

English Summary.

In Reunanen, Esa (ed.) Pienempään kuosiin: Helsingin Sanomien ja Satakunnan Kansan tabloidi-uudistus sisällön, tekijöiden, lukijoiden ja ilmoittajien näkökulmasta. Tampere: University of Tampere, 75–77.

From Broadsheet to Tabloid: *The format change of Helsingin Sanomat and Satakunnan Kansa from the point of view of the content, newsroom, audience, and advertisers*

A current trend in the newspaper industry involves the change in format from broadsheet to tabloid. During the 2000s, several quality papers in the UK and Sweden made this change, and the trend has also been evident in Finland recently. Of the Finnish major daily papers, *Hufvudstadsbladet* became a tabloid in 2004, Alma Media's regional papers in northern Finland followed suit in 2011, *Satakunnan Kansa* in 2012, and the biggest national daily, *Helsingin Sanomat*, and the regional papers owned by Sanoma, changed in 2013. Alma Media has announced that its largest newspaper, *Aamulehti*, will change to tabloid in April 2014.

It is unclear why newspapers have decided to change page size when struggling with declining circulations and advertising revenues. Evidence from abroad shows that the change of format has had little effect on revenues or journalistic content, as the same trends are found in newspapers that have and have not changed their page format. However, the industrial wisdom in the media now favors the tabloid format, and when competitors change format it becomes difficult not to follow them.

In this book, the format change of *Helsingin Sanomat* and *Satakunnan Kansa* has been analyzed from the point of view of content, the newsroom, the audience, and the advertisers. The study shows that although current industrial wisdom favors the tabloid format, it seems to arouse fears that a reduction in page size means the journalistic content will also be tabloidized (i.e. more pictures, shorter stories, less political issues, more personal point of view). In simplifying the results, it is seen that both the audience and the advertisers feared tabloidization, the newsrooms attempted to ensure tabloidization would not occur, and the content analysis showed that this effort was visible, especially on the pages of *Helsingin Sanomat*.

The change in content was minimal, but mostly in a tabloidized direction

The content analysis involved studying the sections of the paper, the genres, and the share of text, photos, graphics, and headlines in *Helsingin Sanomat* and *Satakunnan Kansa*, both before and after the format change. Every third issue from the beginning of March (immediately after, and from a year before, the format change) was coded and metered until data was collected from each day of the week.

Although the change in content and layout was minimal, it was mostly in a tabloidized direction. The total page area decreased by a tenth in both papers after the format change,

and while in *Satakunnan Kansa* the editorial area reduced accordingly, in *Helsingin Sanomat* the editorial area, and the number of stories, remained unchanged. In *Satakunnan Kansa*, the culture section increased its share while foreign affairs decreased. Meanwhile, in *Helsingin Sanomat* the sections remained largely unchanged.

The tabloid-sized *Helsingin Sanomat* only used a double-page layout for every fourth double page, while *Satakunnan Kansa* used it for every other double page, implying that *Helsingin Sanomat* in particular tried to avoid the look of a tabloid evening paper.

Changes in many other features commonly associated with tabloidization were also more evident in *Satakunnan Kansa*. Although the average story size (including photos and headlines) did not change much in either paper, the average length of stories in the news sections shortened from 17 to 15 column centimeters in *Satakunnan Kansa*, while in *Helsingin Sanomat* they lengthened from 19 to 20 column centimeters (column width 48 mm). The share of photographs in the editorial area increased in *Satakunnan Kansa* from 25 to 35 per cent, while in *Helsingin Sanomat* this only increased from 28 to 31 per cent.

Potential changes in the thoroughness of journalistic work were tested by counting the number of sources evident in stories in the home affairs sections. It emerged that the average number of sources had generally remained unchanged in both papers. Thus, the tabloidization hypothesis was unsupported by this analysis. On the contrary, *Satakunnan Kansa* increased the share of stories with four or more sources, and unlike *Helsingin Sanomat* it also increased the share of stories covering local topics.

The newsrooms listened to their readers and tried to avoid tabloidization

Ten journalists were interviewed in the study, five each from *Helsingin Sanomat* and *Satakunnan Kansa*. Two of the interviewees were leading the format change project, two were leading daily news work, two were writing journalists, two were involved in layout, and two were photographers. The interviews verified the supposition made on the grounds of the content analysis that the journalists at *Helsingin Sanomat* were more wary of tabloidization than their counterparts at *Satakunnan Kansa*. Put simply, while the *Satakunnan Kansa* journalists were happy if the paper's content differed from that of the evening tabloids, the journalists at *Helsingin Sanomat* also wanted their paper's layout to differ from that of the evening papers.

