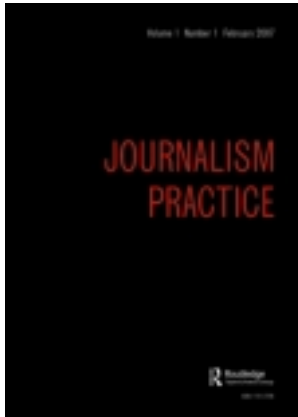


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# CHANGES IN AUSTRALIAN NEWSPAPERS 1956–2006

Rodney Tiffen

*In the 50 years between 1956 (when television began) and 2006, Australian newspapers grew and changed in fundamental ways. A content analysis of six of Australia's leading papers, taken at decade intervals, showed, most obviously, that their size increased very substantially. The increase in editorial space was even greater, as the proportion of space taken by advertising declined. While in absolute terms, advertising volume grew steadily in the early decades, in the last two decades classified advertising declined both absolutely and proportionally, while the volume of feature advertising held up better. Newspapers in 2006 were very different visually from 1956. Several of these changes were introduced slowly, with only relatively modest changes between 1956 and 1976, but then change occurred at an accelerating rate, especially with the introduction of colour throughout the newspaper from the 1990s. The other significant trend in newspapers has been their increasing segmentation, with more specialised sections, many of them with distinctive advertising appeals.*

KEYWORDS advertising; Australia; change; content analysis; newspapers

## Introduction: Australian Media and Newspapers

Australian newspapers in 2006 looked very different from their predecessors in 1956, and they offered their readership a very different type of product. Their role had also changed. In 1956, newspapers were the primary vehicle through which the public learned about news. Long before 2006 that was no longer true.

Three broad drivers of change can be distinguished—changes in the media environment, other social changes affecting the environment in which newspapers operate, and internal forces for innovation. There is not a one to one, automatic response by newspapers to changes in their environment, since change has been mediated by business strategy and editorial vision.

Television began in Australia in 1956, in time for the Melbourne Olympics which were held in December that year. When probing the impact of broadcasting news on the role of the press, it must be remembered that the capacities of broadcasting journalism developed only gradually. Television in those early days, although immediately popular with the public, was not the technologically and professionally sophisticated industry it became. In particular, television news was initially quite primitive, essentially being read by a presenter at a desk with limited logistics for gathering news film. Indeed it was only in 1964 that the laying of the coaxial cable between Melbourne and Sydney meant that news film no longer had to be transported by plane (Lloyd, 1988). Colour television began in 1975, the same year that daily Visnews satellite feeds from London to Sydney began, increasing greatly the amount of international news on television (Alysen, 2005, p. 34). From around 1980, tape began to replace film as the principal means of gathering news film and ENG (Electronic News Gathering) made the logistics of television reporting and

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editing much easier (Tiffen, 1989). Similarly the introduction of digital technology in the 1990s carried this even further.

By 2006 TV networks had easy and immediate access to global news, and the logistics to gather news from anywhere around the country and transmit it to their home studios instantaneously, while editing was much easier and much more elaborate than it used to be. Moreover, while news was at first limited to an early evening and late night broadcast, now there are several news programmes a day, and often headline services between programmes. But all these only developed over decades.

While radio is a more venerable medium than television, dating back in Australia to the late 1920s, its impact as an important medium for news also developed over a protracted period. Regular radio news services existed from the 1930s, but again it was only from the 1960s that radio news began to acquire all the characteristics we take for granted today. It was only then that telephone interviews were permitted to be broadcast, which eventually enabled the large enterprise of talk radio. It also made gathering news from anyone with a telephone much faster and more immediate. This was part of the increasing use of actuality in radio news where reporters' and sources' voices increasingly became part of the product. Also from the late 1960s, the ABC began public affairs radio programming, which immediately became a central source for the most politically interested (Inglis, 1982).

So the press has been displaced in terms of speed and immediacy. However, while it is true that broadcasting increasingly became the public's initial source of news about events, this took a considerable time to become true. But by the end of the period, newspapers were the public's initial source of important news only on stories which the broadcast media had not covered because of lack of access or priority.

Moreover, by the end of the half century, newspapers faced a challenge perhaps even more basic to their operating assumptions. The Internet has drained advertising income from newspapers and has also increasingly been used by people as a substitute for reading the news.

