

## **Playing the game: a study of public relations, politics and the construction of Islam in the UK public sphere.**

**Abstract:** This doctoral thesis explores the relationship between politics, Islam and the news media in the UK. Using the theory of mediatization as a framework for understanding media power, it argues that the relationship between politics and the media cannot be fully appreciated without a consideration of the role of public relations practice within it. Drawing on Bourdieusian field theory, it utilises textual analysis and 31 semi-structured interviews with public relations practitioners, representatives of Muslim organisations and others with professional experience of Islam and the media to establish whether public relations can be understood as a distinct field, how it mediates between the political and journalistic fields and what the implications of this might be for Muslim organisations seeking to shape news media content.

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## Contents

Abstract .....	4
Introduction .....	6
Chapter 1: Islam, media and contemporary society in Britain .....	13
Islamophobia .....	23
Chapter 2: Media, society and power: theoretical perspectives .....	47
Social theories of media.....	52
The public sphere .....	56
Media power .....	59
New institutionalism.....	63
Mediatisation theory .....	67
Media logic .....	75
Mediatisation of politics .....	78
Public relations .....	88
PR logic .....	92
Chapter 3: Studying public relations through field theory: the methodology of this study .....	99
The research questions.....	105
About field theory .....	109
The research process.....	128
Sampling.....	134
Chapter 4: The field of public relations .....	145
Definitions of public relations.....	146
The history of public relations and politics .....	149
PR and professionalism.....	154
Professionalism and field theory .....	160
The value of PR .....	162

Public relations and social capital.....	166
Mystification of practice .....	173
Public relations habitus .....	181
Public relations in the political field.....	183
Chapter 5: Islam, public relations and the political field .....	193
The fieldwork sample.....	194
Islam within the UK political field.....	197
The Prevent Programme and the UK political field.....	198
A new approach: the 2011 Prevent Strategy .....	202
Public relations activity in support of the launch of the Prevent Programme.....	204
Fieldwork among representatives of Muslim groups .....	208
Conclusion .....	229
The research questions.....	229
The methodological approach.....	232
Contributions to existing scholarship.....	234
Public relations and the political field .....	235
Developing understanding of Islam and media.....	238
Developing mediatisation theory .....	241
Annex 1: Press reporting linked to Prevent Strategy press release .....	248
Annex 2: Interview Consent Form .....	251
Annex 3: Summary of research and biography .....	252
Bibliography .....	255

## Abstract

Since the war on terror was launched by US President George Bush in 2001, Islam and Muslims have rarely been out of the news headlines. This intense media exposure has been accompanied by a plethora of studies analysing press coverage in order to understand the relationship between Islam in the UK and the press. These studies provide a useful understanding of how Islam and Muslims in the UK are represented in the national media and how media narratives are framed within a primarily political, rather than religious context. Within this literature explanations of why critical media coverage of Islam recurs focus on broader cultural notions such as Islamophobia rather than demonstrating a clear understanding of the social and professional processes through which the media operate. This limits the critiques offered by this work, as it fails to demonstrate an understanding of structures and processes that would need to be successfully negotiated for press coverage to be changed.

This doctoral thesis explores the relationship between politics, Islam and the news media in the UK. Using the theory of mediatisation as a framework for understanding media power, it argues that the relationship between politics and the media cannot be fully appreciated without a consideration of the role of public relations practice within it. Drawing on Bourdieusian field theory, it utilises textual analysis and 31 semi-structured interviews with public relations practitioners, representatives of Muslim organisations and others with professional experience of Islam and the media to establish whether public relations can be understood as a distinct field, how it mediates between the political and journalistic fields and what the implications of this might be for Muslim organisations seeking to shape news media content. It argues that public relations practitioners do operate within a defined professional field with its own particular forms of social and cultural capital, although this can be obscured by the ways in which they identify primarily with their employing organisation and attempts to mystify the distinctive capital through which their work is possible. In particular, public relations practice is prevalent within the political field, where it is used to enable politicians to communicate with citizens via

the news media. PR practice is more likely to be used by those nearer to the centre of the political field and, in turn, it serves to enhance the power and relative positions of those who utilise it within the political field. The research concludes that Muslim groups in the UK are not strongly enough positioned within the political field to utilise public relations practice effectively in order to challenge or change prevailing news media narratives about Islam.

## Introduction

'MUSLIMS TELL BRITISH: GO TO HELL!' (Daily Express, 4 November 2010, page 1, their capitalisation), 'MUSLIM THUGS BURN POPPIES Sickening scenes on British streets' (Daily Star, 12 November 2010, page 1, their capitalisation), 'Hot cross buns banned for fear of offence' (The Times, 17 March 2003. The article is about hot cross buns supposedly causing offence to Muslims).

Newspaper headlines in capital letters or bold type, shouting out from the front pages, grab public attention and sell newspapers. Headlines are intended to draw the reader into the story while at the same time providing a compelling summary of the main perspective of the news report (Bleich et al 2013). A plethora of studies on Islam and media since the attacks on the United States of America on 11 September 2001, and on London on 7 July 2005, suggest that headlines such as those reproduced above have become common currency in the UK press in the last two decades. These evaluations of press coverage have in the majority, although not universally, reached a common conclusion – that there is an overwhelmingly negative narrative about Islam which predominates in the UK news media. The significance of this is not underestimated in these analyses, with concerns expressed about Muslim participation in public life (O'Toole et al 2013), Muslim exclusion from society (Poole 2002, 2008, 2010; Field 2007; Allen 2010; Lambert and Githens-Mazer 2010) and even suggestions that negative media coverage may result in physical attacks on Muslims (Allen and Nielsen 2002).

This research aims to contribute to the current understanding of the relationship between Islam and Muslims in the UK and the news media. To do so, it does not seek to replicate the many existing studies which evaluate and critique current media reporting. Nor does it seek to examine the impact that different narratives about Islam may have on Muslims in the UK or on society more widely. Instead, this research seeks to achieve a fresh perspective in understanding how Islam and the media interact. Unlike many other approaches, it does not do this by analysing media coverage of Islam. Rather, it moves away from a journalistic or media studies

perspective to explore the relationships between Islam, media and the UK political sphere. In doing so, it seeks to understand the nature and flow of media power and how that power can be interrupted, challenged and changed for the benefit of other groups within society. The research posits that this process of interruption or interference can take place through public relations (PR) practice - the activities of an agent representing the views, policies or activity of a sponsor organisation to journalists in the expectation of influencing media reporting.

This study contends that media coverage about Islam in the UK is primarily political, rather than religious in its identity. As such, it is through a political, as well as a religious or social lens that media coverage about Islam and Muslims should be viewed. This can be achieved through a better understanding of the interrelationships between politics and the news media and how Islam is positioned in relation to both. The media and the political fields are engaged in a continuing process where power is exchanged between sides. There are, however, many players involved in the process and a binary view of the interactions between politics and media misrepresents the complexity at stake. This thesis argues that it is not possible to achieve a full understanding of the relationship between the political field and the news media without acknowledging the role of public relations practice within it. Anyone seeking greater insight into the depiction of Islam and Muslims within the UK press needs to consider the role that public relations practitioners might play in shaping media narratives.

The theory of mediatisation provides the bedrock on which this research is based. Mediatisation offers a framework for understanding the power of the media and in particular its effect on other institutions within society. While approaches to discerning how mediatisation works may differ, the common understanding is that it is a process by which social change is affected as a result of the impact that the media can wield (Schulz 2004; Hjarvard 2008; Krotz 2009; Hepp 2009). Crucially, mediatisation provides a theoretical route in to deconstructing the processes by which the media operates to enable an understanding of media power. Beyond this, the theory of mediatisation also allows an examination of the opportunities for other

institutions to respond to the media's dominance. It is the potential for public relations practice to respond to and work alongside the process of mediatisation, and the consequences that this carries for Islam and Muslims in the UK, that is at the heart of this thesis.

The approach taken by this thesis opens up several potential gaps in current scholarship, three of which are explored further in this research. Of these, the first is a theoretical gap relating to how the theory of mediatisation works and is put into practice. The second is an empirical gap about how public relations practice is used, and to what purpose, within the political field. Within this understanding, the research makes its third contribution to existing scholarship, by focusing on the activity of one specific set of agents within the political field – those undertaking public relations activity on behalf of Muslim organisations in the UK. The fieldwork outlined in subsequent chapters seeks to broaden the current insight and understanding of how public relations practice works and it also provides empirical evidence which contributes to a greater understanding of the dynamics of power and change which this type of practice operationalises. In doing so, it focuses on the current use and future potential for public relations to be used as both a filter and trajectory for messages about Islam and Muslims which appear in the UK public sphere.

The implications of this research are significant for a more stratified understanding of the relationship between the UK news media and Muslims and, potentially, other minority groups. While more nuanced approaches are beginning to emerge in scholarship (e.g. Jaspal and Cinnirella 2010) the overwhelming majority of studies still rely on an approach which looks at the press in isolation when considering media narratives. Yet the construction of particular narratives by the UK news media does not take place as a result of journalistic bias or editorial whim. Instead, the dynamics of media and political power come into play as Islam becomes politicised by association. By approaching the discussion from the perspective of the media, politics and Islam as social fields and the interaction between them, the research highlights the resources and conditions needed within those fields in order to



challenge or more readily accommodate media power. Most of all, the research offers the potential of a new perspective on Islam and the news media which suggests that agents other than journalists can be instrumental in the way Islam is represented.

This is not a study of the media. The literature review in Chapter 1 considers existing approaches to Islam and media, but this study does not include any original research in this regard. The nature or slant of media coverage about Islam in the UK press is, to a large degree, irrelevant to the theoretical basis or methodology for this study which seeks to understand more about some of the processes by which press coverage is influenced and shaped. This research addresses the question of Muslim engagement with politics and public relations and, through this practice, with the media. It does not pursue an understanding of the motivation of media or individual journalists for the coverage they produce, but rather begins to understand the relationship between Islam and media through a sociological perspective, exploring relationships and issues of power and looking at these within a social field. In this, it does not examine the direct relationship between Muslim groups and journalists, but explores the use of public relations practice as an intervention which has the potential to affect media reporting.

To do this, it recasts a perspective on Islam from a religious, or media studies perspective to a political one, exploring the engagement of Muslim groups with the UK political field, and suggesting that it is in these engagements that a way forward might be found. In doing so, it does not offer a rationale for why reporting about Islam may or may not be negative, but it does offer a rationale for why reporting about Islam is not changing or being challenged. The study does not seek to take a position on whether particular types of media coverage are justified, or make recommendations for change. Instead, it suggests that a new perspective on how media narrative is constructed, which includes the role of public relations, might open up fresh possibilities for Muslim groups.

Chapter 2 reflects on the relationship between media and society more widely, exploring the role of the media as a means of communication between citizens and the state. The mechanisms by which this role is played out are discussed, including theories of the public sphere, civil society and new institutionalism. The chapter goes on to discuss the theory of mediatisation and the concept of media logic; the media's way of seeing and interpreting affairs (Altheide and Snow 1979); and the onus placed on other institutions to conform with this. The concept of PR logic is also introduced, suggesting that in order to enable other institutions to conform to media logic, public relations practitioners impose a logic of their own, which has consequences both for the news media and for the practitioner's sponsor organisation. This public relations logic is what enables organisations to accommodate, challenge or work alongside media logic and exert a reciprocal power over the press.

Chapter 3 sets out the methodology for the study's examination of the interrelationship between Islam, politics and media, through the lens of public relations practice. The research questions outlined in this chapter aim to build a broad understanding of how public relations works and the resources that PR practitioners can access. The questions then focus further in on public relations in the political field, the experience of representatives of Muslim groups operating in the political field and the extent to which they engage with PR practice. Field theory is set out as the means by which the research questions are answered. Adopting field theory enables the researcher to determine the role of individual agents, rather than institutional structures. The position of agents within a social field can be established along with the dominant characteristics of that field and the agents' level of comfort in adapting to this. This approach reveals the situation of public relations practitioners and agents representing Muslim groups within the UK political field and the access that they respectively have to different types of power within the field.

Public relations practice is at the heart of understanding the interplay of power between the media and politics. The fieldwork conducted for this research and reviewed in Chapters 4 and 5 attempts to understand how public relations practice

works, both within the political field and among the Muslim groups operating there. Interviews with practitioners ascertain their relative positions within the field and the attributes and characteristics which enable them to succeed within it. The results of the fieldwork suggest a stark divergence of public relations practice among different agents which can help to explain how media power with regards to narratives about Islam appears to go largely unchallenged.

Fieldwork among public relations practitioners outlined in Chapter 4 reveals their high levels of social and cultural capital and their reliance on this to perform effectively in their roles. What also emerges is a mystification of PR practice which is integral to practitioners' perceived standing in the field. This mystification enhances the power that PR practitioners hold, and helps protect them from challenge or competition by those within their sponsor organisation and also externally. The mask that this mystification creates is absent from the fieldwork with representatives of Muslim groups discussed in Chapter 5. While these agents demonstrate significant experience of the political field, their lack of understanding of public relations practice suggest that they are not 'playing the game'. The existence of such a game is evident within the political field and is highlighted in Chapter 5 through a discussion of the public relations activity that took place to launch the coalition government's current Prevent strategy.

The word 'media' which is used throughout this document carries multiple meanings and connotations. The theories under discussion – including mediatisation and field theory - both have concepts of media power at their heart, and different definitions of media could apply. Throughout this thesis the term 'media' is used to refer to the UK national newspapers, both broadsheet and tabloid. Although production processes mean that the content of newspaper websites changes more frequently than the content of the printed newspapers, this study has not differentiated between the two. In similar vein, the thesis identifies the challenges of talking about Islam or Muslims in the UK, particularly in the context of news reporting. There are many diverse communities of Muslims in the UK, and a similar multiplicity of expressions of Islam as a religion. For the sake of brevity, the words 'Islam' and

'Muslims' have been used throughout as shorthand for Muslim communities and the faith they practise.

## Chapter 1: Islam, media and contemporary society in Britain

As little as twenty years ago, a study of the depiction of Islam in the news media would have been viewed as irrelevant to the current trends in media studies as it would have been to domestic politics. The uninformed reader of such a study might reasonably have expected it to focus on foreign affairs reporting, or to be a study of reporting by journalists during the first Gulf War (1990-1991). Yet within two decades the context for this study has been transformed. Islam and different communities of Muslims in the UK have been constantly in the news throughout the period of this research. Headlines relating to Islam and Muslims appear in national newspapers – both tabloid and broadsheet - nearly every day<sup>1</sup>. This notable increase in media reporting has been mirrored in the academic literature, and in the years following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and 7 July 2005 a new urgency has entered the debate about media coverage of Islam. Analyses of media reporting about Islam in the UK, the US and elsewhere abound, together with recommendations about how to change existing media narratives.

Much of the literature in this area which has emerged in the last two decades is focussed on the political consequences of particular events involving or affecting Muslims, from the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (Ruthven 1990; Fowler 2000; Pipes 2003; Poole 2010), to the terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001 and London in 2005. Other studies follow the controversial publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in *Jyllands-Posten*, Denmark's best-selling newspaper, in 2006 (Hussain 2007; Berkowitz and Eko 2007; Keane 2008; Meer and Mouritsen 2009). Strong and sensational headlines about Islam and Muslims are now familiar currency; coverage of Islam in the UK news media has increased substantially over the last two decades and particularly post 11 September 2001. In the UK press, there has been a notable shift from reporting on

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<sup>1</sup> A search of UK national newspaper coverage using the Nexis online database revealed over 1950 national newspaper articles appearing in 2014 which contained the words 'Islam' and 'Muslim' within the headline and lead paragraphs.

international stories about Islam as a religion to reports about Muslims as individuals and references to the 'Muslim community' - a phrase which can be used to mean a specific geographic community of Muslims or Muslims in the UK more generally (Poole 2000, 2010; Poole and Richardson 2006; Moore, Mason and Lewis 2008; Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery 2013; Bleich, Stonebraker, Nishar and Abdelhamid 2013).

In the last two decades there has been more coverage of religion overall in the UK news media and reports about Islam have been the single most significant determining factor in this increase<sup>2</sup>. A study of almost every newspaper article published in the UK national press that referred to Islam from 1998 to 2009 (Baker et al 2013) reveals that numbers of articles published were at their lowest in the year 2000 – with an average of 50 articles appearing per month<sup>3</sup>. A year later, in 2001, the number of articles had increased nearly seven times over, to an average of almost 350 articles per month<sup>4</sup>. This concurs with quantitative research conducted by Poole (2002), who concludes that Muslims were what she describes as 'low visibility' in the British media prior to 2001, particularly in the tabloid newspapers. She suggests that in the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001, between 12 September and 25 October, The Times and The Guardian each carried the equivalent of that paper's previous annual coverage (Poole 2002:5). Baker et al (2013) identify a second peak in newspaper coverage in 2005, with an average of over 300 newspaper reports per month<sup>5</sup> and, eight years after the event which triggered the increased coverage, in 2009 there were still three times the amount of newspaper articles about Islam and Muslims, averaging at over 150 per month. Separately, Bleich et al (2013) considered nearly twelve thousand headlines

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<sup>2</sup> Coverage of British Muslims in the British press increased year on year from 352 articles in 2000 to 2,185 articles a year later. Coverage reached a peak of 4,196 articles in 2006. By 2008, coverage had reduced to 3,466 articles (Moore, Mason, & Lewis, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery (2013) include a health warning with regards to their statistics for the year 2000. The researchers used media database Lexis Nexis as a source for newspaper articles, and this may not be complete for the year 2000.