In both newsrooms, the openness of the change project was greatly appreciated, and the experiences of openness were good. While some previous development projects had been conducted exclusively by a small group of experts, in both newspapers the plans were now openly distributed to readers, advertisers, and staff, both in marketing and in the newsroom. Comments were sought, and were taken in account. In the newsrooms, the suspicion that existed prior to the reform diminished during the process. For example, one of the *Helsingin Sanomat* interviewees said that when the first tabloid edition was finally published, the entire newsroom staff was quite enthusiastic.

According to the interviews, the tabloid format seems to have little effect on the work of a writing journalist. However, the work has become a little more planned, and writing to

a previously determined length is now used more systematically than it was before the format change at *Satakunnan Kansa*. The journalists also said that developing the layout did not cause any more problems in a tabloid format than in broadsheet. However, the changes were more pronounced for the leaders of news work. The hierarchy of the stories is more important in a tabloid layout, meaning those in charge must take earlier decisions on what will make the top story of each page. The top stories must also stand out more clearly than in a broadsheet format because a tabloid is typically read “flippingly,” and the top story must stop this flipping by grabbing the reader’s attention. This increase in pre-planning makes the production process more rigid; timetables must be strictly adhered to, and if the plans change then the multiplicative effects must be taken into account.

The readers criticized the content but liked the smaller size

Readers’ attitudes and experiences of the change to tabloid were studied using focus group interviews. This involved six reader groups, three of *Helsingin Sanomat* readers and three of *Satakunnan Kansa* readers. The groups were divided by age into young (18–35 years), middle-aged (35–60), and aged (over 60). The group discussions focused on the first impressions of the tabloid, opinions regarding the tabloid paper’s form and content, and whether the format change had altered how, and in what situations, they read the paper.

The results largely supported those obtained from previous research. Most readers think the tabloid size is better than broadsheet. However, the middle-aged readers in particular also thought the content had become tabloidized, which they did not like. The young did not recognize a clear change in content, but they wanted the paper to include high-quality analysis and content. The elderly readers of *Helsingin Sanomat* thought the paper had lost its worthiness to an extent by changing to a tabloid format.

The change of page size seemed to have little effect on the places and situations in which the paper was read. Although people said the tabloid-sized paper was easier to carry, they read it in the same places and at the same time as they had read their broadsheet paper. However, the format change had changed the way they read their newspaper. The tabloid paper is “flipped” more than a broadsheet, and the “reading” is thus more superficial. Conversely, the readers return to stories they found interesting, and they take more time than before to read these stories.

The small page size can be a problem for advertisers

Although newspaper owners that change to a tabloid format often promote the “page is a page” principle to advertisers, the advertisers do not “buy” this as such. This emerged during interviews with three advertisers and three media marketing experts conducted during this study. According to the “page is a page” principle, the effectiveness of a one-page advertisement is the same irrespective of page size, meaning the price of the advertisement should also be the same. One of the media marketing experts interviewed

said bluntly that one cannot suggest to an advertiser that his/her advertisement will be half the size but the price will remain the same.

It also became clear in the interviews that openness regarding the format change is as important to the advertisers as it is to the newsroom and the audience. Indeed, *Helsingin Sanomat* even asked some advertisers to take part in the planning of the tabloid paper. Despite this, some advertisers thought their viewpoints were not taken into account enough.

The tabloid size seems to fit well for some advertisers, but some see it as clearly inferior to a broadsheet. If the advertising strategy has been based on impressive whole-page broadsheet advertisements, the advertiser may feel the tabloid cannot offer the same impact. Other advertisers that may be disappointed with the tabloid size are those who have to present many items in one advertisement, as the size of each item may become too small to be effective.

As such, quality journalism was considered a relatively good context for advertising. For example, one of the interviewees explained he wanted his advertisements to run in the *Helsingin Sanomat* home affairs section because there they will reach the right target group. Newspapers were also considered a good choice when the advertiser wants to reach many consumers quickly.

Our content analysis showed that the total volume of advertisements in both tabloid papers was less than it had been a year earlier in the broadsheet equivalents. However, the advertisers and media marketing experts interviewed did not conclude that this reduction was a result of the format change. Instead, they listed several other potential influential factors, including the economic downturn, new digital marketing channels, and changes in companies' marketing strategies. In individual cases, however, the format change can trigger a change in a company's marketing strategy, and may reduce the volume of newspaper advertisements.