

Exploring online newspaper headlines

A comparative study of British and American quality papers and tabloids

Mémoire réalisé par
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Année académique 2017-2018
Master [120] en Communication Multilingue
Finalité spécialisée en langues des affaires

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Abstract

A travers une analyse comparative de journaux sérieux et tabloïdes américains et britanniques (*The New York Times*, *The New York Post*, *The Guardian* et *The Sun*), ce mémoire vise à apporter des éclaircissements quant à la manipulation de l'information pratiquée par certains moyens de communication, en particulier les méthodes utilisées par les journaux en ligne pour rendre leurs gros titres plus séduisants afin d'attirer l'attention des lecteurs.

Cette recherche a permis de révéler que les journaux en ligne ont recours, à des degrés divers, à différentes techniques (linguistiques, typographiques, etc.) pour rendre leurs gros titres plus attrayants. Le tabloïde britannique *The Sun* semble être particulièrement amateur des 'pièges-à-clics', sans doute pour augmenter ses profits en ces temps économiques difficiles pour l'industrie journalistique. Cependant, il apparaît que cette pratique n'est pas caractéristique de tous les tabloïdes, et qu'il convient de ne pas faire de généralisation car chaque journal possède son propre style éditorial. Enfin, il ressort de cette étude que même lorsque les gros titres des journaux en ligne semblent refléter la réalité des faits, la déformation de l'information peut avoir lieu à d'autres niveaux. Ces résultats nous amènent à (re)considérer l'importance de garder un œil critique sur le flux d'information constant qui nous entoure.

Introduction

Nowadays, it is undeniable that the mass media are part of the daily life of each individual, since they are ubiquitous and can be found in many different forms: television, radio, written press, online newspapers, social networks, etc. With the advent of new technologies, this phenomenon has gathered momentum and it is virtually impossible to escape the constant flow of information. The media play several roles in the everyday lives of citizens: for example, they are supposed to inform the public on *newsworthy* events occurring in the world, and to act as the guardian of democracy by monitoring institutional power. However, it should not be forgotten that the mass media also filter and review all the information before publication. Some even claim that the media partly construct our reality, and that most of what we believe comes from what we read and hear through them, as it is extremely difficult to distinguish between the ideas that are really ours and those which are transmitted by the mass media. More people are becoming aware of the situation and are starting to be increasingly suspicious of the media. Nevertheless, the question arises as to whether this awareness is accompanied by a decline in the public's interest in news and the media in general: already in 2006, Aitchison stated that he had "[...] long been puzzled by the public appetite for newspapers, alongside their deep distrust of them [...]"¹.

In view of what has just been said, it seems essential to study the functioning of the mass media to understand to which extent they may influence our thinking and transform reality by presenting it in a certain way. In order to carry out this kind of research, it appears relevant to explore the techniques that the media implement to draw the audience's attention and possibly maximize their profits. To achieve this objective, the choice has been made to take online newspaper headlines as attack angle to verify our working hypothesis, according to which the mass media always manipulate the information to a certain extent before it is presented to the public. This dissertation will explore how headlines can be made more attractive, eye-catching and easy to sell without readers noticing. It will take the form of a comparative study contrasting British and American newspapers as a first step, and tabloids and quality newspapers as a second step. The data collected in the framework of this research come from

¹ Aitchison, J. (2006). Headlines and Deadlines: Changing Newspaper Language. In Corino, E., Marelllo, C. and Onesti, C. (eds) *Atti del XII Congresso Internazionale di Lessicografia*, vol. 1. Torino: Euralex, p. 4.

the following newspapers: *The New York Times* (US), *The New York Post* (US), *The Guardian* (UK) and *The Sun* (UK).

This dissertation will be divided into six chapters. The first three chapters focus on the theoretical framework used to conduct this research, and respectively discuss the history of (online) newspapers, the concept of news as entertainment and the manipulation of information by the media. The fourth chapter presents the research questions, the data and the research method of this study. The fifth chapter elaborates upon the two-stage methodology used to analyze the data: the quantitative approach examines the number of words in each headline and article, while the qualitative approach analyzes the connection between the headlines and the content of the articles, and the linguistic and typographic elements that may influence the way in which newspapers present the information. The sixth chapter summarizes and discusses the main results of the research. Finally, the dissertation closes on a conclusion that aims at exposing the knowledge gained from this study, but also its limitations and possible avenues for future research.

List of abbreviations, conventions and symbols

cf.	confer (compare with)
e.g.	exempli gratia (for example)
etc.	et cetera (and so on)
i.e.	id est (that is)
NY	New York
N°	number
UK	United Kingdom
US(A)	United States (of America)
$\bar{X}$	arithmetic mean

The reference works used as part of this dissertation are cited in APA format.

These references along with brief explanatory comments are placed at the bottom of the corresponding pages, in the form of footnotes.

CHAPTER 1: CONTEXTUALIZATION AND HISTORY OF NEWSPAPERS

Before getting to the very heart of the matter, it seems appropriate to contextualize the topic at hand by means of a theoretical framework explaining the current journalistic landscape in the United Kingdom and in the United States of America, but also the distinction between a quality paper and a tabloid. The chapter will also broach the shift from print to online newspapers, which has been ongoing for several years, as well as the characteristics of the headlines genre and the ideology and purpose of the newspapers under study in this dissertation.

1.1 Journalistic landscape in the UK and in the US

In the modern British and American societies, the press has assumed increasing importance for many years: “[i]n the 19th century, it became apparent that there was a new force in politics and society, which some commentators placed alongside the three traditional estates of the realm [...] or the modern theory of three powers [...]: the press²”. In these democratic states, the free press exercises a vital role of supervisor of those in power and, by providing the general public with reliable and important information about countless areas of society, acts as the guardian and champion of democracy and the common good. In fact, “part of the freedom of the press is that it is run as a commercial enterprise with no dependence upon the public purse³”. However, it may happen that the media step out of their role and go after other aims, sometimes less commendable. For this reason, democratic governments also keep an eye on the press to avoid abuse of power. Regrettably, it seems that the right balance between press freedom and state control is hard to find both in the United Kingdom and in the United States. In 2017, the two countries slipped down the World Press Freedom Index, ranking respectively 40th and 43rd, behind nations that could at first sight be seen as less democratic and egalitarian, such as Chile and South Africa. According to the international NGO *Reporters Without Borders*, the British Parliament, which takes a “heavy-handed approach towards the press –often in the name of

² Arblaster, P. (2016). *LMULT2421: Economic, legal, social and political issues in English-speaking countries*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Université Catholique de Louvain, p. 5.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 6

national security– [...] adopted [that same year] the most extreme surveillance legislation in UK History, the Investigatory Powers Act⁴”. For example, this Act legalizes measures such as subjecting British reporters to stop-and-search requests from the police, mining their digital data and secretly monitoring their communications⁵. The American press freedom, for its part, “has encountered several major obstacles over the past few years, [...] with the election of President Donald Trump [that] has declared the press an ‘enemy of the American people’ [and] his predecessor [that] left behind a flimsy legacy for press freedom and access to information⁶”. The role of the press and the status of journalists have thus been greatly endangered over the past few years.

In the United Kingdom, “the major national newspapers can be divided in two ways: according to political complexion, and according to the market they address⁷”. Politically, the left-leaning press is represented by newspapers such as *The Guardian*, *The Observer* and *The Daily Mirror*, while the right-leaning press consists of basically all the other papers, such as *The Times* and *The Sun* –except for *The Independent*, which is intended to be more neutral. Another distinction is made between the more reliable newspapers, called ‘broadsheets’ or ‘quality papers’, and the more popular and sensationalist ones, called ‘tabloids’ or ‘redtops’. The second category has the best sales record and “the competition between [popular papers] for the most attention-grabbing news is fierce⁸”. According to figures from *Statista*, a provider of market and consumer data, *The Sun* is the most popular and the best-selling⁹, but it has the worst reputation among national daily newspapers. With respect to online papers, *The Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* make their whole content freely available, unlike the majority of other newspapers, and they are therefore the most read¹⁰. Finally, the sources from which British papers obtain information include news agencies, such as *Reuters* and *The Press Association*,

⁴ Reporter Without Borders (2017). United Kingdom. Retrieved March 24, 2018, from <https://rsf.org/en/united-kingdom>

⁵ How will the UK’s Snoopers’ Charter affect journalism? (2016, December 5). *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/listeningpost/2016/12/uk-snoopers-charter-affect-journalism-161203090946739.html>

⁶ Reporter Without Borders (2017). United States. Retrieved March 24, 2018, from <https://rsf.org/en/united-states>

⁷ Arblaster, P., *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Statista (2018). Circulation of newspapers in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2017 (in 1,000 copies). Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/529060/uk-newspaper-market-by-circulation/>

¹⁰ Statista (2018). Monthly reach of national newspapers and their websites in the United Kingdom (UK) from October 2016 to September 2017 (in 1,000 individuals). Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/246077/reach-of-selected-national-newspapers-in-the-uk/>

reporters and correspondents, official statements and press releases, other newspapers or even sometimes readers or illegal leaks and hacks¹¹.

In the United States, the major national newspapers are usually divided according to their political orientation, but this division is different from the British one. The papers are commonly considered as liberal, conservative or middle-of-the-road. Liberal newspapers include for example *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe* or *The Washington Post*¹², whereas *The New York Post*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Times* belong to the conservative category¹³. Tabloid journalism, which refers to a type of journalism emphasizing “topics such as sensational crime stories, astrology, gossip columns about the personal lives of celebrities and sports stars, and junk food news¹⁴” is also present in the United States, and is currently represented by papers such as *The National Enquirer* and *The New York Post*. Just as the British press, American newspapers rely heavily on articles provided by news agencies such as *The Associated Press*, *Reuters* or *Bloomberg News*.

1.2 Distinction between quality paper and tabloid

As mentioned above, British and American newspapers can be divided into two categories: quality papers –or broadsheets– and tabloids. In this section, closer attention will be paid to the distinction between these newspaper types. According to Bastos, “the terms broadsheet and tabloid stem from paper format [but] were subsequently adopted to refer to editorial decisions that define newspapers’ journalism standards, setting quality press (broadsheets) apart from popular press (tabloids)¹⁵”. These labels thus refer to two types of journalism of our modern era that have fundamental differences in audience, content and format. The tabloid press generally has a broader, younger and less educated readership than the broadsheet press. This can be explained by the considerable divergence in the topics covered and in the approaches

¹¹ Arblaster, P., *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹² HWC Reference Librarians (2011, January). “Consider the Source” – A Resource Guide to Liberal, Conservative and Nonpartisan Periodicals. Retrieved from <http://www.ccc.edu/colleges/washington/departments/Documents/PeriodicalsPov.pdf>

¹³ WSU Libraries (2016, December 14). *Bias In Periodicals*. Retrieved from <http://libguides.libraries.wsu.edu/bias>

¹⁴ World Heritage Encyclopedia (n.d.). *List Of Supermarket Tabloids In The United States*. Retrieved from http://www.gutenberg.us/articles/eng/list_of_supermarket_tabloids_in_the_united_states

¹⁵ Bastos, M. T. (2016). Digital Journalism and Tabloid Journalism. In Franklin, B. and Eldridge, S. (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Digital Journalism Studies*. London: Routledge, p. 2.

used to tackle them: “[b]roadsheet papers rely on investigative approaches to news that emphasize in-depth coverage and a sober tone in articles and editorials, with smaller headlines, fewer pictures, and lengthier texts, [whereas] tabloid content [...] tends to expose sexual misconduct and explore conservative and iconoclast topical interests, with strong commercial emphasis and populist vernacular¹⁶”. Contrary to quality papers, tabloids also give more space to headlines and images and offer shorter articles. It should be noted that the uncontested popularity of tabloid journalism in recent years has led to some debate about its impact on society. People are concerned that some news media are increasingly turning into distributors of dramatic entertainment and sensational news about the private life of individuals¹⁷. This discussion will be tackled later on in Chapter 2.

1.3 Shift from print newspapers to online newspapers

Since the 1990s, when the first online newspapers appeared on the ‘World Wide Web’, cyberjournalism has continuously gathered momentum and grown in popularity, to the extent that many experts are questioning the future and longevity of print newspapers¹⁸. But what might explain this important change, which could very well mean someday the replacement of written press by digital press, and, in the long term, the permanent substitution of paper by screens? The development of Internet-related technologies at the end of the past century created an absolute disruption in the functioning of traditional media companies. As a matter of fact, the Internet brought about a significant shift in the way readers consumed news and information. The media industry had to adapt rapidly to face up to the numerous innovations and news media that appeared at that time. As Mesquita explains,

Unlike previous disruptive mediums, the Internet undermined traditional newspapers by offering a news space for the publication of news texts and of advertisement – the two core sources of revenue for prints. Thus, some traditional companies reacted defensively, trying to shield their core-business against online alternatives, while others behaved offensively, trying to take their brand and products to previously unreachable audiences through this new channel¹⁹.

¹⁶ Bastos, M. T., *loc. cit.*, p. 2.

¹⁷ Johansson, S. (2007). Reading Tabloids: Tabloid Newspapers and Their Readers. In *Södertörn Academic Studies*, vol. 34. Stockholm: Södertörns Högskola, pp. 31-32.

¹⁸ Díaz-Noci, J. (2009). 2018: ¿Diarios en dispositivos móviles? Libro electrónico, tinta electrónica y convergencia de la prensa impresa y digital. In *El profesional de la información*, vol. 18, nº3. Barcelona: El Profesional de la Información, pp. 301-302.

¹⁹ Mesquita, R. (2017). The transition of a traditional newspaper to the internet age: an historical account of *Le Monde*’s case. In *Observatorio OBS* Journal*, vol. 11. Lisboa: OberCom, p. 54

An increasing number of media companies then began to develop an online version of their newspapers in order to survive this major change. According to a study by Barnhurst²⁰, at the very beginning, these web adaptations generally reproduced the text of the print editions to a large extent, adding few features such as images, hyper-links or interactive resources. His research suggests that, in the early stages, the transition towards an online presence only responded to public demand and addressed the need to maintain a position on the market²¹. But nowadays, with the commercialization in recent decades of portable e-reader devices and software that facilitate the reading of digital texts²², online newspapers more than ever appear to represent the future of the industry. Nonetheless, one of the issues that arises and bears mentioning is that some traditional papers are starting to see their own digital edition as competition, because the free availability of their content –totally or partially– constitutes an obstacle to potential sources of income.

Naturally, the shift from print to online newspapers has had noticeable consequences on our society. First of all, it has led to a transformation of the audience: the readers of online newspapers are outnumbering the readers of print newspapers. This is partly due to the fact that the modern audience enjoys having direct and free access to continuously updated information, and also welcomes the opportunity to play an active role by voicing their opinion or reading that of others. There is also a rejuvenation of the readership, given that young people generally neglect the written press to favor the online access to information. Logically, the public of print newspapers is thereby becoming older. Secondly, another repercussion of this change is the fact that readers no longer remain faithful to only one medium, but they often combine several sources –online *and* offline– in order to compare and cross-check the information. According to a report by the Pew Research Center, “[...] 65% [of Americans] state that they don’t have one favorite website²³”. Finally, it turns out that the online public consumes information in a very different way from what people did several decades ago. Today, news must be available anywhere, at any time, and the content must be attractive and easily digestible, as readers devote less time and attention to reading articles. Bastos argues

²⁰ Barnhurst, K. G. (2012). Prensa, geografía y monopolio. La forma de las noticias en las páginas *web* de los periódicos de Estados Unidos. In *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, nº67. Tenerife: Universidad de La Laguna.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Díaz-Noci, J., *loc. cit.*, p. 302.

²³ Raimondo Anselmino, N. (2012). Crisis, cambio y transformación de la prensa diaria. Algunos datos para pensar el presente de un medio. In *Razón y Palabra*, nº80. Quito: Universidad de los Hemisferios, p. 7. (My translation from Spanish)

that “[...] the process of increasing tabloidization [...] advanced on the space of online and free daily papers, both of which place an emphasis on rapid turnover of content, digest-style short stories, blogs, entertainment gossip, and a heavy reliance on the visual²⁴”.

