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Perception of factuality in selected online news media

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Abstract

The paper focuses on one's perception of factuality in selected online news media. A group of university students of English were approached and presented with ten statements about Sweden and asked to evaluate their truthfulness. Half of the group (informed respondents) were then advised on the ways media use to infer a narrative onto the reader, potentially influencing the way they view events, while the other half (uninformed respondents) were not made aware of this fact. The respondents were then presented with a news report describing a specific event that took place in Sweden; however, half of each group were asked to read its tabloid description while the other halves were shown the event as reported by a broadsheet (both online). They were then asked to reevaluate the statements they were presented with before and decide whether their opinions changed based on the article they had just read. The results suggest that one is inclined to believe what they read, regardless whether the source seems reliable and whether they are aware of the fact media might manipulate their audiences.

Keywords: perception; factuality; online media; broadsheet; tabloid

Introduction

It has become a cliché to suggest that mass media have a great effect on their audiences; it, however, does not make the fact any less true. Many people (including myself) have stopped watching the evening news on television, as they doubt the information they are presented with is either reliable, or impartial. At best, it is altered in a way that catches the eye of its recipient – not uncommonly in a negative way, arousing one's interest by shocking them. I believe those who have decided to only search for information they truly need for their everyday life in resources they find reliable have done so for a reason – to avoid all the surplus constructed negativity they realise they could do without. Nevertheless, based on my personal experience, many have got used to being shown images and told information they find interesting mainly due to the fact they find it shocking. The

fact they believe it to be true is suggested by the great number of shares such links get on social media. Gervais (2017) claims that people no longer see the difference between a fact and one's opinion, which brings about a threat of people believing someone's opinions simply because they accept them as fact – they see something in written form; thus, they assume it must be true.

Personally, I still occasionally find myself clicking on something that catches my eye but always research its truthfulness before sharing such a link. Many people might, however, not be aware of some of the reasons (if one is to be sceptical, it could be said there is only one reason behind it all – money) behind only partially true, or entirely misleading, information published online, such as media trying to achieve the highest possible attractivity and secure high audience numbers; click-baiting campaigns purely focused on trying to get a reader to click on something they find interesting (only to find out the article provides hardly any information on what the original link promised) for advertisement-based financial gain. Once again, my own experience tells me that even the most intelligent of people are prone to be swayed and are sometimes likely to trust what they have been told just because it supports their already acquired view of an issue. (According to Knobloch-Westerwick (2015), selective exposure theory or paradigm suggests that people choose information and resources that support, or confirm, their already formed views of certain issues.) Others, perhaps due to their trusting nature, might not even be aware their views are being manipulated. It does happen, though, whether we like it or not and whether or not we are aware of it. Holiday (2012), who claims to be a media manipulator that decided to share his secrets with the reader, and, in his words, turn his talents “from exploiting media vulnerabilities to exposing them” states that one should be aware of the times “[w]hen the news is decided not by what is important but by what readers are clicking”, or “when the cycle is so fast that the news cannot be anything else but consistently and regularly incomplete”, as that is when “media manipulation is the status quo”.

Seeing the documentary *A Tale of Two Swedens* on BBC World News (Gatehouse, 2018) on how the information one is presented with might be altered and what the final result and effect could be on those who blindly accept and adopt it, gave me the idea to conduct a small-scale research study to find out whether one is likely to believe what they read even after being told the source might be unreliable. With this in mind, I approached a group of university students of English in order to determine to what extent they still trust the information they were presented with even after being told media do not always share news in an entirely truthful manner.