<sup>4</sup> This number takes account of the fact that the main trigger for news stories – the attacks of 11 September 2001 – happened three quarters of the way through the year.

<sup>5</sup> This follows the attacks on London of 7 July 2005

about five major world religions - Islam, Christianity<sup>6</sup>, Judaism, Hinduism and Sikhism - which appeared in the UK press between 2001 and 2012. Of these, nearly half of the headlines (46%) are about Islam – a disproportionate pattern of exposure<sup>7</sup>.

Aside from the volume of articles, another indicator of increased media interest in Islam comes from research conducted by Field (2007) which explores changing British attitudes towards Islam and Muslims on the basis of opinion polls. Field explains that many of the opinion polls covering attitudes to Islam which were conducted between 1988 and 2006 were commissioned by the news media<sup>8</sup>, while others received wide press coverage. By this count, there were 104 opinion polls conducted during these 18 years, of which over 86% (90 polls) were commissioned in the five years following the attacks of 11 September 2001. Field warns that because the primary purpose of most of the polls is to create news they lack academic rigour in question formulation and analysis. One obvious manifestation of this has been a tendency for polls to regard British Muslims as an homogenous entity, without distinguishing between them or different communities of Muslims. As a result, the lack of sophistication in the questions asked means that the polls do not lend themselves to a nuanced view of Muslims.

This growing pool of newspaper reports provides a rich seam of material for academic analysis. Alongside the news headlines, there is an increasing volume of scholarly literature exploring Islam and the news (for example, see Said 1995, 1997; Poole 2000, 2008, 2011; Hafez 2000; Richardson 2004; Poole and Richardson 2006; Field 2007; Saaed 2007; Moore, Mason and Lewis 2008; Farouqui 2009; Ismael and Rippin 2010; Jaspal and Cinnirella 2010; Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery 2013). While there was some literature exploring the relationship between Islam and the press before the attacks of 11 September 2001 – most notably Said (1995, 1997;

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<sup>6</sup> In their research, headlines about Christianity are divided into two categories – headlines about Catholicism and those about Anglicanism.

<sup>7</sup> In contrast to Bleich et al's findings (2013), the 2011 census shows that 59.3% of the population in England and Wales identified as Christian, compared with just 4.8% who identified as Muslim (Statistics, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Field (2007) does not make a distinction between those polls commissioned for the printed press and those commissioned by broadcast media.

Poole 2000 and Hafez 2000) – more academic interest follows media coverage appearing after the attacks on the USA and the subsequent attacks in London on 7 July 2005.

Despite the now sizeable canon of literature focusing on Islam and media, it remains an emerging area of study (Aydin and Hammer 2010; Jaspal and Cinnirella 2010; Poole 2011). To date, much of the interest in Islam, Muslims and the press has come from researchers primarily working within journalism or media studies. It is only more recent analyses which have begun to address specific quantitative or qualitative questions about different aspects of the representation of Muslims, or their religion, in the UK news media. These more recent analyses include a focus on the relationship between opinion polls, media reporting and Islamophobia (Field, 2007), a discussion of Muslim participation in media debates (Spielhaus, 2010) and a study of Muslim participation in contemporary governance (O'Toole, Nisson DeHanas, Modood, Meer, & Jones, 2013). While some of these discussions diverge from a media studies perspective, the focus remains overwhelmingly on representation of Islam, with the associated challenges that this brings<sup>9</sup>. The diversity of the Muslim community in the UK is not always fully recognised within such studies (Jaspal and Cinnirella 2010) which categorise Muslims as 'the other' or identify Muslims primarily through an assumed religious identity, rather than as individual citizens with different characteristics, lifestyles and preferences<sup>10</sup>.

As the literature around Islam and media develops, the theoretical and methodological approaches used are broadening, taking account of emerging media theory<sup>11</sup>. This chapter reviews some of the most prevalent and recent approaches to discussing Islam and the UK news media and highlights how this research will

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<sup>9</sup> Both Silverstone (1999) and Stuart Hall (1997) address the theme of how society represents people and places that are significantly different to the majority, arguing that representation is a practice which produces culture. Hall argues that people who are in any way different to the majority – 'the other' - are frequently exposed, and often through the media, to a binary form of representation, often using sharply opposed, polarised and over-simplified themes, such as good and bad, civilised and primitive, ugliness and beauty.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the implications of media representation for Muslim identity, see Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010).

<sup>11</sup> This broadening of the academic focus on Islam and media includes literature on societal attitudes to Islam, representation and inclusion in digital and social media, political engagement and community integration (e.g. Hafez 2000, 2007 and 2009; Field 2007; Spielhaus 2010; Uitermark and Gielen 2010; O'Toole et al 2013).



complement, contribute to and extend the current literature. The reaction to the attacks of 11 September 2001 includes studies of Islam and media which are taking place worldwide (for example Quayle and Sonn (n.d); Hafez 2000; Angeles 2010; Spielhaus 2010; Uitermark and Gielen 2010; Smith 2013), but in keeping with the focus of this research, this chapter is primarily restricted to literature that examines the relationship between Islam and media in the UK press.

The tendency to explore the relationships between Islam and media from a journalistic or media studies perspective means that some form of content analysis is a popular starting point, with such studies drawing similar conclusions about negative misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims in the UK media (Poole 2002, 2008; Billig 2006; Poole and Richardson 2006; GLA 2007; Moore, Mason and Lewis 2008; Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery 2013; Bleich, Stonebraker, Nishar and Abdelhamid 2013). Content analysis is conducted through an examination of a series of news reports published over a defined period of time with a critique of the overall depiction or representation of Islam that the copy, headline and accompanying images convey. The way in which the journalist has framed the news article may be categorised by the researcher in positive, negative or neutral terms, sometimes using discourse analysis to associate Islam or Muslims with particular key words or phrases (Richardson 2004; Bleich et al 2013; Baker et al 2013; Yusof et al 2013). Poole (2008) cites what she calls 'significant' or 'prominent' topics featuring in news items about British Muslims, while Moore, Mason and Lewis (2008) identify what they call the 'news hook' for stories about Islam and Muslims<sup>12</sup>. Using this method, Moore, Mason and Lewis conclude that just over one third (36%) of stories in the British press about British Muslims overall are about terrorism while two thirds of articles present Islam as a problem for or threat to British society. Even coverage not specifically linked to an event such as a terrorist attack, or act of conflict nevertheless depicts Islam as a problem and in conflict with British society. This is illustrated by front page headlines such as 'Muslims force [swimming] pool cover up' (Daily Express 26 July 2010), 'Britain has 85 Sharia Courts' (Daily Mail 29 June 2009, their underlining) or 'Christmas is banned: it offends Muslims' (Daily Express 2

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<sup>12</sup> The 'news hook' is the predominant theme of the story, or the event which characterises the news report.

November 2005) – all of which imply that Islam is overwhelming British society or in conflict with British traditions and values. Poole's conclusions (2008) broadly concur, with themes identified in press coverage including Muslims' threat to British security, Muslims' threat to mainstream British values and the cultural differences between Muslims and the rest of society.

In one of the most extensive studies of media reporting of Islam and Muslims in the UK, Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery (2013) use critical discourse analysis<sup>13</sup> to understand who benefits from such media texts, and in particular to gain insight into the dynamics of power at play in reporting. Using keyword analysis they studied the recurrence of words located in close proximity to the words 'Islam' or 'Muslim' in the UK newspapers over a 12 year period (1988 – 2009). Their conclusions are that the presentation of Islam and Muslims during this period is overwhelmingly one of conflict and threat. The religion and its followers are frequently portrayed as a problem or a cause for concern and even discussions of aspects of doctrine and religious practice are often embedded in a context of conflict. These links occur twice as often in the tabloid and midmarket newspapers as in the broadsheets. In the red tops, the Daily Mail and The Daily Express typical words used alongside the words 'Islam' or 'Muslim' include 'terror', 'veil', 'extremists', 'immigration', 'asylum', 'sharia' and 'evil'. The tabloids also frequently include the words 'fanatic' and 'extremist' in stories about Islam and Muslims. In contrast, the broadsheet newspapers are more likely to use words such as 'radical', 'hardline', 'fundamentalist' or 'separatist'<sup>14</sup>.

Although used with regularity, these are not the most frequently employed words co-located with the word 'Muslim'. The most common keywords identified by the study are nouns such as 'community', 'world', 'women' and 'leaders'. This is because

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13 Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery describe critical discourse analysis as: 'an approach to the analysis of discourse that holds that language is a social practice and examines how ideologies and power relations are expressed in language. Critical discourse analysis involves the close examination of language in texts, as, for example, in showing how particular linguistic phenomena (word choice, sentence structure, metaphor, implicature, argumentation strategy, etc.) can be used to represent a particular stance' (2013:20).

<sup>14</sup> Bleich et al ascribe some of the attitudes taken towards Muslims and Islam to the political leaning of the newspaper, arguing that the right-leaning papers are significantly more negative in their tone than left papers (2013:29).

Muslims are frequently referred to via collective nouns, such as 'the Muslim community' or 'the Muslim world' which tend to present a picture of a monolithic religion, closely linked to extremism, indistinguishable from within and different from those outside it. Baker et al (2013) observe that the phrase 'Muslim community' (which suggests a single, homogenous community where all Muslims are the same, rather than an array of different Muslim communities) tends to be used as a simplistic catch-all to refer either to all Muslims in a particular town or city, to a single community that spans the whole of the UK or even to the international, global or worldwide Muslim community. The Muslim community and their representative leaders are viewed as hostile, easily angered and offended. Muslim leaders are also characterised as undeserving of their status within the community, especially by the right-leaning tabloids. Such casual and ambiguous phrasing about Muslims and Islam lends itself to emphasizing the difference between Muslim communities and the rest of the United Kingdom.

The dominance of certain words changes over time. While conversion to Islam is linked through key word analysis to a range of problems including alcoholism, vagrancy, drug dealing and mental illness, from 2004 onwards the British press as a whole is more concerned about prejudice towards Muslims. In 2006 and the years following, words relating to intolerance become more frequent. Following the attacks in London of 7 July 2005 counterterrorism also becomes a keyword. In their study, Baker et al conclude: 'What seems to be in operation is, on the one hand, the drawing of overgeneralisations from the attitudes and actions of a minority among Muslims, which is then applied to Islam and Muslims in general, and, on the other, attempts to counter the image of Islam and Muslims as sources of conflict' (2013:65). This latter observation suggests some sort of awareness among the press about the cumulative impact of its own power and potentially efforts to counter this. However, it also implies a failure to delineate properly between different types of Muslims and expression of faith. The news media's perspective on Islam remains a uniform one: whether they create conflict or not, all Muslims are the same.

Although prevalent in much of the literature immediately following 11 September 2001, content analysis can rely too heavily on a subjective analysis of reporting, dependent on the researcher's interpretation and categorisation of news stories as 'positive' or 'negative'<sup>15</sup>. This can create a simplistic classification of news reports which risks overlooking the complexities of the issues being reported. (For example, see the report commissioned for the Mayor of London (GLA 2007) which classifies news reports about Muslims as 'positive', 'negative' or 'neutral'. This report concludes that an 'overwhelming' number of articles had negative associations about Islam or Muslims.) In a more recent study which aims to test the hypothesis that the representation of Islam in the British media is a negative one, Bleich et al (2013) measure positive and negative associations in headlines about Muslims in four UK newspapers between 2001 and 2012. To achieve this, they categorise the way the headlines depict Islam under five different headings: Victim, Beneficial, Problem, Other and Ambiguous. While initially revealing that the biggest number of headlines sit under the 'Problem' category and present an overall negative impression of Islam, the researchers decide that headlines categorised as 'Beneficial' and 'Victim' depict a positive association of Islam, which are likely to elicit sympathy or 'warm feelings' about Muslims (2013:18). This decision appears to rest on an overarching assumption that newspaper readers would view Muslims victims in a positive and sympathetic light; an assumption which the researchers do not substantiate. Nevertheless, by combining the categories of 'Beneficial' and 'Victim' headlines, Bleich et al deduce that in some years, press coverage about Islam and Muslims is more positive than negative. According to their conclusions, there were five years where negative portrayals of Muslims outweighed positive portrayals in British newspaper headlines, while there were seven years where the tone of headline coverage was 'net positive' (2013:28). Their findings suggest that British media headlines do not consistently portray Muslims and Islam negatively, but neither do they portray them broadly positively. Patterns of coverage are complex, they vary year by year and on the whole, British media headlines are relatively evenly balanced between framing Muslims in a positive and negative light.

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<sup>15</sup> In their study of 'news hooks', Moore, Mason and Lewis (2008) explicitly avoid such categorisation, because of the pitfalls of interpretation it can lead to.

While this study provides a quantitative approach to analysing media headlines about Islam and Muslims its methodology falls down because of its broad brush and subjective method of categorisation. To summarise headlines as 'positive' or 'negative' seems too naive; not least because headlines - often crafted by sub-editors rather than the journalist whose byline sits alongside the accompanying article – may not accurately represent the tone or content of the news article.<sup>16</sup> In similar vein, a study by Yusof et al (2013) analyses 109 news articles about Islam from Time and The Economist magazines in the two months following the death of Osama bin Laden in 2011. The study aims to examine how these media link Islam and terrorism in their reports. The results reveal that of all the articles only 13% of the news was positive towards Islam, with framing of news stories predominantly associating Islam with violence, terrorism and weak or poor leadership in Muslim countries. Most of the news categorised as positive pertained to stories about efforts for peace and reconciliation. However, although the study is clearly focused on media reporting following bin Laden's death, not every article explicitly mentions the words Islam or Muslims. For example, the news reports studied included stories about the future of Al Qaeda which did not make reference to either word: this connection was made by the researchers, rather than the journalist. Here, the researchers risk the same pitfalls that they associate with news reporting: an automatic association of Islam with acts of terror, or the perpetrators of such acts. Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery (2013) sound their own warning about the risks of researcher interpretation in content analysis, observing that as consumers of media their views have been shaped over time by the very newspapers they study. The cumulative influence of the media means that researchers' interpretations of what they read cannot be anything other than subjective, and this influence is discussed further in the next chapter.

This type of content analysis provides an understanding of the overall depiction of Islam in the press and may be a useful starting point for discussion, but it is a blunt

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<sup>16</sup> For example, a headline referring to a Muslim as a 'victim' may be referring to Muslim victims of attacks by other Muslims, or the ideology of Islamist terrorists who see Muslims and Islam as victims of British or American foreign policy.

tool with which to analyse the nuance and construction of news articles<sup>17</sup>.

Categorising stories by their news hook as Moore, Mason and Lewis (2008) do, does not take account of any points of dissenting argument or balance included in the article, or of any groups or individuals that are cited as experts in the piece or the language used in the reporting. Furthermore, their study does not provide any further insight into how or why such coverage appears. While it is easy to find scholarship and other analysis which puts the responsibility for coverage firmly at the door of the collective news media, or an individual journalist, it is less straightforward to find convincing insight or reasoning about which factors influence different types of news reporting.

Alongside cautions of analytical subjectivity such as those articulated by Baker et al (2013), content analysis focuses in too quickly on the detail of the final published copy, without taking into account the processes by which the text appears. These processes can impact on the type of coverage, including its size and positioning in the newspaper and even the content of the story. Often working to tight deadlines, journalists are subject to pressures of time and may struggle to source reliable and accurate information, particularly when working on breaking news<sup>18</sup>. Those working on printed publications may also be constrained by space, with sub-editors responsible for editing copy and writing headlines – production processes which could fundamentally alter the perspective of the piece<sup>19</sup>. The readiness and availability of sources to provide explanation, background or confirmation of news may also turn a story in a particular direction. As a result, the news story may be shaped as much by factors outside the journalist's direct control, with the overall representation of Islam being a consequence, rather than a motivation, for the piece. The angle taken by media coverage is not always the result of biased and distorted reporting.

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17 By describing the existing of a 'news hook' the researchers are suggesting that coverage of Islam is associated with an item which makes news, but they do not explain in detail what a news hook consists of.

18 The Guardian's foreign affairs correspondent Brian Whitaker expressed the view that problems with negative or inaccurate depictions of Islam occur less often with ordinary news reporters than with feature writers and columnists who tend to be strong on opinions but pay less attention to the facts. See Muslim Council of Britain 2002:55.

19 The Daily Express Home Affairs correspondent Rachel Baird was described by a colleague as 'in turmoil' because of the wild headlines accompanying stories about Muslims and asylum she was repeatedly asked to write. The Independent, May 4 2004, p.8.

## Islamophobia

Through his study of opinion polls exploring public attitudes towards Islam and Muslims, Field (2007) observes that public knowledge about Islam has increased over the years, and that much of this knowledge has been gleaned from the media<sup>20</sup>. Poole (2002; 2008; 2010) also identifies this as a theme emerging from media coverage. Prior to 11 September 2001 she describes 'cultures of ignorance' among media audiences but observes that Muslims are increasingly making their presence felt in the public sphere (2002:84). As we have seen, knowledge derived from media reporting is likely to conflate an association of Islam with threat, terror and conflict. Baker et al (2013) go so far as to suggest that there is a deliberate intent on the part of newspaper editors or proprietors to exert (often successfully) agenda setting social and political influence. For example, they describe an article in the Daily Star which claimed that the BBC had been overrun with Muslims accompanied by a photograph of a woman wearing hijab sticking her middle finger up to the camera in a gesture of insult as: 'fanning the flames of conflict between mostly white, nominally Christian majority in the UK and minority Muslim residents' (2013:1). There are conflicting outcomes here: while media coverage contributes to an increasing recognition and knowledge of Islam, the media's cumulative message influences individuals' actions and responses to Muslims, not necessarily in a positive way<sup>21</sup>. Allen and Nielsen (2002) suggest a tangible impact, arguing that the media's definition of what Muslims look like has led to acts of aggression or physical violence towards Muslims.

