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NEWS VALUES AND SELECTIVITY IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEWS

Commentary on peer-reviewed published
research articles

DEIRDRE O'NEILL

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This Commentary critically appraises my body of work over 15 years, the starting and end points being an exploration of the news values underlying the selection of news carried out 15 years apart, via various case study research articles that examine the type and quality of news that audiences receive.

This body of work interrogates – from a range of perspectives – the ways in which some voices are privileged in the press, others are marginalised, while still others are absent in the news. I explore these issues from the perspective of the selection of news, through news values and source selection; how journalists develop those values and use sources to shape the news; the manner in which labour disputes are reported and trade union officials and members are legitimised or delegitimised; the extent to which celebrities are adopted and promoted in the news; how the views and achievements of women politicians are reported; and whether women have made headway in sports news, both in terms of the coverage of women athletes and in sports writing.

The Commentary contextualises this body of work within both critical theoretical perspectives and rapid cultural, technical and social changes to situate the nine publications submitted for the degree to make clear the coherent nature of my inquiries.

In this research I have maintained a contemporary analytical approach that suggests that the processes by which sources are chosen and news is selected undermines the plurality of voices in the press; that previous understandings of news values are outdated and that news values change over time and need to be revisited; that independent reporting is limited and a great deal of news relies on press subsidies with vested interests; and that ideological factors are frequently being played out in the news we receive. All of these findings have negative implications for the range and quality of our news.

My findings have contributed to national and international debates about the news media, including an All-Party Parliamentary Report into Women in Parliament, challenged taken-for granted views about the news we receive and questioned the quality and bias of our news. The research has been disseminated nationally and internationally at leading conferences and in international journals and books, and in press articles, and is widely cited.

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Deirdre O'Neill and Matt Mulready, "The invisible woman? UK press coverage of women's sports before and after the London Olympics", *Journalism Practice*, 9 (5) (2015), 651-668.

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Tony Harcup

Tony Harcup

Catherine O'Connor

Heather Savigny

Victoria Cann

Heather Savigny

Matt Mulready

Suzanne Franks

Introduction

Some things, people, events, relationships *always* get represented: always centre stage, always in the position to define, to set the agenda, to establish the terms of the conversation. Some others sometimes get represented – but always at the margin, always responding to a question whose terms and conditions have been defined elsewhere: never ‘centred’. Still others are always ‘represented’ only by their eloquent absence, their silences: or refracted through the glance or the gaze of others. If you are white, male, a businessman or politician or a professional or a celebrity, your chances of getting represented will be very high. If you are black, or a woman without social status, or poor or working class or gay or powerless because you are marginal, you will always have to fight to get heard or seen. This does not mean that no one from the latter groups will ever find their way into the media. But it *does* mean that the structure of access to the media is systematically skewed in relation to certain social categories. ¹

What makes certain issues, events or people newsworthy? Why are some perspectives or views favoured over others? What influences the selection and construction of news? What does this mean for the representation of certain groups or perspectives in our society? What are the consequences for the quality of our news? These are the over-arching questions that drive the body of research explored in this Commentary.

Phone hacking and the Leveson Inquiry and more recently concerns about fake news have brought the debate about quality and standards in journalism again to the fore, a debate that academics have also explored in terms of ‘dumbing down’ and the trivialisation of the news agenda – what Franklin described as the rise of

¹ Stuart Hall, “Media power and class power” in James Curran, Jake Ecclestone, Giles Oakley and Alan Richardson (eds), *Bending Reality: The State of the Media*, London: Methuen (1986), 9.

'newszak'.² According to Franklin, news is 'delivered in increasingly homogenous "snippets" which make only modest demands on the audience.'³ Journalism has always had a dual role, to entertain as well as inform. For many academics (and members of the public and journalists) the issue is at what point does the balance of news coverage tip over in favour of pure entertainment, lacking any real public interest value and thus leading to a democratic deficit whereby the 'watchdog' role of the media is compromised? However, some scholars view this less negatively. For example, McNair has argued that not all aspects of the trend towards tabloidisation are bad, since it can be seen to represent a society less deferential towards the establishment and makes for a lively style and presentation that engages the public.⁴ While McNair undoubtedly has a point, much of the research critiqued in this Commentary was carried out within the context of my sharing overriding concerns about dumbing down and the quality and diversity of journalism, particularly given the rise of public relations and economic and technological pressures on journalists to fill more space – not least online and in a 24-hour news cycle – with fewer resources (discussed in more depth later in this Commentary).

Journalists and the public commonly refer to 'the news' as if what is reported as 'news' occurs 'naturally', the resulting implication being that the news media provide a full and accurate reflection of the world. Yet every day billions of events occur and issues arise, and only a fraction of these make it through the production line of what eventually becomes news. News is a construct, merely a partial and, arguably, distorted reflection of what is happening, produced through a selective process by journalists, governed in turn by the wider political, social, technological, economic and cultural environment in which they operate. The main body of this thesis (both the Commentary and the published articles on which the Commentary is based) is concerned with this selection process, of events and of sources, and how this translates into the coverage audiences receive, and the resulting implications for society. It starts with what

² Bob Franklin, *Newszak and News Media*, London: Arnold (1997).

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴ Brian McNair, *Journalism and Democracy: An Evaluation of the Political Public Sphere*, London: Routledge (2000).

has become a seminal study into what is known as ‘news values’, and continues with a recent re-evaluation of this research, followed by case studies focusing on the prominence of certain news values and use of sources to further demonstrate the effects of selection on the coverage of particular groups in society. (Copies of the published articles can be found at the end of this Commentary in Appendix 7.)

Reality is not ordered; it is chaotic, potentially confusing and overwhelming. Therefore we need mediators to order and reduce the most important information and messages that society might require so that in the democratic Habermasian ideal of the public sphere⁵ its citizens can be informed and engaged. Thus, we can see the importance of the journalistic role: in a democratic society the public rely on news outlets and their journalists for information and for holding the powerful to account. However, this places the news media and those that own or work in this industry in a position of power. He (or she) who controls the message and flow of information also wields influence and power. What a journalist chooses to cover (and by the same token, what they choose not to cover, since this can be just as significant), and the way they choose to cover some events (who is interviewed, whose viewpoint is expressed, what facts and figures are included) presents a necessarily partisan view of the world. Examination of these choices allows scholars to deconstruct news media in order to make more transparent the processes and decisions - conscious and unconscious - underlying the selection and construction of the news product, so that the public can assess the trustworthiness and quality of the news they receive, and recognise other influences or agendas that are operating. In the same way that citizens would want their news media to fulfil its watchdog role in society, understanding the selection of news can help the public challenge and question the media – itself a powerful institution. This, after all, is an industry that sets agendas, influences public opinion, public policy and politics, promoting or giving voice to some people or viewpoints, while ignoring others.

⁵ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press (1989).

This body of work interrogates – from a range of perspectives – the ways in which some voices are privileged in the press, others are marginalised, while still others are absent in the news. I explore these issues from the perspective of the selection of news, through news values and source selection; how journalists develop those values and use sources to shape the news; the manner in which labour disputes are reported and trade union officials and members are legitimised or delegitimised; the extent to which celebrities are adopted and promoted in the news; how the views and achievements of women politicians are reported; and whether women have made headway in sports news, both in terms of the coverage of women athletes and in sports writing.

Before discussing these issues in more detail, a Historiography provides some theoretical perspectives on, first, news values and, second, source selection, within which my research can be contextualised.

Part 1: Historiography: News Values and Source Selection

News values

The first stage of news selection focuses on what makes an event or issue newsworthy. In asking this, it is useful to conceptualise the journalist in the manufacturing process as a gatekeeper,⁶ allowing some events through into the production line – noticing something that could make a news story, the gathering of facts, interviewing, writing up, sub-editing, proof-reading (and filming and recording in the case of the broadcast journalist) – while excluding others. What is it that captures the journalist’s attention and means one occurrence is chosen over another to become news? One way that scholars have attempted to answer this by putting forward taxonomies of news values, a set of criteria that can be applied to an event or issue, the presence and the combination of which make an item more likely to be selected and turned into news. ‘By shedding light on the values inherent in news selection it is possible to illuminate arguments about the wider role(s) and meaning(s) of journalism within contemporary society.’⁷

Understanding news values can allow the public to challenge the consensus, and enable people and organisations to understand ways of accessing the news agenda and have their views and voices heard. News values – not always explicitly articulated – also play a role in the occupational training of new generations of journalists, contributing to a shared professional understanding of what should be in the news, over-riding to some extent individual choices and personal beliefs and political opinions (though of course these are bound to have some effect on selection).

The criteria by which news is selected developed hand-in-hand with the emergence of what we would now recognise as the professional practice of

⁶ Pamela Shoemaker, Tim P. Vos and Stephen D. Reese, “Journalists as Gatekeepers”, in Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch (eds) *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, London: Routledge (2009), 73-87.

⁷ Deirdre O’Neill and Tony Harcup, “News Values and Selectivity” in Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch (eds) *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, London: Routledge (2009), 161-174.

journalism in the late nineteenth century, with the campaign for a press free of state licensing via stamp duty. According to Curran and Seaton,⁸ the repeal of press taxes, combined with the industrialisation of the Victorian press and an increase in mass literacy, led to the development of a more commercialised press that needed to appeal to mass audiences if entry to the market and running costs were to make these enterprises viable. 'National newspapers became substantial enterprises, with growing newsprint bills and staff costs.'⁹ At the same time, the rise of advertising meant the press came to rely on advertising rather than cover price to meet their costs. The massive increase in expenditure to set up and run a newspaper, together with the need to deliver large readerships to advertisers by owners who now relied on advertising revenue instead of cover prices, forced up the circulation levels newspapers needed in order to be profitable. This combination of technological and economic changes acted as a discriminatory factor against the continuation of a left-wing, radical press. Instead, these new papers were primarily business ventures, concentrating on entertainment rather than taxing political analysis in order to secure mass appeal and circulations. Readers' interests came to take precedence in the selection of content, leading to the emergence of modern news values.

Nevertheless, it was not until the 1960s that a serious study of these criteria was published. Johan Galtung and Marie Ruge were arguably the first scholars to provide a list of news values in a paper presented at the first Nordic Conference on Peace Research in Oslo in 1963, and published their findings in 1965.¹⁰ This research article is regarded by scholars as the foundation study of news values and one of the most influential and important explanations of how news is selected,¹¹ because it was the first time that a taxonomy of news values had been articulated in an academic article. Given its subsequent influence – involving a

⁸ James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, 7th edition (2013).

⁹ *ibid.*, 26.

¹⁰ Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge, "The Structure of Foreign News: The Presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus Crises in four Norwegian Newspapers", *Journal of International Peace Research*, 1 (1965), 64-91.

¹¹ Denis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory*, London: Sage (1994).

'process of canonization'¹² - it is important to note that Galtung and Ruge's paper was not primarily concerned with identifying news values. Their article critiqued the reporting of three major foreign crises in the Norwegian press – the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus - and suggested alternative ways of reporting on such events. As part of this critique they asked, 'How do events become news?' In attempting to answer this question Galtung and Ruge presented 12 factors, or criteria, they identified as being important in the selection of news, such as Reference to Elite People, Magnitude and Threshold (see Appendix 1 for the full list and explanations).

Galtung and Ruge emphasised that that they made no claims that their criteria were complete and, moreover, that their article '*hypothesises* rather than demonstrates the presence of these factors, and *hypothesises* rather than demonstrates that these factors, if present, have certain effects among the audience.'¹³ It is also important to note that the main thrust of the research was into the structure of foreign news. This means that Galtung and Ruge were not investigating the general news values operating in all news, but the news values operating in the reporting of foreign conflicts and crises, and therefore what factors in combination needed to be present in order for certain foreign events to be selected and presented as news, and how this affected the image of the countries in the news. This will have had implications for the news values they hypothesised.

Since the publication of this seminal article, scholars have taken different approaches to the theorisation and study of news values, often focusing on the apparent newsworthiness of an event or news actors to uncover why a story has been selected, but also considering wider influences on news selection. Some scholars use their own experience and/or analysis of news outputs to formulate

¹² Stijn Joye, Ansgard Heinrich and Romy Wohlert, "50 Years of Galtung and Ruge: reflections on their model of news values and its relevance for the study of journalism and communication today", *CM: Communication and Media Journal*, XI (36) (2016), 5-28.

¹³ Galtung and Ruge, "The Structure of Foreign News", 84-85.

news values,¹⁴ while others use ethnographic observations and interviews.¹⁵ Most of these studies have produced lists of the news values that appear to be operating, building on the work of Galtung and Ruge. For example, later scholars, particularly those examining broadcast news, have pointed to the importance of audio-visuals in news selection¹⁶ - no access to film footage or sound reduces the chance of a phenomenon being reported by broadcast journalists - or that visuals themselves and the design and layout of a news page (for example, the size and prominence of a picture, the framing and cropping of a picture and the associated headline) may, in semiotic terms, contribute to certain news values, such as drama or unusualness.¹⁷ Indeed, as discussed in more detail later in this section, the whole issue of access to sources and choice of sources is inextricably bound up with both news selection and the way news is presented. So news selection needs to be viewed as a pluralistic process.

Some news values can be seen as a reflection of what type of information citizens want or need, while others result from the influence of organisational, sociological and cultural norms combined with economic factors.¹⁸ With news outlets vying for audiences in a fragmented and competitive marketplace, economic factors, such as selecting stories that satisfy advertisers,¹⁹ or the resources available to find and cover stories, are also important in exploring news values. This has led to the proposition of commercial news values,²⁰ whereby sensationalist stories are most likely to be pursued; stories that are

¹⁴ Allan Bell, *The Language of News Media*, Oxford: Blackwell (1991).

¹⁵ Philip Golding and Philip Elliott, *Making the News*, London, NY: Longman (1979).

Ida Schultz, "The journalistic gut feeling", *Journalism Practice*, 1, No. 2 (2007), 190-207.

¹⁶ Golding and Elliott, *Making the News*.

¹⁷ Helen Caple and Monika Bednarek, "Rethinking news values: What a discursive approach can tell us about the construction of news discourse and news photography", *Journalism*, 17, No.4 (2016), 435-453.

¹⁸ David Weaver, Randal Beam, Bonnie Brownlee, Paul Voakes and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, *The American Journalist in the 21st Century*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates (2007).

¹⁹ Caple and Bednarek, "Rethinking news values".

²⁰ Sigurd Allern, "Journalistic and commercial news values", *Nordcom Review*, 23, No. 1-2 (2002), 137-152.

costly to pursue are less likely to make it into the news; and news subsidies from public relations professionals, such as well-prepared press releases and photo opportunities, are more likely to be taken up by news organisations with an eye on the bottom line or hard-pressed journalists with a huge amount of platforms to fill, and translated into news items. And being first with a story adds value for producers who must attract audiences, so that exclusivity may override other news values, particularly with online news.