Apart from changes in the mix of media, many factors in the social environment have impacted on the commercial viability of the press. Almost any factor which affects how people spend their time can be said also to impact on newspapers. Newspaper sales in Australia have declined quite sharply in relation to population, but have also begun to decline in absolute terms (Tiffen, 2009; Tiffen and Gittins, 2009). It is impossible to associate causally any such decline with any particular social trend with any degree of certainty. As the number of women employed in the labour force has increased radically, there have been changes in household and family habits affecting the times and places where newspapers are read. Similarly, the declining proportion of people travelling to work by public transport—one of the traditional periods when newspapers were read—could likely have impacted on sales.

Beyond these external changes stimulating adaptive responses, many other developments in newspapers have been internally driven. Some of these have been technological, in particular better printing and production capabilities. This was most obvious to readers with the widespread introduction of colour in all parts of the newspaper in the 1990s, and the increasing supplementation of the main news pages with magazines and other inserts. It was also true in a professional sense as newspaper journalists expanded their sense of their own prerogatives and sought to probe beyond the surface of public events, adding value to what audiences could already gather from

broadcasting news. Apart from technological and professional internal drivers of change, the last is commercial. Making themselves more attractive vehicles for advertising as well as a more attractive product for consumers has been a continuing force for change inside newspapers.

### Research Design and Sample

The data reported in this paper are based upon analyses of the pages and total issues of six newspapers, each sampled for one constructed week, at 10-year intervals between 1956 and 2006. This research design has led to the construction of two files. In the first, the unit of analysis is the page and data on 15,502 pages are included. In the second, the unit of analysis is the individual paper for a given day and there are data for 210 days. This comprises 36 days each for five papers plus 30 days for the *Australian*, which only began publication in 1964.

#### *Choice of Newspapers*

There can be no perfect sample of Australian daily newspapers, but the current study has the virtue of including the most important general daily newspapers in Australia. Only surviving newspapers were included, so that all the afternoon newspapers—which went out of business in the period between 1987 and 1992—were excluded. Apart from the *Australian*—the national newspaper founded by Rupert Murdoch, and included because of its political and professional importance—all the sample newspapers existed across the whole period.

Australia has a city-state press structure rather than a national one (Mayer, 1964). With the exception of two national daily newspapers—the *Australian* and the *Australian Financial Review*, both founded in the 1960s—the most important newspapers are those published in the state capital cities. Only in Melbourne and Sydney are there competing locally published daily newspapers—a broadsheet quality paper and a tabloid popular paper. Elsewhere local monopoly reigns.

In terms of professional leadership, size and political impact, the Melbourne, Sydney and national newspapers are the most important. The special priorities of the business-oriented *Financial Review* make it different from all others, so it has been excluded from this more general examination.

The three largest regional dailies—in Perth, Brisbane and Adelaide—are all around the same size, and have much in common. South Australia has shown less growth than the other two, and the circulation of the *Advertiser* is somewhat less than the *Courier-Mail* and *West Australian*, and so for that reason they have been preferred. Although in other aspects of this total project, the *Courier-Mail* is included, in this first part lack of affordable access to print editions ruled it out. A problem that was not anticipated before research began was just how difficult it has become to access physical copies of old newspapers. Storing them poses great space problems for libraries, which have understandably decided that the growth first of microfilm and then the availability of electronic versions of newspapers (major Australian newspapers are available on Factiva from 1996 on) will satisfy most of the demand. However, for present purposes access to hard copies of newspapers was necessary to examine space and layout. Inability to include the *Courier-Mail* from this stage does have the unfortunate consequence that there is not a direct

comparator for the regional monopoly paper, the *West Australian*. If we had been able to code the *Courier-Mail* as well, we could be more confident about generalising about trends in these papers.

Australian media ownership, and in particular Australian press ownership, is probably more concentrated than in any other democratic country. In 1956, the Herald and Weekly Times owned two of the five papers being sampled (the *Herald-Sun* and the *West Australian*) and accounted for roughly half the metropolitan daily circulation. In 1956, the Fairfax Company owned the *Sydney Morning Herald* and had a minority share holding in *The Age*, although its share in *The Age* was still a minority holding with the local Melbourne David Syme and Company being the major shareholder (Souter, 1982). The *Daily Telegraph* was then owned by Frank Packer.

