

What Is News? What Is the Newspaper? The Physical, Functional, and Stylistic Transformation of Print Newspapers, 1988–2013

MIKI TANIKAWA

Akita International University, Japan

Content analyses of large and internationally influential American newspapers show that today only 35% of the front-page articles are traditional, event-centered news articles, down from 69% 25 years ago. Of the event-centered news, only 47% mentioned the main development in the first paragraph. This study argues that newspapers have transformed in functions and style such that they no longer deliver first-instance news reporting, but serve as an analytical and/or in-depth complement to the more immediate, instantaneous online news outlets. Broader implications of the findings including theoretical connections to comparative media systems, medium theory, and professional role conceptions of journalists are discussed.

Keywords: straight news, features, 5W1H lead, inverted pyramid structure

For centuries, newspapers have delivered news to the reading public, informing them of important events of the day. Since its daily format became widespread in the early 19th century, newspapers have delivered first-instance news on a daily news cycle: Whatever happened on a given day, its news was printed in the paper and delivered to readers' doorsteps the following day. Notwithstanding the successful adjustments they made in response to emerging competition from radio, news magazines, and television over the past century, the position newspapers maintained as the leading purveyor of text news has been seriously challenged with the advent of online and digital media starting in the late 1990s.

In the past 15 years, print newspapers appear to have changed in content, design, and writing style in perhaps the most drastic manner, due in large part to the radically changing media landscape that, with the emergence of online news outlets, has chipped away at the advertising and revenue models that print media have jealously guarded for centuries.

This article reports a content analysis of *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *International Herald Tribune* from 1988 to 2013 and describes the changing content, style, and topography of these leading American newspapers with national and international influences. In particular, it examines whether the ratio of the leading content of the newspapers has changed between event-

Miki Tanikawa: tanikawa2010@gmail.com

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oriented straight news—the staple of daily newspapers—and features, as defined by a working definition that distinguishes between the two categories.

Newspapers are becoming like news magazines, offering lengthy analyses of evolving events of the world and featuring newsworthy people, corporations, and social trends, and at the same time displaying layouts that increasingly prioritize photographs (Franklin, 2008). Where they cannot compete with online news media on the basis of speed, newspapers are distinguishing themselves by beefing up the depth of information, analysis, and coverage of trends that are not published elsewhere (Usher, 2010).

As newspapers, they still strive to retain their identity. Many articles that are intended to supply readers with background, perspectives, and interpretation about important public events may contain references to related events that most recently happened—the day before the publication of the article—to add a touch of newsmanship, blurring the line between straight news stories and analytical articles. Straight news stories may also employ situational, anecdotal, and other descriptive types of leads rather than the traditional 5W1H lead paragraph that dictates an inverted pyramid structure (Fink & Schudson, 2014).

The change in content and style of writing speaks to today's field of journalism being in a state of flux. Yet, the assumption that newspaper articles are, in principle, written in an inverted pyramid style continues to dominate the research literature (Benson & Hallin, 2007; Hartsock, 2007; Pottker, 2003; Sternadori & Wise, 2009; Thomson, White, & Kitley, 2008). In this article, I argue that changes in content and style—the declining number of straight news articles as well as delayed reference to the event and its timeframe—together represent a near-death of the conventional inverted pyramid structure as a representative news category. Also, this study argues against the still-predominant scholarly assumption that newspapers print news articles as traditionally known.

Topographical (layout) changes of the newspaper are also noteworthy. Newspapers are not only becoming more feature and analytically oriented but also printing fewer articles on the front page (Fink & Schudson, 2014), accompanied by the growing practice of carrying a large display photo, attesting to the growing feature orientation of the newspaper design, which, combined with good, readable text, provides readers with “experience” (Readership Institute, 2005; Shaw, 2006).

The changes in forms of news bear potentially broad theoretical significance in political communication because of their hypothesized impact on public deliberation (Wessler, 2008). The transformation of American newspapers from a producer of fact-based discourse to evaluative/interpretive discourse could be of concern to studies that draw theoretically on comparative media systems (Benson & Hallin, 2007; Hallin & Mancini, 2004) that presume a strong contrast, for instance, between that of the United States and France, with U.S. papers considered to be largely fact-based and those in France being oriented toward providing analysis and interpretation. It represents a differential pattern that emerged during the formative years in the respective media systems during the 19th century (Chalaby, 1996).

This study assumes the task of describing these changes through content analyses of both the visual (photos and layout) and text aspects of the newspaper front pages given that they appear to be

correlated. This includes measuring the declining percentage of the straight news, the declining number of articles on the front page, and the increased size of the front-page photograph, all of which have perhaps transformed the newspaper into a qualitatively different product, with the most critical change taking shape in the text structure of news. With a focus on the text and the physical features of news, this study mainly examines the print as a product rather than as the news organization.

Background and Theory

Past research in mass communication has yielded a large body of studies analyzing different categories of news in newspapers and TV programs. This has come in two separate but overlapping clusters of studies. The better known of these two revolves around the distinction between hard news and soft news and the growth of the latter at the sacrifice of the former (Patterson, 2000; Uribe & Gunter, 2004; Weldon, 2008). Patterson (2000), for example, analyzed newspaper, magazine, and television news content and found that soft news, which made up 35% of the articles surveyed in 1980, rose to 50% by 1999. As discussed later, the dichotomy between hard news and soft news is broadly similar to the distinction between straight news and feature/analytical stories, but serves a different utility.