Broadsheets and tabloids as online news media

The press industry is, in many ways, no different from any other industry. It employs people who are good at what they do while, still, always thinking of profit as one of their topmost interests. When one buys a product by a renowned brand and is disappointed with the product, they might lose their trust in the brand and stop buying their products. There are still many, however, who believe it was a one-off failure and believe the next purchase will be worthwhile. While “[n]ews is a money making industry” and “[o]ne that doesn't always make the goal to report the facts accurately” (Serani, 2011, online), broadsheets and tabloids alike have large numbers of loyal supporters. Prior to the internet era, print media, radio and television dominated the news market. Although there have always been some that kept their content and the ways they presented it sober; there have also been those that are rather sensational and prefer to put form ahead of contents. Online media might differ from print media in the way they reach their audiences; still, the same criteria apply regarding differences between broadsheets and tabloids (in other words ‘quality press’ and ‘popular press’) – they vary in the ideological value they contain and also the topics they cover. They frequently report on the same topics while their viewpoints are slightly (and sometimes not so slightly) different. As Preston (2004) suggests, broadsheets tend to commit to in-depth coverage and investigative strategies to news providing, the overall tone of news being moderate and the texts being of lengthier range. Conversely, Rowe (2011) claims that the content provided by tabloids has a strong commercial emphasis and populist vernacular, they feature shorter articles and the attention is drawn to images and the headline. According to Turner (1999), the tabloid press offers entertainment at the expense of information, sensationalism over accuracy. Richardson and Stanyer (2011) examined the readership of the two formats and found out that broadsheet readers are interested in factual stories and reports on domestic issues rather than life style topics or gossip. Generally, broadsheets appeal to readers with a better level of critical thinking who tend to be well-informed. Broadsheets are significant for their fact-checking and researching processes and hard news prevalence; Rowe claims they also devote much effort to refining codes of ethics (Rowe, 2011). The same source suggests that tabloids do not place emphasis on how they collect and present their product, or what it is based on. During the period of tabloidisation, “entertainment [...] superseded the provision of information; [...] measured judgment has succumbed to sensationalism [...]” (Franklin, 1997, in Sparks & Tulloch, p. 215, p. 91).

Since, in the present day, the audience plays a greater role in the production of news, they also help decide on the content of news coverage. This contributes to changes in the freedom and objectivity of the press. As McNair (2006) puts it, in an online world overfull with news from an enormous range of sources (not each of

them being reliable and credible) and hoax messages or half-truths, the audience is positioned between what news to believe to be true and what is only an effort to obtain the greatest readership number of visits on online websites. Since the audience is now seen as consumers, they have an immense power to either glorify the online news source and return to it or completely reject it and move their attention away. Based on Herman and Chomsky's model (1988), a media literate audience knows the boundaries and the restrictions news organisations have; however, they are mature enough to have the possibility of being informed and want to trust the information the organisations' news reports contain. Bingham (2005) believes that too much speculation and not enough reporting is very often seen in news coverage. The same source, furthermore, claims that journalism lacks self-criticism. Connel (1998, in Sparks & Tulloch, p. 215) provides a rather elaborate definition of tabloids when she claims that "a 'storytelling' news style, which, in focusing on personal narratives about individuals, gives predominance to [...] the sensational over analysis and rational description, and entails a growing use of dramatic techniques [...]" (her inverted commas). The media critic and journalist Roy Greenslade (2004, in Johansson, 2007, p. 7) blames tabloids while calling them "illiberal, reactionary, negative, pessimistic and infected with a sentimentality which appeals to readers' emotions rather than their intellect". The same source also claims "they appeal to the basest of human instincts". It is said that tabloids draw upon and strengthen the features of popular journalism. The tabloid style leads to the creation of a public idiom, proposed by Hall (1978), by which newspapers are linked to their readers' everyday life. Ultimately, it will always be the reader who decides what they find more attractive – factuality or sensation.

Media manipulation

"Media manipulation exploits the difference between perception and reality. The media was long a trusted source of information for the public. Today, all the barriers that made it reliable have broken down. Yet the old perceptions remain" (Holiday, 2012, online).

The above quote might partially explain why people still trust sources that have proved to be unreliable. Some audiences do not question what they are shown or told, unaware of the fact some media merely pretend they produce quality news that was once "classified as journalism without adhering to any of the standards or practices that define it" (Holiday, 2018, xiii). The parallel with supporting other industries out of loyalty mentioned above is in place here as well. These would be those consumers who trust their favourite brand and refuse to abandon it, simply because it had provided them with good service; they might even feel it is part of

their image, or part of who they are.¹ While such cases are only potentially harmful, provided the low-quality product one still buys affects their health or well-being in some way, media who present news filled with information they had altered have a great potential to change the way their readers think which, as a consequence, may have a great impact on large groups of people.

Unfortunately, it seems that “media manipulation currently shapes everything you read, hear and watch online” (Holiday, 2012, online). A great number of resources would take any measures to guarantee high numbers of audiences and, since people like to be shocked (Varghese, 2016), they exaggerate the information they present in the effort to make it more attractive. Arousing fear in the audience is a whole (not so) new issue used in (not only) online journalism. “Fear-based news stories prey on the anxieties we all have and then hold us hostage” (Serani, 2011, online). It is true, however, that some sources might not be ‘guilty’ of intended manipulation. The case simply might be they neither have enough time, nor make enough effort to check the level of factuality of what they are to present. The same author claims that “[t]he need to get-the-story-to-get-the-ratings often causes reporters to bypass thorough fact-checking” (Serani, 2011, online). Whether the views of the audience have been swayed by purposeful misinterpretation of facts or a lack of effort to present the truth, the effect might still result in “potentially harmful consequences in society” (Uribe & Gunter, 2004, p. 388).