Press ownership has become even more concentrated in the decades since, mainly reflecting the inexorable rise of Rupert Murdoch. He launched the *Australian* in 1964 (the sixth paper in all subsequent years of our sample), purchased the afternoon *Daily Mirror* in Sydney in 1960 and the *Daily Telegraph* in 1972. Most importantly and spectacularly he took over the Herald and Weekly Times in 1987, which had many follow-on effects (Bowman, 1988; Chadwick, 1989). His company now accounts for more than two-thirds of metropolitan daily circulation. As a result of the Herald and Weekly Times takeover by Murdoch, the *West Australian* reverted to local ownership, the only metropolitan newspaper not owned by the Murdoch or Fairfax companies. (When Murdoch decided afternoon newspapers were no longer a profitable proposition, the company launched in Melbourne and Sydney what they called 24-hour newspapers, meaning that many features and all advertisements remained the same all day, but some of the news content was renewed. This only lasted a couple of years, but at the time both newspapers changed their names. The *Daily Telegraph* reverted to its original name, but the Melbourne paper kept its new amalgamated name, the *Herald-Sun*, its current title.)

The other major proprietor in 2006 was the Fairfax Company. It always owned Australia's oldest surviving newspaper, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and from the 1960s started to take over the second oldest surviving newspaper, *The Age*, by buying stock in David Syme and Company, taking it over completely in the early 1980s. After some very damaging internal upheavals, following a family split and attempted self-privatisation, the Fairfax family lost control and its ownership register became more open (Souter, 1991). A few years ago, an agreement with Rural Press, ironically owned by John B. Fairfax, who made his exit in 1988, has centralised control to a greater extent. The Fairfax Company accounts for around a quarter of metropolitan daily circulation.

So the selection of newspapers has the virtue of including six of the eight largest, representing the major types—competing metropolitan broadsheets and tabloids, a national broadsheet paper and regional monopoly tabloid—and also the major ownership groups in each of the periods.

### *Choice of Years*

Newspapers were sampled every decade, giving six years of data—1956, 1966, 1976, 1986, 1996 and 2006. It was felt that anything less than this would leave gaps that were too long to trace the processes and timing of change, and that more frequent years would devour too many resources while not adding sufficient extra information to justify them.

*Sampling Within Years*

The familiar stratified sampling method of one constructed week was used, so that six days were chosen for each year, one each of Monday through to Saturday, with one day each from every second month from February through to December. The result is a stratified random sample. Constructed weeks constitutes a widely used sampling method in journalism research (Holsti, 1969) in order to guard against skews in data that might arise from day of the week, time of year, or the immediate influences of whatever events are dominating the news at any one time.

Sundays are not included. Sunday titles tend to be separate from the other days in Australia, separately staffed and with some papers not publishing a Sunday edition. For well into the time frame explored in this study, there were restrictions on Sunday trading in many states, which inhibited the growth of Sunday newspapers. Especially for the present purposes of charting the changing structure of newspapers, this is broadly sufficient. For tracing some of the more intricate aspects of news content, more days per year would be preferable.

Although this sample is more extensive than any other study of Australian newspapers—and indeed to gather this much data was a very expensive and labour-intensive project—it should also be remembered that six days per year is a limited basis from which to generalise. Some “blips” and gaps in the data would no doubt have been rectified by taking a larger number of days, as just one or two special or extraordinary days falling within the six sampled can affect the results.

*Coding Procedures and Reliability*

The coding was completed by research assistants, who were mainly honours and post-graduate students. They were trained for two days, and then their initial coding was checked and any problems in the coding resolved. Although there was considerable variation in length, on average, each newspaper took around 12 hours to complete. Later two senior coders checked the analysis once again. Further checks were conducted after initial statistical analysis, with outliers and internal inconsistencies being further examined. There are some remaining issues of reliability, but as a percentage of cases they are very small, and certainly do not affect the findings reported below.

**Newspaper Change in Australia 1956–2006: Findings***Size*

The first and most basic change is the great increase in newspapers’ size. On average, in 2006 each paper had five times as many pages as in 1956, and about three times as great an area.

The number of pages (Table 1) increased steadily over each decade in nearly all papers. On average, they have four times as many pages at the end of the period as at the beginning. With only a couple of exceptions, all newspapers increased their number of pages in every decade. The biggest proportional jump was between 1976 and 1986. It is pertinent to note that even though (as we shall see) some advertising volumes fell in the final decade, and newspapers managements were already gloomy about their financial prospects, the size of the newspapers continued to increase.

**TABLE 1**

Size of newspaper (mean number of pages in each day's paper)

Year	Total	SMH	DT	Age	Sun	WA	Aust
1956	31.7	26.7	28.0	29.3	38.0	36.7	–
1966	42.1	41.7	44.7	38.0	60.0	50.7	17.7
1976	53.7	41.0	42.7	56.3	76.7	82.7	23.0
1986	76.7	67.3	71.3	77.3	91.3	124.7	38.0
1996	96.7	102.3	97.2	87.0	97.3	146.0	50.3
2006	128.9	159.5	118.7	142.3	138.7	170.0	67.3

SMH, *Sydney Morning Herald*; DT, *Daily Telegraph*; Age, *The Age*; Sun, *Herald-Sun*; WA, *West Australian*; Aust, *Australian*.

