunter, 2004). They also point out that in many political and national situations, tabloidization is a dynamic process rather than a static idea. In addition, Lefkowitz (2016) looks at quotations from British tabloids and high-quality newspapers over 40 years from 1970 to 2010. The study aimed to see whether or not tabloidization has occurred. She describes that tabloids increasingly display the specific language and value of their high-quality newspapers, and high-quality newspapers increasingly adopt the unique value of tabloids. Therefore, compared with the single tabloidisation, the discussed value flow is bidirectional, and the trend of double convergence is particularly prominent in the left-wing publications.

Tabloidisation continues to influence today's online news. At the same time, Gran (2016) investigated the tabloidisation of online news in Norway, comparing it with printed news platforms. The results show that online news is more like a tabloid than a quality publication. Online news is characterised by a focus on human interest stories, personalised and casual language, immediacy, entertainment-centric, and designed to appeal to a wider audience (Gran, 2016). Karlsson (2016) conducted a study comparing the content from different publishing traditions over time, specifically Swedish and UK tabloid news sites between 2002 and 2012. The results suggested that there is a tabloidisation effect on the whole, but that it is stronger in tabloids in Sweden compared with the UK. This is because compared with 2002, Swedish tabloids such as the *Helsingborgs Dagblad* significantly pay more attention to sports and entertainment news. He also proposed that tabloidisation could be more precisely described as a shift from political to more lifestyle journalism.

In addition, Conboy (2021) emphasises that tabloidisation is a survival strategy in response to changes in the media landscape. For example, Harrington (2021) describes that Australian journalism has been impacted by social media platforms and has struggled to adapt to these changes. Australian media has adopted an increasingly tabloid stance in facing these changes. On the one hand, most of Australia's newspapers, led by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, have adopted tabloidisation as a survival strategy, ramping up both form and content. Nonetheless, this more sensationalist approach may have staved off the inevitable decline of readership. On the other hand, there has been a sharp decline in TV news programs in Australia, where the once-dominant 'current affairs' programming has largely been replaced

by a more critical news and entertainment hybrid. This new format has been praised for presenting news events in an accessible way. It has been particularly successful among young people (Harrington, 2014) because it covers topics more directly relevant to their lives. Therefore, although both television and newspapers have adopted a tabloid style, the result is different. They are trying to do the same thing: make news production profitable again. It remains to be seen whether these strategies are sufficient to overcome the challenges the journalism industry faces over the past two decades.

Therefore, the shift from the characteristics of tabloids to broadcasting, television, and the internet is a further manifestation of the cross-genre flow of tabloids. This means that the characteristics of tabloids cannot be easily discarded since discarding them would reject consumers' desires and interests (Harrington, 2021). Changing consumption patterns allows the public's desires and tastes to override the journalism's adherence to a set of practices that represent the public. This requires newspapers to play an increasingly interactive and even submissive role in a wide range of media fields. Therefore, Eldridge II (2021) illustrates that from tabloids as a particular type of print to their cultural influence, we can observe how tabloid traits vary throughout the media, particularly due to the requirement for the media to develop lucrative methods for providing their stories.

It can be observed that tabloidisation refers to the expansion of tabloid characteristics in journalism. From the research conducted by the scholars mentioned above, on the one hand, it can be observed that the ability of tabloid culture to permeate the boundaries of the media is growing stronger. The expansion of tabloid characteristics has been reflected in various news media. In the face of fierce market competition, tabloidisation serves as a means to attract audiences and a survival strategy in response to changes in the media landscape. As these media organisations adopt the characteristics of tabloids, a series of changes occur. However, few studies have investigated whether the characteristics of British online tabloids have been amplified and have become more tabloidised within the context of tabloidisation trends. Therefore, this study will explore whether British online tabloids have become more tabloid as changes in these features are analysed.

2.4.2 Digitalisation and online tabloid

Many scholars have pointed out that the advent of digital technology has led to the collapse of the traditional media business model based on advertising and copy sales, and newspapers have faced a serious decline in advertising investment. These changes are forcing a radical change in the news business (Franklin, 2014). Digital media is an inevitable choice for the future of print journalism. The exponential growth of digitalisation and the internet continues to lead to profound changes in the media field, from content production to daily work, media, distribution strategies, and business models (Casero-Ripolles, 2012, p.152).

In digital media, time and space are not subject to the same restrictions, and this affects the production and consumption of news, as it has now shifted to a continuous, interactive publishing process (Boczkowski, 2004). This shift has triggered a significant change in both the way news content is delivered to readers and the way it is consumed. The news industry is moving away from a relatively closed news creation system dominated by official sources and professional journalists (Picard, 2014). The development of applications and websites that enable users to create, distribute, and share content has had an impact on the news industry as a result of these changes. This has helped to foster a "culture of convergence" in which the long gap between content creators and their audiences is starting to close (Peña-Fernández, Lazkano-Arrillaga and García-González, 2016, p.28). Therefore, the circumstances of journalism and news consumption behaviour are changing fast: "Journalism is increasingly audience-centric" (Bergström and Jervelycke Belfrage, 2018, p587).

In terms of consumption, the emergence of the Internet has significantly intensified the commercialisation of the media market (Lund, Raymeckers, and Trappel, 2011). The cost of moving from one media platform to another is now negligible. For example, when Beleslin (2017) explains how clickbait is generated, he points out that in the internet's wide range of communications and media environments, almost all print media can now become digital versions. Consequently, scholars have indicated that news websites need to find their identities and positions in the market with limited advertising and audience revenue possibilities, which can also lead to fierce competition among news media (Hermida and Thurman, 2008). Tabloid newspapers, such as *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail*, target audiences seeking infotainment content and provide them with free news offerings. Without implementing paywalls, tabloid newspapers depend on a large audience to generate advertising revenues and provide their readers with free content (Tong, 2023). Meanwhile, Palau-Sampio (2016, p.63) points out that digital media have succumbed to various strategies to attract the audience, reflected in the clicks generated by each reader. Therefore, in a fragmented and audience-centric media environment, personal motivations and preferences become even more important. Online technology enables faster and more accurate measurements of audiences and their interests than ever before (Karlsson and Clerwall, 2013). Journalists can discover which material, often those with the greatest traffic, provides the most advertising profit by looking at "clicks," "likes," and "shares" (Magin et al., 2021, p.58). The appeal of the content of news articles has become more important.

As analysed above, the advent of digitisation presents many challenges for journalism. It also poses considerable challenges for the tabloid media. The tabloid, a cultural form established in print form, is being cleverly transferred to the digital age, showing how old and new media have adopted the characteristics of tabloid journalism for their own purposes. In the digital age, discussions surrounding tabloids as a special genre have become more complex. Those characteristics that make tabloids distinctive have become very common in other newspapers (Conboy, 2021). Many believe the era of tabloid dominance appears to be coming to an end, as print circulation has declined and new online news websites such as BuzzFeed and

Huffington Post have attracted large audiences in the UK (Chadwick et al., 2018, p.4255). With the development of the internet, tabloidised broadsheets gradually occupy the market niche of tabloids, and tabloid survival becomes more difficult. However, some scholars argue that with the increasing popularity of the internet, the online audience spends more time on tabloid news than ever before (Wadbring and Ödmark, 2016). Örnebring (2008) analyses UGC provision in two tabloid newspapers, *The Sun* (UK) and *Aftonbladet* (Sweden), and suggests that the tabloids are widely considered to be a very successful online form. Both *Sun Online* and *Aftonbladet* are still famous for their online presence and innovation in terms of online content, and *Sun Online* redesigned its website in 2006 specifically to include more UGC and community features (Örnebring, 2008). Deacon et al. (2016) argues that the tabloids still play an essential role in shaping British political life, and there is little sign that they are abandoning their long-standing political missions. Right-wing tabloids such as *The Sun*, the *Daily Mail*, and the *Daily Express* argued strongly online for Britain to leave the European Union ahead of the 2016 Brexit vote. Their online work was an important part of their strategy (Deacon et al., 2016). In addition, Chadwick's analysis of news sharing behaviour on social media shows that tabloid news brands are flourishing online, with the *MailOnline*, *The Sun*, and *The Mirror* among the top five news websites with digital coverage (Gazette, 2023). *MailOnline* and *Sun Online* reach about two-thirds of the UK's digital audience monthly. Also, the most used online news source in Sweden is a tabloid: *Aftonbladet* (Chadwick et al, 2018).

Digitization has also promoted the transformation of tabloids towards internationalisation Peña-Fernández and García-González (2016) examined the transformation and internationalization of Europe's top newspapers. As a result of the internet, some media have transcended their national character and have become global media. An excellent example of this shift is the century-old British tabloid, the *Daily Mail*, which has become a truly global medium. According to this study, only 17.6% of the visits were from the UK in 2016, with the notable fact that the US had twice as many readers as the UK (34.2%). This online news site has a large readership in many other countries (Peña-Fernández, Lazkano-Arriaga and García-González, 2016, pp.30-31).

Meanwhile, Eldridge II (2021, p.19) believes that the evolution of the online tabloid is similar to the tabloidisation of television. Television news becomes tabloid by using the characteristics of printed tabloids: images, graphics, bold text, and sensational content (Bird, 2000, p214). Two dynamics may be used to explain the digital tabloids of the early years of the twenty-first century in great part. The transformation of print tabloids is the earliest; the second is the transitioning in digital media. Eldridge II (2021) argues that in the initial stages of online tabloids, there was a shift away from traditional print media toward sensational content focused on uncovering sexual misconduct and delving into conservative and iconoclastic topics. These online tabloids also placed a strong emphasis on business matters and employed populist language (Bastos, 2017, p217). Eldridge II (2021, p.17) suggests that *MailOnline* is an amplified and digital reproduction of a print tabloid, which ranks high in search results as a result of SEO. Also, it attracts readers with eye-catching

headlines and photos (Dick, 2011, p.464). *MailOnline* provides a clear example of a tabloid newspaper adapting its content to the digital space. They see transformation as a means of accelerating the online reproduction of the print tabloid model, producing popular materials faster than the conventional procedures in traditional newsrooms (Bastos, 2017). *MailOnline* is a way to widely replicate the content of print tabloids. However, these studies lack a comprehensive examination of the specific characteristics of *MailOnline*. Therefore, the present study will examine the critical traditional characteristics of *MailOnline* to assess the presentation of and changes in the characteristics of digital tabloids.

In this section, we can see that transitioning has led to great changes in the journalism industry. Changes in business models, production methods, and consumption patterns have brought huge challenges to tabloids. The broadsheets have incorporated more tabloid features, and the emergence of news websites like the *Huffington Post* has occupied the market niche of tabloids. However, The studies mentioned above fail to address the changing characteristics of tabloids and how they are presented in the digital environment. Therefore, this present research explores how the characteristics of British digital tabloids have changed in the online environment.

2.4.3 Social media and tabloids

Social media has become the primary medium for news consumption (Chakraborty and Sarkar, 2015, p.2). The ways in which people around the world consume news stories have changed (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). Most people get their news through social media. This means that if a news outlet does not maintain a presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Snapchat, it could potentially miss out on a significant portion of its potential readership. Mills (2012) points out that in many respects, social media has not only changed the way organisations and brands interact with consumers, but also the way businesses operate. More and more organisations are trying to use social media to reach existing customers, gain new customers, and build or maintain credibility and reputation (Mills, 2012, p.162). Ronston (2015) conducted research on the operation of the *New York Times* on social media platforms and observed that investing energy in the use of social media platforms to share news significantly increased news audiences (Ronston, 2015).

Within the realm of social media, newspapers must adapt to the rules of suppliers, for whom journalistic standards are meaningless. The news selection logic of social media (Jürgens and Stark, 2017, p.29) shows a strong preference for popularity. This selection logic encourages content that attracts more attention in the form of user reactions, which is a common feature of tabloids. From the perspective of the logic of social media, Chadwick et al. (2018) analyze the news-sharing behavior observed on social media and assert that, at the systemic level, tabloid newspaper logic is now integrating with social media logic. The logic of social media is built on the logic of virality (Klinger, 2013). Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013, p.202) argue

that viral content can include ‘the use of Shared fantasies, humor, parody and reference, unfinished content, mystery, timely controversies and rumors’. Similarly, Conboy (2021, p.8) argues that ‘tabloid culture is easy to overlap with social media’. Wadring and Odmark (2016) examine how social media features interact with traditional news values, revealing that social media align with numerous established traits of tabloid journalism. Thus, social media further promotes the tabloid into a broader daily culture. The principles of social media news include exclusive information that increases shared experience, the explosion of human interest, the privilege of empathy over abstraction, funny or parodic features, rumor and conflict. The most interesting thing is incomplete content in some way, or another, all of which can involve users in a dynamic way (Wadring and Ödmark, 2016: 136). Many of these characteristics are fundamental tabloid elements, including rumors and gossip, which are well-suited for more adaptable technology platforms, further amplified by users in their communication styles (Debrix, 2007, p.38). Therefore, the logic of social media is very similar to the characteristics of tabloids. At the same time, the emergence of social media may have contributed to the development of tabloidisation.

The speed and depth of news dissemination depend not only on the size of a news organisation’s direct audience but also on the possibility of users sharing their own news (Welbers and Opgenhaffen, 2018). Harcup and O’Neill (2017, p.1480) conceptually describe this possibility as the ‘shareability’ of news, which has become an important news value (Harcup and O’Neill, 2017, p.1480). Trilling, Tolochko and Burscher (2016) also discuss the concept of shared value. They argue that in terms of media logic, journalists need to adapt to that logic and make the news that people want to share in order to be competitive in contemporary media. Therefore, news on social media platforms is more audience-centric, and the strategy of attracting people becomes very important. This makes social media very attractive to advertisers. This is why advertising revenue from social media has steadily increased while advertising in traditional media is declining (Cornia et al, 2016). Therefore, newspapers attract the user’s attention as much as possible on social media, thereby promoting tabloidisation (Steiner, 2016). On the other hand, due to the pressure of competition and the adaptation to social media platforms, the newspaper uses tabloidisation as a strategy to adapt to social media logic (Klinger and Svensson 2015). In addition, Lischka and Werning’s (2017) research shows that journalists’ news selection is influenced by social media algorithms and user interaction. Human interest stories on Facebook are used to increase reports, and social media editors emphasise tabloid-style elements such as emotion and subjective expression. Lischka and Werning’s (2017) study demonstrates that social media algorithms and user engagement have an impact on journalists’ choices of news stories. They amplify their reporting on Facebook by using human interest stories, and social media editors prioritize tabloid-style elements like passion and subjective expression more often.

However, Magin et al.’s (2021) research responds to general concerns about the adaptation of journalism to the logic of social media (e.g., Van Dijck and Thomas, 2015) and the trend toward tabloidisation (e.g., Lischka, 2018; Lischka and Werning, 2017; Steiner, 2016).

Drawing on the concepts of Reinemann et al. (2012), they explore to what extent newspaper type and distribution channel (offline, newspaper website, Facebook) influence the degree of tabloidisation of political reporting in different newspapers in Germany. By contrasting two distinct types of German newspapers—*BILD* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ)—across three different distribution methods, they were able to provide an answer to this issue. The results show that the two newspapers exhibit two opposite trends: *FAZ*, a high-quality newspaper, exhibits a gradual increase in tabloidization characteristics from its newspaper websites to social media. On the contrary, *BILD* online and offline content is higher than its social media. Therefore, Magin et al.'s (2021) research did not confirm the widespread concern that there is a strong trend toward tabloidisation online, especially on Facebook.

A potentially shared role of social media and tabloids is audience sharing and feedback on articles, which is usually determined by the appeal of the title rather than its content (Roston, 2015). This is captured by the concept of the audience feedback loop, the continuous interaction and exchange of information between content producers and their audience. On the one hand, social media makes it easier for clickbait practitioners to create, publish, and reach a wider audience faster than before (Ingram, 2014). On the other hand, the social media team's expertise revolves around the art of guessing as to when the stories will go viral (Basto, 2017). For example, some traditional Swedish tabloid media organisations have set up specific viral websites to keep up and try to increase the flow of online content, and these viral news sites get their information from social networking sites. They aim to take advantage of organic conversations in social networks.

Scammel and Semetko (2018) observed that the tabloids quickly joined the social media bandwagon. Having a social media page is the easiest way to reach millions of users around the world. For media like *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail*, it is the perfect way to churn out story after story because someone will see it somewhere and read it. Waterson (2017) found that during the Brexit vote, the *Daily Express* was the most shared news source on social media, with 464,000 shares, comments, and interactions on Facebook. Meanwhile, Bro and Wallberg's (2014) study researched how content from traditional media is spread in social media and found that content from tabloids is spread the most on social media.

However, Basto (2017) believes that social media platforms have introduced a model of news production, breaking the boundaries of broadsheets and tabloids and challenging the current classification system. Indeed, tabloids are facing potentially more damaging changes since virality prefers soft news according to the logic of social media. Furthermore, Karlsson (2016) believes that the tabloids became even more tabloid on social media, with noticeable increases in articles on lifestyle. Some of the articles mentioned above merely mention the similarities between social media and tabloid newspapers and the tabloid's use of social media. However, few articles have discussed how the tabloid newspaper adapts to the logic of social media and what changes have taken place in their audience strategy.

There is no doubt that British tabloids have corroborated with social media, but it is not clear whether the growth of social media has accelerated the tabloidisation of tabloids. Furthermore, the potential impact of social media on tabloids remains uncertain. This aspect will be examined later on in this study.

2.4.4 Tabloid variants

Limited research has been done on how tabloids adapt to the internet, the logic of social media, and the variations occurring in digital and intense competition among commercial media. The following section presents selected studies that present variants of tabloids that have either developed or continued the characteristics of tabloids in the digital environment.

2.4.4.1 (sub)popular news website

Some scholars have explored the realm of tabloid variants, particularly related to the evolution of a (sub)popular and viral website news. Notably, Eldridge II (2021) researches these (sub)popular news websites and also considers models of participatory publishing. To illustrate, he introduces *GeenStijl*, a Dutch blog, as a case. *GeenStijl* has successfully brought certain aspects of the traditional tabloid style to give the website mass appeal. *GeenStijl* seems to consciously combine news and public affairs with more obscene content, delivering this content with a confrontational voice that attracts the public with a specific appeal. *GeenStijl* essentially adopts a tabloid-style approach by satirizing political figures and infusing pointed commentary into their news articles. The American blog *Gawker* is a hybrid digital tabloid that provides hard-news journalism while embracing sensationalism, such as populist tabloid news. Guido Fawkes also offers an illustration of the limited reinterpretation of the tabloid. Though this website includes gossip and political news, it covers politics nearly exclusively, with a conservative stance in discussions, e.g., pro-Brexit and anti-Labour sentiments. In addition, they report on British MP scandals and hypocrisy and focus on policy. For instance, they made public a list of MPs deemed "sex pests" by Conservative Party staffers (Eldridge II, 2021).

These sub-popular websites demonstrate how they can quickly and thoroughly integrate into the digital culture of the internet, which brings a different and successful way of imagining the possibilities of tabloid news media. The images of digital tabloids emerging from these examples are more complex than those of their print ancestors. Uberti (2014) believes that these websites are the 'heirs' of the tabloid inheritance, which is so-called 'crude journalism'. In the emerging digital media landscape, tabloids have a narrower agenda and a more focused understanding of their audience. For these three popular websites, many of the standards of traditional tabloids have not been completely abandoned (Pareene, 2019).

2.4.4.2 Clickbait

The competition for users' attention in the media has led many media companies to use eye-catching and sensational forms of tweets to attract more users, a process known as 'clickbait' (Chakraborty et al., 2017, p.32). At the same time, clickbait is also considered to be a curious, provocative title. Thomas (2017) suggests that clickbait refers to headlines of web content targeting the human 'curiosity gap'. Readers are often drawn to click on a target link by raising their interest in the advertised story mentioned in the teaser message without providing enough details to satisfy their curiosity. This clickbait link usually consists of a video, a photo library, or a simple list (Thomas, 2017, p.1). Therefore, the purpose of the clickbait titles is to attract as many people as possible, enabling the particular portal to amass as many unique readers as possible.

2.4.4.3 Clickbait and tabloids

Many scholars believe that clickbait is a consequence of tabloid media behaviour or the result of the broader process of tabloidization. Rony et al. (2017, p.232) illustrate that using tempting headlines (clickbait) to attract readers has become a growing practice. In order to survive in the competitive media industry, most network media, including mainstream network media, have begun to follow this practice. However, Johansson (2020, p.13) proposes that clickbait has occasionally been employed to describe or elucidate modern manifestations of online news.

Chakraborty et al. (2017, p.34) compare the advent of clickbait with the rise of tabloidisation of news in their study, and they point out that clickbait can be thought of as the digital successor to the tabloidisation of print journalism. Also, many scholars highlight the headlines of clickbait as a traditional feature of tabloids, suggesting that clickbait adopts the writing style and content of tabloids. Similarly, Rony et al. (2017, p.238) suggested that although clickbait is a relatively new term, it can be found in news concepts such as tabloidisation and vulgarisation of content. Also, they suggested that clickbait articles are also similar to tabloid articles in terms of story focus, emphasising the entertainment element of the event rather than the information element. Similarly, Palau-Sampio's (2016) research on the popular Spanish news platform Elpais.com highlights the link between clickbait and tabloid news. Palau-sampio (2016) describes that clickbait is understood as sharing styles and content orientations with tabloid journalism and, as such, represents an aspect of the tabloidisation of online news. The language technique and presentation style of clickbait, usually used in headlines and articles, derives from tabloid reporting. Frampton's (2015) article analyses the changes in the news industry as related to clickbait, stating that the clickbait headline is sensational. At this point, sensationalism can be seen as a style that tends to arouse the reader's emotions and convey the subject matter in a tabloid-style manner (Frampton, 2015).

With the increasingly fierce competition among these viral websites and the popularity of

clickbait in the field of digital media, many scholars have constantly condemned the low news value of clickbait. These psychological tactics used by clickbait have become the core of arguments supporting labeling clickbait as misleading content or false news (Chen et al., 2015). Beleslin (2017, p.364) points out that these headlines usually do not hide actual information because the title and content are not in agreement. This creates a sense of confusion and deception among readers.

2.4.4.4 Viral News Websites

Viral news websites are closely linked to a headline pattern known as clickbait. Media platforms like Upworthy have gained millions of audiences by using attention-grabbing hooks that trigger the reader's curiosity. These hooks can be funny or emotional or use a classic strategy like making things seem enticing or appealing.

Viral marketing strategies are closely related to the title pattern clickbait, which refers to the act of clicking on a digital link. Viral news sites like Upworthy get millions of hits with this headline, and in fact, a resource widely exploited by the tabloid press, which some digital natives have capitalised on (Cassidy, 2015). Similarly, Johansson (2020) conducted research in her study on emerging questions around the category of tabloid journalism in digital settings. She describes viral news sites as competitors, a continuation of tabloid news, and a proxy for the tabloidisation of online news (Johansson, 2020, p.13).

Basto (2017) reviews the legacy of tabloid journalism in the context of digital media. He explores the growing role of audience feedback loops and links these developments to changes in the tabloid media model. He argues that these changes in digital media are forcing tabloids to turn to viral news sites like BuzzFeed. Viral news websites often cater to a highly specialized audience behavior, which is contradictory to the readership and aims of tabloid media. However, it is worth noting that clickbait news sites can be construed as the product of an exaggerated manifestation of tabloidization. Basto (2017) suggests that these changes have been observed in different national settings. Fierce competition among Sweden's tabloid media has extended to clickbait viral news sites. Similarly, Lichterman (2014) analyses how Swedish tabloids set up viral websites to compete with rivals, stating that two of Sweden's biggest traditional tabloid media organisations are fighting on the front lines of viral websites (Lichterman, 2014). The Swedish tabloid Expressen has launched a viral website, Omtalat, that mimics elements of BuzzFeed, and content that speaks to personal experience, ranking of celebrity-related events, feel-good-human-interest pieces, curiosity gap headlines, and memes or videos trending across the web. Expressen's rival, Schibsted, the parent company of Aftonbladet, also launched its own viral news website, Lajkat, in the summer of 2017. Basto (2017) points out that Omtalat and Lajkat have published numerous compilations of clickable content that rarely provides any valuable news. The emergence of these two websites marks a major shift in the tabloid model.

Basto (2017) demonstrates that the eruption of viral news sites such as BuzzFeed, Upworthy, Viralnova, and Mashable reflects a change in tabloid media, where the main aim is to promote clickable web content. This shift in media organizations investing in these clickbait news websites could be attributed to attempts to contradict the business downturn due to shifting readership behavior and reducing advertising revenues. Viral news websites are perceived as both competitors and continuations of tabloid news, serving as a proxy for the tabloidisation of online news. The emergence of viral news websites also marks a major change in the tabloid format. In the fierce digital environment, many tabloid websites have been forced to transform into viral websites. Currently, the extent of transformation undergone by British tabloids remains unclear. Furthermore, it is uncertain whether they have evolved into viral sites, as described by scholars. This issue will be thoroughly explored in this present research.

2.5 Tabloids and society

Since the 1830s, when the penny press started publishing sensational and human interest news stories, these journalistic practices have been criticized for prioritizing financial gain over 'serious' journalism (Bird, 2008, p.41). This argument illustrates that journalists adopt a sensationalist and personalized style in their news stories due to intense competitive pressures. Therefore, historically, journalism has been motivated by financial incentives to be lax in ensuring the reliability of information. The sensational reporting style of tabloid journalism, characterized by the use of hyperbole and emotionalism that blur the boundary between fact and fiction, is a profitable method for drawing people. It has been associated with low-quality content and unethical reporting techniques, shaping readers' worldviews into virtual or false realities (Grabe & Bucy, 2022, p. 567). Popović & Popović (2014, p.18) indicate that the deepest motivation of tabloid journalism is profit, not morality. Despite nearly two centuries of ethical dissatisfaction regarding its impact on individuals, society, and the journalism field, this model of journalism continues to generate profits (Grabe, 2004). Similarly, Grabe & Sharma (2017) point out that tabloids undermine journalism's sacred mission of informing the public with accurate information by distorting facts and needlessly intruding into the private lives of citizens and public figures. Therefore, there is no doubt that the pursuit of profit has led to tabloids being unobjective, inaccurate, unethical, and sensational. We will review these issues with tabloids and their impact on society.

2.5.1 Tabloids and the issue of Inaccuracy and disinformation

The primary driving force behind tabloid news, whether in print, online, or television news magazine programs, is essentially the pursuit of profit (Esser, 1999; Kaplan, 2008; Vettehen et al., 2012). The profit motive drives the development and spread of disinformation (European Commission, 2018). Before the rise of digital disinformation, tabloid journalism had existed for more than a century as a format that raised concerns about the accuracy of news reporting (Lapham, 2018). The majority of individuals exhibit greater trust in reputable sources such as

the BBC or other elite media outlets, in contrast to tabloid publications. Furthermore, they frequently express skepticism regarding the reliability and accuracy of sensational or implausible narratives in tabloid newspapers (Bingham and Conboy, 2015, p.21). It lays the foundation for crafting startling news narratives, fabricating content, and generating attention-grabbing false headlines, ultimately leading to the audience's acceptance of this form (Grabe and Bucy, 2022, p.567).

The main and most valuable function of news as providing us with accurate and reliable information about events and issues. News is pivotal in our cognitive existence, acting as the primary source of our perceived knowledge. Harrison (2006, p1) states that we all need and rely on the news. Meanwhile, cultivating audience loyalty in news consumption depends on meeting the expectations of news audiences. Each media outlet brings its own advantages to signal 'trust,' and reporters compete for what Kimberly Meltzer refers to as 'journalistic cultural authority' (2008, p.72). Patterson and Urbanski (2006) illustrate that in the ongoing effort to maintain the trust of news audiences over the long term, fundamental qualities of traditional journalism, such as accuracy and fairness in reporting, are critical to maintaining audience loyalty. However, at certain moments, specific issues, cases, or events, the authority on trust of the news industry may be undermined by less noble motives such as desire and excitement of exclusive news (Patterson and Urbanski, 2006, p.829). The pursuit of profit by tabloids has drawn widespread criticism from scholars, who have raised concerns about their lack of truth, objectivity, and tendency to disseminate disinformation. They have pointed out tabloid journalism's lack of objectivity and inaccuracy. For example, Lewis and Cushion (2009, p.473) describe that although *The Sun* newspaper may be one of the most popular news sources in the UK, it is unlikely to be regarded as the most reliable source of information. This is because the concept of news typically emphasizes the importance of providing high-quality information and analysis.

Similarly, Leyva (2020, p.79) points out that both the digital and print editions of *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* have readerships that rank among the top three in the UK. Given the widespread acceptance of the content of the conservative newspaper (CN), it serves as an important, if not the primary, source of news for most Britons. Therefore, conservative newspapers wield considerable agenda-setting power, influencing public opinion and exerting significant influence in British politics (Lewis and Cushion, p.473). However, Fenton (2018,p.9) indicates that their coverage does not utilize their popular platform to disseminate balanced, objective, and accurate information, especially on socio-political issues. Instead, it frequently exhibits ideological prejudice, emotional manipulation, and disinformation. Meanwhile, in an interview with a tabloid reporter, Deuze (2005, p.868) points out that disinformation is sometimes used as a tactic to attract viewers. Tabloids are unfettered by demands for impartiality and tend to be louder and more opinionated. Their large circulation seems to grant them authority in representing mainstream public opinion (Bingham and Conboy, 2015, p.21).

However, some scholars have also expressed different opinions on disinformation in tabloids. For example, Turner (1999) acknowledges that tabloid media prioritizes entertainment over information and sensationalism over accuracy. However, he also contends that the discourse of tabloid media holds significance, encompassing explicitly playful or self-aware elements, such as staged family conflicts, while also addressing issues of public interest with self-righteous seriousness, such as the sex lives of politicians. Turner (1999) still believes that criticism of tabloids is based on a traditional, long-standing hostility to popular culture. Meanwhile, Bird (2009) illustrates that although tabloids are often viewed as opposed to traditional journalism's standards of truth and objectivity, it is never entirely clear what those standards actually entail. For example, there has long been a level of unease among both journalists and news consumers regarding the extent to which news can truly provide helpful information when employing a narrative or storytelling structure (Bird, 2009, p.43). However, journalists recognize that telling compelling stories can captivate audiences in ways that 'objective' reporting cannot (Machill et al., 2007).

2.5.2 Tabloids and ethical issues

There was a long-term decline in sales after the war, coupled with increasing competition from radio and television as news sources. These latter media can provide news faster than tabloids, so one important way in which tabloids deal with these broadcast competitors is through their constant pursuit of 'rumpy-pumpy,' or their relentless invasion of other people's privacy (Franklin and Pilling, 1998, p.113). Similarly, Bingham and Conboy (2015,p.231) describe how tabloids work hard to create unique stories to maintain reader loyalty. They wiretap phones, use private investigators to uncover private information and engage in constant surveillance of celebrities. These unethical practices stem from the pressure in tabloid newsrooms to gain exclusive news coverage and outdo competitors. Finally, the tabloids' reputation suffered significant harm due to the exposure of phone hacking and bribery, leading to the News of the World shut down and the establishment of the Leveson inquiry (Bingham and Conboy, 2015, p.227). Therefore, the rivalry among British tabloids is intense, and this competition pushes them to embrace unethical and even illegal practices. Although the standards of journalism continue to decline, voyeuristic reportage is commonplace. Tabloids have a long history of irresponsible conduct that news authorities have been unable to curb. Consequently, the tabloids' thirst for profit has led to unbridled intrusions without moral boundaries and blatant law violations (Bingham and Conboy, 2015). Similarly, in interviews with tabloid editors, Deuze (2005,p.875) describes that ethics and credibility figure prominently when tabloid editors discuss their jobs and the significance they attribute to their jobs. However, tabloid editors often feel compelled to push the boundaries of journalistic ethics in order to excel in their field and remain competitive, particularly in the face of competition from mainstream media. Similar, Hufali (2000) illustrates that the primary consideration in editorial and ethical decision-making is often driven by the pursuit of audience revenue and commercial interests. If competitors cover a story, tabloids are likely to report it as well.

Meanwhile, Mair (2013) suggests that several or all of the tabloids have engaged in a widespread and excessive practice of phone hacking and tapping on an industrial scale. Victims range from celebrities and politicians to athletes. ‘Rogue newsrooms’ could include *The Sun*, *The Mirror*, and possibly *The Star* (Mair, 2013, p.72). Phone hacking is the preferred method of journalism used in tabloid newsrooms. As Leigh (2011) explains in his inquiry into Mark Thatcher's business relationships, as long as the ruse is seen as being in the public interest, it is likely to be deemed legal. Similarly, Rupert Murdoch also defended his newspapers as a public service. He explains that anyone who offers a service that the public desires at a price they can afford provides a public service (Murdoch, 1989). Meanwhile, Phillips (2013, p.256) describes that some journalists believe that human happiness is worth sacrificing a philandering football player if the lives of millions of people can be brightened by publishing salacious details. The stories might have been considered legitimate due to their perceived public interest, even if his newspaper used phone hacking to cover celebrity news.

However, the negative impact of ethical violations by British tabloids is evident across various dimensions. Cohen-Almagor (2015) suggests that the government has become aware of a strange duality among the British public. While millions of people avidly read sensational stories and are willing to pay to satisfy their voyeuristic tendencies, audiences express disgust when tabloids use their power to invade the privacy of vulnerable third parties, such as children. Royals, celebrities, and politicians have the ability to protect themselves, but children and ordinary people lack these abilities. The behavior of tabloids cannot be defended by the same liberal ideals established to uphold free speech, including respect for others and the avoidance of harm. Some media professionals recognize that restrictions on free speech are sometimes necessary to preserve fundamental liberal values, such as the right to privacy. The freedom to print and publish does not encompass the freedom to invade someone's residence and telephone, unjustifiably damage someone's reputation, or irresponsibly besmirch someone's honor and dignity (Cohen-Almagor, 2015, pp.177-178). In addition, Leyva (2020, pp.80-81) describes that in the 2016 Brexit referendum, these tabloids played a meaningful role in stimulating Brexit to happen by justifying the dehumanization and harsh treatment of immigrants. It contends that uncontrolled immigration poses imminent threats and harm, causing fear and anger toward vulnerable immigrant groups. These are the ethical problems that tabloids pose.

2.5.3 Tabloids and democracy

As mentioned above, tabloids sacrifice seriousness, truth or accuracy of news and this has a great impact on society. Johansson (2020, p.3) suggests that tabloid journalism holds a central and critical position in discussions concerning journalism within society and democracy. Therefore, there is a great academic debate about the relationship between tabloid journalism and society, the public interest, and democracy. Johansson (2007) points out that it extends from one extreme pole to another. On one side, tabloid media is criticized for contributing to the possibility of the demise of free and democratic societies. On the other side, it is praised

as both liberating and inclusive, allowing skepticism and opposition to authoritarian systems (Johansson, 2007,p.42). Skovsgaard (2014) describes how tabloid journalism is reputed to prioritize money over public service principles. Consequently, tabloid reporters face greater commercial demands in their everyday jobs compared to other journalists. As a result, people have recognized that tabloid journalism focuses less on public service principles than other media types and professional values such as objectivity and the democratic role are also less effectively implemented as measures of public service ideals.

On the one hand, some views emphasize that tabloids divert viewers' attention from more important' social issues to personal, trivial issues. Popović and Popović (2014, p.15) point out that in tabloids, human interests transcend the popular dimension of personal significance, such as general politics, economics, and society. Human interests dominate real public interests, and trivial private interests replace social relevance. Meanwhile, Basto (2017) indicates that tabloid journalism replaces public interest issues with human interest stories, thereby diminishing the quality of public discourse and potentially posing a threat to democracy by fueling cynicism and a lack of interest in politics. Similarly, Bernstein (1992) criticized tabloid journalism for diverting readers' attention from genuine social and political circumstances, transforming public discussion into a voyeuristic spectacle. A review of the views of these scholars reveals their critique of tabloid priorities. This is a series of commonly used binary oppositions, such as 'human interest' versus 'public interest,' 'general' versus 'trivial,' which are deemed to be directly detrimental to the public interest (Johansson, 2007,p.39). According to these views, tabloid journalism may pose a direct threat to democracy. On the other hand, criticism is toward the style and manner in which tabloid media report traditional public affairs news, such as information about political and social issues. Sparks (1992, p.44) suggests that the coverage of public affairs by British tabloids tends to oversimplify, personalise and dramatise, which seriously conceals its public information content. The implication is that tabloids substitute emotion for reason and feeling for analysis, therefore undermining the ability of citizens to understand and sequentially control the world. Audiences have to rely on lower-quality tabloids. Similarly, Leyva (2020,p.11) indicates that the circumvention of rationality and the instigation of negative emotions can undermine democratic deliberation, ultimately leading to detrimental effects at the macro level.

However, some scholars believe it would be too simplistic to think that the tabloid style of journalism is a negative tendency solely driven by the pursuit of profit. Bird (2000) and Macdonald (1998) argue that human interests, emotions, and personal experiences do not necessarily lead to a decrease in the quality of news. These elements may aid individuals in comprehending situations more effectively and enhancing their concern and awareness about political and social issues. Strömbäck (2005) describes how the personalism style in tabloids also serves an important democratic function by inviting citizens to participate in public debate and express their concerns. This is related to participatory or deliberative democracy, where the function of journalism is to include citizens in public discourse. Including 'ordinary

people' in the news is the first step in engaging citizens in democratic deliberation, identifying social problems, and proposing solutions. Similarly, Skovsgaard's (2014) research results generally support the view that tabloid journalists' use of tabloid style is due to competitive pressure and profit, but this is not entirely explained by the profit motive. Indeed, tabloid reporters' insistence on entertainment has led to greater use of tabloid style. However, a stronger explanation for their use of a personalized journalistic style is that they also adhere to the role of public mobilizers, whose primary focus is to engage ordinary citizens in democratic debate. This shows that personalized news, in the eyes of journalists, also has a democratic function. Thus, reporters also apparently use a personal style to make political and current affairs coverage more understandable, more engaging, and less abstract (Skovsgaard, 2014). These arguments suggest that tabloid journalism may democratize by communicating significant issues in a way that is comprehensible and appealing to broad audiences. Tabloid journalism is seen in some contexts as liberating by making news accessible to more people. Some scholars point out that tabloids are progressive and generous by empowering ordinary people with a potent voice against elitism and vested interests. They criticize privileged political elites and fight against social injustice, serving as a forum for diverse voices and contributors (Bingham and Conboy, 2015; Örnebring and Jönsson, 2004). Fiske (1989) describes that tabloid journalism has a democratizing effect on society and portrays it as a place of opposition to authoritarian systems in society. Also, tabloids encourage people's critical consciousness. Therefore, when we consider the impact of tabloids on society, we should refer to Johansson's views. Johansson (2007,p.43) states that, when considering the relationship between tabloids and society, it is necessary to take into account two different perspectives. We must acknowledge certain reasonable viewpoints that criticize tabloid news, such as their emphasis on the necessity of equal access to information on social issues, while also recognizing that some of these criticisms may hinder a more comprehensive understanding of tabloid media. For instance, criticisms regarding the emotional, easy-to-understand, and personalized nature of tabloids.

2.6 Emotion and journalism

The relationship between journalism and emotion is particularly problematic because professional journalism has always been closely linked to objectivity (Schudson, 1978). However, more and more scholars realise that objectivity and compelling storytelling in the news are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Peters (2011) suggests that the clear-cut division between objectivity and emotion has become less distinct, as news has inherently contained elements of sentimentality. This is because the primary aim of news is to engage the audience in a participatory experience. Furthermore, Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) describes that although the ideal of objective journalism has existed for a long time, emotional expression and stimulation are the core of audience participation, and emotional labor is the core of professional journalism practice. Therefore, the research on this subject has become more and more mature, and news scholars have begun to be more interested in emotion. Not only do journalists realise that emotion plays a vital role in motivating audience participation, but they

also see it as a strategic way of attracting the audience to influence their work.

2.6.1 Emotion and traditional tabloids

Emotions have always played an important role in the development of tabloids, especially in attracting audiences, and they are a prevalent part of audience identification with traditional tabloid journalism. Conboy (2002) suggests that emotions in tabloids are primarily manifested through language, intended to evoke emotional responses and identification. When examining how tabloid language constructs community, Conboy (2006) notes that tabloids epitomise a specific type of journalistic style. News articles are written in a sensationalist and emotional tone, characterised by colloquial language and tone. Tabloids exploit the mood of the British underclass, who are excluded from power, whether in terms of blue-collar populism or disenfranchised petty bourgeoisie (Conboy, 2006). Briks (2014) also contends that the emotional language of tabloids constitutes a significant aspect of their language style. Tabloids often cater to people's fear and prejudice against marginalised groups. However, sometimes they try to use emotional narrative in a more political way, sharing some common characteristics with how broadsheet investigates and exposes scandals, that is to say, considering human stories as a form of proof against the official statement of social reality (Briks, 2014). Based on literary critic Peter Brooks's melodrama (1984), Gripsrud (1992) compares the techniques of the popular press with the 19th-century stage melodrama. Gripsrud (1992, p.46) underscores that tabloid newspapers teach their readers a lesson every day, asserting that the true meaning of the world (news) lies in the emotions, the most basic and the strongest emotions: love, hate, sadness, happiness, desire, and disgust.

Tabloid news is often attacked for its emotional, irrational, and its deliberate attempt to stimulate people's emotions to attract viewers. Connell (1998, p.27) compares the language in broadsheet news discourse with that in tabloids, pointing that traditionally, high-quality newspapers are regarded as objective and rational, while the discourse of tabloids is regarded as anti-rational or sensational. Part of the reason is that the narrative style of tabloids is too harmonious, and the intention is to cause emotional reactions. In this vein, Bob Franklin (1997, p.8) argues that the purpose of tabloid journalism is "less to inform than to elicit sympathy – a collective 'Oh how dreadful' – from the readership."

Another reason why tabloids are criticised is that they degrade the quality of public debate through sensationalism, emotion and polarisation. For example, Sparks (1992) suggests that British tabloids' coverage of public affairs tends to oversimplify, personalise and dramatise, which seriously conceals its public information content. The implication is that tabloids substitute emotion for reason and feeling for analysis, undermining citizens' ability to understand and sequentially control the world. The public is compelled to rely on lower-value tabloid news. However, in the late 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century, some scholars thought that, in some cases, the sensational and emotional way of popular news could

contribute to another public sphere. Additionally, Örnebring and Jönsson (2004) provide some examples from the history of journalism to show that the sensational and emotional way of public speaking in tabloids is not necessarily mutually exclusive from the constructive contribution of the public sphere. It could be an alternative channel.

Despite the ongoing debate surrounding the emotionalised, sensationalised tabloid style, emotion has always been an important part of tabloid audience strategy. Many scholars have pointed out that emotions are expressed in various aspects of the tabloid press, which is intended to attract and cater to readers.

2.6.2 Emotion and Social media

An increasing number of news organisations are employing social media as a means to connect with their current audience, attract new customers, and establish or uphold their credibility and reputation (Mills, 2012, p.126). Tabloid media is no exception; it leverages social media as a crucial communication platform as they have close ties. Therefore, before we explore the role of emotion in digital tabloids, it is necessary to understand the role of emotion in social media.

Wahl-Jorgensen (2019, p.152) points out in her research on the emotional architecture of social media that, unlike old or traditional media, social media is often discussed from the perspective of emotion. The issue of emotional engagement and participation has always been crucial to social media design. This is because social media platforms promote emotional expression and elicitation as a structural approach to encourage user engagement and generate profits (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). Facebook has evolved into an indispensable news medium in the world, and the ontology that underpins the architecture of the platform matters hugely to the public sphere. Therefore, Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) explores the emotional architecture of social media, focusing on the evolution of emojis on Facebook because they are the most prominent example of Facebook trying to channel users' emotions. Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) contends that these emoji have pro-social tendencies, ushering the audience to a particular expressive environment whose architecture is based on positive, pro-social expressions of emotion. This indicates how the emotional structure of social media shapes the public discourse, with the platform itself structurally encouraging specific forms of participation centered around positive and pro-social forms of involvement (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). Similarly, Gonzalez (2015) also points out in his research on Facebook that the majority of emojis introduced by Facebook are positive in nature, which seems to be intentional in order to keep the platform positive. People who experience positive news and emotions are more likely and motivated to share the news on their social networks than those who experience negative news.

In addition to the emotional structure of social media, many scholars also suggest that

emotion plays an essential role in social media news. Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) describe that nowadays, the responsibility of journalists is not only to report and submit their news stories, but also to publish and promote them through their networks. Enabling people to disseminate and share content is crucial, and user 'shareability' is considered of significant news value. Emotional impact is a key to making that happen (Jenkins, Ford, and Gree, 2013). Therefore, many scholars have explored the role and performance of emotion in social media news from the perspectives of expression, language, logic and style.

Welbers and Opgenhaffen (2018) scrutinised the subjective language employed in the news disseminated on social media, analysing status messages on these platforms. Their research underscores the notion that one of the manifestations of social media logic is the use of more subjective language (van Dijck and Poell, 2013). Also, they emphasise the concept of viral transmission and its newsworthiness, the role of emotion in the social transmission of viral news, and the impact of valence on news sharing. Their research confirms that journalists' communication on social media is moving towards a more subjective and positive direction based on content analysis data (Welbers and Opgenhaffen, 2018, p.58). Furthermore, they posit that the use of subjective language, as a manifestation of the author's private state, marks one of the inherent expressions of social media logic.

Kilgo et al. (2016, p.149) believe that sensationalism, which was once the hallmark of tabloids, violent and sensational material should be reassessed. It has changed in the digital field. They propose a conceptualisation of sensationalism as a stylistic approach (comprising category and form) that triggers emotion in the reader (Vettehen et al., 2008) and treats an issue in a primarily tabloid-like manner. In general, they find that emotion-triggered content is more likely to be shared. Their study encompasses an analysis of 400 articles from online-native news organisations across the Americas, alongside relevant social media interaction numbers on Facebook and Twitter. According to their findings, audiences play a role in recommending emotional content through social media, although sensationalism primarily aims to captivate readers' and arouse their emotions. Furthermore, sensational stories garner more shares on Facebook than non-sensational ones (Kilgo et al., 2016).

2.6.3 Digital tabloids and emotion

Emotion is an important part of traditional tabloids, an aspect that has undergone extensive scrutiny by many scholars. Moreover, the critical role of emotion in social media news has garnered considerable attention from scholars. However, there are almost no articles that analyse the role of emotion in digital tabloids. An exception is Wadbring's (2016) article, which discusses the difference between more interactive tabloid news on social media and print tabloid news. Wadbring (2016) suggests that the most interactive tabloids on social media and tabloid viral sites have moved in a more positive direction, and the most interactive tabloids on social media are more personal and emotional than print tabloids (Wadbring,

2016).

2.6.4 Emotion and viral news

Several Swedish tabloid media outlets have also set up specific viral websites to keep pace with evolving trends and try to increase circulation of online content: for example, www.omtalat.nu (Bonnier) and www.lajkat.se (Schibsted). These viral sites mimic American sites like BuzzFeed or Upworthy, whose tabloid-based content is ideal for distribution (Basto, 2017). Concurrently, viral news sites such as BuzzFeed and Upworthy have been described by scholars as "tabloid descendants" (Uberti, 2014, p.11).

Buzzfeed and Upworthy are well known for viral marketing. Furthermore, some researchers who have studied these viral sites say that emotions are an essential part of their viral strategies. Therefore, they began to study emotions more deeply. The findings revealed a direct correlation between a more positive emotional response and a higher likelihood of sharing the story on social media. Consequently, they point out that Upworthy's approach to emotional storytelling is designed to elicit those reactions, promote retweets, and go viral (Sean, 2016).

Within this context, it becomes evident that emotion plays an important role in viral news websites. For example, Hansen et al. (2011) suggest that the link between effect, defined as the capacity for sentimental arousal on the part of a message, and virality, defined as the probability that it be sent along, is of significant theoretical and practical importance. Therefore, many scholars have carried out studies on viral news on social media that spread faster and more widely than other news stories, and they have explored the role of emotion in viral news content.

Berger and Milkman (2010) conducted a study to investigate whether the emotional valence of the content would affect the high level of news sharing. Their findings suggest that content that arouses emotional resonance may have a viral effect, with positive content demonstrating greater virality than the negative ones. Furthermore, they also found that emotionally charged content that evoked highly alert positive or negative emotions was more likely to go viral. Therefore, Berger and Milkman (2012) demonstrate that positive emotions can indeed increase the social transmission of news, but the viral transmission is partly driven by physiological arousal (Berger and Milkman, 2012). Similarly, the research conducted by Stefan and Linh (2014) also supports the idea that emotional content in social media is more likely to be shared, and they also acknowledge that the emotion in the content may also trigger the evoking effect that affects sharing behavior in social transmission.

Al-Rawi (2017) investigated the elements that contribute to news going viral on two social media platforms, specifically focusing on the various cognitive and emotional elements that

make news viral. The results indicate that online news readers are more likely to read and share the highly positive and awe-inspiring news than news that is negative and prone to elicit anger or discomfort. In addition, social significance and sudden/strange/unexpected news stories are the most attractive factors that enable the news virus to transmit quickly (Al-Rawi, 2017). In contrast, Hansen et al. (2011) contend that news infused with negative emotions is more readily shared. They argue that several studies have shown that the negativity of news factors significantly impacts readers' perceptions and journalists' choices. Thus, Hansen et al. (2011) point out that this negative sentiment in the news is not conducive to retweeting, while negative news-related content is more effective in social transmission.

In summary, many tabloid websites have adopted strategies akin to viral news websites, where emotion plays an important role in audience engagement. In the study of emotional and viral news, scholars have found that viral news with sentimental and emotional resonance is more likely to go viral and easier for social transmission than emotionally neutral news. However, the influence of positive and negative emotions on virality remains a topic of contention. Nevertheless, it is evident that emotion certainly accelerates the transmission of news. Emotion is increasingly important in the digital environment, but how it plays out in digital tabloids has yet to be explored.

2.7 The transformation of print newspapers towards the internet and digital strategy

As discussed in the preceding literature on tabloid history, tabloids have always evolved in terms of their engagement with both technology and their audiences. The transmission of tabloid's characteristics is closely intertwined with the adoption of digital strategies and capabilities, as well as the preservation of existing features and conventions of the tabloids. Concurrently, tabloids have been using new technologies to reach their audiences. Therefore, the use of digital strategies is crucial to the development of digital tabloids. This necessitates an understanding of how online tabloids use digital strategies to reach their audiences. When a print newspaper moves to an online newspaper, it needs to adapt to the online platform and take advantage of the new features offered by online journalism. At the same time, journalists will use the characteristics of the internet to form strategies to attract audiences. This section will review the literature related to digital strategy.

2.7.1 The evolution of online news and media convergence

Most scholars believe that journalism has undergone three stages of development in response to the Internet's advent. The first stage saw the news industry trying to impose its standards on online news media. This is exemplified by the start of the *Electronic Telegraph* by *The Daily*

Telegraph in 1994, marking the inception of the first national newspaper website in the UK. Consequently, the UK media industry increasingly realised that the internet would be a major development for the newspaper industry (Bishton, 2001). The *Electronic Telegraph* was among the initial efforts to explore innovative revenue streams, and the newspaper brand employed the internet as a novel marketing tool. They mainly emphasised the aspect of the business since the website brings the danger of ‘cannibalising’ print newspapers. These news websites launched by traditional media institutions are static pages, and they mainly copy the traditional newspaper content on the internet. In the second stage, the news industry sought to introduce features of multimedia, interactivity, and hypertext. In the third stage, a new type of news (UGC) emerged in the online news environment.

Pavlik and Bridges (2013) indicate that online news may be a better form of news because it can re-attract more and more alienated audiences. Also, other scholars highlight the major strength of online news: multimedia format, interactivity, personalisation (or customisation), global accessibility, hypertext, and immediacy (Deuze, 2003; Kawamoto, 2003; Tong, 2023). For example, Deuze (2003) proposes a new model based on traditional new media concepts, combining some characteristics of online news, particularly interactivity, hypertext, immediacy, and multimedia, and stresses the concept of monitorial and dialogue news. Deuze (2003) introduces the term ‘monitorial’ to mean that the website can be operated as a platform for journalists, enabling citizens to express their opinions and questions on issues they care about. Moreover, Gordon (1996) suggests that multimedia makes readers feel as if they can be part of any news event. Also, as Kunelius and Ruusunoksa (2008, p.669) note, sensory journalism contributes to attracting the attention of a media-saturated audience. Scholars assert that we are in a culture of ‘convergence’ and ‘participatory’ journalism (Bruns, 2005; Jenkins, 2006).

Therefore, Boczkowski (2004b) illustrates the potential convergence of traditional culture and new technology in the UK online news market. When news organisations adapt to the internet and expand their activities on the internet, they are forced to give up their traditional unique features due to the influence of the internet. These news organisations have to redefine themselves as multimedia organisations rather than media organisations with a single competitive advantage. They share the news resources between their online and offline output, marking a shift from Single to Multi-Media (Saltzis, 2012). Although they have different online strategies, most news organisations redefine themselves to adapt to new media in the digital age. Group (2012, p.23) points out that online publishing is developing at an amazing speed compared to the decline of traditional media, signifying a complete transformation of the media landscape. At present, it is important that news organisations can develop a production model that satisfies not only the traditional media but also the dynamic demands of digital news media. Most strategies that news organisations adopt can be understood as convergence. Therefore, convergence is another concept that cannot be ignored (Baldwin et al., 1996).

The definition of convergence varies widely within the academic discourse. Nevertheless, some scholars have formed a general understanding of convergence as the integration of editorial teams. In fact, there is no single agreed-upon definition here. Most researchers on this issue emphasise the difficulty of reaching a consensus (Erdal, 2007). Considering this complexity, this present work will only detail the dimensions relevant to our study.

Jenkins (2006) views convergence as a dynamic concept in nature. Convergence represents a process that affects development rather than a static condition or the outcome of transformation. Group (2012, pp.30-34) agrees with Jenkins' views, defining media convergence as a process influencing content production and consumption. The researchers suggest four types of convergence in the media. The first type is technological convergence, encompassing multiple platforms where independent editorial teams collaborate together to produce content according to the form of news. The second type is business convergence, marked by concentration. The third type is professional convergence: polyvalence. What is focused on in this thesis is the fourth dimension: the convergence of contents (multimedia). Online content combines different communicative codes, mainly including text, image (static or moving), and sound. The nature of online media is increasingly convergent, necessitating news organisations to provide content in text and audiovisual format for digital publishing (Group, 2012).

Compared to Group (2012), Srisaracam (2019) identifies four dimensions of convergence, emphasising multiplatform content distribution, participatory journalism, and social media. This thesis focuses on her emphasis on multi-platform distribution and participatory journalism. The initial dimension pertains to the cross-media and integrated newsroom. The second-dimension concerns "multi-skilled professionals," highlighting the importance of professional journalists in this context and their adaptation to different media language and storytelling style. However, Srisaracam (2019, p.30) also illustrates the third dimension is referred to as "multiplatform delivery." Newsrooms aim to engage new audiences, improve the visibility of material, and respond to news-consuming behaviour timely. For example, Domingo et al. (2007) suggests that more than 85% of content is reused by the news organisation for multiple media, rather than creating or expanding different stories for each media. Therefore, social media are used by journalists as tools to advertise news content, and they post brief news announcements with a link that contains the full story on the news website. The fourth dimension is 'active audience' highlighting the relationship between a media organisation and its audience, and how to disclose the news production to the process of audience participation, emphasizing communicative interaction (Srisaracam, 2019, p.58). Undoubtedly, in this study, digital tabloids also involve multi-platform distribution (homepage, social media, Google). Multi-platform distribution affects journalistic practices and content production, thus influencing changes in tabloid characteristics. Therefore, in this present research discusses how tabloids are distributed across multiple platforms and how these strategies affect tabloids. Multimedia content and participatory journalism are also closely associated with digital tabloids. The focus of this thesis is on the related dimensions of

multimedia, audience participation and multiple platforms distribution.

Furthermore, most scholars illustrate that online news outlets have started to establish their own standards and practice, which construct the overall results. For example, Steensen (2009) suggests that the new routines and practices result in a novel form of journalism professional who pays more attention to the viewers rather than the news source. These studies explore various aspects of journalism work and attempt to reveal the news value, organisational routine, ideas, and practice by which journalism constructs the world (Steensen, 2009). Obviously, the new media led to aggressive reconfiguration, new newsroom culture, and new forms of journalism. At the same time, it also creates an opportunity for reevaluating the role of journalism.

In this section, a review has been made into how traditional news organisations adapt to the internet, which involves the new features of online news and the concept of media convergence. The expansion of news organisations' audiences is related to several new features of internet news and several dimensions of media convergence. As mentioned earlier, scholars point out that the new features of the internet have the advantage of attracting audiences and some dimensions of convergence not only to complete the transformation of print newspapers to online news but also to attract a wider audience. At the same time, many journalists will use these new characteristics to develop strategies to engage their audiences.

Therefore, in the next section, we will review how news companies use digital strategies to attract audiences in the digital environment, within the context of media convergence. Additionally, the news practices, and changes in journalists' roles during implementing these strategies, are examined.

2.7.2 The digital strategy of online news

The use of digital strategies not only serves to attract audiences but also significantly influences the features of the tabloid. However, there is no complete theory on how to use digital strategies to attract audiences in online tabloid news. Some research highlights the multimedia strategy and audience participation strategy, while other scholars focus on strategies for using audience metrics and SEO. Nevertheless, this thesis advocates the integration of various strategies as a form of convergence. Therefore, this present research reviewed these studies and identified four important strategies.

2.7.2.1 Online content strategy

The content strategy is the storytelling method in each platform (Srisaracam, 2019,p.45). This strategy dictates the distribution, form, and order of different stories. Another element is

content narrative style, whereby journalists use a particular narrative style to engage the audience effectively. The crucial issue found in most online news narrative studies is the way that traditional media expand the content to online platforms. Journalists attempt to use new narrative and new technology to tell the stories. Digital media can reuse the old media as a unique form in the digital world (Canavilhas, 2012, p.355).

Hartley and McWilliam (2010) suggest that digital storytelling encompasses a novel type of journalism, an emerging media practice, a community-driven, and a textual system. This mode of digital storytelling questions the differentiation between professional and amateur content creation. It also reconstructs the relationship between the producers and consumers.

The unique storytelling method emerges in the convergent environment. When considering the innovation of online narrative, some researchers explore how newsrooms integrate new technology and new forms of content (Pavlik and Bridges, 2013). Specifically, some studies focus on creating innovative storytelling methods by using new technology. First of all, many scholars have emphasized the use of multimedia. For example, Canavilhas (2012) examines online news storytelling and advocates for it: multimedia grammar suits hypertext, multimedia, and interaction levels. The great challenge for online news is identifying a hypertext and multimedia language that distinguishes it from traditional media. In essence, a new online language should include text, audio, video, and interactivity, and could promote the news update in an attractive way for the audience. Similarly, Pavlik and Brides (2013) suggest that the technique of multimedia writing is widely used by high-quality newspaper websites, indicating the necessity for developing specific narrative formats that require enhanced creative skills. In addition, they also examined how news content is presented by digital technology through augmented reality (AR), emphasising the immersive storytelling of AR. This storytelling style has a first-person narrative, which aims to attract audience participation. As Jacobson, Marino and Gutsche (2015) posit, while multimedia narratives form the core of news, journalists should realise the online potential of dramatic and immersive journalism. Other research also agrees with this view. Similarly, Alzamora and Tárcea (2012), in their discussion of cross-media news, suggest that the new form of news narrative creates experience and participation. Immersive news allows people to experience the events or situations described in news reports, effectively making them protagonists in the story. Robinson (2012) illustrates that the immersive experience is increasingly demanded due to the convergence of multimedia, wherein, news content is manifest in diverse ways while transcending any single information channel. For example, Sundar (2000) suggests that multimedia can integrate news better due to its multifunctional nature in conveying information. The elements of packaging and visualisation are also important in constructing immersive news. Furthermore, Ojo and Heravi's (2017) study explores 44 cases of outstanding data storytelling practices, revealing that data storytelling is also a growing trend in digital journalism. Audiences prefer to read news with visual content and data, prompting media organisations to adopt core technologies and tools that enhance data journalism practice. Therefore, the amalgamation of these digital elements gives rise to a 'new narrative,'

compelling media organisations to use their traditional narrative styles and broaden their businesses to embrace digital narratives. This is not only to meet changing audience needs but also opens up new avenues to reach a wider audience.

Canavilhas (2012) summarizes that most media companies are now recognizing the new ways of integrating technology into news production and employing diverse storytelling styles across various content forms to engage their audience. Jacobson, Marino and Gutsche (2015) suggest that combining the news of traditional literary style with digital technology is the challenge faced by journalism in the digital age. The use of digital narrative provides an opportunity for reporting quality news, and then journalists can narrate complex and difficult issues in an interesting and accessible way.

Regarding content construction, the use of digital technology may affect some of the storytelling characteristics of news articles. However, few researchers have explicitly identified the specific digital technologies employed by tabloids in their content strategy to engage with their audience, and to what extent they employ digital technology to tell stories. It is unclear whether online tabloids use digital technology to innovate in storytelling. This aspect will be further explored in our forthcoming interviews with journalists.

2.7.2.2 Audience engagement strategy

Online news has shifted from primarily journalist orientation to increasingly audience-orientated. Audience participation is a business opportunity that some media organisations seek to capitalise on to sustain profitability. Furthermore, it is also a way for popular digital news media to become more attractive. Franquet (2014) suggests that the function of media interaction serves as a promotional tool, boosting traffic on the website and mobile devices. It also represents an opportunity to contribute energy to constructing the community. Therefore, audience interaction with news becomes a means of community participation. Online editorials are increasingly adapting to interactivity.

This strategy focuses on the relationship between media organisations and their audiences, detailing how news production can be opened up to the process of audience engagement. For example, the audience gives feedback to journalists, with user-generated content (UGC) via email becoming a part of online news stories. Some of this content finds its way to the comment section by journalists. The level of involvement with the received feedback varies among news organizations in the United Kingdom (Redden & Witschge, 2010). Some news websites, such as the guardian.co.uk treat audience engagement (AE) as a way to discuss more broadly, ultimately benefiting journalists. These discussions help reporters broaden their horizons and the influence of their work. It is indisputable that journalists can no longer consider their stories as reaching a dead end, and they must discover means to enhance the traffic of their stories. (Saltzis, 2012, p.471). Meanwhile, Novak et al (2015) point out that

audience engagement is a long-term strategy to build relationships and communities, and it entice conversation and participation, resulting in brand loyalty and customer recognition. Audience engagement involves everyone in the organisation, from content creators and publishers to customer service staff, as well as a variety of channels that may participate and interact.