As it is tabloids that are infamous for not checking the accuracy of their output, they seem to be potentially more harmful in their post-reading effects. Although they rarely present political news, when they do, they are very selective in their coverage and decide to on the basis of whether it befits their agenda of news or when the covered political issues may be presented in a sensational way (Conboy, 2006). Consequently, the agenda of tabloids is weightily rooted in national-popular discourses and leads to important political after-effects. Taylor (1992, p. 409) claims that a prevailing motivation for tabloids is profit not ethics; therefore, tabloid journalism is considered “the direct application of capitalism to events and ideas”. It is said that, instead of a rational public sphere, they provide a melodramatic one (Langer, 1998).

With the above findings in mind, I decided to approach a group of university students of English with the effort to find out how they perceived the factuality of the coverage of the same event by two different media – a broadsheet and a tabloid. In other words, what effect the way a selected tabloid presented facts had on their

¹ Another parallel might be seen in the case of football fans who “stick with their favourite team through thick and thin”, disregarding the fact their form or success has long since ‘gone downhill’ and maintain that they are proud supporters.

beliefs while, at the same time, studying whether those who have read the report of the same event by a selected broadsheet were left feeling more optimistic. Moreover, and this was of paramount importance, I was interested to find out whether making one aware of media potentially manipulating the way they report on events changes the way they perceive information they are presented with regarding the level of factuality.

Research characteristics

The present research study was conducted with the aim of finding an answer to the two following questions:

1. *Do informed readers (those who are aware of features typical of broadsheet and tabloid media and potential manipulation) perceive the factuality in online news media differently to those who were not previously informed?*
2. *Does readers' perception of the same event depend on the type of source (an online article from a broadsheet versus one from a tabloid)?*

A group of university students of English were approached and asked to give their opinions on ten statements regarding Sweden, either based on their general knowledge or intuition. Consequently, half of them (the informed group-to-be) were presented with some typical features of broadsheet and tabloid newspapers with the emphasis on the fact tabloids tend to provide information only trustworthy to an extent. The respondents were then asked to read an article – half of them being presented with a broadsheet article describing a specific event in Sweden in an impartial way, while the other half were shown a text published by a tabloid, showing the event in a much darker light. All the respondents were then asked to reevaluate their opinions and mark those that changed as a direct consequence of reading the text they were asked to read.

Target group

A group of 180 respondents (all students of English at the University of Prešov, Slovakia) were approached and asked to participate in the present research study. Half of the group (90 students) were presented with Article A (sourced from the tabloid *The Telegraph*), while the same number were asked to read Article B (originating from the broadsheet *The Guardian*). Since the research was carried out during the author's lessons, the numbers of students within the respective subgroups are not completely equal; still, they are in close approximation (cf. Table 1).

Informed group (90)		Uninformed group (90)	
Article A	Article B	Article A	Article B
44	46	48	42

Tab. 1: Numbers of respondents within individual groups

Research material and methodology

At the very start it should be pointed out that the subject matter of the articles the respondents were presented with had no bearing on the research aim. The key decisive factor in selecting the material was the way information was conveyed rather than the topic they covered. For argument's sake, it could have been any controversial issue, such as religion, politics, gender-related events, etc. However, as Sweden is often presented in black and white (as a highly liberal country where everyone is equal and gets a chance to fulfil their potential which, conversely, also opens its doors to less well-meaning individuals who then 'ruin it for all') and the coverage of events that take place in Sweden is plentiful, it seemed to be a good topic to use for the present research. Since Slovakia also faces a potential influx of immigrants, many misinformed Slovaks feel the need to fear such an event with the vision of the country being slowly overtaking by 'dangerous' people of a different religion, I felt presenting articles covering an event where immigrants to Sweden are mentioned as an issue the respondents might find worthy of their attention. First of all, the respondents were presented with a questionnaire and an article (cf. below) and their individual responses were recorded. A quantitative method was used to arrive at the results, making use of simple descriptive statistics, expressed in percentages. The findings are shown in Table 2 below and are commented on in the paragraphs following it.