Besides all these challenges and transformations related to the advent of new technologies, it should be pointed out that the press in general has been going through a major crisis for several years, provoked among others by a decline in the number of young readers, a loss of influence in favor of other media, such as radio and television, and higher production and distribution costs²⁵. By way of example, “the publishers New York TimesCo, Gannett and McClatchy [...] have seen their income fall by 13%, 16% and 18% respectively in 2008. News Corp, [...] which owns top newspapers such as *The Sun*, *The New York Post* or *The Wall Street Journal*, announced record losses of 6,400 million dollars during the fourth quarter of 2008²⁶”.

1.4 Characteristics and functions of headlines

It is almost impossible to talk about newspapers without mentioning headlines, a very specific genre that cannot be dissociated from journalistic writing. This section discusses the characteristics of headlines and the functions that they have in a piece of news. A headline is a heading at the top of an article in a newspaper, which is generally printed in large bold capital letters and follows specific patterns that are sometimes unlike the rules of English syntax. Headlines, in which plays on words are quite frequent, are often accompanied by a large image related to the topic of the article. As Aitchison points out, “[they] grab readers’ attention [...] via their subject matter, their style or preferably both, and compress information [...]”²⁷. For this reason, they often have the bad reputation of being intentionally eye-catching in order to shock the reader. As the author explains, headlines are created in a very ingenious way that generally reflects the newsworthiness of the story being reported. This specific structure is very important because on the front page, headlines help sell newspapers, and on the inside pages, they influence what people read first. Moreover, they have an immediate and long-lasting impact on the audience’s mind²⁸.

²⁴ Bastos, M. T., *loc. cit.*, p. 7.

²⁵ Raimondo Anselmino, N., *loc. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3. (My translation from Spanish)

²⁷ Aitchison, J., *loc. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-16.

According to Semino, “newspaper headlines are associated with three main functions: they have to attract the attention of potential readers; they indicate the topic of the story, usually by providing a short summary; and they may suggest the approach that will be taken to the relevant event, in terms of tone, evaluation, ideological slant and so on²⁹”. All these objectives must be achieved in a reduced amount of space. That is why headlines have their own specific grammatical and linguistic features, as mentioned earlier. For instance, some superfluous words such as articles and auxiliary verbs are regularly omitted, short and dramatic words are preferred to save space, and verbs are used in the present tense or the infinitive form. The headline genre is thus characterized by an elliptical style. Furthermore, in order to draw the readers’ attention, headlines often make use of rhetorical and stylistic devices, such as puns, rhymes, metaphors, etc. In summary, they possess their own language and conventions, which are sometimes far removed from the norms of the English language, but are often familiar to and understood by the general public.

1.5 Ideology and purpose of the newspapers

The ideology, philosophy and political persuasion of a newspaper certainly have an influence on the content that it will provide to its readership and the way in which it will present the information. As claimed by Fowler, “because the institutions of news reporting and presentation are socially, economically and politically situated, all news is always reported from some particular angle³⁰”. This inevitably leads us to the conclusion that our knowledge of the world –which we receive through the mediation of other people– always bears the stamp of a particular ideological position. Hence the importance of getting as much information as possible on the media that surround us. This section focuses on the newspapers used as part of this research, namely *The Guardian*, *The Sun*, *The New York Times* and *The New York Post*.

The Guardian is a British left-wing daily paper. It was founded in 1821 in Manchester, under the original name of *The Manchester Guardian*, and has been printed there until today. It is part of the Guardian Media Group and is owned by the Scott Trust, which purports to secure the independence and values of the newspaper. Along with *The Daily Mail*, it is the

²⁹ Semino, E. (2009). Language in Newspapers. In Culpeper, J., Katamba, F., Kerswill, P., Wodak, R. and McEnery, T. (eds) *English language: description, variation and context*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, p. 444.

³⁰ Fowler, R. (1991). *Language in the news: discourse and ideology in the press*. London: Routledge, p. 10.

most read online as its content is freely available. It presents itself as radical and likes to do differently from others. For example, unlike the other papers, its name is written without space in two separate colors. Its readership is typically represented by social workers and school teachers, in contrast to *The Times*' one, usually composed of businesspeople³¹. In accordance with its leftist ideology, *The Guardian* states on its website: "We want to make the world a better, fairer place. We want to keep the powerful honest. And we believe that doing so means keeping society informed by producing quality, independent journalism, which discovers and tells readers the truth³²". The newspaper boasts about its unique ownership structure that guarantees its full autonomy and freedom –and hence the preservation of democracy. The fact that no owner, shareholder or advertiser is able to have a say and compromise the quality of information is also emphasized.

The Sun, one of the most popular daily tabloids in the United Kingdom –alongside *The Daily Mirror*, *The Daily Mail* and *The Daily Express*– is also the youngest one, as it was founded in 1964. It is owned by the Australian tycoon Rupert Murdoch, which is thereby an influential figure in British public life. *The Sun* is the best-selling tabloid and is inexpensive, but it has the worst reputation for quality. It is right-wing, like the vast majority of the British press: "[s]tudies have shown the U.K. to have the most right-wing press in Europe³³". On its website, *The Sun* publishes a very different statement in comparison to *The Guardian*, by declaring: "Our services are provided by and maintained by us for your personal entertainment, information and communication³⁴". Emphasis is placed before anything else on entertaining the audience. The section of the website called 'Sell Your Story' also highlights the fact that the tabloid's primary objectives are quite far from *The Guardian*'s. *The Sun* states loud and clear that it is always in search of good stories, pictures and videos –whether they are funny, shocking or scandalous– and that it does not hesitate to buy them at a high price. On the website it is also mentioned on several occasions that the tabloid cannot promise that all the information provided in the articles is accurate, and that readers should always verify its exactitude before relying on it.

³¹ Arblaster, P., *op. cit.*

³² Become a Supporter (n.d.). On *The Guardian Online*. Retrieved January 5, 2018, from https://membership.theguardian.com/eu/supporter?INTCMP=gdwnb_copts_memco_internal_supporter_link

³³ Arblaster, P., *op. cit.*, p. 7.

³⁴ Terms and Conditions (2016, June 6). On *The Sun Online*. Retrieved January 5, 2018, from <https://www.thesun.co.uk/terms-and-conditions/>

The New York Times is an American liberal daily paper that was founded in 1851. It is owned by The New York Times Company but has been controlled by the Ochs-Sulzberger family for five generations. It has worldwide influence, has been awarded 122 Pulitzer Prizes and citations, and is one of the most read in the United States. According to its website, “the core purpose of *The New York Times* is to enhance society by creating, collecting and distributing high-quality news and information³⁵”. The newspaper claims that its solid reputation has been built on three main values: fairness, integrity and truth. It also prides itself on embracing diversity and inclusion in hiring staff, and on being committed to protecting the environment: “The Times Company [...] continually strives to minimize and reduce waste and emissions whenever and wherever it is practical and possible to do so. In addition, [...] The New York Times spotlights [the issues of global warming and greenhouse gas emissions] on both its editorial, Op-Ed and Op-Docs pages and throughout its news coverage³⁶”.

The New York Post is an American conservative daily tabloid that was founded in 1801 by Alexander Hamilton, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. It is owned by Rupert Murdoch, which is also the owner of *The Sun* (cf. above). It is one of the nation’s oldest continuously published daily papers. On its website, *The New York Post* asserts that it has been working for over 200 years to uncover and tell its readers stories that shape their world, make them smile and cause them to share. It also emphasizes the modern aspect of the newspaper: “The New York Post has evolved into a national digital brand. Our flagship sites [...] and all of our digital products and social channels, are infused with the flavor and style of the original newspaper, but also purpose-built for the digital age³⁷”. On these websites, the audience is provided with news about all types of topics –whether it is gossip, sports, scandals or even politics– which are purportedly reported “with wit, irreverence and authority³⁸”.

³⁵ Standards and Ethics (n.d.). On *The New York Times Online*. Retrieved January 5, 2018, from <https://www.nytc.com/who-we-are/culture/standards-and-ethics/>

³⁶ Environmental Stewardship (n.d.). On *The New York Times Online*. Retrieved January 5, 2018, from <https://www.nytc.com/social-responsibility/environmental-stewardship/>

³⁷ Careers (n.d.). On *The New York Post Online*. Retrieved January 5, 2018, from <https://nypost.com/careers/>

³⁸ Advertising (n.d.). On *The New York Post Online*. Retrieved January 5, 2018, from <http://advertising.nypost.com/>

CHAPTER 2: NEWS AS ENTERTAINMENT

As mentioned earlier, the catchy headlines and sensationalist content of tabloids –but generally speaking of an increasing number of papers of all kinds– lead a number of people to wonder about the real aims and purposes of journalism and the true intentions of newspapers today. Experts as well as ordinary readers have concerns about the media becoming a source of entertainment and trivial news rather than a valuable tool for understanding what surrounds us and being aware of the significant changes that take place in the world. This chapter discusses the transformation of our society into a place in which amusement and scandal are predominant, but also the business of mass media, which are increasingly blamed for presenting news as an exciting adventure.

2.1 Our society of show and scandal

In order to fathom this phenomenon of ‘news as entertainment’, it is important to realize to which extent our society has evolved over many years to become obsessed by scandals, juicy stories and amusement. In fact, it must be understood that if news media are changing course, it is mainly because they have an audience that is willing to buy and consume the new sort of content that they are offering. The issue thus seems to lie at a deeper level, which is the one of society in general.

As Han explains in his 2017 book *In The Swarm*³⁹, the vertiginous development of technology and digital media is considerably changing our way of thinking, living and acting. Nowadays we do everything based on new technologies, simply because we could no longer imagine a life without them. In a way, we inebriate ourselves with these digital media that obsess us and change our behavior radically, without even realizing the consequences that this may have. For instance, one repercussion is the fact that technological means –and particularly social networks– are destroying the distance and respect that exist between individuals. Etymologically, ‘to respect’ means ‘to look at someone from a certain distance’. However, in our modern society, the standard attitude is very different: since digital media undo physical

³⁹ Han, B.-C. (2014). *En el enjambre*. Barcelona: Heder Editorial.

and mental distances, people are increasingly looking into the lives of others in a curious and intrusive way, as if it were some sort of show. They always want to know the latest news about the private lives of celebrities, the latest natural disaster that occurred or the latest gossip on their neighbors or colleagues. Moreover, in our society of disrespect and indiscretion, negativity often arouses more interest: “bad news is more newsworthy than good news, and can become addictive⁴⁰”. The problem is that respect is fundamental to live in community and to differentiate between private and public life. This lack of distance and these ubiquitous prying eyes provoke an exposure of privacy and a conversion of private affairs into public concerns. Besides, the destruction of respect is arguably intensified by the massive use of anonymous communication on social media. Respect should be, by definition, connected to specific individuals with their name and identity. In the case of anonymity, it is not, which prevents the building of respectful relationships. As a final word, Han concludes that “a society without respect, without *pathos* of distance, leads to a society of scandal⁴¹”.

2.2 News as an adventure

As explained above, the transformation of society that goes along with technological progress has changed the status and function of the media. News is increasingly becoming a source of entertainment and fun, especially among the younger generations. The audience reads news reports as they watch thrilling adventure series, and they are impatiently waiting for the next episode. The problem is that news is not fiction. It concerns real events that occur in our real world. However, this is nothing new; already in 1991, journalist Neal Gabler explicated in an article that “[r]eality has always had a way of challenging fiction and frequently outflanking it. [...] Life itself is gradually being transformed into a medium all its own like television, radio and print. [...] ‘What if the world is some kind of – of show! [...] Suppose entertainment is the Purpose of Life!’⁴²”.

⁴⁰ Aitchison, J., *loc. cit.*, p. 7.

⁴¹ Han, B.-C., *op. cit.*, p. 6. (My translation from Spanish)

⁴² Gabler, N. (1991, October 20). Now Playing: Real Life, the Movie. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/10/20/arts/now-playing-real-life-the-movie.html?pagewanted=all>

A very good example of this phenomenon is given by Semprini in his detailed 2008 analysis⁴³ of the American 24-hour news channel CNN. Launched in 1980, this station has been steadily growing in popularity thanks to the live coverage of major events, such as the Gulf War or the September 11 attacks. Its specialty is providing the public with shocking live images filmed in perilous conditions. The viewers, hard hit by what they see, always ask for more and more. Basically, the information philosophy of CNN comes down to ‘information as an exciting and dangerous adventure’: “l’information du monde contemporain est aventure à l’état pur. Faire de l’information aujourd’hui signifie jouer ensemble aux combattants, et même risquer sa peau. Il s’agit d’un monde dangereux, excitant, émouvant⁴⁴”. And despite numerous criticisms against the channel, accused of reporting information in a skewed way and of overusing live broadcast, CNN did not change its tactics because they are what works best with the audience nowadays.

Although CNN was the trailblazer of this way of covering news, today an increasing number of media are adopting this approach. Print newspapers obviously cannot use the very same techniques as TV channels to appeal to readers, but over the years they have developed their own methods. For instance, they select juicy stories and put eye-catching headlines and pictures on the front page, as mentioned earlier. They also make use of a particular story structure when writing articles, which is very similar to the one used in storytelling, as explained by Aitchinson: “Journalists are the professional story-tellers of our age. [...] New stories have their own conventions⁴⁵”. In order to be effective and competent, all the critical information should be presented from the very beginning of the article: “The opening lines contain the six ‘W/H words’ [...] with which journalists are taught to start newspaper reports: [...] WHO was involved? WHAT happened? WHERE [...] HOW [...] WHY [...] WHEN did it happen? [...] Skilled journalists pack all the vital information into a single sentence⁴⁶”. This narrative configuration of the information and the modern and lively news style –which generally includes cause and effect, villain and hero, beginning, middle and end, and even a moral– produce articles that are attractive, engaging, exciting and reader-friendly.

⁴³ Semprini, A. (2008). *Analyser la communication: comment analyser les images, les médias, la publicité*. Paris: L’Harmattan,

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁴⁵ Aitchison, J., *loc. cit.*, p. 7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Finally, another technique often used by tabloids, which are champions in the field of drawing the audience's attention, is to make news 'fun'. When in her 2007 empirical study⁴⁷, Johansson asked readers what they liked about *The Sun* and *The Daily Mirror*, it emerged that the primary reason for buying the papers is that they make them laugh and are fun to read: "[p]art of this enjoyment was centered on humorous headlines, jokes used in stories and pictures, and a clever deployment of word-games and puns. [...] But the 'fun' here was also derived from the stories themselves⁴⁸".

To summarize, all the aforementioned techniques contribute to a growing perception of news as entertainment or as episodes that one must follow to stay up-to-date with the crazy and gripping adventures of the information world. Nevertheless, Gabler warns that blaming the media for the theatricalization of life is mistaking symptoms for causes⁴⁹. In his view, this phenomenon of life becoming a form of entertainment is a long-running process in which everyone in our society has played a part.

2.3 The business of mass media

The purpose and reason for being of the media are to deal with news and inform the public of what is going on in the world. However, these aims are frequently called into question. Firstly, 'news' is a very relative notion, which refers to a selection of newsworthy events made by editors according to what would supposedly interest their intended audience; as a result, news considerably varies based on the medium⁵⁰. Secondly, in our modern society, one question that often arises is whether the media's main objective is really to inform the public impartially, or rather to make as much profit as possible by selling news. As set out in Section 1.3, the press has been facing a significant crisis for various years, which has been accelerated by the emergence of Internet-related technologies.

Even though most massive media companies have taken measures to face up to these disruptive changes, these seem insufficient to save them from the economic crisis into which

⁴⁷ Johansson, S., *loc. cit.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁴⁹ Gabler, N., *loc. cit.*

⁵⁰ Semino, E., *loc. cit.*, p. 440.

they have been plunged. Publishing newspapers is no longer profitable, especially when readers know that they can have free access to their content online. Although readers' subscriptions exist, they rarely ensure the survival of a paper. For this reason, it is not uncommon to see on some newspapers' website contribution requests that are placed at the end of the articles. They cordially invite readers to financially support the paper to help it continue its activities in the best possible conditions. For example, the following message can be found on *The Guardian's* website:

Since you're here... we have a small favour to ask. More people are reading the Guardian than ever but advertising revenues across the media are falling fast. [...] we need to ask for your help. The Guardian's independent, investigative journalism takes a lot of time, money and hard work to produce. [...] If everyone who reads our reporting, who likes it, helps fund it, our future would be much more secure. For as little as £1, you can support the Guardian – and it only takes a minute. Thank you⁵¹.