Nor did Galtung and Ruge explore the influence of peers within the workplace or the belief systems of journalists as a result of their social environment and background, nor the ideological or political stance of the news organisations journalists work for, or the wider political culture of society in which journalists operate. Furthermore, if news is a construct, influenced by wider society, including ideology, Hall reminds us that the methods and routines used to construct news are themselves embedded in an ideological construction: 'News values appear as a set of neutral, routine practices: but we need, also, to see formal news values as an ideological structure – to examine these rules [of news selection] as the formalisation and operationalisation of an ideology of news.'²¹

Therefore, as emphasised in my research into news values that re-evaluated the work of Galtung and Ruge,²² no theory of news values can explain everything and other approaches, such as the sources used and how these frame a story,²³ have also been explored in the research critiqued in this Commentary. My research also examines subsequent news treatment of sources and the implications for

²¹ Stuart Hall, "The determinants of news photographs" in Stanley Cohen and Jock Young (Eds). *The Manufacture of News: Deviance, Social Problems and the Mass Media*, London: Constable (1973), 235.

²² Tony Harcup and Deirdre O'Neill, "What is News? Galtung and Ruge Revisited", *Journalism Studies*, 2, No. 2 (2001), 261-280.

²³ Deirdre O'Neill and Catherine O'Connor, "The Passive Journalist: How sources dominate the local news", *Journalism Practice*, 2, No. 3 (2008), 487-500.

the quality and diversity of coverage: whose voices, perspectives and actions are aired in the news media? ²⁴ These are the themes that are explored here.

Sources

Much of the research into news and selection has had at its heart, either explicitly or implicitly, the role of sources in selecting and constructing news. The examination of sources has been key to drawing conclusions about what issues and views frame or dominate the news agenda. Whatever the reality of what is occurring in the world, without a news producer being able to procure sources, no event or issue or person can exist in the 'news'. Further to being part of the selection process, the type of source used also provides the direction or frame in which a news story is covered. In an idealised understanding of the role of a journalist in a social democracy – to hold the powerful to account – the relationship is often viewed as adversarial (particularly if a potential source has something to hide). One way of looking at this is as a tug of war, with each side trying to gain advantage in influencing the news agenda (for example, a politician or their special advisers trying to put a positive spin on a policy when a political reporter breaks a negative story about the same policy, and vice versa).

This is undoubtedly true of some forms of news journalism, particularly investigative journalism such as Andrew Norfolk's investigations for the *Times* into systematic grooming and sexual abuse of children in care by gangs of Asian men in some northern towns. However, this type of journalism is becoming the exception,²⁵ because lengthy, resource-intensive journalism is expensive and

²⁴ Deirdre O'Neill and Heather Savigny, 'Female politicians in the British press: The exception to the "masculine" norm?' *Journalism Education*, Vol. 3, No.1 (2014), 6-26.

Deirdre O'Neill, Heather Savigny and Victoria Cann, "Women Politicians in the UK Press: Not seen and not heard?" *Feminist Media Studies*, 16 (2) (2016), 293-307.
Deirdre O'Neill and Matt Mulready, "The invisible woman? A comparative study of women's sports coverage in the UK national press before and after the 2012 Olympic Games", *Journalism Practice*, 9, Issue 2 (2015), 651-668.

²⁵ Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*, London: Constable (1980).

provides few rewards for commercial media. One of the greatest benefits of investigative journalism for the public is the deterrence of corruption among those in public life who fear media exposure, but 'deterrence' provides no 'product' to sell to an audience. 'Economic theory predicts that when a producer is not able to capture some of the value of the product, it is under-produced. Since deterrence of corruption is entirely uncompensated, and what builds deterrence – investigative reporting – is very expensiveeconomic theory provides an explanation of why it is so rare.' ²⁶ In routine journalistic practice, there is a much more symbiotic relationship existing between source and reporter. As early as the 1950s, in an ethnographic study of how journalists do their job, it was found that journalists rarely carried out what could be described as independent journalism,²⁷ instead generating stories based on information from sources who stood to benefit from the transaction as much as the journalist. And research has shown that journalistic working practices and organisational routines mean that journalists tend to use a limited range of sources.²⁸ The tendency is for the commercial press to privilege official sources, the social and political elite, leading to a hierarchy of access to the media that routinely excludes people without social and political power.²⁹ Academics writing about the alternative press have noted that a different cast of sources can – and should – be called on.³⁰ Interestingly, a study of the gender and race of reporters and

Martin Conboy, *Journalism in Britain*, Sage: London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, Singapore (2011), 39.

²⁶ John H. McManus, "The commercialization of news" in Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch (eds) *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, London: Routledge (2009), 228.

²⁷ Walter Gieber (1964) "News is what newspapermen make it", in Howard Tumber (ed.), *News: A Reader*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1999), 218-223.

²⁸ Gans, *Deciding What's News*.

Justin Lewis, Andrew Williams and Bob Franklin, "A compromised Fourth Estate? UK news journalism, public relations and news sources", *Journalism Studies*, 9, No.1 (2008), 1-20.

²⁹ Stuart Hall, "Media power and class power."

Chris Atton, "Alternative and citizen journalism" in Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch (eds) *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, London: Routledge (2009), 268.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Tony Harcup, *Alternative Journalism, Alternative Voices*, London: Routledge (2013).

their sources in US broadcast news during the 2000 presidential election found that women and ethnic minority reporters tended to use a more diverse range of sources.³¹ Developing the role of sources further, and recognising that sources tend to shape and frame subsequent coverage from a particular angle or perspective, sociologist Stuart Hall coined the term 'primary definers' to describe the relatively narrow list of sources – generally the power elite of society, listed in Galtung and Ruge's taxonomy of news values - who influence the type and tone of most news coverage by defining a story frame³² and it is this issue of primary definition and framing that is explored in my study of a trade union dispute.³³

Thus, the relatively narrow range of sources that journalists use has been explained in a number of ways. For Hall and his colleagues, this phenomenon is as a result of the routines and organisational structures of the news-gathering and construction process.³⁴ For others, such as Herman and Chomsky, it is explained by the political and economic forces in society that in turn affect news production.³⁵

According to Hall *et al.*³⁶ journalists are 'predirected' to certain areas of society to report on (because of the way their work is organised they are cued in to regular institutional sources) and assign random events to a social context within a pre-existing frame of meanings and narratives already familiar to audiences. These sources that journalists turn to for news by virtue of their reliability, position and power, mean they become 'primary definers' whose view

³¹ Geri Alumit Zeldes and Frederick Fico, "Race and Gender: An analysis of sources and reporters in the networks' coverage of the 2000 presidential campaign", *Mass Media and Society*, 8 (4) (2005), 373-385

³² Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts, "The Social Production of News" in *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, London, Basingstoke: Macmillan (1978), 53-80.

³³ Deirdre O'Neill, "From Hunky Heroes to Dangerous Dinosaurs: Journalism-union relations, news access and press coverage in the 2002-3 British Fire Brigades Union dispute", *Journalism Studies*, 8, Issue 5 (2007), 813-830.

³⁴ Hall *et al.*, *Policing the Crisis*.

³⁵ Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, New York: Pantheon Books (1988).

³⁶ Hall *et al.*, *Policing the Crisis*.

of the world tend to dominate the news agenda. These studies are concerned with how certain media perspectives on the world are 'naturalised' and appear to be 'commonsense', when in fact hidden agendas may be operating.

Taking a slightly different approach, studies on the political economy of the mass media have examined how economic issues such as ownership and the profit motive have affected the news we receive, one of the most influential being Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model,³⁷ which proposes that potential news items go through five filters (they are: Ownership of the medium; the medium's Funding sources, such as advertising; the type of Sources selected; Flak, the negative responses to a media statement or programme; and Anti-communism (and fear ideology) that only allow certain types of news and ways of presenting news to enter the news manufacturing process. For example, The Propaganda Model states that ownership of news media is concentrated and primarily exists to make profit for its owners, meaning that the news agenda favours stories and perspectives that reproduce an understanding of our world that broadly supports capitalistic society, and specifically supports the business interests of owners and the political parties that enable those business interests to flourish. What is more, since advertising is a major sources of income to most news outlets, ensuring that editorial copy is suitable for keeping and attracting advertisers and potential advertisers is a major consideration that further reinforces an establishment agenda that favours the views of business and corporations through the type of sources that are used to construct and define the news we receive. When journalists stray outside this consensus, they may find they are criticised or disciplined: this may take the form of their copy being spiked or lead to self-censorship (consciously or unconsciously) of what they select or write about in order to remain in productive work. In a retrospective of the Propaganda Model, Herman acknowledges that Anti-communism has possibly weakened as a filter since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but suggests that journalists have internalized the ideology of the market, which should be added to the fifth filter 'in a world where the global power of the market makes

³⁷ Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*.

non market options seem utopian'.³⁸ Serious challenges to our present system or alternative views are rarely aired. Radical ideas are suppressed, patronised, ridiculed or presented as extreme. A good example of this is a study by the London School of Economics, which has recently found a bias against Corbyn's views in newspapers, online news, newspapers and broadcast news.³⁹ The Propaganda Model derives from the fact that dominant media are firmly embedded in the market system, and it serves their purpose to reproduce the ideology of the market. While public service broadcasting in the form of the BBC relies on a licence fee rather than advertising, its charter and the licence fee are set by the government of the day and it too cannot afford to be seen as radically departing from this broad consensus.⁴⁰ Indeed, a recent book on about the BBC states, '...despite all the claims to the contrary, the BBC is neither independent nor impartial'⁴¹ and that in focusing on the public service model it represents – an ideal, not necessarily a reality - many have overlooked the fact that its reporting reflects the interests of the establishment, the state, big business and the free market, and other powerful interest groups.

A useful example of the influence of owners and advertisers is highlighted in a recent edition of *Private Eye*. The magazine reported on the fallout from a story in the *Daily Telegraph* that was critical of HSBC. The articles 'caused apoplexy on the management floor because the bank's chief executive, Stuart Gulliver, was a friend of *Telegraph* chairman Aidan Barclay, the Barclay family retail empire Shop Direct was a significant borrower from HSBC – and the bank spent £1m a year on advertising in the *Telegraph*.'⁴² While the articles were altered to placate

³⁸ Edward S. Herman, "The Propaganda Model: a retrospective", *Journalism Studies*, 1, Issue 1 (2000), 109.

³⁹ Bart Cammaerts, Brooks DeCillia, João Magalhaes and Cesar Jimenez Martinez, "Journalistic Representations of Jeremy Corbyn in the British Press: From 'Watchdog' to 'Attackdog'", London School of Economics and Political Science (2016).

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/pdf/JeremyCorbyn/Cobyn-Report-FINAL.pdf>

⁴⁰ Cammearts *et al.*, "Representations of Corbyn", LSE research.

⁴¹ Tom Mills, *The BBC: Myth of a Public Service*, London, New York: Verso (2016), 2.

⁴² Street of Shame, *Private Eye* (16-29 Sept 2016), 10.

the bank, HSBC still withdrew advertising for a year. It has now resumed advertising, but the paper has since had two editorial resignations when journalists found that news stories that were critical of HSBC were being pulled from the website or were not being covered in the first place.

Despite these wider pressures and influences, Hall *et al.* stress the relative autonomy of journalists on a day-to-day basis, while Herman and Chomsky describe an unconscious process of reproducing the ideology of the powerful within an environment where journalists can convince themselves that they are choosing and interpreting news 'objectively' on the basis of professional news values.⁴³ By and large journalists reflect the norms of society they operate in.

Herman and Chomsky's proposed filtering model of potential news and the work of Stuart Hall on sources and news treatment, along with Galtung and Ruge's conceptualisation of news values, have been a driving force behind much of the research and the case studies presented here in an attempt to see if news values have changed and the subsequent effects of news values and source-use on the representation of certain groups and the quality of journalism decades later, in a period that has seen startling developments in communications technology, as well as a rise in public relations news subsidies, fewer journalistic resources and changing source-journalist relationships.

The arrival of the World Wide Web, the most powerful information technology in human history, has had a profound effect on news. 'The World Wide Web remains very young, but already it gathers accounts of an extraordinarily wide variety of events from an extraordinarily wide variety of sources and disseminates them in a wide variety of formats fast and far.'⁴⁴ In this period we have witnessed movement onto digital online platforms that can deliver audio-visuals, create links to other articles and make much greater use of audiences in ways not previously possible, along with the rise of social media use and a

⁴³ Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 2.

⁴⁴ Mitchell Stephens, *Beyond News: The Future of Journalism*, New York: Columbia University Press (2014), xii.

multiplicity of viewing platforms and devices on which to access media. There is an increasing trend among news consumers to access news via the internet.⁴⁵ And this news is instant, rapid - remarkably so - global, shared, promoted and amplified.

Formerly passive audiences of news can actively become part of the production process: they can break news on platforms such as Twitter, they can provide expert information and facts on issues through crowd-sourcing, a method that has been employed by the *Guardian* (for example, in June 2010 it launched an app that enabled readers to help analyse the released data on receipts of MPs' expenses to find any buried stories⁴⁶), or act as citizen journalists, supplying video of, for example, a riot or terrorist incident as it happens. 'In the last few years alone our readers have helped us to review MPs' expenses documents, follow the UK riots, gain real-time insights into the Arab spring as events in the Middle East unfolded and challenge the government's employment schemes.'⁴⁷ However, while it must be acknowledged that user-generated content has affected the news we receive, somewhat utopian predictions about open-Web democracy revolutionising news production have not come to pass.⁴⁸ Instead of radically changing the production process, research has shown that the main role performed by the most of the online audience seems to be sharing and disseminating news on social media platforms.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Ofcom, "News consumption in the UK" (2014), 2.
https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/52247/news_report_2014.pdf

⁴⁶ Simon Rodgers, "How to crowdsource MPs' expenses", *Guardian* (18 June 2009).
<https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2009/jun/18/mps-expenses-houseofcommons>

⁴⁷ Joanna Geary in Josh Halliday, 'Guardian launches platform for user-generated content', *Guardian* (16 April, 2013).
<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/apr/16/guardian-user-generated-content>

⁴⁸ Dan Gillmor, *We The Media: Grassroots journalism by the people for the people*, Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly Media (2004).

⁴⁹ Angela Phillips, "Sociability, Speed and Quality in the Changing News Environment", *Journalism Practice*, 6 No. 5-6 (2012), 675.

Nevertheless, the role of social media is not confined to 'sharing'. Twitter and similar social media platforms have further changed the landscape, with Twitter becoming a rich source of stories (particularly the Tweets of the powerful and famous – certainly more ethical than tapping their phones for stories), while Twitterstorms, in another digital-age twist, have become the very object of the news. For example, a seemingly innocuous tweet by Jamie Oliver for a paella recipe became a page 5 lead in the *Times* on 5 October 2016 when it led to social media protests and an online petition about the inauthenticity of the recipe. News sources and the very nature of news are changing because of social media. Furthermore, 'news' from social media may not even be true, as the 'false news' Facebook scandal in the lead-up to the American election has demonstrated. Labour Deputy Leader Tom Watson has gone so far as to state that this development is a 'threat to democracy',⁵⁰ while Apple boss Tim Cook recently said fake news is 'killing people's minds' and called for firms to 'create tools that would stem the spread of falsehoods'.⁵¹

One of the most important changes wrought by social media is that it provides constant feedback on what stories audiences are engaged with, what they like and what they share. Audiences now become rich feedback data sources and can, for the first time, be tracked as to what type of items they like to view.