The area of newspapers (Table 2) has similarly increased in a parallel, although not quite as dramatic, fashion. The growth in area is not as substantial as the increase in the number of pages because the broadsheet papers in particular have added many segments with smaller-sized pages. In this table, the difference in size between the broadsheets (*Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *Australian*) and the tabloids (*Daily Telegraph*, *Herald-Sun*, *West Australian*) is clearer.

Another strong trend is that the gap between Saturdays and weekdays has grown. Saturday newspapers have increased their number of pages much more dramatically (Table 3). The number of pages in Saturday editions increased on average around six-fold; in weekdays around three and a half-fold. At the same time, the gap between weekday and Saturday circulations has grown, especially for the broadsheet papers.

### Advertising

Analysts have shown how newspapers' share of advertising has declined (Meech, 2008). In parallel, the percentage of space taken by advertising has decreased in all the established papers (Table 4). So, when this trend is combined with the increase in the size of newspapers, it has meant a very substantial increase in editorial space.

The *Australian* has always had a distinctive profile, both a smaller newspaper overall, especially in its early years, and with a smaller proportion of advertising. If that newspaper is omitted, advertising has declined as a percentage of all space in all the others. This is most marked in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*, but is true to a lesser extent in the three tabloid newspapers. The regional monopoly newspaper, the *West Australian*, is the only one where more than 50 per cent of all space is taken by advertising in 2006.

**TABLE 2**

Area of papers (mean thousand square centimetres in each day's paper)

Year	Total	Metropolitan broadsheet	Metropolitan tabloid	WA	Aust
1956	48.1	63.7	34.4	44.1	–
1966	63.5	89.7	52.4	61.4	35.5
1976	79.8	106.7	60.5	95.1	49.2
1986	118.5	163.1	82.4	141.9	78.1
1996	134.9	174.3	98.9	160.5	102.4
2006	161.3	200.4	127.5	191.6	120.2

WA, *West Australian*; Aust, *Australian*.

**TABLE 3**  
Size of Saturday papers (pages per paper)

Year	Total	SMH	DT	Age	Sun	WA	Aust
1956	48.0	52	32	64	40	52	–
1966	63.7	88	60	76	60	76	22
1976	91.3	108	60	136	96	112	36
1986	127.0	144	120	196	88	192	80
1996	185.5	200	136	180	104	336	88
2006	283.8	404	188	376	204	404	194

See Table 1 for newspaper abbreviations.

Since 1966 it has been the newspaper with the highest proportion of advertising and much of the time by a clear margin. The two metropolitan broadsheets have always carried a higher proportion of advertising than their tabloid competitors. This gap was always narrower among the Melbourne papers than the Sydney papers, and has narrowed in both over time.

The other notable trend in advertising, apparent in Table 5 which gives the area of feature and classified advertising per day, is that while feature advertising has continued to increase in total space, classified advertising has declined. Between 1956 and 1986 classified advertising increased in all the papers, but in all of them except the *West Australian* its total space in 2006 was less than in 1986. This is particularly important for the metropolitan broadsheets. Rupert Murdoch famously described the classified advertising in these Fairfax papers as rivers of gold, although more recently he observed that rivers sometimes dry up (Plunkett, 2005). *The Age's* total space devoted to classified advertising was less in 2006 than it had been in 1956, when the paper was only roughly one-third of its 2006 size. Its 2006 area was half its 1986 figure. The *Herald's* decline has not been so dramatic, but it was still only at around two-thirds of its 1986 area. In contrast, in all papers except the *Australian* the space devoted to feature advertising is higher in 2006 than in 1986 and also than in 1996.

### Visual Presentation

By 2006, the appearance of these newspapers had changed greatly from 1956. Tables 6–9 illustrate the ways in which the various visual aids and accompaniments to the news increased in use. In each of the four visual aspects on which we have data—(1)

**TABLE 4**  
Advertising (% of overall newspaper space featuring advertising)

Year	Total	SMH	DT	Age	Sun	WA	Aust
1956	51.3	62.5	37.2	54.5	42.5	61.5	–
1966	50.9	61.5	49.5	55.7	54.7	63.5	20.7
1976	53.0	58.0	42.7	56.7	61.3	71.2	28.3
1986	52.8	58.3	44.3	59.7	54.2	66.5	34.0
1996	41.2	49.5	38.7	46.0	35.0	53.8	24.0
2006	37.5	46.0	33.2	37.0	33.5	54.0	21.3

See Table 1 for newspaper abbreviations.