Defining the precise function of 'engagement' can be challenging. For some, the goal of engagement seems to be rooted in marketing strategies. For others, engagement facilitates reporting work by asking the audience to send useful material. Guzman (2016, p.5) suggests that the most valuable connections with the community, according to a reporter, are achieved when the audience perceives that allowing people to participate in journalism serves a more fundamental goal than mere promotion or crowd-sourcing. This is to ensure that your work journalism matters to them (Guzman, 2016). Assmann and Diakopoulos (2017, p.37) also believe that engagement is a term that is very difficult to define. The most common descriptions are 'relationship', 'listening', 'conversation', 'loyalty' and 'community', as well as 'using audience feedback', 'involving the audience' and 'answering questions. Similarly, Gillmor (2004) also advocates for a more interactive connection between journalists and their audiences, proposing that journalism should take the form of a dialogue rather than a one-way monologue. Participation can gradually cultivate consumer loyalty, which is particularly crucial in an era characterized by media fragmentation and proliferation (Jenkins 2006). Several studies summarise strategies for increasing audience engagement.

Guzman (2016) conducted interviews with 25 journalists in both traditional and digital media to refine best practices for audience and community engagement. The results show that there is no single best way; successful engagement efforts can vary widely, from posting a few questions on social media to events designed to bring journalists and communities together. What they have in common is that they connect with and develop relationships with interested groups. It is not about simply delivering the product. How to become a continuous engagement newsroom and market story is an important part of the engagement. The journalist's engagement with the audience and the surrounding community is important, and is carried out through a series of back-and-forth interactions between journalists and the public. Guzman (2016) also highlights five steps to attract the audience to engage in the news, ranging from targeting journalists' service range to specific groups accurately, inviting valuable contributions, fostering strong interaction, publicly acknowledging contributors' impact on the project, and tracking and learning.

As Guzman (2016) points out, the ultimate goal of all reader engagement strategies is to build reader loyalty since advertisers are also looking for a more engaging platform. Hansen and Goligoski (2018) interviewed journalists and executives from some audience-oriented news organizations and summarised strategies for audience participation. The results show four steps in strategic planning for audience revenue programmes, including conducting user research, requiring journalists to increase their influence through social media and personal

participation in community events, focusing on engagement, and involving the recognition and appreciation of members (Hansen and Goligoski, 2018).

Hansen and Goligoski's (2018) research align with Guzman (2016). Both emphasise the need to reach different audience groups and understand their needs accurately. Also, journalists should actively engage with users through social media or other means, actively listening to their ideas. Furthermore, the audience should be provided with a convenient way to contribute materials. Finally, acknowledging and thanking users are crucial components of audience engagement. Similarly, Assmann and Diakopoulos (2017) emphasise the importance of interacting with audiences on social media. They conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 engagement editors in 20 newsrooms in the United States. The results describe that those AE editors serve news organisations, especially marketing departments, by monitoring and measuring audience behavior. They indirectly convey the news concept and content directly to the audience and give the audience's voice to reporters. Publishing news content on social media is the core function for each audience to participate in editing. While the overall goal of engagement is often about personal contact, interaction, service, and community, these activities are typically conducted on 'social media.' It is a common practice for AE editors to use the information they see on social media platforms to obtain news sources.

2.7.2.2.1 User generated content

UGC is a concept related to AE strategies. Traditional newsrooms utilise have adapted to the growing volume of UGC, leading to the concept of 'participatory journalism' (Paulussen et al., 2007, p.163). In other words, UGC is part of AE strategy because UGC is related to the opportunity provided by the online website for audience participation (Manosevitch and Tenenboim, 2017, p.731). Many media executives believe that UGC is a means to attract website traffic, enhance brand loyalty and reduce production costs (Manosevitch and Tenenboim, 2017, p.744).

UGC has become an essential component of modern journalism, as online news organisations offer their consumers a range of engagement opportunities (Batsell, 2015). Manosevitch and Tenenboim (2016) adopt multiple ways to deal with UGC, including various forms of content that users participate in and appear on news sites. This includes user-created content, for example, comments or story ideas, and newsroom-generated content based on users' behaviour within their space, such as an index of the most read or discussed stories. Meanwhile, UGC is " a process whereby ordinary people have an opportunity to participate with or contribute to professionally edited publications" (Hermida and Thurman, 2008, p.344). Although the range of UGC is very broad, in this study UGC refers specifically to user contributions on their news websites, where users contribute content to journalists. As Nip (2006, p.217) suggests, participatory journalism can be characterized as User-Generated Content (UGC) within the context of a journalist-driven framework for news.

Many studies have revealed the impact of UGC on the business and practice of online journalism. Hence, business factors significantly influence the motivation of audience members to engage in contributing to online news. Vujnovic et al. (2010) identify three perceived economic advantages of UGC. Firstly, UGC can build brand loyalty. Secondly, UGC can help increase website traffic. Media managers stress that increasing traffic is a strategic goal, and User-Generated Content (UGC) serves as a means to attain this objective. Media managers also want users to spend more time on their websites (Paulussen, 2011). Thirdly, as recognized by numerous news websites, offering avenues for user participation is essential to uphold competitiveness in the news industry.

Furthermore, many scholars have studied the impact of UGC on news practice and what participation opportunities news websites provide for audiences in each stage of news production. They believe that during the two stages of the news production process, i.e., the initial information-gathering stage and post-publication interpretation stage, users can exert influence. However, during the key stage of determining what news to cover and how to structure it, users have less influence (Domingo et al., 2008; Singer et al., 2011; Tong 2023).

Domingo et al. (2008) argues that audience participation in the media can manifest in various forms, which depend on the openness of each stage of news production. According to the five stages of news production, they summarise the participation opportunities provided by online newspapers in 2007 at each stage. The results show that for all the online newspapers studied, only the interpretation stage is obviously open to citizen participation. At the access/observation phase and the selection/filtering stage, the website does not provide any participation opportunities. During the processing/editing stage, few online newspapers allow citizens to submit news reports. In the distribution stage, the participation options given by the websites are very limited. In addition, few online newspapers use tools considered effective for community building. Therefore, media organisations have largely kept their news culture intact even as they provide opportunities for audience participation. The core journalism culture within the 16 online newspapers has remained largely unchanged, as professionals have decision-making power at every stage, thereby maintaining their traditional gatekeeper role on their websites.

Similar to the research conclusions of Domingo et al. (2008), Örnebring and Henrik (2008) also point out that the participation opportunities provided by reporters to audiences are relatively limited. They explore the extent of UGC integration in two online tabloids (*The Sun* from UK and *Aftonbladet* from Sweden) The results reveal that neither online newspaper offered cooperative news gathering and production opportunities. Users are primarily authorized to create content oriented toward popular culture and personal daily life, rather than news and information content. The only material with a similar status to the material produced by news organisations is the readers' photos of breaking news events. The interaction between readers is based on individuals rather than groups. Forum posts are mainly in response to materials produced by news organisations (i.e., user comments and

discussion of published news). Therefore, Örnebring and Henrik (2008, p.782) state that in the process of news production, the two online tabloids still firmly follow the "old media" model. The collection, selection, and distribution of most news still take place in a centralised system, and the mode of most content production is still "we write, you read". They also describe that traditional news organisations are unwilling to add functions that allow users to have more control and influence over content. The two online tabloids seem to be more in line with Chung's (2007, pp.53-56) so-called 'purist' or 'cautious traditionalist' category of media producers than 'innovators.'

2.7.2.2.2 Changes in the role of journalists

The interactive and multimedia capabilities of the internet are driving a substantial transformation in the culture of journalism because the basic mission of journalism reporters has shifted towards the digital realm. Paulussen and Deuze (2002) suggest that a critical factor in this transformation is that the new technology allows traditional readers and users to take part in producing news content. Online technology offers audiences chances to engage in the production of news. Academics began to term journalists as 'gatekeepers' (Bruns, 2005,p.1) and information 'monitors,' insisting that they are willing to share the authority and accept citizen journalism. However, the advent of new technology and innovation has imposed varying demands on journalism as a whole. These changes mainly relate to journalism's role and function, and scholars no longer view reporters as gatekeepers.

Particular academics assert that traditional news organizations and journalists have relinquished their gatekeeping role. Conversely, some assert that the role of journalists on the internet is still relevant, but more as 'gate-openers'. The term "gate-openers" refers to the editorial function focused on facilitating and disseminating knowledge generated by a large network of users who have become producers (Sambrook, 2005; Kawamoto, 2003). Meanwhile, Boczkowski (2004a, p.209) argues that news organisations may not have completely given up their gatekeeping role. However, they have grown more receptive and accustomed to the evolving news landscape. Therefore, Saltzis (2012) describes journalists as professionals who are experts in processing new information, underscoring the importance of responsibility and professional ideals within journalism. In light of these considerations, this study will investigate how UGC is adopted in professional newsrooms.

2.7.2.3 The use of audience metrics

In recent years, news organisations all over the world have systematically analysed quantitative data on various aspects of audience behaviour to expand their reach, enhance participation, and streamline newsroom operations newsroom. Kristensen (2021, p.11) argues that the rise of the internet has ushered in a new era of cheap methods to track the audience: employing analytics software to measure user behavior on websites quantitatively. Both traditional media and online media use this system, such as Google Analytics, Omniture,

Chartbeat, and some media organizations that have designed their own measurement tools or information systems. The digitisation of news enables news organisations to track audience movements online, and news organisations can adjust the news flow in real time according to the trends of users. This adaptability stems from the programmability of digital media (Strömbäck, 2010; Manovich, 2001). Furthermore, the adoption of audience analytics has consistently been a strategic decision driven by the imperative to generate profits from freely available digital content. The advent of digital news delivery has enabled news organizations to gauge the extent and manner in which content is consumed, as well as the depth of consumption. Numerous recent studies have highlighted the growing influence of audience metrics in newsrooms (e.g., Nguyen, 2013; Tandoc, 2014; Tandoc and Thomas, 2015; Tong, 2022). Most of these studies corroborate that news practices are changing because of this phenomenon, resulting in changes to the products themselves (Kristensen, 2021). Scholars have found that journalists have different exposure and attitudes toward audience metrics, and the impact of audience metrics on news practice also differs (Bunce, 2015; Hanusch, 2017; McGregor, 2007; Usher, 2013).

MacGregor (2007) used qualitative interviews with 19 online journalists from print, broadcast, and online media to investigate the online journalists' response to audience metrics and how to use it. MacGregor (2007) found that audience measurement was widely used by British journalists who checked their intuition by tracking data and sometimes adjusted their actions according to metrics. Nonetheless, despite the alteration in the editorial process, journalists' use of this data and technology is mostly passive. Some journalists embraced the data, but most considered it insufficient to provide information and perceived it as a threat to their autonomy. There are competing attitudes in the way journalists respond to audience metrics. News and brand values affect the behaviour of journalists and have proved to form a strong counterweight against the market pressure on audience growth (MacGregor, 2007).

Cherubini and Nielsen's (2016) work explores how news media in Europe and North America develop and use audience data and metrics. By interviewing more than 30 participants, they describe how most institutions use tools to measure and analyse audience metrics. However, except for limited, short-term, and daily optimisation, audience metrics rarely provide information for editorial decision-making. Despite the increasing availability of various types of audience data for use in the newsroom, challenges related to data availability and incompatibility between different metrics have imposed limitations on the utilization of quantitative indicators in the news industry. Consequently, editorial decision-making consistently involved qualitative evaluation and human judgment. In contrast, Anderson (2011) found that website traffic tended to exert a significant influence on philly.com news judgment. Also, Welbers et al. (2016) studied the relationship between the most-read articles on five Dutch news sites and subsequent follow-up stories produced by journalists. Their work illustrates that the articles the audience read most were more likely to attract attention in subsequent stories. While the traditional role of the journalist seems to remain autonomous, in four out of five news organisations, clicks determine the future of overall reporting. Welbers

et al. (2016) also argue that journalists underestimate the impact of audience metrics on reporting decisions.

In addition, contrary to the research of MacGregor (2007), Cherubini and Nielsen (2016) also contend that journalists' attitude towards audience metrics have experienced a transition from resistance to curiosity to interest. Most of the journalists they interviewed hope to make better use of analysis to reach their target audience and make better news. Similarly, taking Australian journalism as an example, Hanusch (2017) employed in-depth interviews to explore the impact of audience analysis on journalism. The results show that journalists have surprisingly positive views on audience data analysis at the editorial level. This shows that they are open to more audience-oriented news decisions. This is partly because journalists are increasingly eager to make news more relevant to their audience (Hanusch, 2017).

Similar to the research results of Welbers et al. (2016) and Anderson (2011), Karlsson and Clerwall (2013) also contend that clicks affect the editorial process, especially news judgment and news processing. However, they emphasise that the impact of clicks on different media is different. Karlsson and Clerwall (2013) conducted in-depth interviews with 10 journalists from Swedish online news sites. The results indicate that clicks now have an impact in all newsrooms every day, shaping news decisions in various ways. Audience metrics have a strong sense of presence in the newsroom because clicks directly impact the way to narrative stories. Furthermore, website traffic influences news judgment. The first pertains to overall news judgment. Interviewees acknowledged that clicking is important but maintained that journalists' news judgment is crucial as it is used to select stories in the first place, interpret clicks, make changes, and explain whether clicks change. The second consequence relates to the treatment of particular news stories. It is widely observed that if a news article draws significant attention, it will remain on the homepage for an extended period. More notably, it will be edited, enhanced, or updated in various ways to sustain the relevance of the news. Consequently, there seems to be a negotiation between news judgment and audience preference. In addition, although all news media may monitor clicks, their impacts on the editorial process vary. Business news websites, for instance, appear less concerned about specific news items as their traffic increases (Karlsson and Clerwall, 2013). Tabloids, in contrast, seem to transition more effectively into the online world because they perform better in terms of traffic. At the same time, tabloid news websites can rely on a considerable scale and a relatively loyal audience, which evidently diminishes their focus on specific news stories in favour of a broader approach (Karlsson and Clerwall, 2013).

Kristensen (2021) also analysed how news value is negotiated and how news value changes during the course of implementing audience measurement. Interviewees said that clicks are not invariably detrimental. A highly read article also shows the performance of news reports in storytelling and the correct decisions made in the distribution process. Moreover, Kristensen (2021) illustrates that traditional news value is not the only factor guiding the decision-making in the newsroom. Media organizations' utilization of audience data is related

to the classic tension between news autonomy, market logic, and audience participation. These media outlets strive to find a balance between the old and new news world. Indeed, employing audience measurement strategies to inform news judgment can be seen as a move toward market orientation. Nevertheless, audience measurement does not necessarily lead to market-driven news. Furthermore, some traditional news values have undergone subtle change compared with the past. For example, timeliness, exclusivity, and proximity have undergone slight modifications. While not all the desired news values have been fully reflected, this does not mean that they have been abandoned but are not reflected in the audience's measurement strategy (Kristensen, 2021).

In conclusion, most studies indicate that audience indicators are extensively utilised in almost all newsrooms, influencing the editorial process. However, journalists use audience metrics differently in the editorial process, so the impact of audience metrics on news decision-making also varies. Most research shows that the decision-making power is still controlled by journalists. A negotiation between journalists and audience metrics is evident, and reporters hold different attitudes toward using audience metrics. Some journalists are very positive about using it, while others are very resistant. As a result, audience metrics are widely used in newsrooms and have an impact on editorial decision-making. Generally speaking, the impact of audience clicks on news decision-making is reflected in the choice of news topics, content, and narrative style. Therefore, the consideration and exploration of audience metrics will affect the quality of news, news content, and the agenda of tabloids. Consequently, this present research will explore how *MailOnline* and *The Sun Online* use audience metrics, how they incorporate audience metrics into editorial decisions, and how this affects tabloids.

2.7.2.4 The use of search engine optimization

2.7.2.4.1 Search engine optimization

SEO is a set of strategies to improve the visibility and traffic of websites on search engine results pages. The ultimate goal of these practices is to increase the organic search traffic of the website (Giomelakis & Veglis, 2015, p.23). SEO is a constituent of search engine marketing (SEM), outlining the steps involved in increasing a website's relevance by linking, writing powerful content, or submitting it to a search website (Potts, 2007). Also, SEO is regarded as a part of the newsroom online strategy. Search serves as the gateway to online news consumers, and search engines act as the gatekeepers of digital audiences. Consequently, news publishers are actively seeking technologies or new news techniques to enhance the visibility and prominence of their news in search engines. In brief, the higher a website's frequency of appearing in search results, the greater the number of visitors it attracts through search engines (Giomelakis & Veglis, 2015, p.380). These strategies can be categorized into four groups (Malaga, 2008): keyword research/selection, search engine indexing, on-page optimisation and off-page optimisation. On-page optimisation includes managing all factors

directly related to the website, such as keywords, appropriate content, and interlink structure. Conversely, off-page optimisation includes all efforts unrelated to the site such as establishing links or social signaling strategies. SEO is based on the fundamental assumption that users engage in online searches with a certain purpose or intention and that online publishers can understand the minds of online audiences by tracking keyword search recommendations (Enge et al., 2012). This process provides a way to track the language and idioms employed by users, which can then be reflected in the language and idioms used by web publishers to maximise search traffic. Search engines are an important source of traffic for many news websites today.

2.7.2.4.2 SEO is important

With the development of new technology and contemporary search engines, significant changes have taken place in online content. There is no doubt that a large part of internet traffic relies heavily on search engines (Safran, 2013). The importance of factors like achieving the top rank and securing a prominent position on the search results page is becoming increasingly significant for online media outlets.

Visibility through website search results has become a necessary factor for the survival of online news media (Galitsky and Levene, 2004). Research findings from Chitika (2013) underscore the importance of Google search result positioning. In addition, in the digital age, one of the typical shifts in news production is the increased focus on audience interests. (Crain, 2008; Ross, 2017). Online news media boost their visibility on search engines because internet users rely on search engines to find information daily. (Spink and Xu, 2000).

Effective SEO also encompasses effective marketing, which can impact or contribute to the success of brand management and corporate identity communication (Lieberam-Schmidt, 2010). A good website usually has greater popularity on the internet, which can be transformed into more people visiting. For example, at *The Los Angeles Times*, the role of the SEO executive is pivotal in increasing web traffic (Ellis, 2011). Likewise, SEO plays a crucial role in the success of the *Christian Science Monitor* (Online edition), increasing monthly traffic and page views from 3 million to 25 million. Therefore, news organisations must use the opportunities provided by online search to understand the power of SEO in driving search engine traffic and helping content to be read. The newsroom uses SEO as a very useful tool to attract the audience, a necessity in the realm of online news. Many popular online news organisations in the UK now hire SEO experts. For example, the *Daily Telegraph* has a SEO director, and the *MailOnline* has an SEO manager in July 2008 (Press Gazette, 2010). Furthermore, according to an editorial in the *Daily Telegraph* (Sweney, 2014), SEO is considered one of the essential journalistic skills.

2.7.2.4.3 The use of SEO in online newsrooms

Dick (2011) conducted observation case studies on BBC news and conducted a set of in-depth interviews with SEO staff from three other British media organisations. The study aimed to find how SEO drives organisational behaviour, influence online news production and affects the British journalism industry. Notably, The BBC does not possess a distinct SEO writing style and guidelines for reporters. Martin, a BBC News online search engine, acknowledges that many restrictions constrain his SEO activities. Direct alterations to headlines are forbidden by the editor. Similarly, within *Northcliffe* and *The Guardian*, all reporters have SEO training. However, for *The Guardian* and *Northcliffe*, the focus of optimisation is those articles that appear on the homepage or topic (index) pages. Also, in terms of journalistic language, *The Guardian's* SEO principles always follow their style guidelines. *Northcliffe* is also contemplating the integration of SEO into their style guide, although this endeavor has unearthed potential conflicts between SEO. The ultimate finding illustrates the diversity of SEO practices and their varied applications. Not all British news organisations are taking full advantage of SEO, with SEO activities often limited by time, resources and support. In short, SEO has not been institutionalised in the British media to any great extent, and SEO is still in its early stages of adoption within UK media organizations. In Dick's research, only one media organisation's SEO directly guides editorial decisions, while other SEO staff can only inform or give suggestions to the editor but never guide the editor. Dick (2011, P,475) believes that the act of creating links is not a primary focus for national news entities, and certain UK brands are unwilling to yield to the call for higher search traffic.

Prawira and Rizkiansyah's (2018) research delves into the use of SEO in Indonesian online newsrooms and explores their views on SEO in news practice. The study's results reveals that Indonesian online news organisations understand the significance of search engine optimization (SEO) in fostering business growth. However, the SEO applications across the three media outlets are different due to differences in organisational structure, work practices, and reporter attitudes. Management decisions have led to the transformation of journalists into marketers, with SEO serving as the tool for the company's success. Consequently, journalists must follow SEO rules, ensuring that the news they write is easily recognised by search engines. Therefore, it is not easy for SEO innovation in the newsroom, as journalists refuse to use SEO because they believe it violates the ethical code of the news industry. Eventually, a compromise was reached, albeit this decision was reached after years of resistance by editorial team members.

Giomelakis and Veglis (2015) explore the influence of search engine optimization (SEO) on the field of digital journalism, investigating the extent to which the use of SEO affects traffic in Greece's media websites. The findings demonstrate a distinct correlation between news website traffic and multiple SEO factors, such as backlinks, click rates, and link exchange practices. Specifically, the high-traffic news websites in Greece use basic SEO strategies to a certain extent, but there is still space for improvement. The news sites with the most traffic

also have the highest SEO usage. The study also highlights optimised practices or trends often used in online news content, emphasising the significant influence of SEO on journalism. However, Usher (2010) contends that besides using SEO, reporters should understand their online audience and write high-quality, useful content that people really want to read. While media organizations need to implement technologies aimed at ensuring high rankings, they must also maintain traditional news values. Even with an SEO strategy in place within an organization, effective communication with the newsroom is essential to avoid reporters feeling overly dependent on Google Trends (Usher, 2010).

These studies highlight how SEO is used in newsrooms and the impact of SEO on news products and journalistic practice. Also, these studies describe the extent to which journalists use SEO and their attitudes toward it. However, few researchers have explored the potential impact of SEO on tabloid journalistic practices, tabloid style, and content. Consequently, this present research aims to investigate how tabloids employ SEO.

2.7.2.5 The development of artificial intelligence and journalism

Although AI is not the subject of this research, the author is aware of it as an emerging issue. "Artificial Intelligence" is called AI, which emphasizes the ability of machines to imitate human intelligent behavior (Aghion et al, 2018, p.237). It can be applied to many fields, including journalism, and it has changed journalism in recent years. However, it is more likely to assist rather than completely replace skilled journalists (Manyika et al., 2017).

AI techniques are often used in several aspects of news practice; However, they are not yet widely used in creating stories. As Berret and Phillips (2016) indicate, although they are unevenly distributed, computational methods have become commonplace in journalism. However, the changes that artificial intelligence has brought to journalism cannot be ignored. Therefore, we need to review how the field of artificial intelligence has changed the news industry in recent years. Several researchers contend that AI is now utilized in newsroom operations in the form of automated assistants and intelligent search engines (e.g., Pallanich, 2019; Peiser, 2019; Stray, 2016). The use of natural language generation algorithms is impacting advertising copywriting and news writing (Nicolaci da Costa, 2019). In China, the Xinhua News Agency conducted trials with artificial intelligence news anchors possessing anthropomorphic features capable of reading Chinese and English texts (Zhang, 2019). When news is generated automatically by computers instead of editors, it is termed automated journalism (Fletcher et al., 2020), while some scholars also label it algorithmic journalism or bot journalism. Meanwhile, Artificial intelligence is employed to analyse, arrange, and deliver news in a comprehensible manner (Anderson, 2013; Coddington, 2015).

Automated journalism has transitioned from small-scale experiments to global phenomena (Dörr, 2016). This occurs not only in the production of sports or economic news reports but

also in complementing the work of journalists by spotting trends in large databases and suggesting news topics tailored to the needs of different audiences (Lewis et al., 2019). Artificial intelligence is not just infiltrating written media and automated text journalism but is also permeating every aspect of news creation. There is a shift towards utilizing powerful artificial intelligence, enabling machines to mimic human information processing and respond with solutions (Túñez, Toural, and Frazão, 2020). Broussard et al. (2019, p.673) describe that the influence of AI on journalism should be considered in the broader framework of the digitalization of media and public life, encompassing the transition towards applications, algorithms, social media, and other related factors. This phenomenon fundamentally alters the functioning of journalism as an institution, encompassing the erosion of financial models, the transformation of work methodologies, and the proliferation of alternative news sources. The transformative potential of AI technologies may thus be seen as an integral component of the greater narrative of journalism's restructuring in conjunction with computers.

Meanwhile, artificial intelligence has sparked discussions regarding its potential benefits and risks within the industry. Diakopoulos (2019) illustrates that reporting, actively listening, replying, refuting, negotiating with sources, and creatively combining them are all essential journalistic responsibilities. However, artificial intelligence cannot complete these indispensable journalistic tasks, although it can often enhance journalists' work to make it more efficient or of higher quality (Diakopoulos, 2019). In addition, some scholars point out that journalism should be centered on humans, not machines in AI for journalism. Journalism is a profoundly human endeavor. Whether we are studying how humans use machines or how they create stories in journalism, the focus should be on reporting and uncovering insights into human nature. (Angwin, Larson, Mattu, & Kirchner, 2016; Barocas & Selbst, 2016). Galily (2018) questioned if the newly implemented auto-generated content is 'merely another evolutionary stage in the field of sport journalism, or whether it has triggered an insurrection, that will dissolve human journalists from the profession' (Galily, 2018, p.47). Meanwhile, Riedl (2019) indicates that while AI can help increase the speed and scale of news production in everyday situations, complement and enhance journalists, and even create new optimization and personalization opportunities, it still cannot do most journalistic work. Hence, it is imperative for scholarship and practice to pursue a comprehensive plan for examining the impact of human-centered AI on journalism. However, Eubanks (2018) illustrates how journalism can be symbiotic with the development of artificial intelligence, and journalism forces AI academics to address the evident constraints of their field. These harms caused by automated systems, such as discrimination based on race and gender, highlight the need for ethical considerations. Meanwhile, Diakopoulos (2019) describes that artificial intelligence appears to be creating journalism jobs, not destroying them. Hansen et al. (2017) note that AI tools can assist reporters in narrating new forms of news stories that were previously impractical or technically impossible with the existing resources.

Regardless of the development of artificial intelligence (AI), it is bound to produce a disruptive force and significantly impact almost every aspect of society. Journalism would be

best served by being proactive about developing AI, but this requires a better understanding of what AI can do or might achieve in the coming years (Broussard et al.,2019, p.686). Meanwhile, artificial intelligence also brings new challenges to the field of academic research. Although this academic field is still in its infancy, it is currently generating a series of interesting research directions (Parratt-Fernández et al., p.2). Therefore, a lot of attention will be paid to the future of artificial intelligence in journalism, and many issues still have not been fully explored.

Chapter3 Conclusion and research gap

3.1 Conclusion and research gap

The initial section of the literature review delved into the history of tabloids. It is apparent that traditional tabloids have consistently adapted to technological developments, achieving considerable success in terms of audience strategy. There is no reason why the most contemporary form (tabloid journalism) should not adapt and integrate within new technological dynamics.

The growth of digitalisation continues to lead to profound changes in the media field from content production to daily work, media, distribution strategies, and business models (Casero-Ripolles, 2012). Many studies have shown that due to the fierce competition and commercialisation in the media market, high-quality media, television journalism, and other media have adopted the characteristics of tabloids. They also point out the trend of tabloidisation reflected in these media. Some scholars emphasise that tabloidisation is a survival strategy in response to changes in the media landscape (Conboy, 2021; Eldridge II, 2021). However, there is currently little literature specifically indicating whether British online tabloids have become more tabloidised in their response to the change of the media landscape, and what changes have taken place in their characteristics. In addition, tabloidisation also means that the characteristics that make tabloids unique have become very common in other newspapers (Eldridge II, 2021). Similarly, some scholars also believe that with the development of the internet, tabloidised broadsheets are gradually occupying the market niche of tabloids, making tabloids' survival more difficult. Moreover, Basto (2017) and Eldridge II (2021) also explore tabloids' heritage, variants, and continuation in the digital environment. Basto (2017) suggests that due to digitalisation and fierce competition, extreme tabloidisation phenomena have emerged in the digital environment with some tabloids becoming viral websites. Eldridge II (2021) explores another popular format, the variant of tabloids in the new environment. However, there is little literature exploring the digital transformation or representation of British online tabloids in today's digital environment. A handful of articles suggest that print tabloids are still thriving in the digital era, and a few briefly discuss the shift from print tabloids to online tabloids. Nevertheless, there is indeed little in the literature that specifically explores the issue of how British tabloids have been affected by the digital turn. Nothing addresses what changes have taken place in the strategies and characteristics of tabloids in the new environment. Key to this lack is the interrelationship of digital strategies and capabilities and the existing strategies and conventions of the tabloids. As Conboy (2021, p.5) describes, as 'tabloid research has become integrated within the broader discussion of emerging media forms and technologies, it is germane to re-assess the specific dynamics and complexities of the tabloid by asking certain indicative questions.' I believe that in this thesis, it is necessary to consider the digital manifestation of the British

tabloid newspaper. Are tabloids merely harnessing technology to amplify their traditional features, or are they creating something new? A digital tabloid hybrid?

Furthermore, in the digital environment, traditional news media use new technologies to expand the audience market. Online news has many new features, such as interactivity, immediacy, multimedia, hypertext, etc. These online features have great advantages in attracting audiences, compelling most news media to use the advantages afforded by the internet to develop digital strategies to cope with fierce competition. Due to increased competition from the internet and social media, newspapers must compete more fiercely than ever for the attention of users and advertisers. The use of digital strategies to attract audiences is also the key to the survival of news media. There is no doubt that British tabloids have expanded their content to online platforms. However, few studies have specifically explored how tabloids develop digital strategies to engage audiences.

Many scholars have deliberated on content strategy, wherein journalists narrate stories with new narratives and technologies and how newsrooms can integrate new technologies and new forms of content. Most scholars have emphasised the use of multimedia and believe that multimedia narrative forms the core of news, which should include text, audio, video, and interactivity. They underscore the storytelling significance of AR and immersion. However, there are few articles discussing: 1) how the tabloid uses technology to expand its content to online platforms. 2) how it combines traditional tabloid storytelling style with digital technology or the extent to which digital tabloids use multimedia strategies and are innovative in their storytelling. In addition, in the internet age, a sign that journalism has become increasingly marketable is the use of audience clicks. Many recent studies point to the growing influence of audience metrics on newsrooms, and due to this phenomenon, news practices and news products have changed (Nguyen, 2013; Tandoc, 2014; Tandoc and Thomas, 2015; Kristensen, 2021). Several studies examine how media organisations use audience metrics/measurements and how journalists include audience metrics in the editorial decision-making process, as well as the impact of audience metrics/measurements on editorial practice and newsworthiness (Bunce, 2015; Hanusch, 2017; McGregor, 2007; Usher, 2013). Journalists' differing attitudes toward audience metrics affect journalistic practice, newsworthiness, news agenda setting, and storytelling approaches. The literature exploring how British tabloids use audience metrics and how it affects online tabloid news is sparse. At the same time, with the development of search engines, online content has changed dramatically, and there is no doubt that a large part of internet traffic relies heavily on search engines. However, many results suggest that not all news organisations take full advantage of SEO, with their SEO practices exhibiting diversity, variable application, and their impact on news products varies accordingly (Safran, 2013; Galitsky and Levene, 2004). However, few studies have explored how online tabloids are used for SEO and how it affects tabloid products. Furthermore, some scholars pointed out that the strategy of audience participation is undoubtedly very important, and this strategy focuses on the relationship between media organisations and their audiences and the process by which news production becomes open

the process of audience participation. At the same time, a concept related to AE strategies, UGC, constitutes a part of an AE strategy. Many scholars have studied the impact of UGC on journalistic practice and what engagement opportunities news websites provide audiences at various stages of news production. Traditional tabloids have historically engaged and communicated with readers; limited research has explored AE strategies for online tabloids. Few studies specifically indicate how online tabloids interact with their audiences and how they offer the audience opportunities to participate in the news. Currently, Örnebring (2008) has explored the UGC function of *The Sun* in the UK, but their research is relatively dated. It is important to know how tabloids attract audience participation and how journalists facilitate UGC. Additionally, we should investigate to what extent UGC enables users to directly influence the process of news collection, news selection, and news presentation. Furthermore, it is important to understand what types of content users have the opportunity to create.

As a result, few articles have comprehensively discussed how tabloids use these strategies. Furthermore, there are limited articles discussing the impact of these digital strategies on the characteristics of tabloids and how they interplay with digital strategies. This thesis not only considers the use of each strategy but also needs to examine the synergy of different strategies on tabloids. This is because the tabloid is viewed as a product resulting from the convergence of different strategies within this thesis. A discussion of these strategies will not only provide insight into how journalists use them but also reflect how journalistic practices and the role of journalists in digital tabloids have changed. The use of these strategies by online tabloids reflects how they embrace internet technology and adapt to the logic of online platforms, social media, and Google.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this research is to explore how the characteristics of digital tabloids change in the digital environment, how they use digital strategies to attract audiences, and how the use of these digital strategies amplifies or changes their characteristics. This thesis will then find how tabloid characteristics are combined with digital strategies and how tabloids manifest in a digital environment. This article aims to explore the changing characteristics of tabloids and digital strategies through a combination of different research methods.

As the literature review highlights, traditional tabloids exhibit various characteristics, including topics, visuals, style, etc. Additionally, they have incorporated new features, such as multimedia integration and the use of social media resources. This present study aims to compare these characteristics through quantitative content analysis. Furthermore, one of their prominent features, the construction of ideology through language to build readership, will be explored to assess how tabloids presently building ideologies to construct community. Therefore, for the exploration of this feature, two case studies are adopted for the purpose of this thesis. Further, it is more appropriate to use CDA for these two cases. Simultaneously, an investigation into how online tabloids use digital strategies, which impact the transformation and presentation of tabloids. This also reflects how digital tabloids adapt to the logic of online platforms, social media platforms, and Google in the digital environment. Therefore, in-depth interviews with journalists are used to understand how they use digital strategies.

4.2 Research design

This study aims to explore the characteristics of digital tabloids and their digital strategies for attracting audiences. Therefore, this study combines quantitative and qualitative methods. Firstly, we conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with digital tabloid journalists to answer the first research question: What changes have taken place in the audience strategy of online tabloids? How do online tabloids use digital strategies to attract audiences in this digital environment? What are the changes in the news values, practices, and news selection of digital tabloids? Through interviews, we can learn how tabloids embrace technology, how they use these strategies to develop in the digital environment, and how they adapt to the logic of online platforms, social media, and Google. In the past, print tabloids have relied on specific traditional strategies to attract audiences; however, in the present era, the use of digital strategies has become key to the survival of news media. Therefore, qualitative interviews are instrumental in determining how journalists use digital strategies. Furthermore, as tabloids are adopting new technologies and digital strategies, this could lead to changes in

news practices and the role of journalists, such as news value, news selection, and the role of gatekeeper. Therefore, this work also studies the news values, news selection, and the role of digital tabloid journalists, all reflecting how they adapt to the digital environment. Therefore, qualitative analysis can solve the first research question.

Quantitative content analysis, critical discourse analysis, and qualitative interviews are used for the second research question: In the digital environment, what changes have taken place in the characteristics of online tabloids? How do these characteristics change? Are online tabloids using new technologies to amplify their traditional features and become more tabloids or create something new? Quantitative content analysis aids in examining the changes in characteristics of online tabloids compared to traditional tabloids. However, it is insufficient to explore the characteristics of how online tabloids use language to maintain readership. Therefore, it is necessary to use qualitative CDA to explore this facet. Although CDA is important, it is not the main research method of this study; it is a supplement to the exploration of the characteristics of digital tabloids. Furthermore, in-depth interviews are used to explore how tabloid characteristics change and the impact of new technologies on tabloid features. Therefore, by combining qualitative and quantitative research methods, I can discover the changing characteristics of online tabloids, including how they change and how they are combined with digital strategies.

4.3 Content analysis

Content analysis is a research methodology used to objectively, systematically, and statistically analyze the explicit content of communication (Berelson, 1952, p.18). Neuman (1997, p.272-273) describes content analysis as a methodology for gathering and examining textual content. This method is very suitable for exploring the characteristics of tabloids in this study, such as text, pictures, headlines, themes and so on. Furthermore, the quantitative nature of content analysis enables researchers to quantify and categorise observed phenomena and derive causality from the text (Gunter, 2000, p.55). Lasswell et al. (1952, p.34) suggest that content analysis may be seen as a form of quantitative semantics. This implies that it uses statistical techniques to get objective, accurate, and comprehensive data, as well as to classify content according to predetermined criteria and analyze interrelationships. Content analysis is a research method to draw reliable and valid conclusions about the contexts in which texts or other meaningful materials are employed (Krippendorff, 2004, p.18).

The benefits of opting for content analysis in this research include: Firstly, content analysis can be applied to comparative analysis, that is, data displayed by different objects on the same central issue. Secondly, content analysis can collect and analyse large amounts of text (Krippendorff, 2004). Because content analysis is quantifiable, its primary focus is to count the number of occurrences of predefined entities in media text (Kerlinger, 1986). Additionally, the quantitative dimension of content analysis proves highly valuable for precisely depicting

an intricate collection of messages (Gunter, 2000, p.56). More importantly, content analysis is systematic, adopting the principal form of media output sampling and content coding, allowing for objective and transparent coding, as all text asks the same questions (Gunter, 2000, p.55). Finally, content analysis is objective, ensuring that the researcher's personal idiosyncrasies and biases do not influence the analysis. It relies on explicit operational definitions and variable classification rules, enabling other researchers to replicate the process accurately (Kerlinger, 1986, p.18). In addition, many previous studies on tabloidisation and the changing features of print tabloids have used content analysis (Esser, 1999; McLachlan and Golding, 2000; Uribe and Gunter, 2004). Therefore, in order to guarantee the objective of this study, quantitative content analysis is the most suitable method for this purpose.

Although content analysis is suitable for this study, certain limitations exist. This research aims to analyse the characteristics of online tabloids and compare them with print tabloid newspapers, so this study is based on the field of print and online versions. Several studies on tabloidisation have analysed the changing characteristics of print tabloid newspapers (McLachlan and Golding, 2000; Uribe and Gunter, 2004). However, the research on the characteristics of online tabloids is very limited, and there is no available research to compare these two types of news media. Therefore, this present study will help to fill this research gap. Employing the concept of tabloidisation, it aims to provide insights into the characteristics of British tabloids in both print and online versions through content analysis. I summarised some of the main characteristics of traditional tabloids by reviewing research literature in reliance on pioneering research study of McLachlan and Golding (2000) as a guiding framework, as discussed in the literature review. McLachlan and Golding (2000) introduced an integrated approach to investigate tabloidization, which encompasses multiple levels of analysis: Range (This means that the content includes less information space and less focus on “hard” news and foreign news), form (This means using a simpler format, which has traditionally been measured for increased visual impact), mode of address (This means the more demotic and convivially casual tone of the popular press) and market structure. However, this present study does not involve the fourth dimension. As the characteristics of tabloids are not comprehensive enough within the framework of McLachlan and Golding (2000), I have included other features of tabloids from other studies to enrich the features of each dimension. In the range dimension, I expanded the measurement of news topics. In the form dimension, I added visual effects and headline capitalization. In the style dimension, I incorporated personalization and sensationalism. Therefore, after extending the definition of tabloid features in the three dimensions of the framework, we can comprehensively examine the changes in various tabloid features. Thus, this is based on McLachlan and Golding's (2000) three-level operational characteristics of the process—Range, Form, and Style—incorporating operational definitions used by other studies. (Please refer to the appendix for specific code book and definition explanation)

It is worth noting that we use scores to measure certain characteristics of tabloids, while percentages are used to gauge others. In this thesis, I measured eight traditional characteristics

of tabloids and four new features. Specifically, some characteristics of tabloids, such as softening of news, sensationalism, personalization, and mode of address, are evaluated through average scores. This approach is adopted due to the high degree of tabloidisation inherent in tabloids, whether online or offline, differentiating them from broadsheets. This means that whether tabloids are online or offline, most of their news exhibit tabloid characteristics of sensationalism, personalization, news softening, and familiarity tone. Therefore, it is more appropriate to distinguish the degree of these characteristics rather than their mere existence. We can achieve this by using scale measurements and calculating averages to clarify the differences in degree. To determine whether these characteristics differ significantly, we will use the average score for the independence t-test since the independence t-test can see whether there is a statistically significant difference between the two. Consequently, when measuring these characteristics in tabloids, the focus lies on the differences in their degrees rather than simply asking whether these characteristics exist.

In addition, we use percentages to measure other traditional tabloid characteristics such as foreign news, domestic news, topic type, headline capitalisation, and the number of pictures, as these characteristics are more suitable to be measured as percentages since they are evaluated in terms of their presence or absence. These characteristics, measured in the form of percentages, are transformed into average scores and applied to the independence t-test. For data visualisation and the use of social media as a news source, although these two indicators are not traditional tabloids characteristics, they can be used to compare the difference between traditional tabloids and online tabloids, and are likewise better assessed by percentage. Below is a explanation of our indicators. Each indicator represents a distinct tabloid characteristic and is assessed separately. For example, there are three indicators for the style dimension: Indicator 1 is sensationalism, Indicator 2 is personalisation, and Indicator 3 is the mode of address. Each indicator is compared separately between online and offline newspapers to obtain results. For example, I only need to compare the value of indicator 3 (mode of address) between the online and offline of *The Sun*. I do not require any calculations or comparisons between different indicators. Please see the codebook for all specific codes.

Range:

The softening of news, increased focus on domestic news coverage, and the shift toward distributing topics as entertainment rather than political news are all traditional characteristics of tabloid news coverage. Therefore, within the dimension of range, three indicators are considered. The first indicator is the the softening of news, which I measure by calculating the average score, and this indicator consists of two sub-indices: Topic dimension and Focus dimension. The second indicator is the number of domestic news, which we measure by average and percentage. Additionally, the third indicator is the news topic distribution, and we categorise types of topics in the form of percentages. This means share of news topics.

(1) The softening of news

Definition: In this study, we borrow Reinemann et al. 's (2012, p.233) definition of softening of news. 'The more a news items are not politically relevant, the more it reports in an episodic way, focuses on individual consequences of events, the more it can be regarded as soft news.' The softening of news consists of two dimensions.

Topic dimension:

We define non-political relevance as the extent to which news content does not involve the norms, objectives, and interests associated with the preparation, statement, and implementation of authoritative, generally binding decisions on social issues. This includes references to social participants, decision-making bodies, proposals for programs or projects, and decision makers. The less attention paid to these aspects, the more likely the news is to be perceived as having a low level of political relevance.

Focus dimension:

We propose distinguishing stories that emphasize their impact on the public or society from those that highlight their impact on individuals' private lives. Furthermore, using episodic or thematic frames in news reporting can aid in differentiation. A strong emphasis on personal and intimate issues, along with unique events and examples, may indicate a tendency toward softer news.

Regarding the focus dimension, we divide it into two aspects to measure

Focus dimension1: Individual – Societal Relevance

Individual framing highlights the personal and private consequences of reporting events, developments, and decisions. In contrast, societal relevance focuses on the overall significance or consequences of these reported events on society.

Focus dimension 2: Thematic -Episodic framing

The focus of news reporting is to highlight either an episodic or thematic orientation. Episodic news presents issues through specific examples, case studies, and event-centered reports. Thematic news places the issue in a broader context, such as providing the latest unemployment rate data when reporting on unemployment.

		Score
Indicator 1:	The softening of news	$(\text{Average Topic Dimension} + \text{Average Focus Dimension}) / 2$
Sub-indicator1:	Topic dimension non-political relevance.	(0-2)
Sub-indicator2:	Focus dimension	$(\text{Average societal-individual relevance} + \text{Average thematic - episodic framing})/2$
	Societal- individual relevance Thematic - episodic framing	(0-2) (0-2)

Table 4. 1

(Illustration: The degree of the softening of news is composed of two sub-indicators: topic dimension and focus dimension. The degree of softening of news is calculated by adding the average scores of the topic dimension and the focus dimension and then dividing the sum by 2 to represent their average. Furthermore, the focus dimension comprised two sub-indicators: 1 Societal – individual relevance framing, and 2, Thematic – episodic framing. Consequently, the averages of Societal – individual relevance and Thematic – episodic framing are combined and divided by 2 to obtain the average for the focus dimension.)

The reason why I measure the softening of news in this way is that the 'softer' or 'harder' of news is not only determined by the topic, but it is also related to the framing of events that connect news to public interest, policy, and society. Classifying certain themes directly into hard or soft categories can be misleading, as what may appear to be soft themes could still have social relevance. Hard news may be presented with a light and exciting focus on their 'soft' aspects. Therefore, when measuring the softening of news, we need to consider both the topic and the focus dimension (Reinemann et al., 2012, p.231).

The detailed instructions on how to code and calculate measured values are as follows:

Within the topic dimension, we distinguish different degrees of non-political relevance.

News topics unrelated to politics are coded as 2. News partially related to politics or a politician's private role is coded as 1. News entirely related to political issues is coded as 0. The average score is then calculated.

With the focus dimension, I divide this dimension to two aspects: the first focus is related to the accentuation of societal or individual relevance.

If the news primarily or predominantly focuses on individual relevance, it was coded as 2. If the news combines attention to individual and societal relevance, it was coded as 1. If the news mainly highlights societal relevance or consequences, it was coded as 0.

The second focus is related to the accentuation of theme or episodic:

If the news predominantly used episodic framing, it was coded as 2. If the news combined both episodic and thematic framing, it was coded as 1. If the news primarily employed thematic framing, it was coded as 0.

Finally, if a news item is less politically relevant, it tends to report in an episodic frame and emphasizes individual consequences of events, making it more likely to be considered soft news.

(2) Domestic news

Another characteristic of tabloids, in terms of range, is their primary focus on domestic news coverage with relatively less foreign news coverage. As a result, I have developed the following indicators for measuring domestic news reporting.

Definition: According to the news actors and the geographical location of the event, it can be determined whether the news belongs to domestic or foreign news.

		Score
Indicator 2:	Domestic news	(0-1)
		percentage

Table 4. 2

(Illustration: For domestic news, we gauge its presence or absence. If it does not exist, it is 0. If it exists, it is 1. Then, we calculate the average mean for the independent T-test. Concurrently, we present domestic and foreign news in the form of percentages.)

Style

Sensationalism, personalization, and a specific mode of address are all traditional tabloid styles. Therefore, the style dimension has three indicators: sensationalism, personalisation, and mode of address. These three indicators are measured in the form of scores. It is worth noting that sensationalism is composed of 4 sub-indicators: sensational topic, narrative style, detail and negative emotion. Personalisation and mode of address are all single indicators.

(1) Sensationalism

Definition: In this study, we propose identifying sensationalism as a stylistic treatment, combining content, detail, emotion, and style. The content is in the category of stimulating human senses, and the style is to arouse readers' emotions, curiosity and empathy.

	Score
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Indicator1	Sensationalism	$(\text{sensationalcontent} + \text{narrative style} + \text{negative emotion} + \text{grisly detail}) / 4$
Sub-indicator1	Sensational content	(0-1)
Sub-indicator2	Narrative style	(0-2)
Sub-indicator3	Negative emotion	(0-2)
Sub-indicator4	Grisly detail	(0-1)

Table 4. 3

(Illustration: Sensationalism is evaluated using four sub-indicators. The average sensationalism score was calculated by adding the values of these four sub-indicators and then dividing the sum by four to represent their average.)

I measure sensationalism in this way because defining sensationalism is challenging, with scholars emphasizing various aspects of it. From the literature, I have identified four key elements that constitute sensational style: sensational content, narrative style, negative emotions, and grisly details.

The coding and calculation of these four sub-dimensions are as follows:

Sub-indicator 1: Sensational content

Stories about celebrities, crime, sex, disasters, scandals, violence, accidents, and public fears are labeled as sensational topics.

If any of the above content exists, it is coded as 1; if it does not exist, it is coded as 0.

Sub-indicator 2: Sensational narrative style

If there is no sensational narrative in the news, it is coded as 0. If the headline had a sensational narrative style, it is coded as 1. If the title and the entire article predominantly used a sensational narrative style, it is coded as 2.

Sub-indicator 3: Negative emotion

If there are no descriptive and emotive negative labels in the news, it is coded as 0. If there are some negative emotions in the news, it is coded as 1; if there are many descriptive and emotive negative labels in the news, it is coded as 2. (Paragraphs with descriptive and emotional negative labels occupy the majority of the article)

Sub-indicator 4: Grisly detail

If there are terrifying and explicit details in the news, it is coded as 1. If there are no grisly details, it is coded as 0.

(2) Personalization

Definition: In terms of content, the stories are told from the perspective of individuals, emphasizing their personal experiences and emotions. In this study, it is necessary to distinguish between official and private actors for news actors, as the most personalized aspect is the individual's performance in the role (See appendix for details)

		Score
Indicator 2:	Personalization	(0-3)

Table 4. 4

Personalization is measured as follows: If there is no news actor in the news, it is coded as 0. If there are official actors in the news, it is coded as 1. If there are both official actors and private actors in the news, it is coded as 2. If the news is entirely about private actors, it is coded as 3 (News actors also include news sources). Finally, we calculate the average score for personalization.

(3) The third indicator on the style dimension is the mode of address:

		Score
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Indicator 3:	Mode of address	(0-2)
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Table 4. 5

The mode of address is measured as follows: If a familiar, colloquial tone does not exist at all, it is coded as 0; if the familiar tone exists in the title, it is coded as 1; and if it exists in both the title and the article, it is coded as 2. Finally, we calculate the average score of the mode of address.

Form

The use of capital words in news headlines and abundant imagery are traditional characteristics that make tabloid news more compelling and distinctive. Therefore, to measure the two traditional characteristics of tabloids in terms of form, we consider the number of pictures and the capitalisation of News Headlines. Both characteristics are expressed as percentages.

		Score
Indicator 1:	Headline capitalisation	(0,1) Percentage
Indicator 2:	Number of pictures	Percentage

Table 4. 6

The Headline capitalisation is measured as follows: If a capitalised word is present in the headline, it is coded as 1. If there are no capitalised words in the headline, it is coded as 0. We can calculate its average while also presenting it as a percentage. Regarding pictures, each news article is coded based on the number of pictures, and the result is presented as a percentage.

Furthermore, other new characteristics of the form such as visualisation, number of videos, and hyperlinks, will also be presented in percentages. These characteristics not only illustrate the tabloids' format in the digital age but also indicate the extent to which online tabloids utilise multimedia, such as pictures, videos, and hyperlinks. In relation to data visualisation, if a news article contains tables, charts, maps, etc., it is coded as 1. If the news article contains

no tables, it is coded as 0. Finally, the average could be calculated and presented as a percentage.

Indicator 3:	Data Visualisation	(0,1) Percentage
Indicator 4:	Video	Percentage
Indicator 5:	Hyperlink	Percentage

Table 4. 7

Finally, while the use of social media as a news source is not a traditional feature of tabloids, citing social media as a source has become a common phenomenon among newspapers. Therefore, this characteristic (in percentage form) can be calculated to gain insights into its prevalence.

Use social media as a news resource		Percentage
The function of using social media as a news resource:	Trigger	Percentage
	Illustration	Percentage
Authorship	Celebrities, athletes, ordinary people, politicians, etc.	Percentage

Table 4. 8

4.3.1 Selection of newspapers

To the second research question regarding the characteristics of digital tabloids in the UK, we

need to compare the characteristics of tabloids in print and online versions. *The Sun* (online) and the *MailOnline* were chosen as they are widely considered to be very successful online formats. They both represent the largest online newspaper brands in the UK and have the largest number of readers. *Sun Online* is still outstanding for its online presence and innovation in terms of online content (Örnebring, 2008). In 2023, it was the biggest national online news brand. *MailOnline* has transformed into a globally recognised online news website. Therefore, these two online newspapers are representative of tabloids' digital transition. The latest figures show that *MailOnline* holds the second place (49% audience share) just behind the BBC. *The Sun* ranks third, reaching 24.3 million individuals with a coverage rate of 48% (Tobitt and Majid, 2023).

Furthermore, both *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail* are the top ten UK newspapers by circulation. In January 2020, *The Sun's* average circulation reached 1,250,634, ranking second in circulation charts. Meanwhile, the *Daily Mail's* circulation reached 1,169,241, ranking third in circulation charts. (All figures originate from the Audit Bureau of Circulations) Therefore, we chose these two online tabloids, along with their print version, as samples. Audience size serves as an indicator of the significance of online newspapers; the above data fully proves the success of the digital transformation of these two online tabloids. This indicates that they not only adapt to the digital environment but are also achieving success in these new formats. Therefore, it is more representative to choose these two online tabloids to study the changes in the characteristics of British tabloids.

4.3.2 Samples and data collection

The study of news content on the internet is particularly challenging because it is constantly changing and capacity to archive large amounts of information (Krippendorff, 2004). Online newspapers like *Sun Online* and *MailOnline* publish a lot of news at the same time, and more are being added every hour. Therefore, any research on online news content needs to be strictly circumscribed (Nilsson and Wadbring, 2015). This present study analyses the content of the homepages of two news websites and the front pages of two print newspapers. This choice aligns with Bucy's (2004, p.107) observation that for newspaper websites, the homepage more or less emulates the printed product's front page, which serves as a measure of what the newspaper believes is important (Davis, 1999, p. 174). Karlsson and Stromback (2010, p.6) also argue that with respect to websites pages, the most important spot is the front page, which is the first page a visitor sees and where the news media publish the most important or interesting stories. However, none of these scholars have clearly defined what the front page is for a news homepage. Defining the front page of online news can be difficult. Nonetheless, some scholars (Karlsson and Stromback, 2010; van der Wurff, 2005) offer insights indicating that what they identify as the frontpage of online news is the homepage. As the homepage features an abundance of news, we decided to focus on collecting news stories occupying key positions on the homepage. Therefore, considering guidance from digital media experts in our department, we collected the news-coded H2 headlines from The

Sun's homepage, and three-quarters sandwiched between two H2 headline stories were also collected. An H2 headline refers to news displayed using the H2 class code in the news code. This is because digital media experts emphasise the significance of H2 headlines. Firstly, they are often the biggest headlines on the homepage, pointing users to what the publisher thinks are the most important stories. In essence, this mirrors how headline size on a printed front page creates a hierarchy. Secondly, Google likes well-structured web pages. If a page does not have a solid hierarchy (and does not use different-sized text), it is not likely to rank well in the Google search engine. The text that appears bigger on a page (normally in H2*) better signals to Google what topics that website covers. Just as bigger fonts in print are there to catch people's eyes, bigger text online (typically in H2) is there to attract the attention of users and Google. SEO journalists know that Google will pay more attention to the keywords in H2 text than other smaller text. Thus, *The Sun's* H2 news code headlines are important as the newspaper's front page. Furthermore, while online H2s are important, smaller headlines should not be dismissed, much like how a front page could feature smaller headlines. Consequently, based on these H2 codes, we are able to collect around 100 important news items on the home page of The Sun Online every day. However, it is important to note that we found *MailOnline's* homepage to be rather peculiar due to its evident lack of hierarchy. The absence of a well-defined organisational structure creates confusion. Because the news collected from *The Sun* is about 100 articles per day, correspondingly, we chosen collected 100 articles a day from the main positions of *MailOnline's* homepage in order from top to bottom. The main position means that the news takes up a prominent spot, featuring a large title and a noticeable picture. Meanwhile, the front pages of two print newspapers were also collected as samples. These front-page news samples were collected daily from the digital editions of the two print newspapers.

In this study, online articles were collected programmatically using Python from the respective newspaper's homepage. The print editions were collected as scanned versions from the two newspapers' application software. Since tabloidisation theory involves a complex set of content, the unit of analysis determines the whole article (McMillan, 2000; Riffe, 1998). Ultimately, a total of 7,056 articles from *The Sun Online* and 6,133 articles from *MailOnline* were amassed. Given the substantial sample size of online tabloids, we randomly selected 3% of these articles, yielding 397 online tabloid samples, with 213 samples from *The Sun Online* and 184 from the *MailOnline*. This was a randomized computerized process. I used Python to sample these news randomly. Additionally, there were 305 print tabloid samples, with 170 samples from *The Sun* and 135 from the *Daily Mail*. Since the sample size of print tabloids is relatively small, we did not sample them. Importantly, our data collection focused on frontpage news, which are the most important news stories in the two versions of these newspapers, so there is no significant deviation.

4.3.3 Time period

Content analysis is most useful with a historical or comparative perspective (Berger, 2011).

Most studies of tabloidisation have historically analysed news content over extended periods. However, the principal purpose of this present study is to compare the characteristics of tabloids on online and print news platforms. Due to the characteristics of online newspaper articles, sample size, and time constraints, the sampling period spanned two months, from December 20, 2021, to February 20, 2022. This period was chosen to avoid political extremes. For example, months like the Brexit referendum are months of political extremes. During that time, online news articles were collected once a day. This approach offers the advantage of ensuring that the data of online tabloids remains reasonably sufficient, stable, and accessible, with no gaps in data coverage. Meanwhile, news websites update and change so quickly that online articles can be difficult to collect historically. A rapid 'live' collection of data is necessary to avoid missing important front-page information (McMillan, 2000, p.85). Each online article was collected between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. each day, during the peak online hours. This timeframe was chosen because we observed that it was the update period for online tabloids, where they updated the previous day's news during this period. Concurrently, front page news was collected daily from the digital editions of both print newspapers, *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail*.

4.3.4 Data analysis

The data analysis process adopts the following steps: The researcher uploaded the samples to SPSS software for analysis and encoded the following 12 indicators: 1. News topic, 2. The softening of news, 3. Domestic and foreign news, 4. Pictures, 5. Headline capitalisation, 6. Sensationalism, 7. Personalization, 8. Mode of address. 9. Video, 10. Hyperlink, 11. Data visualisation, and 12. Use of social media as news sources.

4.3.5 Independent samples t-test:

In this study, an independent T-test (in SPSS) was used to test some of the indicators to find out whether a significant difference exists between online and print. An independent samples t-test is a statistical test that is used to compare the means of two independent groups to determine whether there is a significant difference between them (Liang et al., 2019, p.1). When assessing statistical significance, it is important to consider the distinction between mean values, the variability inherent in the data (represented by its standard deviation), and the sizes of the samples. These concepts are integrated into a unified equation that calculates a t-value, used to ascertain statistical significance. It is essential to note that this test is specifically applicable for comparing means of quantitative variables (Manfe et al. 2017, p.184).

4.3.6 Reliability

Most of the characteristics of tabloids in this study are single indicators. However, the ‘Degree of Softening’ in news is composed of 2 sub-indicators, while ‘sensationalism’ is composed of 4 sub-indicators. Therefore, Cronbach’s alpha was calculated (in SPSS) to assess the internal consistency of these two indicators, thereby testing their reliability. The results indicated that Cronbach's alpha for "sensationalism" was 0.777, and for "softening in news" was 0.711. These values indicate reasonably good internal consistency, thereby affirming the reliability of the results.

4.4 Critical discourse analysis

This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine online tabloid texts, which may be viewed as language, as a social practice emphasizes the importance of the context in which language is used (Wodak, 2000c; Benke, 2000). Additionally, Fairclough describes CDA as a theory and a practice, more particularly, as an academic perspective on language. Semiosis is, more generally speaking—including "visual language," "body language," etc.—a component or "moment" of tangible social processes. Also, Fairclough points out that ‘in human matters, interconnections and chains of cause and effect may be distorted out of vision.’ Therefore, the main goal of criticism is to make individuals aware of the connections between various occurrences (Fairclough, 1995, p. 747). Hence, CDA can be primarily described as focusing on the examination of both concealed and evident structural dynamics related to dominance, discrimination, power, and control as they manifest in language. It concentrates on social problems, particularly on the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power abuse or domination. CDA represents a critical viewpoint, a form of discourse analysis imbued with a specific attitude. It focuses on societal issues, particularly the influence of discourse in generating and maintaining power abuse or tyranny. It approaches these issues from a standpoint that aligns with the well-being of the marginalized group. It earnestly considers the experiences and recommendations of individuals within these groups and actively supports their fight against inequality (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2018). In essence, CDA aims to explore the expression of social inequality critically. Furthermore, CDA emphasises the necessity of interdisciplinary collaboration to correctly understand how language functions, such as building and disseminating knowledge, organising social organization, or exerting authority (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2018). Therefore, CDA can be conducted in, and in combination with any approach and subdiscipline in the humanities and the social sciences.

According to Van Dijk's study, diversity is identified as one of the key aspects of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Wodak and Meyer (2009) provides a short summary of CDA approaches: (1) Regarding its theoretical foundation. CDA is eclectic in many respects, ranging from grand theory to linguistic; (2) There are no generally accepted guidelines for

data collection; and (3) Both operationalisation and analysis are problem-oriented and require linguistic expertise. More importantly, Wodak and Meyer (2009) also emphasises the similarities between these different methods and that theories are characterized by their emphasis on the social processes of power dynamics, the construction of hierarchies, acts of exclusion, and the practice of subordination. Following the principles of critical theory, CDA plays a role in revealing the discursive dimensions of societal disparities and injustices. In many instances, CDA speaks on behalf of the marginalized and seeks to expose the linguistic methods employed by the privileged to uphold and sometimes increase inequalities in society (Wodak and Meyer, 2009).

This present research's intent was to analyse how tabloids build communities in the era of digital media, specifically examining how they build readership (i.e., how tabloids reach consensus with readers). To achieve this, the aim is to explore what kind of community ideology tabloids construct and how they form these ideologies. Furthermore, this analysis considers the broader context of British social dynamics and realities. CDA is suitable to explore these issues. The following are the reasons for using CDA. Huckin (1997) suggests that critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) acknowledges the notion that texts are not created and consumed in isolation, but rather within intricate real-world contexts. CDA is highly context-sensitive. It considers the most relevant textual and contextual factors, including historical elements, that contribute to text production and interpretation. Also, CDA more focused on important societal issues, a characteristic deriving in part from its attention to 'context'. The context includes not only the immediate environment in which a text is produced and interpreted, but also the larger social context that includes relevant cultural, political, social, and other aspects (Huckin, 1997). Furthermore, in the context of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), ideology is recognized as a significant factor in developing and perpetuating uneven power dynamics. Consequently, CDA places particular emphasis on examining the role of language in mediating ideology across diverse social institutions. Wodak (2019) explains that the concepts of ideology, power, hierarchy, gender, and unchanging sociological factors are all considered important for understanding or explaining text. Moreover, CDA shows a keen interest in power dynamics, control, and societal disparities, with a tendency to direct its attention toward groups, institutions, and organizations. Consequently, CDA also requires understanding the different aspects of social thinking shared within these social groups, which encompass aspects like knowledge, beliefs, ideologies, and values (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2018).

4.4.1 Samples

There are two influential and controversial events that occurred during the data collection period. One was 'Partygate' and another was Prince Andrew's sexual abuse case. 'Partygate' is related to many themes, including the Prime Minister's apology, the attitude of the Conservative Party to the event, the attitude and attack from the other political parties, people's anger about the event, Sue Gray's report, and breaking the lockdown rules. Also, as

far as the event of Prince Andrew's sexual abuse is concerned, this event also relates to many themes. The relations between the members of the royal family, the status of the military, the ordinary people's reaction to the event, Prince Andrew being stripped of royal and military titles, breaking the law, Prince Andrew's trial, sexual abuse, etc. These two events are very representative of tabloids and align with the news values of tabloid news. Since both events involved themes of political scandal, sex, crime, and royalty, they are representative of tabloid values.