Assumptions made by journalists about what is newsworthy – or at least what interests the audience - can be tested: "The key question for news organisations, tied to the goal of big traffic, is now "what works best on Facebook?"⁵² Of course what journalists consider newsworthy is not necessarily the same as what may interest many people, but the latter takes centre stage in the social media age.

⁵⁰ Jack Blanchard, "Major probe to be launched into 'fake news' websites that 'helped Donald Trump win election' by Labour," *Daily Mirror* (20 November 2016). <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/major-probe-launched-fake-news-9299355>

⁵¹ Kevin Rawlinson, " 'Fake news is "killing people's minds,' says Apple boss Tim Cook", *Guardian* (11 February 2017). <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/feb/11/fake-news-is-killing-peoples-minds-says-apple-boss-tim-cook>

⁵² Emily Bell, "What works best on Facebook is the key", *Guardian* (18 May 2015).

The option of pursuing the popular for audience hits becomes very attractive to news media outlets competing in a market where profit margins are strained. 'Clickbait' becomes the economic holy grail of news producers. This in turn distorts the 'news' product and our notions of what news looks and sounds like. According to recent studies, this knowledge about news consumer behaviour influences both the selection of news⁵³ and how it is presented to the public.⁵⁴ If ideas about what is newsworthy change when journalists pursue the popular, this in turn will affect the news values and the sources used.

News outlets, particularly newspapers, have struggled to develop a sustainable digital business model. It remains to be seen if pay walls can succeed in a culture that now expects news to be free (for example, the *Times* made online registration mandatory in June 2010 and quickly lost nearly 90 per cent of online readership by July 2010, according to a report in the *Guardian* in July 2010, though editor John Witherow in 2016 claimed that the *Times* pay wall had contributed to profitability).⁵⁵ Furthermore, unlike in the heyday of media advertising to fund news and journalism, 'the supply of news-rich pages on the Internet is now so large that it is hard to charge much for ads on those pages. Even the supply of online audio and video news, which can be preceded by short commercials, seems to be heading in the direction of unlimited supply as audio and video become ever easier to record, edit upload and access. The success of digital news itself consequently undercuts the economics of digital journalism...'⁵⁶

⁵³ Hong Tien Vu, "The Online Audience as Gatekeeper: The Influence of Reader Metrics on News Editorial Selection", *Journalism*, 15, No. 8 (2014), 1094–1110. Kasper Welbers, Wouter Van Atteveldt, Jan Kleinnijenhuis, Nel Ruigrok, and Joep Schaper, "News Selection Criteria in the Digital age: Professional Norms Versus Online Audience Metrics," *Journalism*, 7, No. 8 (2016), 1037-1053.

⁵⁴ Neil Thurman and Merja Myllylahti "Taking the paper out of news", *Journalism Studies*, 10, No. 5 (2009), 691-708.

⁵⁵ Josh Halliday, "Times loses almost 90% of online readership" (10 July 2010). <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2010/jul/20/times-paywall-readership> Ian Burrell, "The *Times* editor John Witherow on how its paywall is paying off – and why he thinks the *Guardian* will now follow its lead" (28 July 2016).

<http://www.thedrum.com/opinion/2016/07/28/times-editor-john-witherow-how-its-paywall-paying-and-why-he-thinks-guardian-will>

⁵⁶ Stephens, *Beyond News*, xiv.

News values and source use have also been influenced by the corresponding rise of public relations professionals, employed to 'manage' media relations and place stories in the news that are favourable to the organisation hiring them. The most comprehensive study into the extent to which PR has shaped the news the audience receives was carried out by Cardiff University in 2008, commissioned by *Guardian* journalist Nick Davies and discussed in his book *Flat Earth News*.⁵⁷ Having been given wide access to newsrooms, the researchers monitored the role of public relations in British national newspapers and broadcasters, and found a huge reliance on public relations material.⁵⁸ The data gathered supported a picture of journalism in which news-gathering and reporting in a meaningful, independent way was the exception rather than the rule, and that reliance on public relations subsidies favoured big business or government, those who have the resources to produce the best PR. The researchers concluded that the quality and independence of journalism was being adversely affected.

By examining news values, sources and representation in a changing news environment, the themes of news selectivity, diversity and quality have been explored in my research. This research establishes contemporary taxonomies of news values, what sources tend to be favoured in the selection process, and whose voices, views and achievements are aired in both national and local press. Overall, this body of work strongly questions the independence of a press that is all too often a cipher for the public relations industry and the power elite, and feeds into discussions about the implications for the quality of news the public receive from the press.

⁵⁷ Nick Davies, *Flat Earth News: An Award-winning Reporter Exposes Falsehood, Distortion and Propaganda in the Global Media*, London: Vintage (2009).

⁵⁸ Lewis *et al.*, "A compromised Fourth Estate?"

PART 2: My research

Much of the research discussed in this has been done in collaboration with other scholars. In many cases my co-authors have approached me to work with them, and on every project I have either led or been an equal partner in terms of my contribution (see letters attached in Appendix 8). While there can be problems with collaborating, such as individuals being named on a paper when they have not made much of a contribution or people who have contributed not being named as a co-author,⁵⁹ I have generally found that collaboration is a positive experience that enhances effectiveness in terms of bringing different and complementary strengths and knowledge to the process. It also makes it possible to gather larger and more reliable amounts of data samples than working on my own (for example, in some of the research projects, hundreds or even thousands of articles were examined). It can also speed up the time from inception to publication,⁶⁰ important for the relevance of research findings in a fast-moving environment such as the media, and it can be a more stimulating experience.⁶¹ In addition, co-authors can learn from each other, particularly useful for developing inexperienced researchers (for example, in collaborating, I developed two people who had never done research before).

News values

My initial research on news values and selectivity (2001),⁶² carried out in collaboration with Tony Harcup, involved the re-evaluation of Galtung and Ruge's seminal and still widely cited study of news values in a much-altered news environment almost 40 years later. It seemed to us that any taxonomy of

⁵⁹ Barry Bozeman and Jan Youtie, "Trouble in Paradise", *Science and Engineering Ethics*, 2, Issue 6, 1717-1743.

⁶⁰ Basil P. Tucker, Lee D. Parker and Kenneth A. Merchant, "With a little help from our friends", *The British Accounting Review*, 48, Issue 2 (2016), 185-205.

⁶¹ R.K. Fleishman and K. Schuele, "Co-authorship in accounting history: advantages and pitfalls", *Accounting, Business and Financial History*, 19, No. 3 (2009), 287-303.

⁶² Tony Harcup and Deirdre O'Neill, "What is news? Galtung and Ruge revisited", *Journalism Studies*, 2, No. 2 (2001), 261-280.

Tony Harcup and Deirdre O'Neill, "What is news? News values revisited (again)", *Journalism Studies* (2016). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1150193>

news values should be open to question and reviewed regularly. Given the huge changes in news outlined in the previous section, it seemed timely to reassess their news values and to apply them to domestic news, as well as foreign news. Rather than simply rely on journalistic experience to hypothesise how news values might have changed, we took a more systematic approach, examining page lead stories in the three biggest selling UK newspapers in the quality, mid-range and red-top markets and applying Galtung and Ruge's news factors to each story to see if they were still relevant nearly four decades after their original publication.

This meant that we had to approach Galtung and Ruge's criteria from the perspective of media texts rather than events and that there would be a degree of subjectivity in attempting to identify where they were operating in these texts. Each article was closely read and analysed and we tabulated which of Galtung and Ruge's 12 factors, or combination of factors, accounted for the selection of that article. To minimise unreliability, we began by analysing articles together, discussing and agreeing which of Galtung and Ruge's news criteria (if any) were evident, and recording the frequency of all 12 news factors. We also noted articles where Galtung and Ruge's news factors did not appear to apply, reassessing Galtung and Ruge's taxonomy and redefining, relabelling or adding to the taxonomy.

Of course, no content analysis could demonstrate what items were rejected or simply not noticed by journalists. This does not mean the study of news factors has no value, merely that selectivity throws up as many questions as answers, and that no list of news values can be viewed as comprehensive or provide the last word on the selection process. Moreover, such an approach may reveal less about news selection and more about news treatment. Nevertheless, what appears on the page does tell us something about the choices made; news values help shape the mediated world – news selection and treatment - that is presented to news audiences. But any list of news values is simply one of a range of tools to aid analysis and discussion of the journalistic selection process.

During our application of Galtung and Ruge's 12 news factors to 1,200 news stories in the *Sun*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Telegraph*, some of these issues became apparent. While some of the findings had similarities, there were notable problems and differences.

For example, Elite People was too vague a category, with no distinction made between a pop star and the President of the USA. There were a surprising number of stories that were not concerned with elite countries or people but with elite institutions (for instance, the Bank of England, the Vatican, the United Nations). Some of Galtung and Ruge's factors could have more to do with news treatment, rather than selection (Unambiguity or Personification may have less to do with the intrinsic subject matter than how journalists are required to write up stories). Going against conventional wisdom, there was a surprising number of good news stories [for example, miracle cures, rescues, decreasing crime figures, noteworthy achievements], as well as stories with no clear timescale [not all the news was 'new'] or which did not unfold at a frequency suited to newspaper production.⁶³

In addition to the surprising amount of 'good' news (on some days the amount of good news was almost equal to the amount of bad news), it became clear that one newspaper's good news was another's bad news. For instance, aspects of the budget were presented as positive in some publications and negative in others, according to the paper's economic and political stance. Along with other coverage that was also clearly in line with a newspaper's agenda, this drew our attention to the selection and treatment of certain items on the basis of the news outlet's agenda or ideology, an issue not highlighted by Galtung and Ruge.

There were few stories related to Elite Nations or Meaningfulness (cultural proximity), partly because the *Sun* and *Daily Mail* carry so few foreign stories. One of the most significant differences was the number of stories that appeared for no particular reason other than to provide an entertaining read. As expected, the nature of news changes, and there appeared to be a shift from hard news to

⁶³ O'Neill and Harcup, "News values and selectivity", 167.

more soft news, with funny stories, stories about animals, about celebrities, showbusiness and sex often dominating. And with a greater shift towards tabloidisation in all the papers, the opportunity for pictures featured prominently, with attractive or arresting photographs included, even when there was little obvious intrinsic newsworthiness. Therefore, examining the relevance of Galtung and Ruge's news values in domestic news (not just foreign crises) and 35 years later, we demonstrated the need for an updated list of news values, which we proposed in the conclusion of our 2001 study (see Appendix 2).⁶⁴

Fifteen years later, having established that at least some news values change with changes in society, it seemed incumbent on us to re-evaluate our own 2001 list of news values, not least because of the technological changes outlined previously. Thus, we asked ourselves, how well does Harcup and O'Neill's 2001 taxonomy of news values stand up in this rapidly changing landscape 15 years on? Should we refine or devise a new set of news values? What other considerations now influence the selection of news?

There were notable differences as to how we approached this updated study. It was important to take into account the rise of social media, particularly the use of Facebook and Twitter in sharing content, given its role in promoting news and driving traffic. In fact, both serve slightly different functions in relation to news. Hard news tends to be shared on Twitter, but it is Facebook that drives more traffic and shares more lighthearted and humorous stories.⁶⁵ Therefore we attempted to analyse the news tsunami of Facebook and Twitter stories by analysing the Top 10 Facebook stories from 2014⁶⁶ and the Top 15 Twitter stories, as measured by 'shares'.⁶⁷ We examined a wider range of titles in a

⁶⁴ Harcup and O'Neill, "What is news? Galtung and Ruge revisited", 279.

⁶⁵ Angela Philips, *Journalism in Context*, London: Routledge (2015).

⁶⁶ Catalina Albeanu, "Facebook: Top 10 Stories from UK Outlets in 2014", *journalism.co.uk* (9 January 2015).

<https://www.journalism.co.uk/news/the-10-most-popular-stories-on-facebook-from-uk-outlets-in-2014/s2/a563715/>

⁶⁷ Catalina Albeanu, "Twitter Shares: Top 10 Stories from UK Outlets in 2014", *journalism.co.uk* (12 January 2015).

sample week from 14th November 2014: *The Sun*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Express*, *The Times*, *The Guardian*, the *Independent* and free-distribution dailies the *Metro* and *London Evening Standard*. We applied our 2001 set of news values to 711 lead stories. To ensure consistency, each story was read to see if our 2001 news values could account for their selection and cross-checked by both researchers, with any disparities discussed before arriving at a consensus. While some subjectivity is always involved in coding for both the 2001 and 2016 studies, we nevertheless believed the samples were large enough to allow for tentative conclusions to be drawn about the need to add to our existing list of news values. Again, we also noted articles where selection appeared to be governed by news values other than those listed in our 2001 taxonomy, so that we expanded our original list of news values.

Despite its decline, the printed press remains worthy of examination because of the continuous reach of its journalism: the paid-for titles in Harcup and O'Neill, 2016, had a combined daily sale of over six million copies in the sample month and more than two million of the free titles are distributed every day. Circulation on this scale is socially significant. Research also demonstrates that newspapers influence the news agenda of other media ⁶⁸ and in the online world it is major news organisations that obtain the largest audience share (the BBC leads but then comes the *Daily Mail*, the *Guardian*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sun*).

In this 2016 study, a review of more recent literature, which highlighted the role of the audience, audio-visuals, and data journalism, together with our findings, meant this research resulted in some re-definitions and additions to our

<https://www.journalism.co.uk/news/twitter-shares-top-10-stories-from-uk-outlets-in-2014/s2/a563735/>
Searchmetrics, "The *Guardian* Tops List of Most Popular UK Newspaper Sites on Twitter, Finds New Study" (20 January 2016)
<http://www.searchmetrics.com/news-and-events/most-popular-uk-newspaper-sites-on-twitter/>
⁶⁸ Stephen Cushion and Richard Sambrook, "Election Coverage", *Guardian*, (12 April 2015).
<http://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/apr/12/election-coverage-tv-news-newspapers>, 2015.

taxonomy of news values. In all, we list 15 news values instead of 10. We added Conflict (stories concerning conflict such as controversies, arguments, splits, strikes, fights, insurrection and warfare); Exclusivity (stories generated by, or available first to, the news organisation as a result of interviews, letters, investigations, surveys, polls, and so on); Drama (stories concerning unfolding dramas such as escapes, accidents, searches, sieges, rescues, battles, or court cases); Shareability (stories that are likely to generate sharing and comments via Facebook, Twitter and other forms of social media) and Audio-visuals (stories that have arresting photographs, video, audio and/or which can be illustrated with infographics). The full 2016 taxonomy is listed in Appendix 3. It should, however, be acknowledged that the criteria of “shareability” – content that makes audiences ‘sit up’ because it is so clever, funny, shocking, beautiful informative, useful or striking in some other way - needs some further exploration in this Commentary and the work of Jenkins *et al.*⁶⁹ on what they term “spreadability”, similar to our term “shareability”, is useful in this regard. The authors argue that content is shared on the basis of its perceived value for an audience member’s social circle, and the meanings that can be drawn from the content. It follows that content which is likely to be shared and spread will be relevant to multiple audiences and easily reusable in a variety of ways. It will be “portable” (that is, quotable and editable by an audience) and “grabbable” (easily picked up and inserted elsewhere); and “available when and where audiences want it” (producers need to place material where audiences will find it most useful).⁷⁰ Audiences have a variety of motivations in sharing content. It can be used to mobilise, grow or activate a community. Alternatively, it can help members to define themselves, communicating something about who they are and what they like; it may strengthen social ties; or content can provide inspiration for adding their own content as a means to gain notoriety or build their own audience. “Content spreads, then, when it acts as fodder for conversations that audiences are already having.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture*, New York: New York University Press (2013).