**TABLE 5**

Areas of feature and classified advertising (mean thousand square centimetres per day)

Year	Total	<i>SMH</i>	<i>DT</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sun</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>Aust</i>
Feature							
1956	11.5	9.5	8.2	9.4	14.4	15.9	–
1966	18.6	18.8	17.8	20.7	25.4	22.5	6.0
1976	22.6	12.9	11.7	30.4	32.2	40.9	7.7
1986	36.9	41.9	15.9	52.7	35.1	61.2	14.3
1996	38.5	53.8	28.9	51.8	21.9	55.1	19.6
2006	49.8	74.3	31.5	58.8	38.0	76.3	20.0
Classified							
1956	15.4	29.7	5.6	31.9	2.6	10.5	–
1966	17.8	42.2	4.3	33.5	8.3	16.9	1.7
1976	26.2	44.8	6.5	54.8	16.3	27.1	7.7
1986	34.4	55.5	17.4	66.2	15.7	34.3	17.4
1996	26.8	48.9	12.0	35.3	12.7	43.7	8.4
2006	23.4	35.3	10.9	31.7	9.1	43.0	10.9

See Table 1 for newspaper abbreviations.

editorial cartoons; (2) maps, diagrams and illustrations; (3) tables and graphs; and (4) photographs—there was limited change between 1956 and 1976. From 1986 onwards changes are more apparent and in some cases at an accelerating pace, although in some newspapers reduction in their use is evident between 1996 and 2006. It should be remembered that 1996 was the first of the sample years when all sample newspapers had routine colour production throughout the paper. Interestingly in most of these visual innovations, the broadsheet papers introduced the innovations before the tabloids.

Editorial cartoons (Table 6) flourished, especially in the broadsheet papers. They increased particularly between 1976 and 1986, although their use contracted somewhat between 1996 and 2006. But they are still roughly double their 1976 number and area.

Similarly the use of maps, diagrams and illustrations divides the period into two (Table 7). Their use in the papers between 1986 and 2006 was around three times as great as in the period 1956–1976, and they occupied almost four times as much area. Again the decade between 1976 and 1986 was the turning point, and again their adoption in the broadsheets was greater than in the tabloids, a difference that was even more marked when measured in terms of area.

Table 8 on the use of tables and graphs shows a consistent, but slightly different pattern. Again there is a decisive growth between 1976 and 1986, but then an even

**TABLE 6**

Cartoons (number per day and area in square centimetres)

Year	Total	Broadsheet	Tabloid	Total area
1956	1.5	1.1	2.0	178
1966	2.6	2.0	3.2	310
1976	2.2	1.5	2.0	354
1986	6.1	6.8	5.3	624
1996	6.1	7.6	4.6	807
2006	4.4	5.4	3.4	676

**TABLE 7**

Maps, diagrams and illustrations (number per day and area in square centimetres)

Year	Total	Broadsheet	Tabloid	Total area
1956	1.9	1.7	2.1	127
1966	2.0	2.0	1.9	184
1976	1.6	1.7	1.4	112
1986	5.0	5.7	4.2	432
1996	6.8	7.5	6.1	536
2006	7.0	8.3	5.7	615

greater growth between 1986 and 1996. In 2006 they occupied more than five times the space than they did in the period before 1976. The tabloid papers were slower to use such visual aids, but by 2006 the gap had narrowed.

The growth in the use of photographs is even more dramatic. Yet again, the period between 1956 and 1976 shows little change, but from then on change becomes more substantial (Table 9). In this case, the growth is even greater from 1986 on, in many papers doubling in number between 1986 and 1996, and showing a similar growth between 1996 and 2006, although not as great on a proportional basis. Nevertheless, on average the papers had almost five times as many photographs in 2006 as in 1976.

Overall, as Table 10 shows, there has been little change overall in the percentage of space devoted to editorial text, the verbal content, because two contradictory trends tend to cancel each other out. On the one hand, the reduction in the percentage of space devoted to advertising has meant more space for editorial content, while on the other hand, the increasing use of visual aids and more dramatic presentations has meant that the proportion of editorial space devoted to text has declined. So the proportion of the papers given to editorial text is roughly the same in 2006 as in 1956. There are variations between papers, however. The metropolitan tabloids have declined, while the *Sydney Morning Herald* has substantially increased, and in the others the proportion has remained broadly the same.