Questionnaire

All the respondents were approached in person and presented with a questionnaire in print form, which guaranteed a 100% return rate. They were supposed to mark whether they were male or female and whether they represented the informed or the uninformed group (the informed group were presented with the typical features of broadsheets and tabloids, pointing to the fact tabloids often present data in an emotional and 'not-always-reliable-and-truthful' manner). They were then asked to read ten statements about Sweden, focusing on how safe they believed living in Sweden to be and how they viewed immigrants to Sweden, their task being to decide whether they believed each statement to be true or false. Alternatively, they could express a lack of information by writing a question mark next to the statement in question. The following ten statements were presented to all respondents:

1. Sweden is a highly liberal society.
2. Sweden is a safe country to live in.
3. Sweden is home to a high number of immigrants.
4. Most Swedes feel safe in their own country.
5. Immigrants are responsible for the rise in certain crimes in Sweden.
6. Young girls need to watch out for immigrants at festivals.
7. Immigrants are often unfairly blamed in the media for certain crimes.
8. Immigrants have been rightfully blamed for the majority of rapes in Sweden.
9. Large Swedish cities are becoming unsafe to live in, especially for young women.
10. Media are a reliable source in providing crime-related information.

After they have completed the questionnaire, the respondents were then presented with one of the two articles (cf. below). Consequently, they were asked to revisit the questionnaire and express their views one more time, marking those statements of which they changed their opinion as a direct consequence of having read the article they were assigned.

Articles

All the respondents were presented with an article printed from the website of either the selected tabloid or the selected broadsheet, as having them read it directly off the screen would be much more demanding on the organisation of the research. Both, Article A and Article B, covered the same topic – crimes attributed to immigrants in Sweden, which is an issue commonly featuring in media and often presents contrasting views. Two sources were carefully selected for the purposes of the present research (both accessed online) based on their bias – *The Telegraph* (a tabloid/conservative source) and *The Guardian* (a broadsheet/liberal source). Since “the information expressed in the headline is strategically used by the reader during the process of understanding in order to construct the overall meaning [...] before the text itself is even read” (Van Dijk, 2017, p. 50), it was believed the respondents might be able to sense in what kind of source the articles originated, without being explicitly told which article was published by the tabloid and which one was sourced on the website of the selected broadsheet. Text A was entitled *Swedish music festivals hit by reports of rapes by ‘migrants’* and was suggestive of the event bearing the following features: *five reported rapes and nearly forty instances of groping; fresh reports of sex attacks involving young asylum seekers; an anonymous 15-year-old girl who [said] no fewer than five of her six friends had been sexually molested by “foreign youths” stressing [the boys] were “not from a Swedish background. They were probably immigrants”* (Orange, 2016, online).

Statements		Informed group			Uninformed group		
		Pre	Post		Pre	Post	
			A	B		A	B
S1	Sweden is liberal	82	64	43	69	67	48
S2	Sweden is safe	82	32	26	78	33	33
S3	Lots of immigrants in Sweden	49	77	61	44	75	52
S4	Swedes feel safe in their country	62	18	30	62	33	43
S5	Rise in crime due to immigrants	58	64	22	53	75	19
S6	Girls to be careful at festivals	49	91	35	53	92	38
S7	Immigrants often unfairly blamed	62	27	91	64	25	95
S8	Immigrants rightfully blamed	20	73	13	35	50	19
S9	Large Swedish cities unsafe	47	68	65	36	79	52
S10	Media are a reliable source	31	27	13	24	25	24

Tab. 2: Respondents' views on the factuality of statements pre- and post-reading the coverage of a selected event by a tabloid and a broadsheet (*Source: own processing*)

Text *B* bore the heading *Blaming the Swedish festival rapes on migrants isn't just wrong – it's dangerous* and, among other things, stated that “*more than 50 cases of sexual assault were reported across two Swedish festivals*” while pointing out that “*the police later admitted that only two of the seven men or boys arrested [...] were from HVB homes (residential homes for young people, often refugees without parents)*” and that “*there's even less evidence [...] the rapes [...] were carried out by immigrants – but the two were instantly lumped together*” (Pollard, 2016, online).

Research results

The present section presents the findings of the research conducted for the purposes of the current study, aiming to find out (1) whether informed readers (those who are aware of features typical of broadsheet and tabloid media and potential manipulation) perceive the factuality in online news media differently to those who were not previously informed and (2) whether the readers' perception of the same event depends on the type of source (an online article from a broadsheet versus one from a tabloid). Table 2 below shows key extracts of the statements the respondents were presented with in the first two columns, followed by columns presenting the results in percentages, individually for the informed and uninformed groups – pre-reading and post-reading, the latter being

further subdivided into the group who had been shown an article from a tabloid (A standing for Article A) and those who were asked to read an article from a broadsheet (B standing for Article B). The percentages in which the most significant changes occurred are highlighted.