Previous investigations have pivoted on a common normative consideration of how soft news has come to dominate news production (Sparks & Tulloch, 2000; Zaller, 2003). Such an outlook typically casts a negative light on this trend. If soft news, regarded as less serious and less oriented toward covering important social and political events, is growing, then the fundamental role of the news media in society—to provide citizens with the information they need to participate in a democracy in a meaningful way—is compromised (Patterson, 2000; Zaller, 2003). Studies have located part of the impetus for the trend to market-driven journalism (Patterson, 2000; Zaller, 2003) spurred by competition with cable TV (in the 1980s and 1990s) and, later, online news outlets.

But I wished to evaluate how newspaper journalism per se is changing instead of being driven by the normative assessment of whether the change is desirable. In the age of digital media, newspapers are struggling to survive (Meyer, 2009; Morton, 2009). To that end, they are experimenting with a wide variety of content, style, and presentation, especially on the front page (Shaw, 2006; Weldon, 2008). One manifestation of that ongoing experiment common to almost all leading American dailies is the growing number of feature stories and analytical news stories (Johnston & Graham, 2012; Weldon, 2008). Moreover, under this new model, the front-page layout includes fewer articles, all to add value to the medium that cannot live up to the speed requirements of the Internet era.

To the extent that I am interested in capturing the decline of instantaneous, event-centered news reporting and the rise of analytical and feature reporting, this study is more analogous to the second but much smaller group of literature represented by Barnhurst and Mutz (1997) and Fink and Schudson (2014). Barnhurst and Mutz found that over a period of a century, newspaper content became progressively less event-centered and more analytical, based on an evaluative scale of 1 to 10. The content analysis found that the mean score of less than 2 earlier in the 20th century had increased to close to 3 by the end of it. Fink and Schudson classified front-page articles of three representative American newspapers into conventional, contextual, investigative, and social empathy. What they referred

to as “conventional” is the bread-and-butter news story that informs readers of the important event that the newspaper has just learned, which seems identical to the notion of event-driven news in Barnhurst and Mutz. Their content analysis of three newspapers from 1955 to 2003 showed that the conventional fell from 85% of the front-page content to 47%, and what they described as “contextual” rose from 8% in 1955 to 45% in 2003.

The present research sets itself apart from the preceding two. First, neither of the studies links the changes in the news content to the competitive dynamics of the news market of the recent decades, including competition with cable TV and the Internet. Barnhurst and Mutz’s (1997) samples ended in 1994, before the advent of online news; they noted that most stories were still judged to be more event-centered than analytic. Fink and Schudson’s (2014) data ended in 2003, and they did not attribute the typographic changes to the influence of online news media. Instead, they saw the rise of contextual journalism as an extension of the century-long trend that began earlier in the 20th century, which is similar to the argument made by Barnhurst and Mutz.

Although the long, slow-changing trend undoubtedly exists, the present study asserts that the content transformation accelerated in the mid-2000s, which corresponds to the period when newspapers faced the severest of competitive pressures. As a Pew Research Center (2012) study found, newspapers began to face a relentless decline in circulation numbers, circulation revenues, and ad revenues around 2006, which accelerated in 2008 and 2009. The same study attributes the unraveling to the double whammy of recession and migration of the audience to the Internet, which was not accompanied by migration of advertising with the readers.

This study also views changes in the layout of the front page, considered an epitome of news journalism (Utt & Pasternack, 1984, 1989; Weldon, 2008) and whose influence continues into the Internet era (Costanza-Chock & Rey-Mazón, 2016) as part of the structural physical transformation of the print medium, as the front page is crucially linked to reading ease and is at the center of visual impact on readers (Utt & Pasternack, 1984, 1989). Reviewing newspaper history in the late 19th century, Barnhurst and Nerone (2001) argued that the front page came to symbolize the newspaper as it had become “a crowded store window” (p. 190), a showcase of what it represented in content, design, and values. If the function and appearance of the newspaper have significantly changed, one would expect the front page to exhibit such transfigurations.

According to Jack Fuller (1996), “News is a report of what a news organization has recently learned about matters of some significance or interest to the specific community that news organization serves” (p. 6). Given the specific examples provided in Fuller’s book, such as a vote in Congress on free trade and a deadly fire in the Bronx, this definition, as with many others, seems to have the traditional “straight news” in mind rather than features or analytical news stories. Following Fuller’s logic, if straight news is found to have dramatically decreased to a point that it is much less than half of the stories on the front page, this should require redefining news itself. Many scholars’ definition of hard news is nearly identical to Fuller’s characterization of the news, such as that in Tuchman (1978), Patterson (2000), Shoemaker and Cohen (2006), and Weldon (2008), in that they use the time dimension—urgency of dissemination—for the definition. The importance of the time dimension as a criterion to distinguish news

categories is also underscored in Boczkowski's (2009) parallel study on the hard news and soft news operations of the same online news organizations. This ethnography found that the differing temporal rhythms of the two types of news production critically led to different manners of news-gathering, news sourcing, and social and operational practices of the journalists in the newsroom. All told, news is event-driven and time-sensitive, and describes what just happened the day before the publication of the paper.

The results of this inquiry would seem to tie into theoretical studies on differing professional role conceptions of online and print journalists. Building on Weaver and Wilhoit's (1996) categorization of journalistic role conceptions, Cassidy (2005) and Brill (2001) found that print newspaper reporters regarded the interpretive/investigative role conception as significantly more important than their online counterpart. Getting information to the public in a speedy manner—a dimension of the disseminator role conception—was rated as significantly more important to online newspaper journalists (Cassidy, 2005). The diminishing event-centered reporting in the print newspapers chimes in theoretically with the journalists/editors' self-reflexivity of their professional role function and what they believe their strength is, given the physical limitations of the print newspaper and rich reporter resources with a history of covering the news. Playing to their strengths, which would imply deploying their content in a more analytical and featurish style (Usher, 2014), can be seen as their strategic response to the new challenges posed by new media. Studies on journalists' professional function have not surveyed changes over time, but it is plausible that print journalists' self-perception as an analyzer—helping readers make sense of the world—grew in recent time as the proliferation of online news loomed as a threat to their news organizations and to their professional skill set. Medium theory and the concept of technological affordances (Benson, Blach-Ørsten, Powers, Willig, & Zambrano, 2012; Meyrowitz, 1994) may be a fertile theoretical ground to elucidate the changes. Past scholarship has shown that the media will explore the strengths of their medium when new rivals emerge and will attempt to adapt to the new, competitive environment by downplaying affordances surpassed by others while foregrounding other affordances (Brock, 2013; Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Neiger, 2015).