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 197-199.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, 199.

From a methodological perspective, it should be noted that many more printed stories were analysed than those that appeared on social media (711 compared to the top 25). While the main focus was on newspapers, the changing digital climate meant it was impossible to ignore social media, so we made a tentative step to incorporate social media news in a way that ‘managed’ the tsunami of online news that appears via Twitter and Facebook. Therefore any conclusions about shared news via social media must come with a ‘health warning’, and needs further investigation with much larger data sets.

In conclusion, our research demonstrates that any one story might tick several news criteria, even those that may, on the surface, appear contradictory. For example, ‘The finding that a story might simultaneously be good news and bad news [for example, ‘Britain bars “pick-up artist” who gives £1000 lessons in misogyny’ in the *Telegraph* on 20 November 2014 contains both bad news (sexist attitudes) and good news (he is barred)] illustrates that any taxonomy of news values ought not to be thought of as a list of alternatives.’⁷²

And, importantly, it was stressed that ‘*who* is selecting news, *for whom*, in *what medium* and by *what means* (available resources), may well be as important as whatever news values may or may not be inherent in any potential story.’⁷³ This is reinforced by a study of Swedish journalists into what they thought *should be* selected as news compared to what *actually is* selected as news.⁷⁴ The researchers found a distinct contrast: journalists thought important event properties with regards to selecting news were ‘that the event increases people’s awareness of problems in society, that it has consequences for people’s daily lives, and that the event increases people’s insights and knowledge.’⁷⁵ However, the journalists surveyed felt that in practice audience interest, production

⁷² Harcup and O’Neill, “What is news? News values revisited (again)”, 9.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷⁴ Jesper Stromback, Michael Karlsson and David Nicolas Hopmann, “Determinants of news content”, *Journalism Studies*, 13, Issue 5-6 (2012), 718-728.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 725.

routines and economic considerations were more important in deciding what became news than they should be. 'That the event is of interest to the editorial managers, inexpensive to cover, about famous persons or organisations, and that there is a good press release available are perceived to be substantively more important event properties than they should be when deciding what's news.'⁷⁶ Furthermore, the journalists believed that unexpected, sensational and dramatic events, as well as exclusivity, governed what appeared in the news rather than what journalists perceived to be important for society.⁷⁷

Case study articles

In our 2001 and 2016 studies, we (Harcup and O'Neill) aimed to demonstrate the news values that appeared to be operating in the news, but made no judgements about what changing news values meant for the quality of news or ascertained a hierarchy of news values. However, a case study I carried out into celebrity news in 2012 aimed to examine and make judgements about news values by comparing how two celebrity deaths were covered by the press, the first in the late 1970s and the second in the early 21st century and whether any conclusions could be drawn about the extent of the tabloidisation of the so-called 'quality' press.⁷⁸

This case study (2012) compared the coverage of the death of Elvis Presley in 1977 and Michael Jackson in 2009 in the *Guardian*, the *Times*, and the *Daily Telegraph* (the *Independent* was excluded as it did not exist in 1977). The research focused primarily on the first three days of coverage of the respective deaths, when the reporting was at its peak. It was hoped that such a comparison might go some way towards answering the following questions: 'Has celebrity coverage expanded? Where is it situated? Is it driving out more important news? With the red-tops something of a lost cause with regards to celebrity coverage,

⁷⁶ Stromback *et al.*, "Determinants of news content", 726.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Deirdre O'Neill, "No cause for celebration: the rise of celebrity news values in the British quality press", *Journalism Education*, 1, No. 2 (2012), 26-44.

this study focused on what was happening in the quality press, and the implications for the public.’⁷⁹

Since page sizes have changed over the years, all articles relating to Presley or Jackson on the domestic news pages were recorded as column inches and calculated as a percentage of all the domestic news column inches. Coverage of Presley and Jackson that appeared elsewhere (such as supplements, features and obituaries) was also noted separately, but it was not included in overall percentages of column inches as it was not deemed to be affecting news reporting, though arguably it was affecting the news agenda, so was worth recording as supplementary data. These two figures were chosen because they shared certain celebrity similarities. Both were global pop stars originating from the USA who died prematurely as their careers were waning. And both are among the top three best-selling artists of all time.

The main findings were that coverage on domestic news pages ranged between 2-9 per cent for Presley over the three-day period for all the newspapers, while for Jackson this ranged from 9-48 per cent. In addition, the *Guardian* and the *Times* also published supplements devoted exclusively to Jackson, and the coverage for the latter went on solidly for weeks, and more sporadically for months, while it was confined to just three days for Presley (a search over the six months following his death found that Jackson was the leading focus of over 3,000 articles, more than the then Prime Minister). In the first three days following the news of their deaths, Jackson received 10 to 15 times the amount of coverage of Presley. ‘Interestingly, both the *Times* and the *Guardian* treated some of the coverage of Presley’s death as overseas news and did not give the story much prominence on domestic news pages: Unlike in 2009 when Jackson, also an American who died in America, was splashed all over the domestic news pages of UK newspapers, up to nearly a *half of all the news* contained on the domestic news pages of the *Guardian* and the *Times* on day 1, and taking up to a third of all

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

news appearing on domestic news pages on day 2 in the *Telegraph*. All of this was in addition to the pages of supplements in the *Times* and *Guardian*.’⁸⁰

The findings raise a number of issues and themes. First, we seem to be witnessing a phenomenon in the reporting of news that Whannel describes as ‘vortextuality’, a situation where all newspapers get drawn into covering the same news and focusing on this news to the detriment of other news. ‘The various media constantly feed off each other in processes of self-preferentiality and intertextuality. In an era of electronic and digital information exchange, the speed at which this happens has become very rapid. Certain super major events come to dominate the headlines, and it becomes temporarily difficult for columnists and commentators to discuss anything else.’⁸¹ Celebrity news values – not even mentioned in Galtung and Ruge’s landmark study of 1965 – cannot now be ignored, and appear to be rising up the hierarchy of what makes news.

Secondly, it raises issues about the quality and choice of news. ‘Should serious newspapers such as the *Guardian* or the *Times* be purging nearly half of their content of serious news (48 per cent and 45 per cent respectively of domestic news pages on one particular day). With this amount of coverage of the death of one pop star, readers are entitled to ask, “What important news is being ignored?”’⁸² This type of reporting is leading to the homogenisation of the press – both red-top and quality papers – and failing to distinguish between segmented news audiences by limiting choice. In addition, it was found that the sheer volume of this type of coverage invariably meant that a lot of articles were repetitive and speculative, little more than rumour and gossip, and driving out informative news. ‘News audiences are left with a shrinking public sphere where the free exchange of information and opinions has been reduced to acres of coverage of lurid celebrity gossip that materially affect most of our lives not one jot, while journalists fail to expose falsehoods about taking us into war, or warn

⁸⁰ O’Neill, “No Cause for Celebration”, 35.

⁸¹ Garry Whannel, “News, Celebrity and Votextuality: A study of the media coverage of the Michael Jackson verdict”, *Cultural Politics*, 6, Issue 1 (2010), 71.

⁸² O’Neill, “No Cause for Celebration”, 36.

and campaign against the sharp and disastrous banking practices that plunged us into global recession.....The public is being ill served.’⁸³

The founder of Slow Journalism and Editor of *Delayed Gratification*, Rob Orchard, shares the view that ‘The fundamental nature of news journalism has changed for the worst in the last 20 years.’⁸⁴ He describes the constant and unremitting pressure on quality, not least because of the number of journalists who have lost their jobs in the last few decades, while those that remain have to produce more with fewer resources (for example, according to Rob Orchard the number of reporters in the USA has fallen 31% between 2002 and 2012 and the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism has noted the number of journalists working in newspapers in the UK has sharply declined.⁸⁵ This is in addition to major job losses in the news department at the BBC: over 600 between 2012 and 2014⁸⁶).

I concluded my case study by arguing there is still a market for engaging and informative news, a point that Orchard also makes forcefully. He believes some section of the potential news audience will always have an appetite for quality, trustworthy journalism, ‘a journalism that values perspective and hindsight over immediate knee-jerk reaction, which doesn’t see journalistic content as just something to fill in the space between advertising pages, which isn’t filled with re-written press releases, which brings you stories that you didn’t know you wanted to read but which nonetheless change your world view.’⁸⁷

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

⁸⁴ Rob Orchard, TEDx talk, Madrid (2014).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGtFXtnWME4>, accessed Oct 2016.

⁸⁵ Neil Thurman, Alessio Cornia and Jessica Kunert, *Journalists in the UK*, University of Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2016), 5.
<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Journalists%20in%20the%20UK.pdf>

⁸⁶ BBC online news (17 July 2014).

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-28342929>, accessed Oct 2016.

⁸⁷ Orchard, TEDx talk, Madrid (2014).

This issue of an over-reliance on press releases and the impact upon the quality of news was the basis of the case study called ‘The Passive Journalist’.⁸⁸ The research focuses on source selection and information subsidies in the local and regional press. As Sigal stated, ‘who the sources are bears a close resemblance to who [or what] is news’ (my addition).⁸⁹ This study arose out of a concern that, like the national press, local journalists were losing their jobs, news rooms were understaffed and a managerial culture existed that emphasised quantity not quality.⁹⁰ At the time of the research, most local and regional newspapers tended to be owned by just three large media businesses in the UK: Trinity Mirror, Newsquest and Johnston Press (since 2013, Local World has also become a significant player). In recent years, many daily titles (such as the *Halifax Courier*, owned by Johnston Press) have become weeklies, shedding even more jobs. Both as a reader of my local newspaper and lecturer in journalism I was concerned about the standard of local newspapers, an area that tends to be under-researched compared to national newspapers. As a former deputy editor of a local newspaper, my co-author also had concerns about the quality of local news. In addition, our students on placement on local newspapers were telling us they spent their work experience merely re-writing press releases and that few journalists seemed to leave the office to go out on stories. This meant we found ourselves asking about the extent of independent journalism in the local and regional press, and whether there was an over-reliance on organisations seeking favourable publicity through media subsidies. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that press releases *per se* are not always problematic. They have a useful role in alerting a journalist to an event. If a press release is used as a starting point of a story, and other sources and information are found to complete the article, this does not necessarily have to compromise the integrity of the resulting news story. And using press releases to help generate news is not necessarily problematic if other stories are still investigated by journalists

⁸⁸ Deirdre O’Neill and Catherine O’Connor, “The Passive Journalist: How sources dominate local news”, *Journalism Practice*, 2, No. 3 (2008), 487-500.

⁸⁹ Leon V. Sigal, “Sources Make the News” in Robert Karl Manoff and Michael Shudson (eds), *Reading the News*, New York: Pantheon Books (1986), 9-37.

⁹⁰ Samuel Pecke, “Local Heroes”, *British Journalism Review*, 15, No. 2 (2004), 26-30.

independently, especially stories that an organisation or individual may not want publicised. The real issue is if there is an over-dependency on press releases to fill the pages - using press releases to 'uncover' most stories and reprinting them fully or near fully while passing off such news content as 'independent' journalism when it is nothing of the kind. It was to investigate the extent to which this was happening that we conducted our research.

Four local and regional titles representing each of the major companies were used in this study of sources, and nearly 3000 published news articles were examined to identify the primary (and secondary, if any) source from which the main substance of an article appeared to be sourced. We were surprised that such high proportion - 76 per cent - relied on just one source. 'The 76 per cent of stories using single sources were rarely contentious or critical of the source providing the story.'⁹¹ It is obvious that we had no way of assessing how hundreds of journalists made their decisions on the news content we examined but it is possible to establish the range of their sources from the published articles. There is merit in studying the final news product because this is the news that readers receive and this published news reveals the range of information and diversity of sources and perspectives available to readers.

As well as a preponderance of stories that included just one source perspective, we identified that a relatively narrow range of sources - just 16 types of organisations - were used throughout the four newspaper news pages, with most of the primary definers being the police and the courts, as we might expect. Local government came second. However, there were also nearly as many stories sourced from staged events/organisers of events as local government. One significant finding was that most stories were uncritical and did not challenge the view or information provided by the main source. When this finding is combined with the other significant finding - that 76 per cent of articles included just one source - sources were clearly in a strong position to define and frame the tone of articles in most of the local news reported. There was little evidence of independent journalism that explored other source perspectives on the stories

⁹¹ O'Neill and O'Connor, "The Passive Journalist", 493.

being published. It is worth quoting an experienced local journalist who contacted me about this issue on reading a news story in *Press Gazette* summarising our research: ‘ I am concerned about the training given to new-entry reporters who no longer have the questioning attitude inculcated into me and my peers when training in the late 1980s: it doesn’t occur to them to tone down the shameless propagandising in their source material, and the idea of looking for an alternative viewpoint, which might create a better story, seldom seems to arise.’⁹²

It was notable that 61 per cent of stories about local government only used single-sources and these were local government sources, and 80 per cent of crime stories contained only the police as the single source. The fact that the police and local government now have well-developed press and public relations departments ‘suggests a significant unquestioning reliance onpress officers or press releases’⁹³ and raises concerns about a democratic deficit and reduced accountability of organisations that serve the public. A good example was the framing of a story in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* (with the positive headline ‘Three-star Rating for City Council’s Good Showing’, 22 February 2007) only in terms of the views of the council leader and chief executive (and therefore likely to have emanated from a council press release), with no alternative or dissenting views, despite the council having dropped one star in the ratings.

Commercial sources were also used regularly and also fared well, with 85 per cent containing no secondary sources, leading to stories that were banal, non-contested, and which provided free publicity for commercial enterprises. Taking these and other findings into account, the study concluded that local journalists were becoming passive recipients of information, over-reliant on press releases, rather than active investigators, too frequently producing bland, banal copy at best, or free advertising and propaganda at worse, undermining local democracy, journalistic standards and public trust. While methodologically differently, these conclusions were broadly in line with the contemporaneous findings of Lewis *et*

⁹² Personal correspondence, (2008).