After thoroughly reviewing the news reports covering these two events in the online tabloids sample, 40 articles were selected for analysis, with 20 articles dedicated to each event.

4.4.2 Data analysis

We employed the linguistic instruments and structures provided by Fowler and van Dijk in the analysis process, which is divided into two parts. The first part involves the oral mode described by Fowler (1996) because conversation helps the newspaper reach a consensus with the audience. Fowler (1996) points out that the fundamental method of bridging the discourse gap is by facilitating oral models in newspapers, creating the illusion of a dialogue where people discuss common sense issues on which there is consensus. Hence, the conversational style plays a crucial role in diminishing the 'discourse gap' between newspapers and their institutional sources. One of the reasons for adopting a conversational style is to create an illusion of informality, familiarity, and friendliness. Conversation implies collaboration, consensus, equitable influence, and mutual understanding among participants. Conversation implies a shared perspective of the world, a shared subjective reality that is assumed and requires no explanation. The familiarity of a habitual style results in ideological consequences, enabling the unnoticed expression of familiar thoughts. The use of this 'normal' style is crucial for creating an assumption of consensus, which is a key aspect identified by media analysts in the ideological practice of newspapers (Fowler, 1996). Traditional tabloids have used this approach to connect more closely with their audiences. Therefore, in this study, we also examined the text in the oral mode. Regarding oral models, we examine the following linguistic features: phonemes, information structure, lexis or vocabulary, naming and address, syntax and morphology, deixis, and speech acts. Please see the appendix

In addition, regarding the community ideology constructed by tabloids and the analysis of social dynamics, we analysed the text from five aspects: local meaning, vocabulary, grammar, rhetorical structure, and quotation, with a particular focus on local meanings and context. (Please see the appendix for detailed explanation.)

4.5 In depth interviews

The interview is an important and commonly used qualitative research method (Dilshad and Latif, 2013, p.191). Interviews are highly valuable in qualitative research studies because they prioritize providing a thorough and all-encompassing understanding of activities or situations (Frankel and Wallen, 2003, p.380). Anderson (1990, p.222) suggests that an interview can be understood as a unique form of interaction between individuals with a particular aim associated with an agreed-upon topic. Compared with other data collection techniques, such as questionnaire surveys and observation, interviews can be used as a rich source to explore people's inner emotions and attitudes. Wisker (2001) suggests that conducting interviews to gather information based on emotions, feelings, experiences, and internal or privileged opinions is highly desirable. Hence, in qualitative research interviews, the objective is to gain an understanding of the world from the interviewees' viewpoint and delve into the significance of their experiences (Kvale, 1996).

Mason (2002, p.46) suggests that the term 'qualitative interview' generally encompasses in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews, or interviews without a fixed structure. This research adopts in-depth, semi-structured interviews since they are highly effective instruments for strategizing and assessing extension initiatives. They adopt an open-ended, discovery-oriented method, enabling the interviewers to deeply explore the interviewees' emotions and views on a certain topic. This generates a wealth of background information that can determine additional inquiries relevant to the subject matter (Guion et al., 2011, p.1). Boyce and Neale (2006) contend that conducting an in-depth interview, also referred to as a one-to-one interview, is a technique employed to acquire more comprehensive information or a deeper comprehension of a subject or idea. When researchers aim to gain a thorough understanding of participants' thoughts and behaviors or delve deeply into new inquiries, in-depth interviews prove valuable (Boyce and Neale, 2006, p.3). As McCracken (1988, p.9) asserts, it is deemed 'one of the most powerful methods' in qualitative research because they allow investigators to 'step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves'. The primary goal of conducting an in-depth interview is to unearth comprehensive insights into the interviewee's experiences and viewpoints regarding a particular subject. This approach stands out because it reveals more intricate and detailed information than alternative data collection techniques like surveys, as highlighted by Showkat and Parveen (2017, p.3). Therefore, in this research, in-depth interviews can help in better understanding the digital strategies used by digital tabloids, their reasons for change, and how these strategies are utilized.

Concurrently, this study employed a semi-structured interview method. According to Patton (1987, p.7), in-depth interviews can assume different forms, including structured, semi-structured, non-organized, or a mixture of the above two or three modes. In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer presents a series of fields or topics rather than

specific questions, allowing for a flexible conversation flow. The questions are asked about a specific area, and additional questions emerge as the conversation unfolds (Showkat and Parveen, 2017). Semi-structured interviews are conducted conversationally with one respondent at a time, using a mix of closed and open-ended questions, often followed by subsequent "why" or "how" inquiries. The conversation can be conducted around the themes on the agenda and may go deep into the topic rather than being totally attached to the questions, as in the case of the standardized survey (Adams, 2015, p.493). Therefore, the semi-structured interview does not require specific questions or a fixed order. However, Mason (2002, p.67) suggests that this does not mean researchers can ignore detailed planning. Many researchers may find it challenging to adhere to a clearly structured list of questions during the interview. When preparing for and conducting semi-structured interviews, it is helpful to think through a series of questions about the interview's content, style, scope, and order.

4.5.1 Data collection

When using interviews as a research method, one thing to consider is how many participants are needed. McCracken (1988, p.17) points out that eight interviewees are usually enough for many in-depth interview projects. This research roughly follows this suggestion, as 12 participants were recruited for interviews, ensuring their anonymity. Ethical approval was obtained before the interview began, and the participants also signed a consent form and agreed to use their answers in this research anonymously. Interviewees were recruited through two primary avenues. Firstly, I invited the teachers and staff of the department to introduce me to some tabloid journalists. Secondly, I reached out to tabloid journalists and editors through their social media (LinkedIn) accounts and sent them invitations. The interview was divided into six parts. The first part centered on the audience strategy used by the journalists in their work practice. The researchers asked journalists about their online content strategy, which related to narrative style, narrative elements, narrative innovation, and use of technology. The second part was about the distribution on multiple platforms (social media, homepage, google) as well as their social media strategy, homepage strategy, and SEO. For example, the researcher asked respondents about their use of SEO and the impact of SEO on editorial decisions and news products. The third part is about the use of audience metrics. The researcher asked questions about how they use audience metrics in news practice, and the impact of audience metrics on editorial judgment and news products. For example, 'How do journalists include audience metrics in their news judgment, selection, and production?' and 'Has the introduction of audience metrics changed the production of tabloid news items?' The fourth segment explores Audience engagement strategy. The researcher asked questions about AE and UGC. For example, 'How do they use interactivity and UGC to improve interaction with the audience?' To what extent do they allow users to participate in or influence a tabloid's news production and output? The fifth part involved discerning the difference between online tabloids and traditional tabloids in the reporters' view. It also aimed to elucidate why the characteristics of tabloids have changed in the perspective of journalists.

Technology development has ushered in more and more ways to conduct interviews. Unlike in the past, interviews are not necessarily face-to-face at present; instead, they can be conducted over the phone, Skype, email, or through various other forms of the internet and telephone without physical presence. Interviews can be formal or informal (Showkat and Parveen, 2017, p.1). In this study, I opted for the online platform most commonly used by the participants because of the pandemic and the distance from the interviewees. This online video interview format can be considered a hybrid between telephone and face-to-face interviews. Similarly, it is a useful method if the researcher is at a considerable distance from the interviewee (Edwards and Holland, 2013, p.48). Maintaining semi-structured, in-depth interviews within one hour is regarded as a judicious constraint aimed at mitigating potential fatigue experienced by both interviewers and interviewees (Adams, 2015, p.439). In total, six interviewees chose to participate in online video interviews, two participants chose telephone interviews, and four participants chose to send me answers via email. Three interviews lasted 40 to 60 minutes, while five lasted for about 30 minutes.

4.5.2 Samples

Six editors, five reporters, and one social media manager from *The Sun Online* and *MailOnline* were recruited. Specifically, a total of 12 participants were recruited for this study. Three journalists, three editors, and one community moderator from *Mail Online*. Three editors, one SEO editor, and one social media manager from *The Sun Online*.

I have anonymously numbered the participants, please see the table below:

Mail Online	Sun Online
Journalist 1	Editor 4
Journalist 2	Editor 5
Journalist 3	Editor 6
Editor 1	Editor 7
Editor 2	Social media manager
Editor 3	

Community moderator	
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Table 4. 9

4.5.3 Data analysis

The researcher encoded transcripts and conducted thematic analysis in the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes in qualitative data (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017, p.3352). The main objective of using thematic analysis is to identify important or interesting patterns (themes) in the data. These themes are then used to address a research topic or to make a relevant statement about a particular issue. This process extends beyond mere data summarisation. The thematic analysis involves interpretation and deriving meaning from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79). Therefore, we use thematic analysis to analysis qualitative data of interview. In addition, Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a six-step guide that serves as a useful framework for conducting this type of analysis: Step 1: Become familiar with the data; Step 2: Generate initial codes; Step 3: Search for themes; Step 4: Review themes; Step 5: Define themes; and Step 6: Write-up. Our analysis process also follows these six steps.

First, in the first stage, the researcher repeatedly read the transcripts to ensure that I was familiar with and understood the materials. In the second stage, the researcher analyzed each transcript, coding every segment of text that seemed relevant to or directly addressed the research question. In step 3, the researcher examined and categorised the codes, and some were grouped into themes. Some codes were relevant to one theme, and some codes were relevant to more than one. In the fourth step, the researcher reviewed, revised, and developed the preliminary themes that were discovered in Step 3. In the fifth stage, the final improvement of the themes took place with the purpose of recognising the ‘essence’ of what each theme is about (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.92). (Please refer to the appendix for specific coding themes.) the researcher considered what the themes said, and how they relate to each other. In the end, the main themes analysed are shown below:

Theme 1	<p>How journalists and editors of online tabloids use online content strategy, social media strategy, SEO strategy, homepage strategy, and audience engagement strategies to engage audiences.</p> <p>Explore changes in tabloid strategy</p>
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Theme 2	Examine the impact of digital strategies on tabloid journalists' values, journalistic practices, and news decisions and judgments.
Theme 3	<p>Differences between traditional tabloids and online tabloids.</p> <p>Reasons for the traditional characteristics of tabloids to increase, decrease, or retain in the digital environment</p>

Table 4. 10

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter outlined how the research has been conducted, and explained why content analysis, critical discourse analysis and in-depth interview were chosen as the research methodology adopted for the purposes of this thesis. Further, this chapter introduced the methods for data collection and data analysis.

Chapter 5 The digital strategies of online tabloids

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how online tabloids employ digital strategies to attract their audience and examines the influence of these strategies on their news practices. Subsequently, I will combine the synergistic effects of digital strategies with the judgment of journalists to discuss the overall impact of online tabloids. This chapter has two primary themes. The first theme focuses on how digital tabloids construct compelling content in the fiercely competitive digital media environment. This includes their narrative style and use of technology. Also, this theme is linked to their distribution strategy and how they adapt to social media and Google. The purpose of this theme is to answer the first research question. What changes have taken place in the strategy of online tabloids, and how do they use these strategies to attract audiences? The second theme revolves around the influence of market pressures, audience preferences, and digital strategies on the value and practices of digital tabloid journalists. It examines how digital tabloids combine these factors with news values and standards and what news judgments they make. Thus, theme 2 places greater emphasis on how the strategies and platforms employed by the newsroom (audience analytics, social media optimisation, search engine optimisation, user-generated content) influence the value, conventions, and news decision-making of tabloids. These themes aim to answer the first research question and supplement the second research question.

5.2 Findings: Theme 1 The change of tabloid strategy in the digital era.

5.2.1 The changes of content strategy

5.2.1.1 Digital tabloids need to adapt to multiple platforms

When inquiring about how tabloids adapt to the internet environment and formulate strategies to attract audiences compared to the past, reporters and editors stressed the necessity to consider multiple online platforms. Four editors (Editor1, Editor2, Editor5, Editor7) and one journalist (Journalist 1) highlighted to me the primary traffic sources of the two digital tabloids (Homepage, social media, Google). Therefore, the most significant revelation is that editors cannot build content just for one platform in the digital media environment. This illustrates the multi-platform delivery of digital tabloids to increase news visibility. Tabloids need to consider more factors because a news story may need to attract audiences on three different platforms. An editor of *Sun Online* said:

'Really, we have four main channels through which our stories will be read: our direct homepage visitors, social media, SEO, and third-party referrers. While there's nothing much, we can do to influence third party referrers, when commissioning stories, we'd be naive not to be thinking about which of the other three platforms are going to be the way our story reaches its readers. Sometimes there is overlap across all three platforms; sometimes a story will only work on one of three platforms.' (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 5)

Four editors (Editor 1, Editor 2, Editor 5, Editor7) and a journalist (Journalist 1) provided insights into the primary traffic sources of the two digital tabloids. The traffic proportion of the two tabloids in the three channels is different. For *The Sun Online*, the homepage and Google platform traffic is similar, accounting for about 30%, while another 30% to 40% of the traffic comes from social media. As a result, traffic from social media is the largest (40%), followed closely by Google and the homepage. Journalist says that *The Sun's* readers come more from social media than from the homepage. In contrast, for *MailOnline*, most of their traffic (about 60% to 70%) comes from the home page, followed by social media and SEO. Journalists from the *MailOnline* still stress that social media are important to them, but the traffic from their homepage is even more crucial. Four editors (Editor 1, Editor 2, Editor 5, Editor7) from the two online newspapers indicated that tabloids need to adapt to the strategies of three different platforms. Therefore, multi-platform distribution strategies influence the construction of tabloid content. Two editors from *The Sun Online* said:

'We have to choose certain kinds of stories and market them in a certain way to attract readers on things like Facebook and Google.' (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 5)

'Homepage and social media are very visual, so pictures and videos are important to them. However, images are not that important to Google traffic. It just builds stories in a way Google thinks is well built, making stories rank higher.' (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 7)

5.2.1.2 Audience focus

Three journalists (Journalist1, Journalist2, Journalist3) and two editors (Editor 2, Editor 5) agreed that the key point of attractive news content is about 'people'. When they build content, the most important consideration is whether the news is relevant to readers and whether it is a topic people are interested in. Human interest stories are always put in the first place to attract the audience. An editor from *The Sun* mentioned that the publication of the news depends on whether the content would attract people:

'At *The Sun*, every department has a team of senior editors who liaise with reporters, stringers and news agencies to find the most interesting stories in the world each day.

We then take what we consider to be the strongest or most compelling of these stories to a meeting known as a 'conference' or 'news conference' where we all read our lists to the Head of Digital who will ask in-depth questions about the stories and ultimately decide whether it is something he thinks worthy of publishing. The majority of the stories senior editors pitch are accepted, but sometimes a story might be considered a little weak or uninteresting, so the Head of Digital vetoes it. Now, what makes a story strong or weak? First, is it something our readers will be interested in.' (*The Sun Online* editor, Editor 5)

Furthermore, three journalists (Journalist1, Journalist2, Journalist3) were unanimous in their belief that human interest is the most important factor. They contend that news content must fundamentally offer something that people want to read. They think the most important element in building attractive news content is that the stories are helpful to people and closely related to human interests:

'At *MailOnline*, the human-interest element is the most important - they want to make 'boring' stories interesting, and the best way is to focus on a person or how it affects the average Joe. E.g. if a huge oil firm has been swindling money in Russia, it is about focusing on how that affects people here in the UK. Home News (UK news) is the biggest focus - that is the most read alongside Showbiz news, so that comes as a priority.' (*MailOnline* journalist, Journalist 1)

Therefore, In the digital environment, 'people' seem to have become more important. When journalists and reporters produce news, the audience's interest is the most important thing they must consider.

5.2.1.3 Visual Importance in the Digital Landscape

For traditional tabloids, visual content is very important. These publications use eye-catching or humorous pictures to catch people's attention. In digital tabloids, the visual aspect is even more critical than before. A total of nine interviewees emphasised the importance of visuals, which include pictures and videos. This also means that reporters and editors need to work closely with their picture and video desks to ensure every story packs the most compelling visual punch they can. This investigation showed that the visual element is now an indispensable way for digital tabloids to package stories. Nine reporters and editors all said that they use images and videos as much as possible to grab people's attention, induce readers to click, arouse readers' interest, and encourage them to continue reading.

Three interviewees (Journalists 1, 3 and Editor 3) emphasised the importance of photos, while five interviewees believed that both pictures and videos are important in attracting audiences. Two interviewees (Journalist 2 and Editor 2) pointed out that using pictures is the key to

attracting audiences and successfully telling stories. Their perspective underscores that compelling imagery is crucial to the success of tabloid websites, serving as potent storytellers. Moreover, UK audiences now prefer images instead of text paragraphs.

Furthermore, five interviewees contended that pictures and videos are important for illustrating what is being discussed in the story. Both Journalist 2 and Editor 4 emphasised that they added pictures and videos as much as possible to encourage audience clicks and keep them on the page. Furthermore, Journalist 2 also stressed that the purpose of attaching videos is to promote audience sharing:

‘We grab the readers and get more clicks by using as many pictures as possible - in all cases, there has to be a compelling photograph to lead the story. If there is a video element to a story, no matter how short or poor quality, it will always be added to the story. It is interactive and it encourages the reader to continue scrolling down the page.’
(*MailOnline* Journalist, Journalist 2)

‘Attaching pictures and videos takes up half the time you spend producing news. We attach a great video and ask how good the picture is because it attracts more readers and encourages them to share the story. It must be the full package. It is very important, but that is what we seek to look for every day.’ (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 4)

The researcher also asked the interviewees how to make videos that attract the audience and whether technology has been used to provide an immersive experience. The interviewees all agreed that short videos that played automatically within 10 seconds were more characteristic of the production. Surprisingly, the two interviewees (Editor 6 and Journalists 2) said that they only used ‘Adobe Premiere Pro’ for simple editing with labels, and did not have complex screen editing or sound effects like in the case of TV news:

‘Sometimes we do try, just slightly modify the video to make it more shocking and emotional. Watching this person cry, just trying to make you feel our feelings. I think using more emotive sorts of headlines and similar techniques does work, but I wouldn't necessarily say it's something we actively choose to do.’ (*The Sun Online* editor, editor6)

‘I suppose one thing we do as well with videos is we create this little video. If you are scrolling down a story and you see a video, it will play like a 10-second animation of that video. It just gives people an idea of what they are about to watch and what happens in it. Some people like that, and most of us think it makes people want to click on it.’
(*Mail Online* Journalist, Journalist 2)

Two interviewees (Editor 4 and Editor 2) even directly pointed out that videos and pictures are as important as or even more important than words in online tabloids.

‘We find the images as important or even more important than words. When you're attracting people to click onto a story, the imagery you are using to draw them in is often as important as the word.’ (*MailOnline* Editor, Editor 2)

‘Readers expect quite a lot these days. There has been a lot of change in the last 10, 15, and 20 years. People do not just expect to read words anymore. That's the whole package. It combines words and video pictures on links to other stories. You have to provide the full package in many ways. We look for a good story, so it does not necessarily just have to be a good story in writing anymore.’ (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 4)

At the same time, editor 4 also gave an example of how using images to tell a story doubled traffic. He recited an illustrative case where a fight broke out between some football fans in France. At one point, they set off a small explosion. When they used pictures to illustrate the story about the fire, traffic for the story doubled.

As can be seen from the above arguments, in a digital environment, photographers and videographers are now the frontrunners of the whole content creation process. While ‘text’ still remains a potent tool, it now contends fiercely in a landscape inundated with formidable visual competition. It is preferable for editors to use comprehensive visual materials to support their stories. Finally, the interviewees (Journalists 2, Editor2 and Editor4) also indicated a further reason for using videos and pictures. They pointed out that people now prefer to see visual content. This underscores the necessity for news stories to adapt to different platforms. For example, Editor 4 said that for *The Sun Online*, they have a lot of traffic from social media and the homepage, and both are very visual platforms. Therefore, visual content that is now beyond an attractive photo emerges as an indispensable component of contemporary tabloid journalism.

5.2.1.4 Storytelling

Bringing in a storytelling element is one of a number of winning strategies. The audience is likely to return if the storytelling is sufficiently impressive. The way tabloids tell stories has always been known for its unique style, including elements such as sensationalism, personalisation, exaggeration, and emotion which will be discussed further later on. Ten interviewees agreed that the method of storytelling is important to attract an audience. However, they disagreed on whether their storytelling method was traditional or novel due to the influence of the digital environment. Five interviewees (Journalists 1, 2, 3, Editor 2 and Editor4) said that online tabloids continued to use traditional storytelling and to prioritise important information. At the same time, they still employed some dramatic, sensational, eye-catching, vernacular ways to tell stories. These are the well-known narrative styles of tabloids. They aim to make something exciting and interesting for the audience to read while

also provoking a level of controversy. One *MailOnline* journalist explained:

‘We use quite traditional tabloid methods in that there is a lot of drama in the headlines, the typical pyramid method in terms of copy, keeping the most important information at the top and least important at the bottom.’ (*MailOnline* Journalist, Journalist 1)

Two interviewees (Journalist 2 and Journalist 3) stressed that they have made some changes based on the use of traditional storytelling. They pointed out that online audiences have a shorter attention span. Therefore, the stories are structured to reach the point quicker than in print. Also, one *MailOnline* journalist (Journalist 2) indicated that a new element is to use bullet points to start to carve out the story's angle in which they consider and present it to the reader.

In the online environment, tabloid journalists still adhere to the traditional storytelling methods to attract the audience because these have always been effective and can maintain the brand identity. However, it is also obvious that the nature of an online environment has had an impact on digital tabloids. In this environment, reporters had to change their traditional way of narration to attract the audience. Therefore, online tabloids have altered their traditional storytelling techniques in order to embrace new technologies and adapt to new platforms. In the following, we will explore some of these techniques.

5.2.1.5 Hyperlinking:

Hyperlinking is a foundational practice of web publishing. As a reader service, editors provide readers with hyperlinks to allow them to access additional sources of information. Three interviewees (Journalists 1, 2 and Editor5) said it is very important to have hyperlinks and related story recommendations in their content because they have to ensure that their news stories can encourage audience engagement. Therefore, they usually provide all the hyperlinks in the story, or there are recommended links to related topics at the bottom of the story. It is worth noting that these hyperlinks link to other content or news on their own websites, meaning they are links to elsewhere on the same website.

Their purpose is to encourage reader involvement by clicking, reading, and keeping them on their website, preventing readers from reading other media outlet websites. All three interviewees think it encourages much more loyal users. One *MailOnline* journalist and One *Sun Online* editor thought:

'We always have related articles halfway down a story - as well as at the sidebar next to every story - so there is so much to choose from to retain the reader on the website, thus encouraging them to come back to the site in the future because all their questions were

answered on the one-story without having to see another news outlet for more information, as well as being offered similar or related content to feed their interests.' (*MailOnline journalist*, Journalist 1)

'We are always aiming to take our readers on a journey. We use hyperlinks within stories to encourage recirculation. We have great multimedia content, including widgets, graphics, and interactives to create a greater time on each article.' (*The Sun Online Editor*, Editor 5)

Therefore, from the above points of view, online tabloids strive to provide readers with everything in a package so that readers can easily stay on their website and keep coming back. They not only aim to attract audiences but also aim to keep them on the page for longer.

5.2.2 The change of the homepage strategy

5.2.2.1 The importance of the homepage

The largest traffic of *MailOnline* comes from the homepage, which accounts for 60% to 70%, whereas *The Sun's* homepage attracts 30% to 40% of visitors, as noted earlier. Both tabloid journalists believe that the homepage is crucial to them. An editor of *Sun Online* (Editor 4) pointed out that the traffic on the home page is the strongest and most stable. Users on the home page tend to be loyal. Although online tabloids have many users from social media and Google, these users are not necessarily loyal readers. They just happened to read a story one day and then left. Therefore, all journalists want the audience to be able to come directly to the homepage. Journalists and editors (Journalist 1 and Editors 2, Editors 5, Editor6) believe that while social media and SEO are important, the homepage is the top priority. Online tabloids, therefore strive to make their homepage the ultimate destination for their audience. Two editors said:

'Our homepage is very important to us because it tends to be loyal repeat visitors who visit *The Sun.co.uk* as opposed to people who stumble upon our website.' (*The Sun Online Editor*, Editor 5)

'Although we get a lot of traffic from social media, sometimes it can be a problem because Facebook can change its algorithm. Therefore, the long-term strategy is to have more people coming to the Sun as a destination and not just clicking on some stories in their Facebook feed. I think the goal is trying to make sure we have a really good homepage, so the people who do see the homepage will come back to it. We built a homepage where more viewers visited and made them loyal readers.' (*Sun Online Editor*, Editor 6)

5.2.2.2 A Visual media

Five interviewees (Journalists 1, 3 and Editor2, Editor4, Editor5) suggested that the homepage is a visual medium. Therefore, pictures and videos are very important for the home page, and they can always attract people's attention to click on the news or bring people into the story. One editor of *The Sun* described:

‘The homepage is a very visual medium. Generally, for a story to work well on the homepage, it will need compelling images or videos to engage readers.’ (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 4)

There are a lot of pictures and videos on the homepage of *Sun Online* and the *MailOnline*. The top story of the two online tabloids is like a banner with the main headline and pictures. Journalists 2 said that the purpose of this is to attract and engage the audience. The video reporters (Journalists 2) mentioned that there are fast-moving, eye-catching videos on the two online tabloids, which undoubtedly aim to generate audience clicks. One video reporter indicated:

‘When the home page moves, some images will move there and be animated, which is what we need to do. We are getting a video and bring it to the audience. I suppose when you are scrolling through, it hooks you into the story in that way.’ (*Mailonline Journalist*, Journalist 2)

5.2.2.3 Readability

The homepage is very readable, as illustrated by five journalists and editors (Journalists 1, 2, 3 and Editors 2, 6). The *Mailonline* is especially readable and enjoyable. Compared to other sites, it does a good job of page scrolling. They also keep readers on the homepage in many ways. The large amount of constantly updated content on the homepage and the application of side bars keeps readers constantly browsing the news, and jumping back and forth between various stories.

‘There is also the little sidebar up the side, which is full of showbiz stories and things like that, but it keeps a lot of people clicking on just to see what the next one is, and the next one is the volumes of content on the website. I think it always keeps people there. It allows you to stay on the website and jump back and forth between different stories’ (*Mailonline Journalist*, Journalist 2)

‘Our homepage is sometimes similar to social media, featuring a lot of constantly updated news.’ (*Mailonline Journalist*, Journalist 3)

The combination of soft news and hard news on the home page is also an important reason for

high readability.

The homepage of online tabloids often provides a variety of news for readers. Two interviewees (Editor 2 and Editor 6) indicated that they need to provide enough news to appeal to the audience. Also, they stressed that they need to ensure a good mix of stories on the home page while considering audience metrics.

‘Our homepage may be like social media. We need to keep it scrolling to provide much news and new news to attract viewers.’ (*Mail Online* Editor, Editor 2)

‘What we are trying to do is serve our readers well, with a good mix of serious stories, funny stories, entertaining stories, sexy stories, and stories that help readers understand how to consume stories, reduce their bills, and lose weight. We integrate all these stories that stimulate readers to return to the home page to grab different content types. Yes, we have audience analytics and know what they are clicking on. We can manage the home page accordingly and move content up and down. Nevertheless, we must remember to maintain a good combination; otherwise, the stories about death and sex will be very popular, and they will become top stories. However, we want to mix everything so that it will look better visually because you do not just want ugly criminals or half-naked women at the top of the page.’ (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 6)

In addition, to maintain better readability, one interviewee (Editor 6) described that they would regularly make slight changes to the layout of the home page to test which page format is more popular with readers. The reporters tend to set up special news on the top of the homepage with an attractive title to grab readers' attention (e.g., the war in Ukraine).

‘When it is a big story like that, the readers are also interested in it. In terms of clicks, they only fill up the top of the home page, and readers will be tired of it in a few days. We will cut the Ukraine content in half at the top of the page and start introducing some TV and show biz.’ (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 6)

5.2.3 The use of social media strategy in online tabloid

Social media channels facilitate connection with the audience. They also give news websites a way to distribute or repurpose the content that reporters have created. Journalists can use social media to amplify their stories.

5.2.3.1 Social media strategy is important

The interview findings indicate that a social media strategy is very critical to tabloid outlets because social media is a crucial channel for attracting the audience in addition to the homepage. The audience clicks on news stories on social media and reaches tabloid pages. Hence, social media can help tabloids become the leading news websites. The audience traffic from social media is different for the two online newspapers. In the case of *The Sun*, the traffic from social media channels is more than from the homepage, at about 40%. However, *Mail Online* editors (Editor 2) said their main traffic is from the homepage, followed by social media traffic. Although the two online newspapers obtain different traffic from social media, the interviewees agreed that social media is another significant traffic driver. They have a strong relationship with Facebook because they think that traffic on social media is driven by Facebook rather than Twitter. One social media manager describes:

‘Social media is hugely important for us. It brings us much traffic, about 40%. If ever Facebook goes down, we are in trouble. Social media is the other big driver. At *The Sun* social media is driven almost entirely by Facebook users, not Twitter. Both social media and Google are now central to plans and planning.’ (*The Sun Online* social media manager 1)

5.2.3.2 Social media strategies.

Five interviewees (Journalists 1, Editor1, Editor5, Editor6 and Social Media Manager 1) illustrated that the main purpose of the social media strategy is to make the audience reach the tabloid page through social media. This results in the audience staying on the home page or reading more news. Therefore, they hope to attract new audiences and retain loyal audiences. When considering how to make the audience click on stories on social media, several interviewees mentioned the word ‘tease’. They (Social Media Manager and Editor 6) said they would use the headline to tease the audience. They could not give all the stories in the headline but use the headline to arouse the audience's curiosity and induce clicks.

‘Although these images play a part in Facebook, the most important thing is how to sell the story to readers. Most importantly, you need to make sure that you do not reveal all the stories in Facebook posts. Instead, you should tease the audience a bit. For example, you can leave some information in the title, because you want to trigger people's curiosity about who celebrities are dating. Then they click on the story to find out who the celebrity is dating, instead of telling them already.’ (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 6)

The above points indicate that ensuring that headlines on social media are clickable is significant for social media strategy. However, while reporters emphasised that content

needed to be clickable to arouse the curiosity of readers, they did not aim for clickbait. If they used clickbait, Facebook would punish them.

‘The main thing is to write an enticing title on the title when you post. It is about making a clickable one without making it to clickbait so that the audience clicks off instantly. If we create clickbait, we will be punished by Facebook.’(*The Sun Online* Social Media Manager1)

Furthermore, a social media manager emphasised the function of "suggested for you". He described:

‘Mainly when Facebook introduced this "suggested for you" function a few years ago. We mastered it pretty quickly. We got good at it, so our traffic level reached its peak. For example, it suggests that topics like this current one is Tyson Fury, things like that. So, Facebook works alongside things like Google. Google discover what was converged from the homepage and just generally what's on the news agenda.’ (*The Sun Online* Social Media Manager1)

Also, the interviewee illustrated that it was important to determine what kind of news to release on social media from the home page. They often choose "internet-friendly news". On the one hand, they tend to judge which news can be transmitted quickly on the platform based on recent trends, and on the other hand, they also use "social listening" platforms to monitor their competitors. More importantly, they monitor audience metrics and observe audience preferences. The results show that social media is not just a marketing strategy, it can also be used as a tool for news research.

‘We have a full team of journalists who write 150 stories daily. There is also an independent social media team that handles all of these stories and decides which one is best for a Facebook competition. We usually choose internet-friendly stories. For example, at the moment, Tyson Fury is internet friendly. My team focuses on the needs of all Facebook audiences. If there is a story they like, we tell the reporter team and try to do more. We do not do it again if there is a story they do not like. Audience demand is surprising, but in the age of social media, that is where traffic comes in.’ (*The Sun Online* Social Media Manager1)

Furthermore, three interviewees (Journalists 1, 2 and Editor 5) pointed out that the audience on social media is quite different from those on the home page, so the same story receives different feedback on different platforms. Therefore, they will shape their stories depending on what suits their audience. An editor of *The Sun online* said:

‘Data show our Facebook audience is overwhelmingly women in their 20s, 30s, and 40s and you can see certain patterns emerging with what stories they want to read. Stories that work well on our Facebook page are often less visual than those that do well on our

homepage but usually have a compelling headline on a subject that perhaps inspires debate among our readers. Stories about parenting, personal finance, health, and body confidence do disproportionately well on Facebook, whereas they don't necessarily resonate on the homepage or through SEO.' (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 5)

5.2.4 The use of search engine optimisation in online tabloids

SEO is described as part of the newsroom online strategy. On the internet, search engines still bring a lot of traffic to news websites (Giomelakis and Veglis, 2016). Online news media need to get high visibility in search engines because Internet users look for information through search engines every day (McGaw, 2009). As previously mentioned, SEO is the third channel for online tabloids to attract audiences in addition to the home page and social media. This will be further explained in the following.

5.2.4.1 The Importance of SEO for online tabloids

SEO means more clicks and more website visitors. At the same time, it is not only useful to attract readers, but it can also improve the ranking of tabloids on Google. Both online tabloids have independent SEO teams. In particular, one of *The Sun Online* editors claimed that they may have the largest SEO team of British publishers. All 12 editors and reporters explained that SEO is a very important strategy to attract audiences. Two editors of *The Sun Online* expanded on their SEO team and its importance:

'We have an SEO department and their job is to get as much traffic through Google as possible. When you optimise that story, it will be a good, trustworthy story on Google that will rank higher in their search results. The whole point of their strategy is that we are trying to make sure we promote traffic by improving high-click rankings in Google search, whether in the form of including new stories or popular celebrities in keywords.' (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 4)

'Yeah, that huge part of our strategy is that search engine optimization with the team, whether in London or New York. Making sure our stories get the most prominent section on Google is a top priority because that is where people get their news.' (*MailOnline* Editor, Editor 2)

Interviewees (Journalist 1) even thought that few people would find these articles without SEO, and the editorial efforts would be in vain. From the above, we can see that SEO strategy is critically important for online tabloids.

5.2.4.2 SEO strategy in the newsroom

Ten of the interviewees described their SEO strategy in greater detail. They start by looking

for trends of what people are searching for and popular topics. This is followed by consideration of how to optimise their stories from a search perspective so the news stories can rank well on Google Search. In detail, four interviewees (Editor 1, Editor2, Editor4, Editor7) noted that they have a conference every morning to make sure they find any trends on Google, and then inform the news department about the trends in their searches. The SEO team works closely with journalists from other news departments during this process. One SEO editor illustrated their specific process for finding trends:

‘First, we need to look at trends, so we use Google discovery to find trends in searches and we can determine which topics we want to cover. We do have specific topics, so basically our topic market includes Arsenal, football clubs, etc. We know they have a certain amount of searches during the week, so I have to look at that. We need to find popular topics that many people search for, so we also cover the news topics that the BBC reports. There are also topics that we can continue to win. We all want to find the right story. If the audience only cares about a medal, Prince Harry, Megan, or the Queen, then these are the contents we want to try to promote’. (*The Sun Online editor*, Editor 7)

From the editor's description, the tabloids tended to cover specific topics such as sports or entertainment as well as some other popular topics. Then, SEO teams often start thinking about how to improve these subjects from a search perspective. Therefore, the SEO team will advise journalists on optimizing these topics' news for Google rankings. All eight interviewees emphasized that they would be instructed to integrate specific keywords into the news to enable people to find these news stories more quickly. An editor and a reporter explain how they optimise their articles:

‘We have an SEO department that looks at the headline for every single story we publish, often in advance of publication, and provides feedback to editors. This advice can vary from suggesting we tweak words in a headline to make them more search-friendly to suggesting we reorder the headline entirely to ensure keywords are at the front.’ (*MailOnline Editor*, Editor 1)

‘By using key searchable terms close to the top of articles, starting sentences, for example, articles are more likely to be found at the top of a Google results page.’ (*MailOnline Editor*, Editor 2)

One editor indicated that the addition of a simple piece of information in a news article could drive more traffic, saying:

‘Next week is the Queen's birthday, so there will be a certain number of people searching for what time the Queen's Day is, and we will make an explanation along those lines. This is a very simple article; if you answer this question, your story will come out when someone types something on Google along these lines. You will get traffic from it.’ (*The Sun Online Editor*, Editor 6)

Furthermore, the editors stated that adding hyperlinks to the content of articles is also an important aspect of organic searches, which can improve the news ranking on Google. These links are still internal hyperlinks to the website:

‘Make sure you have a link to this news in other articles. If you want to push an article, you should also make sure that there is similar content in other articles.’(*MailOnline* Editor, Editor 2)

‘Internal hyperlinks are like signals, which helps Google recognise them. Whenever Google find the page, they will notice links and similar content. Obviously, we do not want to overload the hyperlinks in the article, so we usually use two or three links in each paragraph at most. Another aspect is the circulation of content. Hyperlinks can increase traffic.’ (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 7)

5.2.5 Audience metrics

The digitisation of news enables news organisations to track audiences online, and news organisations can adjust the news flow in real-time according to user trends. This is because of the programmability of digital media (Karlsson and Clerwall, 2013). In recent years, news organisations worldwide have systematically analysed the quantitative data of all aspects of audience behaviour to increase the audience, improve participation and optimise the newsroom workflow. Tabloids are no exception. The previous analysis mentioned that both editors and reporters use audience metrics as part of their content, homepage, and social media strategy to guide decisions.

5.2.5.1 Use of audience metrics

Results indicated that all the interviewees used audience metrics and analytics in their work. They monitor audience data to provide their most loyal readers with content they already know the audience will enjoy. Digital journalists have much more data than traditional print journalists, which allows journalists to understand more clearly what readers want to read. This is a difference between traditional editing and digital editing. As noted, five interviewees (Editor2, Editor3, Editor4, Editor5, Editor6) monitor what is performing well on other websites. That information can be used to decide if they should also cover a topic. Whichever stories get the most clicks are likely to be covered and expanded on in the future. One interviewee described that it is important to use audience metrics:

‘Everyone in our department has access to metrics. Our traffic indicators can reflect what stories are popular with the audience. We want to write stories that people want to read. It's important to keep an eye on that, and we can see which stories are doing well, and why they are doing well. Can we learn from it and try to copy that story and other stories? However, we always look at our well-written stories and learn from them to

write similar stories because we want people to read our works.' (*The Sun Online Editor*, Editor 4)

If a certain story is found to be very popular, they will report on the topic from a different angle to attract the audience. One *Mail Online* editor said:

'To construct compelling and shareable content, I monitor analytics to see the types of stories that have previously had high engagement and try to build on those trends by following up on stories and writing about the same subjects from a different angle.'
(*MailOnline* Editor, Editor 3)

As noted by an editor at the *Mail Online*, using audience metrics can also drive traffic to important news stories that do not perform well in terms of traffic:

'There are some stories that few people read but are very important, and you are going to find a way of making people read those really important stories. For example, political stories, stories about Ukraine, and stories about COVID-19. Major events happen every day. How can we show this to people interestingly, accurately, and so on? Looking at the analytics is a key part of the editing, but audience metrics are not my solid guide.'
(*MailOnline* Editor, Editor 2)

Furthermore, website content needs to be constantly updated, and analytics has also become a favorite tool for website content to be constantly updated to attract viewers. Three interviewees (Editor3, Editor4, Editor6) expressed that the creation of a new story is judged by reader preference. They are constantly looking for new ways to package and sell a story.

5.2.6 Changes in the way journalists interact with the audience

As regards encouraging audience participation and strengthening the connection between the audience and tabloids, editors 3 and community moderator from *Mail Online* point out two main ways, namely, the comment area and sending stories to editors. The editor (5) from *The Sun* shows that the main way is sending stories and polls. Most *MailOnline* interviewees point out the importance of the comment section.

'Yeah, our comment section is probably the best example of that, isn't it?' (*MailOnline* Editor, Editor 3)

'I think the comment section is an integral part of *Mailonline's* success. As far as I know, *Mail Online* is the number one news website in the UK. One reason for our success is our interaction with our readers. People advertising on the website can see the most

stories attract thousands of comments. It's an indication of the success of the online newspaper.' (*MailOnline* community moderator)

MailOnline community moderator also explained how people interact with editors in the comment section:

'I have to deal with or interact with both readers and journalists' - or something like that. - An example of a reader's request might be that they are asking to contribute to a news report by sharing their own experience on the topic. In such a case, we contact the reporter who wrote the story in case they want to get back to the reader or use reader comments in a future story. When they have a specific request, I direct them to the specific department that can help them.' (*MailOnline* community moderator)

Furthermore, the *MailOnline* community moderator explained the way they manage the comment section:

'Regarding comments, you can appreciate that some comments are not so modest or decent. Some people are very angry in the way they express themselves. They use abuse and dirty language. They make attacks at some, so we need to make sure that these comments will never be published. So many of the news articles and the news reports that the journalism team produces are moderated. That means we have to review all comments submitted and decide which comments will go live and which will not be published. We need to maintain a harmonious environment in *MailOnline*.' (*MailOnline* community moderator)

The researcher asked if editors tended to hold onto positive opinions to maintain a harmonious environment. They explained why they needed to moderate the comments:

'Actually, we need to follow guidelines that don't say anything about the comment should be friendly or positive. It can be as negative as they want as long as they are not using abuse language towards reporters or the subjects of the story. For instance, when we cover a story about the royal family and Prince Harry and Megan, many users use awful words to describe Megan. I'm sure that if they were public, Megan would sue the paper because of this language. So, we make sure we reject this kind of comments.' (*MailOnline* community moderator)

However, *The Sun Online* does not use the comment function to interact with the audience. Although *The Sun Online* used to have a comment section, this function has been turned off. One editor from *The Sun Online* gave the following reason:

‘We used to have comments and turned them off because people always have some aggressive comments. It would take too much time policing them because there are so many people in the comments who are mentally ill, racist, whatever. They are the kind of people who like leaving comments on the internet that we decided just to turn it off.’
(*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 6)

‘User-generated is not so much in our field. For example, the comments section in our stories don't get anywhere near as much as the Mail Online. That's mainly just to keep the ground say it. We do not want millions of people commenting on our stories and creating ridiculous things because it's just not healthy for the brands or people commenting. We don't really encourage much user generated content in terms of that, but we should try to focus on journalism really.’ (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 4)

Apart from the comment function, the interviewees also gave examples of other ways of interaction. Five interviewees pointed out that they used social media to interact with the audience. This mainly included using polls, encouraging the audience to comment on social media, and sharing news:

‘We do things like run polls and competitions, but that is a more commercial thing than a reader engagement playing.’ (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 6)

‘Interactivity like the comments section, the ability to share the story or quotes from the account on most social media platforms, and polls sometimes.’ (*MailOnline* Journalist, journalists 1)

‘I share my stories on social media and sometimes use the poll feature on Instagram to encourage my followers to interact.’ (*MailOnline* Editor, Editor 3)

‘There's interaction through social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram). We constantly urge our readers to write their comments on the stories that appear on our social media channels.’ (*MailOnline* community moderator)

It emerged from the interviews that sending stories to the editor is another essential part of audience participation. Four interviewees pointed out that it is also how the website interacts with the audience. However, one *MailOnline* editor pointed out that they did not welcome readers to submit general stories and suggestions:

‘I'm not interested in this way. It's fine if people talk about stories, but people just send criticism. I refuse to accept those emails; I do not welcome them. I do not want to hear

these opinions or criticisms. In fact, we do not encourage them to send their own stories or ideas. We know the same. We want to get some special stories. There are so many journalists sending in ideas. You do not need readers sending in their own ideas as well.’ (*MailOnline Editor*, Editor 2)

‘Yes, we do. if you notice at the bottom of some new stories on the *MailOnline* website, there is this feature that says, please contact us if you have any ideas or suggestions, or if you want to make a comment or a statement on the article.’ (*MailOnline* community moderator)

5.3 Analysis and Discussion

An important finding is that as tabloids adopt multi-platform distribution strategies to increase news visibility, editors must shift their focus from creating content solely for a single platform. Instead, they need to comprehensively consider how news content can be distributed and receive good traffic across various platforms. This is in line with what Srisaracam (2019, p.36) calls the third dimension of convergence i.e., multi-platform delivery. Moreover, the results are also consistent with the research conducted by Domingo et al. (2007). They found that more than eighty-five percent of content is reused by the Spanish news organisations for multiple media rather than creating or expanding different stories for each platform. Therefore, this means that when designing content, journalists need to consider how this news content can be adapted to match the logic of the homepage, social media, and Google. In fact, when journalists and editors merge the features of different platforms to tell a story, it may bring about some changes to tabloids.

It emerged from the interviews that reporters and editors need to work closely with the photo and video departments, and they spend more time on the packaging of the news to ensure that each story has a compelling visual impact. Visuals are now an important part of the digital tabloid packaging story. This is because online tabloids need to adapt to the visual-dominated platform (homepage and social media) and meet the audience’s needs and preferences. Consequently, both online tabloids prioritise visual elements when creating content. Also, they rely more on multimedia content that provides the visuals for the narrative. Moreover, to keep the audience on the website as much as possible, both tabloids insert a lot of hyperlinks in the news content. These hyperlinks can take readers to other places on the same website. As a result, both have significantly increased their use of multimedia in news reporting. Since sensory news can help attract the attention of media-saturated audiences (Kunelius and Ruusunoksa. 2008), using multimedia storytelling is a good way to attract audiences. Sundar (2000) also suggests that multimedia could integrate news better because of the multiple functions to convey the information. These results are in line with those of previous studies. Tong (2022, p.42) describes that the production and distribution of multimedia content on a global scale has been a common element of online journalism since the 2010s. Similarly, in an

investigation into the cultural changes in news editing rooms at the Tampa News Center, Dupagne and Garrison (2006) found that journalists spent more time on multimedia storytelling and increased their understanding of other platforms. Through these multimedia technologies, new experiences can be created to draw the audience's attention to news issues (Buoziš and Creech, 2018; Jones, 2017). The findings of this study contradict some early studies, which suggested that journalists did not widely use multimedia in online news. For example, Steensen (2011) suggested that online journalism focused primarily on producing, distributing, and writing text in various formats. In his view, multimedia was internet technology's least developed contribution to journalism, and the audience seemed indifferent. Similarly, after an interview with British online news providers, Thurman and Lupton (2008, p350) pointed out that "text was still core." They also researched user behaviour and preferences towards multimedia, and suggested that journalists and editors lacked enthusiasm for its use. However, the results of this study show that although 'text' is still important, it is now fatally lost among severe competition without a compelling visual component. Editors should use multimedia to support their stories. This also confirms Tong's (2022, p.50) view that multimedia content has the potential to become the central and primary storytelling element, forming an immersive and interactive environment for the audience. Both text and multimedia content might hold equally significant roles in narrative presentation.

The results show that tabloids' multimedia storytelling approach, as well as multi-platform distribution illustrate the trend toward convergence. Pavlik and Bridges (2013, p.5) point out that the unique storytelling method emerges in the convergence environment. In addition, consistent with the results, both tabloids create innovative storytelling methods by using a new technology. As Edo (2002, p.32) points out, a new online language that includes text, audio, video and interactivity could promote news updates in an attractive way for the audience.

At the same time, the research results suggest that tabloid journalists are not committed to creating immersive experiences through VR technology. They only use simple editing and production for videos. Although they hope that the audience can participate in the event, they just highlight the emotions of the news actors in the video clip, without providing the audience with an immersive scene. This finding contradicts other studies. For example, Tong (2022) suggests that, in addition to the extensive use of traditional multimedia elements, the news media also express a strong willingness to use innovative tools such as data visualisation drones and virtual reality storytelling. With the rise of immersive technology, many news organisations, including the *BBC* and *The Guardian*, have widely used VR technology as a new way of news reporting (Tong, 2022, p.43). Similarly, Pavlik and Bridges (2013, p.6) emphasise the storytelling of augmented reality and immersion. The advantages of digital storytelling through AR are reflected in its potential to attract the audience and provide more contextualised information.

Furthermore, the results indicate that the majority of online tabloid journalists still use the

traditional tabloid style of storytelling, such as sensationalism and personalisation. At the same time, in the new environment, online tabloids adopt a "hybrid storytelling" narrative method in which traditional narrative styles are combined with new technologies. Storytelling involves a synergy between the narrative styles favoured by traditional media and those styles (multimedia) favoured by new media. This aligns with the findings of Alzamora and Tárcea (2012), which demonstrate that combining all the digital styles together can create a new narrative. Also, most online news narrative studies point to the way in which traditional media expand the content to online platforms. Journalists attempt to use new narratives and new technology to tell stories. Digital media can reuse the old media as a unique form in the digital world (Canavilhas, 2012, p.355).

One critical finding of this study is that although multimedia packaging is extremely important, regardless of the platform and technology used, the first consideration for online tabloids is still the "people", which is more important than all other factors. This means that the content must be audience-centric. Specifically, the human-interest stories that the interviewees described differ from scholars' previous definitions. For example, Hughes's definition of the term "human interest" refers to "chatty little reports of tragic or comic incidents in the lives of the people" (Hughes, 2017, pp.12-13). Langer (1997, p.148) points out the stories of ordinary individuals or groups who had to face adversity that the audience did not know before. However, the categories of human-interest stories shown in the results appear to be broader. This category is not solely related to personal interest but also public interest, referring to what is essential to human beings, what is closely related to human life, and what people want to know. Journalists often link significant matters to people's everyday lives, and stories should offer value to the audience. Additionally, they clarify issues or propose potential solutions to problems. Therefore, even if it is a mundane story, it is necessary to find a human-related angle to narrate it. This shows that when tabloid reporters and editors build engaging news content, each story needs to answer the audience's fundamental question: "Why should we care?" This also tends to bring the topic closer to the everyday life of the audience. This storytelling style helps people easily connect with the story and feel that it is important because their lives are part of the same story. This shows that the public interest in online tabloids aligns more closely with the second aspect of public interest news mentioned by Moore (2007, p.33), which refers to the responsibility to inform, interpret, and analyze. Public interest reporters seek, digest, and extract information to assist the public in forming views and making decisions. Throughout the history of the tabloid, human interest stories have been designed from their earliest incarnations to attract readers and cement reader loyalty. These reports are strategic in this regard Alan Fine and White, (2002). The human perspective seems to have become even more important in the online environment. Overall, the results show that multimedia content is as important as text for online tabloids. However, online tabloid news must be produced from a people perspective, and news should be focused on the people.

As discussed above, in addition to the key strategies for constructing compelling news content

in online tabloids, this study also shows changes in the homepage strategy since the homepage is the most critical channel for the two tabloids to attract audiences. The findings indicate that online tabloid homepages focus on visuals and readability. On the one hand, the tabloid homepage is a highly visual medium. The balance between text and pictures has long been broken, and pictures and videos occupy the primary position on the homepage. This indicates a growing visual trend. These results partly disagree with those of Casado-del-Río and García-González (2021) who point out that the homepage of Spanish online newspapers (elpais.com, elmundo.es, abc.es, lavanguardia.com, and elperiodico.com) display a balance between text and images, and that the role of images in online news is ahead of other multimedia formats. However, although the British online tabloid is primarily visual, this study shows that video is also one of the features found on tabloids' homepages. This demonstrates that the homepage of online tabloids uses more multimedia. Reporters emphasised the automatic play of 10-second animations and vivid videos on the home page, which is aimed at attracting readers' attention. Indeed, this seems to have become a new feature of online tabloids and a unique way of attracting audiences because animation does not commonly appear on the homepage of broadsheet newspapers.

On the other hand, the readability of the homepage is very important. This includes constantly updated content and a good layout to enable readers to stay on the homepage as much as possible and to navigate easily between various news stories. These results align with Hindman's (2015) findings, which show that websites with more content and frequent updates are better at building traffic. A large amount of news is a necessary condition for the growth of the audience. However, few studies have examined the readability of the homepage layout. For example, *MailOnline* is famous for its long sidebar down the right-hand side of the website, which mainly reports on celebrities and scandals. Journalists also suggest it is an important way to attract the audience to stay on the *MailOnline*. At the same time, as the results show, it is important to update content and provide a constant stream of content, but the key is to pay attention to the good mix of content on the home page. Interviewees always use audience analytics to adjust the content on the homepage to ensure the correct story combination. Additionally, the homepage update involves not only the content but also the layout of *The Sun's* homepage. *The Sun* always sets up special topics at the top of the homepage for popular or significant events. As the audience's attention to the event decreases, they will change the layout again to cater to the audience.

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, tabloids strive to engage with new audiences, enhance content visibility, and respond promptly to evolving news consumption behaviors. They have turned to social media to build their online audiences. Social media channels, especially Facebook, have become a major distribution channel for *Sun Online* and *MailOnline*, driving additional traffic to news websites. The ultimate goal of social media strategy is that viewers will stay on the tabloid website by clicking on the news link on social media, thereby increasing the traffic to the website. As Hong (2012, pp.69-70) noted, social media is very important because the way viewers read news online is changing. Online users learn about

news through recommendations from social media. Instead of going directly to the homepage, readers often select stories through external links to enter the site.

Both tabloids have social media teams. As far as their marketing strategy is concerned, they use social media to optimise homepage news and accelerate the transmission of news. Social media managers emphasise that they will look for "internet-friendly news." In other words, they will monitor social media trends and topics and then look for news on the homepage that can be successfully transmitted on social media. For example, *The Sun's* social media team centres their attention on the preferences of their Facebook audience. They choose stories from their homepage to share on social media, guided by the demands of their audience. Also, the results indicate that videos and images in tabloid news play an important role in reaching audiences on social media. However, headlines above news links are more important to attract users. The interviewees also pointed out that the headline on the news link is not "clickbait" but rather exists to arouse the audience's curiosity. This is due to the limitations of social platforms. In fact, they are unwilling to produce clickbait because using clickbait or misleading articles with attractive titles may weaken the newspaper's brand and waste readers' trust. However, these titles are often controversial and attractive. These results reflect those of Nienstedt et al. (2013), who found that social media teams are the next generation in newsrooms. They can bring significant value by leveraging the content that newsrooms have to offer, helping them attract attention and traffic.

Another important impact of social media strategies is on news production. The results illustrate that this social media strategy is two-way. It cannot only accelerate news dissemination and marketing on the homepage but also affects the news agenda of the tabloids. In terms of their impact on tabloid news production, social media teams research audience data to plan and design engaging content that reaches a wider audience and engages followers with news content. They provide reporters and editors with trends in topics that match the interests of their online readers to create news accordingly. Similarly, Nienstedt et al. (2013) found that newsroom staff use social media as a research tool. This is also an essential strategy for them to compete with other media. When news topics and trends begin to spread on social media, the social media team of the tabloid should work with the news team. They ensure that the reporter team understands the content to supplement the work done by tabloid reporters before the news is published. The more people access and share news on social media, the more journalists are informed about published content from social media analysis. These results are supported by Paulussen & Harder (2014), who found that the social media team does much more than promote the work of their news organisation. News teams try to solicit feedback and opinions from social media and promote their work. It is undoubtedly a two-way process. The author believes that the tabloids' adaptation to social media logic is evident through social media teams providing popular trends to tabloid journalists and collaborating with news teams to create articles. The impact of social media on the tabloid news agenda and how news editors face social media feedback will be discussed in the next section.

Furthermore, the findings show that the Google platform is an essential channel for tabloids to attract traffic. SEO is already an important part of news routine practices. For example, the SEO team has three meetings with the news department daily. *The Sun* has the largest SEO team in the UK. The editors of *MailOnline* complained that the Google platform is not friendly for them since Google doesn't rank their news highly. They also acknowledge the importance of SEO to them. Therefore, both tabloids take full advantage of SEO in their journalism practices, with SEO playing a significant role in media sites and their web traffic. These results reflect those of Giomelakis and Veglis (2015), who also find that the media industry has wholly entered the digital era and the competition is also intensifying, and it seems essential for online news to use SEO as a helpful tool to attract more readers in the newsroom. Some studies (Dick, 2011; Prawira and Rizkiansyah, 2018; Giomelakis and Veglis, 2015) indicated that journalists and editors were forced or passive towards the use of SEO. However, the results of this study show that journalists and editors today are not forced to use SEO and they are even positive about its use. At the same time, compared with other studies, the results of this study emphasise the importance of finding trends, a daily priority for all tabloid journalists. They choose the topics they want to include, that is, the trends that are beneficial to them, and promote these trends to different news teams. One unanticipated result is that the trends covered by the tabloids include not only some popular search terms, including the same search terms as the BBC, but also some further topics they pay special attention to. For example, *The Sun* always focuses on topics such as football and entertainment since these most often appear in the tabloids. This is because, in a fiercely competitive environment, they need to find topics that are searched extensively. However, they must also focus on themes the tabloids can continue to win. They also make predictions about trends. Some topics may not be popular at the present moment, but there are predictions that they will gain popularity in the future. In response, tabloids optimize their news coverage to include these topics. The SEO team suggests that the news team do some articles to increase the probability of being searched and obtaining traffic.

Many recent studies explain that SEO optimises the content of articles in order to promote good ranking, such as putting keywords in the title and adding a large number of hyperlinks in articles to enable Google to capture signals (Dick, 2011; Tong, 2022). The results show that the main elements of SEO strategies are the same as those described in most studies, but there are also significant differences. The interviewees emphasized their work on on-page optimization, which includes factors directly related to the website, such as keywords, appropriate content, and internal link structure. However, SEO strategies in tabloids are not limited to those mentioned above. One unanticipated result is that search engine optimisation requires journalists to create articles based on search trends and keywords, which impacts the news agenda. This is rarely mentioned in other studies.

A remarkable finding is that audience metrics have been widely used in all news practices of digital tabloids. Whether journalists are building a compelling news story, using social media and SEO strategies, or adjusting the content on the homepage, these are important strategies

and tools for journalists and editors. Journalists monitor traffic in real-time to understand audience needs and adjust news accordingly. These results also accord with recent studies indicating that journalists often track the audience movements of their websites and use those results to change their practices or website design (Quinn and Trench, 2002). These findings seem consistent with other research, which found that organisations that are more competitive or view their audience as a source of capital are also more likely to use audience metrics (Lowrey and Woo, 2010; Tandoc, 2014). On the contrary, early research on audience metrics in UK newsrooms showed that audience metrics had a little direct impact, as news organisations did not monitor clicks in real-time (MacGregor, 2007). Overall, audience metrics have a strong presence in tabloid newsrooms, and the findings show that "clicks" play a role in the editorial process. In the tabloid newsroom, audience metrics directly impact storytelling, news placement on the home page and even the news agenda.

Moreover, audience metrics can show which stories are not performing well in terms of traffic. Tabloid reporters think that if a vital story does not get the audience's attention, they will re-edit it to make it compelling and accessible. These results are consistent with Karlsson and Clerwall's (2013, p.72) findings, which showed that if a story attracts traffic, it will remain on the homepage longer and be modified or updated. However, if an article is predicted to appeal to readers based on its news value but fails to do so, the editors will attempt to revise it. They can try a different title and change the images. In addition, an interesting finding is that tabloids use audience clicks to study why the news is popular, and they try to learn and copy the writing methods of this news to write similar popular news.

Many scholars have emphasised the importance of audience participation. News websites actively offer opportunities to interact with their audiences. They aim to encourage people to participate in news-making. However, these research results indicate that the importance of participation is different for the two online tabloids. The results show four main ways that tabloids interact with the audience: comment sections, emails to reporters, social media, and polls. However, because there are a lot of offensives, uncivilised comments, maintaining the comment section takes too much effort. Therefore, *Sun Online* has turned off the comment section. This is a significant change to *Sun Online's* interactive function.

On the contrary, most reporters in *Mail Online* believe that the comment section is an essential way for their website to interact with the audience. The comment section provides an ideal opportunity for journalists or editors to learn about audience opinions, requirements, and interests. The comment section can be seen as a channel for readers to submit their experiences and ideas for news. The moderator contacts reporters if the audience expresses a wish in the comments to contribute expertise or materials to the news. This is also the way for the audience to participate in the news. Moreover, journalists can learn readers' feedback and opinions on the news from their comments, and they are also affected by the user comments. As Tandoc and Vos (2016) stated, participatory formats offer journalists an effective way to directly reach out to their readership and allow users to express their views and evaluate new

products. To some extent, the readers' comments influence the tabloids' news agenda. For example, one *MailOnline* community moderator said that:

'When the comments editor seized the specific news item, many comments meant they should follow up. It's most likely that they will follow up with new report on this issue the following day if this trend continues. So if the second story also attracts many comments, we should focus on such stories more in the future.' (*MailOnline* community moderator)

Therefore, from this aspect, the results are consistent with those of Saltzis (2012) who suggests that the growing feedback impacts journalists' work since journalists can learn the audience's response to their news. News organisations consistently monitor audience comments and feedback to provide the most praiseworthy stories. If the audience is highly interested in particular topics, journalists will contribute more resources and news coverage to these topics to reply to the online readers' requirements. In addition, *Mail Online* has a community moderator to engage or interact with readers and journalists. The community moderator is responsible for managing comments and conveying the audience requirements to journalists to connect the audience with journalists. Also, the results show that they need to delete some offensive, abusive, obscene comments to prevent news actors from suing them. These results agree with the findings of other studies. As Domingo et al. (2008, p.338) pointed out, because the amount of feedback has become so widespread, the moderator has emerged, a new type of editor devoted to managing audience feedback. More importantly, the moderator ensures that readers' comments on the news website are not offensive. Saltzis (2012, p.471) also describes that this is related to the issue of responsibility and legal accountability about material managed by news organisations. Many organisations have always been concerned about the danger of defamatory reader comments. Even though their employees do not leave these comments, they still can be seen as their published material. Therefore, this is why *Sun Online* has removed this interactive function. At the same time, the moderators of the *Mail Online* also want to maintain a harmonious environment. Since user comments are often seen as an indicator of public opinion, journalists worry that offensive and hateful comments could influence public discourse (Tandoc et al., 2017).

In addition, sending emails to journalists is a primary way of interaction. Both online tabloids allow the audience to send their stories, ideas, and suggestions to journalists. On the one hand, tabloid journalists allow readers to send their stories or materials about unexpected news, but they do not encourage readers to send them criticism or suggestions. They are unwilling to accept readers' feedback and criticism about their news work. This finding illustrates that the tabloids do not fully use audience feedback to improve their news work. This result contradicts that of Saltzis (2012, p.471), who suggested that some news websites, such as *guardian.co.uk*, have used audience feedback as a way of enabling them to participate in the broader discussion. This participation can benefit journalists, enabling them to expand their horizons and helping them to realise the broader influence of their news work.

Moreover, journalists use social media to conduct polls and urge readers to comment, enabling journalists to understand readers' wishes and opinions. This is consistent with Moosa's view that the possibility of user participation is usually limited to opinion polls, comment sections, and social media (Moosa, 2014). Journalists from both online tabloids have explained that their main motivation for encouraging audience to comment on social media is to promote the dissemination of news through these platforms. Consequently, even though *The Sun Online* have closed the comment section, readers can comment on its news articles through social media because the comments on this platform are not under their control.