The Runnymede Trust (1997) coined the phrase 'Islamophobia' to describe the impact that this type of negative media narrative might have on the way Muslims and their faith are perceived more widely. The Trust identifies what it describes as 'open' and 'closed' views of Islam within the media and public discourse more widely

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<sup>20</sup> A press release by the Islamic Society of Britain claimed that 65% of people got their information about Islam from the media or television (Islamic Society of Britain, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Focus groups on religion and the media carried out by Taira, Poole and Knott (2010) indicated that viewers and readers were aware of Islamophobic representations and the fact that Islamic extremists were written about a great deal, but people found it difficult not to be influenced by such stories because there were so few positive ones that offered a different perspective. However, they also recognised that bad news stories tended to be viewed as having a higher news value than good news stories.

(1997:5). An open view sees Islam as diverse and dynamic with internal debates, interdependent with the West, different but equal. In contrast, a closed perspective is hostile, seeing Islam as monolithic, static and authoritarian, inferior and aggressive or as the enemy. As the content analyses outlined above suggest, the news media frequently presents a closed view of Islam, while positive news coverage is less likely to fit into the 'open' category. The Runnymede Trust's report observes that closed views of Islam are routinely reflected and perpetuated in both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers (1997:20). In November 2010 the term Islamophobia was given further credence when an All Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia was set up to investigate the forms, manifestations and extent of prejudice and discrimination against Muslims in the UK today. Part of the group's terms of reference is to 'investigate and review the role of the media in fostering mutual respect and tolerance and guarding against misrepresentations of Islam and intolerance towards Muslims' (All Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia, 2013)<sup>22</sup>.

The Trust's suggestion of a link between media coverage of Islam and Islamophobia<sup>23</sup> has been widely discussed (Halliday 1999; Allen and Nielson 2002; Field 2007; Osborne and Jones 2008; Lambert and Githens-Mazer 2010; Allen 2010; Jaspal and Cinnirella 2010; Saaed 2010, Petley and Richardson 2011). Field (2007) traces Islamophobia back to the 1988 publication of Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*, which angered some Muslims who considered that the book contained blasphemous references. He identifies an emerging Islamophobia in opinion polls dating from this time, observing that the impact of the Rushdie affair was to unify the British Muslim community and radicalize many young British-born Muslims who developed links with proponents of radical Islam overseas. This created a strong backlash against Muslims in some sections of the British media

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22 Two years later in 2012 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) set up an 'Anti-Muslim Hate Crime' working group made up of government officials, community representatives and academics. The aim of the group is to consider and take forward proposals to tackle anti-Muslim hatred. The group's first report (CPS 2013) referenced community engagement with Muslim communities in response to high profile media stories (2013:14).

23 This study is not a discussion of Islamophobia; which is a contested term. For example, Islamophobia can be used to refer to a spectrum of activity ranging from religious hate crime to drawings of the Prophet Muhammad to the use of stereotypes or the use/misuse of particular language such as 'Islamism or Islamist'. These terms themselves are disputed and used differently by different Muslim groups.



(2007:448). Field suggests that in the years following the Rushdie affair a stereotypical picture of British Muslims in the eyes of the majority population has emerged; of Muslims being seen as slow to integrate into mainstream society, feeling only a qualified sense of patriotism, and prone to espouse anti-Western values that lead many to condone so-called Islamic terrorism.

Osborne and Jones (2008) take a more prosaic approach to identifying causes of Islamophobia in the British media. One trigger, they suggest, was a column written by Home Secretary Jack Straw for the newspaper local to his constituency, The Lancashire Telegraph, which was reproduced widely in the national newspapers, including in The Guardian. In the piece, Jack Straw described how he asked a Muslim constituent to lift her veil during a conversation in his surgery. He wrote that he told the woman: 'in particular about my concern that wearing the full veil was bound to make better, positive relations between the two communities more difficult. It was such a visible statement of separation and of difference' (Straw 2006). Although the piece went on to say that the woman lifted her veil without demur and a constructive conversation was had, the concerns expressed within it triggered a series of aggressive and outraged headlines about Muslims<sup>24</sup> which appeared under the aegis of reflecting the country's mood with regards to the presence of Muslim communities. In a study commissioned by the Mayor of London, researchers found that, following Jack Straw's comments, a woman wearing a full-face veil became a symbol in the media for Islam generally, and even at one stage for all people from ethnic minority backgrounds (GLA 2007:12). The subsequent coverage, they suggest, presented the veil variously as a battleground, a symbol of separatism and even a shroud<sup>25</sup>.

Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010) take a socio-psychological to their discussion of Islam and media, by which they seek to identify the repercussions in terms of behavior and identity for non-Muslims of particular representations of Muslims in the news

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<sup>24</sup> For example, a headline in The Daily Star claimed: 'Muslims kidnap Madeleine McCann' (Daily Star 28 April 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Suzanne Moore, writing in the Observer on 8 October 2006 said: 'These garments are shrouds. They stop the wearer from living a full life. That goes for Lancashire as much as Kabul' (cited in GLA 2007: 14).

media (2010:290) Echoing the concerns expressed by The Runnymede Trust (1997) and Allen and Nielsen (2002), they suggest that the frequency and consistency of media representations will determine their eventual transformation into social representations. This is because the more frequently negative representations or associations are reproduced in the media, the more firmly they become ingrained in the social and psychological context. In particular, they refer to the concept of Muslims depicted as 'the Other' within society as fuel for Islamophobia, suggesting that such suggestions of difference in the media can induce feelings of fear, insecurity and hostility among the readership<sup>26</sup>. A group depicted as 'the Other' is separate from, and in opposition to, society, identified purely by its difference to the mainstream. Poole (2011) also identifies what she calls a process of 'Othering' in the media, whereby a potential perpetrator or terrorist is identified as an individual (thus divorcing him from the wider Muslim community and appeasing the media from accusations of racism), and then linked to radicals outside the UK who have manipulated or radicalised him through their extremist religious ideology. Muslim ideology is identified as the driving force for acts of terror, but it is 'Othered' because it is located outside the UK (2011:56).

Discussions in academic literature about Islamophobia in the press readily cite pages of headlines, columns and articles which misrepresent or stereotype Muslims<sup>27</sup> but fail to explain satisfactorily the causes of such apparent reporting. Islamophobia per se is not a subject for this study, but this research does seek to understand more about the engagement between Muslim groups in the UK and the media. While negative and stereotypical reporting of Islam and Muslims within the UK press - and particularly the tabloid press - is now well evidenced, the causal factors for this need to be explored more deeply. It is not enough to cite Islamophobia as both cause and effect of a negative attitude towards Islam in the press. As Halliday's consideration of Islamophobia (1999) argues, the challenge is one of presentation and interpretation of Islam and an academic approach which is less general and less

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<sup>26</sup> This perception of Muslims as 'the Other' in society is also reflected in Quayle and Sonn (n,d) and Said (1995, 1997).

<sup>27</sup> Osborne and Jones (2008) point out that this occurs in the broadsheets as well as the tabloids, citing an article by Polly Toynbee in the Independent newspaper on 23 October 1997 in which she says 'I am an Islamophobe and proud of it' and another piece by broadsheet columnist Rod Liddle who states: 'Islamophobia? Count me in.'

absolute in its interpretation of Islam than now required<sup>28</sup>. This study does not provide an answer to the question of causal factors for negative representation of Islam and Muslims but generates more complex understanding of the processes through which representation occurs that causal explanations need to take account of.

Hafez (2000) issues a warning about falling too easily into general conclusions about Islamophobia or negative reporting of Islam. Newspapers report what happens in society – statements of fact often backed up by photographic evidence or corroborated by eyewitness accounts. Terrorism and conflict do exist, as do those people and groups whose actions are motivated by extremist ideologies. The results of their actions are very real: devastating and fatal attacks have occurred across the world. These acts will always have the attention of the media - cases in which Muslims have been involved in terrorism or wars are high in terms of 'news value' (Baker et al 2013). Thus, while content analysis may provide compelling evidence for the association between Islam and conflict in news coverage, events such as the Gulf Wars of 1990 and 2003 provide an obvious explanation for the type and volume of coverage. These conflicts – and in particular the latter war which lasted for eight years - generated headlines day after day with many of the accompanying stories referring to Islam both at home and abroad. As such, the wars became a continuous 'news hook' on which to hang continuous coverage of the religion and its followers.

While the scope of the military action is primarily defined by geography, and politicians and religious leaders were at pains to stress that this was not a war against Islam<sup>29</sup>, religion was an ever-present theme in the way it was reported. In the British press, the run up to the war was dominated by stories about Muslims on benefits and Muslims seeking asylum in the UK (Poole 2006, 2011). Sometimes,

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<sup>28</sup> Halliday (1999) challenges The Runnymede Trust's analysis of Islamophobia, suggesting that their report runs the risk of overstating the case. While there may be distortions of Islam in the national press, there is less so in the regional and local British media.

<sup>29</sup> The Times quoted Ashraf Salah, imam at the Regents Park Mosque in London saying: 'It is not a religious war, it is not a war against religion' (The Times, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2003, p.9), while The Independent, among other papers, reported that Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders had issued a joint statement rejecting attempts to portray the conflict as one between religions (The Independent, March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2003, p.24).

these stories went so far as to promote the notion of the 'enemy within', with asylum seekers from the Middle East and Afghanistan singled out for particular coverage. Three weeks before the second Gulf war began, the Daily Express announced on its front page 'Asylum up 20%'<sup>30</sup>, claiming that the number of refugees reaching the UK in 2002 had exceeded the size of the British Army. This benchmark reinforces the perception of asylum seekers as the 'enemy within' and a threat to the UK and asks the implicit question of readers about how the UK can defend itself if the army is outnumbered.

Once the 2003 Gulf War began, at times it was presented as a conflict between religious extremes, with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and US President George Bush both reported to be turning to religion to sustain them in the weeks leading up to the conflict<sup>31</sup>. Headlines in the tabloids referred to the Iraqi army as 'Allah's Army'<sup>32</sup> and Iraqi soldiers were pictured in a mosque at prayer before entering into battle<sup>33</sup>. In contrast, the identification of the Allied Forces with Christianity was so strong that a Muslim fighting in the British army was novel and newsworthy enough to feature as a story in the Daily Mail<sup>34</sup>. The paper claimed that the unnamed soldier had reflected deeply on the 'apparent paradox' of going to war against a tyrant who employed Islamic rhetoric.

The two Gulf Wars, along with the military conflict in Afghanistan also provide established frameworks for exploring the relationship between Islam and the media both from a journalistic and academic perspective (Brittain 1991; Fialka 1991; MacArthur B 1991; Kay 1992; MacArthur J.R 1992; Kelsay 1993; Bennett and Paletz 1994; Chrisco 1995; Arnett 1997; Allen and Jean 1999; Collins and Glover 2002; Gunter, Russell, Withey and Nicholas 2003). While the sheer size and scale of the news operation creates much comment, the focus of the literature also includes

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<sup>30</sup> Daily Express, March 1<sup>st</sup> 2003, front page.

<sup>31</sup> Writing in The Times, Tim Reid reported that the US President was at peace with himself as war began, perceiving destruction of Saddam as both a moral and religious duty. Such was the level of religiosity in the White House, Reid reported, that staff who did not attend Bible classes were frowned upon (The Times 21 March 2003 page 5).

<sup>32</sup> The Daily Mirror, March 18<sup>th</sup> 2003 p.14.

<sup>33</sup> Daily Telegraph, March 15<sup>th</sup> 2003 p.10.

<sup>34</sup> Daily Mail, March 19<sup>th</sup> 2003, p.8.

examinations of the implications of embedding journalists with troops on the front line (Collins and Glover 2002; Gunter, Russell, Withey and Nicholas 2003) and discussions of Allied media relations as 'propaganda', both at home and in the Middle East (MacArthur 1991; Bennett and Paletz 1994; Collins and Glover 2002). Within the countries represented by the Allies, the discussion of such events focuses predominantly on coverage in the US, and to a lesser extent, the UK media, with little understanding or examination of the war and the media from an Iraqi perspective. This is likely to be as much down to practical constraints as anything else, and increasingly scholars are exploring responses from audiences and media elsewhere with the Middle East (Hafez 2000; Karim 2002). Couldry's warning (2004) that too often the study of Islam and the media is focused around extra-ordinary events, such as war or acts of terrorism, is pertinent here. The framing of coverage around global acts of war or terror means that the ordinary, mundane and routine elements of Islam, or what it means to be a Muslim, are rarely considered.

Two explanations for media narratives about Islam and Muslims can be found in the works of Huntington (1993) and Said (1995, 1997). Huntington's theory of a 'clash of civilisations' and Said's theory of 'orientalism' are identified as dominant motifs within the media and are prevalent in the existing literature about Islam and media as a framework around which media coverage is constructed. The suggestion of a 'clash of civilisations' first appeared in a journal article published in the journal, *Foreign Affairs*, (Huntington 1993). Huntington argues that in future the fundamental source of conflict in the world would not be primarily ideological or economic, but cultural. The article predicts a forthcoming clash of civilisations – with civilisations defined by common objective elements such as language, history, self-identity and, most importantly, religion. Huntington identifies two major civilisations - the West, including Europe and North America, and Islam, including Arab, Turkic and Malay subdivisions. He claims that the concept of 'us' versus 'them' will apply to people of different ethnicities and religion and will increasingly be used by governments and groups who will attempt to appeal to religious and civilisation identity to mobilise support (1993:29).

The use of Huntington's theory by the media to establish a conflict between Western civilisation and Islam was widely discussed both before and after the events of 11 September 2001. (Senghass 1998; Halliday 1999; Russett, O'Neal, Cox 2000; Robinson 2002; Abrahamian 2003; Aksoy 2004; Van der Veer 2005; Amir 2007; Ismael and Rippin 2010). While Russett, O'Neal and Cox (2000) tested the theory's viability for accounting for wars between 1950 – 1992, the later literature shows how the mainstream US media, and to a lesser but still evident extent the UK media<sup>35</sup> automatically, implicitly and unanimously adopted Huntington's paradigm to explain the reasons for the attacks on the World Trade Centre and other US targets. After 11 September 2001 events became framed in the predictable defensive rhetoric of us against them, where 'us' meant civilisation and 'them' meant something primitive or uncivilised (for a broader discussion of journalism in the UK and US after 11 September 2001 see Chomsky 2001; Allen and Zelizer 2002; Open University 2003; Munshi 2004).

Huntington's broad brush approach provides an easily understood explanation for the attacks without demanding knowledge or analysis of the complex historical context to the events. It has been criticized for its failure to distinguish between Islamism or Islamic fundamentalism and Islam itself (Senghass 1998). In particular, the theory of the clash of civilisations provides a framework in which to re-rehearse the artificial, but mainstream, perception of a dualism based on religion or race and in which to situate reporting which is based on 'us and them'. A study sponsored by the Quilliam Foundation (Readings, Brandon and Phelps n.d.), suggests that language used by politicians and journalists - including nouns such as extremist, Islamist, militant or adjectives such as radical, fanatical, fundamentalist - can fuel negative coverage by supporting the notion of a conflict between the West and the 'Islamic' or 'Muslim' world.

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<sup>35</sup> Van der Veer (2005) claims that the clash of civilisations theory was less evident in the British media, but Asu Aksoy's analysis of the reactions of British Muslims to media coverage after 11 September 2001 suggests that such views were still prevalent, with established broadsheet commentators questioning whether all citizens of migrant stock in Britain, particularly Muslims, actually wanted to be full members of the society in which they lived (Aksoy, 2004).

Peter van der Veer (2004) argues that an over-reliance on the theme of the clash of civilisations, in the rhetoric and reporting surrounding the war on terror, means that Western audiences have not been well informed by their media about terrorism and the geopolitical context in which it occurs. Rational political debate in the public sphere has much less to do with the weighty decision to wage war than war propaganda and the manufacturing of public consent. The framing of conflict as 'us and them' or through a process of 'Othering' (Poole 2011) creates a politics of fear and difference, which fuels a sense of exclusion and self-protection.

Abrahamian (2003), critiques Huntington for his ability to analyse international politics without discussing real politics, especially the Arab-Israeli conflict. Describing the clash of civilisations as international relations with politics taken out, Abrahamian observes that any mention of Palestine or Arab nationalism was significantly absent in the media coverage in the days and weeks following 11 September 2001. Instead, he suggests, the US administration successfully used much of the American media to convey the message that the US had been attacked not because of what it had done, but because of what it was. The open and free US media, he suggests, had implicitly drawn a taboo line on what could and could not be said. Middle East specialists who did not explain the crisis in the context of Islam were sidelined, while the media turned to experts on terrorism, religious extremism and Islamic fundamentalism. The clash of civilisations' scenario was also echoed in the rhetoric of Osama Bin Laden. His 'Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders' stated: 'For over seven years now the United States has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, the Arabian peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorising its neighbours and turning its bases in the peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighbouring Muslim peoples' (The Daily Telegraph 2003:11). Bin Laden's use of 'Othering' points to persecution and suffering at the hands of the United States and is intended to act as a call to arms.