### Page One

When considering the appearance of a newspaper, a central question is how has the front page changed (Stepp, 1999)? The four tables (Tables 11–14) in aggregate offer a clear perspective on the extent of the change.

The proportion of page one devoted to headlines (Table 11) has remained broadly similar, but this masks contradictory trends in the tabloids and broadsheets. By 2006 the

**TABLE 8**

Tables and graphs (number per day and area in square centimetres)

Year	Total	Broadsheet	Tabloid	Total area
1956	0.5	0.6	0.4	29
1966	0.8	0.5	1.1	40
1976	0.9	0.8	1.1	87
1986	2.9	3.9	1.9	136
1996	8.5	10.3	6.7	444
2006	8.9	8.3	9.5	539

**TABLE 9**  
Photographs (average number per day)

Year	Total	SMH	DT	Age	Sun	WA	Aust
1956	27.8	23.8	16.5	33.7	44.8	20.2	–
1966	29.4	31.0	22.0	30.8	47.3	19.5	25.8
1976	35.3	30.5	30.2	43.2	58.5	21.8	27.8
1986	59.4	55.0	64.3	53.5	78.5	64.2	41.0
1996	109.0	128.8	95.8	100.2	132.0	123.2	74.2
2006	170.4	169.5	187.2	178.2	229.3	137.5	120.8

See Table 1 for newspaper abbreviations.

proportion had substantially declined in the broadsheets, but increased in the metropolitan tabloids.

However, the most substantial change is the sharp reduction in the number of articles appearing on the front page (Table 12). This shows a steady decline, so that the 2006 figure is about 40 per cent of the 1956 figure. As would be expected the broadsheets have more stories than the tabloids, with the *Australian* having the most. By 2006, the metropolitan tabloids often had only a single story, dominating the whole front page.

This marked decline provides context for the broad stability of space which newspapers have devoted to headlines. While total headline space is similar, Table 13 shows the dramatic increase in size of each story's headline. Overall they are two and a half times the size in 2006 that they were in 1956. But the difference between the papers is just as great. Essentially the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Herald-Sun* have far bigger headlines than the others, and they have continued to grow, especially the *Herald-Sun*. By comparison, the other newspapers look quite sober.

Again while there are differences in the extent of change between the papers, the percentage of page one devoted to editorial text (Table 14) has declined from almost a half to just over a quarter. The change has been least in the *Australian* and *West Australian*, and the reduction greatest in the two metropolitan tabloids.

### *Segmentation and Sections of the Newspaper*

While the previous section traced one major change in the appearance of newspapers, namely the increasing use of visual aids to supplement written text, another has been the increasing segmentation of the papers, especially the broadsheets.

**TABLE 10**  
Editorial text (% total space devoted to editorial text)

Year	Total	SMH	DT	Age	Sun	WA	Aust
1956	23.3	16.3	33.0	21.3	24.3	21.5	–
1966	23.1	18.3	28.2	17.8	15.2	20.8	38.0
1976	19.8	16.7	18.2	16.8	13.2	16.0	38.2
1986	22.0	21.8	24.3	19.0	18.2	22.0	31.8
1996	24.6	24.5	23.3	19.5	18.8	18.8	39.3
2006	23.9	24.7	20.0	20.5	18.5	19.4	41.2

See Table 1 for newspaper abbreviations.

**TABLE 11**  
Front page headlines (as % of front page)

Year	Total	SMH	DT	Age	Sun	WA	Aust
1956	18.1	13.1	13.3	20.2	31.0	13.2	–
1966	16.7	13.0	16.5	19.7	23.0	12.8	15.2
1976	19.0	13.1	23.7	16.5	27.5	15.0	18.2
1986	19.5	12.8	26.7	12.0	33.8	13.6	18.0
1996	18.5	8.7	18.8	11.5	43.2	18.0	11.0
2006	20.4	9.5	22.2	12.5	52.0	15.5	10.7

See Table 1 for newspaper abbreviations.

Table 15 gives the percentage of pages that have their own numbering system, in other words, the pages which are part of supplements and magazines and which consequently do not follow a simple sequence of numbering from the front page onwards. Until 1976 these were very marginal in the newspapers, comprising less than 4 per cent of pages, and in three of the six papers nothing at all. The examples in these early decades were such things as weekly TV schedules and racing guides.

From that year they increase considerably in number, but most especially in the metropolitan broadsheets. Between 1986 and 1996 they double, and then in the following decade double again. So by 2006, half the pages have their own distinctive numbering system, but in *The Age*, it is almost two-thirds and in the *Sydney Morning Herald* almost three-quarters. This demonstrates the extent to which the contemporary daily newspaper is in essence a coalition of magazines.