⁹³ O’Neill and O’Connor, “The Passive Journalist”, 493.

al. in their funded study of the national press, where the authors concluded that the media's 'fourth estate' role was becoming compromised.⁹⁴

My study of press coverage of the 2002 firefighters' dispute⁹⁵ was also an attempt to identify which sources, if any, are favoured in a major on-going national news story. The research was sparked in response to a view among many academics that public/media relations could equally well serve either side in a dispute, and that 'under-dogs' such as trade unions had been getting better press for a number of years as a result of more and smarter media relations. In addition, Hall *et al.* had listed trade unions as a primary definer in the 1970s. There was a lull in research about trade unions and the media since the miners' strike (1984-85) and the 1986 Wapping dispute, but academics pointed to better union public relations since the year-long miners' strike,⁹⁶ and the few studies there were drew optimistic conclusions about better media communications by trade unions galvanising public support.⁹⁷ I did not doubt that trade unions had improved their media relations operations, but any apparently 'benign' coverage was due to fewer strikes, and unions generally being seen as less relevant and less of a threat to the free market. Indeed, I shared Pilger's assertion that unions were largely side-lined in the media in the 1990s.⁹⁸ It seemed to me that examining both the media relations strategy of a union and press coverage during an actual strike would be a real test of whether unions had succeeded in gaining better coverage, with space in the news to put their case for industrial action. Thus, I decided to examine coverage during a series of strikes by firefighters and I also interviewed the main press officer of the FBU about the strategy for dealing with the media during the dispute.

⁹⁴ Lewis *et al.*, "A Compromised Fourth Estate?"

⁹⁵ Deirdre O'Neill, "From Hunky Heroes to Dangerous Dinosaurs: Journalism-union relations, news access and press coverage in the 2002-3 British Fire Brigades Union dispute", *Journalism Studies*, 8, No. 5 (2007), 814-30.

⁹⁶ Aeron Davis, *Public Relations Democracy: Public relations, politics and the mass media in Britain*, Manchester: Manchester University Press (2002).

⁹⁷ Allan Kerr and Sanjit Sachdev, "Third Among Equals: an analysis of the 1989 ambulance dispute", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 30, No. 1 (1992), 127-43.

⁹⁸ John Pilger, *Hidden Agendas*, London: Vintage (1998).

In terms of the coverage, this case study not only examined what sources were used, but how those sources were being used. I wished to find out what sources were being used as primary definers, framing the story and setting the tone of coverage; what was the tone with regards to the union and their opponents, the Labour government of the day; who was given space to put their views; who was responding to whom, and were there differences between newspapers.

The firefighters case study involved an empirical study of the first month of the coverage of the strike in a range of nine newspapers representing the quality press, mid-markets and red-tops and different political allegiances. This was combined with qualitative research into the union's communications campaign. While hugely out-gunned in terms of media relations resources and personnel, the union ran a creative and imaginative campaign involving ordinary members and managed a great deal of coverage, some of it sympathetic, particularly in some sections of the local media and national broadcast media, often appealing to human interest news values, which mitigated to some extent the preponderance of negative hard news stories that appeared in the national press and the dominance of primary definers other than the union. Indeed, in the press 74 per cent of all source definers were not from the union, despite it being a key player in the story. A viewpoint antagonistic to the union – not unexpected in what is generally accepted to be a press biased to the right – was very much favoured by the press. But the extent of this was worth noting: viewpoints hostile to the union were presented six times more frequently than viewpoints that were non-hostile towards the union in the *Daily Telegraph*; hostile viewpoints appeared eleven times more frequently than non-hostile viewpoints in the *Times*; eight times more frequently in the *Daily Mail* and twelve times more often in the *Sun*. Only one paper put the non-hostile union view more frequently (the *Daily Mirror*). When it came to examining what sources were used to frame the stories covering the dispute, it was notable that there was a 3:1 ratio of government sources as against union sources framing the tone and direction of the articles in the *Sun*, the *Times*, and the *Daily Mail*. This was a 2:1 ratio in the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Independent*, the *Guardian* and the *Daily Express*. In addition, with the exception of the *Daily Mirror*, all opinion columns in all

other papers in this period were hostile to the union case and action. This includes the *Guardian*; while it provided some of the more balanced reporting in its news articles (along with the *Financial Times*), all its columnists were antagonistic towards the union. At the same time, the union ran an imaginative and active media campaign that included 'ordinary' members doing live interviews, and it was generally accepted, even by the government of the day, that it was successful in certain areas (broadcasting and local newspapers in particular). But no media relations strategy could alter the hostile and often hysterical coverage that the union received in the national press.

Therefore, I concluded that, while media relations can improve coverage, particularly in local and broadcast news, it continues to have limited impact with a largely biased national press opposed to trade unions. 'Forewarned of this, members are less likely to be demoralised by negative coverage and, more crucially, unions can make strategic and realistic decisions about how best to deploy limited resources.'⁹⁹ However, this still leaves many news consumers with a biased and hostile account of why normally popular firefighters (and other trade unionists) feel compelled to take strike action, in coverage that demonises or side-lines trade unions through the choice and use of certain hostile sources, despite trade unions representing six million workers in Britain.

Recent research on trade union strikes using software that analyses linguistics has found that the situation has not improved in the press, with a discourse that continues to demonise trade unions, 'implying a media agenda to convince their readership that workers should be condemned for standing up for their rights.'¹⁰⁰

Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model helps to explain this bias, notably the filter of source selection and, perhaps more importantly, the filter that Herman argues embraces the ideology of the market.¹⁰¹ In an exploration of how news

⁹⁹ O'Neill, "From Hunky Heroes to Dangerous Dinosaurs", 828.

¹⁰⁰ Matt Davies, "Militancy or Manipulation", *Babel* (February 2014), 23.

¹⁰¹ Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*.

sources were used in the reporting of the financial crisis of 2007, Manning found that journalists failed to predict the crisis due to the interplay of various factors: the control of information flows by financial institutions, a dependency on information subsidies from these institutions by journalists, and an underlying shared ideological consensus between the financial industries and those reporting on the sector all combined to affect journalists' ability to question sources effectively. '...[E]xchange relationships and the power that is exerted over and through information flows are embedded in particular political and ideological structures that underpin the 'received wisdom' about the way things are. Thus, it is not exchange relationships alone but their enmeshing within wider ideological and political processes that are crucial. Many financial journalists embraced the received wisdom on financial markets and low interest rates so that they did not pursue holistic questions via their exchange relationships with sources.....The financial media did not act as our antennae and they did not warn us.' ¹⁰²

Besides embracing the ideology of the market and hostile coverage of groups that might challenge this, such as trade unionists, there has been research that shows hostile coverage of asylum seekers¹⁰³ or Muslims,¹⁰⁴ and that these groups are often denied a voice in the news media. Other groups in society may receive less overt hostility and demonisation in the news media, but they may still be side-lined so they are rendered less visible or undermined in other ways. Despite the rise in the number of women in the House of Commons in recent years, studies showed the news media rendered women largely absent from coverage of the 2010 election campaign¹⁰⁵ and women are more likely than men

Herman, "The Propaganda Model: A retrospective".

¹⁰² Paul Manning, "Financial journalism, news sources and the financial crisis", *Journalism*, 14, Issue 2 (2013), 187.

¹⁰³ Greg Philo, Emma Briant and Pauline McDonald, *Bad News for Refugees*, London: Pluto Press (2013).

¹⁰⁴ Julian Petley and Robin Richardson (eds), *Pointing the Finger – Islam and Muslims in the British Media*, London: Oneworld Publishing (2011).

¹⁰⁵ Karen Ross, Elizabeth Evans, Lisa Harrison, Mary Shears and Khursheed Wadia, "The gender of News and News of Gender: A study of Sex, Politics and Press Coverage of the 2010 British General Election", *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 18, No.1 (2013), 3-20.

to be represented in a similar way to celebrities, with articles focussing on their personal lives, appearance and clothes rather than their political views.¹⁰⁶ Any gains in political representation by women has been slow and even after the 2015 UK General Election women comprised just 29 per cent of the House of Commons (the highest proportion ever). Another study also found a 4:1 ratio of male to female experts in broadcasting,¹⁰⁷ and, given the highly mediatised arena in which modern politics is conducted, this clearly has implications for women politicians in obtaining media exposure. So not only are women marginalised in their public life, but they may be doubly marginalised in the space that represents them in public life, namely the media. In addition, the Deputy Chairman (sic) of the Conservative Party has singled out a hostile press as a major deterrent to women standing as MPs.¹⁰⁸ My study into how women politicians fared in the press, carried out in collaboration with Heather Savigny and Victoria Cann (2016), looked into whether the situation appeared to be improving or getting worse with regards to their visibility and voice in our newspapers. It seemed to us that ‘if women do not see their likeness reflected in politics, why would they wish to take part, either as voters, or as elected representatives?’¹⁰⁹

Because we wanted to look at trends, we took a snapshot over three periods 10 years apart, in 1992, 2002 and 2012 using ‘newsweek’ samples (Appendix 4) from each year from seven national papers across the political spectrum, covering red-tops, mid-market titles and the quality press. These were the *Sun*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Guardian*, the *Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the Sunday equivalents of the listed newspapers. We

¹⁰⁶ Emily Harmer and Dominic Wring, “Julie and the Cybermums: Marketing and Women Voters in the 2010 Election”, *Journal of Political Marketing*, 12, No. 2-3 (2013), 262-273.

¹⁰⁷ Lis Howell, “Women Experts – or the lack of them – on TV and radio news”, *NUJ News* (25 April 2015). <https://www.nuj.org.uk/news/women-experts--or-the-lack-of-them--on-tv-and-radio-news/>

¹⁰⁸ Elizabeth Rigby, “Hostile press blamed for lack of women MPs”, *Financial Times*, (25 April 2014).

¹⁰⁹ Deirdre O’Neill, Heather Savigny and Victoria Cann, “Women Politicians in the UK Press: Not Seen and Not Heard?” *Feminist Media Studies*, 16, No. 2, (2016), 293-307.

searched for all articles mentioning MPs, and recorded what percentage were male and what percentage female. We wished to see how the volume of media coverage from our samples related to MPs' gendered representation in Parliament. We also coded for what was the main narrative focus of the articles that the politicians appeared in (we coded for Political focus, Personal focus, Other). Finally, we recorded the how often male and female MPs were quoted in our samples.

We found that women were proportionally the focus of more stories concerned with the 'Personal' rather than the purely 'Political' categories. In addition, over the two decades examined, women were becoming more proportionally under-represented in the media compared to their actual numbers in Parliament. For example, in 1992, women received 8.8 per cent of the coverage in the sampled newsweek at a time when 9.2 per cent of MPs were women. In 2002, when 17.9 per cent of MPs were women, they received 16.6 per cent of press coverage. By 2012, when 22 per cent of MPs were women, they received 16.3 per cent coverage. In the same samples, men were over-represented (compared to their numbers in Parliament), both in terms of how often they were quoted and how often they were the main focus of articles. In addition, there were periodic press stories that could only be described as misogynistic.

In another article, ¹¹⁰ researched with Heather Savigny, I analysed the same data with regards to political parties as well as gender and found that, among other things, coverage of female Labour politicians and female Conservative politicians by 2012 was proportionally more negative than for their male counterparts. In addition we interviewed 10 women MPs (from all political parties) who generally felt they got better coverage in the local and regional press than in the national press. The issues raised by these MPs included the media rarely interviewing them about their experience and expertise, and the press frequently spinning stories about women leaving politics into a narrative about

¹¹⁰ Deirdre O'Neill and Heather Savigny, "Female Politicians in the British Press: The exception to the 'masculine' norm?" *Journalism Education*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2014), 6-27.

women being unable to 'hack politics'.¹¹¹ Interestingly, many of the female Labour politicians interviewed criticised their own Labour press office for the narrow range of MPs who were promoted in the media, and believed that the Conservative Party was better at promoting women in the media.

What, then, does this mean for the public and the public sphere? We concluded: 'To marginalise women is to limit the diversity of democratic debate, rendering it representative only of a narrow range of views.'¹¹² It would seem that little has changed from Hall's view in the 1980s that it is harder for women, among other groups, to be heard in the media.¹¹³ However, since these studies into the representation of female politicians there have been huge changes in the prominence of women in politics, particularly in the Conservative Party, with Theresa May now leading the party and, as Prime Minister, promoting other women to Cabinet roles. It will be interesting to see how women continue to be represented and whether this changes for the better, though I suggest that backbench women may continue to fare less well than their male backbench counterparts.

Sports journalism also under-represents the achievements of women. At the time of my research into women's sports coverage, London had just hosted the 2012 Olympic Games and there was a great deal of discussion about the legacy of the Games, including greater prominence for women in sports, an issue championed by the then Equalities Minister Maria Miller. With health concerns about obesity and fitness, this was seen as important for providing women of all ages with positive role models who might inspire them to take up sport and exercise, particularly as women can easily be put off participating in sport and participation rates are lower than for men.¹¹⁴ Previous studies had shown that

¹¹¹ Even when female MPs may have left for good reasons, such as spousal ill health.

¹¹² O'Neill and Savigny, "Female politicians in the British Press", 22.

¹¹³ Hall, "Media power and class power", 9.

¹¹⁴ Women's Sports and Fitness Foundation, *2011/12 Annual Review* (2012). <http://www.wsff.org.uk/about/annual-review>

routine women's sports coverage was very low, averaging about 5 per cent¹¹⁵ and a more recent study of Sunday papers found that the figure was even lower in the press.¹¹⁶ To what extent might this have improved after the London Olympics? Therefore in a study I led, co-authored with Matt Mulready, a comparison was made across newspapers of women's sports coverage six months before and six months after the Olympics, as well as conducting interviews with mainly women sports journalists and comparing coverage of women's sports 10 years earlier.¹¹⁷

Events such as the Olympics can be described as 'mega-events', events which culturally, psychologically, economically and politically dominate globally for their duration, 'components of lifestyle architecture through which we now build competent, relevant, credible images of ourselves'.¹¹⁸ Rojek argues that mega-events exploit Catharsis (empathy and release of emotions), Emotionalism (desire to do good, a sense of righteousness, the wish to be publicly recognised as a team player), and Exhibitionism (behaviour expressing unity and transcendence). At such times, everyday life becomes temporarily less important.¹¹⁹ Such events require enormous organisational efforts and resources 'to coordinate smooth audience responses purely and fully connected with vision, mission statement, goals and objectives.'¹²⁰ To do this effectively organisers must conscript the media, and clearly a public service broadcaster (PSB) has a major role to play in this process, with mutual benefits for both sides. In the UK, the BBC frequently takes on this role (witness its role in the Live Aid mega-event) and is the 'natural' broadcaster that to date has always had the huge task of covering the Olympics, firmly situated as it is within the national public

¹¹⁵ WSFF (2006). Available from the WSFF.