To help guide this research, I postulated the following hypotheses. First, the inquiry focuses on whether the event-oriented straight news declined from 1988 to 2013 and if the summary-lead structure of the straight news diminished simultaneously.

H1a: From 1988 to 2013 (25 years), the number of articles as a percentage of all the front-page articles deemed as the event-centered, straight news stories declined significantly.

H1b: During the same period, the percentage of straight news articles with the delayed time reference ("yesterday reference" included in the second paragraph or later; DTR hereafter) increased concurrently.

As a synchronous trend toward a more magazine-like layout, I raised hypotheses concerning topographical/design changes of the front pages of the newspapers.

H2: From 1988 to 2013 (25 years), the number of articles carried on the front page significantly declined.

H3: *During the same period, the size of the largest photo carried on the front page grew significantly larger on average.*

H4: *H1a, H1b, H2, and H3 occurred simultaneously and correlate with one another on a linear scale.*

Method

To investigate the preceding hypotheses, I chose the *Los Angeles Times* (LAT), the *International Herald Tribune* (IHT), and *The Washington Post* (WP) for content analysis for five periods from 1988 to 2013. LAT and WP were chosen as they command significant national and international audiences, and each is based in different regions of the United States. IHT, renamed *International New York Times* in October 2013, is owned by the New York Times Group and draws much of its content, style, and editorial policy from the U.S. edition of *The New York Times*, perhaps the most influential American general interest newspaper.¹ While closely indexing an influential U.S. paper based in New York City, IHT was thought to be a geographically neutral newspaper as well as having large international influences.² Due to the nature of the sample, this study pertains to and claims generalizability to nationally and internationally influential dailies and not to locally/regionally based American dailies, although intermedia agenda-setting by major U.S. papers suggests that local papers may display synchronous trends (McCombs, 2014). Weldon's (2008) study shows that local newspapers' movement toward a feature orientation in their front pages synched with that of the national dailies.

The current study is built partially on a previous, preliminary investigation conducted in 2009 (Tanikawa, 2009). This study comprised a systematic content analysis of the front pages of LAT and IHT. Content was collected for a period of two constructed weeks for the years 1988, 1995, 2002, and 2009. I chose 1988 as a starting point as it was well prior to the Internet age and was the tail end of the period of conspicuous design changes for newspapers (1970s and 1980s) including carrying fewer columns and fewer articles, more prominent illustrations, horizontal layout, and simplified headline typography (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; see Figure 1). I wished to connect the end of the previous era of change to the present.

¹ IHT is, stated another way, a *Times* version with greater non-U.S. coverage, similar to papers that put out different regional editions catered for local interests. In its editorial style, flair, and language use, IHT is strongly American in complexion as it is well known as the paper for American expatriates (Tisdall, 2013; Usher, 2014).

² One concern that came to my attention during the test coding phase was that the 9/11 terrorist attacks had sensitized newspapers based in New York City and Washington, DC, where acts of terrorism occurred in such a way as to increase hard news coverage in the months following the incident. This concern was verified to some extent by an off-trend increase in straight news percentage of WP in 2002 (see the Results section). Although WP was added to the content analysis, choosing *The New York Times* itself as another East Coast paper was avoided.

Weather
Today: Mostly cloudy, scattered
flurries. High 45. Low 35. Wind:
Southeast. Partly sunny, windy,
cool. High 45. Low 35. Wind:
Northwest. A.D. 11. Temp range:
34-45. Details on Page 42.

The Washington Post

FINAL
Detailed index on Page A2

111th Year No. 101
at 1100 The Washington Post Building
TUESDAY, MARCH 15, 1988

6,000 D.C. Cabbies Owe Fines
Hundreds Believed To Use Fake Permits To Avoid Detection

By Ed Busch

Nearly 6,000 D.C. taxi drivers have outstanding backing violations, and officials of the D.C. Taxicab Commission said yesterday that hundreds of cabbies may be operating with multiple driving permits as road detourers.

The commission released data yesterday obtained from the D.C. Bureau of Motor Vehicle Services indicating that cabbies owe almost \$1.5 million in fines from more than 25,000 backing and driving violations. The oldest ticket is believed to date back no more than three years.



King Fahd bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, King of Saudi Arabia, holds a news conference after taking charge as Gallaudet University's first deaf president.

Gallaudet Greet Its New President

'Deaf People Can Do Anything... Except Hear,' Jordan Declares

By Melly Strieder

Living King Jordan was 21 years old when a car struck the motorcycle he was riding on 14th Street near Independence Avenue. When he awoke in Bethesda Naval Hospital, he recalled, "There was no sound... I wondered, 'Am I deaf?'"

He was a hearing person until that day in April 1965. But almost as quickly as one life ended, another began: Jordan enrolled at Gallaudet College, embarking on an academic career that culminated with his selection last year as the president of the university.

Israel Places Gaza Under Night Curfew

Shamir's U.S. Talks Economic Measures Likely to Be Tense Imposed on W. Bank

By Dan Osheter

Visiting Israeli Premier Menachem Begin today announced that the occupied territories, including Gaza, will be placed under a night curfew.

