ABSTRACT

The emergence of the news paradigm in the English provincial press: a case study of the Midland Daily Telegraph

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The transmission of New Journalism from its roots in American newspapers to their British counterparts has been characterized as a watershed in the history of newspapers. This process may be defined in terms of the emergence of professional conventions including objectivity (or impartiality or fairness) and characteristics including the use of the interview, the inclusion of the human interest story and improvements in layout (Benson 2009; Conboy 2004; Hampton 2008). However, those studying this process give it a wide time frame – from the first half of the 19th century to the turn of the 20th.

Significantly, this period has been theorized as the emergence of what we have come to consider “news” – including the emergence of the notion of a specific “news discourse” characterized by the use of the ‘inverted pyramid’ as the ideal for organizing the news story (Hoyer and Pottker 2005; Matheson 2000; Conboy 2004).

An analysis of the content of the Midland Daily Telegraph, the forerunner to the still extant Coventry Telegraph, enables us to chart this process in a significant – but typical - provincial newspaper in England. By analyzing the textual presentation of news stories in terms of the extent to which they adhere to the inverted pyramid we are able to see that the techniques of New Journalism gained prominence within this newspaper within the comparatively defined time frame of 1895 to 1905.

Thus, by focusing on news presentation we are able to better define the time frame in which ‘news’ emerges within the columns of provincial newspapers in England. In turn this affords us the opportunity to give better focus to those factors which may influence, and be influenced by this process - including ownership, competition and the professional values and self-characterisation of those working in these newspapers – and so gain a deeper understanding of it.
References


