

Quantifying the popularity of the British *Illustrated London News* in the Australian colonies using *Trove*, 1842-1872

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The Illustrated London News (ILN) from now on) was the first publication in history to regularly combine news images and text and boasted one of the highest circulations of the London-based press in the mid-nineteenth century. The famous illustrated newspaper has mostly been researched within in the context of the formation of British identity (McKendry 1997; Piesse 2013; Sinnema 1995; Sinnema 1997). Using the Australian digital newspaper archive *Trove*, I argue in a forthcoming article that the publication was not only popular in Britain, but also in the Australian colonies (Smits forthcoming). Based on the premise that media write about other media, especially if they were as successful as the *ILN* around 1850, I researched the reception of the British publication in the Australian press.

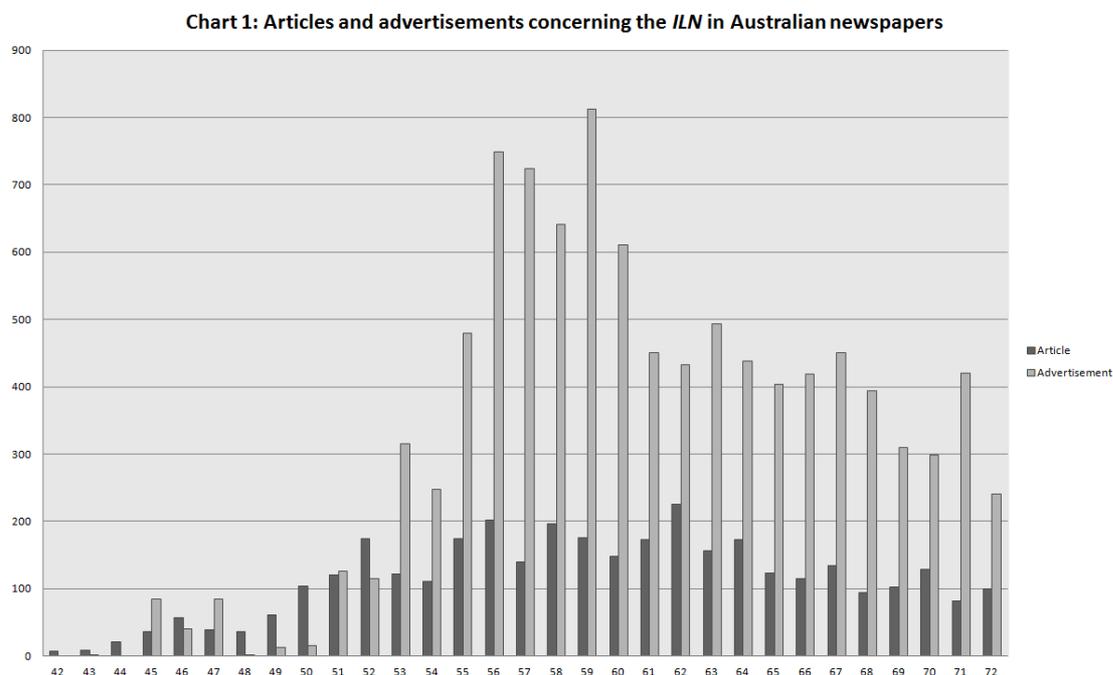


Chart 1: Articles and advertisements concerning the *ILN* in Australian newspapers

In my paper for DHBenelux 2016 I will discuss the possibility of establishing the popularity of the *ILN* in the Australian colonies by using quantitative methods. A keyword search for “Illustrated London News” for the period 1842 (when the first issue was published) to 1872 (when secondary literature suggests that the popularity of the publication declined) shows an increasing number of hits in the

1840s and 1850s, a peak in 1859, and a declining number of hits in the late 18060s (see chart 1). A reading of *Trove* in order to demonstrate the popularity of the *ILN*, such as the one presented above, is problematic. While a keyword search for “Illustrated London News” turns out an increasing number of hits in the late 1840s and 1850s, this is not necessarily indicative of the growing popularity of the magazine. Several historians have pointed out that the Australian press boomed around the mid-nineteenth century (Green 1961; Putnis 2004). I used the API of *Trove* to construct a database that shows that this growth in the number of titles and issues (many weekly newspapers started to publish bi-weekly or daily) is reflected in *Trove*, but it is unclear to what extent (see chart 2 and 3). The website of the *Australian Newspaper Digitisation Program* states that it is the long term objective of the program ‘to make freely available all Australian newspapers published prior to 1955’ (Australian Newspaper Digitisation Program n.d). However, it is unclear to what extent the program has reached this goal.