¹¹⁶ Amy Godoy-Pressland, " 'Nothing to Report': A Semi-Longitudinal Investigation of the Print Media Coverage of Sportswomen in British Sunday Newspapers", *Media, Culture and Society*, 6, No. 5 (2014), 595-609.

¹¹⁷ Deirdre O'Neill and Matt Mulready, "The invisible woman? UK press coverage of women's sports before and after the London Olympics", *Journalism Practice*, 9 (5) (2015), 651-668.

¹¹⁸ Chris Rojek, *Event Power*, London, Los Angeles, New Dehli, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage (2013), 2.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 20-21.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 74

consciousness and national cultural life of Britain (as well as being internationally recognised).

Mega-events, such as the Olympics, can produce an interesting reversal of the assertion sometimes made that newspapers are increasingly setting the agenda for public service broadcasters like the BBC. The nature, scope and spectacle of a mega-event, often co-opted by PSB as a self-justification (in the case of the BBC, the justification of the licence fee), creates a cultural predominance whereby PSB sets the focus and tone of coverage, with other media, including newspapers, following suit. The public service remit of the BBC means that it must demonstrate some commitment to equality and diversity, and in its coverage of events like the Olympics women tend to receive a more equal share which, given inter-media relationships, filters through to other media like the press.¹²¹ However, my study was interested in routine newspaper coverage outside such mega-events, though I was interested in whether there was any legacy from the Olympics mega-event. As Brookes states, 'In a way, the extra attention on such occasions as the Olympic Games only serves to reinforce the message...[that women's sport receives little media attention]...[and] does little to compensate for the routine day-in day-out imbalance in coverage.'¹²²

I examined over 7,000 articles across the majority of national UK titles and recorded which were about sportsmen and which ones were about sportswomen. The findings showed that coverage peaked to around 4 per cent six months after the 2012 Olympics, and that this was a slight increase from a very low pre-Olympics baseline (1-3 per cent); furthermore, there was less coverage than 10 years earlier in 2002 when women's sports coverage was 5 per cent. In terms of the inter-media relationship between public service broadcasting and newspapers, any cultural-economic influence that might possibly exist (and this needs establishing with further research) did not appear to have any effect in the six-month period after the Olympics. This lack of progress – since the 2012 Olympics and since 2002 - indicates that the press

¹²¹ Rod Brookes, *Representing Sport*, London: Arnold (2002).

¹²² *Ibid*, 128.

appears to continue to value male achievements over that of women in sport; in some titles women were practically invisible. The 'symbolic annihilation of women', as described in the 1970s by Tuchman,¹²³ continues over 30 years later in the sports pages of the UK national press where gender equality is a long way off being achieved. Nevertheless, since this study, there have been signs of improvement in 2017, with some newspapers, particularly the quality press, prominently covering the Women's Cricket World Cup (where England beat India in the final), the women's football event Euro 2017, and the Women's Rugby World Cup. But it should be noted that these are major sporting events that parallel popular men's sports. Routine coverage of women's sports, particularly sports traditionally associated with women (such as netball), is still missing.

In this article (O'Neill and Mulready, 2015) we explored some of the reasons why women athletes were not receiving more attention in the press. One reason seems to be the lack of women reporting on sport and a recent study has potentially demonstrated that women journalists have a significant role to play in the inclusion of women's sports.¹²⁴ Therefore in the next piece of research related to this issue, the focus was changed from the proportion of women represented in the sports sections of the press to the proportion of women producing sports content.

It is commonly known that there is gender disparity in sports journalism:

There are thousands of women football fans who could write an in-depth analysis of any Premier League match. It's not rocket science; it's a game with a ball on a piece of grass. But these women do not break into sports

¹²³ Gaye Tuchman, "The Symbolic Annihilation of Women in the Mass Media", in Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels and James Benet (eds). *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*, New York: Oxford University Press (1978), 3-38.

¹²⁴ Merryn Sherwood, Angela Osbourne, Matthew Nicholson and Emma Sherry, "Newswork, News Values, and Audience Considerations: Factors that Facilitate Media Coverage of Women's Sports", *Communication & Sport* (2016). doi:10.1177/2167479516645535.

journalism and after attending this week's awards [the 2012 British Sports Journalism Awards], this is no surprise. British sports journalism is still a world absolutely dominated by men.¹²⁵

Nevertheless, anecdotally at least, this seemed to be improving, with high-profile female journalists such as Gaby Logan, Jacqui Oatley and Claire Balding becoming more prominent in broadcasting, and some women's football and rugby getting TV coverage.

However, along with my co-author Professor Suzanne Franks, who had written a book describing the situation with regards to the number of women working in different areas of journalism, it was decided to investigate the situation in the press, which we believed, unlike broadcasting, was not improving.¹²⁶

Surprisingly, there had been no studies establishing the amount of sports coverage by women in the press. We wished to establish the figure in an academic study that could be used as baseline from which to monitor and compare the situation in the future.

Recording the gender of every by-line attached to nearly 10,000 sports articles in most UK national titles (those that could not be categorised were not included) both in different periods of the same year and in samples from different years, we found that less than 2 per cent of sports stories are written by women and there had been little or no improvement in the last 10 years, and that this figure is substantially less than the average 8 per cent found in a study across 80 countries.¹²⁷ It can be concluded that it is not surprising that women are marginalised in certain sorts of news coverage when they are not employed in these fields of journalism, and that parity between genders in the production of

¹²⁵ Alice Arnold, "Ladies: British sports journalism is waiting for you", *Daily Telegraph*, (27 March 2013).

¹²⁶ Suzanne Franks and Deirdre O'Neill, "Women Reporting Sport: Still a Man's Game?" *Journalism*, 17, No.4, (2016), 474-492.

¹²⁷ Thomas Horky and Jorg-Uwe Nieland, "Play the Game", *International Sport Press Survey* (2011).

http://www.playthegame.org/fileadmin/image/PtG2013/Presentations/30_October_Wednesday/Horky-Nieland_PTG_2013_11.30.pdf

journalism is likely to be one of the factors that could improve women's representation in news.

For those who accept that the press is sexist and that media coverage 'others' women, the findings of these case studies will not be surprising. However, this view is by no means universal and my research has to be set against a wider background of a post-feminist perception that equality has been achieved or that the situation for women is now much better. McRobbie challenges this 'commonsense' view in her book on the aftermath of feminism¹²⁸ and the findings in my representational case studies lend weight to her position. Furthermore, misogyny in the press can take other forms other than overtly sexualised images or sexist copy, which at least can be challenged. More pernicious and less researched is the fact that in certain areas of life women are not seen or heard as much as men in our national newspapers, and in sports in particular they are rendered almost invisible. It is this lack of visibility that has been established in these case studies on women's representation.

For politicians, a lack of media coverage is a form of 'political death'. 'Unless the media reports your contribution, your opinions – your existence – then for all perceptive purpose you do not exist.'¹²⁹ In addition, 'By hearing less of women's views in their own words, the language of politics becomes more male in style and tone. Yet women voters – indeed all voters – may relate better to the way that women MPs speak about and present policies and ideas.'¹³⁰ Certainly, our political system is all the poorer from a lack of diverse views and the media is not servicing democracy effectively.

Now that Theresa May is Prime Minister, previous trends regarding women's lower visibility in political news could be reversed, though this remains to be

¹²⁸ Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*, London: Sage (2009).

¹²⁹ Nancy Woodhall in Maria Braden, *Women Politicians and the Media*, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press (1996), 2.

¹³⁰ O'Neill *et al.*, "Women Politicians in the UK Press".

seen (May appears to be choosing to keep a lower profile than her predecessors; an admirable decision to eschew the limelight and shun the 24-7 media demand for knee-jerk comments, or a blatant attempt to sidestep flak and avoid transparency and responsibility, depending on your viewpoint. Either way, it can be argued that the new PM's level of visibility will be determined less by the media and more by her team). But whatever the amount of coverage, the case studies also pointed to certain narrative frames and stereotypes that periodically appear in the press when covering women politicians: they can be infantilised, and their authority undermined by a focus on appearance; they are sometimes portrayed as weak and emotional, or as humourless, feminist harridans. It remains to be seen if this focus and these frames will change now that the most senior politician in Britain is a woman, and two other political parties, Plaid Cymru and the Scottish Nationalist Party, are also led by women. But certain sections of the press seem determined not to change. The *Daily Mail* prominently featured Nicola Sturgeon's shoes on 25 October 2016 and the *Times* pictured Theresa May in thigh-length boots in a fashion piece on 26 October 2016.

PART 3: Academic contribution to the debate

Overall, the research on selectivity and the case studies demonstrate major problems with the quality of news we receive: an over-dependency on news subsidies and a lack of independent news that challenges those in power; a tendency towards a 'vortextuality' of coverage when major celebrity stories break, leading to homogenisation across newspapers and banal, speculative news; ideology skewing news selection and source selection, depriving the public of important information or misinforming them while simultaneously depriving key organisations or figures in public life a media platform; and the underplaying or side-lining of the role and contribution of sections of society such as women. It has been suggested that powerful institutions, rich in terms of media relations resources, have to appeal to news values as much as resource-poor institutions, and that therefore the underdog can make headway in gaining more (and positive) coverage, thus increasing plurality, while the fourth-estate notion that many journalists adhere to means they must challenge those in power.¹³¹ However, the research discussed here shows that the current normative practices of selectivity in UK newspaper journalism – including news values and source choices - are undermining plurality. In addition, there is a hierarchy of news values, whereby 'Exclusivity', the 'Power Elite' and 'The News Organisation's Agenda' are news values that dominate. Furthermore, I would argue that my research demonstrates that many journalists are not in a position to hold the powerful to account because of a lack of resources and an over-dependency on news subsidies. These issues also appear to be shaping the news produced in other countries. For example, 'event properties related to the democratic role of the media in democracy do not, according to Swedish journalists, matter as much for the actual news selection as they should, while event properties related to perceived audience interest, production routines and

¹³¹ Aeron Davies, "Public Relations and News Sources" in Simon Cottle (ed.), *News, Public Relations and Power*, London: Sage (2003), 27-42.

economic considerations matter more than they should do.’¹³² In a changing technological environment, this is exacerbated by the enormous amount of digital content that needs to be filled and the pressure to attract browsing audiences inundated with media.

These findings, when taken together, suggest a press that insufficiently interrogates the establishment or powerful, and does little to challenge spin. This would seem to support Herman and Chomsky’s Propaganda Model,¹³³ whereby source selection is one of the five filters of ‘news fit to print’, sources that emanate from and favour the Establishment, the free market and business.

That the landscape of journalism had changed since the 1960s was a primary motive for reassessing Galtung and Ruge’s list of news values. Prior to my research into news values, despite some other contributions to the debate and some revisions to news values taxonomies, Galtung and Ruge’s proposed set of news values were invariably cited as *the* criteria of what made news, despite this taxonomy being proposed on the basis of examining the limited reporting of certain foreign news events, and in an age where news was a very different product. Until the publication of Harcup and O’Neill (2001), there had been no systematic attempt to apply and test Galtung and Ruge’s taxonomy in an empirical way to produce a new taxonomy. My research into news values and the wider body of work commented on here helps academics and news audiences to recognise that the implementation of news values in the selection process cannot be viewed as driven by professional democratic ideals nor are they a fixed set of criteria. Rather, any criteria should be seen as a fluctuating reflection of the economic, political cultural and technical environment that journalists operate in, and some of these will have a detrimental or positive effect on the quality of the news produced (depending on one’s viewpoint). Any set of news values should not be quoted *ad infinitum* since they are not fixed. They need reviewing regularly, not least because of rapid changes in technology and changing

¹³² Jesper Stromback, Michael Karlsson and David Nicolas Hopmann, “Determinants of news content”, *Journalism Studies*, 13, Issue 5-6 (2012), 726.

¹³³ Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 2.

definitions of news, as well as changing relationships with news consumers, consumers who are exerting increasing influence on the journalistic product. Indeed, we found that our own taxonomy needed revising after another empirical study 15 years later (Harcup and O'Neill, 2016).

The findings also challenge consensual, commonsense notions of what makes the news, and how well the press is informing the public. Students are often taught that 'news' should contain new information or information about recent events. However, my research showed that a surprising amount of news stories contain no timescale (for example, there was no reference to today, yesterday, last week, and so on) and did not appear to be 'new'. This reflects the fact that a significant proportion of news is recycled from a media industry where one medium feeds off another and there exists a smaller amount of original, independent research into stories than those outside the industry might realise. An example of this is the fact that *Private Eye* exposed Vodafone's deal with HMRC to pay less tax than it owed many months before the story was picked up by national newspapers. National media often pick up stories from local news media and publish a rehashed version well after the events occurred. Galtung and Ruge also listed 'bad' news as a news factor, but did not list 'good' news, yet my research revealed a surprising amount of good (positive, happy) news in the stories examined.

Linked to this lighter side of news, there was also a lot of celebrity news, again a news value not previously listed by Galtung and Ruge. It is fair to say that entertaining news serves a role in engaging news consumers and off-setting an overload of scary and gloomy stories, but for some scholars, such as Franklin,¹³⁴ this balance can be taken too far, leading to the trivialisation of news and 'dumbing down'. My further research on the rise of celebrity news values (O'Neill, 2012) suggests that the balance may have tipped too far in favour of trivial news and that celebrity news sometimes drives out more important news from the agenda, even in the quality press, limiting choice for information-seeking audiences. Recent research on journalists in the UK by the Reuters

¹³⁴ Franklin, *Newszak and News Media*.

Institute for the Study of Journalism supports my findings. It found that 'providing entertainment' is either 'extremely' or 'very' important for half of UK journalists, as is providing the 'kind of news that attracts the largest audience', and the report points out that this is 'an indication of how economic pressures are inducing journalists to treat their audiences less as citizens and more as consumers.'¹³⁵

Furthermore, my research points to other factors contributing to a democratic deficit. The examination of sources in local and regional newspapers (O'Neill and O'Connor, 2008) – which tend to generate less academic interest than national newspapers - revealed increasing media management by commercial and public organisations and the power of sources to frame stories and set the agenda. Local and regional journalism is a cornerstone of local democracy and, even with falling circulations, readers are still engaging online if the content is right, as shown by the success of the online version of the *Manchester Evening News*.¹³⁶ The research was carried out at the same time as a larger national news study into sources,¹³⁷ and both studies demonstrated that the fourth estate role of the media is being undermined by an over-reliance on news subsidies in the form of press releases (and press releases are produced *de facto* by organisations with vested interests in spinning news in a particular direction), a situation not helped by journalism staff cuts.¹³⁸ As NUJ (National Union of Journalists) officers have recently said about proposed staff cuts at regional newspaper group Newsquest: 'It's grim for our colleagues facing redundancy but also bleak for those left behind who will have to pick up an ever-increasing workload to get other people's jobs done. More is being expected of less.' 'Even the loss of a handful [of jobs] will have a huge impact on those remaining and their ability to produce quality journalism..... What is needed instead [of cuts] is a dynamic

¹³⁵ Thurman *et al.*, *Journalists in the UK*, 33.