The clash of civilisations motif continued to be prevalent in the media in the years after September 11, 2001, most notably in coverage of the Danish cartoons of the

Prophet Muhammad<sup>36</sup> (Naim 2006; Hussain 2007; Berkowitz and Eko 2007; Keane 2008; Meer and Mouritsen 2009). Hussain (2007) argues that the furore was a result of long standing misconceptions between the Muslim and Western worlds and that the resulting media coverage was overwhelmingly framed as a clash between Western freedom of speech and Muslim religious sensitivities. The cartoons, he suggests, were the latest in a long line of misrepresentations of the Prophet Muhammad as being the 'enemy' of the West. As the worldwide media coverage developed the meaning of the cartoon images changed. From being simplistic caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, they came to signify either freedom of speech, secular humanism and the virtues of Western democracy, or blasphemy, Islamophobia, religious and ethnic intolerance, insensitivity and the evils of Western democracy and secularism<sup>37</sup>. In the subsequent international debate, the crux of the issue was described as between competing rights: on the one hand, freedom of expression; on the other, the expectation of tolerance and respect for religious sensibilities. Both positions were placed in a context of a confrontation between the secular West and religious Muslims.

In their study of press coverage of the cartoons' affair in the French newspaper *Le Monde* and *The New York Times*, Berkowitz and Eko (2007) suggest that the affair was perceived in the West as a challenge to journalism and free speech, with the media seeing themselves as protagonists in the fight, not merely reporters of the conflict. *The New York Times* actually described the affair as a clash of civilisations (*New York Times* 2 February A12, cited in Berkowitz and Eko 2007). Berkowitz and Eko observe that *Le Monde* in particular reported the controversy as an affair in which it had a stake, triangulating an ideological boundary between the West and

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<sup>36</sup> In response to complaints by a Danish children's writer that he could not find anyone to illustrate his children's book on Muhammad, *Jyllands Posten*, the highest circulation newspaper in Denmark asked 40 illustrators to depict the Prophet. The 12 cartoons submitted, some of which associated the Prophet with violence, were published in September 2005. They were reproduced in 143 newspapers in 56 countries, leading to widespread unrest and rioting.

<sup>37</sup> Hussain suggests that media reporting was based on a fundamental misunderstanding of reactions to the cartoons. It was not just the fact of the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad in the cartoons which caused offence, but the 'vile and discriminatory' nature of the way Muhammad was portrayed. Other satirical or insensitive depictions of the Prophet – such as in the cartoon series *South Park* - had not caused uproar; this, he suggests, is because they occurred alongside similar depictions of Buddha, Jesus, or Krishna (2007:126).



Arabo-Islamic countries (2007:793). While the press may have shown restraint in not reproducing the cartoons, familiar themes still predominated in their reporting.

The second dominant approach to discussion of Islam and the West is outlined in Said's work *Orientalism* (1995) which is further developed in his study of media coverage of Islam (1997). Here, he argues that the media control and filter information selectively, determining what Westerners learn about Islam. Said claims that representations of Islam are not shaped by local or concrete circumstances, instead they show Islam's inferiority compared with the West. The assumption, he argues, is that the 'West' is greater than and has surpassed the stage of religion, while the world of Islam is mired in a belief system that is opposed to both social and economic development. Propositions stemming from this assumption encompass orientalism. Orientalism, he argues, is used by the West to justify the need to dominate, restructure and have authority over the Orient. Central to this is the difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped and inferior while also fascinating, mystifying and alluring. Said observes that the Western media present a limited series of crude, essentialised caricatures of the Islamic world. Arguing that very little of the detail or humanity of Arab-Muslim life has entered the awareness of even journalists reporting on the Islamic world, he states that media coverage is reduced to constructed images of Muslims and Arabs as either oil suppliers, or potential terrorists.

Said's theory explores the historical relationship between Islam and the West, and the echoes of that history that resonate today, resulting in particular types of media narrative. He claims that Islam and Muslims were of little interest to the American media until the Opec oil price crisis of 1974 brought the Middle East to the front pages. The Iranian Revolution that followed five years later was perceived in the West as a 'holy war on the world' and one that introduced the concept of 'jihad' – a term that has been systematically misinterpreted and misused by the media in the

following decades<sup>38</sup>. For Said, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, led by Saddam Hussein in 1990, confirmed a media story about Islam, oil and terror that still dominates the front pages.

Said's theory of Orientalism is discussed in several critical studies of Islam and the media (Fowler 2000; Poole 2000; Oktem 2009; Jung 2010). Over two years Poole (2000) found what she describes as a radical and explicit anti-Islamic presence in the media. Following Said's rationale, she argues that the perception of British Muslims in the media is consistently shaped by references to Islam in its historic and global context, producing the idea that all Muslims are the same. Three years after the 1991 Gulf War, she identified the theme of Islam as a threat to British society throughout the media. Islam was depicted as an antiquated religion and Muslims unable to fit in with British society. The media constructs Islam as a threat and Muslims as extremists, and few people in the UK have alternative images of the religion and its believers.

Oktem's (2009) work looks at Said's work through a more political lens, when he comments that much European mainstream discourse and government policy on Muslims today is characteristic of an orientalist prejudice with deep historic roots. This has been simply updated from its colonial – or even medieval – context, right up to the contemporary war on terror framework in which it fulfils functions of inclusion/exclusion and produces references to 'the Other'. Oktem argues that the recent use of the 'us or them' language with regard to Muslims is the latest manifestation of older frames of reference for such assorted 'Others' including communists, black people or the Irish.

In their discussion of what they call 'security journalism', Hoskins and O'Loughlin (2010) describe the 'translation' of extremist messages by western news media, especially in the UK and the US. Like Said, they argue that media narratives about Islam have deep roots in history but in contrast to Said, who argues that such

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<sup>38</sup> Literally, *jihad* means 'striving' and describes any sincere struggle for God. The 'Greater Jihad' is a moral, inner struggle; the 'Lesser Jihad' can be a literal battle, but only under strict conditions of self-defence or the protection of others from oppression (Masood 2006).

translation, or filtering, perpetuates a negative image, Hoskins and O'Loughlin argue that the UK and US media reporting generates longstanding understanding of Muslim suffering, reminding Muslim audiences of underlying narratives of grievance and frustration. In doing so, British security journalism hinders comprehensive understanding of the terror threat. Short, heavily edited clips of jihadist rhetoric shown on television or quoted in the newspapers mean that the full context of such texts does not appear, hindering proper discussion and analysis of this type of call to arms.

Orientalism suggests that media and representations of Islam are reliant on a deep rooted and cultural perception of historical Islam. Halliday (1999) challenges this, asserting that the past provides a reserve of reference and symbol for the present, but he does not explain it. Crucially, he observes, Said's theory does not offer much hope or possibility of change. Jung (2010) takes a more moderate approach in his discussion of Said, acknowledging that contemporary debates about Islam and the West are still informed by some of the stereotypes which Orientalism describes. He describes the modern image of Islam as dominated by the essentialist assumption according to which Islamic societies rest on a unified and unchanging codex of religious, juridical and moral rules, supposedly regulating the life of both the individual Muslim and the Islamic community in all its aspects. The Muslim religion is presented as a holistically closed system, a social and cultural unity resisting historical change. This has become a building block of globally shared public knowledge about Islam in the Western and Muslim worlds alike. However, Jung also supports critics of Said, who accuse him of being blind to 'Orientalism in reverse' which he defines as the self-application of Orientalist stereotypes in the ideologies of Islamists and Arab nationalists. Orientals not only perceive Western people through similar stereotypical lenses, but they have also firmly incorporated some of the Orientalist stereotypes in their self-image.

Hafez (2009) identifies a structural similarity between the approaches of Said and Huntington. Both of them treated the 'Other' (Islam from Huntington's perspective and the 'West' from Said's) as some kind of cultural monolith. Hafez argues that

Said failed to understand the very logic behind the construction of Western discourses. While he is convinced that Said's critique of the Western mass media's disparaging image of the Middle East and Islam is sound, Hafez points out that media coverage in Europe is not only made up of stereotypes. He suggests that apart from Said, few scholars have studied the constructive mechanism behind popular images of the Islam-West divide. He proposes an approach for doing so, which examines multiple processes involved within different social environments – including the psychological system of the journalist, the politico-economic system, the national and international media and the audience<sup>39</sup>. This focus on the social environments is developed further in this study although, to date, Hafez's proposal about this has not been fully undertaken. Instead, echoes of Said and Huntington's rationales resonate through much of the existing literature about Islam and media. While the literature is quicker to identify these tropes within media coverage than in their own analysis, existing studies of Islam and media can fall into a similar trap by focusing on a study of the overarching macro-environment rather than the processes and interactions which form part of the creation of an individual news story.

The discussions of media coverage outlined above provide large-scale explanations for broad categories of media coverage, focusing on the historical context,<sup>40</sup> the global environment in which the media operates or the overall impression that large volumes of coverage collectively convey. What they provide are macro level frames for understanding overall themes and trends, rather than a micro level appreciation of processes between different actors or practice within a field overall. It is the combination of smaller, individual actions and processes which make up the bigger picture, particularly in the complexity of the news environment. Said and Huntington's theories do not take us any further in understanding how particular media narratives are constructed, or how they might be challenged or changed. The implication of Said's theory in particular is that media narrative is pre-determined by history and cannot be changed. While this provides a useful context for

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<sup>39</sup> Hafez does not include public relations, which is the focus of this study, in his proposed approach.

<sup>40</sup> Said's approach was echoed in interviews with representatives from Muslim groups in the UK conducted for this study. When asked about the reasons for particular types of coverage about Islam more than one interviewee recounted historical chains of events sometimes going back to the Crusades.

understanding the prevailing media narrative about Islam, this study challenges this assumption and suggests that the practice of public relations can change media narrative. It does this not by changing history, or the global environment or the events which generate news, but by the adopting the form and logic of the media through PR practice. The process by which this happens is discussed in subsequent chapters.

The burgeoning academic literature discussing Islam and the media is accompanied by a growing canon of material with more practical intent, aimed at policy makers or others in positions of influence with the media. This material typically includes recommendations for ways of challenging or changing the representation of Islam in the media. This more practical approach, often based on analysis of existing media coverage, has preoccupied non-governmental organisations, political institutions and think tanks, all of whom have an interest in the relationship between Islam and media (e.g. Runnymede Trust 1997; Bunglawala 2002; UNESCO 2003; Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) 2006; British Council 2006; Greater London Authority 2007; Pew Global Attitudes Survey 2008) as well as Muslim groups (e.g. Quilliam 2006; Islamic Human Rights Commission 2007; Soliya 2009; Engage 2011; Future and Centre of Islamic Studies 2012). For some of these groups, their interest stems from social concerns about Islamophobia (Runnymede Trust 1997; Bunglawala 2002) or in response to the challenges of security (OSCE 2006), while others are responding to the increased focus on Islam and Muslims in the media and broader public sphere (UNESCO 2003; British Council 2006; Greater London Authority 2007).

Typically in these reports the problem of negative or stereotypical media coverage of Islam is set out, with recommendations for future change which can include action by journalists or the creation of 'media events', such as roadshows or exhibitions about Islam. Thus, a working group convened by the Centre of Islamic Studies at Cambridge University concluded that: 'Greater efforts should be deployed [by journalists] to highlight the positive contributions of Muslims to the societies they live in, including in the areas of arts, entertainment, science and politics' (Centre of

Islamic Studies 2012:3), while the report commissioned for the Mayor of London (GLA 2007) recommended that news organisations should review their coverage of issues and events relating to Muslims and Islam and should consider drawing up codes of professional conduct and style guides of terminology (2007:133). Similarly, the British Muslim Media Guide, published jointly by the British Council and the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (Masood 2006), focuses on addressing journalistic ignorance and misunderstanding about Islam. The guide, which contains sections on Muslim finance, Sharia law, mosques and the place of women in Islam, says it is responding to the need for a clear, dispassionate explanation of who British Muslims are, what they care about and what they do. A short section on Muslim public relations activity cites the launch of the Muslim Parliament fourteen years before as an example of good public relations by a Muslim group (2006:58)<sup>41</sup>. In the same way, non-profit organisation Soliya, working with the United National Alliance of Civilisations, collaborated with representatives of Muslim organisations to address the question of how the media specifically can be used to promote better Muslim/non-Muslim relations (Soliya 2009). The conclusion was that developing a new discourse on Islam and Muslims requires the joint efforts of politicians, policymakers and scholars, as well as thought and religious leaders, civil society organisations, business representatives and the media.

One route for redress which is absent from most of these reports is the regulatory system for newspapers in the UK; a self-regulatory system which is now overseen by the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) - a body funded at arms-length by most national newspapers (two exceptions to this are the reports by the Runnymede Trust (1997) and the GLA (2007) both of which raise concerns about the effectiveness of the previous self-regulatory system in resolving complaints about inaccurate press reporting about Muslims). IPSO began work in September 2014, replacing the now defunct Press Complaints Commission (PCC) which oversaw the self-regulatory system for newspapers when the reports cited here were published. Concerns about representation of Muslims within the British press were

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<sup>41</sup> This publication also contains a section on Muslim media which details Muslim newspapers, magazines and websites active in the UK (Masood 2006: 48).

also raised at the Leveson Inquiry into the culture, practices and ethics of the British press (Engage 2010, 2011; Bari 2012; Bunglawala 2012). In their submission to the Inquiry, ENGAGE say that they regularly monitor print, broadcast and social media to record and challenge misrepresentations and inaccurate reporting of Islam and Muslims in the UK (Engage 2010:2). They list a series of complaints to the now defunct Press Complaints Commission, including about headlines such as 'POPPIES BANNED IN TERROR HOTSPOTS Muslim snub to forces' (Daily Star 6 November 2008, their capitalisation) and 'MUSLIM PLOT TO KILL POPE' (Daily Express 18 September 2010, their capitalisation)<sup>42</sup>. ENGAGE state that the responses to their complaints demonstrate that the then PCC's Code of Practice had limitations in handling complaints which are inaccurate or discriminatory when lodged by third party complainants. They call for a more robust system of self-regulation, arguing that British Muslims as a social group suffer from poor media practices. While the future regulation of the media was the focus of significant recent public debate following the Leveson Inquiry into the culture, practice and ethics of the press, the absence of any widespread consideration of the potential for regulatory redress in the literature plays to the underlying assumption that the coverage of Muslims and Islam is embedded as an overarching theme which cannot be challenged or changed.

If the increased coverage of Muslims in the UK press has generated greater awareness of Islam among the public (Field 2007), it has also served to recast Muslims with a political as well as religious identity. However, such visibility has not come easily. As media coverage of Islam has spread following the events of 11 September 2001, the literature which analyses it has begun to recognize the political implications for Muslims in the UK of a continuous and negative narrative (Allen 2010; Poole 2011; Petley and Richardson 2011; Centre for Islamic Studies 2012). As outlined above, political and other public agencies have also begun to consider the implications for Muslims and for society. These are social and political analyses, not theological ones. Alongside the ongoing association of Muslims with terror, conflict

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<sup>42</sup> The first complaint was resolved by a clarification in a subsequent edition of the paper. The second complaint was unresolved at the time of the submission.

and violence, other issues pertinent to religious identity- such as veiling or mosque building – have also become political issues, with senior politicians raising questions about their compatibility with British values. While practices such as veiling or arranged marriage may be blamed on cultural differences, Poole (2010) points out that a continual association of Muslims with immigration – sometimes as illegal immigrants or those seeking unwarranted asylum – positions them as a drain on resources, importing alien values and practices to the UK and therefore threatening mainstream British values. The prominence of the keyword 'counter-terrorism' in relation to the words Muslims and Islam in press coverage (Baker et al 2013) also serves to associate religion with political issues of national security. Currently, Islam and politics are irreparably intertwined, with issues concerning Islam and Muslims becoming political issues (for example, issues relating to veiling or mosque building) and existing political concerns – such as immigration or security – being associated with Islam. It is this intertwining which is of particular interest to this study. The current framing of Islam within politics in the UK media, sets the conditions in which Islam has to be thought about in political, rather than social or theological terms by media audiences. The agenda setting power of the media is discussed in subsequent chapters, but the media's potential to inform and form public opinion means that even the mundane and routine can be made political.

Spielhaus (2010) takes issue with over-generalisations of media coverage about Islam, arguing that there is a difference between the representation of Islam on the one hand and of Muslims on the other and the two things are not the same. In similar vein, there is a difference between those Muslims who step forward to speak on behalf of others, and the ordinary person who may identify as Muslim but not associate themselves with any particular grouping. The absence of any representation of 'normal' Muslims in media discourse (Jaspal and Cinnirella 2010; Spielhaus 2010) serves to perpetuate the politicization of Islam, because the absence of 'normal' Muslims<sup>43</sup> encourages representations of negativity and threat (Jaspal and Cinnirella 2010). Without a 'norm' with which to compare it, the

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<sup>43</sup> Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010) claim that this absence is evident not just in the news media, but also in popular soap operas, literature and reality TV.



representation of extremist points of view risks being perceived as usual or commonplace among Muslim communities.