This is also manifest in the different size of pages in 2006. While the tabloid newspapers overwhelmingly have pages of tabloid size, the broadsheet newspapers have many inserts of different sizes. Indeed *The Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* only had one-third of their pages of broadsheet size.

A sign that this is very much driven by a wish to have more advertising is shown in Table 16. In the early decades these supplements did not have a higher percentage of advertising than pages with normal numbering. It is only from 1996 that this is the case, but by 2006 the ratio is four to three, with a higher proportion of advertising now in special supplements. This is by far the most pronounced in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Another way of charting such changes is demonstrated in Table 17. It groups the types of pages in newspapers into seven broad types. Two of these are wholly advertising—pages devoted wholly to feature advertising and to classified advertising.

**TABLE 12**  
Articles on front page (mean number)

Year	Total	SMH	DT	Age	Sun	WA	Aust
1956	8.2	12.8	4.2	12.0	4.8	7.3	–
1966	6.5	9.7	3.5	7.0	2.5	5.5	10.8
1976	5.5	8.2	2.2	6.3	3.5	5.3	7.5
1986	4.6	8.0	2.0	5.8	2.2	2.5	7.3
1996	3.8	6.3	1.7	5.5	2.2	2.2	4.7
2006	3.2	4.5	1.5	3.7	1.8	2.2	5.5

See Table 1 for newspaper abbreviations.

**TABLE 13**

Headline area per front page story (square centimetres)

Year	Total	SMH	DT	Age	Sun	WA	Aust
1956	40.0	23.1	33.7	39.0	82.6	21.6	–
1966	59.8	33.3	49.4	69.7	136.9	29.6	40.0
1976	66.4	35.8	144.3	64.3	82.2	31.9	52.7
1986	84.5	32.2	130.9	46.0	183.2	63.3	51.3
1996	91.6	30.0	126.8	46.4	205.8	90.4	50.0
2006	125.0	46.5	170.0	73.9	341.5	66.9	41.9

See Table 1 for newspaper abbreviations.

In 1956 almost one in two pages of a broadsheet newspaper consisted of classified advertising. This was down to one in eight by 2006. After an initial drop, the percentage remained stable between 1966 and 1986, but then drops precipitately in the last two decades. The trend for tabloid papers is somewhat different. They became better at securing classified advertising after beginning from a low base, but have joined in the general decline in recent decades. The two types of newspapers show contrasting trends in pages devoted wholly to feature advertising. The tabloids peaked in 1976, and show a declining proportion since, while the broadsheets show a recent surge.

Three of the five editorial categories end up being broadly stable, while two show clear trends. Each of the three “stable” categories shows some movement in the intervening decades, however. The percentage of pages devoted to sport reveals that tabloids began and finished the period with about double those of the broadsheets, with the tabloids, after an initial drop, showing an increasing proportion in recent decades. Similarly, the stable total in review and opinion pages masks opposite trends, a steady increase in the broadsheets and decline in the tabloids. After increasing the proportion of specialist news pages (principally international and business) in the decades after 1976, the broadsheets in the most recent decade again revealed a reduction.

The two categories which show strong and secular trends in all papers are general news and advertising-focused sections. The proportion of pages devoted to general news, consisting of miscellanies of stories, has steadily declined, from around one in four to one in 10, with an even sharper decline in the tabloids than the broadsheets. On the other hand, pages devoted to topics where the editorial content aligns with advertising content as a proportion of the total has multiplied by a factor of eight. It has grown from just under 3 per cent to just on one in four. These pages include some areas that have grown

**TABLE 14**

Editorial text on front page (% space devoted to editorial text)

Year	Total	SMH	DT	Age	Sun	WA	Aust
1956	49.8	57.5	52.3	48.5	39.2	51.4	–
1966	43.9	52.3	47.3	37.5	24.5	52.2	49.3
1976	37.8	52.0	23.7	29.8	27.7	45.7	48.2
1986	39.1	56.0	30.7	36.0	32.3	33.5	46.2
1996	31.8	44.3	25.7	35.7	18.7	32.5	34.0
2006	28.9	32.2	20.7	25.5	13.7	40.8	40.5

See Table 1 for newspaper abbreviations.