As one would expect, though, readers' voluntary contributions are not enough to cover the costs and generate revenues for the papers. And since the principle of freedom of the press must be respected in the United Kingdom and in the United States, media companies can't be subsidized with public money. But then, how do newspapers manage to survive in this dog-eat-dog world?

The economics of newspaper production are a complex compact between publishers, readers, and advertisers. The publisher is selling news to the reader while selling the reader's attention to advertisers. [...] some [papers] survive solely on advertising (Metro being the obvious example). This means that commercial considerations about what would lose advertisers are larger than political considerations about what would anger politicians⁵².

The main customers of mass media would therefore seem to be the advertisers –as also confirmed by Fairclough in his book *Media Discourse*⁵³– but this is not surprising since this economic relationship takes place in broad daylight and advertisements form an integral part of today's media landscape. However, in some cases, it may happen that certain leading figures from the political, economic and social spheres are also customers of the media, when they want to be publicly supported –or at least not attacked– by them. In this case, the economic relationship is “indirect, hidden to the public and shady as to its characteristics, which rarely

⁵¹ Smith, D. (2018, January 10). Trump plays down prospect of special counsel interviewing him about Russia. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jan/10/donald-trump-russia-special-counsel-interview>

⁵² Arblaster, P., *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁵³ Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media discourse*. London: Edward Arnold, pp. 42-43.

are ethical when they're not bordering on illegality or aren't clearly outlawed⁵⁴". Graiño Knobel argues that all these intricate and suspicious relationships make the market of means of communication intrinsically perverse, because they involve alterations in the news and opinions given by the media to their audience. The manipulation of information can be exerted in different ways, as will be discussed in the following chapter. In summary, and paradoxically enough, the receivers of the media's content are far from being their real customers, and in addition to that, they are the 'product' that these media sell to some of their true customers to earn money⁵⁵. The debate thus lies in the fact that the audience is not always aware of its actual status on this market, which calls the ethics and responsibility of the media into question.

⁵⁴ Graiño Knobel, S. (2013, September 16). Medios de comunicación: un mercado intrínsecamente perverso. *BBVA OpenMind*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/medios-de-comunicacion-un-mercado-intrinsecamente-perverso/> (My translation from Spanish)

⁵⁵ Fairclough, N., *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.

CHAPTER 3: MANIPULATION OF INFORMATION BY NEWSPAPERS AND THE MEDIA

In the light of what has just been said, it is safe to say that even when the media appear to report information in the most objective way possible, they always at least slightly manipulate it to a certain extent. This final theoretical chapter discusses the manipulation techniques that are adopted by newspapers and the media in general, and the effects that this manipulation can have on the target audience's mind.

3.1 Techniques of manipulation

Fowler argues that the means of mass communication have a considerable power to influence the opinion of their audience, and to some extent they possess resources to construct part of its reality: “[...] news is an industry with its own commercial self-interest. Thus news is a *practice*: a discourse which, far from neutrally reflecting social reality and empirical facts, intervenes in [...] ‘the social construction of reality’⁵⁶”. The most powerful tool used by the media is undoubtedly language. For instance, the media can present facts with a certain slant or with subjectivity according to their editorial line, particularly by naming or describing people and events with purposely chosen words. They may also simplify, generalize, censor or emphasize information. Getting back to what has been said about the business of mass media, it should be stated that –although the majority of advertisers buy from the media a legitimate advertising space in which they can insert their message, which is clearly identified by the audience as such– in some countries, some advertisers spend a lot of money in order to guarantee a manipulation of the information in their favor:

These manipulations can range from a certain *alteration* in the information processing to its omission or even bald-faced lies. Everything will depend on the ethics of the advertiser and of the medium, on the economic and political power of the entity interested in influencing the audience, on the economic situation of the medium, on the attitude of the journalists of its editorial board, and on the critical capacity of its audience⁵⁷.

⁵⁶ Fowler, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁵⁷ Graiño Knobel, S., *loc. cit.* (My translation from Spanish)

All these strategies constitute a transformation in the presentation of the news, realized according various political, economic and social factors. As Fowler explains, “[...] language [in the press] is not neutral, but a highly constructive mediator⁵⁸”.

Another major source of influence exerted by mass media on public opinion is their ‘agenda setting’ power. It refers to “the capacity of the media to set the public agenda⁵⁹”, that is to say “the list of issues that the public considers important⁶⁰”. They have the ability to select and organize hierarchically the topics that will be debated in the public space, since they can choose to which matters they will give more or less media coverage. It seems obvious that this directly relates to democracy and the exercise of power in a country, because some media may well give more space to the political agenda, which is “the list of issues that politicians consider important⁶¹”, and in this way, neglect other topics that mean a great deal to some citizens. In the end, the reported events are always the result of a selection process carried out using rigorous selection criteria specific to each medium, according to its perception of the interests and priorities of its readership. This selection is naturally “[...] guided by reference, generally unconscious, to ideas and beliefs⁶²”. This means that even if facts are reported objectively by journalists and presented fairly by newspapers, some worldviews and values are always unconsciously reflected in the selection of newsworthy events that has been made to engage the intended audience. Finally, it should be added that in this selection process, shocking, extraordinary and negative events are often the ones that receive more newspaper and television coverage. Although they may be exceptional and isolated cases that rarely occur, they end up on the front page, which gives the audience the impression that they happen much more often than they really do.

The last manipulation method that will be addressed is probably the subtlest and most unconscious one. It will be referred to as ‘continuous information flow’. The media, to achieve their economic objectives, strive to always provide their public with a great quantity of information and content that they consider interesting enough. And with the advent of new technologies and social networks, this abounding information is available to the audience

⁵⁸ Fowler, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Petrone, F. A. (2009) *Estudios de Agenda Setting. Conceptos, metodologías y abordajes posibles*, Buenos Aires: Instituto de Investigaciones Gino Germani, p. 1. (My translation from Spanish)

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3. (My translation from Spanish)

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4. (My translation from Spanish)

⁶² Fowler, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

anywhere and anytime. However, the abundance of news and the fact that it can be consulted in real time arguably leads the public to drown in this flow of unfiltered information and, as a result, people's perception of news is completely weakened. These phenomena may even cause 'Information Fatigue Syndrome', also called 'infobesity', i.e. a psychic disease whose symptoms are namely attentional disturbance, anxiety and incapacity to assume responsibilities⁶³. The symptom of infobesity that interests us the most in this dissertation is the way it can be seen to paralyze our analytical capacity, which is essential to shape our thinking. An excess of information is responsible for atrophying our ability to distinguish between the essential and the superfluous, our sense of judgment and our decisiveness. As analyzed by Han, "at some point, information is no longer informative, but distorting; communication is no longer communicative, but accumulative⁶⁴". Ultimately, this continuous flow of information can be considered as a manipulation technique used by the media –even unknowingly– because it has an impact on the audience's critical thinking and, consequently, on its way of perceiving the news. All that being said, it is important to clarify that the aim here is not to accuse all media of being manipulative, because in many cases these techniques are applied in an unconscious way, as explained above. It does seem essential, however, to raise awareness of the phenomenon of media manipulation, which has various effects on people's minds, as will be discussed in next section.

3.2 Effects of mass media manipulation on people's minds

Firstly, it should be noted that people are not always aware of what is really going on in the media industry. As explained by Fowler, "[...] we have a free Press putting forward various points of views, so the individual has to read carefully and comparatively in order to discount the biases and see through to the truth. [...] but people are not in general trained to see through the veils of media representation, and massive educational advances would be necessary in order to produce significant numbers of critical readers [...]"⁶⁵. Nevertheless, a growing section of the public has started to realize the situation and is increasingly wary of mass media⁶⁶. It only takes a few minutes of Internet surfing to see the many comments of discontented Internet

⁶³ Infobesity (2014). In *Macmillan Dictionary Online*. Retrieved January 10, 2018, from <https://macmillandictionary.com/buzzword/entries/infobesity.html>

⁶⁴ Han, *op. cit.*, p. 42. (My translation from Spanish)

⁶⁵ Fowler, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁶⁶ Graiño Knobel, S., *loc. cit.* (My translation from Spanish)

users complaining about a sensationalist headline or a pointless article, the big number of articles and studies about media manipulation, or even online forums on this subject. This contributes, among others, to the tarnishing of journalists' reputation and prestige, and to a general crisis in the world of communication. Moreover, a large number of newspapers' readers admit to being fed up and feeling depressed because of the media continuously focusing on negative news. According to recent research by British psychologist Graham Davey⁶⁷, constant exposure to pessimistic and violent media may have serious psychological effects on the audience such as stress, anxiety and depression.

Another possible consequence of media manipulation, admittedly less often discussed than the others, is the phenomenon of 'spiral of silence', coined by Noëlle-Neumann in 1974:

Those who, by observing their social environment, have the impression that their opinions and values are acquiring additional weight and rally a growing number of supporters [...] feel strong. [...] Those who, on the other hand, think that their opinions are losing ground, become more cautious and keep silent. [...] And the fact that one group expresses their opinions firmly and the other remains silent, influences the way in which the situation appears to the public. The first group appears to have more supporters than it really does, while the second group gives the impression to have less supporters than it does. This, in turn, leads people to pander to the opinion that seems more solid, while those from the other group become discouraged and may even change their mind. This spiral-shaped process results in one of the group dominating completely public opinion, while in the other group, only a small isolated minority makes itself heard⁶⁸.

This frequently observed outcome is undoubtedly reinforced by the great power of influence of mass media. Given that they have the capacity to highlight certain events, people and opinions at the expense of others, they exert an influence on their audience's mind and on the formation of public opinion. As a conclusion, mass media manipulation can be seen to have a significant impact on the way the audience perceives reality, without their noticing it.

⁶⁷ As cited in Gregoire, C. (2015, February 19). What Constant Exposure To Negative News Is Doing To Our Mental Health. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/19/violent-media-anxiety_n_6671732.html

⁶⁸ Noëlle-Neumann, E. (1995) *La espiral del silencio. Opinión pública: nuestra piel social*, Barcelona: Paidós, pp. 3-4. (My translation from Spanish)

CHAPTER 4: DATA AND METHOD

This chapter pays closer attention to the research questions that this dissertation is attempting to answer, and to the data that have been collected and analyzed. The last section of the chapter focuses on the research method that has been adopted in this study.

4.1 Research questions

The general purpose of this research is to explore the functioning of the mass media in our current context, and more specifically the techniques that they implement to draw the audience's attention and maximize their profits. In order to achieve this objective, the choice has been made to take online newspapers' headlines as attack angle to verify our working hypothesis according to which the media always manipulate the information to a certain extent before it is presented to the public. We will investigate how headlines can be made more attractive, eye-catching and easy to sell without readers noticing. We will conduct a comparative study by contrasting, as a first step, British and American newspapers, and as a second step, tabloids and quality newspapers.

In order to delimit the area of research, more specific research questions have been defined. From the quantitative point of view, we will investigate to what extent there is a difference in the length of headlines from one newspaper to another. After that, through a qualitative approach, we will analyze to what degree the headlines really reflect the content of the articles, and finally, to what extent the language and typography used in the headlines hint at the newspaper's ideology or sales objectives.

4.2 Presentation of the corpus and data

In order to carry out this research, four newspapers have been selected: two British and two American newspapers, with each time one of the two belonging to the tabloid category, and the other one to the quality paper category. The intention is to compare the situation in two English-speaking countries and in two types of press targeting different audiences and pursuing

markedly different objectives. The newspapers that have been selected are respectively *The New York Times* and *The New York Post* for the American press, and *The Guardian* and *The Sun* for the British press; the first one in each case is considered as a quality paper, whereas the second one is regarded as a tabloid. The history, characteristics and political slant of these papers were already discussed in detail in Chapter 1.

With regard to the selection of the articles forming the corpus, the research focused on the news items about the 45th and current President of the United States of America, Donald Trump, his administration and his political decisions. This choice was motivated by the necessity to find one and the same subject that would be covered by the four different newspapers over a fairly long period of time (one entire year). The American President's policy emerged as a judicious choice given that it has an international impact and that it is regularly echoed in the worldwide press. The chosen articles were all written between January 2017 and January 2018, from the moment when Trump took office as President until the celebrations and protests on the occasion of his one-year anniversary as President. A total of 40 articles have been selected; 10 pieces of news on the same subject that have been published in the four different newspapers. They address three different types of topics: political decisions taken by the President, controversial statements that he uttered in public or on social media, and acts committed by American citizens that directly affected him. The headline, date, newspaper and country of origin of each of the articles –classified in chronological order– are included in Table 1. The articles are available for consultation in Appendix A.

Table 1. Corpus of selected articles classified in chronological order

COUNTRY	NEWSPAPER	DATE	HEADLINE
US	The NY Times	1/23/17	Trump Abandons Trans-Pacific Partnership, Obama's Signature Trade Deal
US	The NY Post	1/23/17	Trump withdraws US from Trans-Pacific Partnership
UK	The Guardian	1/23/17	Trump withdraws from Trans-Pacific Partnership amid flurry of orders
UK	The Sun	1/24/17	A DON DEAL Donald Trump pledges much closer relationship with Britain after scrapping landmark Trans Pacific Partnership agreement
US	The NY Times	2/19/17	'Last Night in Sweden'? Trump's Remark Baffles a Nation
US	The NY Post	2/19/17	Swedes ask what Trump's 'smoking' after he cites phony terror attack
UK	The Guardian	2/19/17	'Sweden, who would believe this?': Trump cites non-existent terror attack
UK	The Sun	2/19/17	'WAS IT AL-IKEA?' Donald Trump mercilessly mocked after appearing to invent refugee terror attack in Sweden during Florida rally

US	The NY Times	2/25/17	Trump Plans to Skip White House Correspondents' Association Dinner
US	The NY Post	2/25/17	Trump says he's skipping White House Correspondents' Dinner
UK	The Sun	2/25/17	DON JOURNO SNUB Donald Trump announces he will not be attending the White House Correspondents' Dinner – the first president to pull out EVER
UK	The Guardian	2/26/17	Trump will not attend White House correspondents' dinner
US	The NY Times	3/4/17	Trump Claims Obama Wiretapped Him During Campaign; Obama Refutes It
US	The NY Post	3/4/17	Trump accuses Obama of having 'wires tapped' in Trump Tower
UK	The Guardian	3/4/17	'This is McCarthyism!': Trump accuses Obama of 'wire-tapping' his office before election
UK	The Sun	3/4/17	'THIS IS WATERGATE' Barack Obama denies 'ever ordering surveillance on any US citizen' following bombshell accusations he tapped Donald Trump's phone during US presidential election
US	The NY Times	3/6/17	Trump's New Travel Ban Blocks Migrants From Six Nations, Sparing Iraq
US	The NY Post	3/6/17	Trump signs revised immigration ban
UK	The Guardian	3/6/17	Trump travel ban: new order targeting six Muslim-majority countries signed
UK	The Sun	3/6/17	What is Donald Trump's 'Muslim travel ban', which countries are affected and why has Iraq been removed?
US	The NY Times	6/1/17	Trump Will Withdraw U.S. From Paris Climate Agreement
US	The NY Post	6/1/17	Trump pulls US out of Paris climate deal
UK	The Guardian	6/1/17	Donald Trump confirms US will quit Paris climate agreement
UK	The Sun	6/2/17	'I REPRESENT PITTSBURGH NOT PARIS' Donald Trump pulls US out of Paris climate change agreement and vows to create a 'level playing field' for the American economy
US	The NY Post	7/25/17	Trump orders indefinite ban on transgender troops
US	The NY Times	7/26/17	Trump Says Transgender People Will Not Be Allowed in the Military
UK	The Guardian	7/26/17	Donald Trump says US military will not allow transgender people to serve
UK	The Sun	7/26/17	MILITARY BAN Donald Trump BANS transgender people from the military 'in any capacity because of their tremendous medical costs'
US	The NY Times	1/2/18	Trump Says His 'Nuclear Button' Is 'Much Bigger' Than North Korea's
US	The NY Post	1/2/18	Trump brags to North Korea about the size of his 'nuclear button'
UK	The Guardian	1/3/18	Donald Trump boasts that his nuclear button is bigger than Kim Jong-un's
UK	The Sun	1/3/18	'MINE IS BIGGER THAN YOURS' Donald Trump brags his nuke button is 'bigger and more powerful' than Kim Jong-un's after North Korea missile threat
US	The NY Times	1/4/18	After Trump Seeks to Block Book, Publisher Hastens Release
US	The NY Post	1/4/18	Bombshell tell-all Trump book will be published early
UK	The Guardian	1/5/18	Fire and Fury released early in defiance of attempt to ban tell-all Trump book