Spielhaus (2010) studies the construction of a Muslim community in Germany through the lens of media coverage, arguing that media representations of Muslims after 11 September 2001 steered ordinary Muslim individuals, with no connections to Muslim organisations to become active or change their self-representation and act as Muslims. He calls this a 'coming out', observing that previously it had only been individuals who defined themselves predominantly through their religion who had appeared as speakers for Islam and Muslims. Becoming a 'Public Muslim' rather than remaining a private one is motivated by a desire to take control of how Muslims are perceived: 'Many of the Muslims in Germany who actively raise their voices in the media and in the public sphere stress the fact that they refuse to accept the role of victims but struggle for control of how they are perceived by society' (Spielhaus 2010:18). Yet Spielhaus makes no assessment of how successful such attempts are or the extent to which 'Public' Muslims are able to control, or shift, the overarching media agenda. As is explored in later chapters, to do so, individuals and groups need to learn the rules of the media game and be prepared to confront the expectations of the media.

O'Toole et al (2013) suggest that a similar process of participation has taken place in the political sphere in the UK as a result of Muslim activism (for a discussion of Muslim participation in politics see also Centre for Islamic Studies 2012). They explore Muslim participation in contemporary governance, concluding that Muslims have become increasingly visible in recent years in both public and media debates. Greater Muslim inclusion in governance, as well as more widespread government recognition and engagement with Muslim groups has arisen as a result of Muslim activism. However, O'Toole et al focus on political rather than media environments, and, in particular, local rather than central government. Nevertheless, Spielhaus claims that media engagement is having a tangible impact on the Muslim community in Germany. He argues: 'In many rather complicated ways, media, but not only media, are playing an important role in creating a consciousness of being Muslim

and thereby fostering the emergence of a Muslim community. One can judge this process as being positive or negative, but either way, the cliché of the bad media excluding Muslims proves to be incorrect' (2010:26). This conclusion is supported by the literature discussed above. There is scant evidence that the media are excluding Muslims. While it is indisputable that the representation of Islam and Muslims is a negative one, this may be the result of absence or misunderstanding rather than exclusion.

As Islam becomes more politicised the question of who represents and speaks for Islam is asked recurrently in politics as well as in academic studies. As is outlined in Chapter 5, the fieldwork for this study includes those working for Muslim groups which undertake activity to represent their community(ies) to government and the media. The results of that fieldwork suggest that the position of what Spielhaus would call 'Public' Muslims in the UK may be somewhat conflicted, particularly for those who operate in the political sphere. O'Toole et al (2013) cite Labour MP Sadiq Khan who states that the British media and politicians have been lazy, particularly in the years after the Muslim Council of Britain's (MCB) representative status had been questioned, because they have often looked for Muslim politicians as replacements for the MCB. Khan is clear that he is not a Muslim spokesperson but feels pressure from others to 'speak up' as a Muslim (2013:27). Once again this suggests that the media's agenda about Islam is predominantly political. Khan's experience is that rather than seek out community leaders, artists, writers or others who might speak on behalf of Muslim communities, the media turn to politicians. However, this may be because (as is discussed in Chapter 2), politicians conform to the logic of the media in a way that other Muslim groups or representatives do not.

When reviewing the literature about Islam and media over the last two decades it would be easy to assume that media coverage is as homogenous as its depiction of the Muslim community. But the conclusion that the media present an unvarying picture of stereotyping and misrepresentation<sup>44</sup> (for example, see Poole 2002;

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<sup>44</sup> While the volume of news coverage – and literature studying it – about Islam may have increased dramatically in recent years, such attitudes are long standing. Fifty years ago, one scholar of Islam, G.S Hodgson (1964)

Moore, Mason and Lewis 2008; Osborne and James 2008) risks perpetuating as many stereotypes as the media reporting it analyses. Aydin and Hammer (2010) conclude: 'In many existing studies, Muslims are represented in various forms of media mostly negatively and as passive, on one side, while the media appear as a self-perpetuating institution with no human access or participation on the other side.... It seems important at this point in time to go beyond this sharp and artificial distinction and to construct a more complex picture of the ways in which Muslims and media are connected and mutually influenced' (2010:3). This study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of those connections and influences, through a discussion of the exchange of power which flows between Muslims and the media and the potential of public relations agents as intermediaries within that power dynamic.

Karim (2002) counters the prevailing assumption that Muslims are helpless to challenge or change the dominant narrative of powerful media. He disputes the suggestion that Muslims are victims of negative media reporting and posits that a significant responsibility for negative media coverage rests with Muslims themselves for failing to engage effectively with the media and for allowing militant Islamists to become key spokespeople. Alternative voices and positive coverage of Muslims and Islam do appear and this is increasingly acknowledged in the literature<sup>45</sup>. The Guardian and The Independent have been cited for their 'open' views of Islam which have been presented consistently in their reporting (Bleich et al 2013). The unanimous decision by national newspapers not to reprint the cartoon caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad following their publication in Denmark in 2006 was widely seen as both responsible and respectful (Petley 2006:46; GLA 2007; Newspaper

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observed: 'Historians and outsiders generally have tended to find Islam relatively arid and uninteresting. They have found the religion arid, to begin with.... Islamic culture is almost regularly characterized by what it did *not* have' (1964:224, italics in the original).

<sup>45</sup> In a report commissioned by the Mayor of London (GLA 2007), researchers spoke to journalists who identified as Muslims. While the journalists expressed their frustration at the negative coverage of their religion and often felt as if their religious identity was seen to take precedence over their professional identity, they expressed the hope that coverage of Muslim issues in the media would be improved if there were more good journalists of Muslim backgrounds employed in the media (GLA 2007:67).

<sup>46</sup> Petley cites the different rationales given by the British national newspapers for not publishing the cartoons. He argues that The Guardian and Independent's decision not to publish for fear of causing offence was consistent with the overall tone of their coverage, but accuses the Daily Mail of 'sheer gall and breathtaking hypocrisy', given their past record of misrepresenting all matters Islamic (Petley 2006:108).

Publishers Association 2012). Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery (2013) warn of oversimplifying the way Muslims are depicted<sup>47</sup>. While their study concludes that the picture emerging from the press is negative overall, they note that it would be wrong to consider the British press as monolithic and it would also be wrong always to attribute Islamophobic motives to journalists. As they conclude: 'We argue that the words themselves are not necessarily the problem; quite often the issue is the contexts and combinations they are used in.' Instead, 'What emerged is a more subtle and ambivalent picture, which indirectly contributes to negative stereotypes... Thus a significant amount of reporting across the whole of the British press involved placing Muslims in the context of conflict' (Baker et al 2013:269).

Bleich et al (2013) claim clear evidence that the political leaning of the newspaper has a strong effect on the way it portrays Islam and Muslims, with right-leaning papers significantly more negative in their tone than left-leaning newspapers. Their research reveals that left-leaning papers (they describe these as The Guardian and The Daily Mirror) portrayed Muslims in a net positive light<sup>48</sup>. The Guardian in particular is often cited as a newspaper which regularly features discourse which counters the prevailing media coverage (Petley 2006; Poole 2011). The local press also has a different set of news values from the national newspapers which can lead to more inclusive coverage (Halliday 1999). This is evident in its coverage of community relations and interfaith activities and also reports that depict Muslims as ordinary everyday members of local communities. Poole (2011) speculates that as societies diversify and Muslims gain a greater presence in the public sphere so coverage will evolve (2011:59).

The literature reviewed here demonstrates how stories linked to Islam and its followers in the UK news media are constantly alongside reporting that overwhelmingly associates them with threat, conflict and terror. According to the literature, anyone who believes what they read in the papers comes away with a

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<sup>47</sup> Halliday, writing before the events of 11 September 2001 (1999) observes that on both sides discussion about Islam and the West tends towards alarmism and simplification. There is alarmism about the threat and simplification of different issues – e.g. terrorism. He suggests that even use of terms such as 'threat' and 'terrorism' simplifies the issues, hindering proper debate and understanding.

<sup>48</sup> This finding should be viewed alongside concerns about methodology outlined above.

perception of a religion linked with threat and terror, perpetually seeking to dominate and change British culture and way of life. The media presents an ideology which is wholly at odds with mainstream British values and a religion with both leaders and followers quick to take offence, or exception, to perceived slights. The accuracy of such a depiction of Islam is widely disputed by many of the scholars and interest groups cited here. It is not the intention of this study to enter the debate about the characteristics of Islam as a faith or the characteristics of its followers, but such analysis provides a useful rationale for this research, exposing the need overall for a more stratified and nuanced understanding about how the prevailing narrative has come to be and the processes by which it could be challenged or even changed.

The study also suggests that there are gaps in current scholarship. The research to date presents a narrow framework of understanding based on individual researchers' analyses of the framing of media coverage. Crucially, media coverage is seen to stand in isolation, with few connections made between the depiction of Islam and Muslims and the wider UK public sphere. Baker et al (2013) identify difficulties in assigning motives for the more indirect forms of stereotyping in the British press, observing that some of it may be accidental or unconscious. Conclusions about whether the media offers a positive or negative depiction of Islam lead to calls for more positive representations – be it explanation of areas of common ground among faith leaders, the telling of positive stories about the lives of individual Muslims in Britain or explanation of Muslim practice and belief. Responsibility for acting on these calls is often placed with journalists, with expectations that they will work to improve their understanding of Islam, or present news which is more cognizant of different aspects of the faith and its followers. In making these recommendations, useful though they may be, few attempts appear to have been made to understand the mechanisms of the construction of current media narratives. To date, where explanations have been offered, these rely on the theories of orientalism and the clash of civilisations as prevalent cultural attitudes or frames that shape negative reporting. These theories assume an independence and insularity in journalistic practice which belies the actual process of news gathering. While more varied

approaches to understanding Islam and media are now evolving, these have yet to explore fully the processes of news gathering and the role of different agents, both within and external to Muslim communities, in creating and disseminating news.

Fieldwork conducted for this study reveals that the sheer volume, consistency and tone of much of the coverage leaves Muslim groups in the UK grappling for an adequate response. The political positioning of much of the coverage – be it about war or about veils – creates a political perspective on religion which, to its followers, may be unfamiliar and perturbing. But the press reporting cannot easily be ignored, and a cumulative media picture which results in misunderstanding and misapprehension about Muslim communities and their faith can lead to adverse political and other consequences. If Muslim groups hold back from challenging or engaging with the press, politicians will not hesitate to do so. Political reaction to media headlines about Muslims and immigration, terror, veils, mosque building and more can drive a policy agenda which affects every day Muslim lives. The development of the Prevent programme, intended to help counter terrorist activity in the UK, is a prime example of this. The emergence of Prevent is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Baker et al (2013) suggest that the only beneficiaries of such press coverage are newspaper editors, who benefit commercially from stories about conflict, war and threat, and the 'extremists' whose ideology is aired and promulgated via the media. But there is some evidence to show that negative media coverage is mobilizing Muslims, rather than enervating them (Spielhaus 2010; O'Toole 2013). The process of stepping up to engage with the media and political discourse is also a process of renewal of community, fostering religious identity and empowering others to do the same.

## Chapter 2: Media, society and power: theoretical perspectives

The literature review in the previous chapter demonstrates the different quantitative and qualitative approaches that have been used to understand the depiction of Islam and Muslims in the UK news media. Collectively, the literature paints a cogent picture of a religion which is repeatedly associated with news content about violence, threat and terror. While this conclusion is predominant within existing literature, a convincing explanation for why this should be so remains largely elusive. The theories of orientalism or the 'clash of civilisations' provide an overarching or macro context in which coverage can be viewed, but there are fewer explanations of how the processes of news gathering, and in particular those which take place outside the newsroom, result in particular types of reporting. This thesis seeks to offer an alternative approach to understanding the representation of Islam in the UK news media. It does this not through a study of news media content or of journalistic practice or news reporting<sup>49</sup>, but by suggesting that the current literature on Islam and media could be developed by a greater scrutiny of the social role of news media and the processes through which news stories are constructed.

The social role of news media relates to an understanding how news media operates within society and in particular, the function it fulfils for citizens of that society (Schulz 2004; Hjarvard 2008; Krotz 2009; Hepp 2009). While media processes are central features of modern societies, the news media in particular represents a form of social power, determining the flow of information from the state to citizens and, increasingly, from citizens to the state. As a fundamental means of communication between the state and the public, the news media plays a part in helping groups and individuals understand societal norms and values, construct their own identities and make judgements about the identities of other groups and individuals. It is a means by which people can participate in culture, providing interpretation about what is

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<sup>49</sup> For examples of these types of studies see McNair (1999a; 1999b), Tuchman (1980) or Klinenberg (2005).

good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable, normative or different within society (Stevenson, 1997).

This thesis focuses on the social function the news media performs in connecting the political field in the UK with citizens, through the flow of news – or information – about the political field, the events that take place and the individuals and groups within it<sup>50</sup>. The news media is an important mechanism for providing information to the public about Islam and its followers and, as the literature review in Chapter 1 illustrates, news coverage about Islam and Muslims in the UK is frequently focused on matters pertinent to the UK political field and associates the religion and its followers with topics such as national security, war, immigration or community cohesion. In its reporting of Islam, the news media becomes an authoritative substitute for other sources of information and a means of helping individuals construct a perceived identity for Muslims.

The thesis goes on to consider what this association means for relationships between Muslim groups and the news media, in particular those currently operating, or attempting to establish themselves within the political field. It also considers the extent to which Muslim groups are participants in the processes through which news stories are constructed. These are not purely production processes – that is, activities that take place within the journalistic field or the newsroom - and which may be examined through interviews with media personnel or exploring how practical and organisational needs shape news media choices. Instead, the construction of news involves interactions between journalists and practitioners in

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<sup>50</sup> For example, in the 2015 general election campaign, the news media provided a constant flow of information to voters about the different parties, their policies and their perceived relative merits. The coverage included judgements about the party leaders as well as encouragement to citizens to vote in a particular way. While some of the coverage was factual reporting of party manifestos or other policy announcements, other reporting was more subjective, depending on the political leanings of the newspaper concerned. Described as the 'defining image of the election', an unflattering picture of Labour leader Ed Miliband eating a bacon sandwich was used repeatedly to support judgements about Miliband's inadequacy as a potential Prime Minister. The day before the election, The Sun newspaper featured the image on its front page, with the headline: 'SAVE OUR BACON' (The Sun, 6 May 2015, capitalisation in original). The accompanying text exhorted readers not to let Miliband make a 'pig's ear' of Britain and not to 'swallow his porkies'. Miliband's struggle to eat the sandwich – the photograph of which first appeared in the Evening Standard a year earlier in May 2014 - would never have been seen by voters had it not been captured and reproduced by the news media.  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/05/ed-miliband-bacon-british-election/392867/>



other spheres and the nature and process of these relationships are also part of the mechanisms by which news is produced.

At the heart of these relationships is an exchange of power – power invested in news and the nature of news and in those who seek control over what makes news. The processes by which power is exchanged goes to the heart of the social role of news media – how the news adapts and responds to what is happening beyond the newsroom – in other spheres. My emerging contention is that in overlooking public relations practice, existing social theories of media may misconstrue the relationship between media and the state or political sphere. Any assumption that the interaction between the news media and the state operates directly and without intervention or intermediaries does not reflect the complexities or the reality of the relationships at play.

This chapter reviews theories of media which are relevant to this task of scrutiny. It focuses on social theories of media that have a bearing on news media and politics and on an understanding of the relationships between politics, state and media. In its discussion of these theories, this chapter notes the wider failure to take account of mediating factors which can affect these relationships, and in particular, highlights the role of public relations as one such factor. By largely overlooking the significance of public relations, social theories of media may miss out on a more nuanced and layered understanding of how media works and is constructed and the relationships on which it depends. The interdependency between the political field and the journalistic field means that understanding the processes of public relations tells us something about the nature of the political field itself; where different players are positioned and where the power rests within the field. This is because power is, in part, conferred by the relationships that individuals within the field have with the news media.

This perspective on the role of public relations as a mediating factor in the relationship between the political field and the news media has profound implications for Muslim groups seeking to challenge or change media representation. To pursue

this, subsequent chapters consider public relations as a social field and its role in intervening in the exchanges which take place between the journalistic field and the UK political field. This chapter concludes by setting the groundwork for that discussion, by exploring the relationship between public relations practice and theories of media power and influence.

This chapter sets out the theoretical basis for exploring these perspectives and relationships. It begins by looking at social theories of media and in particular by examining the relationship between media and politics through theories of the public sphere. It explores the way in which media narrative can be constructed through the use of binary concepts such as good and evil, us and them or those within society and those outside of it. This is not achieved through discourse analysis (as discussed in the previous chapter, this approach has already been taken to a study of Islam and media (Richardson 2004; Baker et al 2013; Bleich et al 2013; Yusof et al 2013)) or by an impressionistic recounting of media coverage, but by looking at the nature of media power, the interplay between media power and political power and where Muslim groups are positioned within this dynamic. To do this, this chapter continues by discussing the power and the impact the media wields through a discussion of mediation and mediatisation theory. This discussion of approaches to mediatisation examines the connections made between the media and wider society (Schulz 2004; Hjarvard 2008; Krotz 2009; Hepp 2009) including an exploration of the effect of media logic on politics, with a consideration of what this means for political communication.

Whilst these theoretical perspectives have an important role to play in making sense of the processes and roles of news media, they pay little or no attention to the significance of public relations within this. By overlooking public relations practice however, these social theories of media misconstrue the relationship between media and the state or political sphere. Any assumption that the interaction between the news media and the state operates directly and without intervention or intermediaries does not reflect the complexities or the reality of the relationships at play. Disregarding the role of public relations places a limitation on understanding

the function of media within society. A direct relationship between media and state is one in which it is hard to intervene. In contrast, a subtler approach to looking at how news media and state interact reveals the potential to disrupt the appearance of prevailing narratives or to create new ones. To pursue this, subsequent chapters consider public relations as a social field and its role in intervening in the exchanges which take place between the news media and the UK political sphere. This chapter concludes by setting the groundwork for that discussion, by exploring the relationship between public relations practice and theories of media power and influence.