Demonstrating the increasing popularity of the *ILN* by counting the number of references to it in an increasing number of titles and issues is problematic. However, the decreasing number of hits in the late 1860s *does* demonstrate the declining popularity of the magazine in the Australian colonies. After all, as charts 2 and 3 show, the amount of material available in *Trove* continues to grow for this period: the decline in hits is significant because the size of the archive moves in the other direction. In short: the number of hits in a digital newspaper archive can be used as an indication of popularity, either increasing or decreasing, if the size of the archive - the amount of available material - shrinks or grows in the opposite direction. Based on my Australian case study, I will argue in my paper for DHBenelux 2016, that this method can substantiate claims about the popularity of print media, like books, newspapers and periodicals, in a broader sense.

Chart 2: number of titles available in Trove, 1842-1872

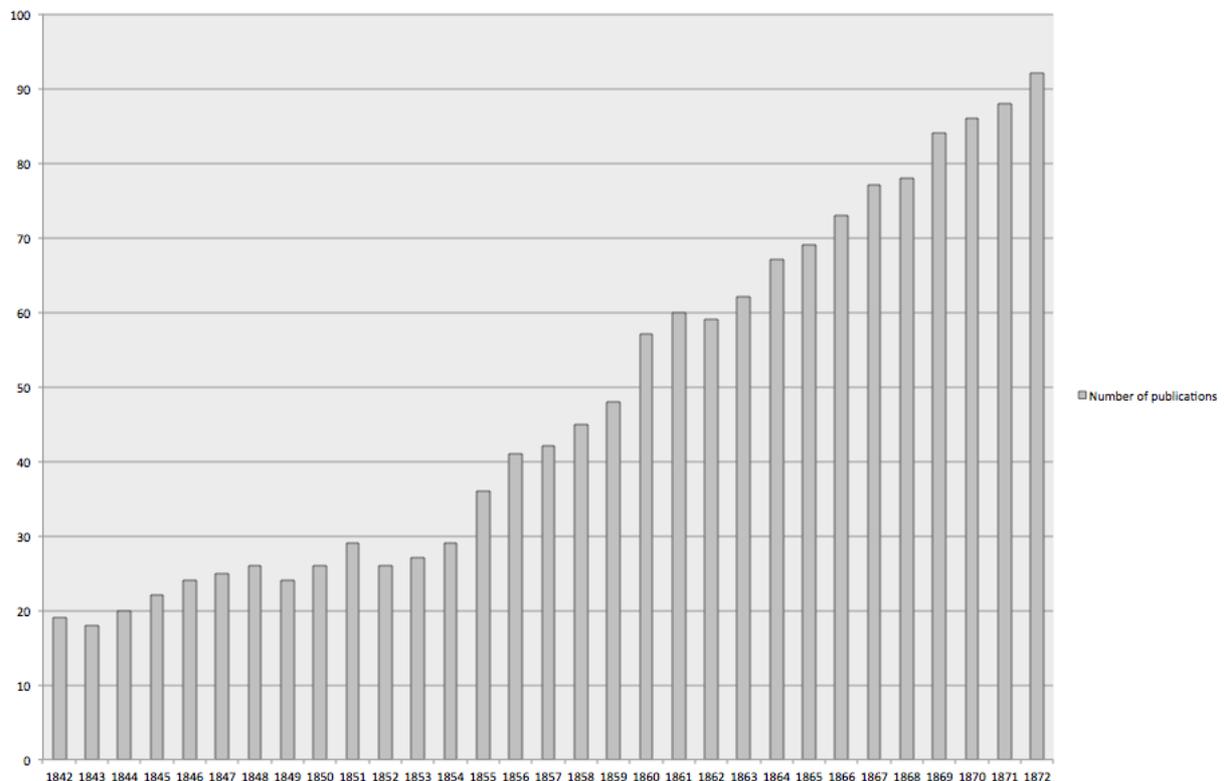


Chart 2: Number of titles available in Trove, 1842-1872.