UK	The Sun	1/5/18	DON THE SHELVES 'Fire and Fury' book to be released four days EARLY despite Donald Trump's threat to sue
US	The NY Times	1/20/18	Women's March 2018: Protesters Take to the Streets for the Second Straight Year
US	The NY Post	1/20/18	Women's March descends on NYC on anniversary of Trump's inauguration
UK	The Guardian	1/20/18	One year later, thousands return for Women's March with spirits undaunted
UK	The Sun	1/21/18	DUMP TRUMP! Women's March sees tens of thousands of anti-Trump protesters take to the streets calling for US president to be axed on one-year anniversary

The selection of the articles is a critical step in the research and it needs to be done carefully. We started looking for articles on the four newspapers' website in a rather random way, by simply typing the keywords 'Donald Trump' in the search bar. However, the collection of data proved to be quite lengthy and complex for the following reason: in order to conduct the most accurate possible comparative study, the choice had been previously made to keep only the news items tackling the topic at hand from the very same perspective. The selection therefore had to be limited to 40 articles, to give priority to the items of news announcing something that had just happened a few hours earlier, without putting them in a larger context. This means that a whole series of articles had to be rejected as part of this research. For example, some articles issuing new presidential decisions sometimes took the opportunity to make reference to and elaborate on other older topics such as former President Barack Obama, or other events connected to Trump's presidency that had taken place several week or months earlier. Such news items were left out to make way for articles presenting very similar contents. On rarer occasions, a single subject was only addressed in two or three newspapers out of the four, which would not have been suitable for our analysis. Taking the aforementioned criteria into account, it would have been difficult to find more articles to include in our corpus. Nevertheless, the number of 40 articles seems satisfactory to carry out our study.

4.3 Presentation of the research method

In order to analyze the data that have been collected, we will use a two-stage methodology: we will take a quantitative approach before proceeding to the qualitative analysis. First, regarding the quantitative approach, we will examine the number of words in each headline and article, and calculate the average for each newspaper. Then, with respect to the qualitative approach, we will analyze the headlines' linguistic and typographic elements that may

influence the way in which newspapers present the information. In concrete terms, we will: 1° Observe which elements from the articles are included in the headlines, and vice versa; 2° Scrutinize the stereotyped expressions, proverbs and puns that might be hiding in the headlines; 3° Examine the possible relevant typographic differences between the different newspapers' headlines. As explained earlier, this study consists of a double comparison; we will thus explore the differences between American and British newspapers, and then between tabloids and broadsheets. Based on the results of the analysis, we will draw conclusions about the techniques used by online newspapers to make their headlines more attractive. These will form the basis to answer our research questions and ascertain whether the media can be seen to manipulate information in an attempt to attract readers' attention and earn more money.

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Quantitative approach

The first step of this quantitative analysis was to calculate the number of words in each headline and article. These calculations were carried out using a website called *Word Count Tools* (<https://wordcounttools.com/>), and the results were compiled in a table which can be found in Appendix B. It is important to clarify that certain elements present on the article Web page have not been included in the calculations so as to avoid distorted results. For example, the captions underneath the pictures that accompany the article and the highlighted quotes extracted from the text have been left out because, in most cases, they simply repeated what had already been mentioned in another paragraph. Also, there were often advertisements and hyperlinks to other popular and most-read articles, or articles related to the topic in question, located right in the middle of the text or on the right and left sides of the Web page. Such elements have not been taken into account in the calculations either, because they were not deemed relevant for this quantitative study. In summary, only the content of the article as such –i.e. the core text written by the journalist– has been included in the word counts. The average number of words in the headlines and articles of each newspaper was subsequently calculated by means of the *Calculator* online tool (<http://www.calculator.net/>). The results of these calculations appear in Table 2, which focuses on the comparison between British and American papers, and Table 3, which focuses on the comparison between tabloids and quality papers.

Table 2. Average number of words in headlines and articles for each newspaper (focus: countries)

COUNTRY	NEWSPAPER	$\bar{X}$ WORDS HEADLINES	$\bar{X}$ WORDS ARTICLES
US	The NY Times	10.3	1354.7
US	The NY Post	8.8	429.7
		Total $\bar{X}$ = 9.55	Total $\bar{X}$ = 892.2
UK	The Guardian	11.5	1030.5
UK	The Sun	22	825
		Total $\bar{X}$ = 16.75	Total $\bar{X}$ = 927.75

Table 3. Average number of words in headlines and articles for each newspaper (focus: type of paper)

TYPE	NEWSPAPER	$\bar{X}$ WORDS HEADLINES	$\bar{X}$ WORDS ARTICLES
QUALITY	The NY Times	10.3	1354.7
QUALITY	The Guardian	11.5	1030.5
		Total $\bar{X}$ = 10.9	Total $\bar{X}$ = 1192.6
TABLOID	The NY Post	8.8	429.7
TABLOID	The Sun	22	825
		Total $\bar{X}$ = 15.4	Total $\bar{X}$ = 627.35

Table 2 shows that when comparing the two countries, British headlines tend to contain many more words than American ones: on average, they consist of 7.2 more words per headline than in US papers, that is to say 1.75 times more words ($\bar{X}$ UK: 16.75 words vs $\bar{X}$ US: 9.55 words). The longest British headline (1) includes 28 words, while the shortest American headline (2) includes 5 words:

- (1) DUMP TRUMP! Women's March sees tens of thousands of anti-Trump protesters take to the streets calling for US president to be axed on one-year anniversary (*The Sun*, 1/21/18)
- (2) Trump signs revised immigration ban (*The New York Post*, 3/6/17)

It is noteworthy that, if we examine each newspaper individually, *The Sun* has a much higher average score ($\bar{X}$: 22 words per headline) than the other three papers ($\bar{X}$ *The New York Times*: 10.3; $\bar{X}$ *The New York Post*: 8.8; $\bar{X}$ *The Guardian*: 11.5), which certainly explains this marked discrepancy. Concerning the number of words per article, there is not a significant difference: British newspapers still have a tendency to use more words, but only 35,55 more words per article (i.e. 1.03 times more words). According to Flesh and Gunning research⁶⁹, sentences in newspapers generally have a length of 18.5 words. This would mean that British articles only include on average two more sentences than American ones in our data.

Our quantitative analysis yields other interesting results when focusing, this time, on the type of paper. As the following examples illustrate, tabloids seem to typically use headlines that are approximately 1.4 times longer than the ones in quality papers –*The Sun*'s headline (3) contains 18 words, whereas *The New York Times*' headline (4) contains 12:

⁶⁹ As cited in Richaudeau, F. (1969). Les structures des phrases. In *Communication et langages*, n°1. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.

- (3) What is Donald Trump's 'Muslim travel ban', which countries are affected and why has Iraq been removed? (*The Sun*, 3/6/17)
- (4) Trump's New Travel Ban Blocks Migrants From Six Nations, Sparing Iraq (*The New York Times*, 3/6/17)

Yet this finding could once more be skewed by *The Sun*'s particularly lengthy titles, as illustrated once again below (cf. [5]):

- (5) 'I REPRESENT PITTSBURGH NOT PARIS' Donald Trump pulls US out of Paris climate change agreement and vows to create a 'level playing field' for the American economy (*The Sun*, 6/2/17)

The New York Post, the other tabloid under investigation in this study, does not make use of such long headlines; on the contrary, its headlines are 2.5 times shorter than *The Sun*'s ($\bar{X}$ 8.8 words vs $\bar{X}$ 22 words) and contain between 1.5 and 2.7 less words than the broadsheets', which are incidentally of approximate equal length ($\bar{X}$ *The New York Times*: 10.3 words; $\bar{X}$ *The Guardian*: 11.5 words). With respect to the number of words per article, quality newspapers include news reports that contain 1,000 words or more and are on average almost twice the length of tabloid articles ($\bar{X}$ 1192.6 words vs $\bar{X}$ 627.35 words). Nonetheless, this disparity between tabloids and broadsheets is mainly noticeable at American level, with *The New York Times* articles being 3.15 times longer than those in *The New York Post* ($\bar{X}$ 1354.7 words vs $\bar{X}$ 429.7 words). At British level, the difference is not as marked: *The Guardian* includes news reports that contain approximately 1030.5 words, whereas *The Sun*'s articles contain on average 825 words.

In view of the observations set out above, it would be difficult at this stage to draw any general conclusions about the length of headlines and articles in American and British broadsheets and tabloids. It appears at first sight that the observed variations would be the result of individual differences between the papers, rather than specific characteristics of a country or type of newspaper. Each paper arguably has its 'trademark', as it were: *The Sun* gambles on very long headlines and medium length articles, *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* offer quite comprehensive and detailed articles with medium length headlines, and *The New York Post* banks on the 'less is more' mantra by posting very short articles and headlines. However, one of the trends emerging from our analysis confirms the results of other previous studies. In

2005, the nonpartisan American think tank⁷⁰ Pew Research Center published figures revealing that old fashioned broadsheets *do* run longer stories than their tabloid counterparts⁷¹. Their research showed that 99 out of 100 youth tabloid articles contained between 100 and 500 words, while 89 out of 100 broadsheet articles exceeded 501 words, and 32 exceeded 1,000 words. Although these findings apply to print newspapers, it is not unreasonable to assume that they might be similar for online newspapers, because these generally reproduce the content of their print edition, as explained by Smith: “[...] the data suggested that story text may not face additional gatekeeping processes between publication and posting of edition; [...] once newspapers publish stories, that is the way the stories stay in most cases, regardless of the limitless opportunities for updated information online⁷²”. Tabloids’ concise articles were also discussed by Johansson, who points out that these “short, clearly demarcated stories and the common highlighting of particular words or sentences⁷³ [...]” allow readers to quickly select the content that they want to read in snippets. This is also the case of an increasing number of quality newspapers, but this format “[...] is especially encouraged in the popular tabloids⁷⁴” and contributes to their accessibility. Finally, it is interesting to remember that Bastos, mentioned in Section 1.2, maintains that “[...] lengthier texts are staples of the quality press⁷⁵”, whereas “[...] tabloid news articles are on average shorter⁷⁶ [...]”.

5.2 Qualitative approach

The qualitative analysis of this study is divided into three parts. The first part explores the connection between the headlines and the content of the articles. The second section includes a linguistic analysis of the headlines, with particular attention paid to stereotyped expressions, proverbs and puns. The last part examines the typographic elements present in headlines that might be of interest within the framework of our research. For the sake of clarity and rigor, we

⁷⁰ An institute, corporation, or group organized to study a particular subject (such as a policy issue or a scientific problem) and provide information, ideas, and advice. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2018)

⁷¹ Pew Research Center (2005, December 12). *Story Length According to Newspaper Format*. Retrieved from <http://www.journalism.org/numbers/story-length-according-to-newspaper-format/>

⁷² Smith, J. E. (2005). *Content differences between print and online newspapers* (Unpublished Master’s dissertation, University of South Florida). Retrieved from <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1867&context=etd>, pp. 46-47.

⁷³ Johansson, S., *loc. cit.*, p. 88.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Bastos, M. T., *loc. cit.*, p. 2.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

shall each time thoroughly scrutinize each newspaper individually before proceeding to the comparison, with a focus on the countries first and then on the type of newspaper.

5.2.1 Connection between the headlines and the content of the articles

The New York Times (US)

After careful examination of the headlines and the articles in *The New York Times*, it appears that the American paper makes use of factual headlines that fairly accurately reflect the content of the articles. The titles indicate the topic and provide a succinct summary of the stories by compressing the information. The following examples are good illustrations of this phenomenon:

(6) Trump Plans to Skip White House Correspondents' Association Dinner (2/25/17)

(7) Trump Will Withdraw U.S. From Paris Climate Agreement (6/1/17)

The news reports obviously contain far more information than the headline, such as contextualization details or what happened before and after the event. The article connected with headline (6) for instance reports on the long-existing tension between the American President and journalists, the reaction of the Correspondents' Association to Trump's refusal to take part in the dinner, and reminds us of the last time when an American President did not attend it. In the article behind headline (7), Donald Trump's motivations behind his decision to withdraw the US from the Paris Agreement are explained, as well as the mixed and heated reactions from American politicians or important economic actors, such as Al Gore (former American Vice President and climate activist) and Elon Musk (CEO of the electric vehicle manufacturer Tesla). In both cases, the elaboration of the title's content into a long text does not imply a divergence between headline and article. These neutral and factual headlines are to be expected from a quality paper like *The New York Times*, which is internationally regarded as reliable. Interestingly, instances of subjectivity and even a certain aversion for President Trump can be spotted in some rare article sentences. For instance, when it is said that "The [White House Correspondents' Association] dinner [...] features a presidential roast of reporters and a comic routine by a notable entertainer", and that "Presidents are [thus] expected

to be self-deprecating, *which Mr. Trump is decidedly not* [my emphasis]⁷⁷. Or when *The New York Times* claims that “President Trump [boasted] *in strikingly playground terms* [my emphasis] [...] that he commands a « much bigger » and « more powerful » arsenal of devastating weapons that the outlier government in Asia⁷⁸”. Nevertheless, these value judgments –which are inevitable, as explained in Chapter 3– are infrequent and do not show at all through the articles’ headlines.

It is interesting to note that all headlines under study follow the ‘who did/will do what (to whom)’ structure, as can be observed from Table 4:

Table 4. Headlines in *The New York Times*

DATE	HEADLINE
1/23/17	Trump Abandons Trans-Pacific Partnership, Obama’s Signature Trade Deal
2/19/17	‘Last Night in Sweden’? Trump’s Remark Baffles a Nation
2/25/17	Trump Plans to Skip White House Correspondents’ Association Dinner
3/4/17	Trump Claims Obama Wiretapped Him During Campaign; Obama Refutes It
3/6/17	Trump’s New Travel Ban Blocks Migrants From Six Nations, Sparing Iraq
6/1/17	Trump Will Withdraw U.S. From Paris Climate Agreement
7/26/17	Trump Says Transgender People Will Not Be Allowed in the Military
1/2/18	Trump Says His ‘Nuclear Button’ Is ‘Much Bigger’ Than North Korea’s
1/4/18	After Trump Seeks to Block Book, Publisher Hastens Release
1/20/18	Women’s March 2018: Protesters Take to the Streets for the Second Straight Year

The headlines state who was involved –mainly Donald Trump, but also Barack Obama, Trump’s opponents or the publisher of *Fire and Fury*⁷⁹– and what they did. As explained by Conboy, “news actors tend to be placed first in headlines, and Bell [...] has identified the following as the most common: political figure, official/celebrity, sportsperson, professional or other public figure (e.g. lawyer), criminal or accused, human interest figure, participant (e.g. victim or witness)⁸⁰”. Interestingly, the following two headlines contain several subjects:

⁷⁷ Grynbaum, M. M. (2017, February 25). Trump Plans to Skip White House Correspondents’ Association Dinner. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/25/business/media/trump-white-house-correspondents-dinner.html>

⁷⁸ Baker, P., Tackett, M. (2018, January 2). Trump Says His ‘Nuclear Button’ Is ‘Much Bigger’ Than North Korea’s. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/02/us/politics/trump-tweet-north-korea.html>

⁷⁹ *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House* is a 2018 book by Michael Wolff and which, according to Wolff, details the behavior of U.S. President Donald Trump and the staff of his 2016 presidential campaign and White House. (Wikipedia website, 2018)

⁸⁰ Conboy, M. (2007). *The Language of the News*. London: Routledge, p. 15.