By Glenn Frankel

JERUSALEM, March 14—The Israeli Army today imposed tough new measures to suppress the 14-week-old Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories, ordering a night curfew on all of the Gaza Strip and continuing restrictions on economic activity and transportation in the West Bank.

On the eve of a general strike called for Tuesday, Israeli soldiers ordered all of Gaza's 650,000 Palestinians to remain indoors and sealed off the strip's borders between the hours of 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. every night until further notice. The army's 2,000 Jewish settlers are exempt from the curfew.

Jackson's Winning Ways Transform Candidate, Voters

Daunting Obstacles Are Still Ahead

By Paul Taylor

SPRINGFIELD, Ill., March 14—After Tuesday's Illinois primary, half of the delegates to the Democratic National Convention will have been selected, and the Democratic incumbent could well lead as follows.

Most popular votes won in primaries and caucuses were for Jackson and Gov. Michael S. Dinkins (D-N.J.).

Simon Asks Illinois Voters To Keep Candidacy Alive

Senator Tries to Shore Up Eroding Support

By Bill Peterson

CHICAGO, March 14—Sen. Paul Simon, desperately needing a victory in Tuesday's Illinois primary, today appealed to home-state Democrats to keep his candidacy alive with their votes.

Simon, on what could be the final day of his 10-month presidential campaign, criticized the state, attempting to stop an erosion of his support that threatens to give Jackson his first victory in a major industrial state during his two presidential campaigns.

Soviets Upset By Terms for Afghan Pact

Gorbachev Critical of American Shift

By Gary Lee

MOSCOW, March 14—During a meeting with American delegation Friday, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev said that the final Amity Dobbins pact on language and official gestures to show their surprise and dismay at the terms that Washington has set for ending the 10-year Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

Gorbachev's emotional reaction when talking about the Afghanistan war also underlined to his American interlocutors that his decision to end the Soviet Union's heavy military involvement in the war was a victory or the assurance of stability in Afghanistan is a fragile one, reached with some political difficulty.

Panamanian Public Workers Join Demands for Paychecks

Teachers Tear-Gassed; Balboa Port Idled

By William Reagin

PANAMA CITY, March 14—Riot police fired tear gas today to disperse school teachers demanding their salaries, and dock workers shut down a major port in protest against the crisis of Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega being spending to government employees.

Street violence and protests erupted as the government raised the first pay raise for the bulk of its 145,000 employees since Panama's cash crisis began earlier this month. The leading factor that does this in the face of U.S. financial pressure.

INSIDE

Wagner U.S. Bank Armory
The Pentagon said yesterday it has developed a new tank armor made from a ceramic hypodermic that it says is impervious to any Soviet anti-tank weapons. Page A4

Health

Two Attempt Suicide
Two cocaine addicts have attempted suicide after reports from D.C. drug program and St. Elizabeth's Hospital. Page D1

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Figure 1. Front page of The Washington Post, March 15, 1988.

To gather a two-week equivalent of the newspaper sample, the front page of the newspaper was examined at intervals of eight days until a total of 14 days for LAT and 12 days for IHT had been reviewed and analyzed (Campbell, 2001). (IHT does not publish on Sundays; thus, there were 12 days for two weeks.) The starting point for each period was the first Monday in March. This method of sampling assumed cyclic variation of content for different days of the week and required that all days of the week be represented (Riffe, Aust, & Lacy, 1993) and that the content be harvested from a period spanning four months from March to June (Campbell, 2001).

For the current study, WP was added to expand the sample base. Samples from 2013 were collected for all three papers using the same sampling method. All front-page articles from LAT, IHT, and WP for the years 1988, 1995, 2002, 2009, and 2013 resulted in a total of 1,260 articles.

Following H2 and H3—and to determine whether and how newspapers have become feature-oriented and analytical—the front-page analysis included counting the number of articles on the front page (H2) and measuring the size of the lead photo on the front page (H3). The photo size was measured as the number of columns wide divided by the total number of columns in the page horizontally. The structure of the columns and their relative size to the photos did not appear to change over time.

Classification of Articles

The articles were grouped into *straight news* and *nonstraight news* based on the following working definitions.

Straight News

Straight news is an article designed to inform readers of an event that the newspaper has just learned and is subject to the daily news production cycle. For example, an article headlined “10 Soldiers Killed in Plane Crash” that revolved around a crash of a military airplane in Pakistan leaving 10 American soldiers dead would be considered a typical case of straight news. Daily newspapers have a once-a-day production deadline. Thus, straight news could be defined as the report of the latest newsworthy event with the need to release the story in the next available edition.

Straight news most inevitably would describe the event of central importance or “what just happened” and would also include a time reference, most commonly in a single sentence. These represent the *what* and the *when* of the 5W1H (the rest of the elements are not always found in straight news articles, especially in recent periods). If the paper was published Tuesday, there would be a reference in the article to “Monday” as in “[event description], White House spokesperson said Monday.” In the vast majority of the cases, such a “yesterday reference” would be found within the first several paragraphs. For coding purposes, finding such a reference within the first five paragraphs determined the article to be a straight news story. Inclusion of a “yesterday reference” in straight news articles is a consistent practice of newspaper journalism going back to the last century (Fink & Schudson, 2014).

In a separate coding, I determined whether the time reference was in the lead paragraph or not (H1b). A growing number of articles deemed straight news carry the yesterday reference not in the first paragraph, but later, which speaks to the receding use generally of the proverbial summary (5W1H) lead followed by the inverted pyramid structure. The growing occurrence of DTR is another manifestation of the declining news orientation of the newspapers.