This finding aligns with the observations made by Karlsson, et al (2015), who found that news organisations have questioned the worth of comment sections, leading to the shift of participatory spaces to non-proprietary platforms like Twitter and Facebook. Assmann and Diakopoulos (2017) also suggest that news organisation monitor audience metrics and interact with audiences on social media. Audience engagement editors hope to encourage the audience to participate, either as a resource or to activate the audience. Hansen and Goligoski (2018) emphasise that journalists need to initiate influence through social media and personal participation in community events and meetings. However, online tabloids primarily use social media to promote the audience's news sharing. They do not use social media to build communities, but are mainly interested in the commercial rather than the democratic benefits of audience participation. Overall, this study shows that the *MailOnline* provides more opportunities for audience participation than *Sun Online*. However, neither of the two news websites' reporters are willing to listen to the audience's opinions on their news, nor do they respond positively to interactions with their audiences.

5.4 Finding: Theme 2 - News value and news judgment of digital tabloids

5.4.1 Changes in news value of digital tabloids

The interview results show that the news value is affected by audience, platform (social media and Google) and fierce market competition. Six interviewees (Editors 2, 6, 7 and Journalists 1, 2, 3,) thought that exclusivity is the most important news value, while four interviewees (Editor 1, 4 and Journalists 1, 2) believe that the timeliness is the most important news value:

'The exclusive story is the most important thing to us. If you get something exclusive, you own it first, so you can put it on the internet. The audience will come to our website for more updates on the story because they know it is our exclusive. In theory, if you own it first, then Google will give you a higher ranking when people search for it on Google. It makes our websites so much stronger.' (*MailOnline* Editor, Editor 1)

‘We have been competing with our rivals for readers. It is about who can be the first website to report the news, such as terrorist attacks or a famous person dying. The first is very, very important. It means that you have a better ranking on Google.’ (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 7)

Two editors (Editors 2, 5) and one journalist (Journalist 1) thought that human interest is important news value. One *Mail Online* editor said:

‘Stories that people are interested in are of important news value. These human-interest stories are related to them and support them. You know stories they care about.’ (*MailOnline* Editor, Editor 2)

The results show that under the influence of social media, ‘shareability’ has also become an important news value of online tabloids:

‘If a news can generate traffic on social media, it is also the news value we consider.’ (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 6)

Surprisingly, five interviewees (Journalists 1, 3 and Editor 1, 2, 4) indicate that important events are also vital for online tabloids:

‘Some important news events, for example, the war in Ukraine or the COVID-19 pandemic, are of important news values.’ (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 4)

5.4.2 The impact of digital strategies on the news agenda

As previously mentioned, although tabloids use social media and SEO as a marketing strategy, journalists often use social media and Google as research tools, especially when constructing stories. The results suggest that both strategies have an impact on the tabloid news agenda.

5.4.2.1 SEO influences the news agenda

The investigation shows that SEO has an impact on the news agenda. Two interviewees (Editor 4 and Editor 7) explained that the SEO team would tell reporters the popular trends and keywords, and then reporters would report these topics from different angles. An SEO editor from *The Sun* Online said:

‘We identify beneficial trends from different angles and convey them to various news teams. These trends are pivotal. Reporters then craft stories centered around these keywords, seeking unique angles. For example, stories about family matters enable us to generate more content within this trend. Reporters will look for these and make their

stories around this theme. Importantly, traffic is a paramount concern for us; Traffic is as good as gold.' (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor7)

Therefore, the interviewees affirmed that SEO affects the tabloid news agenda to a certain extent, because the SEO team focuses the news stories on people's search terms. As an editor said, SEO enables us to guide the news agenda in a way to really drive traffic, not merely an appealing story.

5.4.2.2 social media influences the news agenda

The findings illustrate that social media has a particular impact on the news agenda of online tabloids. One editor from *The Sun Online* editor said:

'It has a big impact on the news agenda when a story goes viral on social media, bringing us incredible traffic. We prioritize making news that can attract a lot of traffic on Facebook, as these are the stories people like to click and read. The social media team knows which stories are useful to our readers. Our reporter teams are encouraged to prioritize specific stories, particularly those already popular on social media.' (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 6).

5.4.3 Journalist's news judgment is paramount

5.4.3.1 SEO and journalists' judgment

SEO is value-neutral. If it is implemented consciously and wisely, it will be beneficial to journalism (Richmond,2008). However, these are editors' choices. Therefore, the choices of online tabloid editors and how they use SEO are worth exploring. Four of the interviewees (Journalist 1, and Editors2, 5, 7) explained that the opinions of the SEO team would be considered and adapted according to the situation, but the editor's judgment was paramount. As noted by an editor at *The Sun Online*, their decisions are based on SEO's suggestion in tandem with the editor's professional judgment:

'Now SEO is very much part of the fabric of the newsroom. There would still be resistance if it were 10 years ago, but it's different now. There is the content they ask for that we do specifically for them. If SEO requires us to do something, we will do something because this is big news. Then, we will optimize the news content according to their suggestions so that we might have a high ranking on Google and get more traffic for that story. However, in some cases, reporters reject SEO's requirements due to legal concerns or the need to balance resources. Sometimes, we do not have time to do this because they will ask for a lot of things. Reporters need to make judgments based on their professional knowledge and the information that the SEO team sees on Google software. That is a good decision' (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 6)

Another editor of *The Sun Online* indicated:

‘Crucially the SEO team's advice is just that - advice. Editors are absolutely able to disregard SEO advice if they feel it diminishes the story in any way. It's vital that wherever a balance needs to be struck between audience development and journalistic integrity, the latter must always win.’ (*The Sun Online* Editor, editor 5)

Therefore, although SEO plays a significant role in generating traffic, the decision-making power of journalists compromises its effectiveness. The SEO team just makes suggestions. An SEO editor described:

‘The news agenda is still their (online tabloids) prerogative whether to use that story or not. When we are at the conference, we will pitch in our ideas and put our ideas to the head of the digital editor. However, it is their decision whether to do it or not in the end.’ (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 7)

From the perspective of these reporters and editors, SEO opinions have become more important than ever in recent years because online news outlets need high visibility in search engines. However, it does not determine editorial decision-making. Therefore, reporters and editors often consider the opinions of the SEO team, but they will make judgments based on their professional knowledge. The editor's judgment always comes first.

5.4.3.2 Social media and journalists’ judgment

The results suggest that editors and journalists prioritise some social media stories, but they still rely on their own journalistic judgment:

‘Indeed, the reporter team will be asked to prioritise stories that are popular on social media. Although we can tell what people are clicking on, we do have to be more mindful of the fact that we need to look like a serious news website since we are like the shop front for The Sun.’ (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 6)

‘I know that some types of stories will appear on Facebook and bring a lot of traffic, but these stories will not necessarily bring clicks on the home page. What's more, Facebook sometimes changes its algorithm, which is hard to control. We cannot just consider the popular news on Facebook. We must realise that there is a good story combination. It balances the combination of traffic and important news.’ (*MailOnline* Editor, Editor 2)

5.4.3.3 Audience metrics and journalists' judgment

Six interviewees (Editors 2, 3, 5, 6 and Journalists 1, 2) suggested that tabloid reporters and editors need to consider traffic, but it is not the only factor. They contended that journalists' news judgment is crucial and advocated for a balance between user preferences and news judgment:

'As mentioned previously, we are always looking to increase recirculation, dwell time and repeat users, so this data is certainly taken into account when considering what our readers are going to want to read. However, it is important that we are not edited by data alone. A good story is a good story, whatever the platform. Some of the most-read stories on our website have been articles that data alone wouldn't have suggested would have driven great traffic. So, no matter how much data we have, our journalist experience and news judgment is still the most vital tool we have.' (*The Sun Online* Editor, editor 5)

'Huge, Huge, Huge, so when I am editing, I am constantly looking at the metrics board. I want to see which stories are the best read. But I have my own judgment. My judgment comes first and then I look at the traffic. I'm gonna also going to consider what an important story is. The most important things in the country's daily life are food safety, politics, and many other necessary things to let people know. For example, you must cover political stories such as the Ukrainian war, even if they are not popular among readers. It's crucial to inform the audience about this important information. We should do that.' (*MailOnline* Editor, Editor 2).

'It is a little complicated. There are many factors to consider. If you want to be a serious news site, you need to treat a big story like Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a massive global story. So we did. When all the news websites report those events, we also need to report those things. We also have live feedback from the readers of what they are interested or not interested in. We will refer to the traffic. At the end of the day, we also need to maintain good traffic. If we ignore the audience's needs, it is not in our interests. If we are only based on traffic, everything in the Sun is just death and sex. Stories about death and about sex are very popular. If we just created the homepage based on what was getting the most clicks, it would all be sex and death at the top. You have a mix of lots of different things. Balance is very important. we need the right mix of news.' (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 6)

'... you see how much traffic the story is getting. This requires a balance. Sometimes, the audience is crazy, but we can't lose our judgment. We are trying to establish the right balance between the two, which is very important. There's a lot of important things we have to report.' (*MailOnline* Editor, Editor 3)

5.5.5.4 Adherence to the traditional gatekeeper role of UGC

Six interviewees (Editors 1, 2,3,6 and Journalists 1, 2) pointed out that the audience can contribute stories, but they cannot write the stories. Also, most readers can submit stories, materials, rather than news content. Journalists are more concerned about stories or information submitted by witnesses of unexpected events. They are also interested in unique or sensational experiences they were unaware of. This implies that audience participation in news often occurs in the first stage (information collection):

‘Yes, we do, for instance, if a crime occurs in London, then the editor will place an instruction on the website: if you witness this crime, please contact our reporter or send them your videos or audio recordings or the information you have gathered.’ (*MailOnline* Editor, Editor 1)

‘It has to be good content (video, picture), and it has to be worth it for us to pay for it. If it were the kind of video all over social media, we would not pay for it. If you have live news video and exclusive content from the scene of a massive news story, you are definitely going to attract a huge audience to your website.’ (*MailOnline* Journalist, Journalist 1)

However, another editor contended that it was not common for them to use reader stories in producing news and that it was only in certain cases that they did so. They mostly adhere to the traditional approach of collecting exclusive material from readers through phone calls:

‘No, we might occasionally do something. For example, readers say someone had a very large baby. I reckon this is the biggest baby in Britain. We might ask the readers, do you think you have a bigger baby than this? Send us your photos, and then we will interview them. We may include them in a story the next day. They are not really submitting content. We maintain a tips hotline for individuals to call in if they have witnessed an incident or observed a celebrity's misconduct. If they have captured photos or videos, we often purchase such materials from readers as they can serve as the basis for a story.’ (*MailOnline* editor, editor 2)

‘At the end of every online article, you will find a phone number and an email address where readers can call or email to share their stories. It's a more traditional approach to news gathering. This is user-generated content in an old-school format, and we want readers to physically call us or email us with their stories so we can conduct proper interviews. We are not just looking for quick comments or superficial feedback. We are dedicated to gathering news through our system. If it might encourage a lot of people to ring in with an ‘exclusive, that's what *The Sun* is known for.’ (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 6)

‘I don't think users influence tabloid news production.’ (*MailOnline editor*, editor 3)

As mentioned above, although journalists allow readers to submit stories or experiences, the majority of reader submissions are not news content. This means that the audience can only submit some material, but not participate in news production.

5.5 Analysis and Discussion

The results of this study reveal that the news values of most tabloid journalists and editors are notably influenced by the platform, traffic, and audience preferences. The most compelling finding is the importance of exclusive news as a news value for online tabloids. This is because exclusive news can achieve a high ranking on Google and high research on social media. This also means that exclusive news can perform well on the digital platform and help tabloids attract more traffic. Furthermore, the timeliness of news is also a significant news value, predominantly driven by market pressure. Tabloids engage in fierce competition with their competitors for readers in the digital media environment. This finding is consistent with that of Schultz (2007), who argues that six kinds of news values dominate: timeliness, relevance, identity, conflict, sensation, and exclusivity. These results affirm that all the news values discussed by online tabloid journalists are included in the list of news values devised by Harcup and O'Neill (2017). Interestingly, Harcup and O'Neill (2017, p.1480) also emphasize the importance of shareability. In addition, human interest stories also hold critical value, as all journalists discussed news value in the interviews centered on catering to people's interests and concerns. This value is most obvious in the interview with the *MailOnline's* reporter. It is well known that human interest stories have always been a traditional news value of tabloids. Additionally, unusual news is also a news value tabloids are very interested in and essential to consider, corroborating the findings of Harcup and O'Neill (2017).

Another important finding is the explicit statement made by the tabloid editor that stories performing well on social media would be given priority in production. Consequently, ‘shareability’ has become a vital news value of the tabloid. As previously discussed, social media is now a critical marketing channel for tabloid websites. They must cooperate with social media to attract audiences to their home page. Bell (2015) has stated that the critical question for news organizations regarding traffic goals is determining what is most effective on Facebook. Therefore, both the *MailOnline* and *The Sun Online* editors believe that ‘shareability’ is crucial. Just as the editor of *The Sun Online* described, social media often feature human interest stories or entertainment trivia, which are, nonetheless, still considered news. This necessitates a consideration of news that can be shared on social media. This finding resonates with Harcup and O'Neill (2017, p.1479), who contend ‘Any study of contemporary news values must now also consider the impact of social media on the traditional division between the roles of journalists as active (producers, selectors, gatekeepers) and of audiences as passive (receivers, consumers)’. The shareability may

increasingly become an important consideration in the newsroom (Bell, 2015). Moreover, the present results indicate that breaking events or big events are also important news values for tabloids. Such events improve people's understanding of social issues, have an impact on people's daily lives, and increase people's insight and knowledge. The event attribute is related to the democratic role of the media.

In addition, social media and SEO also have an impact on the news practice and news value of tabloids due to their algorithms. As discussed earlier, tabloids depend on social media and Google for distribution, which are essential components of the digital tabloid strategy. The findings illustrate that online tabloid reporters and editors use social media and SEO not only for distribution but also as tools for their research. Since many visitors come from social media and Google to visit the tabloid homepage, these channels cannot be ignored in terms of traffic. The editors of the two tabloids acknowledged that social media and Google impact the news agenda of digital tabloids. This is mainly because the social media team will inform reporters about popular topics or (internet-friendly news) based on their platform data analysis so that editors can prioritise news production on these topics. Similarly, the SEO team will inform reporters about the topics and keywords that people frequently search for on Google, enabling reporters to create news content around these key terms. Journalists and editors may consider the suggestions the social media and the SEO team gives and prioritise story topics transmitted well on social media or with numerous Google searches. Therefore, this will have an impact on the news agenda. However, most interviewees assert that the suggestions from the social media and SEO teams are just suggestions. Their own news judgment is the most important because they need to ensure balanced content on the homepage. The tabloid's homepage is a digital storefront, so it cannot be all content with good traffic performance on social media or Google. They need to consider an appropriate combination between popular tabloid content on other platforms and the tabloid's inherent news agenda. This finding is consistent with that of Baym (2013), who points out that newspapers do not need (and should not) turn their websites entirely into social media content, but they do need articles that are suitable for social media on an ongoing basis. Editors also emphasised that Facebook often changes its algorithm, leading to unpredictable fluctuations in tabloid traffic. This concern is consistent with Hindman's (2015, p.21) observations, highlighting that although social media metrics can help journalists better understand their audiences, over-reliance on social media to promote transmission may render organizations hostage to the platform. Online newspapers are vulnerable to the impact of their recommendation strategies and sudden algorithm changes. In addition, the results revealed that while SEO is important for tabloids, journalists are willing to reject team suggestions if these compromise the quality of a news story or pose legal risks. Journalists are often constrained by time limitations in complying with the SEO team's demands, underscoring that reporter's judgment is the most important when considering an SEO strategy. Quality remains of paramount importance, with journalists unwilling to adopt strategies that would diminish the quality of the news or compromise their integrity. Patterson and Urbanski (2006) suggest that fundamental qualities of traditional journalism, such as accuracy and fairness in reporting, are critical to maintain the trust of news audiences over the long term. The investigation in

this study indicates that SEO suggestions can significantly increase traffic, but they also have the potential to harm the quality and accuracy of news, thereby undermining trust in journalism. Additionally, specific issues, cases, or events at certain moments may undermine trust in the authority of the news industry, often due to less noble motives such as the pursuit of exclusive news (Patterson and Urbanski, 2006, p.829)". As mentioned in the literature review, many scholars criticize tabloids for their low quality, inaccuracy, and unethical nature driven by profit. For example, Popović & Popović (2014, p.18) suggest that the deepest motivation of tabloid journalism is profit, not morality, leading to low-quality content and unethical reporting techniques. This shapes readers' worldviews into virtual or false realities (Popović & Popović, 2014). However, the attitude of online tabloid editors toward adopting the suggestions of the SEO team in this research demonstrates their commitment to ensuring news quality, accuracy, and trust. This partly aligns with Deuze's (2005) viewpoint that ethics and credibility are central in discussions with tabloid editors about their work and its importance, reflecting the meaning they attribute to their jobs. In addition, social media and Google have an impact on news value, news selection, news practice, and editorial decision-making. Online tabloids prioritise news that transmits well on social media. However, they still prioritise their news judgments, and they do not completely rely on platform algorithms to make these judgments.

In addition, this study also found that tabloid journalists' decision-making is affected by many aspects and factors, such as technological, commercial, and audience preferences. This finding is consistent with that of Donsbach (2010), who finds that news value is not the only factor guiding the news decision of the newsroom. Many recent studies show that the growing influence of audience metrics in newsrooms has led to a change in journalism practice and newsroom culture. (e.g., Nguyen, 2013; Tandoc, 2014; Tandoc and Thomas, 2015; Tong, 2022). Indeed, audience analytic are widely used in online tabloids and newsrooms, and audience metrics are important in the editing process. However, the impact of audience metrics on decision-making is complex and multifaceted. Firstly, the editors admitted that they include audience metrics in news practice due to the commercial nature of tabloid news outlets. Some interviewees illustrated this by mentioning their keen pursuit of traffic and the establishment of traffic goals. As one SEO Editor succinctly put it, "Traffic is like gold." Therefore, editors include traffic to interact with the audience or feed their needs. On the one hand, online tabloid reporters indeed take audience metrics into consideration, which has a specific impact on news decision-making. On the other hand, audience metrics affect how journalists treat specific news stories. In this respect, the most common way they deal with news is that they may increase or update reports or move the news to the top of the home page if a topic has good traffic. Surprisingly, they also learn and imitate those high-traffic stories, applying those successful writing methods to other news. As the editors themselves said that if they ignore the audience's needs, it is not in line with the interests of the tabloid company because the tabloid is a commercial media. Indeed, the users' attention is an essential factor affecting news reporting. As noted by Zamith (2016), journalism cannot easily ignore the audience's interests and behaviors, as it is a public-oriented profession. When homepage traffic declines and readers increasingly get news through social media, no commercial media

organisation can afford not to play the traffic game. Therefore, reporters adjust their news coverage in line with audience metrics to meet the demands of their readers. However, the results also indicate that, despite the influence of audience metrics on news practices and decisions, they do not serve as a decisive factor. Journalists' experience and news judgment are still their most important tools. This result is in line with those of previous studies. Kristensen (2021, p.10) points out that professional news judgment is still considered the most important asset because it is used to initially select news, explain clicks, make changes, and balance click input with other factors. However, this finding contrasts with that of Tandoc (2015), who suggests that audience metrics have become a decisive criterion of news selection and judgment. As discussed above, journalists and editors believe that they can now take a variety of traffic into account, not only the traffic on their home page but also social media traffic and traffic on Google. However, news judgment remains the primary consideration regardless of the platform or data. A compelling story is often the most important. For example, as mentioned in the interviews, some good stories with high traffic were created without considering audience metrics. One interesting finding is that almost all editors mentioned the word balance. Although traffic is vital to them, their news judgment is more important. Therefore, they must balance user preferences with journalists' professional news judgments. From this perspective, they still firmly hold the role of news gatekeepers.

This inclination towards balance and insistence of journalists' professional news judgment is a recognition that audience preferences are often irrational. If they only focus on traffic and cater to the audience's preferences, all the content on the home page will be about death and sex, which could potentially alienate their audience and damage the news content's quality on the homepage. As Tong (2022, pp. 21-22) elucidates, the online audience's apolitical appetite for sensational and entertaining content may result in serious journalism's decline and the dramatic rise of tabloid media, including sports and celebrity news. Many scholars have raised this concern. For example, Turow (2005, p.110) contends that newspapers must consider the "long-term loss of cultural capital" caused by the pursuit of short-term commercial gains in the form of higher click rates. In addition, another factor motivating journalists to adhere to their news judgment is that news decision-making is primarily driven by journalists' news values and professional principles. There is a consistent emphasis on the necessity of reporting important news in the public interest, even if the news does not attract much traffic. The intention is to disseminate vital information to the audience and give them the opportunity to access the truth. Several editors have made it clear that they are very focused on good stories, and they will report the big stories that all the online broadsheets are reporting too. Almost all online tabloid editors firmly adhere to their news ideals and their role as information providers in democratic countries. For example, one *Mail Online* editor stressed that he would consider the most critical things in the country's daily life, such as food safety, politics, and other important issues in the public interest. This shows that this study is partially different from the arguments stated by Skovsgaard (2014) because Skovsgaard (2014) believes that tabloid journalism focuses less on public service principles compared to other media types and professional values such as objectivity and the democratic role are also less effectively implemented as measures of public service ideals. However, this research found

that online tabloids also place great emphasis on public service and democratic functions. Journalists in online tabloids understand the importance of keeping the public informed about important events, information, and political affairs. They are also committed to safeguarding and cultivating citizens' right to know, which is a fundamental aspect of democratic principles. The results of this study also failed to corroborate Basto's (2017) view that tabloid journalism replaces public interest issues with human interest stories, thereby diminishing the quality of public discourse and potentially posing a threat to democracy by fueling cynicism and a lack of interest in politics. Furthermore, Skovsgaard (2014) suggests that tabloid journalism is reputed to prioritize money over public service principles, resulting in tabloid reporters facing greater commercial demands in their everyday jobs compared to other journalists. This study found that although online tabloids prioritize traffic and report entertainment and human interest news to cater to audience preferences due to their commercial nature, they also appear to uphold their democratic responsibilities. Also, this finding is contrary to a previous study, which suggested that measuring the impact of news coverage by looking at traffic or clicks would lead to pursuing the interests of the audience rather than the public interest (Anderson, 2011).

Therefore, tabloid reporters emphasise the importance of achieving the correct news mix that balances traffic and editorial judgment. This balance is mainly reflected in the news content combination on the homepage. Surprisingly, tabloid editors want to avoid the over-entertainment of their news websites and project a more serious image. They emphasised the need to incorporate big news stories on their home page. They need to mix serious news with entertainment that the audience likes. This result is consistent with Karlsson and Clerwall's (2013, p.75) research, who point out that both broadsheets and tabloids have proved the importance of mixing and balancing different types of content. Audience metrics are used for internal discussions about the composition of homepage content. Therefore, this study suggests that tabloids have not entirely yielded to algorithms and audience preferences.

Moreover, this study demonstrates that audience participation does not significantly influence the news production process. Neither of the two tabloids offers audience opportunities to collaborate with journalists on news gathering and production. Therefore, the audience cannot directly participate in news-gathering, news selection, and news presentation. Specifically, when tabloid journalists receive audience emails, they prefer to ring readers to ask about their personal experiences or information about the breaking news in detail. Therefore, journalists stuck to traditional ways of gathering information. Furthermore, they allow readers to send them personal experiences and pictures or videos provided by witnesses about breaking or unexpected events such as crime, natural disasters, and celebrity gossip. Some material can be seen as the story's basis and developed into a story by journalists and some materials such as photos and pictures can be added to the report.

Therefore, both online tabloids control the format for UGC provision and do not empower readers to provide self-organising content. Even if readers contribute some materials, they are

not presented in the same way as articles produced by journalists. These findings partly agree with Örnebring's (2008) research, which analyzed two tabloids' user-generated content (*The Sun* and *Aftonbladet*). He pointed out that users can produce popular culture-oriented or personal/everyday life-oriented content (traditional tabloid categories) rather than news/informational content (Örnebring, 2008, p.783). Only the audience's photos of breaking news events have a similar status to material produced by news organisations. Also, this finding is consistent with that of Tong (2022, p.57), who also found that UGC has not significantly changed news values and practices, as journalists are unwilling to include UGC in their news coverage, and often they treat UGC as a kind of amateur material. Also, this finding is consistent with that of Tong (2022, p.57), who found that UGC has not significantly changed news values and practices. Journalists are often unwilling to include UGC in their news coverage and tend to treat it as amateur material. Moreover, news organisations have largely upheld their journalistic culture while providing participation opportunities for their audience. Upholding professional standards remains the core journalistic role of the "gatekeepers" who decide what news content appears in online newspapers. Online newspapers still stick to their 'old media model' regarding news production. One unexpected result is that, in some cases, journalists are unwilling to accept users' criticism or suggestions because they think most citizens are unprofessional. This aligns with that of Robinson's (2012, p.70) assertion that journalists rely on cultivating this closed culture to maintain the institutional authority of the media in society. However, this finding contradicts Bruns's (2012) research, which suggests that media organisations open their "gate" by encouraging general readership to participate in news stories and interact with journalists. These changes in the gate-keeping process illustrate that the relationship between journalists and audiences is more shared and indicate that news is becoming a dialogue rather than a speech.

This present results show that this form of UGC is more likely to attract an audience and chase traffic rather than create a more open journalistic culture. Although both tabloids encourage audiences to provide feedback and interaction with already-produced material, they do not want audiences to have any real effect on the news process. The users cannot participate in the core of news production at each stage. This result is in line with those of previous studies, such as Paulussen et al. (2007), who suggest that the economy necessity and pressure lead online news to shift towards a more participatory type of journalism. However, the traditional journalistic norms which adhere to a 'top down' approach still occupy a dominant position in a news organisation.

5.6 Comprehensive discussion on two themes

5.6.1 Synergistic effect of different digital strategies and journalists' values and news judgments

Through the analysis and discussion of the two themes previously mentioned, it is evident that the synergistic effect of different digital strategies, combined with journalists' values and news judgments, plays a significant role in shaping and influencing online tabloids. Primarily, it was observed that tabloid's traffic mainly originates from its homepage, social media, and Google. Due to the commercial nature of tabloids and fierce competition, it is important that tabloids take advantage of traffic from various platforms. Consequently, a multi-platform distribution strategy encompassing the homepage, social media, and Google has an impact on the construction of tabloid news. Social media trends and Google search results play a pivotal role in guiding reporters and editors in prioritising trending topics, thus influencing the tabloids editorial agenda and stylistic choices. SEO teams also collaborate with journalists to optimise news articles from a search perspective. In this way, social media strategies and SEO strategies have had an impact on a tabloid's news agenda and its style. At the same time, tabloids have effectively incorporated features such as multimedia and hypertext in content creation. Finally, whether journalists are building a compelling news story, using social media and SEO strategies, or adjusting the content on the homepage, audience metrics emerge as an important strategy and tool for journalists and editors. Journalists use it to monitor and update the news while making necessary revisions. Therefore, audience measurement has an impact on tabloid agenda, and tabloid style.

A visual representation of the synergy between different digital strategies affecting online tabloids is provided in Figure 5.1.

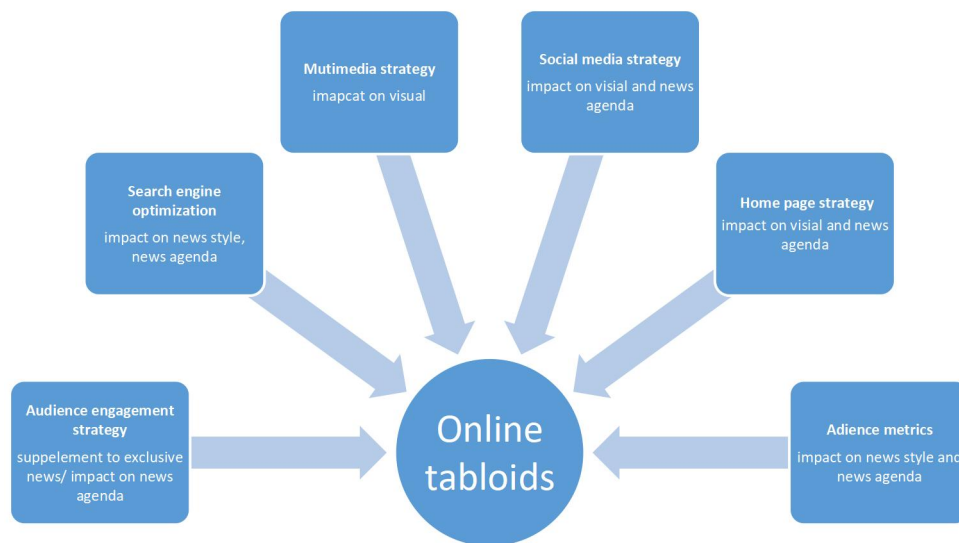


Figure 5. 1

It is noteworthy that an interaction between these digital strategies was observed. The distribution strategy not only enhances the visibility of tabloids but also impacts their production. For instance, visual platforms like social media and homepages promote the adoption of multimedia strategies by journalists. SEO strategies further amplify the incorporation of hyperlinks in tabloid news articles. The homepage strategy, driven by the objective of achieving well-balanced content, restrains tabloids from excessively relying on the algorithms of social media platforms or Google for news creation. Importantly, this present research revealed complexities in the use of digital strategies by online tabloids, as these strategies are invariably influenced by journalists' judgment and professional values. The research finds that, beyond audience engagement strategies, other strategies are heavily employed in tabloid journalism practices. Due to the commercial nature of tabloids, journalists and editors generally have a positive attitude towards these digital strategies, which in turn impact journalists' news selection and decision-making processes. Reporters and editors exercise discretion in employing these strategies, prioritising their own judgment. This results in a balanced utilisation of social media, SEO, and audience engagement techniques. Consequently, the synergistic effect of different digital strategies, combined with journalists' values and news judgments, plays a significant role in shaping and influencing online tabloids, as shown in Figure 5.3.



Figure 5. 2

5.7 Conclusion

In the face of digital technology change, tabloids exhibit a positive attitude toward adopting new technologies and strategies. Compared to the past, there have been significant changes in content construction of online tabloids. To improve audience visibility, reporters need to consider adapting news to these three platforms (the homepage, social media, and Google). Moreover, visual elements have gained increasing importance, potentially surpassing the importance of text. Online tabloids now extensively incorporate multimedia to engage audiences, so they adopt traditional narrative methods to a certain extent and use new technologies to tell stories. More importantly, news content must remain people-centered, with the centrality of 'people' becoming more important than ever. In addition, visuals and readability are essential for tabloids homepages to retain audience attention. This study has shown that pictures and videos dominate the homepage. The layout of the homepage is also very important. Moreover, online tabloids widely use SEO and social media strategies, which are critical tools for generating large amounts of traffic in marketing and creating engaging content. While existing studies emphasise specific steps and elements of SEO, this research underscores the impact of Google Search trends. Online tabloids not only focus on popular trends to optimise articles but also need to consider topics that belong to their own market. Furthermore, audience measurement is essential for online tabloids, as it has been fully applied in tabloids' content construction and distribution process. In addition, there is a difference in interactivity between the two tabloids. Specifically, in the case of *The Sun Online*, their interactivity has decreased compared to the past because they closed their comment section. In contrast, *MailOnline's* comments section promotes reader feedback and engagement. Nevertheless, the opportunities they provide for audience interaction remain limited. The reporters' attitude toward the audience's feedback is not positive. Furthermore, tabloid journalists encourage readers to comment on the news via social media as it helps in promoting news distribution.

Moreover, the tabloid digital strategies have exerted a discernable influence on journalistic values, decisions, news practices, and newsroom cultures. However, it is important to note that these digital strategies do not constitute definitive determinants. Journalists' experience and news judgment are still their most important tools. The news values of online tabloids are

also influenced by SEO, social media, and audience measurement. Specifically, social media and SEO have also significantly impacted news decision-making. However, this does not mean platforms' algorithms entirely determine their news decisions and agendas because they must maintain a balance between traffic and their own judgment. Furthermore, the influence of audience metrics in online tabloids is complex. First, although audience metrics significantly impact their news decisions, journalists' own judgment remains paramount. This signifies their enduring commitment to their traditional role and authority as news gatekeepers. However, the commercial nature of these platforms necessitates a reliance on audience metrics to secure a consistent traffic flow. On the one hand, they emphasise the importance of maintaining a balance, while on the other, they admit that their professional goals still influence their news decisions and a desire to create 'important' news content. Although SEO, social media, and audience measurement have significantly impacted tabloids' news practices, UGC seems to have had little effect. The research shows that the audience cannot directly participate in the newsgathering, news selection, and news presentation process. Journalists are only willing to consider audience material as undeveloped story ideas rather than material that can be added to the news. Therefore, in terms of UGC, journalists still play the role of traditional gatekeepers. In this respect, tabloid newsrooms still adhere to the 'old media model' and retain their 'top down' approach as the dominant position in a news organisation.

More importantly, we reveal the synergistic effects that these digital strategies have had on all aspects of tabloid news through the analysis and discussion of these 2 themes. Also, we find that the synergistic effect of different digital strategies, combined with journalists' values and news judgments, plays a significant role in shaping and influencing online tabloids.

Chapter 6 The changing characteristics of online tabloids

6.1 Introduction:

This chapter describes the changes and manifestations of characteristics in terms of range, style, and form in online tabloids. At the same time, an exploration is made into emerging features, such as the use of multimedia, data visualisation, and the use of social media as news resources. Furthermore, in this chapter, a combination of content analysis and in-depth interviews is employed for discussion. Based on the quantitative content analysis of tabloid characteristics, combined with the impact of digital strategies discussed in in-depth interviews, which highlighted journalists' perceptions of these changes, a discussion is conducted on the continuation, change and presentation of tabloids in the digital environment. The aim is to find out how they integrate traditional features with digital strategies and how the heritage of traditional tabloids is expressed and extended in the digital environment.

6.2 Results of quantitative content analysis

6.2.1 *The changes in range*

In the first section, an assessment is made of the changes in the characteristics pertaining to range of online tabloids compared to print tabloids. This mainly includes three indicators: i) the change in the softening of news, ii) the change in the number of domestic news, and iii) The change in the topic type distribution of tabloids between online and print tabloids.

Firstly, regarding the characteristic of news softening, this characteristic has not changed significantly, and online tabloids have not become more softening. However, The topic dimensions of online tabloids have changed because the non-political relevance of online tabloid news on topics has increased. Meanwhile, online tabloids have also not changed in the focus dimension, which shows that they emphasize the same aspects of news topics or events when reporting news. The following Table 6.1 shows the characteristics of the softening of news. The mean score of *The Sun Online's* news softening degree was 0.8304, while the offline was 0.7934. After the independent t-test, it can be seen that there was no significant difference between the two ($t=1.049$, $p>0.05$). An independent samples t-test is a statistical test used to compare the means of two independent groups to determine if there is a significant difference between them. In this instance, there was no significant difference in softening of the news between *The Sun Online and print editions*. This indicates that the degree of news softening in online tabloids has not been amplified. Based on this characteristic, *The Sun Online* has not become more tabloid.

Table 6. 1

	Mean score	The Sun Online (n=213)	The Sun Offline (n=170)	t	Two-tailed p-value
Indicator	The Softening of news	0.8304	0.7934	1.049	0.295
Sub-indicator	Topic dimension: non-political relevance	0.8545	0.7588	2.402	0.019
Sub-indicator	Focus dimension	0.8063	0.8279	-0.609	0.543

As shown in Table 6.1, the softening of news comprises two sub-indicators: topic dimension and focus dimension. The degree of softening in news is calculated by adding the average values of the topic dimension and the focus dimension, and then dividing the sum by 2, representing the average degree of softening. The Focus dimension comprises two sub-variables: Societal-individual relevance and Thematic- episodic framing.

Specifically, in this thesis, the softening of news was composed of two sub indicators: topic dimension and focus dimensions. The degree of the non-political relevance in topics covered by *The Sun Online* topics is higher than that of *The Sun Offline*. Regarding the degree of news softening between *The Sun Online* and *The Sun Offline*, there was a significant difference in the sub-indicator of non-political relevance ($t=2.402$, $p<0.05$). The mean score of non-political relevance of *The Sun Online* was 0.8545, while offline it was 0.7588. Consequently, this indicates that the degree of non-political relevance in topics covered by

The Sun Online is higher than that of *The Sun Offline*. Therefore, the political relevance of *The Sun* print edition is higher than that of *The Sun Online*, and *The Sun Offline* covers more political topics than *The Sun Online*. However, within the focus dimension, t-tests revealed no significant differences between the mean score of the *The Sun Online* and *The Sun* print edition. This illustrates the similarity in the focus on stories between *The Sun Online* and *The Sun Offline*.

Mean score	The Sun Online (n=213)	The Sun Offline (n=170)	t	Two-tailed p-value
Focus dimension	0.8063	0.8279	-0.609	0.543
Societal- individual relevance	0.7981	0.8294	-0.872	0.384
Thematic- episodic framing	0.8146	0.8265	-0.326	0.744

Table 6. 2

Illustration the Focus dimension comprises two sub-variables: Societal- individual relevance and Thematic- episodic framing.

In Table 6.2, the focus dimension comprises two sub-variables: societal- individual relevance and thematic- episodic framing. Regarding societal- individual relevance, the results of the independent t-test indicated no significant difference between the two ($t = -0.872$, $p > 0.05$). Similarly, for the thematic-episodic framing, there was no significant difference between *The Sun Online* and *offline* ($t=-0.326$, $p>0.05$). Therefore, in terms of the feature of news softening, no significant difference was found between *The Sun Online* and *The Sun Offline*. However, their two main sub-indicators showed a significant difference. The non-political relevance of *The Sun Online* was higher than that of *The Sun Offline*, while there was no significant difference in the focus dimension between The Sun newspaper's online and print versions.

Contrary to the characteristics of softening in news, online tabloids have changed in the characteristics of domestic news reporting. They have reduced their coverage of domestic news.

There was a significant difference between *The Sun Online* and *The Sun Offline* regarding the feature of domestic news coverage ($t=-2.270$, $p<0.05$). The mean score of this indicator for *The Sun* offline at (0.91) was higher than that of its online version (0.84), indicating that *The Sun Online* has reduced the amount of reporting of domestic news.

Mean score	The Sun Online (n=213)	The Sun Offline (n=170)	t	Two-tailed p-value
Domestic news	0.84	0.91	-2.270	0.024

Table 6. 3

Note: for domestic news, we measure it by existence and non-existence. If it does not exist, it is 0. If it exists, it is 1. Meanwhile, we also present domestic and foreign news in percentages. If there is domestic news, it means that they are becoming more tabloid.

In terms of the characteristic of domestic news reporting, the degree of tabloidisation of *The Sun Online* has decreased compared to *The Sun* print. Figures 6.1 and 6.2 show the percentages of domestic news and foreign news. It is evident that the number of foreign news articles reported by *The Sun Online* was higher than that reported by *The Sun* print newspaper. Conversely, the amount of domestic news reported by *The Sun* print newspaper was significantly higher compared to that of *The Sun Online*.

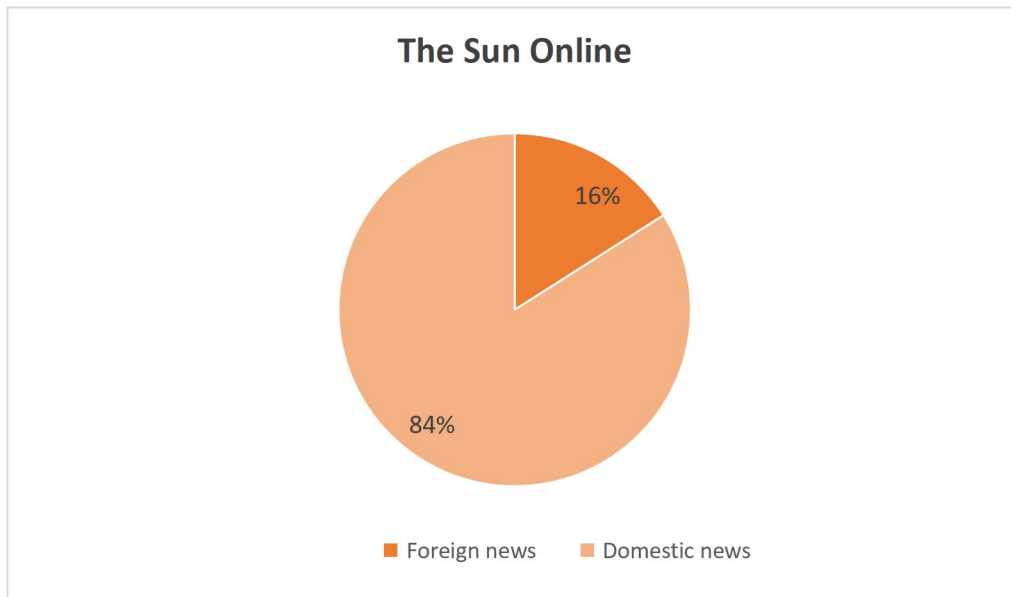


Figure 6. 1

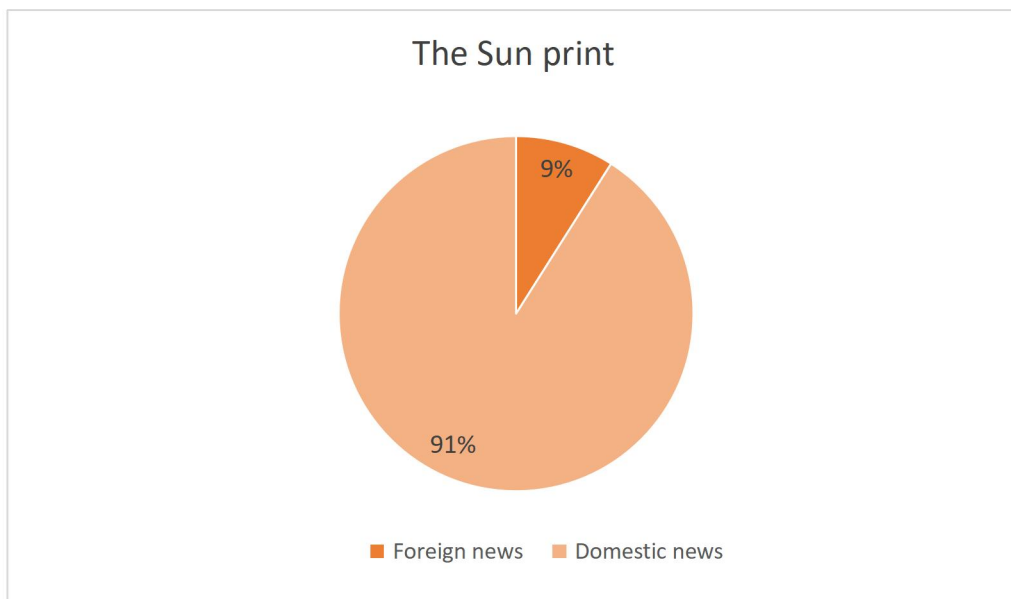


Figure 6. 2

Similarly, the results for the *Mail Online* and *Daily Mail* are presented in the following table. The mean score of *Mail Online*'s news softening degree was 0.7425, with a score of 0.6574 for the print version. The Independence T-test revealed no significant difference between the

two ($t=1.998$, $p>0.05$), indicating that there was no significant difference between *Mail Online* and *Daily Mail* in terms of news softening degrees.

	Mean score	Mail Online (n=184)	Daily Mail Offline (n=135)	t	Two-tailed p-value
indicator	Softening in news	0.7425	0.6574	1.998	0.052
Sub-indicator	Topic dimension: non-political relevance	0.7908	0.6370	3.043	0.003
Sub-indicator	Focus dimension	0.6943	0.6778	0.359	0.720

Table 6. 4

As previously mentioned, this thesis assesses the degree of softening in the news based on two sub-indicators: topic dimension and focus dimensions. Specifically, the table 6.4 show that there was a significant difference between *MailOnline* and *Daily Mail* in the sub-indicator of non-political relevance topics ($t=3.024$, $p<0.05$). These results indicate that the degree of non-political relevance of *MailOnline* topics is higher than that of the *Daily Mail*. However, when it comes to the focus dimension, the tests found no significant differences in the mean value between *Mail Online* and *Daily Mail*. Precisely, focus dimension comprises two sub-variables: Societal- individual relevance and thematic - episodic framing. In terms of Societal- individual relevance, after the independent T-test, it can be seen that there was no significant difference between the two ($t=0.284$ $p>0.05$). Similarly, in terms of thematic- episodic framing, there also was no significant difference between *Mail Online* and *Daily Mail* ($t=0.415$, $p>0.05$).

Mean score	Mail Online	Daily Mail	t	Two-tailed p-value
	Online (n=184)	Offline (n=135)		
Societal- individual relevance	0.6984	0.6852	0.284	0.777
Thematic- episodic framing	0.6902	0.6704	0.415	0.678

Table 6. 5

Similar to *The Sun*, concerning the feature of news softening, there was no significant difference between the *Mail Online* and the *Daily Mail*. However, its two main sub-indicators did show a significant difference, with the *Mail Online's* political relevance being lower than that of the *Daily Mail*, whereas there was almost no significant difference in the focus dimension. Therefore, although the general feature of softening in news has not changed, *Mail Online* exhibits a greater degree of non-political relevance than the *Daily Mail*. However, in terms of news focus, online tabloids and offline tabloids are basically similar.

Contrarily, regarding domestic news coverage, there were significant differences between *Mail Online* and the *Daily Mail* ($t=-6.583$ $p<0.05$). The mean score of *Mail Online* in domestic news reports was 0.69, while *Daily Mail* scored 0.95. This shows that *Daily Mail's* coverage of domestic news is higher than that of the *Mail Online*. In terms of domestic news reports, *Daily Mail* is more tabloid than *MailOnline*. The following figures 6.3 and 6.4 display the percentages of domestic news and foreign news. This pattern aligns with *The Sun*, suggesting *Daily Mail* reports significantly higher amount of domestic news compared to *Mail Online*. This illustrates that, in terms of the characteristics of domestic news reporting, the degree of tabloidisation of *Mail Online* has decreased compared to *The Daily Mail*.

Mean score	Mail	Daily Mail	t	Two-tailed p-value
	Online	Offline		

	(n=184)	(n=135)		
Domestic	0.69	0.95	-6.583	<0.001

Table 6. 6

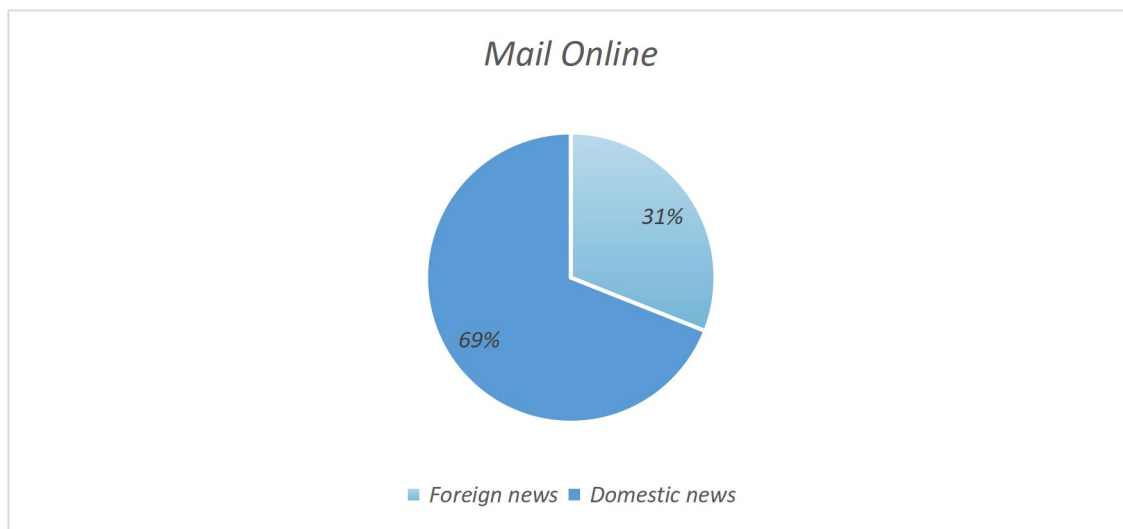


Figure 6. 3

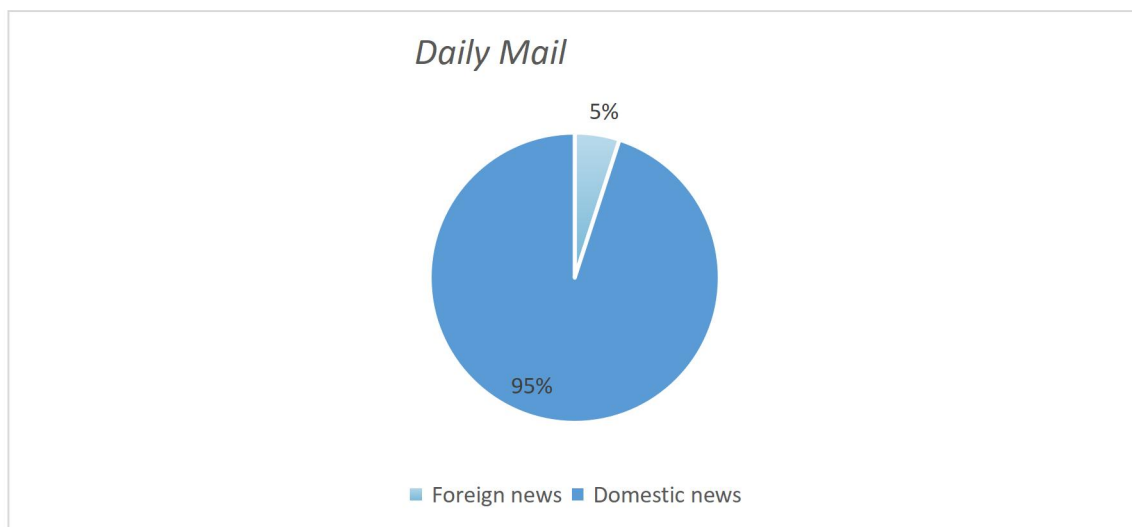


Figure 6. 4

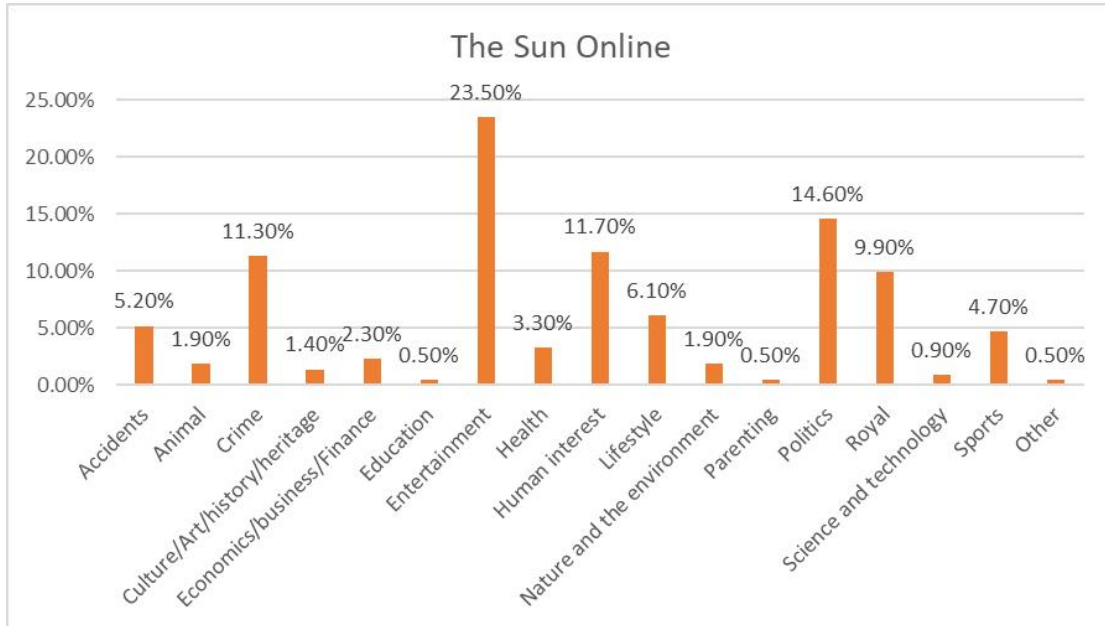


Figure 6. 5

The above figure 6.5 illustrates the proportion of different categories of news topic types. This is classified based on news topics. First of all, we can see from chart that entertainment claims the largest share of online news, accounting for 23.5% of all news topics, closely followed by political news at 14.6%. Human interest and crime news also contribute significantly, representing 11.7% and 11.3% respectively.

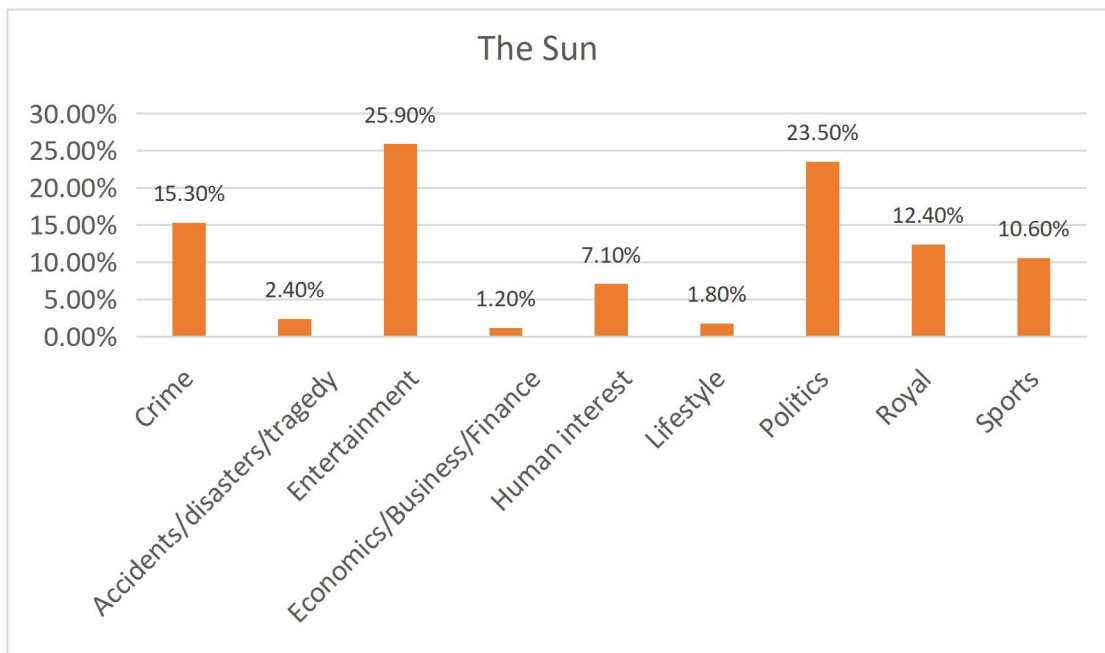


Figure 6. 6

Similarly, the figure 6.6 show that *The Sun* offline is primarily driven by entertainment stories, constituting a substantial proportion at 25.9%, followed closely by politics news at 23.5%. At the same time, both crime and royal news topics closely trail behind each accounting for 15.3% and 12.4%, respectively. This result shows that *The Sun Online* has more stories of human interest and lifestyle stories than *The Sun* Newspaper, but its coverage of political topics is less than that of *The Sun* newspaper. However, in relation to the topics of entertainment, crime, and the royal family, *The Sun Online* exhibits a minor decrease in comparison to *The Sun* print newspaper.

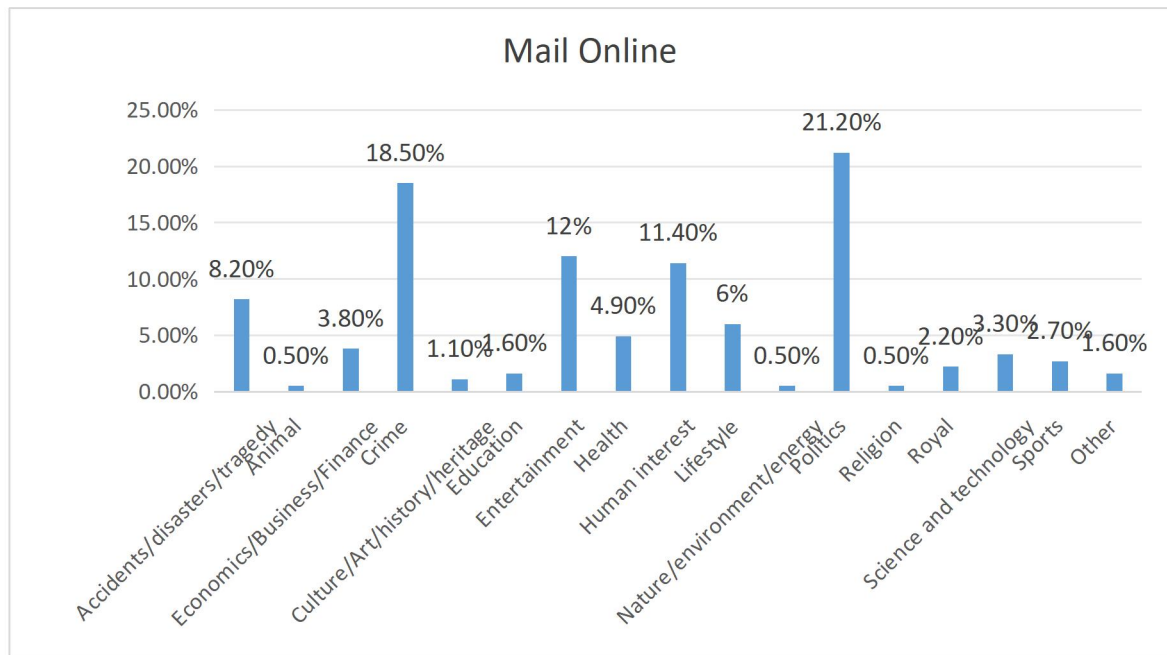


Figure 6. 7

The figure 6.7 above displays the proportion of different categories of news topic types. Surprisingly, political news takes the top spot on *MailOnline*, comprising 21.2% of the total news coverage, closely followed by crime news (18.5%), entertainment (12%), and human interest, (11.4%). Accidents/tragedy/disaster news ranked fifth among the news topics, representing 8.2% of the total.

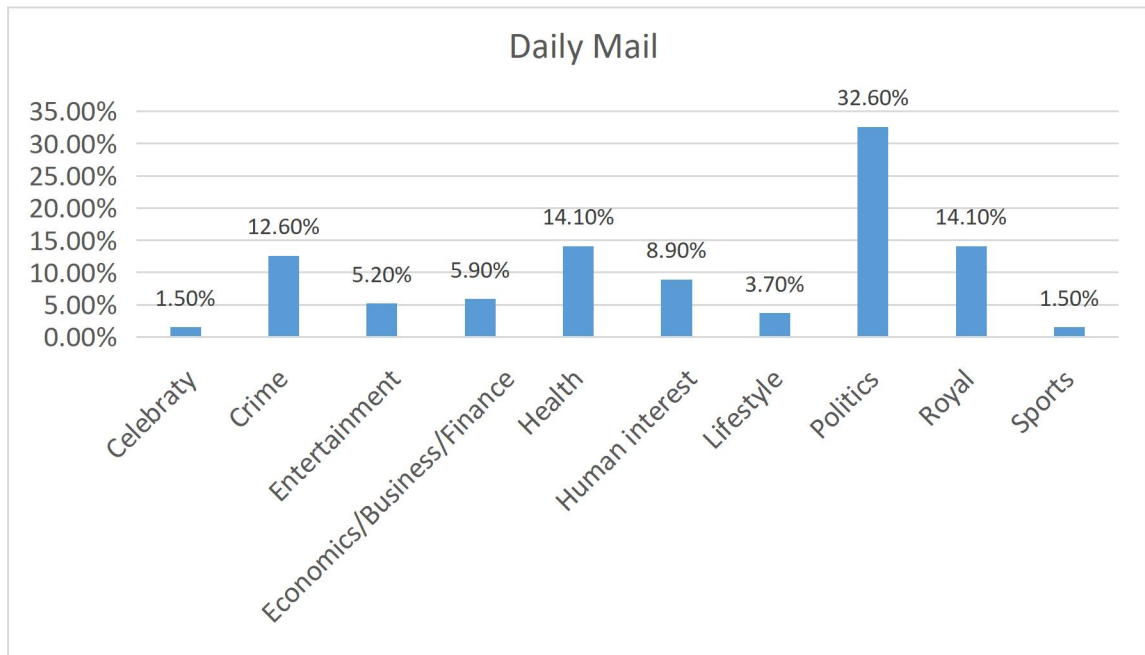


Figure 6. 8

The figure 6.8 shows that, similar to the *Mail Online*, political news holds the first position in the *Daily Mail*, accounting for 32.6% of the news coverage. This proportion is higher than that of political news on *MailOnline*. Royal family news and health news share the second position, both accounting for 14% of the news coverage, followed by crime at 12.6%, and human-interest stories at 8.9%. Therefore, the *Daily Mail* publishes a higher proportion of politics, royal family, and health news compared to the *Mail Online*. Conversely, the *Mail Online* has a higher proportion of news topics such as crime, accidents, entertainment, lifestyle, and human-interest stories compared to the *Daily Mail*.

Therefore, there is no significant change in the degree of news softening between the online and print versions of the two tabloids. This is because the degree of news softening being examined encompasses not only political relevance but also its focus dimension. Based on this feature, the level of tabloidisation is similar between online and print tabloids. However, both online tabloids decreased their coverage of domestic news while increasing their coverage of foreign news. It can be inferred from this change that the level of tabloidisation in online tabloids has decreased when compared to their print versions. In addition, in terms of topic distribution, they exhibit complex and different growth and decrease trends, which will be analyzed in detail later (section 6.3.2)

6.2.2 *The changes in style*

In the second section, the variations in style dimensions between the online and offline versions of the two tabloids newspapers is discussed. These style dimensions encompass three indicators: sensationalism, personalisation, and mode of address.

Table 6. 7

	Mean score	The Sun Online (n=213)	The Sun Offline (n=170)	t	Two-tailed p-value
Indicator	Sensationalism	0.4225	0.2779	4.355	<0.01
Sub indicator	Sensational content	0.57	0.49	1.650	0.1
Sub indicator	Narrative style	0.5023	0.25	6.296	<0.01
Sub indicator	Negative emotion	0.5352	0.2382	6.960	<0.01
Sub indicator	Grisly details	0.08	0.14	-1.722	0.086

Note: Sensationalism is assessed using four sub-indicators, and the mean of sensationalism is calculated by adding the average values of these four sub-indicators and dividing the sum by four, representing their average.