- (8) Trump Claims Obama Wiretapped Him During Campaign; Obama Refutes It (3/4/17, my underlining)
- (9) After Trump Seeks to Block Book, Publisher Hastens Release (1/4/18, my underlining)

In headline (8), the presence of two different subjects is explained by the two independent clauses linked by a semicolon⁸¹. In headline (9), the presence of two different subjects is justified by the subordinate adverb clause of time modifying the main clause⁸². Sometimes, headlines also specify who was or will be affected by the actions of the subject(s).

The information referring to the other W/H words (where, how, why, when) is often –but not always– absent from the title, which is not surprising given that it is generally supposed to be found in the lead, i.e. the opening paragraph of the article. The aforementioned ‘who did/will do what (to whom)’ structure directly tells readers what the article is about and may help them decide if it will interest them to read it, or if they would better keep scrolling down. However, the following headline (10) is an exception:

- (10) ‘Last Night in Sweden’? Trump’s Remark Baffles a Nation (2/19/17)

Although the sentence follows the same structure, it does not clearly state what remark could possibly ‘baffle a nation’. Even quoting Trump’s words at the beginning of the headline is not sufficient for the audience to understand what happened exactly, i.e. the American President suggesting that a terrorist attack had taken place in Sweden the day before, while this was inaccurate. The sentence remains vague and might spur readers to click on the article link to know more about it. This instance is the only one indicating an imprecision or small discrepancy between the headline and the article, and therefore hinting at a possible ploy employed by *The New York Times* to glean more clicks.

⁸¹ Using Semicolons (n.d.). On *The Writing Center – University of Wisconsin-Madison* website. Retrieved May 24, 2018 from <https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/Semicolons.html>

⁸² Adverb Clauses (n.d.). On *YourDictionary* website. Retrieved May 24, 2018 from <http://grammar.yourdictionary.com/parts-of-speech/adverbs/adverb-clauses.html>

The New York Post (US)

At first sight, the same sort of conclusions as those for *The New York Times* can be drawn after analyzing the articles' content and titles in *The New York Post*. The American tabloid appears to use factual headlines that sum up the articles' main information in one short sentence. The headlines are highly representative of the information that is provided in the articles. In addition to content, there is also consistency in terms of form: both headlines and articles are customarily concise and precise, without resorting to long contextualization or detailed descriptions. The article about wiretapping (dated March 4, 2017), for instance, limits itself simply to recounting Trump's accusations against his predecessor Obama, and the latter's reaction via his spokesman. It also briefly clarifies where this denunciation comes from, without entering into details (unlike *The New York Times*). The article dealing with the Women's March (dated January 20, 2018) has a somewhat different structure compared to the others: besides describing the protest, it reports the accounts of several demonstrators who explain why they wanted to participate, which for once makes the news report longer and less straight to the point.

As observed above for *The New York Times*, *The New York Post*'s headlines seem to also follow the 'who did/will do what (to whom)' structure as a general rule. Donald Trump is the main subject of the headline in 7 out of 10 cases, as can be seen from Table 5:

Table 5. Headlines in *The New York Post* with Donald Trump as subject (my underlining)

DATE	HEADLINE
1/23/17	<u>Trump</u> withdraws US from Trans-Pacific Partnership
2/25/17	<u>Trump</u> says he's skipping White House Correspondents' Dinner
3/4/17	<u>Trump</u> accuses Obama of having 'wires tapped' in Trump Tower
3/6/17	<u>Trump</u> signs revised immigration ban
6/1/17	<u>Trump</u> pulls US out of Paris climate deal
7/25/17	<u>Trump</u> orders indefinite ban on transgender troops
1/2/18	<u>Trump</u> brags to North Korea about the size of his 'nuclear button'

Out of the 10 headlines under study, three have another sentence subject:

- (11) Women's March descends on NYC on anniversary of Trump's inauguration (1/20/18, my underlining)
- (12) Bombshell tell-all Trump book will be published early (1/4/18, my underlining)
- (13) Swedes ask what Trump's 'smoking' after he cites phony terror attack (2/19/17, my underlining)

The change in structure in headline (12) can likely be explained by the use of the passive voice in order to highlight the object affected by the action, i.e. Michael Wolff's book, which describes the President and his staff during the 2016 presidential campaign. Example (13) is particularly noteworthy: even though it follows the 'who did what' structure (adding the 'when', in this case), this headline differs from those found in *The New York Post* articles investigated here. If we consider that the important piece of information for the audience is the American President referring to a nonexistent terror attack in Sweden, the latter could have been made the subject of the headline in the following manner: 'Trump cites phony terrorist attack in Sweden'. As is clear from (13), the American tabloid decided to highlight the former Swedish foreign minister's reaction (he is reported to have tweeted⁸³: "Sweden? Terror attack? What has he been smoking? Questions abound."⁸⁴) in its headline. This deliberate choice could indicate a potential strategy used by the newspaper to attract readers' attention: these could find the minister's response (i.e. "What has Trump been smoking?") funny or mocking, or assume there is some sort of conflict between the two men. Finally, we shall conclude this paragraph by mentioning a case where *The New York Post* arguably used a vocabulary that is not entirely neutral in one of its headlines (cf. [14]):

- (14) Trump brags to North Korea about the size of his 'nuclear button' (1/2/18, my underlining)

The tabloid uses the verb 'to brag' to refer to the American President posting a tweet in which he argues that he has bigger and more powerful nuclear weapons than his North Korean counterpart. This choice of word is not completely innocent, when we know that this verb means "to talk about your achievements or possessions in a proud way that annoys other

⁸³ To post a message to the Twitter online message service. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2018)

⁸⁴ Carl Bildt. (2017, February 19). Sweden? Terror attack? What has he been smoking? Questions abound [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/carlbildt/status/833219648044855296>

people⁸⁵”. The selection of this term to describe one of Donald Trump’s actions might allude to the American newspaper passing judgement on the President’s ‘boastful’ behavior.

The Guardian (UK)

Our investigation reveals that Donald Trump is the subject of 7 of the 10 headlines, and that the ‘who did/will do what (to whom)’ structure is followed:

Table 6. Headlines in *The Guardian* with Donald Trump as subject (my underlining)

DATE	HEADLINE
1/23/17	<u>Trump</u> withdraws from Trans-Pacific Partnership amid flurry of orders
2/19/17	‘Sweden, who would believe this?’: <u>Trump</u> cites non-existent terror attack
2/26/17	<u>Trump</u> will not attend White House correspondents' dinner
3/4/17	‘This is McCarthyism!’: <u>Trump</u> accuses Obama of ‘wire-tapping’ his office before election
6/1/17	<u>Donald Trump</u> confirms US will quit Paris climate agreement
7/26/17	<u>Donald Trump</u> says US military will not allow transgender people to serve
1/3/18	<u>Donald Trump</u> boasts that his nuclear button is bigger than Kim Jong-un's

In headlines (15) and (16), the subjects are respectively the *Fire and Fury* book and the anti-Trump marchers:

(15) Fire and Fury released early in defiance of attempt to ban tell-all Trump book (1/5/18, my underlining)

(16) One year later, thousands return for Women’s March with spirits undaunted (1/20/18, my underlining)

The remaining non-Trump subject is a presidential executive order (cf. [17]), which is the subject of a passive sentence where the auxiliary has been left out, as is often done in headlines:

(17) Trump travel ban: new order targeting six Muslim-majority countries signed (3/6/17, my underlining)

⁸⁵ Brag (n.d.). In *Macmillan Dictionary Online*. Retrieved April 10, 2018, from <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/brag>

Semino explains that “because of space constraints, [...] any dispensable grammatical words tend to be omitted, such as auxiliary verbs and the definite and indefinite articles. [...] As a result, a significant proportion of headlines are noun phrases or elliptical clauses⁸⁶”. A noun phrase can incidentally be observed at the beginning of the same headline: ‘Trump travel ban’ is a compressed noun phrase “used to cram in information⁸⁷”, and it includes the noun ‘ban’, which is a multi-purpose monosyllable often used by headline-writers⁸⁸. In certain instances, additional elements referring to the other W/H words are present in the headlines. In headline (16), the ‘how’ was provided (‘with spirits undaunted’), whereas in example (18) below, we are given further details on the ‘when’ (‘amid flurry of orders’):

- (18) Trump withdraws from Trans-Pacific Partnership amid flurry of orders (1/23/17, my underlining)

Concerning the connection between the headlines and the articles content as such, we can once again remark that *The Guardian* uses concise and factual titles that reflect the information delivered in the news reports rather faithfully. Notwithstanding these observations, it must be noted that the newspaper employs on a couple of occasions evaluative language to describe situations or actions. Headline (15) contains the expression ‘in defiance of’, which suggests, in accordance with Collins Dictionary’s definition⁸⁹, that the early release of *Fire and Fury* was decided even though the publishing company was aware that it was not allowed to do it. Presenting things in this fashion could be equal to deliberately implying that Henry Holt & Company⁹⁰ expedited the release of their book in order to irritate the American President and his partisans –especially if we consider that this has nothing to do with the explanation provided by the publishing house itself. In the article, it is said that “[...] a spokeswoman for Holt & Co told the Guardian publication in all formats was being brought forward [...] ‘due to unprecedented demand’⁹¹”. The choice of terminology made by the newspaper in this case may suggest an impression of growing tension between the two parties in the eyes of readers, which

⁸⁶ Semino, E., *loc. cit.*, p. 444.

⁸⁷ Aitchison, J., *loc. cit.*, p. 11.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ In defiance of (n.d.). In *Collins Dictionary Online*. Retrieved April 10, 2018, from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/in-defiance-of>

⁹⁰ Publishing house founded in 1866 by Henry Holt and Frederick Leyboldt which publishes literary fiction, history, biography, politics, current events, science, psychology, and mysteries and thrillers. Henry Holt & Company published Michael Wolff’s *Fire and Fury* on 5 January 2018. (Henry Holt & co website, n.d.)

⁹¹ Gambino, L., Smith, D., Siddiqui, S., Helmore, E. (2018, January 4). Fire and Fury released early in defiance of attempt to ban tell-all Trump book. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jan/04/trump-lawyers-book-steve-bannon-white-house>

is not in line with the content of the article. Headline (18) includes the words ‘amid flurry of orders’, which may be interpreted in a pejorative way. According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, ‘flurry’ signifies “a sudden occurrence of many things at once⁹²”. Consequently, calling several president measures a ‘flurry of orders’ –while they are supposed to be critical and well thought out decisions made to ensure the welfare of American citizens– might amount to considering Donald Trump as an impulsive and irrational person who makes important decisions thoughtlessly. Finally, headline (19) comprises the verb ‘to boast’:

(19) Donald Trump boasts that his nuclear button is bigger than Kim Jong-un’s (1/3/18, my underlining)

This illustrates exactly the same phenomenon observed in one of *The New York Post*’s headlines with the verb ‘to brag’ (cf. example [14] and its analysis set out on page 51). In short, it can be argued that *The Guardian*’s point of view and subjectivity are reflected in some of the words included in the articles’ titles.

The Sun (UK)

It is obvious at first sight that the newspaper makes use of a headline style that is dramatically different from the one that we observed in the other three newspapers. As discussed during the quantitative analysis (cf. Section 5.1), *The Sun*’s headlines are typically much longer than those in *The New York Times*, *The New York Post* and *The Guardian*. Besides, it can be seen from the table below that *The Sun* tends to place some kind of small catchphrase in capital letters (e.g. ‘A DON DEAL’, ‘DON JOURNO SNUB’, etc.) at the beginning of the majority of its headlines –9 out of 10, to be precise:

Table 7. Headlines in *The Sun* containing a small catchphrase in capital letters (my underlining)

DATE	HEADLINE
1/24/17	<u>A DON DEAL</u> Donald Trump pledges much closer relationship with Britain after scrapping landmark Trans Pacific Partnership agreement
2/19/17	<u>‘WAS IT AL-IKEA?’</u> Donald Trump mercilessly mocked after appearing to invent refugee terror attack in Sweden during Florida rally
2/25/17	<u>DON JOURNO SNUB</u> Donald Trump announces he will not be attending the White House Correspondents’ Dinner – the first president to pull out EVER

⁹² Flurry (2018). In *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*. Retrieved April 10, 2018, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/flurry>

3/4/17	<u>'THIS IS WATERGATE'</u> Barack Obama denies 'ever ordering surveillance on any US citizen' following bombshell accusations he tapped Donald Trump's phone during US presidential election
6/2/17	<u>'I REPRESENT PITTSBURGH NOT PARIS'</u> Donald Trump pulls US out of Paris climate change agreement and vows to create a 'level playing field' for the American economy
7/26/17	<u>MILITARY BAN</u> Donald Trump BANS transgender people from the military 'in any capacity because of their tremendous medical costs'
1/3/18	<u>'MINE IS BIGGER THAN YOURS'</u> Donald Trump brags his nuke button is 'bigger and more powerful' than Kim Jong-un's after North Korea missile threat
1/5/18	<u>DON THE SHELVES</u> 'Fire and Fury' book to be released four days EARLY despite Donald Trump's threat to sue
1/21/18	<u>DUMP TRUMP!</u> Women's March sees tens of thousands of anti-Trump protesters take to the streets calling for US president to be axed on one-year anniversary

With respect to *The Sun*'s headline structure, it often conforms to the 'who did/will do what (to whom)' pattern, but generally adds quite a lot of information in the form of adverbial phrases of time (see 'after North Korea missile threat' in example [20]) or cause ('because of their tremendous medical costs' in example [21]):

- (20) 'MINE IS BIGGER THAN YOURS' Donald Trump brags his nuke button is 'bigger and more powerful' than Kim Jong-un's after North Korea missile threat (1/3/18, my underlining)
- (21) MILITARY BAN Donald Trump BANS transgender people from the military 'in any capacity because of their tremendous medical costs' (7/26/17, my underlining)

In 6 of the 10 headlines, Donald Trump is the subject:

Table 8. Headlines in *The Sun* with Donald Trump as subject (my underlining)

DATE	HEADLINE
1/24/17	A DON DEAL <u>Donald Trump</u> pledges much closer relationship with Britain after scrapping landmark Trans Pacific Partnership agreement
2/19/17	'WAS IT AL-IKEA?' <u>Donald Trump</u> mercilessly mocked after appearing to invent refugee terror attack in Sweden during Florida rally
2/25/17	DON JOURNO SNUB <u>Donald Trump</u> announces he will not be attending the White House Correspondents' Dinner – the first president to pull out EVER
6/2/17	'I REPRESENT PITTSBURGH NOT PARIS' <u>Donald Trump</u> pulls US out of Paris climate change agreement and vows to create a 'level playing field' for the American economy
7/26/17	MILITARY BAN <u>Donald Trump</u> BANS transgender people from the military 'in any capacity because of their tremendous medical costs'
1/3/18	'MINE IS BIGGER THAN YOURS' <u>Donald Trump</u> brags his nuke button is 'bigger and more powerful' than Kim Jong-un's after North Korea missile threat

In the other cases, Barack Obama, Trump's travel ban, the *Fire and Fury* book and the Women's March are:

Table 9. Headlines in *The Sun* with non-Trump subjects (my underlining)

DATE	HEADLINE
3/4/17	'THIS IS WATERGATE' <u>Barack Obama</u> denies 'ever ordering surveillance on any US citizen' following bombshell accusations he tapped Donald Trump's phone during US presidential election
3/6/17	What is <u>Donald Trump's 'Muslim travel ban'</u> , which countries are affected and why has Iraq been removed?
1/5/18	DON THE SHELVES ' <u>Fire and Fury</u> ' book to be released four days EARLY despite Donald Trump's threat to sue
1/21/18	DUMP TRUMP! <u>Women's March</u> sees tens of thousands of anti-Trump protesters take to the streets calling for US president to be axed on one-year anniversary

The article on the travel ban (dated March 6, 2017) has a question as headline, which is surprisingly the only such case among the total of 40 under investigation in this dissertation.

