

THE NEW SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT PROJECT: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TWO BROADSHEET NEWSPAPERS

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The new Scottish Parliament project in Edinburgh is intended to be a unique symbol of devolution and national distinctiveness. However, the project suffered significant setbacks due to cost escalations and programme delays. Since the project's inception in 1997, the design, construction and management of the project have undergone intense scrutiny from media journalists. In particular, two 'broadsheet' newspapers, The Scotsman and The Herald have documented the legacy surrounding this unique project. A content analysis of sample headlines from both newspapers suggests that The Scotsman has predominantly employed emotive metaphors in reporting and that this tone tends to emphasise the problems encountered by the project team. The Herald has taken a less judgemental approach with the majority of its reports being less biased in nature. Only a handful of reports could be considered positive in promoting the project and this may have ramifications for the image of the construction industry.

Keywords: Broadsheet Newspapers, Content Analysis, New Scottish Parliament Project

INTRODUCTION

The construction of the new Scottish Parliament building in Edinburgh has suffered significant cost escalations and programme delays. As of May 2004, the project was 20 months late in delivery and approximately £400m over budget. The project has been the subject of various reports (Black 2000, 2004, Spencely 2000) that have criticised the project management arrangements and in May 2003, the First Minister appointed Lord Fraser of Carmyllie to lead an inquiry investigating the key decision-making events undertaken at conception, briefing and design stages. The statistics regarding the inquiry itself are indicative of its depth. During the first 41 days of presentations, 66 witnesses had given more than 1 million words in evidence, and 13,336 documents had been placed on the inquiry website (www.holyrood inquiry.org) attracting 1.4m visitor hits.

The project has attracted unprecedented media attention in Scotland and this has resulted in critics questioning the professional integrity of journalists. Mack (2002), an operations director with Bovis Lend Lease (BLL), the Construction Managers on the project, criticised the Scottish newspapers for their reporting - "*they [project team] can't identify with the stories in them. They are not all representative of what's really going on. It's become a standing joke.*" More recently, the former Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament, Sir David Steel (2004) labelled parts of the press as "*bitch journalism.*" Further criticism comes from Lewis (2004) who is critical of the investigative rigour of journalists attending the Fraser inquiry proceedings-

“journalists can re-report the news from 1997. While this creates the illusion that the media are reporting secret and significant events, in reality they are merely watching while Fraser digs up old news. Thus, different newspapers will often report the same news with a different emphasis and this can lead to accusations of ‘bias’. Readers may find assistance in detecting bias in Kuyper’s (2002) textbook -Press Bias and Politics: How the Media Frame Controversial Issues.

The Media and the Construction Industry

A literature search on this topic revealed no other study that has applied content analysis to newspaper articles concerning construction projects. However, this technique has been widely used by other researchers with various interests (Swiergosz 1998; Hughes 2000; Sitton et al 2001; van Lunenburg 2002; Gunilla 2004; Develotte and Rechniewski, 2004). Despite the paucity of interest in the manner in which construction is represented by the media, it is clear that this is an important aspect for industry. The Millennium Bridge (Blade of Light) footbridge project over the river Thames is a good example. In June 2000, the bridge was closed to the public three days after opening, due to ‘swaying’. The consultant engineer’s (Arup) public relations officer acknowledged the power of the media- *“It was a really intense time because we’ve never had a project that has received such negative coverage, [it was] hard to deal with initially. [However] I don’t think it had damaged our brand, I think we came out of it pretty well”* (Ryan 2001). The power that the media have to influence the public by employing negative coverage is also noted by Singer and Endreny (1993) who offer a critique on this subject and note that several other researchers contend that the media tend to construct reality instead of merely reflecting it; hence the media select, emphasise, and arrange. Thus, the press can adopt a ‘friend or foe’ attitude to the construction industry. They have the power to promote the construction industry or vilify it. Indeed, as van Lunenburg (2002) notes, journalists may prefer negative news, and an event may become more newsworthy when it is unexpected, negative, and has a high impact on a large group.