Nonstraight News

When the news item did not center on an event that took place the day before, but described or analyzed a development, a pattern, or a trend that emerged in the preceding days, weeks, or months, it was considered a typical case of “features” or analytical news stories. Determination of this group of articles was accomplished by default: by not being identified as straight news as defined above.

Working out the precise definition of the nonstraight news category was not necessary for the purpose of coding, but describing this category was highly relevant for the purpose of this project: If straight news is on the decline, what is growing in its place? If newspapers are changing their content to survive in the radically changing environment as noted earlier, knowing what they are increasing is perhaps more important than what they are decreasing. This body of news content not considered straight news generally divides into two categories.

1. Feature articles that portray social, economic, political, and demographic trends such as certain consumer goods gaining popularity among consumers, college tuition hikes causing economic strains among families, and lining up and profiling a swath of Republican presidential candidates in a primary: Features can also be a story that looks at a person of fame or a company that achieved a noteworthy business success. Because of a measure of timelessness in the topic’s nature, these articles display a shelf life lasting several weeks or longer.
2. News features, news analysis, or other analytically oriented articles that are typically released soon after (but not immediately following) the day of an important political, social, or economic event, and are closely tied to the news occurrence that is typically serious and socially significant, but are not considered straight news for reasons of temporality—no “yesterday” reference: These articles provide background, context, and analyses of the significant political, social, or economic development that is unfolding before the public eye. An example might be analyses and prognoses of a highly publicized event such as the U.S.–Iran nuclear agreement in 2015. Such articles typically add background, perspectives, analyses, and updates to the evolving news development.

The second category seems to correspond generally to what Fink and Schudson (2014) describe as “contextual journalism.” The distinction between the contextual and features is complex because any type of feature story could include analyses and contextual information and therefore cast as contextual. Meanwhile, a story with high social–political significance such as the Obama administration making judicial

appointments regardless of racial, gender, and sexual orientation (*The Washington Post*, March 4, 2013), could be cast as a trend/feature story defined as above (Category 1) as it does not flow from a recent public event. The two areas are often too intertwined to be content analyzed into two distinct categories. But they share a strong common feature: They are not pegged to an event that occurred the day before the publication. Newspapers are uniquely positioned to provide these types of articles, leveraging their less pressing deadlines, large news holes, and the format that allows editors to showcase certain important articles on the front page and/or the upper portion of the pages.

Variables and Statistical Methods

As the objective of this study was to measure the change in the percentage of the categories of articles, considered continuous variables increasing or decreasing and other dependent variables over time, the independent variable was time or changes in the years from 1988 to 2013.

The relationship between time and each of the three dependent variables was statistically tested using simple regression (H1a, H1b, H2, H3). It was determined whether the dependent variables moved in tandem with one another (H4).

I content analyzed all 1,260 articles, and 10% of the articles were content analyzed by two trained coders for intercoder reliability tests. Scott's pi statistic, which measures interrater agreement of categorical variables discounted for chance agreement, was computed. The intercoder reliability was .89 for the identification of straight news versus nonstraight news articles and .83 for the identification of the use of DTR in straight news stories.

Results

The results were consistent overall with the hypotheses, but some aspects of the results were unexpected. Pursuant to H1a, straight news content declined from 1988 to 2013, falling from 69.3% of the front-page articles in 1988 to 35.5% in 2013 (see Figure 2). Linear regression analysis showed that passage of time predicted the decline of the straight news category ($R^2 = .746$, $p < .001$). The percentage decline was steepest from 2002 to 2009, falling to an average of 31% from 59%, which then perked up in 2013 to 35.5%. This rebound in straight news percentage was not predicted and was observed for all three newspapers, showing a rise of between 2.7% (LAT) to 5.5% (WP) from 2009 to 2013.

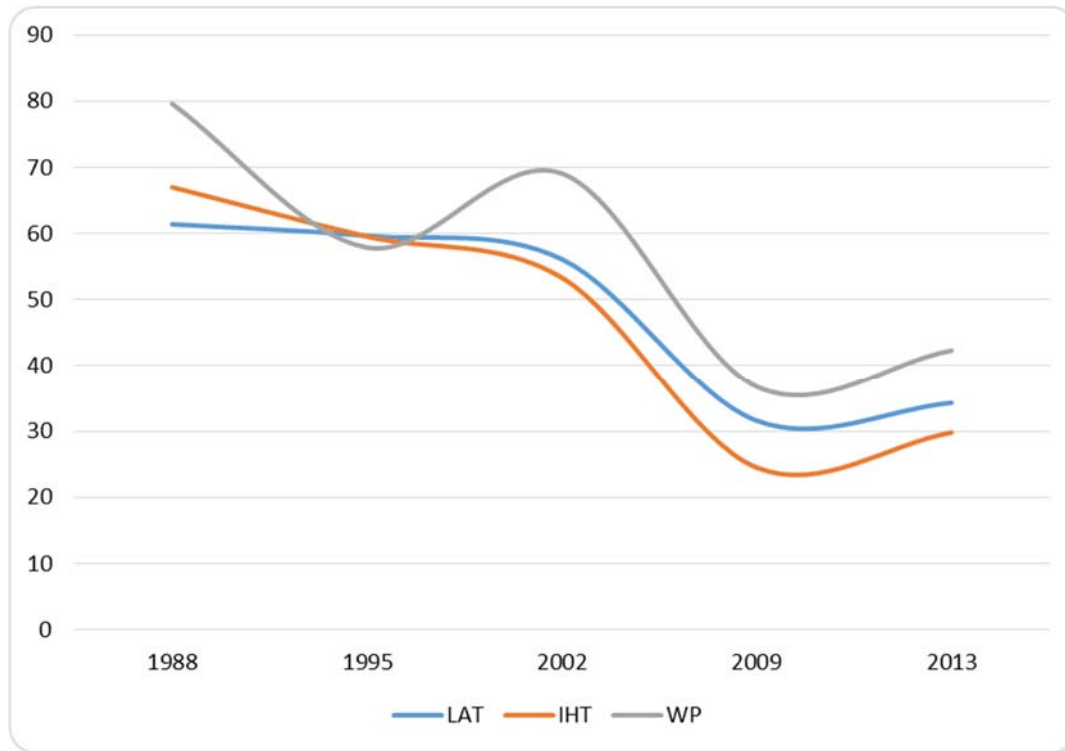


Figure 2. Changes in straight news percentages. LAT = Los Angeles Times; IHT = International Herald Tribune; WP = The Washington Post.