Firstly, online tabloids have increased their sensational style in news reporting, enhancing this traditional tabloid characteristic. In terms of the indicator of sensationalism style, a significant difference was found in the degree of sensationalism between *The Sun* Online and *The Sun* Offline ($t=4.355$, $p<0.01$). As shown in Table 6.7, the mean score of sensationalism style for *The Sun* Online was 0.4225, while it was 0.2779 for *The Sun* print edition. This indicates that the level of sensationalism style in *The Sun* Online is significantly higher than print edition. This shows that in terms of the tabloidisation indicator of sensationalism, *The Sun* Online is more tabloid than *The Sun* Offline. From Table 6.7, we also can see the difference in the sensational 4 sub-indicators between *The Sun* online and offline. After the conducting an independent t-test, it can be seen that there was no significant difference in both sub-indices of sensational content and grisly details between *The Sun* Online and offline ($p>0.05$). However, there were significant differences in two sub-indicators of narrative style and

negative emotion between *The Sun* Online and *The Sun* Offline ($p < 0.05$). The results showed a mean score of 0.5023 for *The Sun* Online regarding narrative style, while the mean score for *The Sun* print edition was 0.25. Therefore, this indicates that *The Sun* Online exhibits a higher degree of narrative style than the print version. Similarly, the mean score of the negative emotion sub-indicator on *The Sun* Online was also higher than that of *The Sun* Offline. Overall, *The Sun* Online surpasses *The Sun* offline not only in the overall level of sensational style, but also in the two sub-indices of narrative style and negative emotion.

	Mean score	Mail Online (n=184)	Daily Mail (n=135)	t	Two-tailed p-value
Indicator	Sensationalism	0.3281	0.1907	3.899	<0.001
Sub indicator	Sensational content	0.4348	0.2148	4.313	<0.001
Sub indicator	Narrative style	0.3342	0.1926	3.371	<0.001
Sub indicator	Negative emotion	0.4185	0.4232	2.927	0.004
Sub indicator	Grisly details	0.125	0.0741	1.529	0.127

Table 6. 8

Similarly, *MailOnline* also enhances the sensationalism. Regarding the sensational style indicator, a significant difference was found between *MailOnline* and *Daily Mail* ($t=3.899$, $p < 0.001$). The results showed that the average of *MailOnline* at (0.3281) was higher than *Daily Mail* (0.1907). This demonstrates that in terms of the indicator of sensationalism style, *MailOnline* is more sensationalised than *Daily Mail*. Therefore, *MailOnline* can be considered more tabloidised in this particular aspect. Furthermore, the result also showed a significant difference between the *Mail Online* and *Daily Mail* in the three indicators of sensational

content, narrative style, and negative emotion ($p < 0.05$). *MailOnline* was seen to have a higher score in both sub-indicators of narrative style and sensational content compared to the *Daily Mail*. This suggests that the *Mail Online* has a higher level of narrative style and sensational content than the *Daily Mail*. However, in the indicator of negative emotion, the *Daily Mail* (0.418) was stronger than the *Mail Online* (0.4232).

Mean score	The Sun Online (n=213)	The Sun Offline (n=170)	t	Two-tailed p-value
Personalisation	0.759	0.7902	-0.955	0.340
Mean values	Mail Online (n=184)	Daily Mail (n=135)	t	Two-tailed p-value
Personalisation	0.6467	0.6963	-0.955	0.340

Table 6. 9

Both online tabloids have not changed in their use of personalisation. They maintain the same level of personalization as offline tabloids. Regarding the personalisation indicators, the independent t-test revealed no significant difference between *The Sun* Online and *The Sun* Offline ($t = -0.955$, $P > 0.05$). Similarly, no significant difference was observed in this indicator between the *Mail Online* and the *Daily Mail* ($t = -0.955$, $P > 0.05$). Therefore, these results demonstrate that there is no significant difference in the degree of personalisation between the offline and online versions of the two tabloids. At this point, online tabloids have not become any more.

Mean score	The Sun Online	The Sun Offline	t	Two-tailed p-value
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	(n=213)	(n=170)		
Mode of address	0.4577	0.4735	-0.814	0.416
Mean score	Mail Online (n=184)	Daily Mail Offline (n=135)	t	Two-tailed p-value
Mode of address	0.1957	0.3444	-5.003	<0.001

Table 6. 10

Both online tabloids have different performances in the characteristic of the mode of address. *Mailonline's* decline in this feature suggests they are reducing the familiar, colloquial tone in their news. In addition, there has been no significant change in this feature of *The Sun Online*, as it maintains a similar level of familiar and colloquial tone used offline by *The Sun Offline*.

The table 6.10 shows that there is no significant difference between *The Sun Online* and *The Sun Offline* in terms of mode of address ($t=-0.814$, $p>0.05$). However, the difference between the *Mail Online* and the *Daily Mail* is significant ($t=-5.003$, $P<0.001$). The results show that the mean score of this indicator is 0.1957, with the mean value of the *Daily Mail* at 0.3444. Therefore, when compared with the *Mail Online*, the *Daily Mail* showed a higher degree of the mode of address. This means that the extent of this feature has not changed in *The Sun Online* compared to the print version. However, this feature has been weakened in the *Mail Online* compared to the *Daily Mail*. Consequently, concerning this aspect, the level of tabloidisation in the Sun Online has remained constant, whereas the tabloidisation of the *Mail Online* has been reduced.

Therefore, in terms of the style dimension, compared with the print newspaper, the two online tabloids have shown an upward trend in the sensationalism features. Therefore, in terms of sensationalism features, online tabloids have shown a trend of tabloidization. However, when considering personalisation, there was no significant change between online and print tabloids. Furthermore, regarding the degree of mode of address, there was no difference between *The Sun Online* and the print edition of *The Sun*. However, the *Mail Online* shows a lower degree

of the mode of address and is hence less tabloid in the respect.

6.2.3 *The changes in form*

In the third section, the differences in form between the online and offline versions of the two newspapers are discussed. This form dimension includes two indicators: visual effect and headline capitalisation. Visual effects were measured by the percentages of pictures. In addition, the percentages of videos, hyperlinks, and data visualisations in the two tabloids were also analysed. The results indicate significant changes in tabloid format characteristics. Apart from *MailOnline's* title characteristics, which have declined, the visual characteristics of both online tabloids have considerably improved.

Mean score	The Sun Online (n=213)	The Sun Offline (n=170)	t	Two-tailed p-value
Headline capitalization	1	0.94	3.829	<0.01

Table 6. 11

Note: The measure of Headline capitalization is determined as follows: if there is a capitalised word in the headline, it is coded as 1, if there is no capitalisation in the headline, it is coded as 0. Hence, the presented table exhibits the mean values employed for the independent t-test. Also, a clearer percentage representation of the proportion of capitalised headline was presented.

Both online tabloids also experience significant changes in their headline characteristics and exhibit distinct trends of change. Regarding headline capitalisation (Table 6.11), following the independent t-test, a significant difference was observed between *The Sun* Online and *The Sun* Offline ($t=3.829$ $P<0.05$). The results also indicate that *The Sun* Online significantly exceeded *The Sun* offline (0.94) in this indicator, suggesting that *The Sun* Online employs a higher degree of headline capitalisation compared to *The Sun* offline.

Mean score	Mail Online	Daily Mail	t	Two-tailed p-value
	Online	Offline		
	(n=184)	(n=135)		
Headline capitalisation	0.38	0.59	-3.824	<0.001

Table 6. 12

Table 6.12 displays the results of the independent t-test, revealing statistically significant differences ($t=-3.824$, $P<0.05$) between the *Mail Online* and the *Daily Mail* regarding the indicator of headline capitalisation. In terms of headline capitalisation, *Daily Mail* (0.59) exhibited a higher value than *Mail Online* (0.38). This suggests that the *Daily Mail* employs a greater degree of headline capitalisation than the *Mail Online*.

It can be seen that the differences in headline capitalization pattern in these two online tabloids show opposite trends (Figures 6.9 and 6.10). *The Sun Online* amplified the feature of capitalising words in their headline compared to *The Sun* print version, while *Mail Online* has decreased capitalising words in its headlines compared to the *Daily Mail*. The following Figure 6.9 provides a visual representation of the percentage of headline capitalisation, illustrating that, with regards to this characteristic, *The Sun Online* displays a higher degree of tabloidisation compared to its print version. In comparison, the *MailOnline* exhibits a lower degree of tabloidisation.

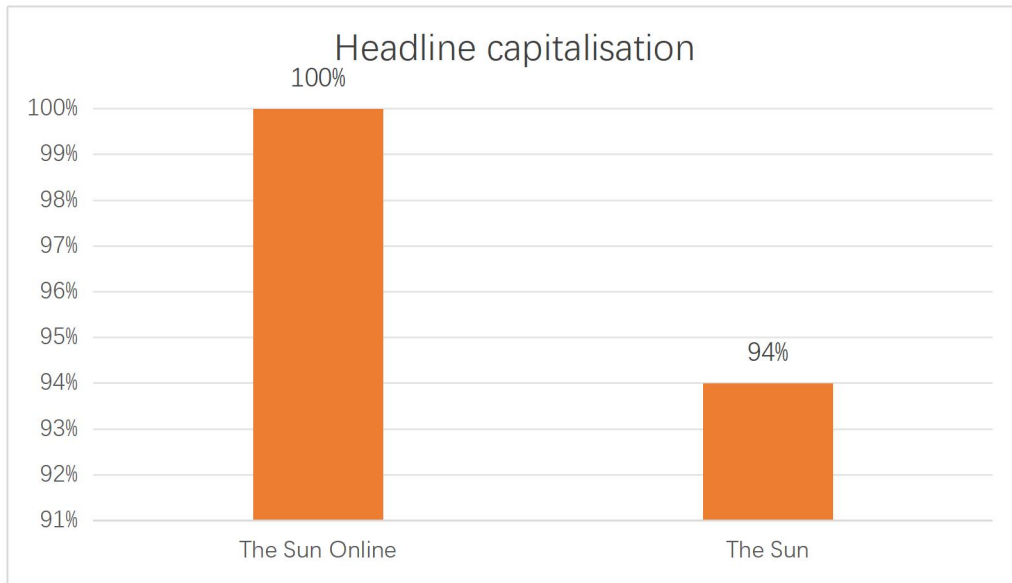


Figure 6. 9

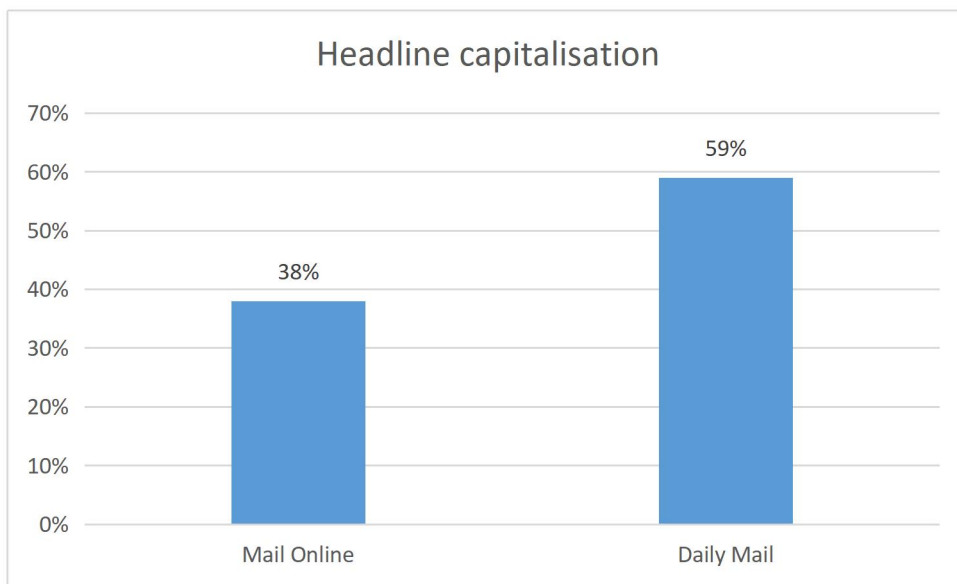


Figure 6. 10

Figures 6.11-14 show a statistical overview of the number of pictures in news displayed in online tabloids and newspapers. Charts 5 to 6 provide the summary statistics for the video proportion.

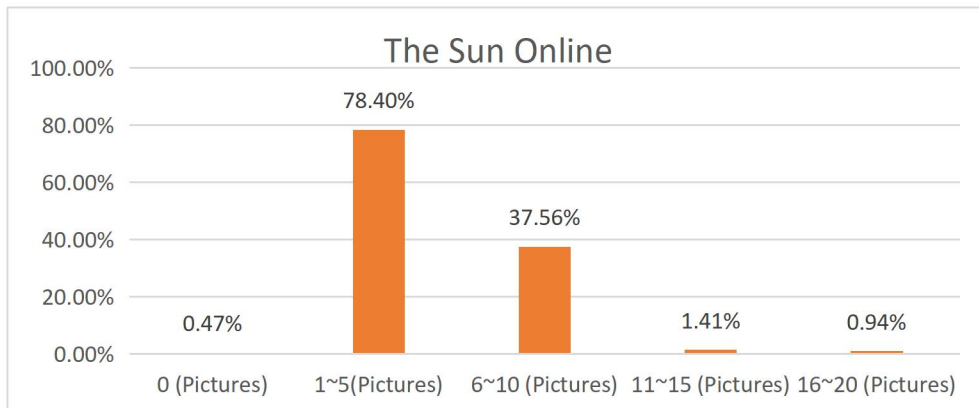


Figure 6. 11

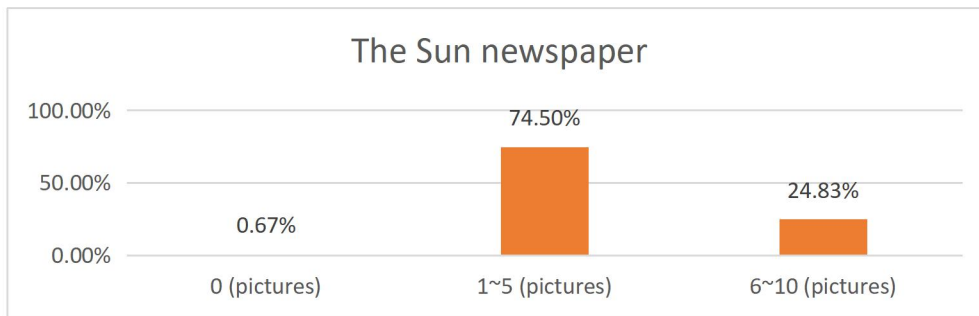


Figure 6. 12

The figures above illustrate the distribution of news articles with a different number of pictures in *The Sun Online* and *The Sun* newspaper. The analysis revealed that news articles featuring between 1 to 5 pictures predominate in both *The Sun Online* and *The Sun* newspaper. Notably, *The Sun Online* exhibits a higher prevalence of news articles containing 1 – 5 pictures compared to the newspaper's print version. Furthermore, it is evident that *The Sun Online* exceeds that of *The Sun* newspaper in terms of the number of images accompanying their news items. *The Sun* newspaper includes no more than 10 pictures for one single article. In contrast, *The Sun online's* articles containing more than 10 pictures account for 2.35% of its overall content. Additionally, *The Sun's* print version has a higher proportion of news without pictures than *The Sun's* online version.

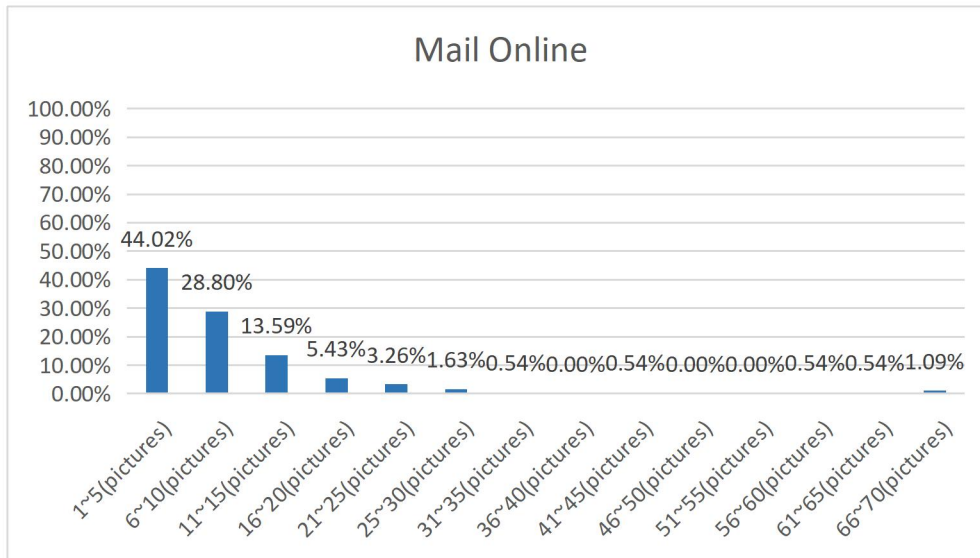


Figure 6. 13

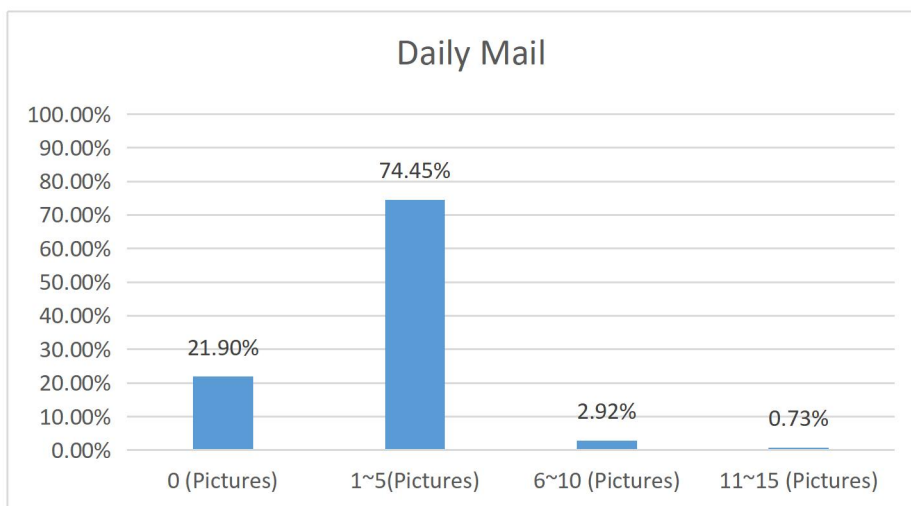


Figure 6. 14

Consequently, comparing these two results reveals that online tabloid news contains more pictures than print tabloids. This implies that online tabloids prioritise visual effects, which amplify this feature. Thus, in terms of the traditional visual effects, there appears to be a trend towards more tabloidisation. Figure 6.13 and figure 6.14 illustrate that all *Mail Online* news includes pictures, while *Daily Mail* news articles without pictures constitute for 21.90% of the total content. Notably, the majority of *Daily Mail* articles (74.45%) contain no more than 5 pictures, a higher percentage than in the *Mail Online*. However, the *Mail Online* features a substantially greater number of images in its articles than the *Daily Mail*. Notably, figure 6.14

reveals that 1.63% of *Mail Online* news articles contain more than 60 pictures.

In terms of form, an examination of *The Sun Online* indicates an enhancement of both visual effects and headline capitalisation, reflecting an increased sense of tabloidisation. In contrast, *Mail Online* displays a growing trend towards tabloidisation in terms of visual effects, while displaying a decreasing trend of tabloidisation regarding headline capitalisation.

We have so far discussed transformations in the traditional characteristics of tabloids. We will now examine trends concerning the emerging characteristics of tabloids below.

The following figure 6.15 describes the extensive use of multimedia by online tabloids.

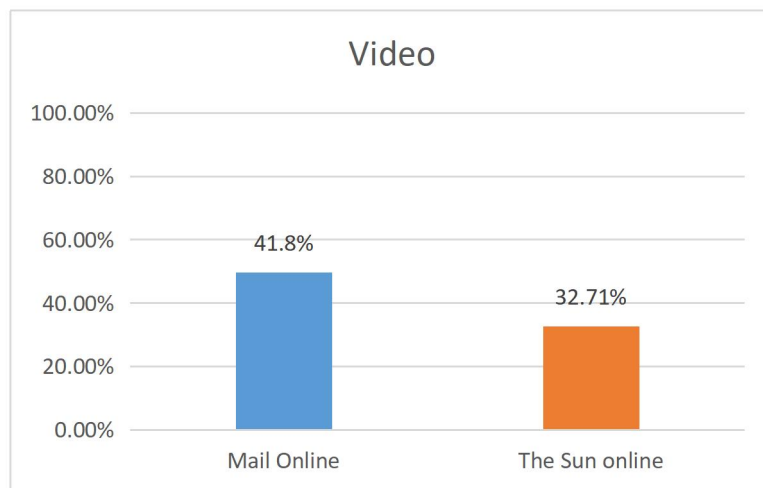


Figure 6. 15

From Figure 6.15, it is evident that the proportion of news articles featuring video content in the *Mail Online* reached 41.8% of total content, while the proportion of news with video in *The Sun* reached only 32.75%. The proportion of news content with video in *Mail Online* is higher, underscoring its emphasis on incorporating video elements in its news coverage.

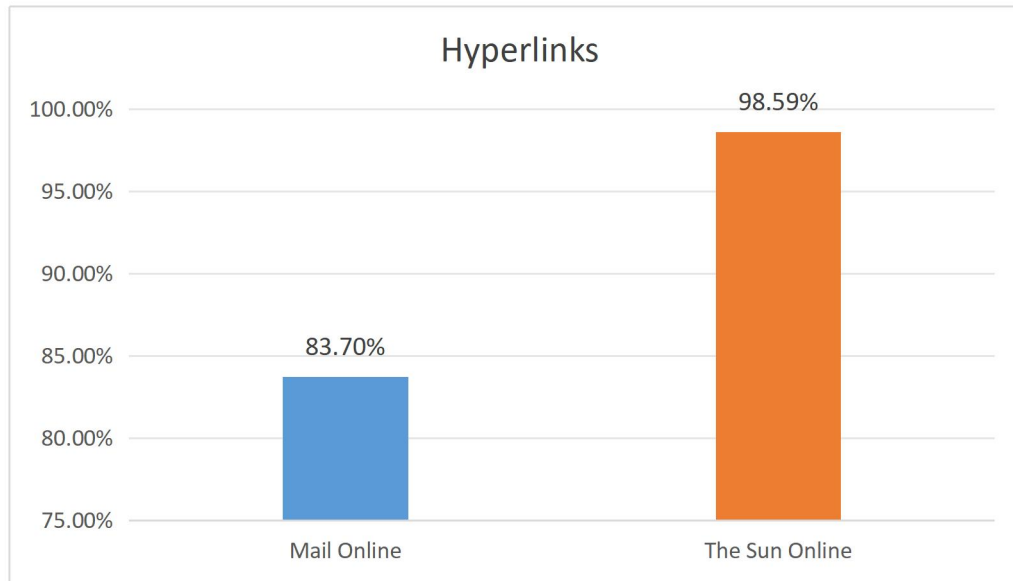


Figure 6. 16

Both tabloids make extensive use of hyperlinks in their news. A striking observation from this chart is the high proportion of news articles with hyperlinks in *The Sun Online*, which stands at 98.59%, followed by the *Mail Online* at 83.7% (Figure 6.16). Both online tabloids have more than 80% of news articles with hyperlinks, underscoring their extensive use of this multimedia feature. The results of the above two charts demonstrate the substantial use of multimedia in online news content.

Furthermore, this study identified an increase in the use of data visualisation by online tabloids (Table 6.13). A statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) was shown to exist in the level of data visualisation between the online and offline versions of both tabloids. The data visualization level was higher in *The Sun Online* (0.15) compared to *The Sun Offline* (0.04). Similarly, the *Mail Online* (0.14) exhibits a higher level of data visualisation than the *Daily Mail* (0.04). Figures 6.17 and 6.18 clearly present the percentage of data visualisation in the two tabloids. It can be seen from the chart that the proportion of articles with data visualisation of the two online tabloids exceeds that of print newspapers.

Mean score	The Sun	The Sun	t	Two-tailed p-value
	Online	Offline		
	(n=213)	(n=170)		

Data visualisation	0.15	0.04	3.555	<0.001
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Mean score	Mail (n=184)	Daily Mail (n=135)	t	Two-tailed p-value
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Data visualisation	0.14	0.04	3.421	<0.001
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Table 6. 13

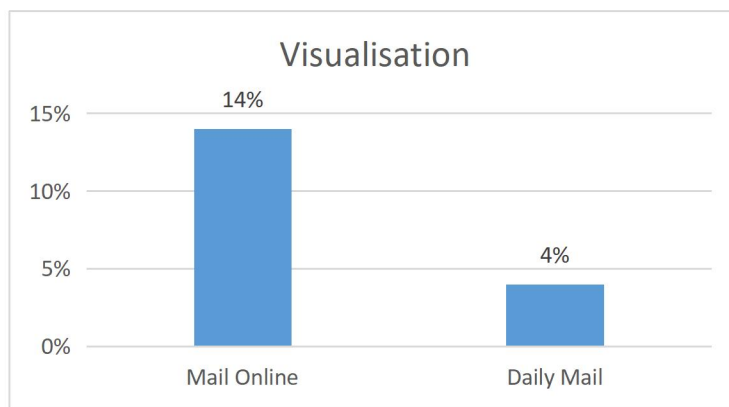


Figure 6. 17

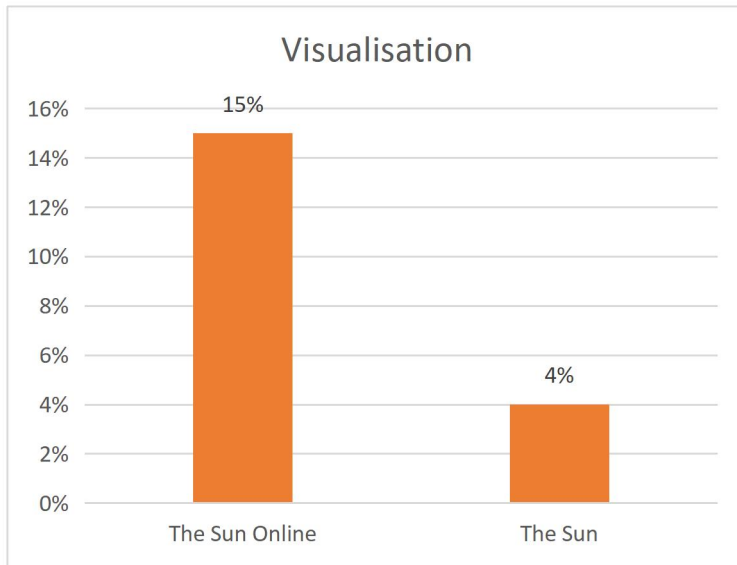


Figure 6. 18

Furthermore, this study explored the use of social media resources as news resources by online tabloids and print tabloids. Both online tabloids have significantly increased their references to social media resources, indicating a decrease in the proportion of their news resources from official sources.

As depicted in figures 6.19 and 6.20, the *Sun Online* (23%) relies more heavily on social media resources than *The Sun* print version (9.4%). The data suggest that *The Sun Online* uses social media resources to generate news stories rather than merely to illustrate events. Conversely, *The Sun* print edition tends to employ social media resources as an illustrative element for events rather than as a catalyst for news stories.

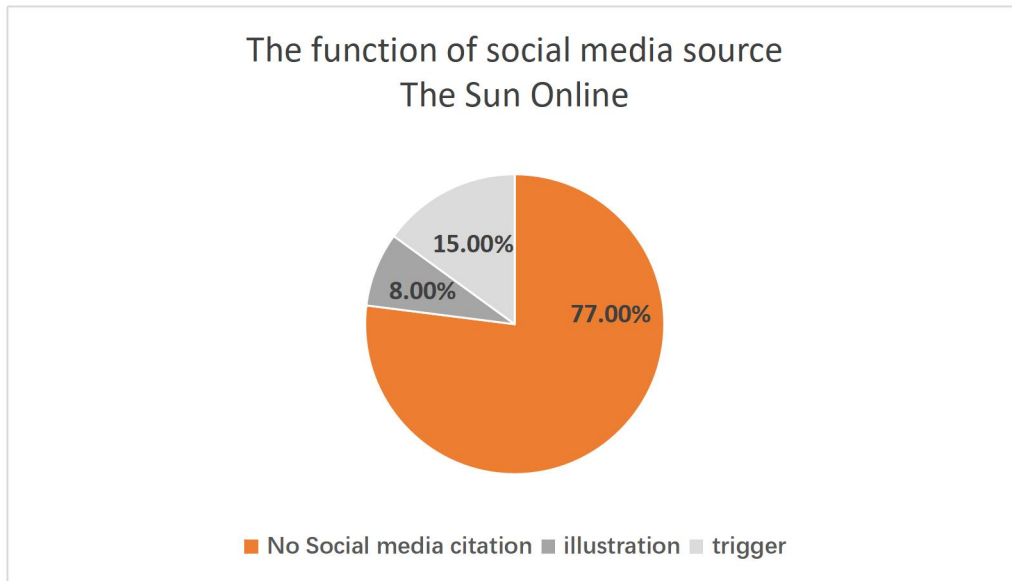


Figure 6. 19

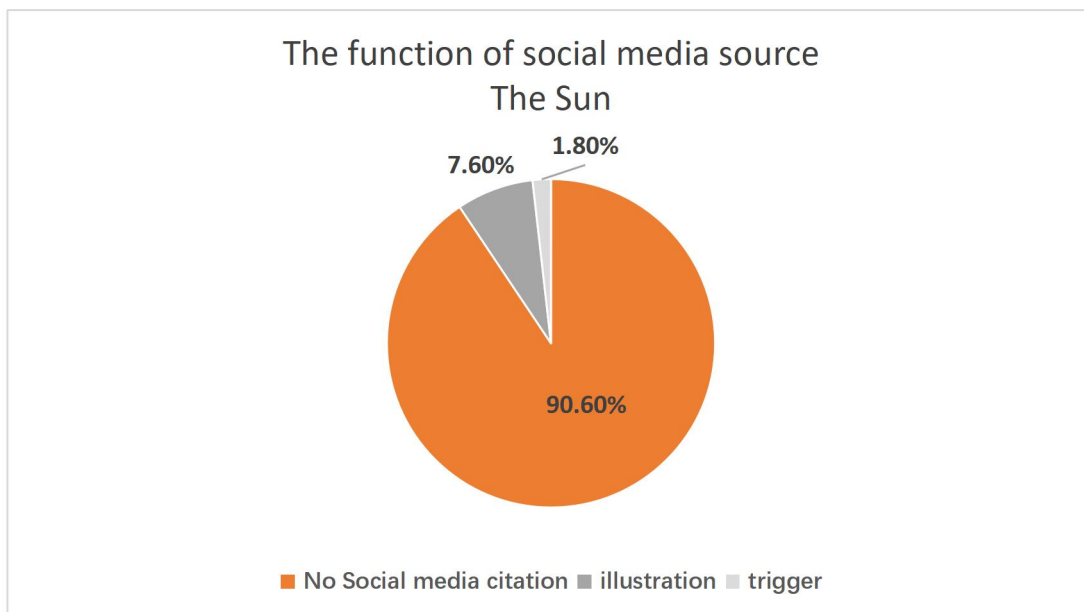


Figure 6. 20

Regarding *Mail Online*, it significantly surpasses *Daily Mail's* use of social media resources as news sources (Figures 6.21 and 6.22). *Mail Online* and *Daily Mail* utilises social media resources more for illustrative purposes than for triggering news stories.

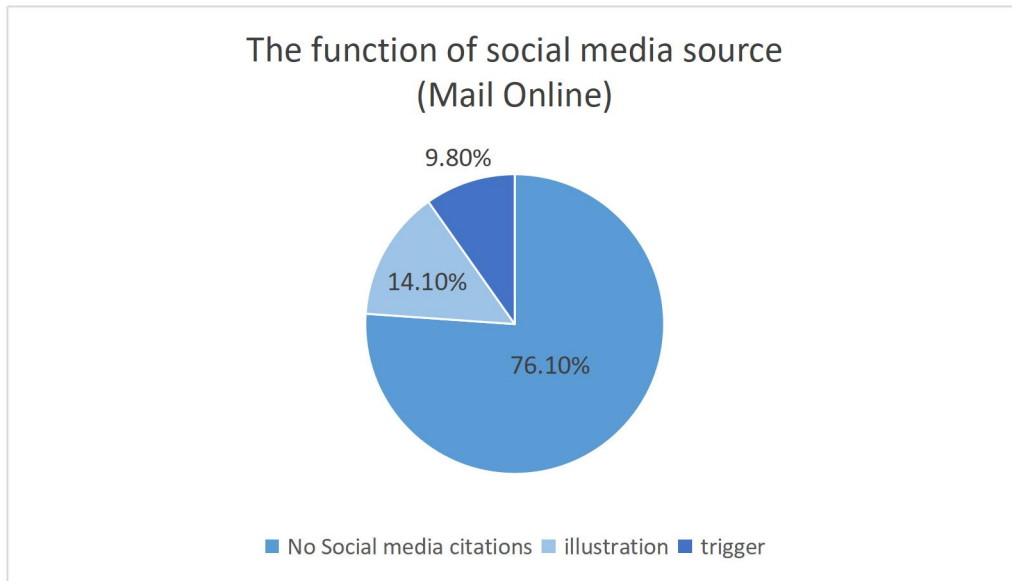


Figure 6. 21

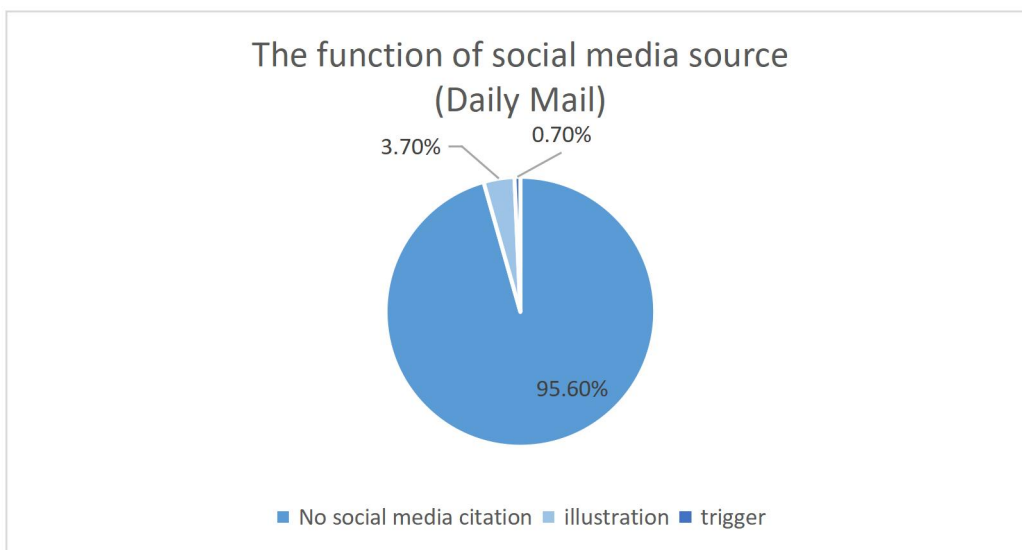


Figure 6. 22

Figures 6.23-6.26 display whose social media content was cited by online and print tabloids.

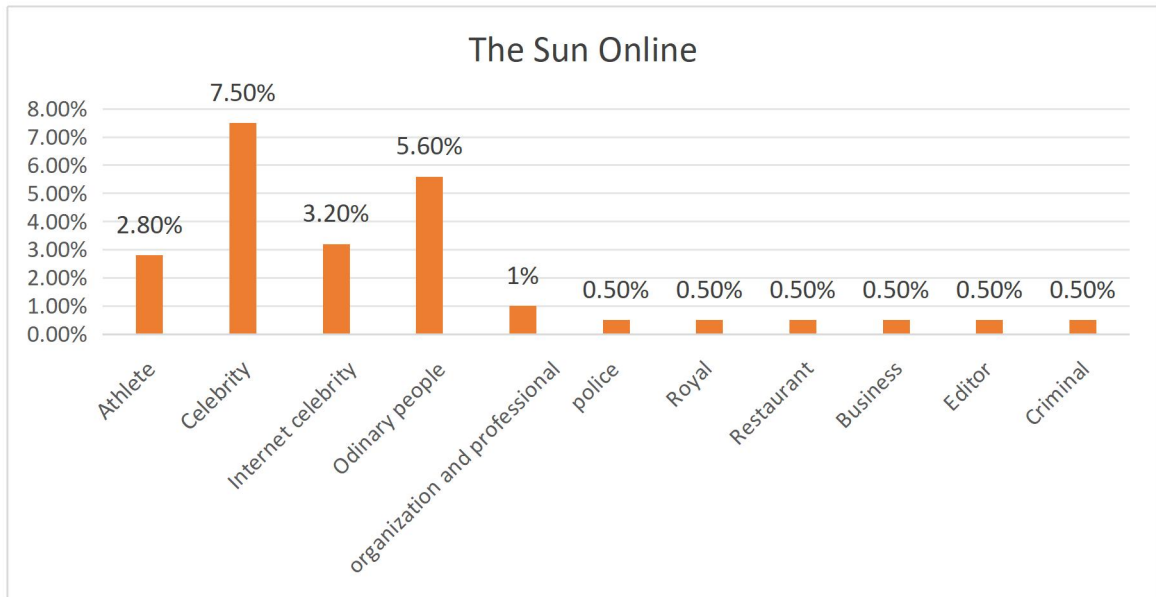


Figure 6. 23

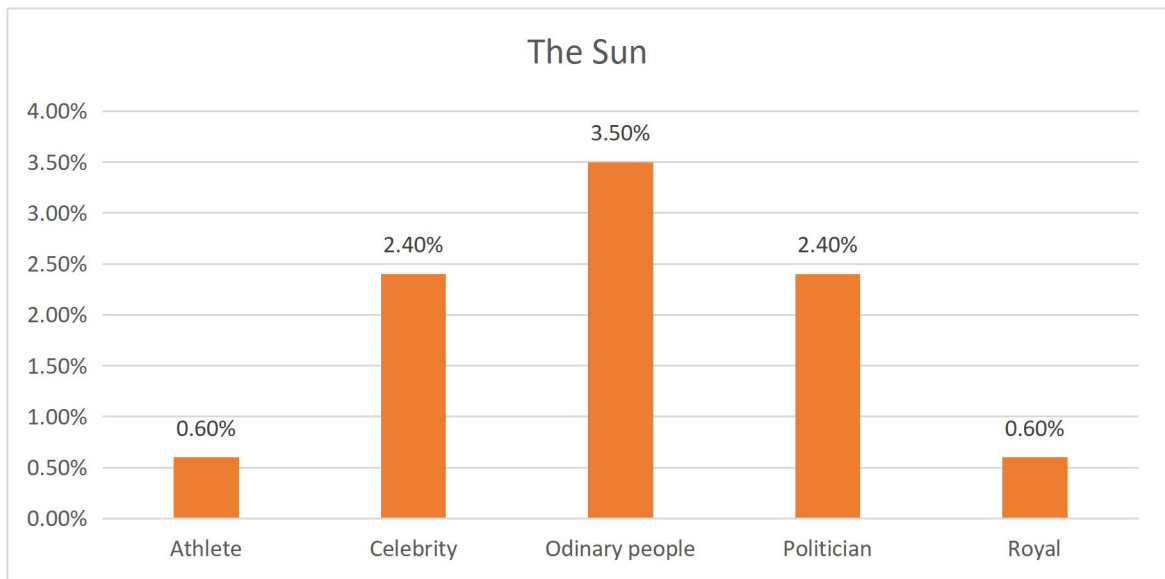


Figure 6. 24

Figures 6.23 and 6.24 show that *The Sun Online* primarily sources social media content about celebrities, ordinary people, internet celebrities, and athletes, while *The Sun* print newspaper mainly cites social media content about ordinary people, celebrities, politicians, athletes and the Royals.

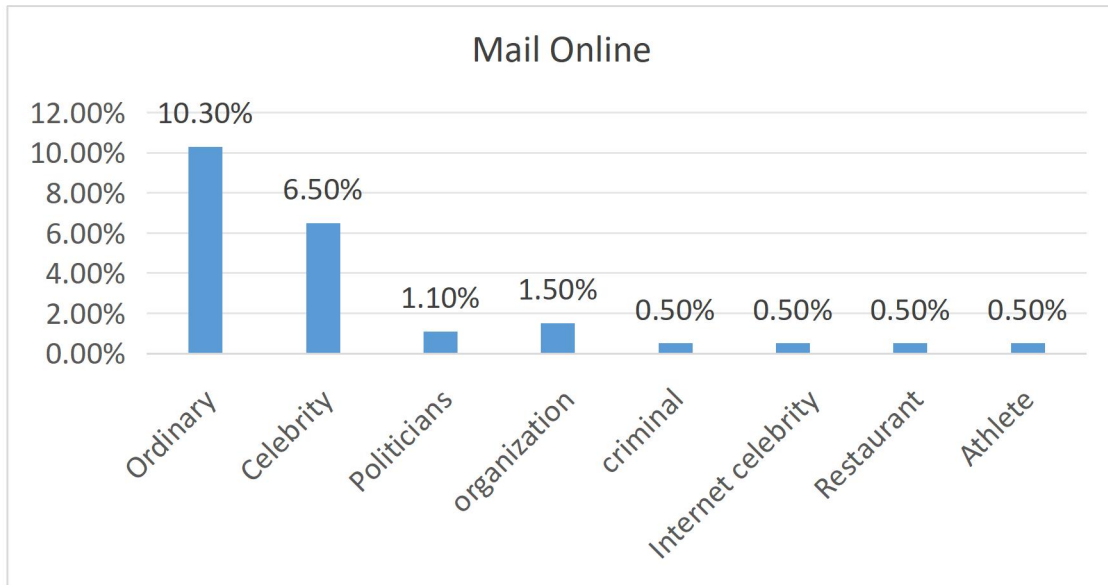


Figure 6. 25

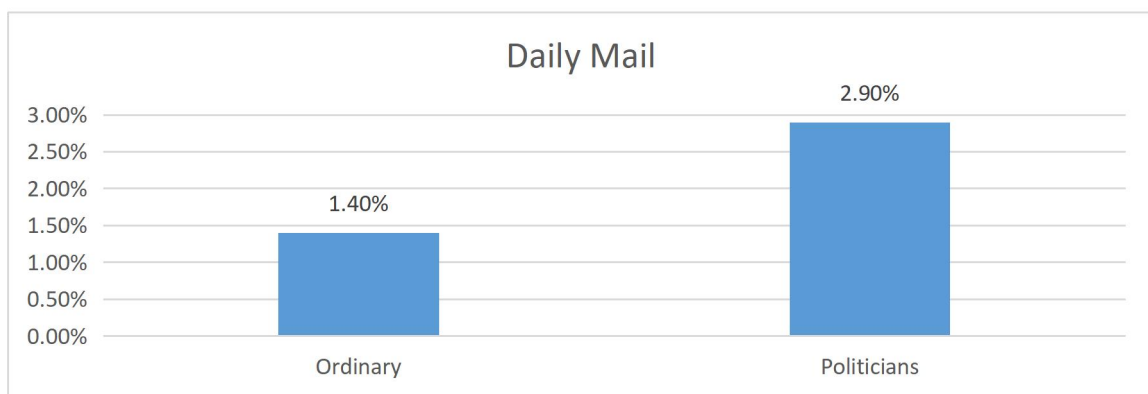


Figure 6. 26

In the case of the *Mail Online*, their citations from social media are mainly about ordinary people, celebrities, politicians, and organisations. However, *the Daily Mail's* citation sources are only about ordinary people and politicians.

The citations of social media resources by the two online tabloids are notably higher than those of print newspapers. *The Sun Online* and *The Sun* print have different trends for citing social media resources, whereas the trend of *Mail Online* and the *Daily Mail* for the function of citing social media resources share a similar approach in this regard. Furthermore, the two tabloids cited different sources when referencing social media content.

It is evident the citations of social media resources by the two online tabloids are notably higher than those of print newspapers. *The Sun Online* and *The Sun* print have different trends for the function of citing social media resources, whereas the trend of *Mail Online* and the *Daily Mail* for the function of citing social media resources share a similar approach in this regard. Furthermore, the two tabloids cited different sources when referencing social media content.

Overall, in light of these emerging trends, it becomes obvious that both online tabloids exhibit a relatively high level of multimedia integration. Additionally, data visualisation has also significantly increased compared to the print newspapers, and both tabloids have also strengthened the use of social media sources as news sources.

6.3 Analysis and discussion

Having outlined the results of the quantitative data analysis, we will now discuss the change of tabloid characteristics in the light of these results combined with the insights gained from the interviews.

6.3.1 Changes to the tabloid form

Firstly, it is important to analyse and discuss changes in the form of tabloids. The results demonstrate that both online tabloids significantly enhance their visual features. However, the changes in headline characteristics are different. Historically, tabloids have been characterised by an increased emphasis on visual content. Moreover, capitalising words in headlines to attract attention and highlight information is also a traditional feature of tabloid print editions. The results indicate that *The Sun Online* and *Mail Online* have undergone similar changes in visual characteristics compared to traditional tabloids. However, there are contrasting trends in headline capitalisation.

On the one hand, table 6.11 and figure 6.8 illustrate that *The Sun Online* has increased the use of headline capitalisation. This is because *The Sun Online* has maintained the headline style of the print version, using capitalised words at the beginning to grab attention. This is a distinctive feature of their headlines.

FIND THE COWARDS Was OAP, 86, killed by GANG that has been terrorising neighbourhood for years?

Figure 6. 27

On the contrary, table 6.12 and figure 6.10 show that there has been a decrease in headline capitalisation in *Mail Online*. One editor and one journalist from *Mail Online* explained why this feature has declined:

‘We think lowercase headlines look better on a website, compared to capital letters.’

(*Mailonline* Journalist, Journalist 1)

‘Block capitals do not tend to look as good on a website as they do in a print product. Newspapers are typically all put next to each other on the news, and you really need to get your headline to stick out. That is why it is so big. However, with online, you tend to be brought to the stories either through social media and Google search, so the apps are not so useful.’ (*MailOline* Editor, Editor 1)

Therefore, this answer illustrates that online news platforms and websites have their own conventions and style guidelines. The reduction in headline capitalisation also relates to the impact of social media and SEO.

On the other hand, the visual effects of *The Sun Online* and *Mail Online* have been enhanced. The number of pictures used by both online tabloids has increased (Figure 6.11-Figure 6.14). This result indicates a high level of visual presentation in both online tabloid websites. One explanation for this is that the traditional printed style imposes restrictions on the number of pictures that can be included in tabloid newspapers. The online platform provides tabloids with the opportunity to utilise a greater number of pictures. For example, a news article on *Mail Online* can include as many as 60 images. Some articles consist of minimal text at the beginning and end, with a large number of images interspersed in the middle. Other reasons for this feature prominence are elaborated on in the following reporter's opinion.

While employing percentage statistics to assess other characteristics of online tabloids, certain manifestations typical of the online tabloid form were observed. This also relates to the digital storytelling approach. The results clearly show that online tabloids are increasing their use of new features in their news articles. Therefore, we evaluated the extent to which online tabloids utilise multimedia. Firstly, figure 6.15 shows that both online tabloids use video to increase their visual effect, which is a new feature compared to the print tabloid. Especially for the *Mail Online*, the video usage rate of its news articles accounts for almost half (41.8%). *The Sun Online* utilises videos (32.71%) to a lesser extent compared to the *Mail Online*. Therefore, our quantitative content analysis revealed that both online tabloids rely heavily on visual elements (pictures and videos). Additionally, the research results (Figure 6.16) showed that both online tabloids make extensive use of hyperlinks. There are many hyperlinks in the news articles of *The Sun Online* and the *MailOnline*, with *The Sun's* use of hyperlinks accounting for over 95% of their total content. Online news articles can include extensive background and contextual information through hyperlinks, which enriches news stories. This is particularly beneficial considering the limited space available in a single article.

From the interviews with reporters, it was possible to gain insights into probable reasons behind the changes in the visual effects and utilisation of multimedia in the two online tabloids. Visuals are as important as words, possibly even more important than text. It is evident that the tabloid reporters and editors work closely with the photo and video desks to ensure that the news is compelling, and the packaging of videos and pictures constitutes a significant portion of news production. Online tabloids seem to regard visual as a traffic trick in the highly competitive media landscape. The following aspects suggest why online tabloids are increasing their use of visual and multimedia. Firstly, almost all reporters mentioned that pictures and videos could attract the audience's attention. The audience demands more pictures and news videos. This aligns with previous research results suggesting that images attract readers' attention because they are perceived very quickly, and can effectively communicate and activate emotions. Images serve as entry stimuli for news stories, increasing the probability that news stories will gain further attention (Brantner, Lobinger and Wetzstein, 2011, p.523). Secondly, most journalists also see the use of video and pictures from an editorial perspective. This enhances the storytelling aspect of news, making it more vivid and attractive. Schill (2012) indicates that images trigger various emotional and attitudinal effects, affecting public opinion, news understanding, and evaluation of events. Photos evoke certain moods, affecting the comprehension of news texts. Therefore, photos convey human emotions more directly and authentically than text. Thirdly, the editors emphasised the attraction of video, highlighting how home pages and social media are very visual platforms. As Kant Xu (2016) believes, Facebook placed a greater emphasis on video content in 2016, which is evident from several public statements in 2016, and their algorithm prioritizes videos.

In addition, the hyperlink labeling strategy is also a crucial part of tabloid news packaging. Journalists often put hyperlinks in the middle, at the bottom, and in the sidebar to increase the number of page clicks and the time readers spend on the page. These hyperlinks allow readers

to read other news on the same website. Hyperlinks in the news can provide the viewers with everything they want to know, thereby increasing their overall understanding of the news. The reason for the widespread use of hyperlinks in both online tabloids aligns with Tong's (2023) views, which suggests that by clicking on the links provided in a news article, readers can access additional content that is considered relevant but not included in the article itself (Tong, 2023,p.54). Similarly, according to Eveland et al.(2004), hyperlinks can increase the amount of time that audiences spend on news sites, and the inclusion of 'most popular' content can lead to increased page views.

When online tabloids build their stories, they pay great attention to the use of multimedia elements such as images, videos, and hyperlinks. The findings here indicate that online tabloids rely more on the visual element than ever before. The interviews found that tabloids use these elements mainly from a business perspective, accompanied by considerations for enhancing storytelling. This aligns with the views of other scholars who argue that the use of hyperlinks in online reporting increases transparency, credibility, and diversity (Jarvis, 2006; De Maeyer, 2012). This finding is also consistent with that of Hindman (2015) who considers that multimedia content attracts more traffic than text articles. Multimedia includes interactive elements and graphics that have long been associated with high reader engagement. Some digital news websites are already actively capitalising on this finding, and multimedia content may generate more traffic (Hindman, 2015). Therefore, under the influence of commercial interests and digitalisation, the tabloid format adds new visual features.

Furthermore, while the level of data visualisation in the two online tabloids is not particularly high, it is significantly higher than that of print tabloids. As Tong (2023) points out, when data stories are published and shared online, they can offer much more creativity, interactivity, immersion, and diversity. Online data stories can include various types of content, such as graphs, tables, timelines, maps, and datasets. Using data for narrative purposes effectively uses this available information. Digital tools help create visually appealing data visualisations that highlight journalism's digital and data-focused aspects. Creative and interactive data visualisation captivates audiences with engaging and innovative storytelling methods (Tong, 2023, p.48). Specifically, according to the observations in content analysis, the use of data visualisation by both online tabloids was most pronounced in news related to the COVID-19 pandemic and news about Ukraine and Russia, mainly in the form of line charts, tables and maps. This finding confirms Tong's argument about the significance and widespread adoption of data journalism during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, and how data reporting has become essential in covering the pandemic and its impact on the world.

Therefore, this finding indicates that online tabloids rely more on visual element (pictures, video, data visualisation) than before. The visual features of tabloids are influenced by digital storytelling strategies, multiple platforms, and audience preferences. The change in headline capitalisation in the *Mail Online* illustrates the transformation of online news, diluting traditional features.

6.3.2 Changes in the news type and news topic characteristics

The results (table 6.1 and table 6.4) revealed no significant difference between online tabloids and print tabloids in terms of the overall degree of news softening, measured by the topic dimension and focus dimensions. Likewise, there was no significant difference between online and print tabloids regarding the focus dimension, neither in relation to the societal-individual relevance nor the thematic-episodic framing. Nevertheless, compared to the traditional print newspaper, online tabloids have increased coverage of non-politically relevant topics and decrease coverage in informative and hard news content. As a result, online tabloids appear to veer more towards tabloidisation, focusing on soft news topics.

The topic distribution of *The Sun Online* (Figure 6.5) shows a contradictory trend of tabloidisation. Specifically, the findings indicate a decrease in political news coverage for *The Sun Online* (14.6%) compared to its print newspaper (23.5%). The decrease in political topics is closely linked to the process of tabloidization, since tabloidization focuses on soft news like scandals, human interest stories, crime, and disasters. However, the primary features of tabloid content in *The Sun Online*, such as entertainment (23.5%), crime (11.3%), the royal family (9.9%), and sports (4.7%), have also experienced a decline. Moreover, *The Sun Online* has seen an increase in other tabloid characteristics like human interest stories (11.7%), lifestyle content (6.1%), and accidents (5.2%) when compared to its print version's coverage of human interest stories (7.1%), lifestyle (1.8%), and accidents (2.4%).

Additionally, online tabloids display a broader range of news on their frontpages, including topics like environment, culture, and animals. Although entertainment, crime, and royal family news have declined in *The Sun Online*, they still hold a significant share of the topic distribution. For instance, entertainment news ranks first, political news in second place, crime news in fourth place, and royal family news in fifth place.

Surprisingly, in the case of the *Mail Online*, political news commands the highest share (21.2%), although it is still lower than the *Daily Mail* (32.6%). It is followed by crime, entertainment, human interest stories, and accidents. These news story categories have experienced growth compared to the *Daily Mail* newspaper, indicating a trend towards tabloidisation. In addition, the proportion of royal family (2.2%) and health news (4.9%) topics in the *Mail Online* has decreased compared to the print tabloids' coverage of royal family (14.1%) and health news topics (14.1%). Similar to *The Sun Online*, *Mail Online* has expanded its coverage to include lifestyle and other news types.

The results indicated an increase in the coverage of entertainment news (12%) for the *Mail Online*. In contrast, for *The Sun Online*, although the proportion of entertainment news (25.9%) has decreased, it still maintains the highest proportion among all topics. This highlights that entertainment news is still an important news agenda for *The Sun Online*.

During the content analysis, the researcher observed that the majority of entertainment news on both online tabloids focuses on topics such as showbiz, TV series, internet celebrities, celebrities' personal lives, celebrity crimes, and the lavish lifestyles of celebrities. For instance, *Mail Online* shared a story about a celebrity couple's date, mentioning that they went for dinner at the London restaurant Gola in Fulham where they enjoyed a glass of wine and pasta (Farmer, 2022). This mundane life of a celebrity can be seen as a critical link between the celebrity and the reader. Additionally, traditional tabloids are an important place for spreading celebrity gossip. According to Johansson (2007, p.114), reading entertainment news provides a glimpse into the lives of celebrities, allowing readers to explore a different world. In addition, a further important tabloid characteristic is its tendency to 'attack' celebrities. Tabloids always try to expose the flaws in the lives of celebrities. For instance, *Mail Online* reported on James Franco's admission of experiencing sexual addiction (Johnson and Stern, 2021). It can be argued that these tabloid stories offer readers a fleeting sense of power and control.

Furthermore, even though *The Sun Online* has reduced the proportion of entertainment news compared to its print version, it still maintains its characteristic focus on soap opera actors. According to Conboy and Steel (2010, p.4), *The Sun* newspaper focuses on capturing a younger readership through a disrespectful, anti-establishment, and entertainment-driven agenda. Therefore, *The Sun Online* has continued to show an interest in reporting the activities of soap opera characters, both on-screen and off-screen.

In the digital environment, the increase in the proportion of entertainment news in the *Mail Online* can be attributed to the significant news value associated with celebrity-related stories. According to Jewkes (2015, p.46), there is a growing dependence on stories with a 'dramatic, sensationalist or celebrity component.' Additionally, the public is more likely to share and participate in celebrity or sports news on social media, rather than world events or issues (Garfield, 2010). As the above example shows, many other aspects are involved in the coverage of celebrities by online tabloids, such as morality, and crime amongst others. As Conboy said, tabloids not only prioritise the lives of celebrities as their main news agenda, but also strive to incorporate celebrities into broader reporting content. This means that when a story comes up if it is already newsworthy and has an extra celebrity aspect, it has the potential to become more valuable in terms of news coverage (Conboy, 2006, p.186). Therefore, the combination of the audience's preference for celebrity news, the inclination of social media towards entertainment content, and the significant news value associated with tabloid entertainment news, has increased the coverage of entertainment news on *Mail Online*. It is important to mention that, unlike traditional tabloids, some celebrity news in online tabloids is sourced from celebrity social media platforms. This will be discussed later. However, for *The Sun Online*, despite the decrease in the proportion of entertainment news, it continues to hold the highest share among all topics. This may be because for *The Sun* print newspaper, the tabloidisation level of entertainment has reached its ceiling level. In fact, in the 1970s, the appearance of *The Sun* newspaper helped redefine the British tabloids by

highlighting the close relationship between entertainment, consumerism, and tabloids.

In addition, both online tabloids have experienced an increase in the coverage of human-interest stories (The Sun Online: 11.7% Mail Online: 11.4%) compared to their print versions (The Sun 7.1%, Daily Mail 8.9%). According to Conboy (2006, p.10), a significant aspect of tabloid news values involves the amplification of sensationalism and the prioritisation of 'human interest' stories, which focus on individuals at the extremes of human experiences and behaviour. Additionally, Gans (1979, p.156) explains that human interest stories usually center around the extraordinary experiences of regular people, evoking empathy and sympathy from the audience. For example, these stories might feature victims of tragic diseases or individuals who have shown heroism in a disaster. Therefore, there is no doubt that the increase in reporting of such stories is leading towards tabloidisation. For instance, *The Sun Online* features various human-interest stories, such as heartwarming stories of good Samaritans who help fix a blind woman's garden (Somper, 2022).

The increase in the coverage of human-interest stories in online tabloids can be explained from various perspectives. Firstly, journalists employ human interest as a common strategy to attract the audience (Figenschou, Thorbjornsrud and Hallin, 2021). Human interest refers to news stories centered on ordinary people's everyday lives, which can evoke strong emotions among audiences (Megan and John, 2016). As a result, this can encourage increased engagement from readers who spend more time on online platforms. Secondly, it is related to social media traffic. During an interview, one editor from *The Sun Online* expressed how human-interest stories are widely embraced by people on social media platforms:

‘When a story goes viral on Facebook or other social media platforms, it generates an incredible amount of traffic for us. It's not just about delivering news; it's about sharing things that people genuinely care about. We often come across stories about neighborhood disputes, like arguments over building fences on someone's property. Surprisingly, these stories attract a lot of clicks and engagement because people are interested in reading about them. Our social media team has a deep understanding of what works for our readers, and they request certain stories to be prioritised.’ (*The Sun Online Editor, Editor 6*)

The reporter's views provide a twofold justification. Firstly, human interest plays a crucial role in motivating users to share content on social media platforms. Journalists use human interest stories to captivate the audience and increase the shareability of their news on social media (Kilgo, Lough and Ried, 2020). This high traffic generated on social media platforms is evidence of people's keen interest in human interest stories. (Tandoc and Thomas 2015).

Furthermore, the author believes that Langer's view of the human-interest story remains relevant in today's digital era. Langer (1997) suggests that society operates as a cohesive

entity, where every individual plays a role, regardless of their position. Despite recognizing inequality, these stories encompass a variety of subjects, such as motorcycle stunt jumpers, mothers reliant on iron lungs, schoolboys constructing hovercrafts, female competitors in trotting races, and barbers achieving record-setting feats, highlighting the possibility of self-improvement and social mobility. They propose that some talented individuals can overcome their circumstances through hard work and determination. These stories promote the idea that ordinary individuals can become extraordinary by confronting challenges, surmounting obstacles, utilising available resources, and asserting agency over their own lives. While class and status systems are unavoidable, there will always be a place for those who can make a positive impact through their hard work, abilities, and determination (Langer, 1997, pp.49-50).

Compared to print newspapers (12.6%), *Mail online* has seen a rise in the proportion of crime news (18.5%). For example, they reported a story about a Baptist church pastor who confessed to concealing his son-in-law's disturbing child sex crimes against two young girls for twelve years. On the other hand, *The Sun Online's* crime coverage (11.3%) has decreased compared to that of the print newspaper (15.3%), but it still maintains a significant proportion. However, both online tabloids have noticed an increase in the proportion of accident news.

The rise in crime and accident stories indicates the *MailOnline's* focus on chasing traffic and prioritizing timeliness. Research on online news highlights the importance of immediacy and how news can be included and adjusted according to the clickstreams. It is observed that online platforms often prioritise crime and other engaging stories over public affairs (Bird, 2009; Nerone and Barnhurst, 2001; Thurman and Myllylahti, 2009). According to Lewis and Cushion (2009), crime is the most extensively covered topic within breaking news stories, serving as an indicator of news value and importance. Journalists constantly pursue breaking news because it can generate traffic and bring readers to their website. Journalists prioritise breaking news to attract more traffic, capturing their audience's attention and ensuring their financial success and survival. Additionally, Graber's research confirms that crime news has a high potential to capture audience attention. According to Heath (1996), news about disasters, accidents, and emergencies tends to be shared more frequently. This relates to emotion-led sharing. People may feel more personally touched by natural disasters presented in the news, and they may also feel more need to discuss them. Brichta (2011) supports the idea that traditional tabloid newspapers fulfill basic human needs by evoking emotions through horror, disaster, and violence, contributing to social stability and security.

In addition, the two online tabloids have experienced an increase in their coverage of lifestyle news. For instance, *The Sun Online* frequently publishes articles like "Six top TikTok and Instagram DIY tricks to give your home a budget-friendly makeover (Shaw, 2022)." This phenomenon can be considered a form of tabloidisation since lifestyle news primarily focuses on the private sphere rather than the public sphere (Sparks, 2000, p.10). This result is partly consistent with the findings of Karlsson (2016), who argues that tabloid news websites in

Sweden and the UK have become more tabloid, demonstrated by a shift from political news to articles about lifestyle. He believes this tabloidisation can be described as a shift from political news to a greater emphasis on lifestyle topics. The results of the present study are more qualified. Although lifestyle news has been found to have increased, political news still maintains a significant proportion and surpasses lifestyle news.

Several reasons can be used to explain the increase in lifestyle news. According to Rolland (2006), commercial news production must ultimately be profitable. For instance, lifestyle news is more appealing to advertisers, and stories related to home decoration or international travel may receive subsidies from companies. The second reason is that lifestyle news often receives more shares and engagement on platforms. As noted by Newman et al. (2015), Facebook tends to prioritise content that is easily accessible and brands that emphasise entertainment and lifestyle-oriented material. Similarly, Rudat and Buder (2015) indicate that tweets with 'high information value' and agent awareness messages always lead to re-tweets. This is because consumers may share useful content for altruistic reasons, such as helping others, generating reciprocity, or enhancing reputation (Berger and Milkman, 2012). This aspect is closely related to the ego-oriented appeal.