The Scotsman & The Herald

Journalists, editors and newspapers are not free from political bias, with most offering a distinct opinion and specific view regarding major current affairs. As such, the press can encourage its readers to view controversial issues in a particular way. It is well known for example that The Sun (UK tabloid) switched their support from the Conservative party to New Labour. In Scotland, the two main broadsheet newspapers are The Scotsman and The Herald. Each is associated with Scotland’s two main cities, Edinburgh and Glasgow. In an attempt to broaden its appeal, The Herald recently dropped ‘Glasgow’ from its title, although it still has a west of Scotland bias, especially in its sport coverage although political coverage is generally considered to be neutral. However, the Scotsman, recently relaunched in a tabloid format, is characterised by its right of centre politics and anti-devolution stance. The Scotsman head office is located a stones-throw away from the New Scottish Parliament project and given the long-standing cultural rivalry between the two cities one might have expected that the Edinburgh based paper would be supportive of the project.

METHODOLOGY

According to Hughes (2000) several techniques can be employed to review newspapers- grounded theory; qualitative data analysis; content analysis and discourse analysis. These procedures have similarities that make a clear distinction problematic

and their frequency of use is predominantly characterised by professional interests. Content analysis is frequently used to analyse newspaper articles and according to Stempel (1981) it is a method for the quantitative analysis of symbolic content, a formal system for doing something that we all do informally rather frequently, drawing conclusions from observations of content. Content analysis uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences. It is often associated with positivistic research given that it employs coding units to convert text into numerical variables for quantitative data analysis.

The analysis of newspapers can be a time-consuming activity and Develotte and Rechniewshki (2004) offer pragmatic guidance on how to undertake a large-scale review of newspapers -discourse analysis by analysing headlines only. They argue that a corpus of headlines facilitates quantitative analysis and in particular a longitudinal study of the frequency of headlines on a particular issue can reveal the evolution in the prominence of a topic and that a comparison between newspapers can reveal the relative importance each paper awards to an issue during a particular period. Moreover, they argue that as most press news is drawn from external agencies and shared with competitors, the headline is a newspapers opportunity to stamp its individuality on what is otherwise a mass-produced product.

In the research reported on in this paper, a content analysis technique was employed in a longitudinal study of newspaper headlines between January 1998 and January 2003. The purpose was to establish the intended message in each headline and to ascertain whether it was complementary or derogative in tone. This involved intuitive judgement regarding whether each headline was positive, neutral or negative towards the project. In total, ninety-three headlines were examined and these were placed with a typology using four themes- cost issues; time/programme issues; design issues and political game playing issues. The four themes were chosen after an initial review of articles and this is indicative of the evolving nature associated with non-positivistic research. Given the close relationship between the reporting of time and cost issues, several of the headlines were considered under more than one heading within the typology. Table 1 shows a sample of the headlines used in the analysis, the complete list with references can be found in Czarnocki (2004).

The analysis of each headline relied on judgement and it is accepted that given its subjective nature, 'researcher bias' (in this case, political and ideological) had the potential to influence the author's analysis of the headlines. However, support for this approach was sought in van Lunenburg (2002) whose content analysis of Dutch newspapers involved 'judgement'. Moreover, the distinct contrast in the tone of the headlines from both broadsheets suggests that the inferences drawn from the analysis, offer reliability. Van Lunenburg suggests three categories of judgement: -

- Firstly, the event itself, is it a negative event (for example, in the case of the Parliament project, a time delay or cost overrun) or a positive event (for example, meeting a deadline or exceeding expectation). This is known as implicit judgement. Implicit evaluations are necessary when one wants to know whether there is an effect of media coverage on the public or not. This was not the purpose of this study although it is possible to make inferences regarding the impact that the headlines may have on the public regarding the damage to the image of the construction industry.
- Secondly, the way in which a journalist evaluates and reports about the event (in a negative, neutral, or positive way) and

- Thirdly, the way in which a third party is quoted in the article and report headline.

The second and third categories are termed explicit evaluations and have been employed in this survey. Thus, intuitive judgement was used to determine whether each report headline was positive, negative or neutral in nature. Assessing the use of metaphors within each headline assisted this. This technique has previously been employed by Gunilla (2004) in a doctoral thesis that examined the use of metaphors in two newspapers.