Following H1b, articles with DTR for straight news articles grew significantly from 1988 to 2013, rising from 12.9% on average for the three papers in 1988 to 53% in 2013 (see Table 1). A steady linear increase in the use of DTR was observed from 1988 to 2013 ($R^2 = .366, p < .01$).

Table 1. Straight News With Delayed Time Reference (DTR; as Percentage of Total Number of Straight News Articles on the Front Page).

Newspaper	1988	1995	2002	2009	2013
LAT	7.14	14.1	9.1	12.5	70.0
IHT	21.7	15.1	37.5	33.3	64.3
WP	9.76	10.9	9.0	12.0	24.2
Average	12.88	13.37	18.52	19.28	52.85

Note. LAT = Los Angeles Times; IHT = International Herald Tribune; WP = The Washington Post.

As predicted by H2, the average number of articles on the front page declined between 1988 and 2013 from 8.03 articles per front page to 4.83 articles (see Table 2), with the lapse of time predicting this downtrend ($R^2 = .752, p < .001$). H3 predicted the growth in the size of the largest front-page photo, which was indeed observed throughout the period, recording a steady average increase from 48.9% of the entire column width in 1988 to 64.3% of the entire column width ($R^2 = .816, p < .001$; see Table 3).

Table 2. Average Number of Articles on the Front Page.

Newspaper	1988	1995	2002	2009	2013
LAT	8.14	8.5	7.0	5.43	5.0
IHT	8.58	7.42	5.0	4.08	3.92
WP	7.36	6.79	6.93	4.86	5.57
Average	8.03	7.57	6.31	4.79	4.83

Note. LAT = *Los Angeles Times*; IHT = *International Herald Tribune*; WP = *The Washington Post*.

Table 3. Size of the Largest Front Page Photo (Percentage of Horizontal Size of the Page).

Newspaper	1988	1995	2002	2009	2013
LAT	47.6	53.6	54.8	58.3	65.47
IHT	51.0	58.1	51.9	62.5	65.3
WP	48.2	50.1	55.4	63.7	62.1
Average	48.94	53.94	54.04	61.5	64.29

Note. The photo size (%) was measured as the number of columns wide divided by the total number of columns in the page horizontally. LAT = *Los Angeles Times*; IHT = *International Herald Tribune*; WP = *The Washington Post*.

The following two observations can be made. First, overall, all four variables moved in sync with each other in support of H4. This was true at the micro level (within an individual paper), as well as at the overall macro level (average for all three papers). In the case of WP, its irregular up-and-down movements in the straight news percentage was accompanied by a comparable up-and-down movement in the other two variables during the same period, most notably during 1995–2002: When the straight news articles increased contrary to trend, its number of articles on the front page increased, against trend, and the use of DTR decreased, contrary to trend. During 2009–13, the straight news percentage rose at the same time that the number of articles on the front page grew and the photo size shrank, all contrary to trend, but bucking the trend simultaneously. (The DTR for 2009–13 increased, which was consistent with trend.) It was not possible to determine why WP data moved against the tide during this period,³ but they do seem to indicate that these variables—relating to content, style, and physical layout of the newspapers—have a strong level of association with each other, as the correlation analyses show (see Table 4).

³As noted, one possibility is that 9/11 created a heightened sense of news in the months following the terrorism, pushing up the straight news percentage.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Variables.

Variable	Straight news (%)	DTR	Article number	Photo size
Straight news (%)	1			
DTR	-.617	1		
Article number	.947*	-.676	1	
Photo size	-.963**	.782	-.943*	1

Note. DTR = delayed time reference.

* $p < .05$ (two-tailed). ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study quantitatively examined the changes in the news styles and layout of three large American newspapers from 1988 to 2013. From 1988 to 2013 (25 years), straight news declined from 69% of the front-page content to 35%. This means the default category—features and analytical news stories—sprang from a third to now more than two thirds of the front-page articles.

Newspapers have followed a long trajectory of deemphasizing news in favor of features and analysis for more than a century (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997). The changes observed in the past two decades, however, represent more than an extension of the phenomenon that the pair has observed through a century to 1994 in two important respects.

First, the two categories—news-oriented articles versus nonnews—traded places sometime in the early 2000s, and today nonnews has become the main course rather than the side dish as regards the front page. This arguably represents a functional turnaround for the newspaper from being a medium of providing first-instance news to a medium of delivering analysis and features, somewhat akin to a news magazine in a sense that it assumes to a great extent that readers have knowledge of first-instance news from elsewhere and the medium is assumed to be a complement to it. It is unclear how much of the newly dominant nonnews content is analytical as opposed to features as this study was unable to distinguish the two categories for content analysis. But it is safe to assume that given nearly half of the straight news on the front page does not possess its former characteristics of leading the article with basic facts, and that much of straight news itself is contextual and analytical (see the following example), the analytical dimension of news has become a dominant facet of news.