Another characteristic of the traditional print tabloid newspaper is that political news almost always means domestic news. If they report foreign news, they tend to report some extreme news e.g. tragic case of a foreign worker (Conboy 2006,p.17). It is worth noting that although online tabloids have increased foreign news, some of it can be categorised as soft news. This includes stories about foreign celebrities, foreign tragedies, or even insignificant matters. For instance, *Mail Online* may report news such as the decision of a Swedish village to change its name (Jewers, 2022), while *The Sun Online* may cover incidents like the New Year's Eve stampede at a shrine in India (Manzoor, 2022).

However, compared to the print version, both online tabloids have also increased their coverage of international political news, with a particular focus on tensions between Russia and Ukraine. This finding aligns with the research conducted by D'Haenens, Jankowski, and Heuvelman (2004), who observed that online newspapers report more international news and less sports coverage than their print version. The increase in foreign news in both online tabloids illustrates the shift from tabloids to global media. Peña-Fernández et al. (2016) suggest that the internet means that some media have transcended their national character and become global media as a result of gradual internationalisation. Especially the *Mail Online*, has become a truly global medium (Peña-Fernández et al, 2016,p.30). Consequently, in order to meet the needs of a wider audience, online tabloids have increased the coverage of foreign news.

6.3.3 Changes in style

In terms of style dimension, tabloids display varying trends in their characteristics. Both types of online tabloids have witnessed an increase in sensationalism, while the personalization of tabloids remains unchanged. Furthermore, concerning their mode of address, *Mail Online* has reduced this feature, whereas *The Sun Online* has maintained its approach unchanged. Therefore, there is a difference in the degree of tabloidization in terms of style dimension.

A notable finding from this present work is that both online tabloids focus on sensationalism more than traditional tabloids. However, the performance of these two online tabloids regarding sub-indicators of sensational content, negative emotion and narrative style is not the same. For *The Sun Online*, its narrative style (0.5023) and negative emotions (0.5352) are significantly higher than the print version's narrative style (0.25) and negative emotions (0.2382). Also, the sensationalism of *Mail Online* differs from that of print newspapers as regards the three key aspects examined above: sensational content, narrative style, and negative emotions.

Compared to the *Daily Mail*, *Mail Online* has a higher proportion of story topics (0.4348) related to sensationalism than traditional tabloids (0.2148), including content about celebrities, crime, sex, disasters, accidents, and public fears. Such content has been labeled sensational (Hofstetter and Dozier, 1986; Juergens, 1966). There is no doubt that sensational content reinforces the characteristics of sensationalism.

Furthermore, both online tabloids display a higher level of sensationalism regarding narrative style than their print versions. Online tabloids tend to be more sensational in their headlines and at the beginning of the article content. Specifically, in terms of news narrative style, both online tabloids are exaggerated, emotional, and dramatic. They often narrate in the form of a climax at the beginning of the headline or the first sentence of the article or set up suspense to arouse readers' emotion or curiosity. For instance, the initial headline is crafted to evoke suspense and attract readers' curiosity. The second headline uses suspense, drama, and a striking turn of events to attract readers. Noteworthy is the use of the word 'after' in headlines to indicate the reversal of climax and complication. It can be seen from the example below how the third headline and the beginning of the news content directly attracts the audience's attention with a climax:

(1) 'OUT THE WINDOW Phillip Schofield shocks This Morning viewers by revealing massive secret about the ITV studio' (*The Sun Online* 13 Jan 2022)

(2) 'Final cruel twist for the family of the mother who was kidnapped and killed in 1969 after being mistaken for Rupert Murdoch's wife: Dramatic confession reveals where Muriel McKay is buried... but the landowner won't let them search the site' (*MailOnline* 14 Jan 2022)

(3) 'DECADES OF INCEST Horrors of 'world's most inbred family' with four generations of incest including 14 kids who are all related' (*The Sun Online* 25 Jan 2022)

Therefore, the two online tabloids both use the narrative style of curiosity and suspense, as well as structure climaxes or turning points to trigger emotions. Through the analysis of folk tales, myths, and literary fiction, it becomes evident that the canonical story format comprises an initiating event, exposition, complication, climax, and resolution, typically presented in chronological order. Within these genres, curiosity can be aroused by rearranging the chronological sequence of narration. On the other hand, Molek-Kozakowska (2013, p.184) describes that a narrative arrangement in which the climax is placed before the complication, is most likely to create a sensational feeling. What tends to be more likely to foster a sense of sensationalism is a narrative structure where the climax comes before the complication, often introduced as the initial point. As a result, both online tabloids often resort to a sensational narrative.

In addition, *The Sun*' headlines and content are designed to evoke negative emotion, since they extensively employ descriptive and negative emotive labels. For instance, consider the following examples:

FAMILY'S SHOCK Dad of Windsor Castle suspect, 19, says 'something's gone horribly wrong' after masked man threatens to kill Queen

Chilling footage showed the masked man threatening to "assassinate the Queen" just minutes before police swooped on him on Christmas Day (*The Sun Online*, 28 Dec 2021)

PAEDO PC Disgraced cop, 42, jailed for sexually abusing little girl while she slept in her bed at night (*The Sun Online*, 4 Feb 2022)

MURDER cops investigating the brutal murder of a pensioner in her own home have launched a probe into any unsolved crimes that could be linked to her death. (*The Sun Online*, 19 Jan 2022)

'FAMILY'S SHOCK,' 'Chilling footage,' and 'Disgraced' are emotive negative labels, whereas 'MURDER,' 'death,' and 'sexually abusing' serve as descriptive negative labels. As Molek-Kozakowska (2013, p.187) points out, the repetitive use of negatively charged labels

and modifiers contributes to sensationalism. These descriptive and emotional negative labels are considered to be the contributing factors to the expression of sensationalism, reaching a high level of attitude saturation (Bednarek, 2006; Martin and White, 2005). Also, negative evaluation is an important part of evoking emotion (Martin and White, 2005). This suggests that online tabloids have acquired a substantial emotional impact by consistently arousing negative emotions. Given that social media is an important distribution channel for online tabloids, online tabloids need to adapt to the logic of social media. Therefore, this finding is contrary to Wadbring's (2016) findings, which suggest that journalists' communication on social media is moving in a more positive direction. Our results indicate that online tabloids exhibit stronger performance in expressing negative sentiment. At this point, we can find an explanation from the viral emotional transmission mentioned in the literature review. This result is consistent with Berger and Milkman's (2012) view who point out that the social transmission of emotional content may not only be driven by valence but may also induce different levels of physiological arousal or activation. Anger and anxiety are characterised by high arousal or activation. This state of arousal has been shown to increase people's action-related behaviours (Gaertner and Dovidio, 1977). Therefore, the relationship between emotion and social communication in news is more complex than valence alone. Positive emotions can indeed increase the social transmission of news, but the viral transmission is partly driven by physiological arousal (Berger and Milkman, 2012). Therefore, many of the emotional and descriptive negative labels used by *The Sun Online* in the news may trigger viral content transmitted on social media.

However, interviewees had different views on the rise of sensationalism in online tabloids. Two interviewees (Editor 2 and Editor 6) also disputed the above results. They asserted that they tend to write in a more straightforward, accurate and clear way, and they do not believe their writing style is sensational and dramatic. Also, they thought it was not feasible to copy all the traditional tabloid ways on the website. In the online environment, the creation of news stories was affected by many factors, such as SEO and the control of social media. Therefore, they drew on some elements of traditional tabloids, but only if appropriate. They needed to be very alert to sensational news stories, because if they were too sensational, they could incur penalties on social media platforms:

'I think when I'm writing a headline, it has to be the most interesting headline, and it must contain all the most important facts, at the least all the key points, in this title.' (*Mail Online* Editor, Editor 2)

'Because we are competing with other news outlets, we tend to use a very straightforward way of writing. We have to be careful with sensational rising because if you exaggerate something, Facebook has the power to penalise you and downgrade you on the news feeds.' (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 6)

At the same time, the editor also suggests that accurately defining whether online tabloids use sensational methods is challenging. They acknowledge that their content may be more emotionally charged than the BBC's. However, compared with traditional newspapers, it may not be significantly more sensational. Thus, the views of the two interviewees were contrary to the results of the content analysis. It is worth mentioning that scholars generally criticize the tabloid style for problems such as untruthfulness, inaccuracy, and exaggeration. For example, tabloids' use of hyperbole and sensationalism blurs the boundary between fact and fiction, which proves to be a profitable method for attracting readers (Grabe & Bucy, 2022, p. 567). Similarly, Grabe & Sharma (2017) point out that tabloids undermine journalism's sacred mission of informing the public with accurate information. However, the study showed that journalists believed they adhered to an objective, factual approach to creating news, although content analysis revealed that sensationalism was amplified. Meanwhile, they believe that due to the limitations of social media platforms, they cannot report exaggerated disinformation. The author contends that sensationalism remains profitable in today's online environment. However, some tabloid reporters believe they have shifted from an exaggerated, subjective, and fictional style to what they consider to be objective, factual reporting, primarily driven by the pursuit of profit rather than public service. This shift is influenced by the importance of social media platforms as a source of traffic, and the necessity for accuracy due to social media's role in limiting the spread of false information.

Nevertheless, according to the interviews conducted with five other interviewees (Journalists 1, 2 and Editors 3,4,5), online tabloids persist in employing dramatic, sensational, eye-catching, and vernacular methods to narrate stories. These are well-known narrative styles of tabloids. The author agrees with the views of these five interviewees. They aspire to create an exciting and captivating reading experience for the audience. Also, they might try and provoke a level of controversy as well. As one *Mail Online* reporter explained:

‘We use quite traditional tabloid methods in that there is a lot of drama in the headlines, for example, the inverted pyramid method in terms of copy, keeping the most important information at the top and the least at the bottom.’ (*MailOnline* Journalist, Journalist 1)

Furthermore, one editor from *The Sun Online* (Editor 4) emphasised that they do have to consider various factors in the online environment. Nonetheless, they still use the sensational, exaggerated and eye-catching techniques, as they need to maintain a balance and make sure they do not lose their identity. He explained:

‘It depends. For example, if you're talking about headlines, headlines are very different on the Internet. We have various multimedia factors to consider, including SEO and traffic, as well as obtaining a lot of information. However, at the same time, we need to keep it as *The Sun* story that just because it is the online world, it does not mean that we should lose any of our identity. We need to keep it. We need to keep it engaging. We

need readers to know this is some story we are equipped on. Some stories are sensational. They are entertaining, they grab attention, and they will grab your attention. It's important to keep that balance between SEO demands and other such things that you have to deal with in online journalism. So, keep it sensational, keep it entertaining, keep it improving. (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 4)

By combining content analysis and interviews, the author argues that the sensationalist style is, overall, amplified in online tabloids. However, it is worth thinking about why the other two journalists' opinions on sensationalism are contrary to the results of the content analysis. There are two explanations for this result. Firstly, reporters' emotions can occasionally impact on their reporting, as writing is an act influenced by the unconscious mind (Soloski, 1989). On the other hand, journalists develop their professional values and perceptions through a social learning process within tabloids news organisations, so they internalise the organisations' goals and values and make them their own (Skovsgaard, 2014).

However, according to one reporter's explanation, they seem to be very careful about the use of emotions in the news. While some journalists are reluctant to admit that their online stories are sensational, they add emotion in a subtle way. It is worth noting that online tabloids often use quotations with strong emotions to increase the emotional nature of the news. An editor of *The Sun Online* (Editor 6) explained how they emotionalise online tabloids:

'We can use other people's emotion. We can't use our own emotion when reporting a report of the news story. We can only use quotes because that would be editorialising. However, if you're just doing a report of a court case, the emotion has to be from somebody else. You can't put your own emotion on it. We need to be objective rather than subjective.' (*The Sun Online Editor*, Editor 6)

Hence, compared with traditional tabloids, the emotional approach of digital tabloids has undergone some changes. Journalists often use the sentiments and comments of others to enhance emotional engagement through quotations. As mentioned above, tabloid journalists are constrained by social media policy and cannot be too emotional and sensational in news, so they seem to try to be objective and neutral. However, journalists may use very subtle methods to arouse the audience's feelings. Quotations are frequently employed to express praise, criticism, or slander towards individuals or events they are involved in. As many scholars (Wahl-Jorgensen's, 2013; Jullian, 2011; Rodrigo-Alsina, 2005) have suggested, external voices are allowed to express their ideas more loudly than journalists. In this way, quotations help journalists to include their personal views on the event and ultimately play an ideological role in the text. This is why news reports are also full of journalists' views and beliefs, even if they try to remain neutral (Bell,1991; Rodrigo-Alsina, 2005). Also, this finding aligns with Wahl-Jorgensen's (2013a) argument that journalists tend to attribute emotions to news sources.

Therefore, from the perspective of comprehensive content analysis the majority of journalists, sensational features have been amplified. Although a few journalists (Editor2 and Eitor6) disagree with their use of more sensational narrative style, they do believe that their use of emotions is mainly reflected in quotations. It is worth mentioning why the sensational features of online tabloids are amplified. First of all, this is because of the market forces and commercial interests of tabloids news media outlets. As is widely acknowledged, tabloids are commercial news organisations, so their commercial nature determines their pursuit of traffic to a certain extent. Social media is an important channel for tabloids to distribute and attract traffic, and the underlying logic of social media is the creation of emotional and attention-grabbing content. Sensationalism represents a specific news story intended to trigger an audience response (attention, emotion). Kilgo and Harlow (2018) illustrate that sensational stories get more shares on Facebook than normal stories. This means that sensational stories are more likely to attract the attention of Facebook users, and Facebook users may amplify the influence of sensational stories through social sharing, which may incite online tabloid journalism to produce sensational stories. As Trilling et al (2017) suggest, newsworthiness and 'shareworthiness' are strongly associated with sensationalism. Sensational and attention-grabbing content is more likely to be widely shared on social media platforms, increasing awareness and exposure for online news outlets. To optimise the dissemination of news on social media platforms, online tabloids prioritise the use of sensationalism as a strategic approach. Secondly, online tabloids aim to capture their audience's attention. In a fiercely competitive environment, online news platforms must attract and retain readers' attention. As Tong (2023, p.22) highlights, to capture the audience's attention within a brief moment, news media and journalists must ensure that the headlines of their news items are compelling and enticing enough to prompt audience engagement. Online news organisations rely on advertising revenue, so sensational content frequently generates more page views and clicks, making it more appealing to advertisers. Finally, as the reporter pointed out, sensationalism is a traditional and classic feature of tabloids, and it serves to maintain their brand independence. In addition, tabloids need to be cautious of headlines becoming a clickbait.

Both online tabloids maintain a similar level of personalisation in their print version, with few significant changes. This personal style is not just in the political news, but also in the news coverage of disasters, ordinary people, and celebrities. When describing content, online tabloids pay more attention to personal private life, experiences and emotions. There has always been controversy in journalism about personalised style. Esser (1999, p.318) suggests that due to economic pressure in the media industry, sensational, emotional, and personalised reporting styles have spread from tabloid newspapers to hard news outlets. The result is a decline in the quality of news, with serious consequences for public debate and democracy. Others refute this and point out that the personal style makes news less abstract and more comprehensible (Baum, 2002).

Based on the interviews, the editors' explanations for their use of tabloid style certainly fit the latter view. As noted by two editors, they like to tell stories in a way that is easy for most people to understand. One editor of *The Sun Online* said:

‘Tabloid may have become something of a dirty word within journalism - especially in the US - but for me it means presenting an important story in the most accessible way possible. When there's important news to be shared, doing so in a way that reaches people from all walks of life rather than those who are highly educated is a public service. I've worked at broadsheet publications in the past and regularly thought that coverage felt inaccessible for most people. I often have my mum in mind when thinking about the way we write stories. She is highly interested in current affairs but as a former hospital cleaner didn't go to university.’ (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 5)

Similarly, Macdonald (1998, p.110) points out that under certain circumstances, personalisation can be successfully combined with extensive exploration of issues, the openness of views, and attention to personal political provocations. Personalisation plays a great role in encouraging knowledge to form attributes. Although the use of personalised style is controversial among scholars, the author argues that in certain circumstances, the personalised style of online tabloids does facilitate an understanding of stories and the promotion of citizens' right to information. It also generates widespread interest in social issues. However, the data also revealed that personalisation is employed when reporting on some celebrities, human interest stories, and mundane trivia. The use of personalisation in this context is undoubtedly about chasing traffic. Therefore, both online tabloids use personalisation, which not only helps people gain a broader understanding of news, but also contributes to tabloids gaining more traffic. Similarly, Skovsgaard (2014)'s research results generally support the view that tabloid journalists' use of the tabloid style is due to competitive pressure and profit, but that this is by no means entirely explained by the profit motive. Indeed, tabloid reporters' insistence on entertainment has led to greater use of the tabloid style. However, a stronger explanation for their use of a personalized journalistic style is that they also adhere to the role of public mobilizers, whose primary focus is to engage ordinary citizens in democratic debate. This demonstrates that personalized news, in the eyes of journalists, also serves a democratic function.

When comparing *Mail Online* to traditional tabloids (0.1957), it is evident that *Mail Online* (0.3444) has weakened the mode of address feature, but still retains it. However, there is no distinction between *The Sun* online and the print newspaper in this regard. This feature involves simulating a level of interaction between content producers and the audience. Online tabloids continue to engage with readers in a familiar and casual tone. In this thesis' content analysis, we observed that this tone is also more prominently reflected in the headlines.

Particularly, the headlines of *The Sun Online* still emulate interaction by using a familiar and informal tone which incorporates colloquial language, slang, idioms, catchphrases, quotations, first and second person perspectives, imperatives, and interrogatives. As shown in these examples:

'BE CAREFUL!' This Morning's Dr Ranj reveals he was robbed on his way home from the Brit Awards (*The Sun Online*, 15 February 2022)

'SYMPTOM CHECKER The FIRST sign you could be infected with Omicron revealed – and you might miss it' (*The Sun Online*, 11 January 2022)

'NO KIDDING I'm a mum-of-10 and now my daughter's pregnant at 21 – I couldn't be prouder' (*The Sun Online*, 29 January 2022)

As Conboy (2006) believes, the headline uses familiar nicknames and slang, which conveys a familiar tone, and characters are given their full names in subsequent articles. Moreover, familiar names and nicknames are used as a bridge of kinship, connecting readers to the world beyond their life experiences. These characteristics have always been the characteristics of traditional tabloids newspaper. Trudgill (1995) agrees that this is in line with the blue-collar appeal of this newspaper because it tries to match the language with the reader. In addition, an obvious way for tabloids to try to strengthen their relationship with readers is to use colloquial language. This is because interactivity and informality help readers and journalists share the same values. This also means more street talk when addressing readers. Rhetorical questions, deixis and other colloquial expressions often appear in the headlines of online tabloids. For example:

'KEEP DANCING! Strictly's Maisie Smith braves the cold in plunging bra at tour rehearsals' (*The Sun Online*, 29 January 2022)

'Is that all we get for £12 BILLION? Sajid Javid admits NHS waiting lists will keep RISING for another two years despite April's national insurance hike' (*The Sun Online* 15 February 2022)

In addition, in content analysis, we also observed that this feature often manifests in the form of yelling at powerful people to take action. This strategy seems to allow newspapers to talk to readers in an informal way, constantly demonstrating their ability to take action for readers. This language implies that tabloids stand on the side of readers and oppose the interests of power groups (Fiske, 1994). In this regard, the tone of the traditional newspaper yelling at powerful people and calling for action is more aggressive than the online tabloids. For example:

‘SORT IT OUT, OR GO, BOJO’

(*The Sun*, 11 January 2022)

‘ELLO ELLO ELLO BOJO!’

(*The Sun*, 1 February 2022)

‘You can’t have your birthday cake.... and eat it, Boris’

(*The Sun*, 24 January 2022)

Traditional tabloids aspire to be seen by readers as important players in news production so as to own their unique populist acclaim. Journalists and readers are no longer bound by decorum, they are treated as equal familiar members, with the same social status (Conboy, 2006).

It is worth noting that many colloquial, informal, slang, and idiomatic expressions in *The Sun Online* often appear in the first few words of the headline, often referred to as the ‘kicker’. This entails prefixing headlines with a two- or three-word clause, followed by a colon (Dick, 2011,p.469). In contrast, *the Mail Online* does not fully retain the headline characteristics of the print version, so the language that simulates interaction, or the familiar tone, is reduced, compared with the print version. The response of the reporters clarify why *The Sun Online* has not weakened these characteristics, whereas the *Mail Online* has seen a decline. One editor from *The Sun* said:

“You can see that the first few words of our headline are always colloquial, informal, or word play, and we will mark them with special colours. This has little to do with search engines. This is just to keep our brand prominence because *The Sun* is known for its snappy headlines and its poems. It's our online headlines. To keep these, we call them kickers. *The Sun* has always been known since the 60s when it launched for. So that's sort of bringing out and moving from the first century by keeping them on our online stories as well. Yes, we are influenced by social media, SEO, but we still want to keep this feature.” (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 4)

For *Mail Online*, this headline feature has become weakened. This is because SEO influences headlines and news content, and it limits the display of traditional tabloid headline style.

From the interviews, it emerged that when reporters find that certain stories do not perform well on social platforms or home pages, they will consult with the SEO team on how to optimise the story, often resulting in headline modification to align with the search perspective. In addition, two reporters noted that the most evident change is the lengthening of headlines to accommodate keywords into the headline. One *Mail Online* reporter explained the change in the headline:

‘SEO changes the tabloid headlines massively - and we have very long headlines that can run over 5 or 6 lines. But since there are so many clicks from Google (most are just directly from our homepage) - we need to ensure that we keep the keywords that people will be searching for on Google.’ (*MailOnline* Journalists, journalist 1)

Two interviewees from *Mail Online* illustrated the impact SEO has on tabloid style:

‘I think you may have noticed some colloquialisms, jokes, and puns in our headline in the print edition. On the online version, we have reduced the use of them because we need to consider headlines from a search perspective. We need to make sure we include search terms in the title to drive traffic.’ (*MailOnline* editor, editor 1)

‘We might be instructed to use the word ‘murderer’ instead of the word ‘assassinator’ because they think that most people will search for the world murder in the story.’

(*MailOnline* community moderator)

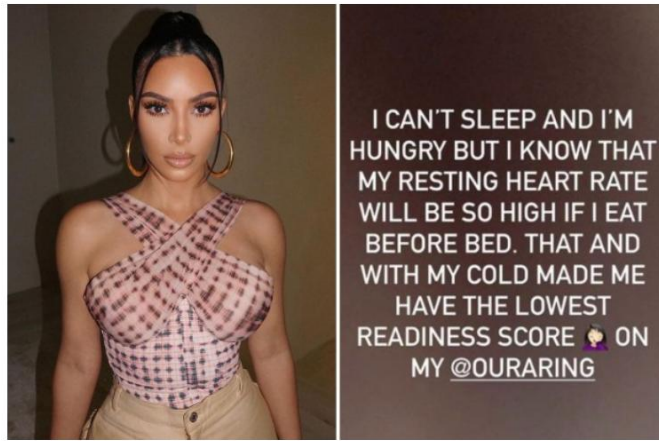
Therefore, *The Sun* online aims to maintain brand independence by keeping the headlines interactive, colloquial, and intimate in tone and still retain this feature despite the influence of SEO. On the contrary, *MailOnline* is heavily influenced by SEO, resulting in a significantly reduced use of the mode of address style, compared to print newspapers. The shift in *Mail Online* style is driven by digital strategy and increased web traffic. Furthermore, another interesting finding is the extensive use of social media as a news source by both online tabloids, surpassing that of traditional tabloids. The data indicates that tabloids use social media not only as a platform for marketing their news content, increasing website traffic and strengthening customer relations, but also sometimes as a news resource.

6.3.4 Using Social Media Sources as News Sources

Through the content analysis, it was observed that online tabloids primarily use four social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. The results indicate that online tabloids have increased their use of social media resources as news resources. Also, the results indicated that tabloids mainly employ social media resources for the function of illustration or as catalysts for news stories when the tweets themselves are newsworthy. *The Sun* online received 23% of its news content from social media sources, while *Mail Online's* usage amounted to 23.9%. *Mail Online* focuses more on using social media content as illustrations

within news stories. Conversely, *The Sun* used social media content more frequently to trigger news stories. At the same time, *The Sun* Online predominantly used social media sourced from celebrities, ordinary people, internet celebrities, and athletes, while *Mail Online* predominantly relied on ordinary people, celebrities, and organisations as primary social media sources. These results partly disagree with research conducted by Broersma and Graham (2013) on the use of social media resources by British and Dutch print newspapers. While they also highlight that newspapers commonly rely on celebrities, athletes, the general public, and politicians as the four main sources, they emphasise that quality newspapers tend to source tweets from the general public and politicians more often. In contrast, they argue that tabloids rely more on celebrities and athletes. Although online tabloids lean more towards relying on celebrities' social media among all social media citation sources, they are also increasing their usage of content from ordinary people's social media. *MailOnline's* citations of ordinary people's social media content rank first (10.3%) among all its sources, while *The Sun's* social media content sourced from ordinary people ranked second only to celebrity citations with 5.6%. At the same time, both online tabloids significantly increased social media citations from ordinary people compared to print tabloids. However, as online tabloids increase their references to social media, this may soften the news.

Additionally, both online tabloids frequently incorporate social media content from celebrities and ordinary people. Broersma and Graham (2013, p.460) also suggest that journalists enter the private domain of well-known or newsworthy people through social media, from celebrities to politicians. As BBC's Richard Sambrook stated: 'social media are the new towns, or cities, or neighborhood bars where the public gather and discuss things' (Newman, 2009, p.10). Specifically, the news feature in online tabloids' use of social media is that reporters also focus on celebrities, athletes, politicians, and other well-known elite actors and 'explore their private fields (Broersma and Graham, 2013, p.458). According to the author's observation, celebrity tweets used by journalists mainly include celebrity post updates on social media, daily life, and other trivia, or scandals. For example, Kim Kardashian was attacked by fans after she posted on Instagram that she was slammed to eat (Ciandella, 2022). It is worth noting that the findings of this present study showed that online tabloids use social media resources to trigger news stories at a significantly higher rate than print tabloids. Therefore, unlike traditional newspapers, tabloids increasingly use social media resources by directly incorporating content published by celebrities or ordinary people on Instagram or TikTok (text, pictures, videos). They use the status or videos released by celebrities as news topics. Online tabloids not only directly quote the language of celebrities but also describe and attach whole videos. In the author's opinion, this will make the news softer and entertaining and intensify the prying into the private lives of celebrities.



TV

'TERRIBLE' Kim Kardashian slammed for refusing to eat even though she's 'hungry' as fans claim she's 'encouraging eating disorders'

Figure 6.27

As said above, ordinary people's social media is also the primary social media source cited by internet tabloids. This occurs through several mechanisms. The tabloids source content from citizens' feedback and opinions. Using social media resources amplifies the tabloids' voice as it facilitates collecting social media user's opinions on social media. Sometimes, they are used to measure public perceptions of political and social issues. For instance, in the case of the party gate event, some news articles in the *Mail Online* drew upon public anger and ridicule against Boris Johnson from social media (Phillips and Bunyan, 2021).

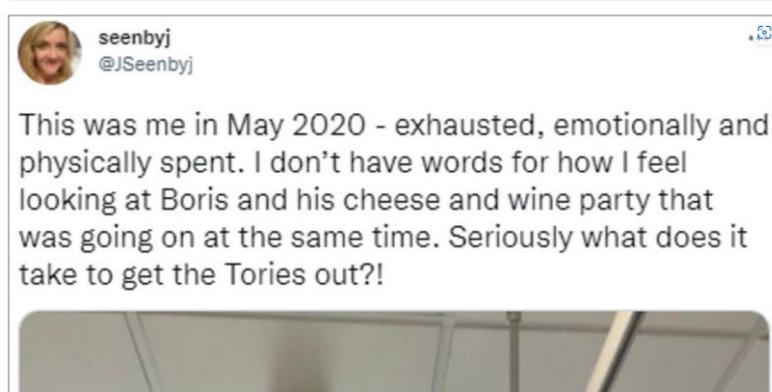


Figure 6. 28

Both online tabloids also quote ordinary people's views on various social issues. For example, in the following event: 'the popcorn makers sparked outrage among social media viewers when they placed a large billboard advertisement just a few feet away from the Cenotaph in the park' (Gant, 2022).

Twitter users blasted the brand for 'shamelessly' plonking the huge billboard by the iconic war memorial. It is pictured driving through Westminster

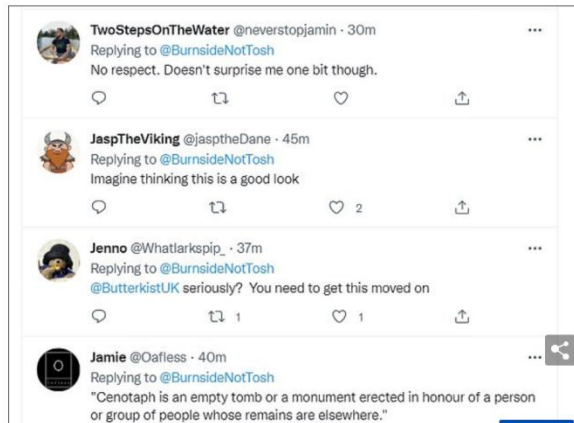


Figure 6. 29

Also, for both online tabloids, these resources are used for soft news reports as a means to obtain public feedback on popular TV dramas. In addition, the rise of news topics on lifestyle topics was mentioned in the analysis of news topics. The author noted a correlation between this trend and journalists' citations of content on social media platforms. Both tabloids often quote ordinary people's life tips and their every story (Roach, 2022).



Next Ayeh sits the perfectly cooked egg on top and adds a couple of drops of her favourite hot sauce directly on top to give the bagel an extra kick

Figure 6. 30

Social media serves as a platform for sourcing diverse perspectives and opinions. By monitoring social media conversations and trends, news outlets can identify emerging stories, measure public sentiment, and include a wider range of voices in their reporting. Therefore, the use of social media has the potential to infuse tabloids with a multitude of voices and people's reactions. This verifies the views that tabloid journalism is a forum for diverse voices and contributors, as Bingham and Conboy (2015) stated. Therefore, this is related to participatory or deliberative democracy, as the function of journalism is to include citizens in public debate. Including ordinary people in the news is the first step in engaging citizens in democratic deliberation, identifying social problems, and proposing solutions (Strömbäck, 2005). Meanwhile, tabloids adopting social media users' reactions and opinions on social events, politicians, and powerful organizations also align with the democratizing effect on society advocated by some scholars. Tabloids are progressive and generous by empowering ordinary people with a potent voice against elitism and vested interests. They criticize privileged political elites and fight against social injustice (Bingham and Conboy, 2015; Örnebring and Jönsson, 2004; Fiske, 1989). Tabloids also encourage people's critical consciousness. This approach serves as a bridge between the audience, whether the subject pertains to politics or an attitude towards entertainment. Reich (2011) thinks that news reports are more attractive and accessible from people's perspectives because observations in tweets can naturally connect abstract topics with the reader's experience. In addition, online tabloids report on celebrities, popular trends on social media, and viral articles, which add more trivia to the tabloids. This leads to a decline in news value and news quality. This is the same as the view of some scholars that tabloids' focus on areas such as celebrities, ordinary people's private lives, scandals, and sex serves as a diversion, diverting the audience's attention away from significant social issues. Tabloid journalism is seen to diminish the quality of public discourse (Bernstein, 1992; Basto, 2017; Popović and Popović, 2014). Also, as Broersma and Graham (2013) point out, all content can be provided to everyone on social media. Because of the openness of social media, it will lead to tabloids losing their exclusivity. In addition, in online tabloids, tweets seem to be viewed as superficial by journalists.

According to the interviewees, reservations were expressed about directly using social media as a source of information:

‘There is such a way. I know some people use social media resources as news sources, but I do not do that. There are enough news sources in our official system’ (*MailOnline Editor*, Editor 2)

‘If something is going viral on social media that could be of interest to readers, I will take a look.’ (*MailOnline Editor*, Editor 3)

This perspective is consistent with the findings of Broersma and Graham (2012), and Kant (2013). News organisations also employ social media to discuss their activities and share ideas. Journalists are equipped to monitor the constant flow of news and information on social media. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the use of social media resources may bring new voices, topics, and the public to the news industry. However, the editor of the *Mail Online* made it clear that he used official sources. Hermida, Lewis and Zamith (2014) refer to the credibility rating, which is applied to the news industry. This means that journalists tend to respect a certain source rating, and they attribute more credibility to official sources. This sentiment aligns with editor 2 and editor 3's attitude in the interview. Therefore, from the comprehensive content analysis and interview analysis, while monitoring social media platforms has become a part of tabloids' daily news collection, this does not mean that social media dominates newspaper content as a source of information. Although the findings show that online tabloids use social media content as a resource more than print media, the percentage of citations originating from social media remains relatively low. The reporters stated that they would prefer official rather than unofficial sources. However, as online tabloids mainly obtain social media resources from celebrities, ordinary people, and athletes, this accelerates the softening of the news. Similarly, Tong (2022, p.63) suggests that social media content on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter, closely resembles tabloid-style content, often focusing on trivial, personal, and emotionally-driven material such as cute cat pictures, individual selfies, and amusing videos of adorable kids' dances. Therefore, the increase of online tabloid citing social media content can diversify news sources to a certain extent, thus attracting audiences and having a democratizing effect on society. However, it can also reduce the quality of public discourse and accelerate the tabloidization of news.

Overall, based on our content analysis and interviews, a range of modifications in the traditional characteristics of tabloids in the digital age becomes apparent. Some features have been amplified in the online context, while others have been reduced or remain unchanged. Moreover, some changes in traditional characteristics differ between the two online tabloids. It was found that the changes in the traditional characteristics of tabloids in the digital age are very complex and diverse. It is not a straightforward progression or a single trend in tabloid characteristics, but rather a multitude of changes across various aspects. At the same time, online tabloids have increased their use of new features, such as multimedia, data visualisation, and social media resources. This underscores the importance of reassessing the specific dynamics and complexity of tabloids, as highlighted by Conboy (2021, pp.1-2). Tabloids are a multifaceted phenomenon that has successfully adapted to the digital news media and social media landscape.

6.3.5 The continuation and change of tabloid in the digital environment

This chapter has demonstrated the symbiotic relationship between the traditional tabloid characteristics and different digital strategies. By understanding the influence of employing

digital strategies on tabloids and the changes in their characteristics through quantitative analysis, a deeper understanding can be gained of how tabloids effectively combine these digital strategies with traditional features to achieve a successful transformation. In fact, tabloids' digital strategy amplifies some of their traditional characteristics, but at the same time limits or weakens the development of others.

The digital transition influences tabloids, but the impact of digital strategies on the characteristics of tabloids is complex and do not simply amplify all features. This challenges the view held by some scholars that digitisation and social media inevitably transform all characteristics into a more tabloid direction (Zelizer, 2010 ; Wadbring and Ödmark, 2016, p. 136). The research findings demonstrate that the traditional characteristics of online tabloids have experienced varying degrees of change, with some characteristics having been strengthened and others muted. Regarding the news topics, the findings presented here indicate an increase in coverage of soft news topics such as lifestyle, human interest stories, and accidents in both tabloids. Additionally, *MailOnline* has shown an enhanced focus on entertainment content. At the same time, the sensationalism of both tabloids has intensified. Undoubtedly, these changes are closely linked to the influence of social media platforms and their use of social media resources as news content. In fact, as digital tabloids adapt to the logic of social media, certain traditional characteristics are amplified. However, in comparison to its print version, *The Sun Online* has reduced its focus on traditional tabloid topics such as entertainment news and crime news. This suggests that some scholars overly stress the potential of social media in accelerating the growth of tabloid characteristics, presenting a somewhat one-sided view. They overlook the complexity of and synergy between digital strategies. The interviews revealed that although social media can influence the news agenda, journalists must strike a balance between social media traffic and homepage traffic. While they consider topics with viral potential on social media, they cannot blindly pursue them. They need to comprehensively consider the traffic on different platforms, as some stories may be suitable for social media but not necessarily for the homepage. In addition, the amplified visual characteristics of tabloids signify that the combined effect of three strategies - homepage strategy, social media strategy, and digital storytelling strategy - has enhanced the visually dominated form of tabloids.

In addition, the results also indicated that sometimes digital strategies can limit the development of traditional tabloid features and alter others. For example, the findings of this study suggest that *MailOnline's* headlines have shown a decrease in the use of mode of address compared to traditional newspapers. Although some journalists maintained they write their headlines in a traditional way, they generally suggests that online headlines are very different from traditional ones. For a website to rank high in search results, journalists need to adopt the rules of SEO, meaning that editors need to include readers' search terms in their headlines. On the one hand, this practice alters the headline's form, resulting in extremely lengthy headlines for the *MailOnline*, distinguishing them from their print newspapers and other broadsheet websites. On the other hand, it diminishes the use of traditional features in

online tabloid headlines. This means that the language has to be more accurate and direct. That is why some journalists think they do not write headlines in the traditional, sensational or colloquial way, because headlines must contain specific information and keywords. As a result, the traditional features of tabloid headlines, such as puns, jokes and rhetoric, are weakened. Headlines have become more accurate and direct.

Many scholars consider that tabloid characteristics align with the logic of social media and the internet (Conboy 2021, p.8; Zelizer, 2010). However, this study found that some tabloid features do not match the logic of the internet and other platforms. Similarly, one of the interviewees, Journalist 2 also mentioned that tabloids needed to change certain traditional features in order to adapt to the logic of digital platforms. As discussed in the chapter five, the introduction of social media strategies, search engine optimisation, and audience metrics have impacted news-making. Due to their commercial nature and the need to pursue traffic, they must adjust to various social media platforms and Google without sacrificing their independent judgment. Therefore, just as some journalists and editors said, it is important to retain the traditional tabloid characteristics, that is, to protect the brand's independence, but this is very difficult. Two editors (Editors 1 and 4) and one Journalist (journalists 2) explained that tabloids are required to chase traffic. The traditional tabloid style alone cannot generate substantial online traffic. Two interviewees pointed out:

‘As you know, a large part of our traffic comes from social media and Google. If we completely use traditional tabloids to write news, it is difficult to attract Google. We need to change our headline. If we want to get traffic, we need to let the tabloids adapt to these platforms’. (*Mail Online Journalist, Journalist 2*)

‘Traditional tabloids cover stories in a certain traditional way that doesn't generate online traffic, because they are just traditional newspaper tabloid stories, like a man catching a big fish that they still put in the newspaper sometimes, we can do that story and put it on our website, but it won't get many clicks. As we said, we are dictated by chasing traffic. We have to give up some traditional features’. (*The Sun Online Editor, Editor 6*)

As Richmond (2008, p.54) states, those headlines are perfect in print newspapers since they complement the pictures and the page layout as a whole to attract the reader's attention. However, they are not suitable for the online medium, and insisting on them is self-indulgence. The research results of this study are more nuanced. It is true that print media and online media are different, and online tabloids cannot completely copy the characteristics of traditional tabloids. However, this research has shown that tabloids have not wholly abandoned the traditional headline features, but tried to retain them. The interview findings suggest that the use of SEO has changed the headlines of tabloids, but in the content analysis, it was found that elements of familiar names, nicknames, informal colloquialisms, and other

traditional tabloid features were still present. For example, the printing convention ‘kicker’ is used for every title of *The Sun Online*. (The title is prefixed with two or three-word clauses and colons.) This result may be explained by the fact that brand independence of the media, which means a connection between newspapers and readers. In addition, the quantitative results also show that *The Sun Online* has not abandoned their style of capitalising their headlines in terms of form. It is well known that *The Sun Online* is famous for its unique format in history. Interviewees also emphasised that despite SEO and technological influences, they still need to retain their traditional features to a certain extent. Therefore, under the influence of digital strategies, both online tabloids have amplified certain traditional characteristics of tabloids while weakening others to better align with digital platforms. Their objective is to strike a balance among traffic, technology, and traditional features to ensure their brand identity.

The impact of digital strategies on online tabloids contradicts some studies' findings. Contrary to the assertion of certain scholars who contend that digital media inevitably leads to either tabloidisation or extreme tabloidization. For example, Basto (2017, p.215) suggests that social media platforms have introduced a model of news production, blurring the lines between broadsheets and tabloids and challenging the current classification system. Consequently, the tabloids are facing potentially more damaging changes. Basto (2017) also argues that these changes in digital media force tabloids to turn to viral news sites like BuzzFeed, that publish compilations of highly clickable content rarely covering news events. However, this thesis' findings differ from Basto's because the tabloids did not become a viral website (extreme tabloidisation). For example, the percentage of news coverage on politics ranks first in the *MailOnline* and second in *The Sun Online*. This indicates that both online tabloids have not deviated to become platforms that publish only highly clickable compilations of content that rarely offer any significant news value. This preservation of substantial news is driven by their professional journalistic values, as attested to by the interviewed reporters, who made it clear that they cannot blindly pursue traffic and only report trivial, entertainment centered, sensational stories but also need to report important events that people should know. Additionally, Basto (2017) neglects to consider the synergistic effects of digital strategies on tabloids, focusing more on social media and the effects of virality on tabloid agendas. This seems to be a question that many scholars ignore when discussing the changes in tabloids. Furthermore, Basto' analysis lacks empirical research on the influence of SEO on tabloids, a factor discussed in the previous chapter. Since the SEO team plays an important role in guiding tabloid content by identifying trending topics from sources like the BBC and then providing suggestions to reporters for create the news in line with these keywords. This underscores the significance of homepage strategies, diminishing tabloids' reliance on social media platform algorithms for visibility.

At the same time, in the interview, both online news editors also commented on the differences between online tabloids and viral websites:

'Let us see, website like the Huffington Post and BuzzFeed and all these kind of places, they took tabloid characteristics. They take the tabloid mentality. They didn't produce nearly enough stories. In my opinion, they did try to take that kind of like tabloids and take a headline. tabloids are totally different from viral sites.' (*MailOnline* Editor, Editor 2)

Another editor from *The Sun Online* added:

'*The Sun Online* has done everything to distinguish itself from these viral websites. We pride ourselves on good journalism and work hard daily to verify stories. We make sure not to copy and paste videos or viral content simply. We verify everything we do with professional journalists who get paid for their good work'. (*The Sun Online*, Editor 4)

In addition, Eldridge II's (2021, p.17) research on the early version of the *MailOnline* suggests that the *MailOnline* is a replication of what made tabloids popular, amplified, and digitised in a way that triggers high rankings in search results using SEO. However, we contend that this assertion lacks balance in representing the attributes of digital tabloids. From the content analysis and conducted interviews in this present study, it was found that online tabloids did not fully adopt and amplify all the characteristics of traditional tabloids. They didn't simply copy but rather adjusted some features. This difference may be attributed to the fact that Eldridge II (2021) only used *MailOnline* as an illustrative example and did not conduct an in-depth study on various features. In contrast, the study conducted by Magin et al. (2021) suggests that the level of tabloidisation was higher in offline tabloids than in online tabloids. Magin et al. (2021, p.69) believes that the impact of social media on online tabloids is relatively modest and that the characteristics of tabloids have remained relatively stable. These results differ from this research findings, which demonstrate that compared with print tabloids, some characteristics of tabloids have intensified while others have diminished in online tabloids. At the same time, online tabloids are influenced by social media to a certain extent. For example, both tabloids feature more coverage of human-interest stories and lifestyle content. Moreover, they have heightened their use of visuals and sensationalism to adapt to the demands of social media platforms. This disparity in findings can be attributed to the different context of tabloids, as Magin et al. (2021) focused on German tabloids and their focus was only on political news and did not examine other news topics. Therefore, relying solely on the analysis of political themes cannot fully capture the changes in tabloid characteristics. Indeed, a softening of hard news and less information are distinctive features of tabloids. However, the characteristics of tabloid content are not just the softening of political news. There are many other characteristics worth measuring, as discussed in the literature review. Conboy (2006, p.12) describes how tabloids all share certain features of popular journalism, including sensationalism, emotive language, the bizarre, the lewd, sex, chequebook journalism, gossip, police news, marriage and divorce, royal news, celebrities, among others. In addition, Djupsund and Carlson (1998, p.102) also suggest that the strong visual effect of the form is the concept of defining tabloid news. Consequently, the influence

of social media on tabloids is not limited to political news. It also affects the tabloid news agenda, tabloid visuals, and tabloid style. Therefore, comprehending changes in tabloid characteristics necessitates a multifaceted approach considering a diverse array of features.

Furthermore, there exists an inseparable relationship between the audience and the changes in tabloid characteristics. Most interviewees emphasised that the readers of traditional and digital tabloids are very different. In other words, the readership has changed. With news consumption shifting to the internet, the two tabloids did not hesitate to acknowledge that their target group had expanded, placing particular emphasis on attracting all people, especially the young. For example, the rise in human-interest stories or entertainment news in *MailOnline* may also reflect the fact that its audience has become younger. Similarly, the increase in foreign news coverage by these two online tabloids may be attributed to changes in their audience, as their aim is to attract more global readers. Most journalists who were interviewed stressed that changes in their online audience have led to adjustments in tabloid features. One *MailOnline* editor explained:

‘Yes, we also want to have a more global audience. For example, we did have a China department online desk in the UK. We have a couple of people in this department, we are aiming to get our news to a wider audience. Also, our content wants to include different cultures’. (*MailOnline* Editor, Editor 2)

Due to the fierce competition, tabloid journalists and editors themselves compete with other tabloids for readers. In this environment, the traditional tabloid characteristics can be a double-edged sword. Tabloids are famous for their traditional characteristics and attract a large number of readers, even as many viewers express their dislike. In order to win more readers, editors have to reduce some of the traditional characteristics of tabloids:

‘*The Sun* newspaper has a very strong identity in the British public and is world famous. We have tried to keep some of that with the websites. It is a difficult line to tread because *The Sun* is also very divisive. Although it is very popular with a certain section of the public in Britain, many people also dislike it. If you are on the internet, you are just fighting for readers across all walks of life, genders, classes, whatever.’ (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 6)

‘Print tabloids have a loyal readership, most of whom may be over 40 or 50 years old. On the website, our audience is much younger and broader. If we just copy what the newspaper did, we would lose many of those readers. We must make more changes for broader demands’. (*MailOnline* Editor2)

Consequently, the characteristics of online tabloids are influenced by audience structure and preferences. Online tabloids rely on audience measurement to determine whether to continue

reporting certain news or reduce its coverage. For example, as indicated by the quantitative results, a decline in the coverage of the royal family or football topics in *The Sun Online* may suggest a decrease in audience interest in these subjects. During the interviews, several editors indicated that if the audience dislikes a story or does not generate significant traffic, they will discontinue it, as this is the age of traffic. Due to the free consumption model of the two online tabloids, they heavily rely on click-through traffic to attract advertisers.

Therefore, in the digital age, the changes in the characteristics of tabloids are very complex, and they are conditioned by many aspects such as audience structure, digital strategy and platform. Through the above discussion, we can understand why the characteristics of tabloids exhibit a mixed trend of both increasing and decreasing. Consumption patterns enable the public's desires and preferences to supersede the traditional practices upheld by news organisations. This requires news organisations to adopt a more flexible approach across various media platforms. Almost all editors said that it is not feasible to copy all the characteristics of traditional tabloids on the online platform, and they must make some changes and adjustments. They expressed the view that online tabloids and tabloid newspapers are two different industries. These findings echo Richmond's (2008) view that online media should possess their own conventions, not the conventions inherited from print media. In addition, this present study finds that, contrary to the views of most scholars, they have overlooked the synergy of digital strategies and the complexity of their influence on the characteristics of tabloids. The use of digital strategies can be influenced by the judgment of journalists and the conventions of the newsroom, and most scholars have not considered how journalists use digital strategies. Existing considerations of digital strategies are predominantly unidirectional in nature, often focusing on the influence of social media, or the influence of search engines. What remains unnoticed is the fact that contemporary digital tabloids result from a convergence of multiple digital strategies. Additionally, their measurement of tabloidisation is an oversimplification, and they do not comprehensively consider all the changes in the characteristics of tabloids.

In the literature review, it was highlighted how there has been limited research conducted on the development of British online tabloids in the digital environment. This study has now filled this gap by exploring the main changes in the characteristics of the two online tabloids through content analysis and reporter interviews. Compared to their print versions, *MailOnline* and *The Sun Online* focus less on political news. However, they have a higher proportion of political news coverage among all news topics. *MailOnline* ranks first in coverage of political topics, while *The Sun Online* ranks second. Both platforms extensively cover entertainment, crime, accidents, human interest stories, lifestyle, and other soft news topics. It is worth noting that they portray soft news by increasing the use of social media sources from celebrities and ordinary people, introducing innovation to the way soft news is presented. This shows that, under the influence of social media and audience preferences, online tabloids tend to feature more entertaining and trivial news content. However, they have not neglected their responsibility for political reporting, for instance, focusing on social and

public affairs, including issues related to the cost of living and epidemic policies. Additionally, they have expanded their international coverage by highlighting, for example, the tensions between Russia and Ukraine. The increase in foreign reports shows that the content of tabloids has become more culturally diverse, and it also shows that tabloid news has strengthened its global perspective.

The sensational style of both tabloids has intensified. While several journalists hesitate to acknowledge their use of sensationalism, they admit to using quotes to emotionalise news. At the same time, the personalized style continues to be highly useful, with no significant changes observed. Regarding the mode of address, *The Sun Online* continues to use this feature as usual, but there has been a decrease in the mode of address in *MailOnline*. On the one hand, some journalists believe that although they use these traditional tabloid style to tell stories, this method differs from the traditional tabloid style that scholars have long criticised. As mentioned in the literature review, the tabloid style has always been the core of the controversy, being regarded as inferior by many critics, catering to the instinct of the public and the demand for sensationalism. Some common synonyms that scholars define tabloids are ‘yellow news,’ or soft news,’ and ‘information entertainment.’ They have also contemplated whether narrative or storytelling can provide important information. (Popović and Popović, 2014; Bird, 2009; Reinemann et al., 2012). Nevertheless, this research contends that what the reporters believe that their traditional tabloid style conveys critical news to people in a more understandable, interesting, and accurate way to ensure that people can get this important information. This can be construed as a public service. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Örnebring and Jönsson (2004, p.284), who assert that tabloid news has actually become an important and influential part of the public sphere of mainstream media, serving the public interest. In many cases, news elements defined as ‘bad’ (sensational, personalised) serve the public interest more than journalism, which is considered more respected. Bird (1998) and Macdonald (2000) argue that telling compelling stories can reach readers in ways that ‘objective’ reporting cannot. Journalists have long been encouraged to look at significant issues from a personal perspective, knowing that they are under-informed if the public rejects news simply out of boredom. Human interests, emotions, and personal experiences do not necessarily lead to a decline in news quality, as these aspects may contribute to a better understanding of the problem and increase the attention and knowledge of some news audiences (Baum, 2002). This illustrates that journalists' use of the traditional tabloid style of personalisation and sensationalism is not just a result of profit-seeking, but a democratic function. This is consistent with Rowe's (2011) argument that it is an oversimplification to interpret the use of personalised news styles as a negative trend for profit and that personalised styles that include ordinary citizens may also be an attempt to serve an important democratic function. In this present research, some journalists admitted using the traditional tabloid style to attract and engage the audience, aiming to generate more clicks. The content analysis employed for this thesis revealed that the increased sensationalism in both online tabloids is largely influenced by the demands of social media logics and the need to capture the audience's attention. Furthermore, as we discussed in the chapter five, if a piece of news garners substantial traffic, journalists tend to emulate its writing style. Therefore, the tabloid

style also serves as a barometer of audience preference, an essential survival strategy to attract a broader readership. Consequently, online tabloids continue to employ or amplify the traditional style to attract and inform their audiences.

In addition, both *MailOnline* and *The Sun Online* use a variety of visual element to enhance the appeal of their content, including increased use of images, data visualisations, and videos. Both tabloids extensively utilise multimedia elements. It is important to note that the use of visual elements in digital tabloids serves multiple purposes, including engaging readers, enhancing the user experience, attracting a wider audience, and accelerating news dissemination on social media.

Therefore, the results indicate that contemporary online tabloids seem more like a ‘hybrid’, or, to borrow a metaphor, a like cornucopia of all kinds of content. It takes this unique form covering a market niche between broadsheet news website and pure gossip websites or viral website news. Furthermore, this present work concurs with Dahlgren's perspective (2009, p.174), which contends that journalism strives to serve as an integrative catalyst and a shared platform for debate among a diverse citizenry that fundamentally shares a common public culture, and within which citizens utilise journalism as a means to engage with the political and cultural dimensions of society. Therefore, we think online tabloids have contribute to this debate. Online tabloids also reflect a combination of the tabloid format’s appeal with a better understanding of the specific news interests of the public. As an editor from the *MailOnline* said:

‘For online, we adhere to that recipe; we cover everything our readers might be interested in. It's about encompassing a wide range of topics. We have numerous stories, including compelling human interest pieces, valuable scientific insights, and significant political coverage. Editing plays a crucial role; it's about presenting content in a coherent form. It's a serious kind of blueprint that we just extract pockets for a line. It's like everything you could be interested in. It's important in its field, covering not just the old material, but also every political maneuver, twist, and even tired or low-grade celebrity news. We include various pictures and videos. We understand what our readers like and strive to provide them with the best content.’ (*MailOnline* Editor, Editor2)

As Basto (2017) points out, changes in audiences, social media, and news consumption patterns pose challenges for tabloids. It seems that for those who work at the crossroads of digital and tabloid journalism, the reality of digital journalism is not very clear, and the future is even less clear. However, this study believes that tabloids have successfully combined traditional characteristics with audience needs and the influence of digital strategies to achieve successful transformation. As Bingham and Conboy (2015, p.232) point out, the tabloid may be the medium of the twentieth century, but its values and approach will continue to define the twenty-first century. As editor from *The Sun Online* said:

‘In a sense, in the future of the internet, everyone wants to see great pictures and everyone wants to read the best stories. I certainly think it's a strong time for online tabloids because that is the future of journalism’. (*The Sun Online* Editor, Editor 4)

6.4 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter explored the combination of the traditional tabloid newspaper and new digital opportunities. The traditional features of tabloids still extend to the online platform. Tabloid journalists and editors acknowledge that it may not be easy to maintain brand identity online because the extension of traditional characteristics of tabloids are influenced by factors such as SEO, social media, and demographic changes in audiences. Therefore, some styles and characteristics of tabloids must be adjusted. Online tabloids have not embraced the extreme tabloidisation often described by scholars. The tabloidisation that appears in online tabloids is multi-faceted. Furthermore, the complex changes in the characteristics of tabloids can be attributed to their pursuit of web traffic, catering to audience demands, and adapting to the core logic of various platforms. Tabloids have completed the integration of traditional characteristics and digital strategy. Some traditional tabloid characteristics have intensified, while others have been widely retained but improved and adjusted. This finding is consistent with that of Siegert et al. (2011), who contend that news brand identity is determined by its political, social, regulatory, technical, and competitive environment. Social media and other platforms have changed the technical and competitive environment of news media, have affected the brand identification, working standards, and procedures of news production. In essence, online tabloids strike a balance between traditional characteristics and the synergy of digital strategies. Simultaneously, they navigate the interplay between tabloid characteristics and digital strategies, platforms, and audiences. Embracing technology, they correct characteristics that are inappropriate for the digital environment and audience, while amplifying and perpetuating traditional features to expand and engage audiences.

Chapter 7 Online tabloids use language to build readership

7.1 Introduction

Throughout their history, tabloids have been very successful in constructing communities. Indeed, this is a prominent feature and audience strategy of tabloids. They have been historically very successful at maintaining readership, with language playing a vital role in constructing community for traditional tabloids. This study analyzes two events, Partygate and Prince Andrew's sexual abuse case, to explore how digital tabloids build communities through language, reach a consensus with the audience, the role of emotion in online tabloids, the ideologies they express, and the social dynamics and realities they reveal.

Constructing a community is essential to build a readership (Conboy, 2006). Communities share a general knowledge (the common ground), shaping the basis of all social representations of the community and thus building the ideology of the various social groups within that community. In other words, knowledge here is not a proven true belief as in the classic definition in epistemology, but rather an accepted belief in a group (Van Dijk, 2006, p.130). Building consensus values with readers is very important for building groups because consensus is the core of the ideological practice of newspapers (Fowler, 1996, p.48). Consensus is based on a set of beliefs or values, but not facts. If the fact does not conform to the belief, the defender of the consensus must try to show in words that the reality does conform to the belief (Fowler, 1996, p. 50).

The ideology of expressing consensus is an important practice for the press to manage the relationship with government and capital as well as with individual readers. One strategy involves dichotomizing practices, which entail the construction of 'them' and 'us,' leading to polarization between internal and external groups based on ideology. This polarization emphasizes our positive attributes while highlighting their negative ones and conversely, downplays our negative attributes while accentuating their positive ones. (Van Dijk, 2006, p.124). This is usually how tabloid newspapers operate because the agenda of traditional tabloid newspapers is binary. At the same time, this knowledge is acquired and shared by all competent members of these communities, so it is usually presupposed. This shared, presupposed and natural knowledge makes discourse, communication, and readers' understanding of the text possible and crosses ideological groups' boundaries. Building a community through consensus is based on and presupposes the common knowledge of the community. Van Dijk (2006) believes that this is especially reflected in the systematic description of how ideological discourse represents 'us' and 'them'. The following sections will examine Partygate followed by Prince Andrew's sexual abuse case.

7.2 Partygate

In online tabloid articles, many familiar, colloquial and informal expressions are always used to give readers a sense of familiarity, and these informal and familiar expressions often appear in the headlines. Many phonemes and capitals of words are also used in the headlines of online tabloid news:

‘My brother lay dead and husband lay dying as No 10 threw BYOB bash’ (*MailOnline*, 11 January 2022)

‘Ex-Health Secretary 'attended garden gathering after hosting press conference warning OTHERS against socialising' (*MailOnline*, 21 December 2021)

‘THE PARTY IS OVER Boris Johnson APOLOGISES for No10 lockdown-busting party but tries to claim it was a WORK EVENT’ (*The Sun Online*, 12 January 2022)

The use of capitalisation and phonemes of words in tabloids are often a kind of semantic emphasis and hint. For example, ‘BYOB’ is an acronym for alcohol, meaning ‘bring your own bottle’ and ‘bring your own wine.’ The ‘BYOB’ here alludes to the party where Boris Johnson invited staff to bring their wine. This wine party is in stark contrast to the imminent death of a younger brother and husband mentioned by Twitter users and referred to in the *MailOnline*. Tabloids assume that readers are familiar with ‘BYOB’. This identification of a common language is aimed at an idealised reader, and this style of language forms an important part of the ideological pact with the readership (Conboy, 2006, p.15). The second headline, ‘OTHERS’ represents ordinary people who obey the lockdown rules. *The MailOnline* capitalised the word ‘OTHERS’, hinting that the Ex-Health Secretary asked the British people to comply with the lockdown rules while attending the party himself. This alludes that he does not comply with the lockdown rules and believes that the rules applied only to other people from early on in the pandemic. In the third headline, *The Sun Online* capitalised ‘APOLOGISE’ and ‘WORK EVENT’, emphasising that although Boris Johnson apologised, he insisted that the party was a work event. This implies that Boris Johnson is insincere about the apology and that the ‘WORK EVENT’ is an excuse. Therefore, we can see that the capitalised words and phonemes in the headlines are often an emphasis and a hint, which is full of irony in the Partygate event.

At the same time, colloquial language is typically a feature that often appears in the headlines of online tabloids:

‘He's lost the room!’ (*MailOnline*, 21 December 2021)

‘Were Dominic Cummings and Matt Hancock at Downing Street ‘cheese and wine’ lockdown party?’ (*MailOnline*, 21 December 2021)

‘So how was YOUR May 2020?’ (*MailOnline*, 11 January 2022)

‘He’s lost the room!’ (*MailOnline*, 21 December 2021)

This phrase is the darts fans’ shouts and warnings to Boris Johnson at the World Darts Championships. In addition, the interrogative question in the second headline is also a very eye-catching question: it creates space for the reader to imagine, and the reader can imagine the correct answer. Therefore, this speech act is a more explicit and interactive behaviour. As Fowler (1996, p.65) illustrates, if such speech acts are frequent and prominent in the printed text, the sense of personal interaction will be enhanced. At the same time, Fowler (1996, pp.64-65) points out that taking utterance as a speech act is to acknowledge the speaker. Warnings and questions appear in the title in a familiar style, which is full of interactivity and gives the reader the illusion of being in a conversation. This familiar style is the language of the reader, adding to ideological cohesion.

‘This is MY May 2020, Boris’: Furious Brits share images of the loved ones they couldn’t see face-to-face - taken at same time PM held a cheese and wine ‘party’ in Downing Street’ (*MailOnline*, 20 December 2021)

‘I REGRET IT’ Boris Johnson admits he was at No10 party for 25 minutes’ (*The Sun Online*, 12 Jan 2022)

The first headline described the anger of Britons having learned that Boris Johnson was partying during the lockdown. The second headline is Boris Johnson’s confession when he apologised for attending the No. 10 party. The first-person quotation is used in both headlines, and often appears at the beginning of tabloid headlines. ‘First person quotation’ is used to dramatise the report and personalise people affected by news events. According to Luginbühl (2012, pp.258-259), quoting directly affected sources in this way produces immediacy and emotional participation. Similarly, Stenvall (2008, p.1570) suggests that direct speech provides a way to report emotions because these emotions are marked as the new actors’s emotions. Therefore, in the Partygate event, the use of first-person quotations can report the British’s anger and Boris Johnson’s repentance. Tannen (1986) believes that this is similar to ‘constructive dialogue’ in oral interaction. This refers to retelling personal experience in the form of report dialogue, although it is presented in the form of direct speech. Meanwhile, Bös (2010, p.229) referred to the construction of dialogue in news reports as “conversational first-person quotes”. Consequently, the use of first-person quotes in the news not only expresses the emotions of new actors, but also constructs an oral dialogue style.

Above all, in the analysis of online tabloid headlines, it was found that online tabloids still inherited the language features of traditional tabloids to build a community. In particular, they continue to use colloquial and conversational language. The news media need to narrow the discourse gap for reaching consensus and building a readership (Fowler, 1996). The basic means to narrow the discourse gap is to promote the oral mode and give people the illusion of dialogue. In this dialogue, people talk about things with common sense (Fowler, 1996, p.47). Using colloquial language, questions, and various fonts, the text of online tabloids imitates people's voices, like a person talking informally, but full of emotion. The tabloid is full of anger in its report on the Partygate event. Therefore, as Fowler (1996, p.40) stated: 'in order to understand the text, a reader brings to it a mental model of the expected style, must recognise the style intuitively, through prior learned knowledge, and be able to read into it the values it embodies.' The model directly involves speaking in the reader's own words, and the style is conversational, colloquial, and familiar. The events can be expressed in the language of ordinary people, so even if it involves elite individuals, ordinary people can experience it. Consequently, what is happening here is that online tabloids still construct a community through a discursive model of popular speech.