RESULTS

The results presented in this paper provide a brief summary of the research undertaken by Czarnocki (2004). Table 1 shows a sample of the headlines used in the analysis whilst Table 2 shows the tabulation of the analysis exercise. Eighteen report headlines were analysed from each broadsheet for evidence of cost increase incidents. In terms of The Scotsman, all eighteen headlines were extremely critical of this project. The Herald had two headlines that were optimistic and supportive; ten were neutral; and six critical of project developments. The condemnation over rising costs was most evident in reports made by The Scotsman's Scottish Political Editor. In one headline "*Eh-oh... The Holyrood bill has gone up again*" he stressed that a large component of the latest cost increase was attributable to the proposal for a foyer linking the MSPs' office block with the main Parliament chamber. In comparing the project to the grassy mound where the BBC children's characters, the Teletubbies live. This is a cry of derision of the Parliament project and everyone involved in its design and construction. By March 2002 the press rarely had a positive remark to make on the new Scottish Parliament Project – commenting on the collapse of cladding works contractor, Flour City. The Scotsman was no exception and critically 'attacked' the project on several occasions regarding the latest reasons for the rise in cost. Scottish Government Editor took the lead role in criticising the project team by stating in his report headlines "*Holyrood consultants to take home £40 million*", and "*lost Holyrood contract could cost taxpayer extra £2 million.*" He appeared especially keen to emphasise to readers that the reasons for the latest rise in cost were farcical and should never have occurred in a project of such stature as the Scottish Parliament building. However, most interesting was the change in reporting at The Herald. The collapse of Flour City saw Scottish Political Correspondent produce the first negative report on the developments of the Holyrood project stating in his report headline "*taxpayer will pay for failed Holyrood contract.*" He blamed the Holyrood Progress Group for being "incompetent" given that they should have known that Flour City had been experiencing well publicised difficulties. Audit Scotland (2002) concluded that the award of the contract to Flour City was not improperly made, but that there were deficiencies in the selection, award and management procedures for the contract.

The analysis of time related incidents concerned the continuous rescheduling of the contractors programme. Eleven report headlines were analysed from both broadsheets. In The Scotsman, one headline was optimistic, the remaining ten reported negatively on project developments. In The Herald, three headlines were supportive; six neutral and only two were critical. Following several delays, the Auditor General, Robert Black reported that the inaccurate programme was due to difficulties in approving a finalised design, a tight project timetable, continuous design changes by the client and a demanding project brief, which combined, increased the complexity and workload of the project from the architects viewpoint (Black 2000). John Spencely, an independent architect employed to investigate the cost and time overruns, confirmed

Black’s prognosis. Spencely’s investigation found that the project was dogged by mismanagement. Spencely found that “more realistic” estimate of project completion was August 2003 and occupation as of December 2003, based on information provided by the construction manager and the design brief as of the date of review (Spencely 2000). By 2002, The Scotsman had established a pattern of attacking the project with ‘late delivery’ headlines (i.e. “MSPs facing a later Holyrood moving date” and “Holyrood three years behind schedule”). The Herald was again pressed to move from a neutral to negative headline- “No end to the Holyrood saga over costs and opening date.”

In the design alteration incident analysis, seven report headlines were analysed from both broadsheets. In terms of The Scotsman, all seven reported critically on events that altered the design brief. In The Herald, one was supportive of the design alterations, six were neutral and only one was negative. Between October 1998 and April 1999, the design team had refined and developed their sketches and these were presented to the public. The Scotsman’s Scottish Political Editor commented on the design alterations by stating in his report headline “Miralles draws up Parly rethink.” He seemed enthusiastic about reiterating to his readers that in the short time since the projects launch, it’s consequent design specifications have been changed several times, and thus it is evident that the underlying theme of this report is to scrutinise the project design team and Parliamentary officials for not identifying and accurately setting out a project design brief at the feasibility stage. However, from a more optimistic viewpoint, The Herald’s Scottish Political viewed the new Parliament building as “flexible, friendly design for debate.” He considered the revised designs to be, in general, a better match for the proposed building than that of previous designs. However, The Scotsman kept up the pressure on the design team by commenting on the design of the new entrance to the parliament building- “Is it a Parliament or a supermarket.” This was perhaps to be expected given that earlier on in the project, the Scotsman had already been critical of the design for the MSP’s office building- “Call that an office block? ‘ More like el hotel cheapo.”

Finally, in the political game playing analysis, thirteen report headlines were analysed from The Scotsman and nine from The Herald. The Scotsman reported negatively in all thirteen articles relating to antics of political game playing from opposition MSPs etc – an expected result from a newspaper that is right of centre and hence against the in power Labour Government. In terms of The Herald, two report headlines were positive and supportive, six were neutral and only one was negative and critical. Analysis of these issues proved that The Scotsman was keen to report on any allegations of incompetence of project officials, whereas The Herald looked at both allegations and defensive comments by the accused part.