¹³⁶ Dominic Ponsford, "Regional press digital growth outstrips print decline as Manchester Evening News tops website table", *Press Gazette* (26 August 2015). <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/regional-press-digital-growth-outstrips-print-decline-manchester-evening-news-tops-website-table/>

¹³⁷ Lewis *et al.*, "A Compromised Fourth Estate?"

¹³⁸ "Roll call of newspaper closures and job losses", NUJ.

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/news/roll-call-of-newspaper-closures-and-job-losses/>

programme of investment to breathe fresh life into titles that have an incredibly important role to play in their local communities.’¹³⁹ A similar conclusion was reached in O’Neill and O’Connor (2008). The article also provided data and a method by which comparisons can be made in future about the quality of regional or local journalism in those titles that remain.

Writing in the 1980s, Hall¹⁴⁰ argued that certain sections of society, such as low status women, are under-represented in the media and their voices are not heard as much as men. The case studies I conducted test and measure the extent to which real change in media representation has occurred (or not). Even for those who acknowledge the class or gender bias of the press, this research provides hard empirical evidence in areas where it was lacking before, and demonstrates the extent and ways that women or workers, for example, are marginalised with regards to their views and achievements.

The research I published on the coverage of the 2002 firefighters’ strike (O’Neill, 2008) established that trade unions are no longer routine primary definers of the news agenda as they had been at the time of Stuart Hall *et al*’s work on primary definition in the 1970s. Instead, they were marginalised and given little coverage or, where coverage was unavoidable because of trade union action impacting on the public, such as in the recent strikes on Southern Rail, they would invariably get a hostile press. The research also demonstrated that the power of public relations had frequently been overstated by academics, some of whom argued that more effective PR by trade unions helped improve their media coverage.¹⁴¹ ‘Better’ coverage merely equated to little or no coverage because there were fewer industrial disputes in the 1990s. I found that in the face of an ideologically opposed press – the ‘News Organisation’s Agenda’ being a news value identified in my 2001 news values taxonomy - a well-developed public or media relations would always be limited in improving coverage.

¹³⁹ National Union of Journalists, “Bradford’s *Telegraph & Argus* loses a sixth of its newsroom” (4 November 2016). <https://www.nuj.org.uk/news/bradford-telegraph-and-argus-loses-a-sixth-of-its-newsroom/>

¹⁴⁰ Hall, “Media power and class power”, 9.

¹⁴¹ Aeron Davies, “Public Relations and News Sources”.

Beharell and Philo's work on trade unions and the media, conducted in the 1970s,¹⁴² found that there is a systematic bias in the media against trade unions, with a broad political consensus operating in the media that vilifies workers and their rights. My research establishes that, compared with previous decades, little seems to have changed. There was little or no work being done on trade unions and the media at the time of my research, possibly because it was seen as unfashionable or less relevant. However, subsequent recent research by Matt Davies using linguistic analysis supports my conclusions.¹⁴³ As Davies asks, 'What is it about trade union members withdrawing their labour to protest about what they perceive to be unfair pay and working practices, which gets journalists, news columnists and editorial boards into such a lather?'¹⁴⁴ In terms of news values and selectivity, the additional news value of the 'News Organisation's Agenda' (Harcup and O'Neill, 2016) clearly becomes a dominant news value that over-rides all others if the establishment feels threatened by workers asserting themselves. This demonstrates the importance of regularly examining news values and source selection to understand the determinants of journalistic plurality (or lack of it).

While Hall referred to low-status women being marginalised¹⁴⁵, my research demonstrates that even high-status women such as MPs are at a distinct disadvantage in being seen or heard in the press compared to men. Concerned about this, an All-Party Parliamentary Group carried out a report on Women in Parliament, which, among other things, addressed how press coverage might be putting women off standing for Parliament. As part of their investigation I was asked to report the findings of my research on female politicians at Portcullis House to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Equality, and my research was referenced in the final report,¹⁴⁶ as well as generating national press interest,

¹⁴² Peter Beharell and Greg Philo, *Trade Unions and the Media*, London: Palgrave Macmillan (1977).

¹⁴³ Matt Davies, "Militancy or Manipulation", *Babel*, (February 2014), 19-24.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁴⁵ Hall, "Media power and class power", 9.

¹⁴⁶ *Improving Parliament: Creating a better and more representative house*, APPG Women in Parliament (July 2014).

with articles appearing in the *Financial Times*¹⁴⁷ and in the *New Statesman*.¹⁴⁸ (See Appendix 6 for copies of press articles.) Identifying issues that might be putting women off going into politics is essential if we are to have a more representative Parliament. Female MPs are having to contend with increasing amounts of trolling and abuse, and poor media coverage can exacerbate these.¹⁴⁹ In recognition of the significance of this work, the Association for Journalism Education awarded myself and my co-author Heather Savigny a small grant in 2014 with which to carry out this research. This work led to us carrying out some research on media coverage of women politicians during the 2015 election campaign for the Fawcett Society, which promotes gender equality.

The data collected for the case studies on women and sport has established just how woefully under-represented women are on the sports pages, and that this has not really changed in the last decade. Furthermore, this research means we now have a figure from which to measure future progress (or lack of progress), data that was not available before I carried out my research. Subsequent research in this area on the proportion of sports stories written by women demonstrates that opportunities to work in sports journalism in the national press are not being extended to women, and Britain lags behind most other countries. My research on sports and women in the press has attracted international interest, and in two consecutive years (2014 and 2015) my research in this area was accepted for presentation at the annual conference of the International Communication Association, one of the most prestigious communications conferences in the world (which only accepts about one third of applicants). I have been interviewed by numerous undergraduate and postgraduate students about this work, the latest being a Washington-based

¹⁴⁷ Elizabeth Rigby, "Hostile Press blamed for lack of women MPs", *Financial Times*, (25 April 2014).

¹⁴⁸ Lucy Fisher, "Female MPs in the press – slated or ignored", *New Statesman* (10 July 2014).

Heather Savigny and Deirdre O'Neill, "It's 2014 – yet media and politics is still a man's game", *New Statesman* (28 April 2014).

¹⁴⁹ George Bowden, "Women MPs Face Horrific Levels Of Abuse, BBC Radio Five Live Survey Finds", *The Huffington Post* (25 January 2017).

http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/women-mps-face-horrific-levels-of-abuse_uk_58885857e4b0f5d9c2195f6d

student who interviewed me as part of a Fulbright Scholarship application in October 2016. I was also invited to write a piece for the National Union of Journalists' website about this research,¹⁵⁰ and an opinion piece for the *Yorkshire Post*.¹⁵¹ (See Appendix 6 for copies of press articles.)

My news values research has become internationally well-known, with Harcup and O'Neill (2001) becoming the most viewed article in the history of the international journal *Journalism Studies* and very widely cited (866 citations according to Google Scholar on 1 March 2017). It is the most-read article in the history of *Journalism Studies* (the journal was launched 18 years ago). It led to an invitation to write a chapter on selectivity in the book *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*¹⁵², produced by Routledge in conjunction with the International Communication Association, where my work features alongside chapters by internationally recognised scholars who have produced seminal research in the field of journalism studies, such as Michael Schudson, Pamela Shoemaker, Howard Tumber, Barbie Zelizer, Brian McNair and Thomas Hanitzsch. I have recently been asked to contribute to the 2nd edition. I was also invited by the University of Haifa to present at a conference on news values in October 2011. The research was recently referenced in the academic forum *The Conversation*¹⁵³ and is widely used in the teaching of Journalism in higher education. I have been interviewed by numerous undergraduates and postgraduates doing work on news values, both in Britain and abroad, and asked to peer review other work on news values for top academic journals such as Sage's *Journalism*. My latest research on news values (Harcup and O'Neill, 2016) was made available as an open access article in *Journalism Studies*, paid for by the University of Sheffield (where Tony Harcup is based) because the university

¹⁵⁰ Deirdre O'Neill, "Sports bylines - where are all the women?" National Union of Journalists (16 October 2016). <https://www.nuj.org.uk/news/sports-bylines-where-are-all-the-women/>

¹⁵¹ Deirdre O'Neill, "Challenging the media silence on women's sport", *Yorkshire Post* (31 July 2014).

¹⁵² O'Neill and Harcup, "News Values and Selectivity" (2009), 161-174.

¹⁵³ Sean Dodson, "Four reasons why listicles and clickbait are killing real journalism", *The Conversation* (24 October 2016).

<http://theconversation.com/four-reasons-why-listicles-and-clickbait-are-killing-real-journalism-67406>

considered it an important piece of research, and a paper on this research was accepted at the prestigious biennial Future of Journalism conference at the University of Cardiff in September 2015. Only recently published, it has already become the most downloaded article in *Journalism Studies* in 2016 (see Appendix 5 for email about this) and has been viewed far more widely than other articles published in *Journalism Studies* in the last few years (more than 12k views on 1 March 2017 and now the fourth most-read article in the history of *Journalism Studies*), so it is clearly having an impact.

On the basis of my research, I have recently been offered a Visiting Fellowship at the University of Karlstad in Sweden in the academic year starting 2017 (see Appendix 5). This involves taking part in their research project on News and Opinion in the Digital Era (NODE) and teaching PhD students.

PART 4: Future research

With regards to further news values research, 'The finding that a story might simultaneously be good news and bad news illustrates that any taxonomy of news values ought not to be thought of as a list of alternatives. It is clear that one story might tick several boxes, and how certain news values operate in different combinations might usefully be an issue for future research.'¹⁵⁴ Perhaps more importantly, '*who* is selecting news, *for whom*, in *what medium* and by *what means* (and available resources), may well be as important as whatever news values may or may not be inherent in any potential story'¹⁵⁵ and these would be fruitful comparisons to make in future research. Certainly, in an era where increasingly more people are consuming news online, particularly 18-30 year olds, attention needs to shift to the analysis of news values in online news, as previously stated, with larger data sets than the top stories posted on Twitter and Facebook. This poses challenges because online texts are 'fluid and

¹⁵⁴ Harcup and O'Neill, "What is news?" 9.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

ephemeral – difficult to pin down in time and space’¹⁵⁶ but there is a need for research that develops methodologies for dealing with this. Comparisons between different media may also reveal that different news values dominate on varying platforms. For example, it has been suggested that what we called ‘Exclusivity’ (Harcup and O’Neill, 2016) and other scholars have called ‘the thirst to be first’ seems to be more relevant for online news than it is for offline news.¹⁵⁷

In addition, audiences have become a more dominant force in what journalists select to cover. While audience orientation has always been an influence on the selection process (it would be a foolish journalist that never considered the audience), this influence has become increasingly powerful because audience ‘clicks’ on online news provides comparative feedback to individual journalists and journalism organisations. However, this data also provides researchers with a tool for exploring audience selection and research has just been published that explores user rankings in journalistic news selection. This research found that for the majority of news factors, journalistic and audience selection is similar.¹⁵⁸ However, web metrics only provides data about quantities, not about the thinking behind any selection. Furthermore, ‘What people expect from a specific content provider and what they actually select on the internet is not necessarily identical in all cases’¹⁵⁹ so there is room for further exploration around the decisions made by audiences selecting news.

It must also be said that research on news values and content analyses of output rather assumes a particular shared consensus about definitions of news and

¹⁵⁶ Michael Karlsson and Helle Sjøvaag, “Content Analysis and Online News: Epistemologies of analysing the ephemeral web”, *Digital Journalism*, 4, Issue 1 (2016), 79.

¹⁵⁷ Justin Lewis and Stephen Cushion, “The Thirst to be First: An analysis of breaking news stories and their impact on the quality of 24-hour news coverage in the UK”, *Journalism Practice*, 3, No. 3, (2009), 304-318.

¹⁵⁸ Manuel Wendelin, Ines Engelmann and Julia Neubarth, “User Rankings and Journalistic News Selection”, *Journalism Studies*, 18, No. 2 (2017), 135-153.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

journalism, and the cultural, social and organisational routines of production centred around the newsroom production.

In her work observing Danish broadcast journalists making decisions about news selection, Schultz concluded that news values could be categorised as 'doxic' news values, the *unspoken*, self-explaining and undisputed news values that govern newsworthiness, and orthodox news values, which are *spoken* about, but also commonly recognised and agreed upon. These tend to come into play with regards to hard news. In contrast, she also identified heterodox news values, again spoken about, but which are more contested and are more likely to come into play when considering soft potential news items.¹⁶⁰ Schultz did not make explicit what news values might tend to fall into each category, but the broad categories go some way to explaining why some events or issues come to dominate news coverage, and why so much of what is selected and given prominence is similar across news outlets, particularly when what might be considered hard news is breaking, such as a terrorist atrocity, which will be prominent on most newspaper front pages. The news values embodied in these events could also be termed consensual news criteria. However, in a competitive marketplace, how do newspapers distinguish and brand themselves? They may do this in two ways, by making different choices with some of their coverage (selection) or by news *treatment*, the language and presentational style of their coverage. A comparison of consensual news values, and distinguishing news values associated with branding could prove fruitful for a deeper understanding of how these criteria play out in different news outlets. Further, critical discourse analysis, as posited by Bednarek and Caple,¹⁶¹ to identify how linguistically news is packaged and 'sold' to audiences as news, along with how the semiotics of visuals and presentation serve to reinforce news values,¹⁶² provide useful methods to unpick news treatment in the process of creating distinctive 'brands' in future research.

¹⁶⁰ Schultz, "The journalistic gut feeling".

¹⁶¹ Monica Bednarek and Helen Caple, "Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond", *Discourse and Society*, 25, issue 2 (2014).

¹⁶² Caple and Bednarek, "Rethinking news values".

In addition, journalistic practice can be found in places and in forms beyond traditional settings, featuring genres and formats not previously seen, as a result of technological change and working practices. As Wahl-Jorgensen points out, scholars are ‘paying scant attention to places, spaces, practices and people at the margins of this spatially delimited news production universe.’¹⁶³ Many ‘journalists’ now have a patchwork, precarious career outside large news organisations, in what is often called entrepreneurial journalism. This involves short contracts, freelancing, or setting up small media businesses that service larger institutions. Even within the traditional newsroom, as well as job losses in traditional roles, new roles have emerged, for example, technical support staff and data journalists (as well as increasing numbers of unpaid interns) all of whom have an effect on content. On the one hand, this fluctuating and unpredictable media production landscape - what Deuze calls an era of ‘liquid’ journalism¹⁶⁴ - underscores my point that news values are not fixed; it is important that researchers should engage in this fluctuating ecology to revisit and update news values regularly in the face of such profound changes. On the other hand, future research might also usefully question the current conceptualisation of news values based on this implied newsroom-centred approach with its shared and assumed definitions of what it means to be a journalist and what is meant by news and journalism in this age of ‘liquid’ journalism, where media content is increasingly determined by interactions between users and producers.