It is particularly interesting to look into the correlation between the headlines and the content of the articles. The analysis reveals that *The Sun's* headlines reflect the information contained in the articles rather accurately. However, compared with the other papers under investigation here, it often adopts a particular stance that focuses on the crispy details of each story. Moreover, in its headlines *The Sun* tends to use strong and sensationalist terms that might give readers the impression that the news –and thus reality– is more 'spicy' than it really is. Examples are:

- (22) 'WAS IT AL-IKEA?' Donald Trump mercilessly mocked after appearing to invent refugee terror attack in Sweden during Florida rally (2/19/17, my underlining)
- (23) DON JOURNO SNUB Donald Trump announces he will not be attending the White House Correspondents' Dinner – the first president to pull out EVER (2/25/17, my underlining)

In (22), the tabloid's headline highlights the jeering and teasing endured by the American President following his mistake, by using the dramatic and acutely pejorative expression 'mercilessly mocked'. This headline truly represents the content of the article, the latter being a rough summary of all the reactions to his confusion via Twitter⁹³ (from Swedish celebrities

⁹³ Free social networking microblogging service that allows registered members to broadcast short posts called tweets [...] and follow other users' tweets by using multiple platforms and devices. (TechTarget website, 2018)

and anonymous people). However, it is noteworthy that *The Sun* deliberately chose this angle of approach and put this kind of information at the center of its article, while this kind of mocking towards Trump on the social network is in fact quite common. The same goes for (23): the tabloid's headline relies heavily on the fact that the President is breaking a long-standing tradition by not attending the Dinner. It emphasizes this aspect by preceding it with a long dash and capitalizing the word 'ever'. Once again, *The Sun* is adopting a different position to that of the other newspapers in its headlines, most likely to make the information look juicier and attract the audience's attention.

The British tabloid uses in some of the aforementioned headlines vocabulary that hints at its perspective on the information that it is providing. Headline (20) on page 55 brings us back to the depreciative use of the verbs 'to brag' and 'to boast' by *The New York Post* and *The Guardian* in their own headline about this nuclear affair. Headline (22) on the previous page includes the verb 'to invent' to refer to Donald Trump's mistake, while the other newspapers only mentioned a 'remark' or the American President 'citing' a nonexistent terrorist act. Using this term could subtly make Trump look like a mythomaniac who tells lies during his political speeches. We can therefore conclude that *The Sun*'s language is not always neutral.

Comparison of the four newspapers

To conclude this section, a comparison is drawn between the four newspapers. First, **at the country level**, we notice that the two American newspapers, *The New York Times* and *The New York Post*, have many things in common: they both use factual headlines that accurately reflect the content of their articles, and generally follow the same pattern regarding the information that is provided in the headline (i.e. 'who did/will do what [to whom]'). Moreover, we found for both newspapers one headline out of 10 that was ambiguous and more likely to draw the audience's attention. In both cases we also detected evaluative words reflecting a certain degree of subjectivity (i.e. 'which Mr. Trump is decidedly not', 'in strikingly playground terms', 'brags'). Having said this, there was a difference at that level between the two papers: these words were found in the articles only in *The New York Times*, while they were present in both the articles and the headlines in *The New York Post*. As regards the British newspapers, they both tend to use accurate headlines that are in line with the information contained in the articles, and these headlines generally follow the abovementioned informational structure. However,

The Sun uses much longer headlines providing circumstantial information (e.g. about time, cause, etc.). The greatest difference observed between the two British papers was the fact that *The Guardian* sometimes uses slightly judgmental language in its headlines (i.e. ‘in defiance of’, ‘boasts’) while *The Sun* sometimes resorts to downright strong and sensationalist terms (i.e. ‘mercilessly mocked’, ‘EVER’) and often highlights the crispy details of the articles in its headlines. If we compare American and British newspapers from a broader perspective, we could say that *The New York Times*, *The New York Post* and *The Guardian* are generally similar when it comes to headline structure and headline-article coherence, with *The New York Times* slightly standing out from the other two, as it appears to be more objective. *The Sun*, our fourth and last newspaper, differentiates itself given its more biased and sensationalist approach to news both in its headlines and in its articles. **When contrasting quality papers and tabloids**, a rather surprising conclusion emerges: *The New York Post*, considered a tabloid from the beginning of our study, seems to display the same characteristics as quality papers: they opt for article-headline consistency and factual headlines, and their opinion only shows through a few equivocal words or expressions. *The Sun*’s headlines, on the other hand, betray the tabloid’s views more acutely by means of emotionally-charged vocabulary and a peculiar approach to news. It is noteworthy that all four newspapers display elements of subjectivity (to varying degrees), which suggests that complete objectivity is unattainable, no matter the type of newspaper or its publishing country (cf. Chapter 3).

5.2.2 Linguistic analysis of the headlines

Before examining the use of expressions, proverbs and puns in the newspaper headlines, it is worth pointing out some **register differences** that have been observed between the papers. A close examination of the 40 headlines shows that some papers tend to use more informal words than others. The most representative example of this is the British tabloid *The Sun*.

The Sun (UK)

As indicated in Table 10, we noticed on four occasions the use of **informal terms**, respectively two verbs (cf. ‘scrapping’ and ‘axed’), one noun (cf. ‘JOURNO’) and one adjective (cf. ‘nuke’):

Table 10. Informal terms in *The Sun*’s headlines (my underlining)

DATE	HEADLINE
1/24/17	A DON DEAL Donald Trump pledges much closer relationship with Britain after <u>scrapping</u> landmark Trans Pacific Partnership agreement
1/21/18	DUMP TRUMP! Women’s March sees tens of thousands of anti-Trump protesters take to the streets calling for US president to be <u>axed</u> on one-year anniversary
2/25/17	DON <u>JOURNO</u> SNUB Donald Trump announces he will not be attending the White House Correspondents’ Dinner – the first president to pull out EVER
1/3/18	‘MINE IS BIGGER THAN YOURS’ Donald Trump brags his <u>nuke</u> button is ‘bigger and more powerful’ than Kim Jong-un’s after North Korea missile threat

The verb ‘to scrap’ is, according to the online *WordReference Dictionary*⁹⁴, a figurative and informal term meaning ‘abandon’. The verb ‘to axe’ is a figurative and informal alternative to the expression “to fire from a job”⁹⁵. In connection with this verb, Semino explains that it is one of the “conventional metaphorical expressions [that] are used in [...] headlines to increase their impact⁹⁶”. The British tabloid also uses the word ‘JOURNO’, which is, according to the *Macmillan Dictionary*⁹⁷, a very informal noun that means ‘journalist(s)’. Finally, the informal term ‘nuke’ (referring to ‘nuclear missile’⁹⁸) is used here as an adjective modifying the noun ‘button’. In addition to all this, it is interesting to note that *The Sun* employs the short form ‘DON’ to refer to Donald Trump on two occasions (cf. ‘A DON DEAL’ and ‘DON JOURNO SNUB’). This practice in itself can be characterized as highly informal, bearing in mind that it is quite unconventional and against protocol to call the President of one of the most powerful countries on Earth by a familiar nickname. It is unclear whether the tabloid is making fun of Trump, and if giving him this nickname is kind of sarcastic and ironic. However, Semino

⁹⁴ Scrap (2018). In *WordReference Dictionary Online*. Retrieved April 22, 2018, from <http://www.wordreference.com/enfr/scrap>

⁹⁵ Axe (2018). In *WordReference Dictionary Online*. Retrieved April 22, 2018, from <http://www.wordreference.com/enfr/axe>

⁹⁶ Semino, E., *loc. cit.*, p. 445.

⁹⁷ Journo (n.d.). In *Macmillan Dictionary Online*. Retrieved April 22, 2018, from <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/journo>

⁹⁸ Nuke (2018). In *WordReference Dictionary Online*. Retrieved April 22, 2018, from <http://www.wordreference.com/enfr/nuke>

reports us that in some headlines, the first names of celebrities such as political figures can be “shortened to monosyllabic nicknames [...] so that they form a symmetrical structure⁹⁹” with the words surrounding them. This may well be the case for the examples set out above, given that the nickname ‘DON’ is in both cases followed by short words not exceeding two syllables. One last interesting thing to mention with regard to *The Sun* is that the structure ‘DON JOURNO SNUB’ (cf. headline dated February 25, 2017) is made up of “heaped up nouns¹⁰⁰”. According to Aitchison, “noun sequences of [this] type [...] are common in newspapers today. They are a British post-1960s pattern and tend to confuse foreigners [...]. Yet speakers of British English are in no doubt [...]. Headlines have an internal structure which allows habitual newspaper readers to interpret them without difficulty¹⁰¹”.

The New York Post (US)

It is noteworthy that the choice to use **informal words** is also found in the American tabloid *The New York Post*, as evidenced by the following headlines:

Table 11. Informal terms in *The New York Post*’s headlines (my underlining)

DATE	HEADLINE
2/19/17	Swedes ask what Trump’s ‘smoking’ after he cites <u>phony</u> terror attack
2/25/17	Trump says he’s <u>skipping</u> White House Correspondents’ Dinner

According to the *WordReference Dictionary*, the word ‘phony’ is an informal adjective that means ‘not real, fake’¹⁰². As for the verb ‘to skip’, it is an informal term signifying ‘not attend, miss’.

⁹⁹ Semino, E., *loc. cit.*, p. 445.

¹⁰⁰ Aitchison, J., *loc. cit.*, p. 14.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Phony (2018). In *WordReference Dictionary Online*. Retrieved April 22, 2018 from <http://www.wordreference.com/enfr/phony>

The New York Times (US) and The Guardian (UK)

The penchant for using colloquial words in headlines seems to be characteristic of tabloids; nonetheless, this does not preclude quality papers from doing the same on rarer occasions. We noted one single occurrence of **informal term** among our two quality newspaper headlines. It can be found in example (6), already mentioned in Section 5.2.1 and extracted from an article in *The New York Times* online edition:

- (6) Trump Plans to Skip White House Correspondents' Association Dinner (2/25/17, my underlining)

The American quality paper makes use of the verb 'to skip', as did the tabloid *The New York Post* in its article on the same topic. In brief, colloquial terms are not limited to tabloids only, even if the latter use them more frequently than quality papers do.

We will now pay closer attention to the **puns, proverbs and stereotyped expressions** that might be hiding in the headlines of the four newspapers under study. As mentioned earlier, these are quite common due to the fact that newspaper headlines need to be highly communicative while using very little space¹⁰³.

The Sun (UK)

Based on our observations, it would appear that *The Sun* is particularly fond of making a **play on words** and using **common sayings** in order to increase the appeal of its headlines. Out of the 10 headlines under study, we pinpointed three examples of puns, which are in the form of a catchphrase at the beginning of the headline, and which are displayed in Table 12:

Table 12. Puns and common sayings in *The Sun*'s headlines (my underlining)

DATE	HEADLINE
1/24/17	<u>A DON DEAL</u> Donald Trump pledges much closer relationship with Britain after scrapping landmark Trans Pacific Partnership agreement

¹⁰³ Conboy, M., *op. cit.*, p. 15.

1/3/18	<u>‘MINE IS BIGGER THAN YOURS’</u> Donald Trump brags his nuke button is ‘bigger and more powerful’ than Kim Jong-un’s after North Korea missile threat
1/5/18	<u>DON THE SHELVES</u> ‘Fire and Fury’ book to be released four days EARLY despite Donald Trump’s threat to sue

The first instance includes a pun that is readily identifiable: the phrase ‘A DON DEAL’ is none other than a reference to the famous expression ‘it’s a done deal’, which means that “something [...] has already been decided and cannot be changed¹⁰⁴”. The second headline contains a well-known and popular sentence –often used by children when they bicker– which illustrates the quarrel between the American and North Korean head of states about nuclear weapons. According to the *Urban Dictionary*¹⁰⁵, ‘mine is bigger than yours’ is also frequently uttered by some teenage boys when they go through a period of obsession with their penis, and feel the need to constantly brag about the size of their genital organ and compare it with that of others. It goes without saying that placing this sentence at the start of the headline to describe the squabble between the two men is not an innocent choice. The last example includes a play on words that might not be so obvious, and remains first and foremost the result of our own interpretation. The phrase ‘DON THE SHELVES’ consists of two parts: ‘Don’, which likely alludes to Donald Trump, and ‘the shelves’, which presumably refers to the paragraph of the article stating that “the book will hit the shelves at 9am Eastern Time [...]”¹⁰⁶. A more detailed look at this phrase reveals that it may very well mean ‘fill the shelves’, with the word ‘don’ being in this case none other than the English verb signifying ‘to put on a piece of clothing¹⁰⁷’. Usually, this mainly literary verb is solely employed to talk about clothes. Nevertheless, in this particular case, its presence might reveal a pun crafted by the British tabloid.

After analyzing these examples, it is also worth noting that some catchphrases in *The Sun*’s headlines are actually play on words that were used by other protagonists quoted in the articles. By way of example, let us examine Table 13:

¹⁰⁴ Done deal (n.d.). In *Macmillan Dictionary Online*. Retrieved April 22, 2018, from <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/done-deal>

¹⁰⁵ Dickness (2010). In *Urban Dictionary Online*. Retrieved April 22, 2018, from <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Dickness>

¹⁰⁶ Hodge, M., Vonow, B. (2018, January 5). DON THE SHELVES ‘Fire and Fury’ book to be released four days EARLY despite Donald Trump’s threat to sue. *The Sun*. Retrieved from <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/5270490/donald-trump-book-michael-wolff-fire-and-fury-lawyer-release/>

¹⁰⁷ Don (n.d.). In *Macmillan Dictionary Online*. Retrieved April 22, 2018, from https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/don_1

Table 13. Puns in *The Sun*'s headlines coined by other protagonists (my underlining)

DATE	HEADLINE
2/19/17	<u>'WAS IT AL-IKEA?'</u> Donald Trump mercilessly mocked after appearing to invent refugee terror attack in Sweden during Florida rally
1/21/18	<u>DUMP TRUMP!</u> Women's March sees tens of thousands of anti-Trump protesters take to the streets calling for US president to be axed on one-year anniversary

The catchphrase 'WAS IT AL-IKEA?' is a reference to the following message, posted by Swedish model Ines Helene on Twitter on the day after Donald Trump's confusion (and *before* the publication of *The Sun*'s article¹⁰⁸): "BREAKING: Terror organi[z]ation Al-IKEA has claimed responsibility for the terrorist attacks that occurred last night in Sweden¹⁰⁹". The term "Al-IKEA" is a pun –likely created by the model– which mixes up two references linked to common knowledge: on the one hand, Al-Qaeda, "a radical Islamic organization operating through an international network of secrets cells [that] has been responsible for many acts of terrorism¹¹⁰", and on the other, IKEA, "a Swedish company started in 1943 by Ingvar Kampard which makes and sells simple, well-designed furniture and other things for the home at low prices¹¹¹". In the second example, the catchphrase 'DUMP TRUMP!' is actually one of the many slogans chanted and displayed on placards by the demonstrators during the Women's March, as can be seen on the picture below:

Figure 1. Demonstrator carrying a placard during the Women's March on 20 January 2018



© The Sun

¹⁰⁸ Ines Helene posted her tweet at 4:20 am (local time in Sweden, UTC+2), whereas *The Sun* published its article at 3:28 pm (local time in the United Kingdom, UTC +1).