The chapter begins with a review of structural theories which set out the interplay between media and society, which have been developed by Jürgen Habermas (1992), Ron Jacobs (2000) or Jeffrey C Alexander (1981, 1998, 2006) before going on to look at media power and effects, and in particular theories of mediation and mediatisation. Whilst illuminating important dimensions of the role of news media in society, these theories do not typically focus on the micro-processes involved in interactions between social actors, institutions or professional groups. Instead, theories of media and society, media effects or the nature of media power, risk implying a direct relationship between institutions, the media and society, without presenting a more finely nuanced discussion of the roles that different agents can take. Similarly, in discussions about the mediatisation of politics, the complex nature of the political field may be reduced to a discussion of the relationship between MPs and journalists, or the reporting of Parliamentary news and debate within the media (for example, Kepplinger's 2002 study of the mediatisation of the German Parliament omits to mention the role of public relations, or press officers in communicating with the media). While these studies usefully reveal the interplay of power between different factions, their presentation overlooks the presence and activity – either actual or potential - of other agents involved in relationship between politics and the press. Consequently, this study will argue that theories about the relationship between media and society raise important and relevant questions about how media narratives that are constructed and the interchange of power between media and society, but it will show that they are not of themselves a complete theoretical

platform from which to understand the formation of media narratives or the depiction of particular groups.

Before delving too far into theories of media and society, it is necessary to acknowledge that the language of media and society is highly contested<sup>51</sup>, and any discussion of different theoretical approaches risks tripping into pitfalls of meaning<sup>52</sup>. This chapter intentionally steers clear of such debates and does not seek to enter into discussions of the changing nature of media and the changing relationship between media and its audience. Debates about, for example, the impact of digital media on society's interaction with what makes news are outside the parameters of this research. In contrast, the chapter is intended take an overarching view of the interplay of power between the news media and society. As in the rest of the thesis, the term 'news media' is generally used to refer to the national news media in the UK and, in particular printed and online newspapers.

## Social theories of media

Most understandings of how news develops merge a cultural view of news with an organisational perspective. These might include the opportunity to explore the role of news within a democratic state (Eldridge 1993; Cook 1998, 2006; Sparrow 1999; Davis 2002; Benson 2006) or to study news as a social organisation through examining the profession of journalism (Tuchman 1980; Bell and Garnett 1998; McNair 1999). Looking at news through a more cultural lens might involve exploring the way in which the media create and perpetuate particular narratives, or their role in communicating certain ideologies on behalf of particular groups (Bennett 1982, Sparrow 1999, Schudson 2002, Benson 2004). A cultural view of news finds symbolic determinants of news in the relations between news reports and symbols. The media is seen as a cultural system of the production and dissemination of symbols, signs, messages, meanings and values. It perceives news as a form of meaning making, which helps explain generalized images and stereotypes in the media,

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<sup>51</sup> Benson (2004) goes so far as to suggest banishing all references to the word 'media'. Often used in the singular rather than the plural, it masks the variety and complexity of social construction and its relations of power.

<sup>52</sup> For a description of some the different meanings attributed to language around media and society, see Bennett (1982).

including characterisations of particular groups or types of individuals as different, or 'other' to the mainstream<sup>53</sup>. A cultural account of news is also relevant to understanding journalists' news sense, described by Tuchman (1980) as the journalist's own point of difference from others, an implicit ability which helps define what makes news and what does not. All this recognises that news is a form of literature and that among the resources journalists work with are the traditions of storytelling, picture making, and language they inherit from their own cultures, with built in assumptions about how the world operates<sup>54</sup>. This narrative tradition within journalism can be analysed through studies of public discourse or mass communication, which in turn can be framed through the twin concepts of civil society and public sphere. These concepts - both of which provide explanations for the construction of public discourse - overlap but are not synonymous and can be studied independently of each other<sup>55</sup>. But within these varying approaches, explorations of the exercise of power, moral authority, social control and relationships (between the state, the audience and the media) are dominant. It is this aspect – the relational exchange of power – that is of most interest to this thesis.

The concept of civil society (Alexander and Smith 1993; Calhoun 1993, Keane 1996, Alexander and Jacobs 1998; Flyvbjerg 1998; Jacobs 2000; Alexander 2006) can present such a cultural view of news. Civil society refers to an autonomous social organisation outside the control of the state; it is a way of describing the capacity of a community to organise itself, independent of the direction of state power. There is no consensus about what civil society is, but broadly it is made up of communities, networks and social ties: relationships that go beyond family but that are not within

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53 Both Silverstone (1999) and Hall (1997) develop this when they address the question of dominant groups in society represent people and places that are significantly different. Hall argues that people who are in any way different to the majority – 'the other' - are frequently exposed to a binary form of representation, including in the media, often using sharply opposed, polarised themes – good and bad, civilised and primitive, ugliness and beauty and so on. Hall argues that this difference matters, because it is essential to meaning. Without difference, meaning could not exist. It is only possible to construct meaning through a dialogue with, and in relation to, the other.

54 In a Bourdieusian sense, this might be described as journalistic 'habitus' – the structuring structures which determine how agents within a particular field operate. While this thesis is not exploring journalists as agents, it will explore the nature of habitus among public relations practitioners in the political field.

55 The differences between civil society and the public sphere are outlined in more detail by Calhoun (1993).

the realm of the state<sup>56</sup>. Most theories of civil society focus on the boundaries which define society - such as its autonomy from the state and its dependence on the resources of other spheres - to the extent that Keane (1996) observes that the definition of civil society is a negative one and it is easier to define civil society by what it isn't than by what it is.

Within civil society citizens can have conversations with one another, discover common interests, assert new rights and try to influence public opinion and public policy. Although independent of the state, civil society has organisations of its own, including the law and the media<sup>57</sup>. These organisations exercise power, helping to perpetuate the codes and logic of civil society and reinforce what is distinctive and elite within it. The form that any particular civil society takes is driven by the relationships between the different actors within it. Alexander (2006) puts forward two models for this relationship: a model of power or one of uncoerced agreement. The latter model plays to a Habermasian notion of the nature of discourse in the public sphere (Habermas 1992) which is discussed in more detail below, while the former plays to a more developed notion of media power which is also examined in detail later in this chapter. Calhoun's work (1993) precedes Alexander's models, observing that nothing in the world happens as a result of uncoerced agreement and only power can explain how civil society functions.

According to Alexander, civil society is a realm of symbolic communication. This symbolic communication is played out through codes that exist within civil society which define concepts such as civility, equality or respect. These codes help to constitute the very sense of that society for those within it, and for those outside it<sup>58</sup>. The codes are bound together in the expression of narratives, and supply the structured categories of pure and impure into which every member, or potential member, of civil society is made to fit. Alexander (2006) suggests that there is no

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56 According to Jacobs (2000), civil society also includes public relations specialists, media personalities and the pursuit of common political agendas as well as common cultural identities.

57 Alexander describes this in moral terms, explaining that the goal of this civil society is the moral regulation of social life and this is administered via the courts, voluntary associations and the media: institutions through which conflicts and problems can be resolved (Alexander & Smith 1993).

58 Alexander points out that because meaning is relational and relative, the civility of the self always articulates itself in language about the incivility of the other.

civil discourse that does not conceptualise the world into those who deserve inclusion and those who do not<sup>59</sup>. Such discourse is often structured around the distribution of economic wealth, according status to those with money, resources and the capacity to shape public processes of representation. Failure is attributed to those without these advantages. This makes it difficult for agents without economic achievement or wealth to communicate effectively in the civil sphere, to receive full respect from its regulatory institutions and to interact with other, more economically successful people in a fully civil way.

These descriptions of civil society and the role of narrative within them place an emphasis on what the media does and the impact that it has, rather than what it is<sup>60</sup>. Within this model, power rests with the media as they represent the public to itself: for most members of civil society, the news is the only source of firsthand experience they will ever have about their fellow citizens, their motives, relationships and the institutions they create. Different news media are important, not only for public information but for influence, identity and solidarity. Through narratives, the media produce and reproduce these symbolic codes and patterns in order to formulate explanations for societal strain and conflict. The media help to narrate events, and have the power to disrupt prevailing systems of belief and to change understandings about other events in the past, present and future. The same event can be narrated in a number of different ways: groups and associations who consider themselves to be continually misrepresented in a newspaper narrative are forced to operate from a defensive and reactive position.

Alexander suggests that the ability of the news media to fulfil this normative function is dependent on the autonomy granted from powers and authorities that sit outside civil society. This means that reporters must be prepared to enter different social

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<sup>59</sup> An alternative perspective on this is the work of Hall (1997). While Habermas, Alexander and others approach this issue from the macro perspective of societal structures, Hall is more concerned with issues of representation as a practice which produces culture. He argues that people who are in any way different to the majority – ‘the other’ - are frequently exposed to a binary form of representation, often using sharply opposed, polarised themes – good and bad, civilised and primitive, ugliness and beauty and so on.

<sup>60</sup> This accords with critiques of mediatisation theory, which point out that there is no overriding definition of media used by proponents of mediatisation. In this thesis, ‘media’ refers predominantly to the daily national news media, both print and broadcast.

subsystems, or environments, in order to establish news sources and contacts from whom they then withdraw in order to process and judge the information according to independent norms. This assumes a purity of independence within the media which makes the power it wields inherently objective and autonomous. This assumption fails to acknowledge additional pressures or influences on the media – for example, economic pressures - which can dilute or affect the deliberative nature of the media's role.

## The public sphere

While Alexander's theory of the civil sphere provides a cultural understanding of the relationship between news and society in which power rests firmly with the media, Jürgen Habermas' (1992) notion of the public sphere<sup>61</sup> provides a cornerstone for analysis of the interaction between the media and the state as institutions<sup>62</sup>.

Habermas developed the model of the bourgeois public sphere as a society engaged in critical public debate following an historical analysis of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century development of public institutional space between the state and the family. According to his thinking, the public sphere is a space that is distinct from both the state and the private domain and is a place where every citizen can participate in the creation of public opinion in a free and autonomous way. It is a place where human beings can congregate and communicate openly, expressing arguments and views through rational discussion. Such a sphere enables people to think critically about the state and its practices and engage in debate that is important for strong democracy<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>61</sup> Benson (2009) warns that the concept of the public sphere has almost become a cliché, and is perhaps one of the most overused words in the sociology of media and communications.

<sup>62</sup> Like other terms within any discussion of media and society the meaning of 'institution' is also contested. Here, Giddens' definition is used: institutions are enduring social forms that reproduce themselves e.g. governments, the family, legal systems, political and economic institutions and the media (Giddens 1984).

<sup>63</sup> Habermas' formulation of the public sphere is seen to evolve from the dominant ideology thinking of the early Frankfurt School. The Frankfurt School espoused that the media operated a uniform and monolithic system that they regarded as a manufactured 'culture industry', dominant and imposed from above and in accordance with its definitions of what audiences want. For the Frankfurt writers, the new mass media were not merely a tool of totalitarianism, but a major reason for its existence. The power of the media is so strong that an individual member of the audience is powerless to resist the ideological message which plays into the recipient's unconscious. Habermas describes a culture that cannot allow critical forms of dialogue but, unlike the Frankfurt School, Habermas limits agendas of social change to the realm of communication in which people rationally discuss alternative social policies and attempt to build consensus about them (Curran and Seaton 2000).



The norm of the public sphere calls for coercion-free communication which aims for consensus, an impartial, reasoned exchange where only the force of better argument wins out. The ideal public sphere requires a forum accessible to as many people as possible where large varieties of social experiences can be expressed and exchanged<sup>64</sup>. As the most important agency for public debate, the media fulfils this role, acting both as a mediator of argument and a forum for public discourse. A deliberative media adopts a rationalist discourse which is central to the effectiveness of the public sphere, aiming for common understanding or consensus and excluding emotion, outrage or scandal from their coverage.

Critics of Habermas (Flyvbjerg 1998; Silverstone 1999; Hohendahl and Silberman 1979; Butsch 2007) are quick to point out that his theory of the public sphere is an ideal, which has never existed<sup>65</sup>. The life of the public sphere was short, rapidly compromised and commandeered by the expanding state which became increasingly confident of its ability and right to intervene in the private lives of citizens and by an increasingly powerful and insistent market. Various interest groups assert their demands and the basis of the public sphere is destroyed and its function of public opinion as the advocate of general interest is increasingly undermined. Rational discourse disappears, to be replaced by a manipulated media culture in which the masses have become objects, and the public sphere is subsumed into a stage managed political theatre. Instead of acting as a subsidiary to the public sphere, the media are now the main focus of it.

Davis' empirical study (2009) of the communication processes in and around the UK parliament tests out Habermas' theory, and responds to his critics. Davis conducted interviews with MPs, Lords and Parliamentary officials, working on the basis that the UK parliament and its actors, practices and institutions operated as the 'state' within

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<sup>64</sup> While civil society's autonomy from the state empowers its organisations and institutions to be independent from politics, the public sphere's process of open rational public communication is integral to the modernist theory of politics. The public sphere is not synonymous with the political field described later in this thesis, but the two concepts overlap as arenas for political discussion and debate (Garnham, 1993).

<sup>65</sup> Habermas acknowledges his critics and cites the development of capitalism as a challenge to the public sphere. Capitalism meant that the media became a commercial enterprise, less concerned with forming public opinion than with publicity. Instead of rational discussion leading to consensus, money and power are seen to lead to success.

Habermas' model of democracy. Davis concludes that in many ways, the Westminster parliamentary public sphere of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a significant advance on anything described by Habermas as existing in previous centuries. His research shows that MPs, peers and others rely on the media as valued sources of information, and the media in turn influence them on issues of policy and legislation. Davis suggests that earlier descriptions of the public sphere (including Habermas') were idealised, and based on limited historical accounts<sup>66</sup>. However, in the intervening centuries, the conditions for what Davis describes as 'democratically institutionalised will formation', centred on parliament, influenced by media and external forces, have been firmly established (2009:283).

Davis' conclusions may seem optimistic to some, but Habermas' theory of the public sphere establishes a clear and direct link between the media and politics, and provides a framework for studying the interaction between the state and the media. Unlike Alexander's theory of the civil society, within the public sphere the media are less autonomous and, to a greater extent, are subject to the changing nature of society. The power of the media is dependent on the changing nature of the state: as the public sphere becomes more commercial, so too must the media.

However the relationship between media and politics is described, at its heart is an exchange of power, a relational dynamic that has profound effects for the society in which both forces exist. The media have been acknowledged as the main channel for enabling discourse in both civil society and the public sphere, for expressing public opinion and as a channel of power and influence<sup>67</sup>. In doing so, they have the capacity to act as a bridge or to create tension between the state and civil society or between the civil and non-civil spheres.

Theories of the public sphere and civil society provide overarching frameworks for considering how media and society interact. These frameworks are built around a

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66 In this, Davis suggests, Habermas' critics are correct: the bourgeois public sphere excluded a majority of the public, was frequently irrational and was entirely ad hoc in its social organisation, choice of subject matter and deliberations.

67 The primacy of the traditional news media may be challenged here by the growth of new and social media, including social networks. These are outside of the scope of this research and are not considered here.

distribution of power and how it shapes and influences the way in which society functions and how the media operate. Understanding different models of how the media operate within these frameworks begins to reveal the workings of media power, where it comes from and the impact that it has. Dissecting the instrumentality of the media yields greater insight into how that power is constructed and how other institutions or groups can challenge or take advantage of it. This dissection happens through an examination of the relationships that groups have with the media and the role of public relations agents as intermediaries within that relationship. For the purposes of this study into the representation of Muslim groups in the UK, the focus is on public relations within the political field and the use of PR by Muslim groups in particular.

## Media power

The status of the media's power should not be underestimated. Silverstone (1999) describes the media's power to set and destroy agendas and says that this means they can shift the balance of power between state and citizen and even between countries. Silverstone offers an eloquent description of this power: 'It is about the media's power to create and sustain meanings; to persuade, endorse and reinforce. The power to undermine and reassure. It is about reach. And it is about representation: the ability to present, reveal, explain: and also the ability to grant access and participation' (Silverstone 1999:143). The Sun famously laid claim to such power when, following the Conservative victory in the 1992 general election, it published a front page headline declaring: 'IT'S THE SUN WOT WON IT' (The Sun 11 April 1992, capitalisation in the original). The headline became a catch-phrase for the media's power to influence elections<sup>68</sup> and was referred to again following the 2007 general election after The Sun switched sides to support Tony Blair who was subsequently elected as Labour Prime Minister. There may be some element of truth in the media's power to influence votes, although the impact on voters of

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<sup>68</sup> A decade later, The Sun's owner, Rupert Murdoch, distanced himself from the headline during his evidence to the Leveson Inquiry. He said that the headline was tasteless and wrong, stating: 'We don't have that sort of power' (Dowell 2012).

newspapers of any one particular political persuasion is likely to be offset by the impact of partisan newspapers for the other side (Curtice, 1999).