Due to lack of space, only shortened versions of the statements appear in the table maintaining their main points. The respondents were presented with the statements in their entirety (cf. the section on *Questionnaire* above). 'Pre' and 'post' stand for views as given pre-reading and post-reading respectively. A and B mark Article A (by the selected tabloid) and Article B (by the selected broadsheet), respectively.

Based on the statistics presented in Table 2, a considerable number of respondents approached lost their belief in *Sweden being a highly liberal country* (Statement 1) after reading either of the articles. While prior to reading, as many as 82% of the informed and 69% of the uninformed group believed the statement to be true, those who had read the broadsheet article in both (informed and uninformed) groups lost their trust in the concept even more so than those who had read the tabloid article (64% and 48% respectively post-reading). Further research would be necessary to confirm whether the event covered in the two articles made the respondents (especially those in the informed group) more sceptical regarding Swedish society being highly liberal but it could be assumed this was the case. The level of belief in *Sweden as a safe country to live in* (Statement 2) plummeted from 82% and 78% (in the informed and uninformed groups respectively) to the range between 26% and 33%. Clearly, the data provided in both the articles scared the respondents regardless whether they were informed or uninformed. This suggest that, at least in the group of respondents approached for the present research, readers seem to believe what they see in written form, as suggested by the theoretical background provided in the first part of the paper.

The difference in the respondents' perception of the data provided by the two articles when Statement 3 is concerned is rather interesting – although no statistics regarding the *numbers of immigrants living in Sweden* was provided, many more of those respondents who had read the coverage by the tabloid in both, informed and uninformed, groups felt there was a high number of immigrants (77% and 75% respectively) than those who had read the broadsheet article (61% and 52% respectively), while only 49% of the informed and 44% of the uninformed respondents believed the statement to be true prior to reading the articles. This result seems to support the above stated idea that tabloids might be responsible for implying information with, potentially, harmful effects for society.

Statement 4 pointed the respondents' attention to whether or not *Swedes feel safe in their own country*. While, pre-reading, the score in both informed and uninformed groups was identical (62%); the tabloid article disillusioned most of the more optimistic uninformed students, whose score plummeted to 18%. The other three groups (uninformed respondents presented with Article B, the informed group shown Article A and those who read Article B) also scored much lower than prior to reading either article, now achieving 30%, 33% and 43% respectively.

Whereas 58% of the informed respondents believed *immigrants to be responsible for the rise in certain crimes in Sweden* (Statement 5) pre-reading, as many as 64% of those who had read the tabloid article while only 22% of those who had read the broadsheet believed this to be true post-reading. The difference was even more staggering in the uninformed group where the percentage of those who had read the tabloid increased by 22% (from 53% to 75%), while the percentage of those who had read the broadsheet article dropped greatly plummeted to 19% (the difference of 34%). Statement 5 was the first instance where the information provided to the respondents who were to read Article A seems to have caused a rise of a mere 6% (from 58% to 64%) in contrast to the uninformed group where the percentage of 'believers' in immigrants being responsible for the rise of certain crimes in Sweden rose from 53% to 75% (a difference of 22%). The difference between the informed and uninformed groups having read Article B was nowhere near as significant (22% in the informed and 19% in the uninformed group).

The most marked difference was recorded in Statements 6, 7, and 8 regarding *decreased safety of girls attending music festivals* (Statement 6) and whether or not *immigrants have been rightfully blamed for certain crimes*, or, specifically, the majority of *rapes by the media* (Statements 7 and 8). While a similar number of respondents in both groups (49% of the informed and 53% of the uninformed respondents) were of the opinion that young girls needed to watch out for immigrants at festivals prior to reading, the tabloid article seems to have caused a great deal of unease in 91% of the informed and 92% of the uninformed respondents. Those having read the broadsheet, on the other hand, thought there was a cause for concern only in 35% and 38% of respondents in the informed and uninformed groups respectively. Whether or not immigrants to Sweden have been unfairly or rightfully blamed for certain crimes (and, specifically, the majority of rapes) was a concept tested in Statements 7 and 8, in both of which major differences prior and post reading were recorded. While 62% of the informed group and 64% of the uninformed group (so, truly, numbers not really far apart) believed immigrants to be often unfairly blamed in the media for certain crimes, only 27% (informed group) and 25% (uninformed group) having read Article A