**TABLE 15**

Special supplements (% pages in special supplements with own numbering)

Year	Total	<i>SMH</i>	<i>DT</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sun</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>Aust</i>
1956	2.1	2.5	0	4.4	3.5	0	–
1966	2.9	4.1	0	2.6	5.6	0	7.5
1976	3.6	3.2	0	5.8	9.6	0	0
1986	11.8	12.9	0	25.3	25.2	1.6	7.0
1996	26.2	42.2	0	26.4	8.2	47.6	17.2
2006	50.0	74.2	26.7	65.8	32.7	49.6	39.6

See Table 1 for newspaper abbreviations.

substantially across the decades—IT did not exist at the beginning, while travel has increased markedly as an economic activity. Others such as lifestyle have also increased, while some papers, especially *The Age*, have sought to put more editorial content around traditional areas of classified advertising, such as property and motoring, perhaps in order to increase readership, and thus perhaps also to stop the drift to the Internet for such advertising.

## Conclusions

Tracing changes in the overall size and structure of newspapers is an important task for two principal reasons. Newspapers exist and survive first and foremost as commodities which consumers purchase and which must be financially viable to continue. Charting changes in size and format provides insights into the product available to the consumer, and hence also into their experience of it. It also offers some information on how newspapers have sought commercial viability by the amount and nature of their advertising, and how this coexists with their value and appeal to readers.

Secondly, data on the size and structure of newspapers provides a context against which particular changes in news coverage can be better understood. If the amount of one type of news has doubled, for example, at the same time that the total amount of news has also doubled, then it shows that despite increased size, editorial priorities have not changed. Equally if the proportion has remained the same of a product that is twice the size, then readers are able to access double that type of news. It also allows us to chart changing conceptions inside journalism about ways to structure the news and appeal to the reader.

Change did not come all at once. Nor was it linear and regular. Perhaps the most obvious feature of the changes in Australian newspapers over these 50 years is that they

**TABLE 16**

Advertising in normal pages and in supplements (% of area devoted to advertising)

Year	Normal	Special supplements
1956	53.9	5.8
1966	58.0	48.9
1976	61.5	58.5
1986	60.4	50.0
1996	45.3	56.7
2006	39.3	53.2

**TABLE 17**  
Page types (% pages of different types)

Year	1956	1966	1976	1986	1996	2006
Total						
Classified ads	26.2	25.2	29.3	26.0	17.9	13.8
Feature ads	3.6	8.5	10.0	10.6	5.1	9.0
General news	26.7	23.7	21.1	16.3	13.1	10.8
Sport	13.6	10.3	11.3	11.3	13.1	15.0
Focused news	16.8	18.3	13.8	15.9	19.9	16.7
Advertising focus	2.8	4.9	6.5	9.5	20.0	24.3
Reviews, opinion	10.2	9.3	8.1	10.3	10.8	10.4
Broadsheet papers						
Classified ads	47.6	36.6	37.9	31.9	16.8	13.1
Feature ads	0.9	3.0	1.5	4.9	3.3	11.1
General news	20.0	19.4	17.1	11.4	10.1	9.5
Sport	8.5	9.1	10.2	7.7	8.1	9.8
Focused news	15.0	20.1	16.8	22.9	23.2	17.9
Advertising focus	2.1	1.4	6.2	11.4	26.1	25.9
Reviews, opinion	5.9	10.4	10.2	9.9	12.3	12.7
Tabloid papers						
Classified ads	14.5	17.5	24.1	22.2	18.7	14.5
Feature ads	5.2	12.1	15.0	14.3	6.4	7.1
General news	30.3	26.5	23.5	19.5	15.2	11.9
Sport	16.5	11.1	11.9	13.7	16.6	19.3
Focused news	17.7	17.1	12.0	11.5	17.7	15.8
Advertising focus	3.2	7.2	6.7	8.3	15.8	22.9
Reviews, opinion	12.6	8.6	6.8	10.6	9.7	8.5

offer their readers much more than previously. They are much larger and the proportion of advertising has declined, so there is much more content on offer, although because of increased use of visual aids the proportion of editorial text is much less changed.

The newspapers of 2006 look very different from those of 1956. Interestingly on the measures used here, there was little change between 1956 and 1976, but from then on it was considerable. Most notable in the era of colour has been the sustained expansion of photographs, so that by 2006 there were almost five times as many as in 1976.

The data which most suggests the possible financial vulnerability of contemporary Australian newspapers is the decline in classified advertising, both proportionately and absolutely. This is most serious for the two metropolitan broadsheet papers, which traditionally relied heavily on this revenue stream. All newspapers, but especially the broadsheets, have been studiously trying to cultivate new formats attractive to advertisers.

That explains the final important trend. One of the most dramatic changes has been the growing segmentation of newspapers. As newspapers have become ever larger, specialist sections have grown and proliferated. In many ways, contemporary daily newspapers are now coalitions of magazines.

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