Second, the most likely impetus for the change was the burst of news available on the Internet. Straight news content declined from 59.5% to 31.0% from 2002 to 2009, according to the present study, a period of sharpest fall. The major turning point was perhaps the middle of this period around 2006 and 2007,⁴ which represents the most transformative stretch for newspapers as they faced steep declines in

⁴ The content analysis this study produced generally matched those of preceding studies such as Fink and Schudson (2014) and Weldon (2008), whose studies ended in 2003 and 2004, respectively. Fink and

advertising and subscription revenues (Pew Research Center, 2012) brought on by Internet-based media, which absorbed newspapers' advertising revenues and compromised their business model (Meyer, 2009). Bill Keller, *The Times's* executive editor, succinctly explained the rationale for the ongoing front-page remake:

The notion of a Page 1 story, in fact, has evolved over the years, partly in response to the influence of other media. When a news event has been on the Internet and TV and news radio all day long, do we want to put that news on our front page the next morning? Maybe we do, if we feel our reporting and telling of it goes deeper than what has been available elsewhere. But if the factual outline—the raw information—is widely available, sometimes we choose to offer something else that plays to our journalistic advantages: a smart analysis of the events, a vivid piece of color from the scene, a profile of one of the central figures, or a gripping photograph that captures the impact of an event, instead of a just-the-facts news story. ("Talk to the Newsroom," 2006, para. 4)

Keller's statement matches with the chief findings in this study. Newspapers as epitomized by their front pages are not primarily designed to supply facts and information. They are meant to complement readers' information-seeking behavior accomplished elsewhere by providing analytical and narrative texture and depth, and thus deliver comprehensive value-added experience to readers.

As pointed out earlier, this study's sample was limited to major U.S. dailies with national and international influences and is not generalizable to American newspapers at large, especially local news dailies, which have different structure of competition and editorial orientations. It was also restricted to newspapers' front pages. It is notable, however, that two of three newspaper samples were national dailies in two closely related studies: Barnhurst and Mutz (1997) and Fink and Schudson (2014). In each study, their one regional daily sample appeared to match those of the national examples in the trends under study. Weldon's (2008) comprehensive study of 20 U.S. dailies revealed similar patterns for local and nationally influential newspapers regarding the extent of their featurization of news. Also, Weldon's and Fink and Schudson's (2014) studies were based on front-page sampling. As representative content of the newspaper, the front page will continue to be sampled as the benchmark content of the newspaper.

Front-page content and design, which had become a standard measurement of how newspaper content has changed, perhaps went through a major remake in the past 10 to 15 years, in the breadth of the 1970s and 1980s transformation (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; Utt & Pasternack, 1989)—"the period of design revolution" as already mentioned—which was triggered by a technological threat mainly from television (Garcia, 1987), much as it has faced online news today.

Schudson reported that the conventional news articles on the front page represented 47% of the three newspapers they studied in 2003. Weldon came up with a study showing that in 2004, about 50% of the front-page news was "hard news," which generally matched the definition for straight news used in this study. It should be noted that WP with a high straight news percentage of 69% in 2002 pushed up the average in this study. LAT and IHT each had about 56% and 53%, respectively, straight news percentage in 2002.

Throughout the last century, the newspaper had adjusted to major competition from all quarters: news magazines, radio, television, and cable TV. But the threat to the print edition of newspapers had never been greater until their centuries-old paper-based advertising model was seriously challenged by the online media of the 21st century. This perhaps forced newspapers to change in an unprecedented way by differentiating their product: What they cannot compete in timeliness, they made up for in the depth in analysis and background information, unique coverage, richness of narrative, and better visuals (Pew Research Center, 2006; Usher, 2010), all of which was visible on the front page.

In the process, newspapers shed their daily news focus, stripping away what had already been a diminishing trend away from the summary lead, inverted pyramid style of news writing. It is today no longer accurate or useful to believe that the 5W1H style writing of news is widely practiced in the main sections of the newspapers as some assume, with such views lingering in different corners of journalism scholarship, including literary journalism (Bak & Reynolds, 2011; Hartsock, 2007), studies in the language of the news (Bell, 1991, 2007; van Dijk, 1988), and journalism studies in general (Benson & Hallin, 2007; Pottker, 2003; Sternadori & Wise, 2009; Thomson et al., 2008). It must be noted, however, that the examined content was confined to the front page for the aforementioned methodological reasons. Articles with a traditional summary lead are still commonly found as shorter articles provided by wire services appearing in the "news bulletin" sections inside the paper, although such articles with less value added are increasingly positioned on the margin of the print editions.

The content and stylistic transformation described in this study carries broad significance in journalism studies as it signifies changes in the basic forms and the function of news extending from newswriting styles to professional role conceptions of journalists. It is useful from a scholarly perspective, for instance, to review the assumption that examining the lead paragraph will reveal the gist of the article as some content analysis research designs appear to assume (Patterson, 2000). Studies of content analysis often do not address the issue of stylistic changes in newswriting over time, even though such change could throw into question the validity of the news content analysis (Lacy, Watson, Riffe, & Lovejoy, 2015). The present study showed that the majority of front-page stories are not straight news articles, but features and analytical stories, which are known to have a variety of approaches to opening a story (Itule & Anderson, 2007; Yopp & McAdams, 2007). This study showed that within straight news, 53% did not contain the time reference in the lead (in 2013), suggesting that many news stories do not resort to a summary lead as a way of opening the story, but instead embraced a more stylish, analytical, or contextual approach to introducing a news subject. The following lead in a July 11, 2014, *New York Times* front-page article serves as one illustration:

The Obama administration had hoped that after years of frustration with President Hamid Karzai, a successful election in Afghanistan would finally produce a leader who could stabilize the country while working with the United States to allow an orderly withdrawal of American troops and end its longest war.