¹⁰⁹ Ines Helene. (2017, February 19). BREAKING: Terror organisation Al-IKEA has claimed responsibility for the terrorist attacks that occurred last night in Sweden. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/inihelene>

¹¹⁰ Al Qaeda (n.d.). In *Collins Dictionary Online*. Retrieved April 22, 2018, from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/al-qaeda>

¹¹¹ Ikea (n.d.). In *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries Online*. Retrieved April 22, 2018, from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/ikea>

This phrase echoes the Dump Trump Effort, a movement mainly active in 2016 and aimed at convincing Republicans to push aside Donald Trump when he was still a candidate for the presidency¹¹². This movement assembles more than 18,000 people, to mention just the Facebook¹¹³ page. It should be noted in passing that the catchphrase ‘DUMP TRUMP!’ displays a stylistic device, which is a feminine rhyme¹¹⁴. Even though these two catchphrases are not strictly speaking an invention of *The Sun*, the very act of reusing them and placing them at the beginning of its headlines is not without significance; they are probably used to draw readers’ attention.

The New York Times (US), The New York Post (US) and The Guardian (UK)

As for the other three newspapers under study, we have not noticed **any play on words or expression** in particular in the headlines under investigation here. They tend to be factual and sober, which could mean that they are less inclined to catch the audience’s eye by means of colloquialisms. We detected the presence of a **familiar phrase** in only one of *The New York Post*’s headlines, already mentioned in Section 5.2.1:

- (13) Swedes ask what Trump’s ‘smoking’ after he cites phony terror attack (2/19/17, my underlining)

According to *The Phrase Finder* website, the question ‘what are they smoking?’ is “a humorous slang expression of disbelief or amazement that refers to the practice of smoking drugs¹¹⁵ [...]”. The *Urban Dictionary* specifies that it is usually asked jokingly “to show the stupidity of a statement or action made by another person¹¹⁶”. However, in this case, the American tabloid is not behind the use of this phrase in this context, but it borrowed the words written by former Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt in a tweet on 18 February 2017.

¹¹² Flitter, E. (2016, March 4). Republican ‘Dump Trump’ effort struggles to gain traction. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-republicans-idUSMTZSAPEC34HTO55S>

¹¹³ Popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and videos, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues. (TechTarget website, 2018)

¹¹⁴ Examples of Rhyme (n.d.). On *Your Dictionary Online*. Retrieved May 23, 2018, from <http://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-rhyme.html>

¹¹⁵ What are they smoking? (2003). In *The Phrase Finder Online*. Retrieved April 22, 2018, from https://www.phrases.org.uk/bulletin_board/21/messages/300.html

¹¹⁶ What are you smokin? (2006). In *Urban Dictionary Online*. Retrieved April 22, 2018, from <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=what%20are%20you%20smokin%3F>

Comparison of the four newspapers

To complete this linguistic analysis, we shall now compare our four newspapers with one another. First, **when comparing countries**, it emerges that the two American newspapers share some characteristics. Both papers do not make much use of informal terms in their headlines: only one word for *The New York Times* (i.e. ‘skip’), and two words for *The New York Post* (i.e. ‘phony’, ‘skipping’), out of a total of respectively 103 and 88 words (cf. Appendix B). It also appears that the two American papers do not resort to puns, expressions or proverbs; the tabloid confines itself to displaying a familiar phrase written by someone else in quotation marks in one of its headlines (i.e. “Swedes ask what Trump’s ‘smoking’ [...]”). With regard to British newspapers, it can be argued that *The Guardian* and *The Sun* use dramatically different approaches. While the quality paper opts for a rather formal and ‘no-frills’ style, without any familiar word, colloquialism or play on words, the tabloid does just the opposite: in its headlines, it repeatedly employs colloquial terms (i.e. ‘axed’, ‘nuke’) and common sayings (i.e. ‘mine is bigger than yours’), allows itself to shorten the American President’s first name (cf. ‘DON’), and plays many word games (e.g. ‘A DON DEAL’) –when it does not borrow them from other people (e.g. ‘DUMP TRUMP!’). Secondly, **when comparing the two types of newspapers (tabloids vs quality papers)**, we observed that tabloids tend to use a more informal register and to insert puns and familiar expressions in their headlines more often than quality papers do. Yet, in view of the characteristics that have been pointed out, we cannot fail to reiterate that the American tabloid *The New York Post* seems to once again line up with the two quality papers.

5.2.3 Typographic analysis of the headlines

The New York Times (US)

First, *The New York Times* uses the same style in all its headlines: they are written in black, bold and italics in a font named *Cheltenham*. The American newspaper has a distinctive feature: it is the only paper that capitalizes the first letter of every single word of its headlines, except for the following six words: the indefinite article ‘a’, the preposition ‘in’, the preposition ‘for’, the definite article ‘the’, the infinitive marker ‘to’ and the preposition ‘to’. Below is an example hereof:

Figure 2. Headline in *The New York Times* (1/20/2018)

Women's March 2018: Protesters Take to the Streets for the Second Straight Year

© The New York Times

This comes from a conventional grammatical rule called ‘title case’ according to which all important words in titles should be capitalized. Nowadays, this convention is rather out of fashion and “most academic journals and standard referencing systems, for instance, prefer what is known as ‘sentence case’, with a single initial capital¹¹⁷”. We also noticed the presence of simple quotation marks¹¹⁸ in two headlines of *The New York Times*. These are used to inform the reader that certain words spoken or written by someone else –i.e. one of the article’s protagonists– have been inserted in the headline in the form of a quotation, as shown in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3. Headline in *The New York Times* (1/2/2018)

Trump Says His ‘Nuclear Button’ Is ‘Much Bigger’ Than North Korea’s

© The New York Times

The New York Post (US)

Secondly, *The New York Post* exhibits the same design for the 10 headlines in our data: a classic print type very similar to the *Helvetica* font, always in black color and boldfaced. Contrary to *The New York Times*, the American tabloid uses capital letters exclusively when it is required by general English capitalization rules: in other words, in our case, for the very first word of the sentence, for proper nouns and for acronyms¹¹⁹. Figure 4 illustrates this last point:

¹¹⁷ Capital Letters: A Usage Guide (n.d.). On *SkillsYouNeed* website. Retrieved May 23, 2018 from <https://www.skillsyouneed.com/write/capital-letters.html>

¹¹⁸ Inverted commas/Quotation marks (n.d.). In *Oxford Dictionaries Online*. Retrieved May 23, 2018, from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/punctuation/inverted-commas-quotation-marks>

¹¹⁹ Capitalization Rules (n.d.). On *GrammarBook* website. Retrieved May 23, 2018, from <https://www.grammarbook.com/punctuation/capital.asp>

Figure 4. Headline in *The New York Post* (1/20/2018)

Women's March descends on NYC on anniversary of Trump's inauguration

© The New York Post

As far as quotation marks are concerned, *The New York Post* makes use of them for the same reason as *The New York Times*, that is to say to quote the words of other people, as shown in Figure 5:

Figure 5. Headline in *The New York Post* (3/4/2017)

Trump accuses Obama of having 'wires tapped' in Trump Tower

© The New York Post

The Guardian (UK)

Thirdly, observations similar to the ones mentioned above can be made for *The Guardian*. The British quality paper keeps the same style for the 10 headlines that were analyzed: it uses a font called *Guardian Egyptian* in black type, without recourse to bold or italic type. Just like *The New York Post*, *The Guardian* only resorts to uppercase letters for reasons of grammatical consistency, as can be seen from Figure 6:

Figure 6. Headline in *The Guardian* (6/1/2017)

Donald Trump confirms US will quit Paris climate agreement

© The Guardian

Like the other two newspapers discussed above and as illustrated in Figure 7, *The Guardian* uses simple quotation marks to introduce the words of other people in its headlines:

Figure 7. Headline in *The Guardian* (2/19/2017)

'Sweden, who would believe this?': Trump cites non-existent terror attack

© The Guardian

The Sun (UK)

Fourthly and lastly, *The Sun* uses the same typographic style for all the headlines analyzed here. This style has some distinctive features in comparison with the other three newspapers'. It is composed of **two parts**: one short catchphrase, followed by the headline itself. Both the catchphrase and the headline are written in a bold print type very similar to the *Geneva* font. The catchphrase is always written in light-blue block capitals, while the headline is written in black lowercase letters (cf. Figure 8):

Figure 8. Headline in *The Sun* (1/6/2018)

DON THE SHELVES 'Fire and Fury' book to be released four days **EARLY** despite Donald Trump's threat to sue

© The Sun

Exceptions to this rule appear when a video is positioned on a black background between the headline and the text of the article, as shown on Figure 9 below. For obvious reasons of readability, the headline appears in white in those cases.

Figure 9. Headline in *The Sun* (6/2/17)

'I REPRESENT PITTSBURGH NOT PARIS' Donald Trump pulls US out of Paris climate change agreement and vows to create a 'level playing field' for the American economy

© The Sun

It is noteworthy that the use of simple quotation marks is more widespread among *The Sun*'s headlines than any other newspapers': in 7 out of 10 cases to be precise (cf. Table 14), whereas *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* resort to them in only two of their headlines, and *The New York Post* in three.

Table 14. Headlines in *The Sun* with words enclosed in simple quotation marks

DATE	HEADLINE
2/19/17	'WAS IT AL-IKEA?' Donald Trump mercilessly mocked after appearing to invent refugee terror attack in Sweden during Florida rally
3/4/17	'THIS IS WATERGATE' Barack Obama denies 'ever ordering surveillance on any US citizen' following bombshell accusations he tapped Donald Trump's phone during US presidential election
3/6/17	What is Donald Trump's 'Muslim travel ban', which countries are affected and why has Iraq been removed?
6/2/17	'I REPRESENT PITTSBURGH NOT PARIS' Donald Trump pulls US out of Paris climate change agreement and vows to create a 'level playing field' for the American economy
7/26/17	MILITARY BAN Donald Trump BANS transgender people from the military 'in any capacity because of their tremendous medical costs'
1/3/18	'MINE IS BIGGER THAN YOURS' Donald Trump brags his nuke button is 'bigger and more powerful' than Kim Jong-un's after North Korea missile threat
1/5/18	DON THE SHELVES 'Fire and Fury' book to be released four days EARLY despite Donald Trump's threat to sue

In addition, it is interesting to note that the British tabloid does not make use of these quotation marks for precisely the same reasons as the other papers. Most of the time, it is well and truly about quoting another person, as do the other three newspapers. However, the quotation marks appear to have a **different function** in some headlines, as is illustrated in the following three examples (headlines [3] and [20] have already been mentioned above, respectively in Section 5.1 and in Section 5.2.1):

- (3) What is Donald Trump's 'Muslim travel ban', which countries are affected and why has Iraq been removed? (3/6/17, my underlining)
- (20) 'MINE IS BIGGER THAN YOURS' Donald Trump brags his nuke button is 'bigger and more powerful' than Kim Jong-un's after North Korea missile threat (1/3/18, my underlining)
- (24) DON THE SHELVES 'Fire and Fury' book to be released four days EARLY despite Donald Trump's threat to sue (1/5/18, my underlining)

In example (3), the utilization of quotation marks with the noun phrase 'Muslim travel ban' can be explained by the fact that *The Sun* mentions a nickname that has been given to an

executive order issued by Donald Trump. It is not the genuine name of ‘Executive Order 13769’, which is in fact titled ‘Protecting The Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into The United States’¹²⁰. By resorting to quotation marks, the tabloid probably wants to signal that this phrase is the one that people generally use to refer to this executive order. In example (20), the popular expression ‘MINE IS BIGGER THAN YOURS’ is placed in quotation marks. Once again, these are used for other purposes given that the American President did not write this exact sentence in his tweet –unlike the words ‘bigger and more powerful’, of which he is the author and which are enclosed by quotation marks straight after. In this case, the quotation marks seemingly highlight the fact that the expression ‘MINE IS BIGGER THAN YOURS’ is a well-known colloquialism. Finally, in example (24), the use can be explained by *The Sun*’s desire to emphasize the title of the book. One last headline (already referred to in Section 5.1) needs mentioning in connection with the use of quotation marks:

- (1) DUMP TRUMP! Women’s March sees tens of thousands of anti-Trump protesters take to the streets calling for US president to be axed on one-year anniversary (1/21/18, my underlining)

In this very case, it is the absence of quotation marks that might be of some interest for our analysis. As mentioned in Section 5.2.2, ‘DUMP TRUMP!’ is a famous slogan used by demonstrators during the Women’s March, which took place on 20 January 2018 and protested Donald Trump and his administration’s policies. Bearing this in mind, it seems surprising that *The Sun* did not place this catchphrase between quotation marks, as it usually does with words uttered by protagonists in its articles. It is an open question whether it is a deliberate choice justified for specific reasons, or simply an inconsistency caused by carelessness.

Our analysis has also shed light on a peculiar phenomenon that was only observed in *The Sun*: it is the only paper that stresses certain words by writing them in **capital letters**. We are not speaking here of the uppercase catchphrases at the beginning of each headline –which we have previously referred to– but rather of specific words that are intentionally emphasized with regard to other lowercase words. Consider the following examples:

¹²⁰ Trump, D. (2017, March 6). Executive Order Protecting The Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into The United States. Retrieved from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states-2/>

Table 15. Headlines in *The Sun* with words emphasized with capital letters (my underlining)

DATE	HEADLINE
2/25/17	DON JOURNO SNUB Donald Trump announces he will not be attending the White House Correspondents' Dinner – the first president to pull out <u>EVER</u>
7/26/17	MILITARY BAN Donald Trump <u>BANS</u> transgender people from the military 'in any capacity because of their tremendous medical costs'
1/5/18	DON THE SHELVES 'Fire and Fury' book to be released four days <u>EARLY</u> despite Donald Trump's threat to sue

This method does not go unnoticed because it is directly related to the topic under study: writing these words in block letters undoubtedly aims to attract readers' attention to them. Given the choice of words that have been highlighted, it could be argued that the tabloid is trying to make the headline information more shocking or surprising than it is. Furthermore, typographic choices of this type are more significant than it seems, because they are "the most immediate form of rhetorical device¹²¹". As stated by Conboy, newspapers can subtly indicate through typography their editorial stance, what they consider important –and thereby also what the audience should consider important and worthy of attention. Interestingly, *The Sun* is the only one of the three newspapers to use this technique.

Comparison of the four newspapers

To conclude our typographic analysis of the newspaper headlines, a comparison is made between the four papers. First, **at the country level**, we notice that the two American newspapers display a similar typographic style. *The New York Times* and *The New York Post* opt for black bold headlines and use quotation marks to cite other people from time to time (e.g. 'nuclear button', 'wires tapped'). However, they have different fonts and a different way of using capital letters. The two British newspapers have completely different headline typographic styles. *The Guardian* uses black headlines (without italics or bold type), capital letters exclusively when required by grammatical rules and some rare quotation marks to cite Trump's words. *The Sun*, on the other hand, uses bold characters, combines blue and black colors, alternates between upper- and lowercase letters to stress certain words (e.g. 'BANS', 'EARLY'), and uses a large amount of quotations for a variety of reasons. Concerning the **comparison between quality papers and tabloids**, the findings are in line with the ones

¹²¹ Conboy, M., *op. cit.*, p. 74.

discussed above. *The New York Post* once again seems to roughly conform to the quality papers' typography, i.e. a rather sober style resorting once in a while to a quotation to illustrate what is being said in the article. *The Sun* exhibits more extravagant and showy features, which arguably reflects its intention to draw the audience's eye. Finally, **when comparing all the newspapers with one another**, it appears that they all have commonalities, most likely linked to journalistic and stylistic conventions: they keep the exact same typographic style for the totality of their headlines and never put a period at the end of them. On this last point, Darren Rowse maintains that beyond stylistic reasons, avoiding periods in headlines "[...] is more about the signal that it sends to your reader¹²²". They are used to halt the readers' eye, which would be exactly the opposite of the intended effect. He goes on to explain that "titles are all about leading your reader into your post [...]"¹²³ and that avoiding periods "[...] is a pretty established copy writing principle that is universally practised [sic]"¹²⁴. The punctuation marks that are used in our four newspapers' headlines are commas, colons, semi-colons, apostrophes, hyphens, dashes, question and exclamation marks. Their utilization complies with English grammar rules and arguably makes it easier for readers to understand the headlines. Furthermore, the presence of some punctuation marks, such as question marks, is explained by the need to faithfully quote the words of other people in the headlines (e.g. 'Sweden, who would believe this?'). The only periods that we observed among our 40 headlines corpus are located in the following headline from *The New York Times* (already referred to in Section 5.2.1), and are used to abbreviate the proper noun 'United States':

(7) Trump Will Withdraw U.S. From Paris Climate Agreement

The three other newspapers, whether American or English, quality paper or tabloid, use the abbreviation 'US' without periods when referring to the country. This phenomenon thus seems to be a matter of editorial style specific to each paper.