Table 1: Sample of headlines used in content analysis

Year	The Scotsman	The Herald
Cost Issues		
1998	“Holyrood Site Chosen”	“Dewar did his homework – these are good reasons for choosing Holyrood”
1999	“Behind Schedule and over budget”	“Debate over Donald’s Building”
2000	“MSPs back Holyrood but cap cost at £195m”	“Fears for architect mar £195m Holyrood vote”
2001	“Its out of control”	“Holyrood building cash cap removed”
2002	“Benefit fraud at Holyrood may add to spiralling cost”	“Benefit officers raid Holyrood site”

2003	“Holyrood cost soars by further £13 million”	“Holyrood is a deracinated symbol of Scotland”
Time Issues		
2000	“Spencely report charts spiral of Holyrood Cost”	“Sir David provides concrete answer for Holyrood Delay”
2002	“MSPs facing a later Holyrood moving date”	“An architectural asset in the making so lets stop carping”
2003	“Holyrood building cost surges to £338 million”	“Holyrood opening date questioned”
Design Issues		
1999	“Miralles draws up Parly rethink”	“Flexible friendly design for debate”
2000	“All change in grand design for Holyrood”	“Design changes that pushed up price”
2001	“Is it a Parliament or a supermarket”	No Report
2002	“Holyrood consultants to take home £40 million”	“MacDonald urges Holyrood fees cut”
Political Game Playing Issues		
1999	“SNP to block building plan for Holyrood”	“SNP on trail of Euro billions”
2000	“SNP stokes row on Holyrood bill”	“Dewar and officials in clear over rising cost of Holyrood project.”
2002	“No end to Holyrood bills even when it’s finished”	“Holyrood cost go through the £300m roof; outrage at buildings latest £28m increase.”
2002	“Holyrood saga shatters Scots illusions”	“Dream still holds – just; Scottish Parliament could yet be a national asset.”
2003	“McConnell building debacle must not be repeated”	“Holyrood is a deracinated symbol of Scotland.”

Note: This table represents a sample of the ninety-three headlines analysed

Table 2: Cumulative Totals

Newspaper	+ve Articles	Neutral Articles	-ve Articles
Scotsman (Cost)	0	0	18
Herald (Cost)	2	10	6
Scotsman (Time)	1	0	10
Herald (Time)	3	6	2
Scotsman (Design)	0	0	7
Herald (Design)	1	3	3
Scotsman (Politics)	0	0	13
Herald (Politics)	2	6	1
Grand Totals	9	25	59
	(S=1)(H=8)	(S=0)(H=25)	(S=48)(H=11)

S= The Scotsman H= The Herald

USE OF METAPHORS

Table 3 shows the metaphors employed by journalists. Clearly, the term ‘soar’ could be used in a complementary manner to describe the aesthetic appeal of the buildings roof, as it rises to meet the skyline above Holyrood Park. However, this term was used to denigrate the project. Thus, it was evident that journalists placed added emphasis on issues by employing metaphors that implied failure. Perhaps, The Scotsman

readers, expected this? As Develotte and Rechniewshki (2004) note, headlines can intrigue and awaken the readers interest and reward the reader through the intellectual satisfaction gained in successfully decoding them. Thus, the use of a pun or plays of words within a headline can reinforce the bond between the reader and the paper, strengthening the message that the editor / reporter may wish to convey.

A total of thirteen metaphors were used on twenty-seven occasions. Words such as “soar”, “surges”, and “catalogue” were used in order to emphasise the severity of the problems with the project. Of this twenty-two were used in The Scotsman compared with five in The Herald. The Scotsman’s Scottish Government editor was the first journalist to employ metaphors. His 1999 headline “*Holyrood costs soar to £110m*” insinuates that costs were rising, flying or gliding high with little apparent effort – hence Scott’s intention is to ensure that his readers are aware that the cost of the Holyrood project is ‘out of control’, and escalating without any evidence of plateauing. However, in sharp contrast to this reporting style, was that of The Herald, whose political neutrality was evident. The Scottish Political Editor pointed out that cost predictions had again risen but made a point of explaining that Ministers were alarmed by this increase in cost and that as such MSP’s were prepared to hold a full-scale debate on the issue. As the cost of the project increased further a political correspondent at The Scotsman reported “*Holyrood costs spiral to 13times Dewar’s estimate*”. Insinuating by the use of the metaphor “spiral” that the cost of the parliament building is continuously accelerating and rising out of control. However, in a more neutral tone, The Herald’s Scottish Political writer reported, “*Holyrood cost now tops £240 million.*” He accepted fact that cost was on the increase again but no harsh critical comments were included in the report.