Yet nearly a month after a runoff election to choose Afghanistan's next president, Secretary of State John Kerry arrived here on Friday for a hastily arranged visit aimed at

resolving a crisis that began with allegations of widespread vote rigging. (Rosenberg & Gall, 2014, p. A1)

The event to which this straight news story is pegged is Kerry's visit to Kabul meant to broker a deal between two rival candidates. But the event itself—Kerry's arrival, which would have been more speedily reported online elsewhere—is embedded in a broader contextual and background reporting about the secretary's trip to Kabul. This analytical approach to relaying news perhaps moved the yesterday reference to the second paragraph from the first in a highly common textual strategy in today's newspaper articles.

In cases in which the paper chooses to present basic facts about the event in the first paragraph, the top sentence still might not appear the way tradition would dictate—again because of the assumption that the readers would have been exposed to the first-instance news reporting from other sources. The following *Times* article reports the outbreak of a magnitude 8.9 earthquake and a subsequent tsunami attack in northern Japan on March 11, 2011. Printed as the lead story on the front page, it was the first report on the subject and opened as follows: "Rescuers struggled to reach survivors on Saturday morning as Japan reeled after an earthquake and a tsunami struck in a deadly tandem" (Fackler, 2011, p. A1). This sentence appears to have been shaped with the understanding that readers have already been informed of the event—surely, it was difficult to miss the news that had been on the television screens the world over for more than 24 hours. The earthquake struck right after the paper's midnight deadline, preventing the print edition from publishing any news on the subject until fully a day after. The newswriting convention would dictate that the subject in this case of the first sentence would be either the earthquake or the victims, not the rescuers. In this key respect, some newspaper articles now display a writing style that is ill suited as a first reference of a significant historic event, the kind of primary reference that historians rely on and many assume that newspaper articles continue to produce. Reference to "Japan reeled" is also suggestive of an interpretational function of the text.

The news text of both examples demonstrates that the primacy of event presentation in a straight news article is fading, whereas the analytical function of the news text is foregrounded, a change in the text norms that further testifies to the changing functionality of daily newspaper articles. They increasingly serve as a complement to the fact-based news provided online or elsewhere. It is a departure from the conventional inverted pyramid style of news presentation, known to adhere to the detached, objective style of event description, so that the facts speak for themselves, assuming no prior knowledge of the event. This had been a primary characteristic of Anglo-American news journalism that marked the beginning of objective news reporting style in the history of modern journalism dating back to the 19th century (Chalaby, 1996). The changes in the news style in the print edition carries significance into newspapers' online and digital versions given that traditional news organizations rely on newsroom reporters to produce content for both (Usher, 2014).

These changes, which seem to have accelerated in the most recent decade, should be of interest to scholars who study the forms of news given that these modifications could mean that U.S. newspapers have shifted from being a fact-based news medium toward a model premised for some of European press:

news forms that provide analysis, interpretation, and opinion (Benson et al., 2012; Benson & Hallin, 2007; Hallin & Mancini, 2004).⁵

The content analysis of this project also showed that typographical (article type) changes were closely linked to topographic (layout) changes. Newspapers' expansion of their feature and analytical coverage (leading to contraction in straight news percentage) is usually accompanied by growing photo size, decreasing number of articles on the front page, and growing instances of DTR for straight news, suggesting an organic relationship between text and visual elements (see Table 4). In support of the suggestion that newspapers changed their news orientation most radically from 2002 to 2009, the average size of the photo grew fastest and the number of the articles on the front page declined the fastest during this period also (see Tables 2 and 3). This suggests strong efforts made by publishers to remake and reimagine the newspaper as a commercial product during this time period.

But what could explain the resurgence in straight news in 2013 compared with that in 2009? On the one hand, it is possible that news publishers determined that they went too far in featurizing newspapers and attempted to bring back the news focus. If newspapers became like a news magazine, an obvious dilemma would be that the readers would lose the rationale to pick up a copy every day. As noted, it is hard to miss the growing instances of DTR in articles coded as straight news articles. It was observationally clear that some of those articles, especially in recent periods, although containing a reference earlier in the story to an event that just occurred, were analytical and/or contextual in much of the rest of the article in content and style. The above example from *The New York Times* on Kerry's visit to Afghanistan demonstrates this point. Such articles arguably bear much closer resemblance to the analytical/contextual category of articles than to traditional straight news, but the journalist/editor included a reference to a relevant event that took place the day before to add a newsy touch and a sense of timeliness.

It may thus not be precise to say that newspapers are becoming like news magazines as they strive to maintain a daily news orientation. Still, based on the content analysis of this study, one could plausibly advance that newspaper publishers now position themselves as an analyzer/interpreter of news, just as professional role conception studies have observed (Brill, 2001; Cassidy, 2005), rather than a mere disseminator of information.

All told, the changes observed and analyzed are consistent with the general assumptions of the medium theory and technological affordances (Benson et al., 2012; Deuze, 2003; Meyrowitz, 1994): Print newspapers have adapted to the new, competitive, and technological environment by repositioning their medium to their advantage—that is, to deploy their rich existing resources (reporters) to conduct more analytical and background reporting that makes use of their physical spaces in print, while receding from the areas in which the online news outlets surpass the print in their temporal and technological strengths

⁵ It is unclear whether the analytical and interpretational style observed recently in U.S. newspaper articles was similar to those found in European newspapers. Future studies should investigate the content and stylistic differences between the two.

(i.e., relaying timely, bare-bone news). Simultaneously, the print papers, stuck in their daily production cycles, continue to weave "just happened" occurrences in the text, albeit less dominantly than in the past, to remind readers that they are in the daily business of delivering important news and updates. The sudden growth of articles interspersed with references to recent happenings that are otherwise featurish or analytical and deftly mix time sensitiveness and analytics is a testament to their medium's strengths, limitations, and dilemmas.

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