In describing people's attitudes towards the No. 10 party, the online tabloid repeatedly used 'Furious Brits' and 'growing anger' to show people's reaction after seeing the leaked picture. Meanwhile, *The Sun Online* and *MailOnline* mainly used lexicons, rhetorical structure, modality, and passives to emphasise the hardship and sacrifice of the Brits during the epidemic. In addition, it is worth mentioning that both online tabloids integrate some users' social media content to tell people's experiences during the pandemic.

'Today hundreds of people took to social media to rage about the latest apparent breach of Covid protocols by No 10 staffers'. (*The Sun Online*, 13 January, 2022)

'The image sparked fresh anger among the public, who have now told of the sacrifices they were making to abide by lockdown restrictions on the same date'. (*MailOnline*, 20 December 2021)

'Twitter users shared harrowing pictures, including grandparents hugging grandchildren through sheeting'. (*MailOnline*, 11 January 2022)

'Stephen Laughton revealed he could not see his dying mother because it was 'against the rules'. (*MailOnline*, 20 December 2021)

'Today, Twitter users shared what they were going through around the time of the party, with pictures showing grandparents hugging their grandchildren through plastic sheeting and people forced to say goodbye to dying loved ones over Zoom'. (*MailOnline*, 11 January 2022)

MailOnline uses ‘harrowing’ to describe the tragic experience of people during the epidemic. They were forced to separate from their families and could not physically or closely meet them. The use of this word hints at people's sacrifice during the epidemic, which shows that people suffered loneliness and loss in unimaginably challenging circumstances. Meanwhile, the *MailOnline* uses ‘dying’ and ‘loved ones’ to describe the family members who could not meet. This description of the family members further implies the pity, hardship and heartache of the people.

At the same time, the online tabloids also use modality and passives to describe people:

‘A mother also shared a picture of her son having to speak to his grandmother through a window because of the restrictions just a day prior to the picture of the Downing Street garden’. (*MailOnline*, 21 December 2021)

‘Thousands could not see dying loved ones in hospital or relatives in care homes’. (*MailOnline*, 21 December 2021)

‘May 2020 was also the height of virtual quizzes, with friends and families forced to socialise over Zoom due to restrictions preventing the mixing of households’ (*MailOnline*, 20 December 2021)

The use of the modality 'having to' in the examples above shows that although they are in a difficult situation, they still have to abide by lockdown restrictions. Meanwhile, the use of the passive 'forced to' implies that although they want to meet family and friends subjectively, they also have to comply with lockdown restrictions. Consequently, when online tabloids describe people, they use lexicon, rhetoric, modality, and passives to convey a good image of people obeying the rules of the epidemic. When online tabloids use these linguistic tools, they assume societal division and entrench it further. This means that tabloids construct ‘we’ (people who obey the lockdown rules) and ‘they’ (Boris Johnson attending the party). The tabloids associate our position with something good and legitimate. The two online tabloids further affirmed the pain and sacrifice of people during the epidemic, creating emotional resonance among readers. These descriptions are the same as the readers' beliefs and can reach a consensus with readers.

In this event, the online tabloids did not just classify the vulnerable or ordinary people as a group. They also described the dissatisfaction of those in the privileged class who made sacrifices or lost loved ones during the epidemic.

‘Tory MP Aaron Bell, who is believed to have submitted a letter of no confidence, recalled sticking to funeral rules after his grandmother died:’

“He raged: “I didn’t hug my siblings, I didn’t hug my parents, I gave the eulogy and afterwards I didn’t even go to her house for a cup of tea’.” (*The Sun Online*, 1 Feb 2022)

‘Scottish Tory leader says Boris should QUIT if he was at No 10 'BYOB' party: Top donor tells PM 'sort it out or go' as TWO-THIRDS of Brits say he should resign after he ducked highly-charged Commons showdown with bereaved MPs’. (*The Sun Online*, 13 Jan 2022)

Traditional tabloids take the individual as the story's focus and invite readers to respond (Conboy, 2006). However, the *MailOnline* quoted many tweets and pictures on social media to tell British people's poignant experiences and stories during the epidemic. Obviously, the content and language strategies mentioned above confirm the sacrifices made by people during the epidemic. This actually triggers people's traumatic emotions and places emphasis on public sentiment. As Gravante and Poma (2021) noted, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, traumatic emotions may include: grief over the loss of a loved one, anxiety, fear, pain from illness, infecting others, or economic insecurity (Gravante and Poma, 2021, p.378). Online tabloids describe the tragic experience of many people and use direct quotations to show this emotion. Citizens express their personal experiences on social issues and provide emotional, touching details. This may stimulate the audience's sense of identity and empathy, as well as discrete emotions, such as the audience's anger and anxiety (Bas and Grabe, 2016, p.163). Meanwhile, these depictions evoke public sentiment. Using personal examples in news stories tends to increase readers' discomfort, anger and concern. Stories with photographic images and pictures of suffering also tend to elicit emotional reactions (Kyriakidou, 2014). In addition, the personal experiences during the epidemic on these social media reported by the *MailOnline* describe readers' common memories and experiences during this difficult time. This formed what Halbwachs (1985) termed 'collective memory'. Therefore, the tabloid hopes that the familiar experiences of readers constitute an essential part of the ideological pact they share with the readers. The hard sacrifice as a result of the epidemic thus forms part of the collective memory of the readers. This sympathetic description links the reader's imagination with the tragic moments of the past. Therefore, this collective memory and experience create an imaginary community and form a 'we.'

In addition, it is worth mentioning that two key elements (party and email invitation) in this event were repeatedly mentioned by the online tabloids, which seems like a presupposition of people's ideology and knowledge. The description of them in the online tabloids alludes to a negative view of the event:

‘Cheese and wine' lockdown party’ (*MailOnline*, 21 December 2021)

‘Details of the “bring your own booze” event had been leaked, sparking a wave of public fury.’ (*The Sun Online*, 13 January, 2022)

lockdown-breaking party (*The Sun Online*, 12 January, 2022)

‘the lockdown-busting booze-ups in Downing Street.’ (*The Sun Online*, 6 February 2022)

The three metaphors ‘cheese and wine’, ‘lockdown party’, and ‘bring your own booze’ emphasise that the party is entertaining. They suggest that the party was not a work event as Boris Johnson explained, but rather a party involving considerable alcohol consumption. The phrase ‘lockdown-breaking party’ means that the online tabloid regarded the party as violating the lockdown rules. The tabloid’s repeated mention of these words suggests that it is presupposed that this is a conscious agreement with the reader. The use of ‘booze-ups’ is a hyperbole, which shows the irony of the party.

Meanwhile, the description of the email invitation is also full of negative undertones:

‘In a now notorious email to more than 100 Downing St staff Mr Reynolds invited them to “socially distanced drinks” at 6pm and encouraged them to ‘bring your own booze’.
(*The Sun Online*, 12 Jan 2022)

“The PM is standing by embattled Mr Reynolds, who defied warnings to invite more than 100 staff to the booze-up, insisting he “remained in post.” (*The Sun Online*, 12 Jan 2022)

‘The email apparently caused shock among some of the recipients at the time, who reportedly exchanged comments including ‘Why is Martin encouraging a mass gathering in the garden?’ and ‘Is this for real?’ (*MailOnline*, 11 Jan 2022)

The two online tabloids’ descriptions of the email inviting Downing Street staff to attend the party are negative. The lexicon used by *The Sun Online* and *the MailOnline* includes ‘notorious,’ ‘sensational,’ and ‘bombshell’. Meanwhile, the tabloids also used exaggerated and ironic language. It implied that the invitation of Downing Street staff to participate in the party during the lockdown was unthinkable and hateful, indicating a negative attitude towards this behaviour. The use of the words ‘shock’ and ‘defied’ also expressed criticism of the invitation email. Therefore, both tabloids used negative words and rhetoric to describe the email and party, expressly and implicitly suggesting that Boris Johnson’s party was against the law. Meanwhile, the online tabloids also used hyperbole in their language to describe ‘email invitation’ and ‘party’. For example, ‘notorious email’ and ‘booze-ups’. These all counterpoise to the anger of the British people described by tabloids, for example, ‘Angry Britons today raged at.’ In addition, in the aftermath of the Partygate revelations, the conservative party, the House of Commons, and the opposition parties also expressed their doubts and anger. Indeed, Boris Johnson’s image at this time was described as very negative.

‘The PM was branded ‘pathetic’ (*The Sun Online*, 12 Jan 2022)

‘the PM finally broke cover to issue a grovelling apology - and said he regretted not telling everyone to stop and go home’. (*The Sun Online*, 12 Jan 2022)

‘Before their clash the PM got on the front foot with a humbling statement addressing the fury’. (*The Sun Online*, 12 Jan 2022)

‘The under-fire PM offered his ‘heartfelt apologies’ but got a battering from Labour boss Sir Keir Starmer’. (*The Sun Online*, 13 January 2022)

‘However Mr Johnson remains in deep peril after his own MPs, lawyers and voters savaged his excuses’. (*The Sun Online*, 13 January 2022)

‘But there are growing signs of disquiet among senior Tories at the hypocrisy and evasive responses from the government’. (*MailOnline*, 11 January 2022)

The Sun Online described Boris Johnson's apology as a ‘grovelling apology’ and a ‘humbling statement’. These words depict Boris's negative image. At the same time, *The Sun Online* used the rhetoric of ‘heartfelt apologies’ and ‘excuse’ to satirise that Boris Johnson's apology was hypocritical, evasive and failed to explain the key issues. His apology is more likened to an excuse to defend himself. While his apology was groveling, it was not sincere. These words suggest that Boris Johnson's apology was simply a forced move out of pressure and anger from all sides. In other words, he just wants to cling to power. There is no doubt that Boris Johnson is described as a dishonest and untrustworthy person. At the same time, the use of the words ‘pathetic’ and ‘hypocritical’ suggests that Boris Johnson's apology is contrary to the fact that Boris Johnson violated the lockdown rules.

Meanwhile, the online tabloids portrayed Boris Johnson as an embattled figure in crisis:

‘Fellow Tories turned on Mr Johnson today as he faces the threat of a police probe and growing pressure to come clean after a raft of damaging revelations about lockdown-breaking parties at Number 10’. (*MailOnline*, 11 January 2022)

‘Mr Johnson's authority has come under serious challenge among backbenchers and Cabinet colleagues in recent months’. (*MailOnline*, 11 January 2022)

‘PM is now suffering the hangover from hell as a Whitehall probe threatens to strike a devastating blow’. (*The Sun Online*, 12 January 2022)

‘The PM was forced out of hiding for his weekly Commons duel at PMQs, where he was forced to fight for his political survival’. (*The Sun Online*, 12 January 2022)

Online tabloids use the words ‘threat’, ‘serious challenge’, and ‘crisis’ to describe the situation Boris Johnson is facing. These all express that Boris Johnson was in trouble. Similarly, the use of the passive tense in the phrase ‘forced out of’ shows that Boris Johnson had to face

both the crisis and the pressure from all sides. Interestingly, *The Sun Online* also uses the pun 'hangover from hell'. On the one hand, it refers to the drinking party that Boris Johnson participated in. On the other hand, it hints that Boris Johnson is now facing a painful investigation. Also, the metaphor of 'survival' implies that Boris Johnson is now in a precarious position as Prime Minister and faces a serious risk of having to resign. Furthermore, both tabloids have portrayed Boris as an evasive person.

'Downing Street has refused to apologise, instead insisting it was not a social event, and claimed staff were working in the garden in the afternoon and evening'. (*MailOnline*, 21 December 2021)

'He had spent almost 48 hours trying to avoid discussing the leaked party invite that has rocked Westminster, insisting he could not comment while the probe was ongoing'. (*The Sun Online*, 12 Jan 2022)

'He finally faced the music after hours in hiding'. (*The Sun Online*, 12 January 2022)

'He merely insisted it was a matter for Sue Gray'. (*The Sun Online*, 12 January 2022)

The two tabloids repeatedly used the words 'refuse', 'avoid', and 'hide', suggesting that Boris Johnson chose to avoid rather than respond to the scandal. Further, use of the words 'merely insisted' suggests that his response to the constant revelations and doubts was equally feeble and evasive. This also implies that Boris Johnson's participation in the garden party was against the lockdown rules, which he was powerless to refute.

In this event, the online tabloids used the logical implications and contextual comparisons to imply their views on Partygate:

'One Twitter user wrote: 'While my brother lay dead and my husband lay dying, Downing Street staff were invited to a drinks party in the No 10 garden to "make the most of the lovely weather". No drinks parties for us to mark their deaths, just solitary mourning in lock-down.' (*MailOnline*, 11 January 2022)

'While Downing Street staffers were toasting the sunny weather, officers were patrolling London parks looking for groups of more than two people, and in Edinburgh a large group of swimmers were broken up'. (*MailOnline*, 11 January 2022)

'Less than an hour earlier, Minister Oliver Dowden had told the public at the daily press conference to stick to meeting in pairs outdoors'. (*The Sun Online*, 11 January 2022)

These sentences imply that the rules set by Boris Johnson are unfair to the people. The use of

inflectional sentences implies that the British could not reunite with their relatives because of the lockdown policy, while Boris Johnson enjoyed the party with his staff in the garden. Similarly, Boris Johnson and the staff were enjoying the sunshine and partying while the police were trying to implement the lockdown rule. This hints that the party took place during the lockdown period, when ordinary people and the police were all trying to comply with and implement the lockdown rules. However, Boris Johnson's team broke the lockdown rules, which is a strong contrast with the people who obeyed the rules during the epidemic, and it is full of cynicism. The information implicit in the third example appears in the contrast of contexts. It shows that the Prime Minister's principal private secretary sent an invitation email after the lockdown policy was released. This implies that the Prime Minister's team ignored the policy. Therefore, such syntax and implicit information in the text further emphasises the polarisation between the people and Boris Johnson, and this helps to form a polarised event model. In this model, news actors are cleverly divided into positive and negative ones. This confirms that 'it's one rule for them and another for the rest of us'.

At the same time, the tabloid portrayals of ordinary people and Boris also provide many details that further polarise the group:

'Mr Johnson ducked questions about whether he attended the gathering along with wife Carrie and 30-40 staff who feasted on drinks, crisps and sausage rolls'. (*MailOnline*, 11 January 2022)

'After making the 500yd dash to the cramped Tesco Express to pick up gin, rosé and wine around 40 staff filed into the sun-kissed No10 garden'. (*The Sun Online*, 12 January 2022)

Online tabloids gave a detailed description of the party, providing details of the number of people who participated in the party, snacks and drinks. They also made fictional and exaggerated descriptions of the situation at the party. The phrases 'making the 500yd dash' and 'filed into' are used to satirize the urgency and joy of No. 10 staff for attending the party. These detailed descriptions show that No. 10 staff drank happily at the party during the lockdown period.

In addition, the tabloids also gave a detailed description of people's behaviours when abiding by the lockdown rules:

'Another Twitter user posted a picture of themselves in full personal protective equipment, recalling how they had to sleep in the garage to avoid putting their family at risk of contracting Covid'. (*MailOnline*, 20 December 2021)

'Laura Smith shared a picture of her son seeing his grandfather for the first time after 'months of lockdown', but added the pair sat two metres apart and did not embrace, believing they were 'doing the right thing'. (*MailOnline*, 20 December 2021)

In the description of ordinary people, the *MailOnline* sets out some of the various difficulties faced by people during the lockdown. For example, a Twitter user sleeps in the garage to avoid family infection, and the child meets his grandfather at a distance of 2 metres. These details form a strong contrast between people and Boris Johnson's image. Online tabloids try to give enough details to 'us' to explain good behaviour and give details of the party to explain 'their' negative image, so as to reach an ideological consensus with the readers.

In addition, both online tabloids quote some speeches from the Labour Party and other politicians and organisations. They stand for the people, criticising Boris Johnson's selfishness and asking him to give the people a reasonable explanation. For example, the *MailOnline* emphasises Boris Johnson's disregard for people's sacrifices. This means that the government does not represent the people, and that people are treated unequally:

"Mr Blackford said the PM 'has no moral authority left' and urged Tory MPs to 'remove him from power'."(*MailOnline*, 15 January, 2022)

'People will find it utterly outrageous that while the rest of us were banned from public gatherings, the most powerful people in the Tory Government were boozing up at No 10 Downing Street, proving yet again that it's one rule for them and another for the rest of us'. (*MailOnline*, 15 January, 2022)

Similarly, *The Sun* also quoted some politicians and the Labour Party, expressing criticism of Boris Johnson. They reveal that Boris Johnson did not fulfil his job responsibilities and was not responsible to the British people, so his actions hurt the rights and interests of the British people:

"The leader of the Labour Party, Sir Keir Starmer, railed: "His defence that he didn't realise he was at a party is so ridiculous that is actually offensive to the British people: "Is he now going to do the decent thing and resign?" (*The Sun Online*, 13 Jan 2022)

"M's Gray wrote: "There were failures of leadership and judgement by different parts of No 10 and the Cabinet Office at different times. She said "at least some of the gatherings in question represent a serious failure to observe not just the high standards expected of those working at the heart of Government but also of the standards expected of the entire British population at the time". And she said that at times "too little thought" was given to the suffering of the public". (*The Sun Online*, 1 Feb 2022)

"Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer told Tory MPs it was their "duty" to "spare the country from a Prime Minister totally unworthy of his responsibilities". He called him "a man without shame" who "took us all for fools. He held people's sacrifice in contempt, he showed himself unfit for office". (*The Sun Online*, 31 Jan 2022)

In addition, we can see from these quotations that the *MailOnline* and *The Sun Online*

represent an anti-elite populism. These quotations are basically anti-elite statements that advocate for the people—slamming Boris Johnson for his political mistakes and neglect of the people. In the concept of populism, all defeats and problems are blamed on politics, including political incompetence, unwillingness, and sabotage. Moreover, populism stresses the unbreakable divide between people and elites (Moffitt and Tormey, 2013, p.381). Therefore, both tabloids use quotations to confirm the efforts and sacrifices of the people during the epidemic. They stand on the people's side and accuse Boris Johnson of wrongdoing. These quotations are in line with the anti-elite populism that many scholars emphasize. Albertazzi and McDonnell (2008,p.3) noted that populism describes people as a homogeneous group to construct social unity or community. Some scholars point out that the elite is criticised for betraying the people and exercising unfair control over their rights, well-being, and progress (Jansen, 2011). Also, elites abuse their power, and they occupy, distort, and exploit democracy (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008; Betz and Johnson, 2004). Therefore, these quotations are anti-elite in the name of the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice. In addition, these quotes also illustrate that the rules established by Boris Johnson were unfair to the people. It is one rule for them and another for the people. As Aslanidis (2018, p.1244) notes, they support the people as the ultimate source of political authority and attack powerful elites who seek to usurp or have already seized popular sovereignty in pursuit of their own narrow interests. Meanwhile, anti-elitist suggests the distance and gap between the elite class and the people. Anti-elite populists stand with the people against elites who live in their ivory towers and only pursue their own interests.

Meanwhile, online tabloids have quoted a number of voices within the Conservative Party, which express the Tories' anger towards Boris Johnson:

“Phones4U founder John Caudwell, a major Conservative donor, slammed the government's 'arrogance and hypocrisy', saying the scandal was 'disastrous' for the party and telling Johnson to 'sort it out or step aside'.”(*MailOnline*, 26 December 2021)

“While the rest of us were striving to follow the ever-changing rules - including myself, even when I deemed them to be excessive at best, nonsensical at worst - those who were setting those rules were, apparently freely and frequently, disregarding them.” (*MailOnline*, 26 December 2021)

“Each one of these new revelations gives greater force to the accusation that areas of the government think it's one rule for them, one rule for the rest of us. This is disastrous.” (*MailOnline*, 26 December 2021)

“The Penrith and the Border MP said: 'I was in the House of Commons Chamber today and I welcome that the PM came and admitted that he was at the May 20 2020 gathering and that he apologised for that.’”

'But I will not defend the indefensible and I fully share the country's outrage and upset when people up and down the land were making huge personal and sometimes tragic

sacrifices to do the right thing and obey the public health rules'. (*MailOnline*, 13 January 2022)

“It's worse because he was breaking the rules that he himself made and told everyone to obey. He can relaunch, hide behind reports, do what he wants. The public have made their minds up,”the Tory MP said.

Other MPs have revealed their inboxes have been flooded with furious constituents reacting to the Partygate scandal. Publicly, at least six Tory MPs have called for Mr Johnson's resignation. (*MailOnline*, 17 January 2022)

These quotations reveal the Tories' discontent with Boris Johnson's participation in the Downing Street parties. They express their frustration concerning the catastrophic impact of this scandal on the Conservative Party, which could influence the next election. Simultaneously, they are also angry that Boris Johnson did not adhere to the rules, while the public made sacrifices during the lockdown imposed due to the epidemic. They emphasise Johnson's disregard for the rules he imposes on others. Therefore, on this occasion, the Tories align themselves with the sentiments of ordinary people, and express the same attitude towards Boris Johnson. Their quotations show that they completely understand people's anger and feel the same way. This is consistent with exclusionary populism, which means people essentially share the same interests and the same characteristics. Moffitt and Tormey (2013) point out that some isolated groups obviously do not possess the 'good' traits of the broader population. In these quotations, Johnson and those involved in the Downing Street parties were isolated as a group not aligned with the interests of the people. This enemy is not outside but within the people. The quotation suggests that the Conservative Party believes that the rules set by Boris Johnson apply only to others, preventing people from seeing their deceased relatives. Moffitt and Tormey (2013) illustrate that real populism underscores an unbreakable divide between people and elites, highlighting some groups' values incompatible with the people's general interest. Therefore, specific population groups are being discriminated against and ostracised by 'the people.' From this perspective, both online tabloids refrain from criticising the entire Conservative Party; they only target Johnson and the Tories who participated in the parties. On the one hand, these populist quotes emphasise that Boris Johnson broke the rules that he made and told everyone to obey, highlighting an inherent injustice. On the other hand, the quotes repeatedly stress that Boris Johnson should be punished, indicating that no one is above the law. At the same time, the release of the Sue Gray report remains a central theme in the partygate incident. *MailOnline* described the attitudes and controversies surrounding the Sue Gray report. Interestingly, *MailOnline* also used people's reactions on social media to express their attitudes toward this event.

“Britons eagerly awaiting the Sue Gray report into 'partygate' are comparing the wait to the build up to Christmas or to their GCSE's results - with one joking: 'I hope they aren't as disappointing as mine'. ”(*MailOnline*, 26 January 2022)

'Partygate looks set to drag into next week with Sue Gray still yet to hand over her report - and Tories drawing battle lines over efforts to 'suppress or conceal' damaging details'. (*MailOnline*, 26 January 2022)

'Twitter users have flooded the site with memes about the wait, which has been extended due to the emergence of new allegations, while others have even written poems about the dossier'. (*MailOnline*, 26 January 2022)

Tories, lawyers and ex-officers joined a furious backlash after police confirmed they have told the Cabinet Office the long-awaited document should feature 'minimal reference' to lockdown breaches that might be criminal:

'The announcement has thrown the situation into complete chaos, with Ms Gray now considering pausing the process rather than releasing a version that would inevitably be condemned as a whitewash'. (*MailOnline*, 29 January 2022)

The MailOnline describes people's anxiety while waiting for Sue Gray's report and also expresses people's mockery of the delayed report. Moreover, the *MailOnline* portrays people's dissatisfaction and suspicion with Sue Gray's party gate report. This implies that the report may have been watered down or biased. The dissatisfaction with Sue Gary's Partygate report reflects people's dissatisfaction with the British government's lack of accountability and transparency.

7.2.1 Analysis and discussion

The analysis reveals that online tabloids inherit the oral, informal, conversant language of traditional tabloids. This language style bridges the discourse gap and creates a sense of communal dialogue, creating the illusion of readers engaging in a conversation. As Hall (1978) points out, the familiarity of this conversant style has ideological effect, and it allows people to express familiar ideas inadvertently. The establishment of this 'common' style is crucial to building consensus (Hall, 1978, p.40). These findings are similar to Conboy's (2006) analysis of how traditional tabloid newspapers construct communities. Although targeting the mass audience, traditional tabloids still maintain a consistent attraction through their idioms, which is reflected in a close textual display of intimacy with idealized individual readers.

Online tabloids build a readership through lexicons, rhetoric structure, modality, syntax, and providing detailed content. First, they use these linguistic tools to presuppose readers' beliefs and knowledge and to reach a common ideology with readers. As Hall (1978, p.40) points out, it is the tabloid's version of rhetoric, imagery, and underlying common stock of knowledge that it assumes its audience shares, thus forming the basis of reciprocity between producers and readers. In order to appeal to common values, online tabloids used these linguistic tools to polarise the actors in the news event: 'PM who defied lockdown rules to party' versus 'People

struggling to abide by lockdown rules'. The online tabloids in our sample used positive lexicons, and rhetoric in the description of the people, and provided many details about 'us' to show our good side. In contrast, they use language including negative vocabulary, exaggeration, irony, metaphors, puns, and other rhetorical structures to describe Boris Johnson, projecting a negative image. This creates a binary opposition. Conboy (2006, p.17) argues that binarism is at the heart of the tabloid imagery of characters in the news, which is applicable to both trivial and sensational topics as well as to more serious political issues.

In addition, online tabloids employ more emotionally charged reporting. Both tabloids featured in this present study used emotional and evaluative words, details, and quotes to describe Boris Johnson's negative behaviour. It is worth mentioning that both tabloids pay attention to presenting the opinions and reactions of the public, other parties, and conservative party members on this event. Wahl-Jorgensen (2019, p.133) points out that political scandal reporting is a genre central to journalism's claims of holding the powerful to account, and it heavily relies on provoking moral anger over alleged violations through public accusation. A credible individual affected by the wrongdoing can mobilise outrage, and people share their personal experiences to denounce it in public. For example, compared with traditional tabloids, one way that online tabloids reflected the voices of ordinary people to show their responses to Partygate was by using ordinary people's tweets. Undoubtedly, using ordinary people's tweets will heighten people's emotions. Duncombe (2019) describes that users can represent emotions via their tweets, and this also provokes an emotional response. Tweets can express feelings and evoke powerful emotional responses from other people, resulting in wide-ranging debates that affect offline political outcomes (Duncombe, 2019). The function of social media in promoting emotional expressions such as anger, compassion, or empathy raises questions about the changing power dynamics between a country and its populace (Duncombe, 2019, p.410). In the case of Boris Johnson, tweets not only expressed people's anger but also their distressing experiences. Online tabloids described the tragic experience of many people and also use their direct quotations. Bas and Grabe (2013) explains that the emotional testimony of ordinary citizens who have experienced social problems reveals strong emotional pain, which is likely to trigger the audience's emotional response, stimulate the audience's empathy and recognition of other people's predicament, as well as promoting the formation of memory. This is also the embodiment of personalised news emotion. Furthermore, the process of people empathising with another's emotional state is an important step towards developing a particular emotional culture. This could provoke "massive-scale emotional contagion" (He et al., 2016, p24). Therefore, tabloids build a community by stirring public sentiment.

In addition, Duncombe (2019) describes that our judgements of emotions are determined by effect, which is shaped by society. Therefore, people's anger and anxiety described by tabloids reveal a social reality. This moral anger is rooted in British society's inequality and political shortcomings. Firstly, these types of emotions were generated by people's tragic experiences during the pandemic. Feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression result from

complex factors. Individuals were often unable to socially quarantine, lacked sick pay, lived in overcrowded housing, or needed to care for elderly family members. The absolute divisions in UK society have been exposed due to COVID-19. For example, Northern cities in the UK have been seriously impacted by COVID-19 (Dennison, 2021, p.115). The government did not use sufficient precautionary measures to prevent contagion and protect the most disadvantaged social population in the early months of the pandemic (Gravante and Poma, 2021). More importantly, there was widespread dissatisfaction with the UK lockdown policy, which caused 'disruptions to routines' and had a profound impact on their mental health (Gravante and Poma, 2021,p.376). For example, the featured online tabloids provide numerous quotations and descriptions about the hardships individuals face, including separation from family and relatives, the immense strain of lockdown measures, and the unresolved issue of rising living costs, which remain unaddressed by the government.

In general, many people have been dissatisfied with the government's response to the pandemic. They believe it was cruel and unfair for the government to employ policies around social restrictions because the government had seemingly not considered the considerable strain placed on families. This public mood reflects people's emotional response and is rooted in membership of political communities such as a nation or a political party (Rahn et al., 1996). This is an important concept in emotional and political opinion and explains people's insistence on the publication of the Sue Gray report. People's urging and ridicule also exposed their disappointment with the accountability and transparency of the British government. Also, Boris Johnson avoided apologizing after breaking the lockdown policy. The Tories, other politicians, and the general public angrily called for Boris Johnson to apologise, explain and resign. This raised doubts about the pandemic policy and made people feel the government ignored and disrespected them. People's perception of injustice can evoke anger and is strongly linked to negative emotions (Mikula et al., 1998). Negative public mood is relevant to life satisfaction, government trust, and collective economic concerns (Marcus, 2000). Therefore, as represented by the tabloids, people's attitudes and responses to this event revealed underlying issues, such as social inequality, government accountability problems, people's lack of trust in the government, and lack of representation in the political process.

7.3 Prince Andrew's sexual abuse case

As in the previous case, online tabloid headlines in this case feature many familiar, colloquial, conversational and informal public idioms. For example, speech acts (speakers engage in various speech acts, such as making promises, expressing requests, issuing commands, giving warnings), and first-person quotations:

'Andrew faces New York court D-Day TODAY: Legal experts say secret \$500,000 deal between Epstein and Virginia Roberts that covered 'other defendants' WON'T protect the Prince - but his lawyers say it gives 'strong grounds' to KILL case'.

(*MailOnline*, 4 January 2022)

The use of 'D-Day' refers to the Normandy landings, and also to the date of an important event. This expression often appears in print tabloids. Therefore, this is an example of the continuation of the language characteristics of traditional tabloids in online tabloids. As far as tabloids are concerned, Normandy Beach is a part of the 'sacred geography', which forms part of the country's history (Wright, 1985). *MailOnline* mentioned 'D-Day' to reference an event in the public memory and display a historical discourse of patriotism. It attempts to strengthen the link between the public and tabloids. The kind of history that tabloids want their readers to be familiar with forms a very important part of the ideological compact they share with their readers (Conboy, 2006). Traditions, myths, histories, and symbols must all emerge from the existing, living memories and beliefs of the people who are to compose the nation. Their popular resonance will be greater and more connected to the living past they represent (Smith, 1991). The D in 'D-Day' merely stands for Day. This coded designation was used for the day of any important invasion or military operation, thus implying that Prince Andrew would fight against Virginia Roberts Giuffre at the New York court. Combining this proud history with Andrew's humiliating sexual abuse scandal conforms to the binary of tabloid news agenda. Meanwhile, 'today' is a deixis that provides an important part of the oral mode (Fowler, 1996).

'Deploy Kate Middleton! Deploy Kate Middleton! Grenadier Guards want the Duchess of Cambridge as their new Colonel to replace shamed Prince Andrew'. (*MailOnline*, 26 January 2022)

'We don't want him either, says city of York! Calls for Prince Andrew to lose Duke of York title after Queen stripped him of HRH and military ranks'. (*MailOnline*, 14 January 2022)

MailOnline uses speech act in its title, which is a conversational expression. The military cheers are shown in the second headline. There was cheering after the Queen rescinded Prince Andrew's military titles and appointed Kate Middleton to the position. This expresses their anger toward Prince Andrew and their desire to draw a line with him. Furthermore, 'We don't' in the second headline is the contraction of negatives. This is a standard cue to oral mode.

'I will fight on': Prince Andrew strikes defiant tone after being stripped of his royal and military titles as he faces sex abuse lawsuit as a private citizen – with allies insisting case is 'a marathon not a sprint'. (*MailOnline*, 13 January 2022)

This headline uses first-person quotations to highlight Prince Andrew's perceived arrogance. Besides, in this event, both online tabloids use locutions that carry an attitudinal value

(positive or negative assessment) in their descriptions of Prince Andrew and his friends. They use negative adjectives, words, rhetorical structures and implications to express Prince Andrew's negative image.

‘Princess Beatrice is spotted on the day her disgraced father was stripped of royal HRH title that she can still use - as it emerges SHE could face sex case quiz’. (*MailOnline*, 14 January 2022)

‘The famously party-loving prince is likely to be shunned in the wake of his humiliating £12m settlement with sex crime accuser Virginia Roberts’. (*The Sun Online*, 18 February, 2022)

‘His reputation lies in tatters, and Royal experts have warned his chances of being welcomed back into public life are extremely slim’. (*The Sun Online*, 18 February, 2022)

“‘ROYAL CREEP’ Prince Andrew was my creepiest massage client and kept asking X-rated questions about my sex life”. (*The Sun Online*, 10 February, 2022)

“Previously, the Royal dubbed the Playboy Prince was pictured at a number of parties, despite later claiming to Emily Maitlis that he ‘didn't party much’”. (*The Sun Online*, 18 February, 2022)

“PART OF THE FIRM Prince Andrew allowed pal Ghislaine Maxwell to ‘breeze into Buckingham Palace like a Royal as ‘she trafficked girls.’” (*The Sun Online*, 20 December 2022)

Both online tabloids employed a lot of negative appraisal words, such as ‘disgraced father’, and ‘famously party-loving prince’ to describe Prince Andrew's shameful image in this sexual abuse case. This is not only the tabloid's attitude towards Prince Andrew but also the tabloid's assumption of Prince Andrew's image in readers' minds. *The Sun Online* also embedded the phrase ‘lies in tatters’ in the value assumption to state that Prince Andrew is now discredited. Concurrently, the masseuse said that Prince Andrew was her 'creepiest client' and a 'persistent sexual pest', so *The Sun Online's* comparison of Prince Andrew to a 'royal pervert' was full of irony and drama. In addition, a lot of logical implications were also used for the image of Prince Andrew. The sixth and seventh sentences are logical implications. Prince Andrew has been photographed at many parties but denies attending them, and the use of 'despite' suggests that the prince is being dishonest. This paints him as the party-loving playboy. The adverbial clause shows that the Prince allowed Maxwell access to the palace because she trafficked girls, which implies the shameful sex trafficking between Prince Andrew and Maxwell.

The Sun Online and *MailOnline* also describe two other villains in this case, Maxwell and Epstein, who are also related to Prince Andrew's image. The emphasis on Prince Andrew's friendship with Maxwell and Epstein indicates that he was also implicated in sex trafficking:

'The Duke stepped down from public duties in November 2019 'for the foreseeable future' over his friendship with paedophile Jeffrey Epstein in the wake of the disastrous Newsnight interview he had hoped would clear his name'. (*MailOnline*, 13 February 2022)

'Andrew's sex trafficker pal Ghislaine Maxwell was interviewed last week'. (*The Sun Online*, 30 December 2022)

'PRINCE & THE PIMP Ghislaine Maxwell introduced as Prince Andrew's ex-girlfriend on Buckingham Palace tour with Bill Clinton'. (*MailOnline*, 13 February 2022)

Both online tabloids have utilised sensational negative lexicon such as 'sex trafficker pal', 'paedophile' and 'PIMP' in their descriptions of Epstein and Maxwell. At the same time, the two tabloids repeatedly stressed that these were Prince Andrew's close friends, linking him with these sensational words in the reader's consciousness. This stereotyped Prince Andrew's negative characteristics and firmly established them in the public consciousness. Also, this description implied that the Prince was involved in sexual trafficking. More importantly, online tabloids have used this typical tabloid language to shape people's views on Prince Andrew—the portrayal of his image in this event as disgraceful and humiliating aligned with the tabloid worldview.

The description of Virginia Roberts Giuffre in the sexual abuse case is a weak image:

"Anthony Figueroa claims former 'sex slave' Virginia Roberts Giuffre knew what the vile pair expected of her - which included acting as bait to attract more victims - but she 'didn't want to do it'" (*The Sun Online*, 3 January 2022)

'Epstein survivor Virginia Roberts Giuffre has launched a civil case against the Duke of York - who she alleges had sex with her when she was a teenage sex slave'. (*The Sun Online*, 30 December 2022)

'VIRGINIA'S HELL 'Prince Andrew abused my girlfriend when she was just 17 – she was scared by what Maxwell & Epstein made her do' 21'. (*The Sun Online*, 3 January 2022)

The use of metaphors 'sex slave' and 'survivor' expresses the tragic experience of Virginia Roberts Giuffre, evoking feelings of helplessness and sympathy. The use of the words

‘VIRGINIA'S HELL’ implies that she was extremely distressed by the traumatic experience. *The Sun Online* portrayed Virginia Roberts Guiffre as a victim, thereby characterizing Epstein, Maxwell, and Prince Andrew as malevolent through term such as ‘sex criminals’, ‘pedophiles’ and ‘sex worms’. However, their victims become helpless sex slaves in a melodramatic way. This binary portrayal aligns with tabloid news values and fits the melodramatic representation of the world described by Gripsrud (1992). This mode of shaping also reached a consensus with the readers. We can see that the tabloids' description of the two opposing figures is dramatic and exaggerated in this case. As Van Dijk (1991, p. 219) describes, this emphasis on language accentuates the extremes of human experience, amplifies the polarization characteristic of tabloids, and relies on dramatization and hyperbole, which are described as the main rhetorical techniques of the popular press to make news more exciting.

Both tabloids reported on Prince Andrew's performance in the US sex case:

‘Andrew was accused of trying to ‘dodge, duck, run and hide’ in his mother’s palaces to avoid legal papers being served on him after Virginia Giuffre filed a lawsuit against him’. (*MailOnline*, 1 January 2022)

‘The comments came as Andrew suffered two setbacks in his US sex case, admitting he has no proof over his infamous claim he cannot sweat and also seeing the judge throw out an attempt to stall the case’. (*MailOnline*, 2 January 2022)

‘The senior British royal has categorically denied allegations that he had sex with his American accuser’. (*MailOnline*, 3 January 2022)

‘Andrew strongly denies the claims and all allegations of misconduct made against him’. (*The Sun Online*, 15 February 2022)

‘After that failed, he came out fighting with his US lawyer branding Miss Roberts a ‘money-hungry sex kitten’ who had ‘initiated this baseless lawsuit to achieve another payday’. Last week, the duke – who strenuously denies all the accusations – attempted to have the case struck out in a crunch hearing in Manhattan. But his bid was comprehensively dismissed by Judge Kaplan on Wednesday’. (*MailOnline*, 14 January 2022)

Both online tabloids describe Prince Andrew's response to the allegations as very negative. The use of verbs such as ‘dodge’, ‘duck’, ‘run’ and ‘hide’ shows Prince Andrew's negative attitude of trying to avoid sexual abuse allegations. The adjective ‘infamous’ not only gives a negative evaluation but also presupposes people's views on Prince Andrew's response. It implies that Prince Andrew's denial of Giuffre's accusation was without any

evidence. The tabloid used the word ‘strongly denies’ and ‘categorically denied’ to reflect Prince Andrew's strong denial sentiment. Additionally, the articles contain attitudinal tokens, which, while not explicitly displaying attitudes, are provocative and can lead readers to infer negative attitudes. For example, the second sentence states that Prince Andrew was unable to provide any evidence when he denied the allegations, suggesting that his explanation failed, and in the interview, he shot himself in the foot. The news provides the details of Prince Andrew's performance at the trial. This shows that after Prince Andrew failed, he directly slandered and insulted Giuffre in court, portraying him as arrogant and embarrassing.

Furthermore, as the case progressed, a critical moment emerged when Prince Andrew decided to continue to fight Virginia Roberts Giuffre's allegations. Consequently, both online tabloids expressed critical attitudes towards Prince Andrew and stressed the negative impact of this decision. These contents express that Prince Andrew should not to participate in the trial:

‘Despite pleas for Andrew to 'do the right thing for the Queen' and offer his accuser millions to avoid a trial, the duke appeared to be digging in for the long haul’. (*MailOnline*, 14 January 2022)

‘Prince Andrew’s ‘time-wasting bluff’: Legal experts suggest duke’s demand for trial by jury could be a bid to ‘buy time’ and force ‘settlement’ with Virginia Roberts... because he is unlikely 'to bet on public opinion' after Newsnight disaster’. (*MailOnline*, 28 January 2022)

“Gruelling deposition where 'NOTHING is off limits': Prince Andrew faces being quizzed for seven-hours on video with embarrassing questions on his sex life and 'private parties and what he has told the Queen”. (*The Sun Online*, 13 January 2022)

“Andrew now faces a choice between settling Virginia Roberts Giuffre’s sex abuse lawsuit or going through a potentially ruinous court battle in which he would likely be questioned about his sexual history”. (*MailOnline*, 13 January 2022)

“The pressure for Andrew to settle out of court and spare the Queen the ignominy of a sordid public trial was growing last night as he was warned he was in 'the last chance saloon with the towels over the taps'.” (*MailOnline*, 13 January 2022)

‘It led to widespread calls for him to stump up millions to settle the case rather than submit himself to a humiliating and disastrous courtroom grilling about his sex life in the Platinum Jubilee year’. (*MailOnline*, 13 January 2022)

The first sentence shows that Prince Andrew's demand for trial by jury is questionable. This

logical implication reflects Prince Andrew's perceived arrogance and his apparent disregard for the royal family's reputation. Both tabloids made certain assumptions about the US court where Prince Andrew would face trial. Using the phrase 'time-wasting bluff' implies a value judgement that Andrew's continued battle with Giuffre in New York courts was futile and irreversible. Additionally, *MailOnline* described the grilling Prince Andrew would face in the US court, involving tough lawyers and awkward questions. More importantly, the use of the phrases 'NOTHING is off limit', 'sex life', and 'private parts' indicates that this trial would involve a lot of 'details', and these details would cause damage to the royal family. This shows that Prince Andrew was facing an embarrassing situation and that this trial was bound to humiliate the royal family. In this context, with most people calling on Prince Andrew to choose an out-of-court settlement, the tabloids also preempted the consequences of the US trial. Their assumption includes evaluative phrases such as 'potentially ruinous', 'ignominy of a sordid public trial,' and 'humiliating and disastrous courtroom grilling'. This exaggerated, sensational tabloid language presupposes that people believe this trial would inevitably damage the royal family's reputation, indicating that this was a tragic consequence that no one wanted to face. 'The last chance saloon with the towels over the taps' is a slang term meaning a final opportunity to be successful or to be accepted after a number of failures. This implies that Prince Andrew's out-of-court settlement is the best option to avoid embarrassing the royal family. Therefore, the tabloids mainly express and hint at the devastating consequences of Prince Andrew's choice. This resonates with tabloid readers because they are unwilling to see images that discredit the royal family. As Rhoufari (2000, p.173) illustrates, tabloid newspapers establish and maintain a readership based on a solid understanding of British national identity and on the utilisation of issues that may arouse nationalistic sentiment in the readership.

As Prince Andrew faced sex abuse allegations, there was a strong negative reaction to him from all sides. Both online tabloids depicted widespread outrage over Prince Andrew's actions and their impact on the royal family's reputation. This is mainly manifested as criticism and protest with calls for Prince Andrew to give up his military title and royal role. Relevant cities, schools, and street residents also asked to change their names in an attempt to keep a distance from him:

"Defence chiefs 'wait "toxic" royal to quit military roles', while his family put on a united front at Swiss ski resort without him". (*MailOnline*, 2 January 2022)

'Accusing the duke of bringing the services he is associated with into disrepute, the 152 former members of the Royal Navy, RAF and Army said that 'were this any other senior military officer it is inconceivable that he would still be in post'. The Queen is head of the armed forces and honorary military appointments are in her gift.' (*MailOnline*, 14 January 2022)

‘From Falklands war hero to humiliation: Top Army figures tell of ‘widespread relief’ as Prince Andrew is stripped of all honorary military titles’. (*MailOnline*, 20 January 2022)

MailOnline uses rhetoric and evaluative vocabulary as the military pressures the Queen to remove Prince Andrew from an honorary military role. The use of the metaphor ‘toxic’ for Prince Andrew shows that the royal defense chiefs believed that Andrew's continued service in the military would damage the image of the military. Therefore, they strongly urged Prince Andrew to leave the military. At the same time, 152 veterans used the word ‘disrepute’ to describe Prince Andrew when expressing their anger. Therefore, they expressed their concern and anger about Andrew's damage to the military. In addition, *MailOnline* also used the comparison, ‘From Falklands war hero to humiliation’, to satirise Andrew's transformation from a former hero to a shame that the military despises. The impressive ‘Falklands War’ in history is mentioned here again. This is evocation to the collective memory of tabloid readers in order to construct an imaginary community.

In addition, Prince Andrew's sexual abuse case could have an impact not only on the military, but also on the royal family. Both tabloids stressed the impact of the sexual abuse case on the royal family:

‘ROYAL CRISIS Prince Andrew’s lawyers ‘in emergency talks’ amid fears Ghislaine Maxwell could ‘name names’ after guilty verdict’. (*The Sun Online*, 30 December 2021)

‘ROYAL HEADACHE Prince Andrew causing ‘enormous challenges’ for Queen with ‘horrific’ associations to Epstein and Maxwell’. (*The Sun Online*, 19 January 2022)

‘PRINCE Andrew's ‘horrific’ friendships have been an utter nightmare for the Queen, a minister blasted today in an extraordinary broadside’. (*The Sun Online*, 19 January 2022)

‘Palace paralysis over Duke's case: Royal staff ‘sleepwalked’ into Prince Andrew crisis and were ‘too scared’ to stand up to him because he operated with ‘impunity’ within the Royal Family, say insiders as he suffers two setbacks in his US sex case’. (*MailOnline*, 1 January 2022)

The Sun employed negative terminology such as ‘ROYAL CRISIS’ and ‘huge challenge’ in its title to describe the difficulties faced by the royal family at that time. *The Sun* also used rhetoric. They used the metaphors ‘ROYAL HEADACHE’ and ‘utter nightmare’ to imply that Prince Andrew's relationship with Maxwell and Epstein caused huge trouble for the royal family. The use of the hyperbole ‘Palace paralysis’ illustrates the serious damage Prince Andrew's sexual abuse case brought to the royal family.

What might have made the Queen decide to revoke Andrew's military title and royal role was that Andrew would continue to fight the allegations against Virginia Roberts Giuffre. Also, the tabloids have highlighted the attitudes and actions of Prince Charles, Prince William and the Queen in the face of this royal crisis:

“The Prince of Wales sharpened the knife over Christmas, deciding his brother had “run out of road” and should be stripped of all military titles, patronages and his HRH status to protect the Royal Family”. (*The Sun Online*, 15 January 2022)

‘KNIVES OF WINDSOR Prince Charles and William planned axing of disgraced Andrew at Christmas – before telling Queen ‘favourite son’ must go’. (*The Sun Online*, 15 January 2022)

‘BROTHERLY SHOVE Prince Charles and William urged Queen to strip Andrew of HRH and military titles in ‘hour-long summit’. (*The Sun Online*, 14 January 2022)

‘Both he and Prince Charles are said to be in complete agreement that Andrew must go - and were ‘completely furious’ after he ‘crossed a red line’, *The Sun* exclusively reported’. (*The Sun*, 14 January 2022)

‘The Duke of York will no longer be known as His Royal Highness ‘in any official capacity’ in a stunning downfall as his family abandoned him to fight his sex abuse lawsuit in America as a private citizen’. (*MailOnline*, 14 January 2022)

‘Andrew faces life as a Royal pariah after being stripped of his titles and duties amid the scandal’. (*The Sun Online*, 18 February 2022)

‘At 11.30am she summoned him to Windsor Castle before effectively kicking him out of the Royal Family during a highly emotional 90-minute summit’. (*The Sun Online*, 18 February 2022)

Online tabloids use a lot of rhetorical structures, modality, and verbs to describe the attitude and anger of Prince William and Prince Charles over Prince Andrew’s sexual abuse case. The language style used here is hyperbole, dramatic, and farce style. The use of exaggeration ‘sharpened the knife’ and the metaphor ‘KNIVES OF WINDSOR’ illustrate that Prince William and Prince Charles wanted to distance Prince Andrew from the royal family and shield the royal family from the many humiliating details that would occur at the trial. Concurrently, the phrase ‘completely furious’ and the verb ‘urged’ show that the two princes were furious at Prince Andrew's damage to the royal reputation. Both tabloids used the

modality ‘must’ to indicate the firm attitude and determination of the two princes to drive Prince Andrew out of the royal family. Also, ‘crossed a red line’ is an idiom that means to defy or violate the furthest limit of what is tolerable, allowable, or forgivable. This shows that Prince Andrew's choice was willful and disregarded the royal family's reputation. Prince Andrew's actions are portrayed as having exceeded the royal family's tolerance. Additionally, the term ‘summit’ describes the gravity of the situation and reflects the tension among members of the royal family. Moreover, the two online tabloids described Prince Charles and William as positive role models, trying to protect the royal family and save the monarchy. As Conboy (2006) said, by using a series of unique and recognisable dialects, tabloids enable readers to use newspapers as a text bridge between their own experience of the culture they live in and their attitudes and beliefs in a series of languages. It is worth noting that using the transitivity of the verbs expresses a brief, sharp retribution for Prince Andrew's expulsion from the royal family, as seen in phrases like ‘kicking him out of the royal’ and ‘abandoned him’. The phrases ‘a stunning downfall’ and ‘Royal pariah’ indicate that Prince Andrew has been stripped of his privileges and turned from a prince to an ordinary citizen. This is a common sensationalist framing tactic often employed by tabloids. Consequently, tabloids frame the royal family's attitude and actions towards Prince Andrew within a narrative of moral anger and revenge, all filtered through the lens of celebrity and sensationalism (Conboy, 2006).

The two tabloids highlighted that the Queen's removal of Prince Andrew's royal title is seen as a way to distance him from the royal family:

‘Lawyers for the Queen’s second son said that Andrew ‘hereby demands a trial by jury on all causes of action asserted in the complaint’ because he denies ‘any and all wrongdoing’. Experts say it further confirms why Her Majesty ‘swiftly and ruthlessly’ forced Andrew to step down from his remaining royal patronages and demanded he fight the case as a ‘private citizen’. (*MailOnline*, 27 January 2022)

“The two heirs then told the Queen her ‘favourite son’ must go because of the damage caused by sex abuse claims”. (*The Sun Online*, 14 January 2022)

‘The decision represents the duke's complete removal from official royal life, and an attempt to distance the monarchy from Andrew, who was once second in line to the throne as the spare to the heir, in the year of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee’. (*MailOnline*, 27 January 2022)

The tabloid explains that by stripping Prince Andrew of his royal role, the Queen aimed to prevent his pernicious influence on the royal family. The use of the word ‘distance’ conveys the necessity for Prince Andrew to separate himself from the royal family before causing more embarrassment and humiliation. The use of the words ‘favourite son’ along with

‘because of’ is a logical implication that the Queen was under a lot of pressure to remove Prince Andrew. Even though Prince Andrew was the Queen's favourite son, the trial would be hugely damaging. At the same time, the Queen is also described as ‘ruthless,’ portraying her as a figure of power and determination, willing to set aside her sentiment when the interests of the monarchy are at stake. Therefore, the Queen would have to distance Prince Andrew from the royal family. This was a way of cherishing and protecting the monarchy. As seen from the above, the royal family’s reaction is depicted as full of fear and anger, eliciting empathy from readers.

Simultaneously, it is not only the royal family and the army who wanted to disassociate themselves from Prince Andrew, but also the residents of York, schools, and sex abuse charities, all expressed their anger and protested against Andrew:

‘Nine out of 10 York residents want Prince Andrew to be stripped of his Duke of York title as he faces Virginia Giuffre sex allegations’. (*MailOnline*, 19 January 2022)

‘Nearly nine in ten residents in York have demanded that Prince Andrew be stripped of his dukedom as the dramatic fallout from his bombshell sex abuse lawsuit rumbles on, a poll suggests’. (*MailOnline*, 19 January 2022)

‘York appears to be distancing itself from the so-called 'pariah prince' after the Queen sensationally stripped him of his honorary military roles, royal patronages, and official 'HRH' status last week’. (*MailOnline*, 19 January 2022)

‘RAGING residents have demanded Prince Andrew is removed from their street's name after the disgraced duke's rape allegations’. (*The Sun Online*, 9 February 2022)

The tabloid uses the hyperbole 'bombshell' to describe the sex abuse lawsuit and 'sensational' to describe the queen's removal of Prince Andrew's honorary military roles, royal patronages, and official 'HRH', echoing the sensational language employed in reporting the Partygate event. In the description of the residents of York, tabloids used verbs like ‘want’ and ‘demand’, indicating that the residents were eager to ban the Duke of York title. The word ‘distance’ indicates that York residents did not want to have any connection with Prince Andrew. Furthermore, the adjective ‘RAGING’ was used to describe the residents' attitude towards the Duke's sex abuse lawsuit, prompting the removal of Prince Andrew’s name from their street. This suggests that the residents were ashamed that their street name was ‘Prince Andrew’:

‘The Prince Andrew High School in Canada has announced it is changing its name of more than 60 years to create a 'safe and inclusive' space for its students’. (*MailOnline*, 21 January 2022)

'Principal Craig Campbell told parents in a letter that the school was 'ready and excited' for the re-brand which will 'uphold its values'. (*MailOnline*, 21 January 2022)

The High School decided to change its name to create a 'safe and inclusive' space for students, implying that the name Prince Andrew now represents danger and carries negative connotations. Also, the use of the adjective 'ready and excited' shows that the school cannot wait to disassociate from Prince Andrew to present any potential discontent among students and parents. The word 're-brand' implies the school's denial of Prince Andrew's image and its beliefs that he did not align with the school's brand: Sex abuse campaigners have also expressed dismay at Andrew becoming an ambassador against 'sex trafficking':

"SEX abuse campaigners have reacted with horror that Prince Andrew has pledged to redeem himself by becoming an ambassador against 'sex trafficking'." (*The Sun Online*, 17 February 2022)

"Lily Di Giovanni, 40, of the Isle of Wight, was sexually abused for eight years from the age of 14 and is "appalled" by Prince Andrew's decision to pay out and to become an ambassador for those who have been sex trafficked." (*The Sun Online*, 17 Feb 2022)

'But sex abuse charities and campaigners distanced themselves from the Duke of York who has stopped short of an apology to sex trafficking victim Virginia Roberts Giuffre.' (*The Sun Online*, 17 February 2022)

"Teresa Parker, spokesperson for Women's Aid, said: "I have been speaking to some of the survivors of abuse we work with at Women's Aid today, and the last thing they personally want is for any powerful man accused of abusing women to be campaigning on their behalf, or pledging support for them." (*The Sun online*, 17 February 2022)

'He has never done anything for victims of abuse. But when it's convenient for him, he uses their trauma and abuse as a way of trying to reform himself.' (*The Sun online*, 17 February 2022)

'He remains a man accused of rape who has not faced justice, he has not apologised, he used vicious victim-blaming tactics that backfired including trying to expose her mental health records to the world to discredit her.' (*The Sun Online*, 17 February 2022)

Sex abuse charities have vehemently protested over Prince Andrew's desire to become an 'ambassador against sex trafficking' The use of the words 'applied' and 'horror' shows the attitude of sex abuse campaigners towards Prince Andrew. The word 'distance' is used here

again, indicating that sexual abuse charities and campaigners have rejected Prince Andrew as the ‘ambassador against sexual trafficking’. Additionally, *The Sun Online* also used quotations from sexual abuse charities from women’s aid organisations to convey their anger and protest at Prince Andrew and their belief that he was arrogant.

In this event, Prince Andrew’s cash settlement was also of concern, and his wealth also raised questions:

‘It comes as MPs demand the source of Prince Andrew’s settlement cash, with Tory MP Jake Berry calling on the Royals to guarantee that “no money whatsoever” has come from the public purse’. (*The Sun Online*, 18 February 2022)

‘Andrew, who remains ninth in line to the throne, has so far been allowed to keep his taxpayer-funded police bodyguards at a cost to the public purse of an estimated £2-3 million a year. This has sparked intense public debate, particularly because his nephew, Prince Harry, was stripped of his police protection when he quit as a working royal in 2020 and moved to the United States.’ (*MailOnline*, 24 January 2022)

‘The glaring discrepancy between his lifestyle and any discernible income is a serious cause for concern because it raises suspicion that he might be receiving funding from sources that would expect something in return.’ (*The Sun Online*, 15 Feb 2022)

‘His apparent hidden fortune has come back into the spotlight as he faces a potentially multimillion-pound legal battle against his sex accuser Virginia Giuffre.’ (*The Sun Online*, 15 Feb 2022)

‘The royal expert said that questions have been raised about Andrew’s wealth “for at least 15 to 20 years”.’ (*The Sun Online*, 15 Feb 2022)

The use of the phrase ‘no money whatever’ means that both Tories and the public are firmly against Prince Andrew paying for his mistakes from the public purse. Also, the logic used in the third paragraph implies that people were dissatisfied with Prince Andrew’s privilege. If he continued to use taxpayers’ money to enjoy bodyguard services, it would be bound to spark outrage. Calls for Prince Andrew to settle the investigation suggest that ordinary people may be the victims of Prince Andrew paying for his own mistakes. These quotations question Prince Andrew’s financial situation, implying that there may be problems with his funding sources. Therefore, the tabloids still gravitate toward topics that are meaningful to readers in their case coverage. This means that tabloids prefer topics that are meaningful to their readers. Ordinary people are portrayed as potential victims, and the tabloid takes a stance in support of them.

7.3.1 Analysis and discussion

In the Prince Andrew's sexual abuse case, the tabloids still used a lot of colloquial, informal, public idioms to build community, especially in the headlines. Concurrently, the tabloids tapped into readers' shared memories, which has long been a community-building strategy for print tabloids. Selective recall of the nation's history is one of the ways popular newspapers connect readers with institutions and the historical past. It provides an important element to the tabloid's cohesive and argumentative strategy to establish their readership's identity and perspective (Conboy, 2006, p.73). In addition, the two online tabloids still used binary opposition, a traditional tabloid approach when dealing with sex scandals. They described Prince Andrew as a villain and Virginia Roberts Giuffre as a victim in exaggerated language in the form of 'melodrama'. Tabloid newspapers are keen to keep the images of the characters in these terrible cases clearly in the public eye (Conboy, 2006).

The negative portrayal of Prince Andrew as a sexual abuser caused public outrage. Both online tabloids capitalised on this public outrage by attempting to immerse their readers in the perspective of the royal family, eliciting emotions and a sense of alignment with their audience. This approach underscores the online tabloids' heavy reliance on emotion to describe this event. Simultaneously, the two tabloids also highlighted that the Queen had banned Prince Andrew from honorary military roles, royal patronages, and official 'HRH' in order to protect the monarchy. Both tabloids emphasised that Prince Andrew's actions may tarnish the royal family, which is essentially an intention to stir up collective emotions about the monarchy, rooted in the constitution of the country. As Barrett (2017) points out, emotions are constructed by cultural and social factors, and how people feel is based on their experience, social role, gender, the social contexts, their ideology, beliefs, and culture. Therefore, the context element should be considered in this event. Undoubtedly, online tabloids understand the importance of the monarchy in people's hearts. Billig (1992, p.30) suggests that for English-born people, it is hard to imagine Britain without a monarchy. By abolishing the monarchy, you eliminate a distinguishing feature that sets the UK apart from other nations. Both tabloids assert that Prince Andrew disregarded the honour of the royal family and was determined to fight in court. The tabloids reached a consensus with readers that the royal family and the military needed to distance themselves from Prince Andrew to prevent him from harming the monarchy. This perspective is because the scale of the event was unprecedented, comparable only to the abdication crisis of the 1930s. The potential repercussions for the monarchy if Prince Andrew were to face trial in New York are portrayed as a momentous moment in royal history. Shils and Young (1953, p.80) describes that A society's cohesion relies on its internal consensus regarding the sacredness of fundamental moral standards, and popular constitutional monarchy is widely acknowledged for its role in enhancing the moral and civic sensibilities of society.

Therefore, both online tabloids use the audience's emotion toward monarchy to construct a community. This is because building an idea of community and society is the typical function

of the monarchy as an institution of state (Clancy, 2019, p.429). Nairn (1981, p.429) defines it as a 'national spirit essence' devised to facilitate integration and belonging. Thus, the language of the tabloids stimulated the nationalist sentiments of the readers, and they reached an agreement with them about the need to punish Prince Andrew and protect the monarchy. On the other hand, by describing Prince Andrew's cash settlement and privilege, the tabloids questioned and attacked privilege. They used a binary perspective to construct the opposition between Prince Andrew as a privileged person and 'we' as a public taxpayer, with the tabloids obviously on the side of 'us.' The tabloids' attack on Prince Andrew's privilege highlights the inequalities in British society. McKenzie (2017, p.266) asserts that class inequality and class struggle have always been a part of the political consciousness of the British populace. Indeed, The fact that British people are considered subjects of a monarchy rather than citizens of a United Kingdom suggests that the country's nature is inherently hierarchical and shaped by class politics. This means that they cannot evade the hierarchical politics of class. Therefore, part of the consciousness of the British subject is politics related to class inequality and class struggle. Consequently, critiquing privileges can stimulate sentiment against social privilege. Similarly, some scholars point out that some tabloids stories can be used as an outlet for dissatisfaction with the circumstances created by social inequality. The key point of reading tabloid celebrity stories is a wider interrogation of privilege (Johansson, 2007; Connell, 1998). More importantly, the online tabloids express that people should not be above the law no matter how rich or powerful they are. As scholars have emphasized before, online tabloids like to appear as the embodiment of justice rather than an outlet for people's emotions. Nelson, Juurlink and Perrone (2015, p.395) regard sexuality as included within the realm of social justice journalism, characterizing it as 'in-depth reporting on societal inequities and systemic abuses that drive collective engagement and change on those issues.' The tabloids used emotionally charged language when they described Virginia Roberts Giuffre, employing compelling quotes to arouse people's sympathy. If unjust treatment goes against moral standards, people will pay attention to justice. One way of bringing people into the moral community is by using empathy, warmth, and concern for a victim. Empathic concerns transform moral standards into specific actions toward another person. Empathic concern is likely to heighten the prominence of concerns about fairness (Blader and Tyler, 2001).

Finally, it was found that tabloids frequently employ evaluative language in their coverage of this event, including elements of rhetoric. This shows the online tabloids' attitude and stance on this event. The evaluation process serves as a key function of this rhetoric, ultimately shaping ideology. Evaluation is the orientation of a text toward an audience, encompassing the portrayal of news characters, actions, events, and the state of affairs in either a negative or positive light. Through such evaluative positioning, the media constructs a particular model of the social and moral order—a model of what is normal and aberrant, beneficial and harmful, praiseworthy and blameworthy, and so on (Martin and White, 2005, p.2). The tabloids employed evaluative language to establish Prince Andrew's reprehensible character. Furthermore, both online tabloids built their readership by predicting readers' attitudes toward Prince Andrew's sexual abuse, assuming a presupposed common ground. Implicitness is a universal property of texts and has considerable social importance. It is impossible to imagine

any form of social exchange or interaction without this 'common basis' (Fairclough, 2003, p.126). Implicitness and assumptions are important issues for ideology, as tabloids need to shape 'common ground' to reach a consensus with readers.