(tabloid) now trusted in immigrants being blamed rather unfairly while 91% (informed group) and 95% (uninformed group) of those having read Article B (broadsheet) believed immigrants to be innocent. This instance seems to have caused the most significant differences. In the informed group, the percentage of those who believed immigrants were often unfairly blamed dropped by 35% after having read Article A, while the number of those having read Article B increased by 29%. In the uninformed group, the percentages changed by 39% (a drop in those who had read Article A) and 31% (a rise in those who had read Article B). Whether the respondents were informed or uninformed does not seem to have played any significant role in this instance. Statement 8 was formulated in a contrastive manner in comparison to Statement 7 pointing out the rightful blame of immigrants for the majority of rapes. Prior to reading the articles, only 20% of the informed and 35% of the uninformed respondents believed blaming immigrants was a rightful action. A staggering result was recorded in the group of informed respondents who had read the tabloid article where an increase of 53% occurred (from 20% to 73%) while only a 7% difference (that being a drop) was observed in those having read the broadsheet. The results were less notable, although still highly significant, in the uninformed group where an increase of 15% (from 35% to 50% in Article A's readers) and a decrease of 16% (from 35% to 19% in Article B's readers) was recorded.

Statement 10 was rather general claiming media were a reliable source in providing crime-related information. Here, prior to reading, 31% of the informed and 24% of the uninformed respondents believed the statement to be true. The views of those having read Article A did not change significantly post reading in either group (27% in the informed and 25% in the uninformed group) and neither did those of the uninformed respondents who have read Article B (24% both prior to and post reading). The only significant difference was recorded in the informed respondents having read Article B who now only trusted Statement 10 to be true in 13% of cases. This instance (alongside Statement 5 claiming the rise in crime is to be attributed to immigrants) was one of the only two where informing the respondents of the features typical of tabloid and broadsheet media, pointing out potentially presenting information of lowered factuality, seems to have made a significant difference. What, however, seems much more relevant is whether one reads tabloids or broadsheets. In other words, the fact that a respondent is aware of the features of the two above types of (online) news media does not seem to sway their perception of factuality. Instead, they tend to believe what they read, be it in the emotionally coloured information found in tabloids or the more factual nature of broadsheet articles. Although the results only relate to the group of respondents involved in the research, they still suggest online news media are a powerful tool responsible for a number of notable beliefs in readers.

Conclusion

The present study was aimed at finding out to what extent the approached respondents believe news reports published by selected online media to be factual. Two research questions were stipulated. The first one discussed whether informed readers (those who are aware of features typical of tabloid and broadsheet media) perceive the factuality in digital news media differently to those who were not previously informed. The results suggest this is not true, as the percentages were consistent – similar results were recorded throughout in both the informed and uninformed groups of respondents (apart from Statement 5 where, in the informed group having read Article A, there was a rise of a mere 6% (from 58% to 64%) in contrast to the uninformed group the increase was much more significant (from 53% to 75%, a difference of 22%). It seems that, in most statements (eight out of ten), informing the respondents of the ways typically used by tabloids to infer a narrative onto the reader, potentially influencing the way they view events, did not make a significant difference.

On the other hand, the results suggest that the answer to the second research question, formulated in an effort to find out whether a reader's perception of the same event depends on the type of source (an online article from a tabloid versus one from a broadsheet), is positive. The differences between the group having read the tabloid article and those having been presented with a broadsheet article were rather dissimilar. The most significant differences were found (as presented in Table 2) in Statements 6, 7 and 8, where changes (increases or decreases) between 15% and 53% were recorded in the group having read Article A (tabloid), while the percentages showing the changes in views of those respondents who had read Article B (broadsheet) only ranged between 15% and 39%.

The above findings are, in my view, rather interesting and suggest that the respondents' views might have been manipulated by the way the information was presented to them by the selected articles. Although the results only apply to the groups in question and further research would be necessary to find out whether the results would be consistent in the entire population, they are still suggestive of ideas put forth in the theoretical part of the present paper. I believe that, in order to prevent potential harm caused within society, one of the following is necessary: either people realise they truly cannot believe everything they read, or media are made obliged to only publish truthful information. In spite of my optimistic nature, I doubt either is going to happen. I am, however, hopeful that the present study points to the ease with which a source of information can raise negative emotions in a person, causing them to form negative views of events and, by effect, towards certain groups of people, and how careful one should, therefore, be when forming them in the first place.

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