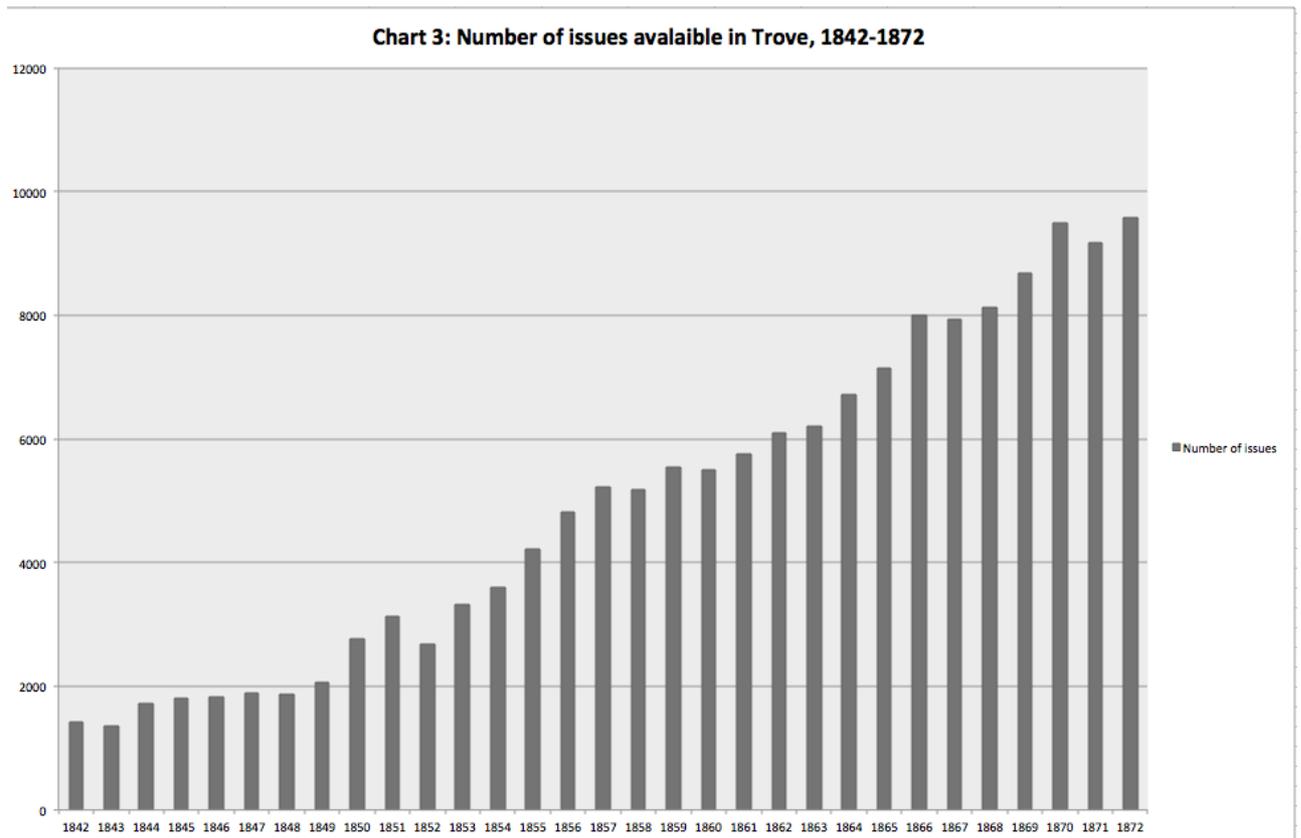


Chart 3: Number of issues available in Trove, 1842-1872.

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