7.4 Comprehensive discussion of the two events

Combining these two cases, it is evident that online tabloids reach an ideological consensus with readers through familiar dialogues, vocabulary, details, quotations, and presuppositions, thereby forming a common community of 'us'. The results of this thesis are in agreement with those from Conboy (2006) and Fowler (1996). Consequently, it is apparent that online tabloids continue in this traditional way in the digital environment. At the same time, online tabloids relied heavily on emotion when reporting these two events. They provoked outrage against the inequality and privilege of society, striking a chord with their audience. Specifically, in the case of Partygate, online tabloids evoked people's traumatic emotions during the pandemic, and their anger at Boris Johnson. This mainly focused on Boris Johnson's disregard for the law, disrespect for the public, and perceived betraying. In the case of Prince Andrew's sexual abuse, online tabloids aroused people's anger about the fact that Prince Andrew ignored the law and discredited the monarchy, arousing their emotional instinct to protect the monarchy. As mentioned in the literature review, numerous scholars have pointed out the emotional nature of traditional tabloids. This research has demonstrated that online tabloids still use emotion in building community. Online tabloids construct social sentiment to trigger public mood and reach an emotional resonance with readers. The two online tabloids used in this study harnessed readers' collective consciousness by arousing what has been referred to as the concept of 'shared rage.' Notably, the two online tabloids quoted a large number of ordinary people's views on social media in the news, reflecting their attitudes, opinions and emotions towards the incident. This amplification of public voices in the news distinguishes online tabloids from their traditional counterparts in building their readership.

Tabloids employed familiar language and rhetoric to influence people's views on these two events. Both online tabloids have constructed a binary opposition between the antagonists and readers of these two cases. Through the skillful construction of an imagined community, they have successfully achieved a consensus with their readers, fostering a sense of belonging and differentiation between 'we' and 'they.' In the case of the Partygate, 'we' refers to those who obey the rules or make some sacrifices for the pandemic, while 'they' refers to Boris Johnson and the 10 Downing street staff who attended the party. In the case of Prince Andrew's sexual abuse, 'we' refers to people who were angry with Prince Andrew and sympathetic to the victims and the royal family. 'They' refers to Prince Andrew and his associates. *The Sun Online* and *Mail Online* allow readers to construct and unfold their social identity by joining an imaginary community of readers. This is related to Hall's (1996) arguments about identities being diverse constructions depending on the setting. This also corroborates Brichta's (2011)

perspective that community depends on the context of inclusion and exclusion that tabloids construct. In these two cases, online tabloids played the role of ‘guardian of conscience,’ revealing wrongdoing and mobilising people's moral indignation against protagonists. Therefore, both cases reflect that the ‘we’ constructed by online tabloids refers to people who insist on justice and are treated unfairly, while the ‘they’ refers to people who ignore the law due to their power. This result is partly consistent with the views of some scholars, but there are also differences. Brichta (2011, p.206) suggests that *The Sun* can be seen as an amplifier and advocate for ‘the voice of the people’, portraying popular tabloids as voice amplifiers for positions that are not often heard in society associated with a notion of ‘fairness’. Readers perceive such popular newspapers as platforms to critique social inequalities. Everyone is equal in *The Sun*. This also implies a challenge to the existing social power relations. Similarly, Johansson (2007, p.149) argues that British tabloids can be seen as taking an ‘anti-establishment’ stance while encouraging ordinary readers to be disaffected and resentful of those in power. Additionally, Brookes (1999, p.256) illustrates the use of the collective pronouns ‘we’ and ‘us’, which can consistently be encountered in the tabloids’ texts. ‘We’ can be expressed as opposition to some bureaucrats. This is part of a populist discourse that opposes ‘us’ with politicians and bureaucrats. Here ‘we’ refers to a vague concept of ‘the people.’ Fiske (1989, p.196) suggests that community can be defined as being against the ‘power bloc in society. However, the community built in online tabloids is not just specific to disadvantaged groups or completely opposed to everyone in the power group. ‘We’ in the community built by online tabloids are opposed to the group which violates morality and the law, and harms the interests of ordinary people. ‘We’ insist on fairness and justice. For example, in Prince Andrew's sexual abuse case, readers may stand with the Queen against his perceived harm to the monarchy. In the Partygate event, both online tabloids failed to critique the entire Conservative Party, instead opting to just criticise those who broke the rules and betrayed the people. They even described the speeches of many politicians and Tories as representing ordinary people's views.

Therefore, this community does not have a fixed model or a fixed group of people. The community changes according to circumstances, values, and specific events. Therefore, it is evident from the two studied online tabloids that, due to changes in the audience structure of online tabloids and their efforts to appeal to a diverse demographics, they emphasised certain universally shared values as the basis for consensus. The consensual ideology of equality, legality, and fairness expressed by the two online tabloids is consistent with the positive legal values in Steve (1977). Each value is assumed to be widely agreed upon as true. Because the consensus determines that some people are outside the consensus, the ‘we’ in the consensus narrows and solidifies into a group of people who believe in the cultural and economic validity of their interests. However, they face challenges from various hostile forces, represented by factions forming the ‘they’ threat. Also, they still use emotion to inspire a sense of collective identity. The answer can be gleaned from an analysis of UK social dynamics and realities, Online tabloids expose the social reality, including government accountability problems, people's lack of trust in the government, and people’s lack of representation in the political process.

More importantly, we can deduce the reason for this traditional way to construct community from the audience engagement strategy discussed in the chapter 5. As discussed in the literature review, audience engagement strategy focuses on the relationship between media organisations and their audiences, and how it exposes news production to audience participation (Redden and Witschge, 2010). Franquet (2014) suggests that the function of media interaction is a promotion tool that increases traffic on their websites, which, in turn, is used as a means of strengthening brand and gaining the loyalty of their audience. Also, interactivity represents an opportunity to contribute to community building. Consequently, audience interaction with news becomes a way to participate in the community.

However, it emerged from the interviews that both tabloid news organisations have largely retained their journalistic culture whilst providing participation opportunities for the audience. Firstly, in the case of *The Sun Online*, their interactivity has decreased compared to the past. This reduction stems from the proliferation of offensive, uncivilised comments, leading *The Sun Online* to turn off the comment section. From this perspective, *The Sun* does not appear to be neglecting the chance to engage with the audience through the comments section. Reporters also stressed that their primary focus was on real news rather than user-generated content. Secondly, although both online tabloids in this study offer the audience the opportunity to email feedback and stories, they do not encourage readers to send them criticism or suggestions, being unwilling to accept readers' feedback and criticism about their news work. Thirdly, both online tabloids use social media to interact with audiences, but they have not yet used social media to build a community. Finally, journalists are only willing to consider audience material as undeveloped story ideas rather than material that can be added to the news.

Therefore, the interviews concerning audience engagement strategy illustrate that tabloid news organisations have largely retained their journalistic culture whilst providing opportunities for audience participation. Upholding professional standards remains the core journalistic role of the 'gatekeepers' who decide what news content appears in online newspapers. In addition, news websites do not allow the audience to participate completely as managers, either by themselves or working alongside journalists at each stage. Therefore, professionals fully take charge of each stage of the production process. This aligns with Örnebring (2008, p.782) assertion that online tabloids firmly stick to the 'old media' model in the process of news production. Most content production continues to follow the 'we write, you read' model. Hermida and Thurman (2008) illustrate that while UGC can also help connect users to a newspaper, news organisations stick to extend their conventions to the online platform in accordance with their existing newsroom culture, including the way they engage with the public. This study has shown that despite the interactive potential of the internet to provide opportunities for audiences to participate and build communities, the news culture of the two tabloids basically adheres to the top-down 'old model'. Therefore, they have extended the feature of print tabloids, which relies on consensus to build an imaginary community on the internet, with the aim of maintaining reader relationships.

Silberstein-Loeb (2015) argued that newspapers used to be the main way people connected as an imagined community, but that the internet and digital culture have mostly replaced this print form culture, spreading worldwide. However, our research shows that digital tabloids have not abandoned the way print tabloids build community. Therefore, tabloids adopt a mixed model that combines 'old' and 'new' features in maintaining audience relationships. They utilise interactivity features of the internet to enable audience participation, maintain reader loyalty, and website traffic. At the same time, they still uphold their core news culture by adhering to the traditional tabloid newspaper model of reaching consensus with the audience to build an imagined community and strengthened loyalty with the audience. In this manner, online tabloids attract the audience and retain their distinct voice. As a result, employing traditional tabloid culture to establish consensus with readers remains the primary approach for online tabloids to sustain their readership. In this regard, we agree with Conboy and Steel (2010, p.508) who suggested that Stead's reflection on the future of journalism was accurate. In this century, journalists continue to be the primary channel for reestablishing an individual connection to an audience as part of the generalised 'we'.

Also, in addition, online tabloids have expanded their use of emotion in the process of building groups in the digital age. This is captured by Wahl-Jorgensen's (2020, p.175) concept of 'emotional turn'. The emergence and rapid expansion of digital and social media have facilitated these developments, as the affordances of these digital platforms profoundly influence the emotional landscape. This emotional turn has taken place due to the rapid technological change in the digital era, and it promoted the role of emotion in the participation of news audiences. The purpose of emotion-driven news reports is to create a kind of news that can establish a close and trusting relationship with the audience, which can be achieved by stimulating its emotional response. At the same time, Stefan and Linh (2014) demonstrate that emotional content in social media is more likely to be shared, and they also acknowledge that the emotion in the content may also trigger the evoking effect that affects the sharing behaviour in social transmission. Therefore, online tabloids pay more attention to emotion. Moreover, our results show that online tabloids trigger readers' collective consciousness by arousing what has been referred to as the concept of 'shared rage'. Berger and Milkman (2012) suggested that anger and anxiety are characterised by high arousal or activation, which can drive viral transmission.

Therefore, online tabloids understand ordinary people's lives and thoughts, emphasizing that no one should be above the law and demand equal rights. As Hassan (2019) describes, 'class and inequality strengthen the entitlement culture of Boris Johnson and the royal family. This also resulted in Prince Andrew's close friendship with sex abuser Jeffrey Epstein since he never thought he would be held accountable. In the Partygate event, the online tabloids showed anti-elite populism and exclusion populism to a certain extent since British society remains unequal, and the demagoguery of populism remains politically attractive. Meanwhile, online tabloids attack the privileged class, which breaks the law, not all influential people. They do not aim to shape society by pitching ordinary people against all privileged people.

This is because online tabloids need to include a variety of voices in the public sphere, so they express common sentiments, adhere to legal and social justice, and follow the interests of the majority. Since the audience of digital tabloids has changed, digital tabloids aim to attract as many groups as possible. The online tabloid reporters who were interviewed for this study explained that their articles were less aggressive for commercial reasons than traditional tabloids had been in the past. They wanted to reach as wide an audience as possible and attract people of different ages and social classes.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we saw how online tabloids build communities through language strategy of two incidents. We found that they mainly continue with many of the language strategies of traditional tabloids. Through the skillful construction of an imagined community, they have successfully achieved a consensus with their readers, fostering a sense of belonging and differentiation between 'we' and 'they'. At the same time, emotions play an important role in building communities for online tabloids. They also cite more ordinary voices on social media in the news. Furthermore, online tabloids are more like messengers of justice. They emphasise that, no matter how rich or powerful, no one should be above the law. People's anger and anxiety described by tabloids reveal social reality. 'We' in the community built by online tabloids are opposed to the group which violates morality and the law and harms the interests of ordinary people. 'We' insist on fairness and justice. More importantly, we found that tabloids use a combination of 'new and old models' to build readership.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings, conclusions, original contribution to knowledge and limitations of this thesis.

8.2 Digital strategy for online tabloids

In the digital environment, traditional news media use new technologies to expand the audience market. The significant advantages of these online features in attracting audiences have compelled most news media to leverage the internet's capabilities, developing digital strategies to contend with intense competition. Newspapers must compete more fiercely than ever for the attention of users and advertisers. The development of digital tabloids relies heavily on employing digital strategies and transforming traditional tabloid conventions and features. Many scholars solely focus on the tabloid text but ignore the measurement of specific digital strategies. There has been a wealth of research on the digital strategies employed by online news organisations to attract audiences in this highly competitive environment. This has provided a certain foundation for this study. However, there have been limited discussions among scholars regarding how tabloids utilise these digital technologies to attract audiences, and a comprehensive exploration of the synergistic impact of digital strategies on tabloid products is lacking. In addition, few studies have examined the impact these digital strategies have had on the journalistic practices, values, and news decision-making of British tabloids. In contrast to the revenue model of other news websites, *The Sun Online* and *MailOnline* offer free content without paywalls. They depend on a large audience to generate advertising revenues and provide their readers with free content, so tabloids inevitably need to compete more fiercely than ever for the attention of users and advertisers. This thesis has examined how online tabloids use digital strategies to attract audiences and the synergistic effect of these strategies on tabloids.

To comprehensively understand the evolution of tabloids within the digital environment, this thesis began by investigating how tabloids employ digital strategies to attract the audience. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with online tabloid reporters explained the effects of digital strategies on tabloids, and on journalists' decision making. The thesis shows that an important strategy in building a compelling tabloid in a digital environment is its multi-platform presence (homepage, social media, Google). This is because tabloid editors and reporters aim to improve the visibility of tabloid news on various platforms. In addition, the thesis shows that the importance of visual effects can be comparable to or even surpass

text. Visualisation is now an indispensable way for digital tabloids to package stories, aiming to catch people's attention while also improving the use of multimedia. In terms of text, the majority of online tabloid journalists made changes based on traditional narratives. In addition, regardless of any visual package or platform, the most important consideration when constructing news is still the 'people'. News content must remain people-centered, with the centrality of 'people' becoming more important than ever in the digital environment.

The homepage is the most critical channel for the two tabloids to attract audiences, and it is a highly visual medium. The pictures and videos occupy the primary position on the homepage to attract an audience. Tabloids aim to ensure the readability of the homepage by constantly updating a large amount of content and having a good layout to retain the audience. In addition, the research indicates that social media strategies are widely used by tabloid journalists since social media channels have become a major distribution channel. However, online tabloid reporters and editors not only use social media for distribution but also as tools for their research. The social media team monitors social media trends and then looks for news on the homepage that can be successfully transmitted on social media. The headlines above news links are more important than pictures. The interviewees from *The Sun Online* argued that social media headlines do not act as clickbait but rather aim to arouse the audience's curiosity. In addition, social media strategies impact news production. Social media teams research audience data and provide reporters with trending topics to create news accordingly while also using SEO strategies. These strategies help tabloids obtain a large amount of traffic and they are important research tools to build engaging content. This research has shown the impact of Google Search trends. Online tabloids not only focus on popular trends to optimise articles but also consider some of their market-specific topics. Most importantly, SEO not only requires journalists to put keywords or hyperlinks in titles and articles but also requires them to create articles based on search trends and keywords. In addition, audience metrics have been widely used in all news practices of digital tabloids. Whether journalists are building a compelling news story, using social media and SEO strategies, or adjusting the content on the homepage, audience metrics are important tools. Journalists monitor traffic in real time to understand audience needs and adjust news accordingly. They use audience metrics to follow up on news coverage and update it from a new perspective or re-edit news to make it compelling and accessible. The thesis also shows tabloids use audience metrics to study why the news is popular, and they try to learn and copy these techniques to write other stories.

Although many scholars have emphasised that news websites are actively offering opportunities to interact with their audiences, this thesis found that the *MailOnline* and *The Sun Online* have a different approach towards audience participation. Both have experimented with four different ways of interaction with the audience, by using comment sections, emails to reporters, social media, and polls. However, due to the comment section taking too much effort to maintain, *The Sun Online* turned off the comment section, while most reporters in the *MailOnline* believe that the comment section is an essential way to interact with the audience.

The *MailOnline* has a community moderator who is responsible for managing comments and conveying the audience requirements to journalists. In addition, both online tabloids allow the audience to send their stories, ideas, and suggestions. However, journalists are unwilling to accept readers' feedback and criticism. The tabloids did not fully use audience feedback to improve their news work. Although journalists offer the audience the opportunity to send stories, they prefer to receive exclusive good stories instead of general stories. In addition, journalists use social media to conduct polls and urge readers to comment. They are mainly interested in the commercial rather than the democratic benefits of audience participation. Ultimately, the results show that apart from the comments section of the *MailOnline*, the two tabloids are not committed to building a community through audience participation.

This thesis also studied the impact of digital strategies on tabloid values, journalistic practices, and news decision-making. Journalists and editors generally have a positive attitude towards the adoption of digital strategies. However, these digital strategies are not decisive in their news production. Journalists' experience and news judgement are still their most important tools. The online tabloids still adhere to their 'old media model' regarding news production.

Still, digital strategies do have an impact on tabloid news value. The news values of online tabloids, such as exclusivity, shareability, and timeliness, are influenced by SEO, social media, and audience measurement. Notwithstanding these digital strategies, online tabloids also adhere to the values of traditional tabloids. In addition, it is worth noting that the impact of these digital strategies on news practices and decision-making is complex and multifaceted. Due to the commercialisation of tabloid news outlets, journalists have the goal of pursuing traffic, so they include audience metrics. Therefore, both online tabloid editors acknowledged that social media strategy and SEO impact the news agenda and content of digital tabloids to some extent. However, journalists reject the suggestions if the search engine team's requirement weakened the story or posed legal risks, possibly diminishing the quality of the news or compromising their integrity. Most interviewees stated that suggestions from social media and search engine optimisation teams were just suggestions. Their news judgement was the most important.

One interesting finding is that almost all editors mentioned the word 'balance.' The tabloids' homepage can be considered as resembling the storefront of a store, so it cannot just consist of content with good traffic performance on social media or Google. They need to consider an appropriate combination between popular content on other platforms and the tabloid's news agenda. This is because the algorithms of other platforms will change, and news suitable for other platforms may not all be suitable for the home page. Facebook often changes its algorithm, where in tabloid traffic may fluctuate unpredictably. Therefore, tabloid reporters emphasise the correct news mix that balances traffic and editorial judgement. This can ensure both the news quality and the visual effect of the homepage. Besides, if they only focused on traffic and catered to the audience's preferences, all the content on the homepage would be about death and sex. This may offend the audience and damage the quality of the news

content on the homepage. Tabloid editors mix important and serious news with entertaining news to avoid the over-entertainment of news websites. News decision-making is primarily driven by journalists' news values and professional values, and they emphasize the necessity of reporting important news in the public interest. Even if the news does not attract much traffic, they hope to provide information to reach the audience and allow the audience to learn the truth. They believe that regardless of the strategy or platform, a good story itself is the most important. It is worth noting that clicks can sometimes be used as a tool to ensure that important news reaches the audience. For tabloid editors, clicks are not all "evil", and they can also be used to improve the quality of news. Overall, this study found that tabloid journalists' decision-making in new environments is affected by many factors, such as technological, commercial, and audience preferences, as well as journalists' own professional values.

Digital strategies have an impact on news agenda, news style, and news visuals of online tabloids. However, reporters and editors exercise discretion in employing these strategies, prioritising their own judgment. This results in a balanced utilisation of social media strategies, SEO strategies, and audience metrics. Consequently, the synergistic effect of different digital strategies, combined with journalists' values and news judgments, plays a significant role in shaping and influencing online tabloids.

8.3 The continuation and change of tabloid characteristics in the digital environment

Scholars have conducted limited research on the transformation or continuation in the characteristics of tabloids within the digital environment. Their analysis may not fully cover all aspects of changes in the characteristics of tabloids. Many scholars believe that online tabloids either merely replicate or amplify their traditional features, or that these tabloids have evolved into more tabloid and viral websites. This study uses content analysis to explore the various characteristics of online tabloids to reveal the complex changes and manifestations of tabloids. A key to tabloid development is the combination of traditional tabloid features and digital strategy. Therefore, to fully understand how the characteristics of digital tabloids are changing, this thesis has analysed the content of online and print tabloids, and has taken the perspectives of journalists on the development of tabloid characteristics into account.

Based on content analysis and interviews, the thesis found a mix of changes in the traditional characteristics of tabloids in the digital age. Some traditional features have been amplified in the online context, while others have been reduced or remain unchanged. At the same time, some new features, such as the use of multimedia, data visualisation, and the use of social media as news resources have been enhanced. Therefore, the characteristics of online tabloids in the digital age are complex and diverse. It is not a straightforward progression or a single

trend in tabloid characteristics, but rather a multitude of changes across multiple aspects. Moreover, some changes in traditional characteristics differ between these two online tabloids which further emphasises the importance of reassessing the specific dynamics and complexity of tabloids, as highlighted by Conboy (2021). When compared to their print versions, the *MailOnline* and *The Sun Online* exhibit a lower focus on political news. Also, under the influence of social media and audience preferences, online tabloids are more entertaining and trivial in terms of news topics and content. On the other hand, both online tabloids have reduced their coverage of domestic news while broadening their international reporting. This indicated a shift toward greater cultural diversity and a more global outlook in their content. Furthermore, both tabloids have amplified their sensationalist style, and the personalized approach remains highly effective, with no discernible significant alterations. In terms of mode of address, *The Sun Online* continues to use this feature as usual whereas a decrease in mode of address can be seen in *The MailOnline*. The reporter argues that their so-called traditional tabloid style conveys some critical news to people in a more understandable, interesting, and accurate way, ensuring that people can access this important information as a public service. However, the content analysis employed for this thesis revealed that both online tabloids increased sensationalism or used personalization to capture the audience's attention for profit.

In addition, this thesis also reveals how tabloids have adapted to the digital environment. The changes in the characteristics of tabloids are complex, and affected by many aspects such as audience structure and digital strategies. Firstly, this thesis demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between the traditional characteristics of tabloids and digital strategies. The digital strategy amplifies some of the traditional characteristics of tabloids, but at the same time limits or weakens the development of other characteristics. Digital strategies have complex impacts on the development of tabloid traditional features. This challenges the views held by some scholars that digitisation and social media inevitably amplify all characteristics into a more tabloidization direction. For example, journalists need to adopt the rules of search engine optimisation, which weakens the use of traditional features in the headlines of online tabloids. At the same time, despite being influenced by digital strategies, reporters also insist on retaining some characteristics in order to maintain their brand independence. They are determined to balance traffic, technology, and traditional features to ensure their brand identity.

The content of these two online tabloids includes both serious political content and entertaining soft news content. At the same time, the abundance of images and videos makes online tabloids more vivid and eye-catching than ever before. Additionally, they present news in a sensational and easily understandable style. In order to mitigate the limit of social media platforms, they cleverly adhered to the sensational characteristics of tabloids by adding emotional quotes. They condense complex political topics into easily understandable formats that are accessible to a wider audience. The two digital tabloids in question navigate between serious and trivial entertainment content. They have broadened the tabloid's dynamic by

incorporating a range of soft and hard news topics and styles, and added an international perspective. For example, the increase in the use of social media sources as news resources has not only increased the exploration of the lives of celebrities, but also conveyed the voices of ordinary individuals and showed the lives of ordinary people. This promotes discussions on public content while engaging in entertainment. British digital tabloids have not turned into viral websites but seem more like a 'hybrid'. It takes this unique form to establish a market niche between broadsheet news websites and pure gossip sites or viral website news. This thesis shows that tabloids have successfully combined traditional characteristics with audience needs and the influence of digital strategies on achieving successful transformation.

8.4 Online tabloids build communities through language

In order to further explore the change or continuation of the traditional characteristics of tabloids, it is necessary to explore how digital tabloids maintain audience relationships and construct community. Previously, the tabloids have always been successful in keeping their readership through the traditional feature of constructing communities with their audience. This audience community is an 'imagined community' built through its participation in print newspaper culture. However, due to the appearance of web 2.0, the media is becoming more individualised as communities break down into groups of individuals. Newspapers used to be the main way people connected as a community, but now the internet and digital culture have mostly replaced this medium, spreading all around the world. This research study explored how tabloids use language to build community in a digital environment.

Online tabloids reach an ideological consensus with readers through familiar dialogues, oral language, vocabulary, details, quotations, rhetorical structure, modality, syntax, and presuppositions, forming a common community of 'us'. This demonstrates the continuity and change of traditional characteristics in the construction of imaginary communities within digital tabloids. This thesis shows that online tabloids continue to build communities in this traditional way in the digital environment. First, they use these linguistic tools to presuppose readers' beliefs, knowledge, and attitude, and to reach a common ideology with readers. Online tabloids try to shape the common ground to reach a consensus with readers. In both of the cases examined in this thesis, a binary opposition was constructed through the use of language strategies to describe positive and negative images. For example, the 'PM who defied lockdown rules to party' versus 'People struggling to abide by lockdown rules'. In the second case, the online tabloids described Prince Andrew as a villain and Virginia Roberts Giuffre as a victim in the exaggerated language in the form of 'melodrama' in traditional tabloids' familiar way of dealing with sex scandals. More importantly, both online tabloids also constructed a binary opposition between the antagonists and readers in these two events. Through the skillful construction of an imagined community, they successfully achieved a consensus with their readers, fostering a sense of belonging and differentiation between 'we' and 'they'. In the case of Partygate, 'we' refers to those who obeyed the rules or made

sacrifices during the pandemic, while ‘they’ refers to Boris Johnson and the 10 Downing Street staff who attended parties.

Moreover, online tabloids heavily relied on emotional appeal when reporting these two events. They constructed social sentiment to provoke public outrage against societal inequality and privilege, effectively resonating with their audience. It is worth mentioning that both tabloids pay attention to presenting the opinions and reactions of the public. Compared with traditional tabloids, online tabloids reflect the voices of ordinary people by using ordinary people’s tweets to express their attitudes and reactions. Specifically, in the case of Partygate, online tabloids evoked people's traumatic emotions during the pandemic, and their anger at the Prime Minister mainly focusing on Boris Johnson not obeying the law, disrespecting and betraying the people. In the case of Prince Andrew's sexual abuse, online tabloids aroused people's anger about the fact that Prince Andrew ignored the law and discredited the monarchy, arousing their emotional instinct to protect the monarchy. Many scholars have pointed out that traditional tabloids are emotional. This research shows that emotions still play an important role in online tabloids in building community. This is also the same concept as Wahl-Jorgensen’s (2019) highlighted emotional turn in the digital age.

As emphasised in the interviews conducted for this study, the audience of digital tabloids has changed and such tabloids want to attract as many groups as possible. This means that online tabloids need to include a variety of voices in the public sphere, so they express common sentiments, adhere to legal and social justice, and follow the interests of the majority. Therefore, the way the two online tabloids reach consensus is to highlight some generally shared and agreed values such as the consensual ideology of equality, legality, and fairness, which states that no matter how rich or powerful, no one should be above the law. The community built in online tabloids is not just specific disadvantaged groups nor are they completely opposed to all the people in the power group. Online tabloids attack the privileged class who breaks the law, not all powerful people. They do not aim to shape society by pitching ordinary people against all privileged people. ‘We’ in the community built by online tabloids are opposed to the group which violates morality and the law and harms the interests of ordinary people. ‘We’ insist on fairness and justice. For example, in Prince Andrew’s sexual abuse case, readers may have stood with the Queen against his assault on the reputation of the monarchy. Therefore, this community does not have a fixed model or a fixed group of people and changes according to circumstances, values, and specific events.

Despite changes in the media environment and audience groups, online tabloids still maintain their language and adhere to a populist style and ideology to a certain extent. Also, they still use emotion to inspire a sense of collective identity. People’s anger and anxiety described by tabloids reveal a social reality. This moral anger is rooted in the inequality and political shortcomings of British society, including social inequality, government accountability problems, people’s lack of trust in the government, and lack of representation in the political process. Class inequality and class struggle have always been a part of the political

consciousness of the British citizens. Since British society remains unequal, the demagoguery of populism remains politically attractive. The reason for this can be found in the interview. Tabloid news organisations have largely maintained a journalistic culture whilst providing participation opportunities for the audience. Upholding professional standards remains the core journalistic role of the ‘gatekeepers’. In addition, news websites do not allow the audience to participate completely as managers, either by themselves or by working alongside journalists at each stage. Although professionals empower the audience, they are still constrained to the role of contributor. As a result, although the interactive feature of the Internet provides opportunities for audiences to participate and build communities, the news culture of the two tabloids adheres to the ‘old model’. Except for the *MailOnline*, which used comment sections to promote readership building, the two online tabloids did not take advantage of the interactivity of the Internet to build readership. They extend the feature of print tabloids that utilise consensus to build an imaginary community onto the internet, aiming to maintain reader relationships. Therefore, combining interviews and critical discourse analysis, this thesis also discussed how online tabloids strive to keep their readership. They adopt a mixed model that combines old and new using the interactive features of the internet to allow audiences to participate thus maintaining reader loyalty and website traffic. At the same time, they still keep their core news culture, adhering to the traditional tabloid newspaper model of reaching a consensus with the audience to build an imagined community and strengthen loyalty with the audience.

8.5 Original contribution to knowledge

In terms of its contribution to knowledge, this thesis mainly explores the development of British tabloids in the digital environment. Many scholars have studied the traditional characteristics of tabloids, and have highlighted the success of the tabloid format. At the same time, certain scholars have discussed the expansion of tabloid characteristics in various media and the development of tabloids under the influence of digital technology (Basto, 2016; Eldridge II, 2020). Especially in the digital environment, due to the fierce competitive pressure and the emergence of digital platforms such as social media, there has been a trend of tabloidisation in various media. These researchers provide a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of traditional tabloids and the impact of tabloidisation in journalism. However, the change of British tabloids in the digital news environment is still underexplored. This study reveals the continuation, changes, and manifestations of tabloids in the digital environment. At the same time, this study also demonstrates how tabloids use digital strategies to attract audiences and the impact of digital strategies on their news practices. More importantly, the study examines how tabloids integrate traditional features with digital strategies to adapt to the digital media environment. This research contributes to our understanding of the online tabloid dynamics in journalism.

First, the results of this study contribute to previous studies in terms of changes in the

characteristics of British online tabloids and the trend of tabloidisation. Scholars (Magin et al., 2021; Eldridge II, 2020) have conducted limited research on the transformations and continuations in the characteristics of tabloids within the digital environment. They do not appear to thoroughly address all aspects of the changes in the characteristics of tabloids. Many scholars believe that online tabloids either merely replicate or amplify their traditional features (Basto, 2017; Zelizer 2010). However, this research has conducted a comprehensive exploration on the characteristics of tabloids in terms of range, format and style. The thesis found a mix of changes in the traditional characteristics of tabloids in the digital age. Some traditional features have been amplified in the online context, while others have been reduced or remain unchanged. At the same time, some new features, such as the use of multimedia, data visualisation, and the use of social media tabloids as news resources have been enhanced. Therefore, the changes in the traditional characteristics of tabloids in the digital age are very complicated and diverse. It is not a simple linear progression or a singular trend in tabloid characteristics; instead, it involves numerous changes across various aspects. This helps further understand the complexity of the changing characteristics of news media in the digital environment.

Secondly, this thesis illustrates how tabloids effectively integrate these digital strategies with traditional features to achieve a successful transformation. Achieving a balance between the digital strategy, audience structure and traditional characteristics is the key to developing today's digital tabloids. They correct characteristics that are inappropriate for the digital environment and audience, while amplifying and perpetuating traditional features to expand and engage audiences. Therefore, the study provides a model of how traditional media can successfully transform in the face of the digital turn. This shows that newspapers have mastered ways to leverage digital technology while maintaining their brand independence and audience appeal. This also provides insights into how newspapers can successfully adapt to new environments. This is instructive for media organizations who seek successful transformation or survival strategies. Meanwhile, this helps us understand how journalism adapts to the changing media environment.

Thirdly, the thesis contributes to our understanding of how tabloids utilise digital strategies to engage their audience. It shows how tabloids employ strategies of distribution, online content, social media, search engine optimisation, and audience engagement. This study also sheds light on tabloid journalists' attitudes towards the utilisation of digital strategies. Therefore, our research on digital tabloid practices, values and news judgments has contributed to the understanding of the sociology of journalism.

More importantly, the thesis indicates the impact of synergy of digital strategies on tabloids. Existing research on digital strategies mainly follows a one-way approach, often concentrating on the impact of social media or search engines (Basto, 2017; Eldridge II, 2020). However, in this thesis, the synergy of different digital strategies for tabloids is highlighted given that that contemporary digital tabloids employ a convergence of multiple

digital strategies. This gives us a comprehensive understanding of the complex impact of technology on news products. Moreover, most scholars believe that the use of digital strategies will increase tabloidisation or cause extreme tabloidisation (Zelizer, 2010; Wadbring and Odmark, 2016; Basto 2017; Eldridge II 2021), while others believe that social media does not necessarily accelerate the impact of tabloidisation (Magin et al., 2021). However, this thesis shows that the synergistic effect of digital strategies on tabloids is complex. These strategies are invariably influenced by journalists' judgment and professional values. They rely on their own judgement and professional values to control the possibility of digital strategies disrupting the quality of news and to keep a balance in news reporting. Therefore, this thesis found that the development of tabloids in the digital environment is significantly influenced by the synergy between digital strategies and journalists' values and judgments. This provides us with an insight into how to integrate digital strategies into journalistic practice. It demonstrates how tabloid media can use the advantages of digital strategies to attract audiences while still maintaining editorial judgment and inherent news values and journalistic professional values. This shows that news media can successfully use digital strategies and balance the impact of digital strategies.

In addition, some scholars emphasise the important role of the interactive characteristics of the Internet in maintaining the readership, which may replace the characteristics of the imagined community built by traditional tabloid language. This thesis shows that online tabloids have extended the features of print tabloids, which use consensus to build an imaginary community for maintaining relationships. Also, emotion still plays an important role in online tabloids. Therefore, the thesis also reveals how online tabloids keep their readership by adopting a mixed model that combines old and new.

8.6 Limitations and further development

This study explores how a tabloid manifests in a digital environment, with a focus on its digital strategies for attracting audiences, changes in tabloid characteristics, and the ways it maintains readership. Online tabloids are still thriving in the UK news market. Therefore, two online tabloids with the largest audiences, highest popularity, and most representative in recent years were chosen for the analysis. Future research on British tabloids should include a wider range of online tabloids in the market, so that the results may be more diverse. For example, the two tabloids selected for my research are both right-wing. The results may be richer if left-wing and right-wing tabloids can be compared in the future. Also, future research on research topic of tabloidization and digitization could compare online tabloids to online broadsheets.

Due to the substantial daily sample size of online tabloids collected, the sample collection spanned two months. However, for future research, extending the sample collection period to

reflect the tabloid changes in the online environment is suggested. Furthermore, the author suggests that future research on digital tabloids can focus on their visual characteristics. In this study, visuals were found to be very important for online tabloids from interviews with journalists and quantitative analysis. Tabloids have increased the use of pictures, videos, and data visualisations. Visuals play an important role in online tabloids. Therefore, that qualitative research on the visual characteristics of online tabloids can be conducted in future research. In addition, the next technological revolution is expected to be driven by the rise of artificial intelligence, following the digitization of newsrooms and the integration of social networks into news creation and distribution (Parratt-Fernández et al., p.8). Research on the utilization of artificial intelligence in journalism is still in its early stages, as leveraging algorithms and artificial intelligence in the industry is also relatively new. Interest in this phenomenon has transformed many journalistic practices and fields, yielding some interesting academic work. There is still much research to be done on the new and ever-changing journalistic processes and products that may emerge when artificial intelligence is integrated into tabloid journalism practices in the future. Many questions about artificial intelligence in journalism remain unexplored. Therefore, these issues deserve to be addressed in future research.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 Code book for content analysis

Range:

1. News topic

Definition: Topic of the news.

There are many kinds of new topics, for example, politics, science, government finance, crime, football, TV, incident, royal, accident, disasters, showbiz, health, celebrity gossip, fashion, COVID-19, policy, animal, war, festival, weather, parenting, etc. Based on the news content, the news will be coded as the topics mentioned above.

2. News Type:

Definition: Category the news type by topic. There are 17 types.

(1) Politics (2) Economics, finance or business (3) Crime, (4) Accidents, disasters, tragedy (5) Human interest (6) Sports (7) Entertainment (8) Royal (9) Culture/Art/ history/ heritage (10) Health (11) Lifestyle (12) Region (13) Education (14) Science and technology (15) Animal (16) Parenting (17) Nature and the environment, energy

The coder should decide what category the article best fits into. If an article is split even between two categories, the headline should decide where the article belongs. Examples on entertainment: Celebrity, TV series etc.

3. Domestic and international news

Definition: According to the news actors and the geographical location of the event, it can be determined whether the news belongs to domestic or foreign news.

News will be coded as domestic or foreign news.

If there is domestic news, it will be coded as 1; If there is foreign news, it will be coded as 0

4. The softening of news

Definition: In this study, we borrow Reinemann et al (2012)'s definition of soft news. 'The more a news item is not politically relevant, the more it reports in an episodic way, focuses on individual consequences of events, the more it can be regarded as soft news.' (Reinemann et al, 2012)

We measure the degree of softening in news through 2 dimensions.

Topic dimension:

We define a non-political relevance as the extent to which news content does not involve the norms, objectives, and interests associated with the preparation, statement, and implementation of authoritative, generally binding decisions on social issues. This includes references to social participants, decision-making bodies, proposals for programs or projects, and decision makers. The less paying attention to these aspects, the more likely the news is to be perceived as having a low level of political relevance.

If the entire news topic is about political issues, it will be coded as 0. If politics were only mentioned briefly, with a focus on the private lives of politicians, etc., it will be coded as 1. If the news is completely unrelated to political issues, it will be coded as 2.

Focus dimension

In terms of the focus dimension, we propose distinguishing stories that emphasize their impact on the public or society from those that highlight their impact on individuals' private lives. Furthermore, the use of episodic frames or thematic frames in news reporting can aid in differentiation. A strong emphasis on personal and intimate issues, along with unique events and examples, may indicate a tendency toward softer news.

(1). Focus dimension 1: Individual framing– Societal Relevance

Individual framing highlights the personal, private consequences of reporting events, developments, and decisions. In contrast, societal relevance focuses on the overall significance or consequences of these reported events on society as a whole.

If the news has a pure or predominant focus on societal relevance /consequences, it will be coded as 0; If the news has mixed attention to individual and societal relevance /consequences,

it will be coded as 1; If the news has a pure or predominant focus on individual relevance / consequences , it will be coded as 2;

(2).Focus dimension 2: Thematic Framing-Episodic framing

The focus of news reporting is to highlight either an episodic or thematic orientation. Episodic news presents issues through specific examples, case studies, and event-centered reports. Thematic news places the issue in a broader context, such as providing the latest unemployment rate data when reporting on unemployment. The middle category is to be chosen if about equal attention is given to both aspects.

If the news has pure or predominantly thematic framing, it will be coded as 0. If the news has mixed episodic and thematic framing, it will be coded as 1. If the news has pure or predominantly episodic framing, it will be coded as 2.

Form:

1.Visual

Definition: Visual effect

The visual impact depends on the number of pictures in the news and the presence of capital words in the headlines that are eye-catching.

The visual effect is based on the number of photographs in the News. If the article has many pictures, the visual effect of the news is considered to be strong. If the headline contains capital words, it is also considered to have a strong visual effect.

(1).Photographs

Definition: Number of photographs in the News

The effect of Photographs will be coded as the number of pictures in the news, such as 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, etc.

(2).Headline capitalization

Definition: Capitalized words in the news title

If there is capitalized words in the news headline, it will be coded as 1; If no video, coded as 0.

(3).Video

Definition: Videos in the news

If there is one or more videos in the news, it will be coded as 1; If no video, coded as 0.

(4).Hyperlink

Definition: Hyperlinks in the news

If there is one or more hyperlinks in the news, it will be encoded as 1; If no hyperlink, coded as 0.

(5).Data Visualization,

Definition:

Using graphic elements in news refers to the inclusion of maps, charts, graphs, etc., to express complex data or statistics in an easily understandable graphical format.

If there are one or more graphic elements in the news, it will be encoded as 1; if no graphic elements are present, it will be coded as 0.

Style

1.Sensationalism:

Concept:Sensationalism frequently appears in various definitions of tabloid journalism and is often interchangeable with words like 'scandal' and 'drama' (Renebring & Jönsson, 2004; Sparks, 2000). The definition of sensationalism is also somewhat ambiguous. Stories that are unexpected, dramatic, or that capture reader's attention are typically related to sensationalism

because they elicit sensory and emotional responses (Grabe et al., 2001). Numerous academics concur that sensationalism can be operationally defined as a content characteristic distinguished by the ability to arouse the senses of media audiences. Sensationalism is fundamentally an appeal to human instinct and emotion (Slattery & Hakanen, 1994). More specifically, sensationalism might be defined as the existence of news characteristics that elicit strong emotions.”

Definition: In this study, we measure the degree of sensationalism in terms of both its form and content, we propose identifying sensationalism as a stylistic treatment, combining content, detail, emotion and style. Style aims to pique readers' emotions, curiosities, and empathy, while material falls under the heading of arousing human senses. In this study, we use the following to evaluate sensationalism.

(1)Sensationalism content: Stories about celebrities, crime, sex, disasters, scandal, violence, accidents, and public fears. These contents have been labelled as sensational by scholars (Davie & Lee, 1995; Ehrlich, 1996; Hofstetter & Dozier, 1986).

If any of the above sensational topics is present, it will be encoded as 1; If no sensational topics are present, it will be coded as 0.

(2)Narrative: Sensational style news often begins by purposely evoking emotions from the audience. They capitalize on extreme circumstances to grab attention, simplify and downplay complex subjects, and prioritize shock value (Kilgo et al., 2016).

If there is no sensational narrative in the news, it is coded as 0. If the headline has a sensational narrative style, it will be coded as 1. If the title and the entire article predominantly use a sensational narrative style, it will be coded as 2.

(3)Negative Emotion: The use of emotional and evaluative language, especially negative words, can serve as an indicator of sensationalism in news reporting. Negatively charged phrases are often employed as labels and modifiers to enhance sensationalism. For instance, words like 'revolt,' 'hell,' 'murdered,' and 'terrify' have the capacity to elicit powerful emotions in readers, leading to heightened arousal and physical reactions. Furthermore, it's evident that evaluative language is both pervasive and highly influential (Uber & Gunter, 2004).

If there are no descriptive and emotive negative labels in the news, it will be coded as 0. If there are descriptive and emotive negative labels in the news, it will be coded as 1; if there are many descriptive and emotive negative labels in the news, it is coded as 2.

(4) Grisly details

For example, in crime news, tabloids often describe terrorist details about criminals.

If there is Grisly details in the news, the code is 1; If not, the code is 0.

2, Personalization

Concept:

Personalization is defined as incorporating individuals' personal experiences and adopting a subjective, emotional perspective when addressing a problem, rather than an objective, analytical one. Personalization extends beyond political news to encompass a broader range of topics, such as individual lives, experiences, and emotions within general news coverage.

Definition:

This study measured the individuation of article by including news actor and news sources. In terms of content, stories were told from the perspective of individuals directly affected, emphasizing their personal experiences and emotions. If news actors, such as decision makers, witnesses, and individuals involved in the news event, received significant attention in the news report, it would contribute to a higher level of personalization in the news event. (Landert, 2014). This includes official roles such as politicians and experts, celebrities, and private individuals directly affected by events or interviewed as witnesses. It is necessary to distinguish between official and private actors for journalistic roles since the level of personalization is most pronounced in how individuals perform their roles (Landert, 2014).

News actors

A、 Official actors: Official actors are individuals who assume the role of news actors in their professional identities and official capacities. This category includes politicians, representatives of interest groups, senior executives of companies, and experts. For example, an article featuring an expert's opinion on an economic topic is more informative than one without experts. Professional spokespeople represent the interests of larger groups or more abstract collectives, such as governments, political parties, the law, the scientific community, interest groups, corporate executives, etc.

B, private actors: This means representing individuals in their private roles. Celebrities and

private individuals are directly affected by an event or interviewed as witnesses. It also includes the personal lives of politicians. Private roles only represent themselves. This makes news events more personalized by focusing on the relationship between their private lives and news events. Thus, personalization is often about presenting stories from the perspective of the experiences and emotions of individuals directly affected by news events. For example, highly personalised news actors are often found in the role of victims who report how they experienced news events, focussing on their emotions and the effects on their private lives. Moreover, there is a general tendency towards a stronger person focus and more significant identification potential for private rather than official actors. This means private actors also tend to have a more substantial personalising effect overall (Landert, 2014).

If there is no news actor in the news, it will be coded as 0. If there are official actors in the news, it is coded as 1. If there are both official actors and private actors in the news, it will be coded as 2. If the news is entirely about private actors, it will be coded as 3. (News actors also include news sources)

3.The mode of address

Definition:

The tabloid consistently engages with its audience in a familiar tone and strengthens its relationship by employing a language strategy that mimics personal communication. Tabloids often seek to reduce the perceived distance between them and their readers. Traditional tabloid characteristics include familiarity, colloquialism, and street talk, which are primarily achieved through stylistic techniques such as direct addressing of the audience, rhetorical questions, and imperatives, among others. These techniques are predominantly spoken and conversational in nature. The vocabulary used tends to be informal and colloquial, all of which simulate a certain level of interaction between the text producers and the audience. These elements include imitative words, nicknames, first and second-person pronouns, colloquialisms, imperatives, rhetorical questions, and speech acts, among others.

If none of the above familiar tone elements are present, it will be coded as 0. If any of the above elements are present in the headline, it will be encoded as 1. If both the headline and the article use these elements, it will be coded as 2.

Social media used as news sources

Definition: tabloids use social media resources as news sources. This includes the function of social media resources in tabloid news and the authorship of social media resources.

1, Are social media sources cited in the news?

If social media sources are present in news, it will be coded as 1; if no social media sources present, it will be coded as 0.

2, What is the function of social media resources in news?

(1) All those social media resources that triggered a news story will be coded as a 'trigger' because the social media resources themselves were newsworthy

(2) If social media that will be used to illustrate news events or larger trends in the article, coded as illustration.

3, Authorship: who is being sourced?

The author of the social media was identified, and their occupation was then categorized. These social media resources are encoded as:

(1) Politicians; (2) Celebrities; (3) Internet celebrities; (4) Business; (5) Restaurant; (6) Athletes; (7) Ordinary people; (8) Editor (9) Royal (10) Police (11) Criminal

Appendix 2 Explanation of linguistic instruments and structures in Critical Discourse Analysis

Phonemes	Misspellings and simplifications of of spellings draw attention to pronunciation ('wot')
Information structure	This means short and incomplete sentences.
Lexis or vocabulary	This tends towards the informal, colloquial. Slang, idioms, cliches, proverbs and catch-words are all used to cue the illusion of oral mode; learned or official words are avoided by the popular Press.
Naming and address	First names, diminutives and nicknames are all used to connote the informality and intimacy of face-to-face discourse.
Syntax and morphology	Contractions of auxiliaries and negatives
Deixis	These devices consist of: Indicators of person, Indicators of time, Indicators of place
Speech acts:	The propositional function, speakers make promises and requests, issue commands and warnings

Local meanings	<p>There are many forms of implicit or indirect meanings, such as implications, presuppositions, allusions, vagueness, omissions and polarisations.</p> <p>Manifestation: Explicit versus Implicit</p>
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	<p>Granularity: Detailed/fine versus Broad, rough</p> <p>Modality: We/They Must/Should...</p> <p>Evidentiality: We have the truth versus</p>
Lexicon	Nouns, Adjectives, Verbs, etc.
Grammar	<p>Active versus Passives</p> <p>Full clauses/propositions versus nominalisations</p>
Rhetorical structures	Comparisons, metaphors, metonymies, irony; euphemisms, hyperboles, number games, etc.
Quotation	This includes between direct speech and indirect speech

Appendix 3 Interview questions

Questions about Online content strategy
<p>How do you construct compelling and shareable content?</p> <p>What storytelling methods do you use? Do you use traditional tabloid methods? Or do you use something new?</p> <p>In the process of editing news, what news factors do you emphasize on to attract users' engagement?</p> <p>What content do you like to post on the tabloid website to attract users to click or engage?</p> <p>How do you distribute and report news across platforms?</p> <p>What is strategy on multi-platform storytelling?</p> <p>What are the impact of multimedia distribution?</p>
Questions about Audience engagement strategy
<p>How do you build communities, entice dialogue and encourage participation?</p> <p>What avenues of engagement do you offer audience at all stages of news production?</p> <p>How do you use UGC?</p> <p>To what extent do you allow users to participate in or influence tabloid's news production and output?</p>
Questions about audience metrics
<p>How do you include audience metrics in your news judgment, selection, and production?</p> <p>Are audience metrics a driver of editorial decisions?</p> <p>How do audience clicks affect tabloid products?</p>
Questions about search engine optimization:

<p>How do you use SEO to reach a larger audience?</p> <p>How does SEO change the tabloids?</p> <p>Will SEO Change editorial decisions?</p>
<p>Questions about characteristics:</p>
<p>What are the new features of digital tabloids?</p> <p>What do you think are the main differences between online tabloids and traditional tabloids?</p>

Appendix 4 The coding theme of the interview

Theme 1	
Theme	Sub-theme 1:
Multi-platform distribution to improve visibility	<p>The importance of multi-platform distribution</p> <p>The traffic of each platform</p>
Theme	Sub-theme 1:
Online content strategy	<p>Considering multi-platform distribution</p> <p>Sub-theme 2 :</p> <p>Hybrid storytelling</p> <p>Storytelling involves synergy between the traditional narrative styles and new media styles (multimedia)</p> <p>Visual is more important than ever</p>

	<p>Vision is equally important as text, and even more so</p> <p>Use of multimedia (pictures, videos, hyperlinks, data visualization)</p> <p>Controversy over the use of traditional narratives or innovations in narratives</p> <p>Sub-theme 3: Focus on ‘people’ is the most important</p> <p>The first consideration for online tabloids is still the "people". "People" are more important than all factors.</p> <p>Sub-theme 4:</p> <p>Use audience metrics</p> <p>Sub Theme 5:</p> <p>Use SEO</p>
<p>Theme</p> <p>Homepage strategy</p>	<p>Sub-theme 1:</p> <p>Visual</p> <p>Homepage of a tabloid is a highly visual medium</p> <p>Pictures and videos occupy the primary position on the homepage.</p> <p>Sub-theme 2:</p> <p>Readability</p> <p>Constantly updated content</p>

	<p>Good layout</p> <p>Good mix of content on the home page</p> <p>Sub-theme 3:</p> <p>Use audience metrics</p>
<p>Theme</p> <p>Social media strategy</p>	<p>Sub-theme 1:</p> <p>Social media is important for online tabloids</p> <p>Sub-theme 2:</p> <p>Social media strategy is two-way.</p> <p>Use social media to optimize homepage news and accelerate the transmission of news.</p> <p>Using social media as a research tool</p> <p>The Importance of Visuals and Headlines in social media marketing strategy</p>
<p>Theme</p> <p>SEO strategy</p>	<p>Sub-theme 1:</p> <p>SEO is important for online tabloids</p> <p>Sub-theme 2:</p> <p>finding trends</p> <p>Trends encompass not only popular search terms but also market-specific topics.</p>

	<p>Sub-theme 3:</p> <p>Optimize articles</p> <p>Optimize stories from a search perspective</p> <p>Requires journalists to create articles based on search trends and keywords</p>
<p>Theme</p> <p>Audience metrics</p>	<p>Sub-theme 1:</p> <p>Audience metrics have been widely used in all news practices of online tabloids.</p> <p>Sub-theme2:</p> <p>Follow-up updates or reduced coverage of news</p> <p>Changing the way news is reported to reach the audience</p> <p>learn from the narrative style of high-traffic news</p>
<p>Theme</p> <p>Changes in the way journalists interact with audiences</p>	<p>Sub-theme 1:</p> <p>The way of audience participation</p> <p>Four main ways: comment, sending stories to editors, polls, social media</p> <p>Sub-theme 2:</p> <p>Journalists' attitudes to Audience Engagement</p>

Theme2	
Theme Changes in news value.	Sub-theme 1: Online tabloids news value Digital strategies influence online tabloids news value
Theme The Impact of Social Media on Online Tabloids	Sub-theme 1: The social media influence the news agenda Sub-theme 2: The social media influence the news visual
Theme The Impact of SEO on Online Tabloids	Sub-theme 1: The SEO influence news agenda. Sub-theme 2: The SEO influence news content and style
Theme The UGC can not impact on online tabloids	Sub-theme 1: Audience participation cannot influence the news production process. The reporter has set standards for the materials that can be submitted Both tabloids allow readers to send some materials about their personal experiences or readers' images of breaking news events. Therefore, journalists stick to traditional ways of gathering information. Journalists and editors distinguish UGC from professional

	<p>content.</p> <p>Journalists are unwilling to accept users' criticism or suggestions</p> <p>Subtheme2:</p> <p>Adhere to gatekeeper role</p> <p>Adhere to 'old media model' and journalism culture</p>
<p>Theme</p> <p>Journalists' news decisions.</p>	<p>Sub-theme 1 :</p> <p>Journalists' own news judgment is the first and most important.</p> <p>Sub-theme 2:</p> <p>Keep the balance between audience metrics and trends (traffic from social media, SEO) and Journalists' own news judgment</p>
<p>Theme</p> <p>The difference between online tabloids and print tabloids</p>	<p>Sub-theme 1 :</p> <p>Traditional tabloids are different from Online tabloids</p> <p>Some traditional tabloids characteristics are not suitable for online media</p> <p>Different audience structures</p> <p>Sub-theme 2:</p> <p>The difficulty and importance of keeping brand independence.</p>

<p>Theme</p> <p>Journalists' views on online tabloids</p>	<p>Sub-theme 1:</p> <p>Online tabloids are different from viral news websites</p> <p>Sub-theme 2:</p> <p>Online tabloids are successful and find their own market niche.</p>
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Appendix 5 News Source

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Appendix 6 Participant Information Sheet

1. Research Project Title:

British digital tabloids in the 21st century

2. Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research project on digital tabloids. Before you decide whether or not to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

3. What is the project's purpose?

In the history of tabloids, tabloids always adapted to technological developments. It has been very successful in terms of audience strategy. There is no reason why the most contemporary form (tabloid journalism) shouldn't adapt and integrate within new technological dynamics. Nowadays, news value has become more user-oriented in the digital environment. Personal motivations and preferences have become more important. Meanwhile, in order to maximize user participation, most media are fiercely competitive. All of these have led to a lot of changes in tabloids. Therefore, this study aims to explore the characteristics of today's digital tabloids and their strategies to attract audience. Firstly, we will study what changes have taken place in the characteristics of digital tabloids, including the traditional and new characteristics of tabloids. Digitalization and the new media environment have brought many changes to journalism. Therefore, we will study the strategies of digital tabloids to attract audiences in the context of the digital media environment. For example, their online content strategy, audience engagement strategy, the use of audience metrics and the search engine.

The project starts in October 2019, it is scheduled to end in June 2023., and it is aimed to obtain educational qualifications.

4. Why have I been chosen?

Because my research is about British digital tabloids, it is best to invite online tabloid journalists, editors or regulators with work experience to participate in the interview. You have a say in this research area, because you are familiar with the daily routine of producing digital tabloid news and understand the strategies to attract online audiences. A total of 12 participants, including you, will be recruited.

5. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason. If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact the researcher (Xiangyi He; xhe18@sheffield.ac.uk).

Please note that choosing to participate in this research, will not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship between you and the University of Sheffield.

Please note that you have the right to refuse to participate in the research in question. At any time during your active participation, you have the right to withdraw from the research, without having to give a reason. However, these rights cannot extend to the withdrawal of already published findings or be invoked in such a way as to compromise anonymised data sets that are being used as specified in the original consent agreement.

6. What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?

You only need to participate in one in-depth interview. The interview time is no more than 30 minutes. If there are omissions in the interview or questions for you to supplement, we will send an email inviting you to add the answers, which will take place within half a year of your participation. Meanwhile, this one-to-one interview will be semi-structured. Questions raised during the interview covered multiple areas of strategy.

Because of the trend of multimedia integration and technology development, journalists and editors have used new technology to produce many new strategies to attract the audience and new features. Therefore, the type of information sought is the strategy of digital tabloids to attract the audience. For example, their online content strategy, audience engagement strategy, the use of audience metrics, and of search engines. The interviews will aim to identify how journalists build and use content to attract audiences, how they can attract and develop a loyal audience and establish a closer relationship with the audience, and how they include audience metrics in news judgment, selection and production, as well as SEO so as to track and cater to

the preferences of the audience. The interview questions will focus on the above contents. For example, how do you construct compelling and shareable content? (the use of pictures, videos, headline writing etc) What storytelling methods do you use? how do you build relationships, build communities, and attract dialogue and participation? Are audience metrics a driver of editorial decisions? Etc.

What's more, the interview is flexible. Participants can talk about the areas they are familiar with, but they don't need to talk about all the above areas. This is because each participant's work position and responsibility are different. Therefore, Participants can talk about what they know or talk about the attractiveness of online tabloids based on their work experience. They can talk about what they can share.

This interview will use a mix of closed and open-ended questions, usually accompanied by subsequent what, why or how questions. Your answer can be open-ended.

Please note that there is no travel expense to participate in this interview because the interview will be conducted online.

7. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The study will have no foreseeable discomforts, drawbacks, or risks. The interview will not involve confidential personal issues, or any issues that affect your comfort and privacy. At the same time, if you have concerns or other requirements for the interview, I will also discuss, negotiate with you and respect your wishes.

8. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You can express your voice and hopes on the development of online tabloids through my research. Inspired by the interview, you may conclude that there are some important strategies for tabloids to attract audiences. Meanwhile, it is hoped that this work will contribute to the research in the field of digital tabloids and let more people know how tabloids develop in the digital age and how they embrace new technologies. This is because there is little literature devoted to how tabloids are affected by the digital turn.

9. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

In data collection and thesis, participants' information will be anonymous, so participants' information will not be disclosed. Meanwhile, I will also avoid the use of identifiable personal information. In addition, I will use security arrangements for the data, such as

encryption of portable devices. All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to members of the research team. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications unless you have given your explicit consent for this. If you agree to us sharing the information you provide with other researchers (by making it available in a data archive) then your personal details will not be included unless you explicitly request this.

10. What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

11. What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

First, the interview will be recorded, and then the researchers will transcribe the audio recording into transcripts. These data will be anonymous. My two supervisors and I will have access to these data because we are a research team and supervisors guide my research.

The results will be published in 2023. If you want a copy of the published results, I can email you. Unless you have given explicit consent, you will not be identified in any report or publication, because your information will be anonymous, and I will avoid the use of identifiable personal information. You will also be informed which part of the project you were involved in.

The data you provide will be stored anonymously, and identifiable personal data will be destroyed 3 years after publication. I will also take additional security measures to store data, such as encryption of portable devices. I will also store data on university storage devices.

Due to the nature of this research, it is very likely that other researchers may find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. We will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way.

12. Who is organising and funding the research?

The project is not funded.

13. Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after my information and using it properly.

14. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by department of journalism.

15. What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research or report a concern or incident?

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the research and wish to make a complaint, please contact [Xiangyi He; xhe18@sheffield.ac.uk] in the first instance. If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the Head of the Department of journalism [Jackie Harrison; j.harrison@sheffield.ac.uk]. If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

If you wish to make a report of a concern or incident relating to potential exploitation, abuse or harm resulting from your involvement in this project, please contact the project's Designated Safeguarding Contact [Irina Katsirea; i.katsirea@sheffield.ac.uk]. If the concern or incident relates to the Designated Safeguarding Contact, or if you feel a report you have made to this Contact has not been handled in a satisfactory way, please contact the Head of the Department of Journalism [Jackie Harrison; j.harrison@sheffield.ac.uk] and/or the University's Research Ethics & Integrity Manager (Lindsay Unwin; l.v.unwin@sheffield.ac.uk).

16. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

The content of the interview will be recorded, and then the researchers will transcribe the audio recording into text. The audio recordings of your Interviews made during this research will be used only for data collection, data analysis and research results. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. In addition, with your permission, research results and

research publications will use your recording transcripts (text) instead of the original recordings.

17. Contact for further information

If you wish to obtain further information about the project, you can contact the lead researcher and supervisor.

Contact details:

The lead researcher	The supervisor
<p>Xiangyi He</p> <p>Email: xhe18@sheffield.ac.uk</p> <p>Address: University of Sheffield</p> <p style="text-align: center;">9 Mappin Street Sheffield S1 4DT</p> <p>Telephone number: +86 1372106178</p>	<p>Dr. Irimi Katsirea</p> <p>Email: i.katsirea@sheffield.ac.uk</p> <p>Address: University of Sheffield</p> <p style="text-align: center;">9 Mappin Street Sheffield S1 4DT</p> <p>Telephone number: +44 114 222 2540</p>

Thank you very much for your participation and support for the research!

Appendix 7 [British digital tabloid in 21century] Consent Form

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 26/ August/2021 or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include: participating in an in-depth interview.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree that whilst I am participating in this interview audio recordings will be made. I agree to being audio recorded and for transcripts of these anonymised audio recordings to be used in the research.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I give permission for the audio recording and transcripts that I provide to be deposited in the University storage so it can be used for future research and learning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of participant []

Signature

Date:

Name of Researcher []

Signature:

Date:

Project contact details for further information:

The lead researcher	The supervisor
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<p>Xiangyi He</p> <p>Email: xhe18@sheffield.ac.uk</p> <p>Address: University of Sheffield</p> <p style="text-align: center;">9 Mappin Street Sheffield S1 4DT</p> <p>Telephone number: +86 13721060178</p>	<p>Dr. Irimi Katsirea</p> <p>Email: i.katsirea@sheffield.ac.uk</p> <p>Address: University of Sheffield</p> <p style="text-align: center;">9 Mappin Street Sheffield S1 4DT</p> <p>Telephone number: +44 114 222 2540</p>
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A person outside the project who can be contacted in the event of a complaint (Head of Department):

Jackie Harrison (Head of Department)

Email: j.harrison@sheffield.ac.uk

Address: University of Sheffield

9 Mappin Street
Sheffield
S1 4DT

Telephone number: +44 114 222 2509

Appendix 8 Ethics approval



Downloaded: 29/09/2023
Approved: 11/11/2021

Xiangyi He
Registration number: 190200680
Journalism Studies
Programme: PhD in Journalism Studies

Dear Xiangyi

PROJECT TITLE: British digital tabloid in 21century
APPLICATION: Reference Number 043324

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 11/11/2021 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 043324 (form submission date: 09/11/2021); (expected project end date: 01/09/2022).
- Participant information sheet 1097178 version 2 (12/09/2021).
- Participant information sheet 1097392 version 2 (26/10/2021).
- Participant information sheet 1098434 version 1 (26/10/2021).
- Participant consent form 1097179 version 1 (31/08/2021).
- Participant consent form 1097393 version 1 (13/09/2021).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Stefanie Pukallus
Ethics Administrator
Journalism Studies

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/ethics-integrity/policy>
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.671066/file/GRIPPolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.