Put simply, is a social media posting or tweet commenting on, for example, what a politician has just done a form of journalism? If it provides an interesting perspective, does it matter if it was posted by a well-known newspaper

¹⁶³ Karin Wahl-Jorgensen “News production, ethnography, and power: On the challenges of newsroom-centricity” in E. Bird (ed.), *The Anthropology of News and Journalism: Global Perspectives*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press (2009), 21-35.

¹⁶⁴ Mark Deuze, “Journalism in liquid modern times: An interview with Zygmunt Bauman”, *Journalism Studies*, 8, No. 4, (2007a), 671-679.

columnist, a young freelancer from their bedroom or a member of the public? Is a 'listicle' news? Or a cute video of an animal?

Thus, future work on news values should contribute to the debate around redefining what is meant by news and journalism, and in the process reconceptualise news selection – or possibly more appropriately 'content' selection - in this brave new world. One way of doing this might be through ethnographic studies of people producing content on the margins of traditional journalism, along with audience studies of what the public consider to be news and journalism.

Part 5: Final word

This Commentary has brought together research on news values and source selection. It demonstrates that old ways of conceptualising news values is out of date, not least because of rapid changes in the ways news is produced and consumed. The nature of journalism and news is changing to such an extent that it needs to be reconceived and defined in the 21st century and, thus, as demonstrated in my research, it follows that news values must be revisited and redefined. Deuze and Witschge ask why the concept of journalism as a public service serving democracy continues to endure in the face of profound changes to the profession.¹⁶⁵ It is important to acknowledge their point – much that is being produced serves no such purpose and in defining and describing journalism we must bear this in mind. But that is not to deny that in a mediated world – whatever media platform content is produced on and by whoever – that democratic public service role (amongst many) still exists and that those sections of the public who have an appetite for hard news (and I agree with Rob Orchard that they still exist) have little choice but to rely on the media to provide some semblance of this function. Indeed, journalists and news organisations assign this role to themselves when resisting any outside interference to a 'free'

¹⁶⁵ Mark Deuze and Tamara Witschge, "Beyond Journalism: Theorizing the transformation of journalism", *Journalism* (2017), 1-17
DOI: 10.1177/1464884916688550.

press, many publications even dragging their heels with regards to post-Leveson proposed regulation. Indeed, in this era of great flux, there is probably a more powerful imperative to interrogate the extent to which the criteria by which news and sources are selected are serving commercial and political masters, and whether members of the public are being treated as mere consumers rather than citizens.

My research contributes vitally to this debate, revealing that very nature of selection practices leads to the exclusion of certain voices from the news agenda, subverting the representative democratic process. Those that are endowed with the best resources, usually the Establishment and powerful figures or institutions, dominate the sources, views and perspectives in the news. In effect, those that can shout the loudest get heard most in the media. Further, our news is frequently devoid of independent journalistic research and contains much that is trivial. In fact, what this work has revealed so far is that the way news is selected and constructed in UK newspapers undermines pluralism and the democratic function of the press.

There has been much consternation recently about 'fake' news, which can be defined as the deliberate placement of falsehoods and lies into the news agenda for commercial or political gain. But I would argue that fake news can come in more subtle guises, where the public receives partial or distorted news, where certain groups, issues or views are misrepresented or sidelined or receive no coverage at all, and that this is normalised by the very routines of practice by which news is selected. This has led to an erosion of trust in mainstream news (ironically creating a climate whereby the right-wing in the USA are able to accuse the mainstream media of producing fake news, while deliberately peddling media falsehoods that are fuelling fake news). It is incumbent on media academics to make processes like news and source selection transparent, and to monitor the quality of the news output in the interests of public media literacy in these times of uncertainty, and I believe I have contributed in a small way to this process through my research.

Appendix 1

Galtung and Ruge's 12 news factors

F1. Frequency. An event that unfolds at the same or similar frequency as the news medium (such as a murder) is more likely to be selected as news than is a social trend that takes place over a long period of time.

F2. Threshold. Events have to pass a threshold before being recorded at all. After that, the greater the intensity, the more gruesome the murder, and the more casualties in an accident - the greater the impact on the perception of those responsible for news selection.

F3. Unambiguity. The less ambiguity, the more likely the event is to become news. The more clearly an event can be understood, and interpreted without multiple meanings, the greater the chance of it being selected.

F4. Meaningfulness. The culturally similar is likely to be selected because it fits into the news selector's frame of reference. Thus, the involvement of UK citizens will make an event in a remote country more meaningful to the UK media. Similarly, news from the USA is seen as more relevant to the UK than is news from countries that are less culturally familiar.

F5. Consonance. The news selector may predict - or, indeed, want - something to happen, thus forming a mental 'pre-image' of an event, which in turn increases its chances of becoming news.

F6. Unexpectedness. The most unexpected or rare events - within those that are culturally familiar and/or consonant - will have the greatest chance of being selected as news.

F7. Continuity. Once an event has become headline news it remains in the media spotlight for some time - even if its amplitude has been greatly reduced - because it has become familiar and easier to interpret. Continuing coverage also acts to justify the attention an event attracted in the first place.

F8. Composition. An event may be included as news, less because of its intrinsic news value than because it fits into the overall composition or balance of a newspaper or news broadcast. This might not just mean 'light' stories to balance heavy news; it could also mean that, in the context of newspaper reports on alleged institutional racism within the police, for example, positive initiatives to combat racism which would normally go unreported might make it onto the news pages.

F9. Reference to elite nations. The actions of elite nations are seen as more consequential than the actions of other nations. Definitions of elite nations will be culturally, politically and economically determined and will vary from country to country, although there may be universal agreement about the inclusion of some nations (eg the USA) among the elite.

F10. Reference to elite people. The actions of elite people, who will usually be famous, may be seen by news selectors as having more consequence than the actions of others. Also, readers may identify with them

F11. Reference to persons. News has a tendency to present events as the actions of named people rather than a result of social forces. This personification goes beyond 'human interest' stories and could relate to 'cultural idealism according to which man is the master of his own destiny and events can be seen as the outcome of an act of free will'.

F12. Reference to something negative. Negative news could be seen as unambiguous and consensual, generally more likely to be unexpected and to occur over a shorter period of time than positive news.

Galtung and Ruge (1965), 65-71.

Appendix 2

Harcup and O'Neill's taxonomy of news values (2001)

1. The power elite

Stories concerning powerful individuals, organisations or institutions

2. Celebrity

Stories concerning people who are already famous

3. Entertainment

Stories concerning sex, showbusiness, human interest, animals, an unfolding drama, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment, entertaining photographs or witty headlines

4. Surprise

Stories that have an element of surprise and/or contrast

5. Bad news

Stories with negative overtones such as conflict or tragedy

6. Good news

Stories with positive overtones such as rescues and cures

7. Magnitude

Stories that are perceived as sufficiently significant either in the numbers of people involved or in potential impact

8. Relevance

Stories about issues, groups and nations perceived to be relevant to the audience

9. Follow-ups

Stories about subjects already in the news

10. Newspaper agenda

Stories that set or fit the news organisation's own agenda

Appendix 3

Harcup and O'Neill's taxonomy of news values (2016)

1. *Exclusivity*

Stories generated by, or available first to, the news organisation as a result of interviews, letters, investigations, surveys, polls and so on.

2. *Bad News*

Stories with particularly negative overtones such as death, injury, defeat and loss (of a job, for example).

3. *Conflict*

Stories concerning conflict such as controversies, arguments, splits, strikes, fights, insurrections and warfare.

4. *Surprise*

Stories that have an element of surprise, contrast and/or the unusual about them.

5. *Audio-visuals*

Stories that have arresting photographs, video, audio and/or which can be illustrated with infographics.

6. *Shareability*

Stories that are thought likely to generate sharing and comments via Facebook, Twitter and other forms of social media.

7. *Entertainment*

Soft stories concerning sex, showbusiness, sport, lighter human interest, animals, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment, witty headlines or lists.

8. *Drama*

Stories concerning an unfolding drama such as escapes, accidents, searches, sieges, rescues, battles or court cases.

9. *Follow-up*

Stories about subjects already in the news.

10. *The Power Elite*

Stories concerning powerful individuals, organisations, institutions or corporations.

11. *Relevance*

Stories about groups or nations perceived to be influential with, or culturally or historically familiar to, the audience.

12. Magnitude

Stories perceived as sufficiently significant in the large numbers of people involved or in potential impact, or involving a degree of extreme behaviour or extreme occurrence.

13. Celebrity

Stories concerning people who are already famous.

14. Good News

Stories with particularly positive overtones such as recoveries, breakthroughs, cures, wins and celebrations.

15. News Organisation's Agenda

Stories that set or fit the news organisation's own agenda, whether ideological, commercial or as part of a specific campaign.

Appendix 4

Newsweek samples

For each year, a 'newsweek' sample was analysed, moving from May through to November, with data from each day of the week being recorded once over the seven month period. So, for example, *The Times* from Monday, June 8 was used in 1992, and the *Daily Mirror* on Tuesday, July 7, 1992, and so on. The initial order of newspapers was randomly chosen, and then the same sequence was analysed during each of the periods in the data collection. In 2002 *The Sunday Times* was used on Sunday, May 12, the *Daily Mirror* on Monday, June 10, and so on.

Appendix 5

Emails about my research

1. Email about downloads

[journalismstudies@press.uk.net]

To: 'Tony Harcup' [t.harcup@sheffield.ac.uk]; Deirdre O'Neill
Inbox

23 February 2017 11:05

Dear Tony & Deirdre,

This is just to let you know that your articles on What is News? were the 1st and 2nd most downloaded JS articles in 2016. (Revisited again 1st and Revisited 2nd.)

Best wishes,
Annie

Annie Rhys Jones

Editorial Assistant

Journalism Studies/Journalism Practice/Digital Journalism

journalismstudies@press.uk.net

<http://www.facebook.com/journalismstudies>

2. Email about Visiting Fellowship

From: Henrik Örnebring [henrik.ornebring@kau.se] **Sent:** 23 November 2016 13:32 **To:** Deirdre O'Neill **Subject:** Visiting scholarship in Karlstad?

Dear Deirdre,

Hope you are well – it's been a while since we met (at the Future of Journalism conference in Cardiff last year and before that at ICA Seattle, if memory serves)! I am writing to you because my colleague Michael Karlsson (whom I believe you also met in Cardiff) are running a research centre here at Karlstad University, Sweden, called NODE – the Ander Centre for Research on News and Opinion in the Digital Era (see <http://nodecentre.se/home/>). Within this centre we are running a broad research programme titled "What if the press disappears?". The programme has two parts: one focused on media/news audiences, and one focused partly on the various groups of actors who actively work to disseminate sociopolitically-relevant information and who engage in public opinion formation (e.g. political parties, state and municipal authorities, interest groups); and partly on the new actors who have emerged as de facto producers of sociopolitically-relevant information in a new

media landscape (e.g. activist groups, citizen journalists). Within this project, we have the resources to offer international scholars whose research is relevant to our programme (and Michael and I both think your research is *_highly_* relevant to us!) a 0.3 FTE Visiting Fellowship for 6 or 12 months. In practice, such a fellowship would entail you coming to Karlstad to participate in research and research activities (seminars, PhD student sessions etc) for maybe a week at a time around once a month for the duration of the Fellowship (that is how our previous Visiting Fellows, Helle Sjøvaag from the University of Bergen, and Kate Wright from Roehampton University/University of Edinburgh, have organized their time) – so for example, if you were to take up such a fellowship in the Autumn of 2017 (Aug – December), you would be expected to come here for a week at a time (or more of you wish!) about four or five times over the course of the semester. However, there is some flexibility so if you for example would prefer to come here for four to six weeks at a stretch, that would also be possible to organize.

We would very much like to invite you to be a NODE Visiting Fellow here in Karlstad at some point during the coming year. Would that be something you would be interested in, and something you could fit in with your other commitments?

With my very best wishes,

Henrik Örnebring
Professor and Head of Subject, Media and Communication
Department of Geography, Media and Communication
Karlstad University
SWEDEN

Appendix 6

Press articles about my research

Elizabeth Rigby, "Hostile press blamed for lack of women MPs", *Financial Times*, 25 April 2014

<https://www.ft.com/content/bfd14ab2-cc51-11e3-9b5f-00144feabdc0>

Heather Savigny and Deirdre O'Neill, "It's 2014 – yet media and politics is still a man's game", *New Statesman*, 28 April 2014

<http://www.newstatesman.com/media/2014/04/it-s-2014-yet-media-and-politics-still-man-s-game>

Lucy Fisher, "Female MPs in the press: slated or ignored", *New Statesman*, 10 July 2014

<http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2014/07/female-mps-press-slated-or>

Sarah Freeman, "Why don't national newspapers cover more women's sport?" *Yorkshire Post*, 19 June 2014

<http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/analysis/why-don-t-national-newspapers-cover-more-women-s-sport-1-6681561>

Deirdre O'Neill, "Challenging the media silence on women's sport", *Yorkshire Post*, 31 July 2014

<http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/opinion/deirdre-o-neill-challenging-the-media-silence-on-women-s-sport-1-6761654>

Deirdre O'Neill, "Sports bylines - where are all the women?" NUJ website, 16 October 2015

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/news/sports-bylines-where-are-all-the-women/>

Appendix 7: List of academic articles

Tony Harcup and Deirdre O'Neill, "What is news? Galtung and Ruge revisited", *Journalism Studies*, 2, No. 2 (2001), 261-280.

Tony Harcup and Deirdre O'Neill, "What is news? News values revisited (again)", *Journalism Studies* (2016).
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1150193>

Deirdre O'Neill, "No cause for celebration: the rise of celebrity news values in the British quality press", *Journalism Education*, 1, No. 2 (2012), 26-44.

Deirdre O'Neill and Catherine O'Connor, "The Passive Journalist: How sources dominate local news", *Journalism Practice*, 2, No. 3 (2008), 487-500.

Deirdre O'Neill, "From Hunky Heroes to Dangerous Dinosaurs: Journalism-union relations, news access and press coverage in the 2002-3 British Fire Brigades Union dispute", *Journalism Studies*, 8, No. 5 (2007), 814-30.

Deirdre O'Neill, Heather Savigny and Victoria Cann, "Women Politicians in the UK Press: Not Seen and Not Heard?" *Feminist Media Studies*, 16, No. 2, (2016), 293-307.

Deirdre O'Neill and Heather Savigny, "Female Politicians in the British Press: The exception to the 'masculine' norm?" *Journalism Education*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2014), 6-27.

Deirdre O'Neill and Matt Mulready, "The invisible woman? UK press coverage of women's sports before and after the London Olympics", *Journalism Practice*, 9 (5) (2015), 651-668.

Suzanne Franks and Deirdre O'Neill, "Women Reporting Sport: Still a Man's Game?" *Journalism*, 17, No.4, (2016), 474-492.

Appendix 8: Attached joint author declarations

Tony Harcup

Tony Harcup

Catherine O'Connor

Heather Savigny

Victoria Cann

Heather Savigny

Matt Mulready

Suzanne Franks

**Word count: 19,565 excluding footnotes
21,947 including footnotes**

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