The media's power is a symbolic one, which differentiates the media from other types of power as a result of the resources it possesses<sup>69</sup>. Couldry (2003) describes it in a ritualised sense: ritual, he says, organises our movements around space and helps us to experience constructed features of our environment as real. In understanding media rituals, Couldry explains, there is a need to shift the emphasis in ritual analysis away from questions of meaning or content and towards questions of power. Ritualised media events accord with the role of the media within civil society – and the power it has to create events and interpretations of events through the narratives it creates. Couldry characterises media power through identifying media rituals<sup>70</sup>, such as the cult of celebrity, or the nature of TV viewing. All these, he argues, position the media as a substitute for something more significant. To understand the power that the media hold and disseminate, its dual role – of production and representation – needs to be considered jointly. Couldry (2004) argues that existing media research fails to do this or to probe below what he calls the chaotic surface of everyday media practice. Positive evaluations of the media process address how well media perpetrate the daily texture of private and public life but fail to consider the social impacts of media power. Negative evaluations, by contrast, address media power, but lack engagement with the media's place in everyday lives. It is the combination of the two that create the symbolic power that the media hold. Both Thompson (1995) and Couldry echo Pierre Bourdieu (1989),

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69 Thompson (1995) defines symbolic power as the capacity to intervene in the course of events, to influence the actions of others and to create events by means of the production and transmission of symbolic forms. Couldry (2003) disagrees, calling Thompson's definition of media power weak because it does not allow for the possibility that certain types of concentration require a special analysis. A strong concept of symbolic power suggests that some concentrations of symbolic power are so great that they dominate the whole social landscape and are so natural that they are misrecognised and difficult to see.

<sup>70</sup> Couldry names media rituals as society's mechanism for acting out, and naturalising, the myth of the media's social centrality (Couldry 2003:2). Examples of media rituals include forms of TV viewing, or the notion of media celebrity. Media rituals can be understood through questions of power as the closest link between power and ritual is the power engaged in ritual performance itself, which he describes as symbolic power or ideological domination (2003:38).

from whose work the notion of symbolic capital, or power, originates. Bourdieu's theoretical approach to the study of power is discussed later in the thesis<sup>71</sup>.

The recent 'Plebgate' scandal provides a good example of this. In September 2012, an encounter between a police officer on duty in Downing Street and the then government Chief Whip, Andrew Mitchell, was reported in The Sun newspaper which quoted Mitchell saying to the police officers: 'You're \*\*\*\*ing plebs' (asterisks in the original)<sup>72</sup>. This story was picked up and repeated by most other newspapers and what had originated as a brief, if unpleasant, private exchange between two people became a media event, characterized by numerous press reports, comment pieces and leaked accounts. The media christened the affair 'Plebgate' and, with the help of this title, the media event became a political event which was imbued with symbolic meaning about class, privilege and status. Groups with vested political interests sought to gain political mileage from the publicity, with both the Police Federation and opposition politicians making strong media statements calling for Mitchell's resignation. The initial media reporting of the affair was damning of Mitchell and in October 2012 he resigned from his post, stating that it was unfair to continue to put his family and colleagues through such continuing and upsetting publicity. However, two months afterwards, the leak of CCTV footage of the encounter, together with investigations by two journalists, led to a change in tone of coverage, as police officers were accused of duplicity in their accounts of what had happened. There were calls for the police officers involved to be disciplined and one officer was jailed for 12 months for falsely claiming to have witnessed the incident. This was not the end of the story and in a subsequent court case, the judge ruled against Andrew Mitchell, stating that he probably did call the police officers 'plebs' leaving him with a hefty legal bill and his political career in tatters (BBC, 2014). The twists and turns of the 'Plebgate' saga provide a vivid example of the power of the news media to create political capital out of seemingly insignificant incidents. As the

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<sup>71</sup> Couldry argues that Bourdieu's notion of field does not go far enough to explaining media power. The media, he suggests have a form of 'meta-power' through which they exercise power over other fields. He goes on to say that when the media intensively cover an area of life for the first time, they alter the internal workings of the subfield and thus increase their own power across the social terrain.

<sup>72</sup> The Sun, 21 September 2012, front page.

story also illustrates, the media has the potential to make evaluative, if inconsistent, judgements about such events which can have significant effects on people's lives.

The story of Andrew Mitchell's political demise is a good example of how an examination of the role of power in creating and perpetuating narratives within civil society begins with the media, rather than with politics (see Silverstone 2002 and Couldry 2004). In this sense, research into media power is inherently political. Yet Cook (2006) suggests that to date, the main focus of concern has been how well or badly media reflect the political agenda, and that this fails to start from the position that the institutions and processes of public communications are themselves part of the political process. Schudson (2002:5) concurs, pointing out that one study after another, whether at national or local level, comes up with essentially the same observation: journalism, on a day-to-day basis, is the story of the interaction of reporters and government officials, both politicians and bureaucrats<sup>73</sup>.

This political interpretation of media power means that research in the media to date has focused on the exercise of media power in key events, such as war or national crisis (Silverstone 1999; Couldry 2003). In these exceptional and high octane events, the distinction between media and political power and the exchange between them may be difficult to draw<sup>74</sup>. The structural approaches of the theories of media and society discussed here do not enable the unravelling and separation of the interchange of power between the media and the state. Unsurprisingly, the degree to which the boundaries between media and politics overlap is contested. Jacobs (2000) warns that a distinction should be maintained between the news media and the public sphere, while Schudson (2003) suggests that journalism has been neglected by political science. For Jacobs (2000), the news media are an

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73 Schudson observes that government officials may not admit it, but there is little doubt that the centre of news generation is the link between reporter and official, the interaction of the representatives of news bureaucracies and government bureaucracies.

74 Silverstone observes that for most people, it is in the everyday world that the media operate most significantly, filtering and framing every day realities through singular and multiple representations, providing references for the conduct of everyday life (Silverstone: 1999)<sup>74</sup>. While this description of everyday media power accords with Alexander's perspective of the role of the media within civil society, Silverstone also warns of the potential for media power to disrupt the day to day and the mundane; by setting and destroying agendas and shifting the balance of power between state and citizen.

important tool that people use, providing a common stock of information and culture, which private citizens rely on in their everyday conversations with each other. As he concludes, news media may not tell people what to think but they have been remarkably successful in shaping what people think and talk about.

## New institutionalism

One alternative theoretical approach to explore this interaction is the theory of new institutionalism (Cater 1959; Cook 1998; Sparrow 1999; Kaplan 2006; Ryfe 2006) which suggests that the news media are at most a political institution, or at least, a framework for thinking about ways in which news organisations operate as political actors. New institutionalism posits that the media are separate from politics, but increasingly dependent on it; a dependence which is eroding the distinctiveness of the media landscape.

Conceived as a political institution, media organisations exist in an uncertain political and economic environment in order to stabilise their position they have to compete for attention and so establish ties with and develop normalised practices to be able to work with the political and economic actors on whom they depend. Sparrow (1999) refers to this as the 'dance' of journalists and politicians: a dance whereby news is socially constructed via negotiation between journalists and officials. The result of the dance is that news becomes increasingly homogenous as journalists are all reliant on the same sources. This can lead to apparent consensus in news reporting of political issues.

Like the other media theories described here, new institutionalism views relationships with the state from the perspective of the news room and economic pressures are at least as significant an influence on the homogeneity of news as access to information. But as with other theories, new institutionalism explores the relationship at an institutional rather than agency level, although the individual interactions between journalists and government officials are the means by which the news is constructed. It is the structured repetition of these interactions between

agents across the institutional media that leads to homogeneity. This concept of constructed news is hugely important for an understanding of public relations practice, but like others referenced in this thesis, Sparrow skips past any detail about the role and characteristics of the 'officials' who are involved in this process. Nevertheless, this approach to understanding news highlights a significant role for public relations practitioners to play. Individual journalists and media groups rely on public relations as a way of receiving trusted, accurate and reliable information. By providing a consistent narrative to journalists and the institutional media, public relations practitioners can influence the nature, content and characteristics of the news.

Here, Jacobs' (2000) scepticism about the authenticity of the link between the news media and wider society comes to the fore. His claim, that the everyday practical routines of journalists tend to favour dominant groups over subordinate ones, accords with a new institutionalist approach<sup>75</sup>. He interprets this in economic terms, pointing out that journalists will seek to cultivate high value sources and that public relations practitioners are more likely to be available to bigger institutions with greater economic resource available to them. In this way, the media reinforce the dominant groups, while minority groups and associations lose the ability to influence the larger public agenda. Jacobs is not explicit here, but his critique of the routines of journalists suggests that public relations practitioners bring skill and expertise in developing narratives which are likely to be absent, or unavailable, to subordinate groups<sup>76</sup>.

The news media may be increasingly homogenous, reliant on a small number of sources for information, but its homogeneity can also serve to reinforce its power

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<sup>75</sup> Jacobs argues that the tendency of the mainstream media to favour elite groups makes it difficult for minority groups, such as African Americans, to be adequately represented. He rejects Habermas' concept of a single, unitary public sphere, arguing for multiple public spheres where minority groups can be heard.

<sup>76</sup> On one level, Jacobs' argument appears to be supported by the findings of this research, which demonstrates the absence of public relations activity by Muslim groups in the UK. As the previous chapter has shown, Muslim voices or perspectives are less dominant in the news media than narratives stemming from other more powerful or politically influential groups. This thesis would concur with Jacobs that an absence of PR activity contributes to this. However, the interviews conducted with practitioners for this thesis could also be seen to belie his argument of exclusion as all the Muslim groups interviewed were involved with and had direct access to senior agents within the political field.



and influence. At the heart of Sparrow's dance is the continual exchange of power between the dancers. As a single unit, or institution, the news media (or the journalistic field) have the potential to preserve their autonomy and wield their power, in particular with regards to other social sectors. This is evident in the way in which the news media report on each other's stories. For example, in May 2009 when the Daily Telegraph newspaper published a series of exclusives detailing MPs' expense claims (Telegraph, 2009), journalists from other newspapers also reported the story – taking their lead from the Daily Telegraph's coverage - which dominated the news agenda for several weeks and had a significant political impact<sup>77</sup>. The exclusive nature of the scoop enhanced the Daily Telegraph's power in publishing the story, enabling it to set the political agenda and leaving Members of Parliament and others waiting each day for the next details that might appear in print. A more diffuse and diverse media publishing this story would have found its power diluted, with the attention of readers spread over different presentations of the material, lessening the impact of the reporting and, perhaps, conversely enhancing the potential of MPs or Parliament to respond and challenge the way the story was being reported.

The homogeneity of the media is as much about commercial and professional as informational interests, but Cook (1998, 2006) suggests that it is resulting in a transformation of the media itself. The media, he argues, have been so dramatically transformed and downsized to the point that they can no longer be described as a distinct political institution. Media outlets are still the central means of communication between the political system and the public, but they become more similar to one another as they seek to differentiate themselves from their political environment. Cook's argument is challenged by reporting such as The Daily Telegraph's coverage of MPs' expenses, or The Guardian newspaper's extensive

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<sup>77</sup> The Daily Telegraph's reporting resulted in a number of resignations and some prosecutions of MPs, together with public apologies and the repayment of monies. The reporting also created pressure for political reform.

collaboration with Edward Snowden, the American computer professional who leaked classified information from the National Security Agency<sup>78</sup>.

The argument for homogeneity among the media is a compelling one, at least in terms of traditional news media, but it presents a single snapshot of the 'dance' between officials and journalists which tells us more about the positioning of the individual players than an understanding of the dance itself. As a result, the presentation of journalists, media and officials is a static one, and the exchange of power is primarily seen in binary terms, with power passing backwards and forwards between them. The dancers are long established in the dance and what is missing is an understanding of how the relationships between media and government move and change over time, and how new entrants fare when trying the steps for the first time. As has been outlined above, this thesis suggests that public relations practitioners are an integral part of the dance itself, helping to dictate the direction and even the nature of the steps between the dancers. Bourdieu's field theory, (Bourdieu:1987, 1990, 1993, 1994 ) which is discussed in later chapters, offers what new institutionalism does not, namely the opportunity to examine the relationships and exchange of power between the dancers and the characteristics of the dancers themselves. It does this through an examination of the positioning and relationship of individual agents, rather than the institutions which they represent.

While new institutionalists debate the impact that politics has on media, Thompson (1999) turns the debate on its head, and identifies the media's ability to make political leaders visible as a key source of media power. Prior to the development of media, he says, political leaders were invisible to most of the people over whom they ruled. Today, in the media spotlight, they must adapt their activities to a new kind of visibility<sup>79</sup>. This visibility means that face to face encounters are no longer

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<sup>78</sup> Edward Snowden is described as a computer analyst whistleblower who provided The Guardian with top secret documents which evidenced extensive internet and phone surveillance by US security agencies <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/edward-snowden> .

<sup>79</sup> For example, Labour party leader Ed Miliband's attempts to eat a bacon sandwich while campaigning in May 2014 became headline news as the media judged that he failed to eat it 'elegantly enough'. The Independent reported: '...the mound of oozing grease and ketchup could not be tackled elegantly. After no more than a few bites, the leader's advisors had to intervene...' (Independent 21 May 2014). The incident led to headlines in the

necessary for publicity – or what Thompson calls the ‘publicness’ - for individuals, actions or events. Instead, new forms of publicness have begun to supplement, extend, transform and displace the traditional forms. This changing nature of publicness has profoundly altered the conditions under which political power is exercised and those who exercise political power continuously seek to manage their visibility before others.

Thompson does not ascribe this new ‘publicness’ to public relations, but the different activities within public relations are an important contributing factor to political leaders’ visibility. Yet while the media have the power to make the politician visible, it is through the management of information that political power is exercised. The control of information provision – which new institutionalists argue is resulting in the homogeneity of the media – aims to restrict media power, through the ‘day to day’ business of governing: press briefings, speeches and the creation of soundbites and photo opportunities. By controlling the way information is presented, public relations activity serves to limit and direct the media’s capacity to report on events, while enhancing the status of politicians as the source of information and news. Here, Thompson unwittingly points to the existence of the PR logic which is outlined later in the chapter. While the development of mass media has enabled political leaders to be seen by many more citizens, it is the public relations activity that helps to shape how they are presented and the impact that this has.

## Mediatisation theory

Institutional, cultural and political approaches to media and society all present differing formations and expressions of media power. Social theories of media which start from the perspective of the newsroom may acknowledge the differing external pressures on both the media and the state, but they present the exchange of power in structural and often linear terms: from the state to the media and back again. The complexities of this relational interchange of power may be revealed by

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press such as: ‘Ed Miliband fails to look normal while eating bacon sandwich’ (Independent 21 May 2014) and ‘Ed Miliband looks weird eating a bacon sandwich’ (The Huffington Post 21 May 2014).

understanding the processes by which it takes place and the role of institutional agents and the relationships between them. Furthermore, such theories risk overlooking the impact and influence of agents and structures sitting outside the media and state<sup>80</sup>. This seemingly straightforward dynamic fails to take account of other agents who, wittingly or otherwise, may be drawn into relationships with both the media and the state. As the literature review in Chapter 1 demonstrates, the representation of Muslims in the UK press has the potential to bring Muslim groups or individuals into this dynamic. While theories of civil society, or of the public sphere, provide an initial framework into which these new players can be added, they do not allow scope for them to take a place on the centre stage. This thesis argues for the recognition of additional players - public relations practitioners acting on behalf of sponsor organisations or groups – into the exchange of power between media and the state. It argues that rather than being dismissed or unnoticed, categorized as government or information officials, they need to be acknowledged and studied as a source of power in their own right.

Before addressing this omission in detail, this chapter turns to the theory of mediatisation. Mediatisation is an emerging theory of the process of social change in which media have become increasingly influential. As a theory, it provides an alternative way of exploring media power and the process of its interaction with society and culture (Hjarvard 2004, 2008; Lundby 2009; Strömbäck and Esser 2009; Krotz 2007; Hepp 2013; Deacon and Stanyer 2014). The chapter goes on to explore how this theory can be translated and extended to build a greater understanding of the operation of public relations practice and how PR practitioners, active within the political field, receive, hold and convey power. Like other theories described here, mediatisation is predominantly a theory of media, but it is a concept with which to grasp the process of media and societal change, rather than a means of understanding and interpreting the actions of the media or of other institutions. As such, this thesis argues, mediatisation theory has the flexibility to be extended to aid a greater understanding of the process of change that public relations can effect.

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<sup>80</sup> For a discussion of this and how other agents, such as advertising and public relations, are left out of this dynamic, see Deacon and Stanyer 2014.

While in recent years mediatisation has become a significant concept with which to understand the impact of media on various political, cultural and social processes, there is still no common agreement about how it is conceptualised or analysed (Deacon and Stanyer 2014)<sup>81</sup>. Nevertheless, Livingstone (2009) traces the term back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when the states of the Holy Roman Empire were 'mediatised' by Napoleon. She goes on to cite a definition of mediatisation as the subsumation of one monarchy into another in such a way that the ruler of the annexed state keeps his or her sovereign title and, sometimes, a measure of local power (2009:6). A more recent explanation of the origins of mediatisation relies on Postman's concept of media ecology (Postman 2000), which places media at the heart of communication between human beings. Postman argues that human beings live in two different types of environment – the natural environment and the media environment. Media ecology is the study of the media environment, its structure, content and impact on people, and the ways in which the interaction between media and human beings gives a culture its character and helps a culture to maintain symbolic balance. Postman defines media ecology as the study of transactions among people, their messages and their message systems (Postman, Lum 2006:62).