Table 3: Use of Metaphors in Headlines

Metaphor	Dictionary Definition (www.dictionary.com)	S	H
Soar	To rise, fly, or glide high and with little apparent effort.	5	2
Spiral	A continuously accelerating increase or decrease; the course or flight path of an object rotating on its longitudinal axis.	3	0
Slams	To criticise harshly; censure forcefully.	1	1
Chaos	A condition or place of great disorder or confusion.	1	0
Catalogue	A list or itemised display, as of title, course offerings, or articles for exhibition or sale, usually including descriptive information or illustrations.	1	0
Surges	To rise and move in a billowing or swelling manner.	3	0
Saga	A long detailed report.	3	1
Fiasco	A complete failure.	1	0
Jibe	To make taunting, heckling, or jeering remarks.	0	1
Donor	One that contributes something, such as money, to a cause or fund.	1	0
Pits	A miserable or depressing place or situation.	1	0
Shatters	To cause the destruction or ruin of; destroy: The outcome of the conflict shattered our dreams of peace and prosperity.	1	0
Debacle	A total often-ludicrous failure.	1	0
Totals		22	5

S= The Scotsman H= The Herald

The Scotsman reacted to the Corporate Body’s new completion and occupation dates and new budget by stating “*Holyrood back in chaos claim critics.*” The metaphor

“chaos” employed in an attempt to successfully deliver a message to readers that the project was a place of great disorder and confusion. However, The Herald again looked at commentary on the latest design change and consequent cost increase from a neutral and optimistic perspective not only reviewing the critical remarks by opposition MSP’s but also positive remarks by project and in government Labour Party officials. The Herald challenged the story of chaos published by The Scotsman by reporting “*Dewar insists Holyrood not out of control.*” This article emphasising that Dewar denied that the spiralling costs and time delay of the Parliament project “had got out of hand.” The Scotsman, Scottish Government Editor commented on the further spiralling of the cost of the new Scottish Parliament building, stating that the project has created widespread disillusionment across Scotland and has been the biggest disappointment of devolution, stating in his report headline “*Holyrood saga shatter Scots’ illusions.*” The use of “saga” in the report headline emphasising that the project is a long winded, detailed project ‘plagued’ by overspend and delay

DISCUSSION

The majority of articles reviewed in this longitudinal study involved front-page news headlines designed to ‘sell’ newspapers. Newspapers have a relatively relaxed form of self-regulation despite an undertaking to comply with The Press Complaints Commission code of practice. The code covers aspects such as ‘the definition of public interest’ ‘the need to distinguish between comment and fact (i.e. not to mislead) and ‘accuracy’ in reporting. However, the cumulative totals shown in Table 2 might suggest that The Scotsman has sailed close to the wind with its extensive number of negative headlines. No doubt The Scotsman might argue there style of reporting is objective and in the public interest, particularly given that the project involves taxpayers cash! However, the analysis of headlines would perhaps infer that they have engaged in a prolonged attack on the project. Mack (2002), an operations director with the Construction Manager, Bovis Lend Lease, commenting that many of the specialist suppliers who work regularly with them, were reluctant to tender for work on the project because of the media attention.

CONCLUSIONS

As of May 2004, the project is ten times over budget at £431 million and 20 months behind schedule with construction works expected to end around September 2004. This controversial project is near completion and Scotland may very well emerge with an impressive, landmark Parliament building, but the cost, in political and social terms, has been enormous. The media interest in the project has been intensive and the interest in project problems has provided editors with a continuous stream of front-page stories. Newspaper editors and journalists have no doubt relished this period and the results from this research suggest that the use of emotive syntax in headlines may be construed as bias towards the project. Any such bias has the potential for undermining the efforts being made to improve the image of the construction industry. Negative reporting may detract potential graduates and present the industry as inept. Paradoxically, this project has probably been visited by more built environment students, schoolchildren and dignitaries than any other building project in Scotland’s history. However, the recent revelations exposed by the Fraser Inquiry have made life relatively easy for journalists to re-examine the project in minute detail. That said, it is the readership of the two newspapers examined that must judge for themselves the degree of bias applied by individual reporters or the chief editorial staff.

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