¹²² Rowse, D. (2006, September 26). Full Stops (Periods) in Titles. *ProBlogger*. Retrieved from <https://prologger.com/full-stops-periods-in-titles/>

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

6.1 Summary of the main results of the research

The **quantitative analysis** showed that the variations in the articles' and headlines' length observed between the different newspapers are probably attributable to particular house styles, rather than to specificities proper to a country or a newspaper type. Nevertheless, one of the trends that emerged confirmed the findings of other studies: quality newspapers definitely tend to post longer articles than tabloids. Concerning headline length, the British tabloid *The Sun* stood out through particularly lengthy titles packed with information. One might think that these kinds of headlines are staples of the tabloid press, and should therefore also be the hallmark of *The New York Post*. However, according to our analysis, the American tabloid's headlines tend to be very short, which brings it closer to the two broadsheets, *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*.

The **qualitative analysis** revealed that the two American newspapers, *The New York Times* and *The New York Post*, share many common features in all respects. From the point of view of coherence between the headlines and the articles' content, they both use factual headlines that accurately reflect the content of their articles. Indications of subjectivity were subtle and infrequent, especially in *The New York Times*. From a linguistic perspective, the two newspapers seldom resort to informal terms, expressions and play on words. At typographic level, the two papers are similar, except for their font and letter capitalization. As regards the British newspapers, our investigation reveals marked differences at all levels. Even though both papers ensure consistency between the information in the headlines and in the articles, *The Sun* uses strong and sensationalist terms in its headlines, which contrasts with *The Guardian*'s rare and fairly weak judgmental words. Linguistically, the quality paper opts for a rather formal style without puns and familiar expressions, whereas the tabloid regularly employs informal terms and play on words. From the point of view of typography, *The Guardian* resorts to a simple style and a few quotations, while *The Sun* uses several colors, many quotations, and uppercase letters to highlight some words. Our qualitative analysis also sought to compare the quality newspapers and tabloids under study on the aforementioned aspects. The study shows that *The New York Post* shares features with *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*, while *The Sun* uses a series of a peculiar techniques. The first three look

alike in terms of headline structure and headline-article coherence, tend to restrict their use of informal terms and puns in their headlines, and display a fairly sober style with some quotations to illustrate what is being said in the article. In contrast, the British tabloid has a more sensationalist, emotional and informal approach to news, starting with its headlines. It employs a more daring vocabulary and register, and even seems to use typography as a testing ground to attract readers.

6.2 Discussion

Throughout the investigation, we drew a comparison between four newspapers and examined their similarities and differences. Even though the analysis revealed a number of resemblances between the papers, often linked to the conventions of the journalistic genre, special attention will be devoted to the dissimilarities in this section as they are arguably the most relevant within the framework of this study to try and answer our research questions. In the light of the results obtained, particular attention will be paid to the British tabloid *The Sun*.

The first question addressed here is ‘how can the differences between the newspapers be explained?’ These differences are the results of choices made by each newspaper. These choices have been carefully thought out and are motivated by specific purposes. As Conboy explains,

Newspapers have a clear idea of who their reader is. This must be represented in the style and register of language they employ, the stereotypes, both positive and negative which they contain which confirm the social and cultural perspectives of the reader, and the assumptions which are embedded in the truncated style of the newspaper and which have been referred to as ‘scripts’ (Hall, 1978) [...] All of these features contribute to the production of a textual version of the ideal reader. They are covered by the combination of house style and the distinctive news values of the individual newspaper¹²⁵.

Each newspaper is different because it targets a different audience. In other words, analyzing newspaper headlines can uncover many things about the paper itself, but also about its readers. Register, for example, “can reveal as much about the media institution as it can about its perceived audience because it articulates a version of the language of its target social grouping.

¹²⁵ Conboy, M., *op. cit.*, p. 11.

Cohesion and worldview are both embedded in the language selected and therefore assumptions about what the audience knows in terms of lifestyle, education and politics¹²⁶”. Based on Conboy’s statement, it can be assumed that *The Sun*, whose popular register relies on informal language, puns and colloquial expressions, reduces the complexity of language in its news stories to get closer to the average person and reach a large number of readers. *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*, on the other hand, use more formal vocabulary typical of the quality press and thus seek to address a more educated section of the population. *The New York Post* would, in our view, be positioned somewhere between the two, given that some of its features brings it closer to the quality paper category, despite its tabloid ‘label’.

Although the four newspapers display differences, what clearly emerges is that *The Sun* stands out through its headline style, which particularly seeks to draw attention. Let us return briefly to the devices which are used by *The Sun* in its headlines. First, the British tabloid has a higher proportion of headlines that are not faithful reflections of the content of the articles in comparison with the others: it tends to adopt a particular stance that focuses on the crispy details of news stories, and repeatedly uses sensationalist and highly evaluative terms. This finding is not so surprising, because, as Marquez argues, misleading and ambiguous headlines are more often found in newspapers that are in tabloid format and have a “tendency to focus on the more sensational aspects of news events¹²⁷”. In addition to that, *The Sun*’s headlines are particularly lengthy, which gives a melodramatic effect to the news¹²⁸. In terms of headline content, the British tabloid relies heavily on play on words and references to popular sayings, likely to provoke laughter among readers; Johansson explains that “the joke is a constant connector of the popular tabloid news discourse¹²⁹”. Visually, the newspaper banks on color contrast and alternation between upper- and lowercase letters. As pointed out by Conboy, “the interrelationship between the newspaper’s writing and its typographical features, layout and pictures combine further to endorse an identifiable community of appeal¹³⁰”. We could be satisfied with the explanation that *The Sun* uses all these methods to create its own house style to which its core audience community can identify. This, however, would mean ignoring the current context of economic crisis that journalists are going through, and the alleged perverted

¹²⁶ Conboy, M., *op. cit.*, p. 41.

¹²⁷ Marquez, F.T. (1980). How Accurate Are the Headlines? In *Journal of Communication*, vol. 30, n°3. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 34.

¹²⁸ Johansson, S., *loc. cit.*, p. 89.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹³⁰ Conboy, M., *op. cit.*, p. 12.

business that some believe the media has become, as explained respectively in Chapters 1 and 2. This would also mean forgetting *The Sun*'s information philosophy, based on the purchase of funny and shocking stories at a high price to entertain the public, even if this means compromising the quality of information (cf. Section 1.5). We believe that the many devices observed and described in Chapter 5 are used by *The Sun* to transform its headlines into 'clickbait' titles. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines a clickbait as "something (such as a headline) designed to make readers want to click on a hyperlink especially when the link leads to content of dubious value or interest¹³¹". Even though we did not analyze the content of the tabloid's articles in detail, and therefore are not in a position to pass judgment on their value or interest, we consider that *The Sun*'s headlines are designed in such a way as to obtain as many clicks as possible. As mentioned before, the aim of a headline is naturally always to grab readers' attention and make them want to read the whole article; it is clear that most newspapers would like to reach the greatest number of people possible. Our investigation shows that *The Sun*, more than the others, tends to use headlines as an obvious marketing tool to attract more people and incite them to engage with its online content, i.e. by clicking on the title to discover the entire article.

In order to understand how *The Sun* –and many other newspapers across the world–have come to use sensationalist headlines as a way to earn money, we need to understand the significant changes that are currently taking place, and are directly linked to the shift from print newspapers to online newspapers and the advent of digital media discussed in Chapter 1. Nowadays, an increasing number of people read news articles because they were shared on social media by friends' or media companies' accounts; few people still read headlines within the context of a newspaper¹³². This shift has triggered a change in the function of headlines. As Kuiken et al. explain, "previously, the primary function of a headline was to give the reader, who was scanning the newspaper, a clear understanding of what the article was about. [...] Nowadays, a headline is often the primary way of getting a potential reader interested in an article. This has led to something known as clickbait¹³³". As a result, it appears that some newspapers will stop at nothing when it comes to making the readers curious about the article,

¹³¹ Clickbait (2018). In *Merriam-Webster Online*. Retrieved May 23, 2018, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/clickbait>

¹³² Kuiken, J., Schuth, A., Spitters, M., Marx, M. (2017). Effective Headlines of Newspaper Articles in a Digital Environment. In *Digital Journalism*, vol. 5, n°10. Colchester: Informa UK Limited, p. 1300.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 1303.

and luring them into opening it¹³⁴: longer headlines, emotional words, quotes, etc. Besides opening the article, the media also expect Internet users to engage with the content, for example by sharing it with their own network of friends and relatives. Bastos points out that

The integration of social networking technologies to online newspapers further changes the reading experience not only because of new standards of graphic design, illustrations, typography, and positioning but also because of the technical possibilities granted to audiences that can access, share, and recommend the content to large communities of users. In fact, the impact of social networking sites to the news industry is likely to be of greater importance than generally acknowledged at the time of this writing [...] ¹³⁵.

The question remains whether these techniques are truly effective to increase the popularity of an article among Web users. The study carried out by Kuiken et al. showed that “many of the stylistic characteristics that are linked to the clickbait phenomenon actually do have a statistically significant impact on the performance of a headline¹³⁶”. Nonetheless, we cannot help but wonder if this impact will last for long, given the audience’s growing awareness of these methods and its mistrust of mass media, as pointed out in Chapter 3.

To conclude, it is important to mention that ‘falling into the trap’ of clickbait headlines and reading sensationalist and somewhat biased tabloid articles do not necessarily make readers naive or devoid of critical thinking. Johansson raises this matter quite rightly in her book *Reading Tabloids – Tabloid Newspapers and Their Readers*:

The self-reflexivity singles out popular tabloids from the rest of the press and broadcast news media, where stylistic devices are employed precisely to put the journalistic process in the background. It raises question about its reception. Liesbeth van Zoonen has suggested that because news is relied upon to tell the truth, a person’s critical awareness of underlying ideological messages in the media may be greater when consuming entertainment, which is seen as a realm of fantasy [...]. The news style of the Sun and the Mirror, in a more openly revealed relation to fictional narratives, could work in a similar way, encouraging a skeptical reading. It is worthwhile asking how far tabloid news is taken seriously by readers¹³⁷.

Quite often, tabloid readers are actually perfectly aware of the lower quality level and sometimes poor journalistic standards of the newspaper that they are reading¹³⁸. This does not prevent them from opting for this form of journalism, regarded as less serious, in order to relax

¹³⁴ Kuiken, J., Schuth, A., Spitters, M., Marx, M., *loc. cit.*, p. 1300.

¹³⁵ Bastos, M. T., *loc. cit.*, p. 7.

¹³⁶ Kuiken, J., Schuth, A., Spitters, M., Marx, M., *loc. cit.*, p. 1312.

¹³⁷ Johansson, S., *loc. cit.*, p. 92.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

or entertain themselves¹³⁹. Nevertheless, even if readers take a step back from the information that they read, we must not forget that a certain form of manipulation can still subtly occur. For instance, “many newspaper readers may read only headlines and thus may form their opinions of the day’s events based on those headlines alone¹⁴⁰”. The ubiquitous presence of humor and jokes in tabloid headlines may also paradoxically reinforce the message that the newspaper is trying to deliver, “as the invite to laugh along is an invite to agree with the newspaper¹⁴¹”. Lastly, it is important to bear in mind newspapers’ intrinsic power of agenda-setting as to what kind of and how the news is discussed. Conboy explains that broadsheets, with their neutral language, represent newspapers of record, while tabloids and their emotionally charged language represent a primarily entertainment model. However, he insists that “both produce ideological perspectives for their audiences¹⁴²”. Johansson’s study confirms that “in spite of the distanced and sceptical [sic] approach encouraged by tabloid journalism, the newspapers [that she analyzed] could contribute to determine conceptual frameworks for understandings of society¹⁴³”. Finally, “the fact that headlines can shape public opinion was confirmed by Tannenbaum¹⁴⁴” as early as 1953¹⁴⁵.

¹³⁹ Johansson, S., *loc. cit.*, pp. 125-141.

¹⁴⁰ Marquez, F.T., *loc. cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁴¹ Johansson, S., *loc. cit.*, p. 92.

¹⁴² Conboy, M., *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹⁴³ Johansson, S., *loc. cit.*, p. 175.

¹⁴⁴ Marquez, F.T., *loc. cit.*, p. 31.

¹⁴⁵ Tannenbaum, P. H. (1953). The Effect of Headlines on the Interpretation of News Stories. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, vol. 30, n°2. Columbia: Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, pp. 189-197.

Conclusion

This dissertation shows that online newspapers may have recourse to certain techniques –whether they are linguistic, typographic or humoristic– to make their headlines more attractive and thereby maximize their profits. Although this phenomenon could be observed in each newspaper to a greater or lesser extent, more or less subtly, we mainly noticed it in the headlines of the British tabloid *The Sun*. The latter makes use of humoristic catchphrases and eye-catching typographic features in the majority of its headlines. Moreover, *The Sun*'s headlines are particularly lengthy in comparison to other papers, and often include strong and emotional words that might give readers a distorted impression of the articles' content. The utilization of such devices is likely the result of a conscious choice made by the British tabloid, which probably seeks to draw the audience's attention and expects Internet users to engage with its articles, by clicking on them and sharing them with their network.

Our working hypothesis, according to which the media always manipulate the information to a certain extent before it is presented to the public, has partly been confirmed. Furthermore, our comparative approach contrasting British and American newspapers on the one hand, and tabloids and quality papers on the other, shed light on the following: each newspaper seems to have its own editorial style adapted to its readership, and it is important not to stigmatize a newspaper according to its nationality or its belonging to the 'tabloid' or 'quality paper' category. Contrary to popular belief, 'tabloid paper' does not necessarily mean 'catchy and misleading headline'. As discussed throughout the analysis of the data, *The New York Post*– generally considered as a tabloid paper– rarely meets these criteria and generally aligns with the characteristics of the quality papers (i.e. *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*). In the same way, even if this was not observed in this study, it would be quite conceivable to find a newspaper regarded as belonging to the quality press using attractive and deceptive headlines. Ultimately, it appears that it can be dangerous to generalize on the basis of common preconceptions, and that it is always preferable to make case-by-case examinations. The analysis of the four newspapers enabled us to learn more about their ideology and sales objectives: *The Sun*, more than the others, displays its determination to appeal to a larger audience by using clickbait headlines, possibly to get through the challenging journalistic economic climate. This approach to news is totally in line with the British tabloid's information philosophy. Finally, it must be noted that even if some readers are not taken in by this kind of

headlines, other forms of manipulation can still occur in such a subtle manner that it is hard to realize. For example, even though little evidence of information manipulation was found in the other three newspapers' headlines (i.e. *The New York Times*, *The New York Post*, *The Guardian*), it should be remembered that they too have the capacity to shape our perception of reality (e.g. by selecting every day the topics that they consider newsworthy to discuss).

Although this research highlighted several interesting findings, there are still many aspects of this topic left to investigate. It would be relevant, for instance, to carry out further studies of this type, by analyzing a greater amount of data coming from a larger number of newspapers (e.g. many different newspapers within the United Kingdom or the United States, or newspapers from other countries with different socio-economic and cultural contexts). It could also be interesting to contrast lesser-known newspapers, for example small local papers which are not market leaders; the analysis of their headlines could possibly reveal more marked stances and editorial choices. Finally, it may be pertinent to investigate how different newspapers report the same event by looking in greater detail at the similarities and divergences in the content of the articles, and not only in the headline. In any case, let us always remind ourselves of the importance of keeping a critical eye on the information that we read and hear, since it reflects a subjective perception of reality.

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Appendices

Cf. attached documents.

(They have been sent by e-mail and uploaded alongside this dissertation on *DIAL.mem.*)

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