This does not mean that communication media are merely neutral, or value-free conduits for carrying information from one place to another. Instead, media's intrinsic physical structure and symbolic form plays a defining role in shaping what and how information is to be encoded and transmitted and therefore how it is to be decoded. It is the structure of the medium that defines the nature of information and each medium's physical as well as symbolic characteristics carry with them a set of biases, including intellectual, emotional, political and social biases. Thus, the transmission and decoding of messages sent by text or by Twitter are, by limitations of size, very different to messages conveyed in the Financial Times. The differences in the physical nature of the message create differences in meaning, not least because a text message is sent and received in seconds, whereas the Financial

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<sup>81</sup> Couldry (2008) suggests that it a single answer to how mediatisation works should not be expected, as the media themselves are always at least doubly articulated through their roles of production and transmission.

Times – at least in paper copy – only appears once every twenty four hours. Mediatisation theory takes forward this notion of media’s potential to create effects and to define, shape and change the information that it carries. Such potential may not be universally beneficial. It is a theory of the processes of social change which posits that characteristics of mass media result in problematic dependencies, constraints or exaggerations (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Schulz 2004).

Deacon and Stanyer (2014) identify two approaches to mediatisation and argue that most of the literature to date conflates them, which creates confusion. The first approach – which they describe as institutionalist – is where non-media social actors have to adapt to media’s rules, aims, production logics and constraints. The second approach is that of the social constructivist - a process where information technology drives the changing communicative construction of culture and society.<sup>82</sup> This research discusses the institutionalist approach, but while this process oriented definition is shared by others (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Hjarvard 2004; Schulz 2004; Strömbäck 2004) few have attempted to specify how these processes have evolved from an empirical perspective. As Strömbäck (2004) observes, most jump from a process-oriented definition to the present state of affairs, where almost anything can, purportedly, be mediatised.

Mediatisation refers to the long term process of changing social institutions and modes of interactions in culture and society due to the growing importance of media in all strands of society (Krotz 2009). Hjarvard (2008) goes one step further in his claim that most human interaction and communication is filtered through media. According to Hjarvard, the media are providers of information and moral orientation as well as society’s most important storyteller about society itself. Consequently, the media also structure feelings of community and belonging and ritualise the small transitions of everyday life as well as the events of the larger society. In this, Hjarvard reflects Alexander’s analysis of the role of the media within civil society: a channel which, through its definition and dissemination of narratives within society,

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<sup>82</sup> For further discussion of the relationship between technology and mediatisation see Schofield Clark 2009.

helps to shape what is normative in the way in which that society operates and how it sees itself.

Hjarvard goes on to define the mediatisation of society as a process which can affect core elements of a social or cultural activity such as politics, teaching or religion (2008a:13). Mediatisation is the process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic. This process is characterised by a duality in that the media have become *integrated* into the operations of other social institutions, while they have also acquired the status of social institutions in their own right. As a consequence, social interaction – within the respective institutions, between institutions and in society at large – takes place via the media (Hjarvard 2008b:113, his italics). Asp (2014) sums this up by describing how mediatisation goes beyond the visible face of media power and approaches the invisible face of media power. Lundby (2009) concurs; defining mediatisation as the process of social change that to some extent subsumes entire social or cultural fields into the logic of the media. Like Hjarvard, he suggests that as a result of mediatisation, media are not only an independent institution but also become an integrated part of other institutions such as politics, religion or the family<sup>83</sup>.

Schulz (2004) deconstructs the processes by which mediatisation occurs, arguing that there are four different ways in which it can take effect. He suggests that mediatisation can involve an extension, substitution, amalgamation or accommodation of face to face encounters with mediated encounters (2004:88). As an extension of face to face encounters, the media serve to bridge spatial and temporal distances. Echoing Habermas, Schulz talks about indirect mediation by the production of a public sphere – a forum or space accessible to everyone where actors can articulate their opinions and interests. The media's publishing capacity

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<sup>83</sup> Krotz (2009) goes further still, suggesting that mediatisation is a meta-process that changes communication and so the core of human action. As such, mediatisation must be understood as a long-term process that has a specific realisation in each single culture and society. For Krotz, mediatisation sits alongside individualisation, commercialisation and globalisation in helping to shape modernity.

enables citizens to observe the political discourse and contributes to the mediation of politics.

Through its substitution role, the media partly or completely substitute social activities and institutions and change their character. For example, in online dating the media act as a substitute for face to face encounters, creating new rules and logic for communication between individuals looking for relationships. The rules of the game for online dating are different to the rules for face to face meetings, as the internet provides among other things anonymity, the ability to communicate round the clock and the potential to interact with several prospective partners at once.

The amalgamation of media means that media activities not only extend and partly substitute non-media activities, they also merge and mingle with one another. For example, a teenager may sit with his or her family watching television, texting a friend and updating their status on Facebook at the same time. The teenager may be physically present in the room, but is also occupying one or more virtual worlds that intermingle with what else is happening in the room. This blurring of the boundaries between media and non-media activities affords possibilities for the individual to regulate or change behaviour and relationships, both in real life and via a screen. It also offers the opportunity for multiple agents to be involved in the process – participating themselves through media. For example, numerous people who have never met can participate in online games together, sign online petitions or befriend each other on social networking sites.

Schulz's final mediatisation process is accommodation - the mere fact that communication media exist induces social change. For example, the introduction of online shopping has changed shopping habits when compared with the physical experience of visiting a shop<sup>84</sup>, while citizen participation in media, via Twitter or through citizen journalism changes the nature of what is reported in the newspapers. Petersen, Heinrichs and Peters (2010) explore the mediatisation of

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<sup>84</sup> For example, online shopping can now take place around the clock, without the need to interact with any sales assistants or other agents.



science, arguing that scientific expertise has increasingly lost its power due to the prevalence of controversial expertise in the public sphere, in particular the mass media. The dominance of the news media's agenda encourages politicians to address a particular topic and the media become a source of information and opinion formation. Scientific events, findings and arguments communicated by the media can trigger political activities more successfully than those which do not feature in the media. Positive media coverage becomes a criterion for success within science, alongside more conventional measures of scientific achievement.

In the political field, politicians adapt to the rules of the media system by trying to increase their publicity while adapting to a loss of autonomy and control. This adaptation may affect both what they say and how they say it, benefitting the media by making politics more newsworthy and conveniently formatted. Political events such as the Chancellor of the Exchequer's annual Budget have also become media events, with politicians on both sides regarding the battle of the headlines as an indicator of political success<sup>85</sup>. In this way, mediatisation acts as a process through which other social or cultural fields (such as politics, science or religion) are subsumed to some extent into the logic of the media and may even assume media form.

The debate about the realisation of media effects continues to be a lively one. Strömbäck argues for a conceptualization of media that is sensitive to and recognizes the interactions and interdependencies of media systems, institutions and actors with political systems and the reciprocal effects that politics can have. As scholarship responds, two different concepts – mediatisation and mediation – feature heavily (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Silverstone 1999; Schulz 2004; Couldry 2008; Strömbäck and Dimitrova 2011; Hepp 2013). There is often no clear distinction between these two terms, although Strömbäck and Dimitrova (2011) claim a growing consensus that they should not be viewed as synonymous.

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<sup>85</sup> The Guardian (2014) reported that the agenda for the day of the 2014 budget (Wednesday 19 March) began with the Chancellor taking part in an interview on Radio 4's Today programme at 8.10am. This was followed by the Deputy Prime Minister taking part in a radio call-in show. At the same time, the Shadow Chancellor was also doing broadcast interviews, with some having been pre-recorded the day before. All this media activity took place before the budget announcement was given in Parliament at 12.30pm.

Mediation is a neutral act of transmission, while mediatisation focuses on increasing media influence, or the media as a mediating or intermediary agent whose function is to convey meaning from the communicator to the audience or between communication partners (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999).

Couldry (2008) calls for more substantive definitions of both concepts, arguing that theories of mediatisation look for an essentially linear transformation from 'pre-media' (before the intervention of specific media) to 'mediatised' social states. This suggests an overly simplistic process of change – from one formulaic setting to another – through a single mechanism and without recognition or accommodation of the complexities of the fields and arenas in which mediatisation takes place. In contrast, mediated approaches emphasise the heterogeneity of the transformations to which media give rise and the complexities and divisions within social space. Through its intervention, public relations practice seeks to move from mediation to mediatisation, by exerting control over the homogeneity and linearity of the transformation process. It does this by channelling the 'pre-media' state of its sponsor organisation through its own form of logic, thus making the transformation to a mediatised state appear to be simpler, more linear and more successful. This process appears to reduce the complexity of the fields which are being mediatised by eliminating the ambiguity and uncertainty that arises from competing or contradictory voices. Instead, public relations practice ensures that one, official voice is heard, such as a spokesperson expressing the official line, either verbally or in writing. As the sponsor organisation adapts to this public relations logic, the potential for the mediatised state to diversify in form or content reduces and a similitude of form is the result.

To resolve this ambiguity between mediatisation and mediation, Couldry throws his support behind Thompson's (1995) term – mediization –and also Silverstone's description of mediation as the 'fundamentally, but unevenly, dialectical process in which institutionalized media of communication (the press, broadcast radio and television and increasingly the world wide web) are involved in the general circulations of symbols in life' (Silverstone, 2002: 762). He goes on to express

reservations about Lundby's definition of mediatisation, which includes the potential subsumation of other institutions to media forms. This, he suggests, means that mediatisation goes far beyond the adoption of media forms or formats to the broader consequences of dependence upon media exposure. These critiques helpfully identify how any process of mediation (or perhaps 'mediation') of an area of culture or social life is always multi-dimensional, involving at least a two way process of exchange. The media do not merely work in linear fashion – transmitting content, data or messages to be absorbed by recipients (Schulz 2004, Couldry 2008, Strömbäck 2004), but through a process of transformation which in its turn, transforms the conditions under which any future media can be produced and understood. Such a multi-dimensional process provides the opportunity for additional agents to participate, belying a direct exchange of information between two parties. For public relations practitioners, such participation can be in the form of intervention through an attempt to shift the nature of the exchange, to quell it completely or to enhance it in order to generate their preferred type of media coverage. Through this, the PR practitioner takes part in the process of transformation and, as is discussed below, brings their own logic and form to it, for the benefit of both the media and their sponsor organisation.

## Media logic

Media logic has been described as a crucial driving mechanism behind and within the processes of mediatisation and central to understanding both the emergence of independent media institutions and the adaptation of society to the changing media environment (Altheide and Snow 1979; Hjarvard 2008; Schrott 2009; Strömbäck and Esser 2009; Asp 2014). While Alexander suggests that the original purpose of the media was to advance the claims of particular institutions, today's media are no longer in the service of other institutions but operate according to their own independent logic, which includes the way in which they choose and present material.

Altheide and Snow (1979) were the first to use the term media logic to identify a particular form of communication - a process through which media present and transmit information. Media logic is the specific frame of reference of the production of media culture in general and of the news in particular. Altheide and Snow define media logic as a way of seeing and interpreting social affairs which could include how material is organized, the style in which it is presented, the focus or emphasis, and the grammar of media communication. These production processes imply a certain extent of standardization, reflecting the goals, traditions and routines of media organisations and an adaptation to the demands of particular audiences. The underlying idea is that of a dominant form, a representation of reality, and content definitions to which media producers conform. By identifying these 'formats' it is possible to understand better what lies behind the process of media production.

Altheide and Snow's concept of media logic has evolved into a broader set of definitions, all of which articulate how the media's own format and needs, rather than that of other social subsystems, take precedence and guide the media and their coverage. Included within the scope of media logic are the practical and tangible matters of form and presentation, including technological and production requirements (Hjarvard 2008a, Strömbäck and Esser 2009; Schrott 2009), and less palpable filters and rules about interpreting social, cultural and political phenomena (Hjarvard 2008a; Strömbäck and Esser 2009). These interpretations include criteria for newsworthiness – novelty, immediacy and conflict<sup>86</sup>, as well as commercial appeal and viability. Media logic can be identified in the various media formats, production processes and routines that the media adhere to, as well as the need for compelling stories which shape how the media interpret and cover public affairs. It covers both the structural environment which journalists work in and cultural factors like journalistic attitudes and their repertoire of media formats and grammar, professional norms and values, commercial incentives and motives. For Hjarvard these are formal and informal rules, for Schrott they are filters, while Strömbäck and Esser describe media logic as the component parts which contribute to media

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<sup>86</sup> These filters accord with the criteria for content that makes news: for example, content must be novel, unexpected, significant, timely and with human interest (Tuchman, 1980).

presentation. However it is defined, media logic acts as a constraint by providing an overall structure that shapes the behaviour of those who come into contact with it (Asp 2014). Conversely, it also provides certainty, enabling the efficient production of news suitable for a particular audience. For the public relations practitioner, media logic provides the opportunity to shape messages and content in a way that exactly conforms to the media's requirements – increasing the likelihood of favourable journalistic attention. Conversely, it also offers a route for avoiding, or minimizing the likelihood of media attention. By acting counter to the media's logic – often in practical ways which make it difficult for the media to receive or replicate information – public relations practitioners can seek to keep information out of the headlines<sup>87</sup>.

These critiques suggest an underlying linear depiction of media logic, whereby one state of affairs becomes another because of the intervention of the media. Couldry (2008) highlights Schulz's (2004) process of substitution as such an example – the media replaces a face to face encounter in a straightforward transaction. In his critique of mediatisation, he argues that the reality is not so straightforward, particularly because the role of human agents needs to be considered. Couldry suggests that the role of human agents cannot be adequately explored within mediatisation theory, and that other theoretical frameworks, such as Bourdieu's field theory may be more appropriate ways forward. This is the approach taken by this study, not least because the theory of mediatisation operates on too large a scale to provide a granular understanding of how the media effect change and how media power is exchanged. The role of public relations, as outlined above, is a role for human agents, contingent on the relationships practitioners hold. Bourdieu's field theory, which is discussed further below, provides the scope for a detailed analysis and to understand the role of individual actors in achieving this. Although different, the two approaches are not incompatible. This study aims to demonstrate how mediatisation and field theory can be combined to understand how the relationships

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<sup>87</sup> For example, the phrase 'a good day to bury bad news' is now shorthand for the way in which public relations practitioners time their announcements to reduce the likelihood of media coverage. By releasing information to the press after deadline or when another story is dominating news coverage, PR practitioners can hope to circumvent media logic and avoid negative publicity.

and interactions between human agents can enhance, challenge or even compete with media power.

These differing interpretations of media logic reveal an absence of consensus as to what it is, how many different types of logic there may be and how media logic impacts on the cultural institutions it subsumes. Krotz (2009) warns against the concept, claiming it may be misleading as there is no technical definition of media logic. He points out that the media logic of today is not the same as of a decade ago, and that the media logic of a mobile phone will be different for a teenager than for an adult because of the different ways in which each will use the phone.

Lundby (2009) argues that the use of media logic as an overall term weakens the scholarly argumentation about mediatisation. As a generalised concept, media logic hides the constraints of specific formats and the transformations that are shaped in concrete social interactions and communication processes. Hjarvard concurs that media logic is merely a shorthand for the multiplicity of factors structuring media practices while Hepp (2009) agrees that we cannot suppose one single, general logic of the media, but have to investigate the concrete interrelation between mediatisation and cultural change for certain contexts and fields. Here, he is supported by Couldry (2008), who argues that the concept of a single type of media based logic may obscure the variety of media-related pressures at work in society. For example, media exposure may be of more importance to one agent seeking to establish themselves in their professional field than to another, while some agents may consciously seek to avoid media exposure. In these instances the logic of the media varies in its function and its dominance. These critiques do not dispute the existence of some kind of media power or influence, summarized as logic, but rather suggest the need for further examination of how the relationship between media and other institutions operates.

### Mediatisation of politics

Hepp (2009) observes that it is possible to assess the nature of mediatisation by studying the way in which a field such as politics has become functionally dependent

on mass media and is continuously shaped by interactions with mass media. Asp (2014) concurs, pointing out that the concept of media logic has first and foremost occurred in studies of the mediatisation of politics (e.g. Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Schulz 2004; Hjarvard 2008; Strömbäck 2008; Schrott 2009; Strömbäck and Esser 2009; Green-Pedersen and Stubgager 2010; Strömbäck and Dimitrova 2011).

Unlike new institutionalism, where the media as a political institution are also dependent on political sources, the theory of mediatisation suggests a political system that is highly influenced by and adjusted to the demands of the mass media and the way the media report on politics (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Kepplinger 2002; Meyer 2003; Schulz 2004; Strömbäck 2007 and 2011; Petersen, Heinrich and Peters 2010; Strömbäck and Dimitrova 2011). While communication is necessary for the functioning of any political system (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999), the mediatisation of politics suggests that through the operation of media logic the media exercise a level of control over the public political agenda. Without the media, the public's exposure to politicians and to politics would be constrained. The media's independence from the political system means they have genuine, legitimate political functions to perform in voicing a distinct position on an issue.

This perspective on the mediatisation of politics harks back to Habermas' original concept of the public sphere. Yet Strömbäck suggests that mediated politics goes much further, describing it as a situation in which the media have become the most important source of information and vehicle of communication between the governors and the governed (2008:231). One part of media logic is the adaptation of political communication to meet the production demands of the media, through the use of soundbites and other techniques that make politics 'televisual'. Political actors know, and are able to deliver this. Here, the argument is not just about communicating political performance or aspirations, but about the incorporation of media-based logics and norms into political action. At the extreme, media have the potential to change the nature of what politics is, because of the requirement for all effective policy to be explainable and defensible within the constraints of media formats (Kepplinger 2002; Meyer 2003).

Strömbäck argues that political communication is either governed by political logic or by media logic. Political logic means that the needs of the political system and political institutions take centre stage and shape how political communication is played out, covered and understood. Here 'what is important for people to know' takes precedence. The political logic broadly corresponds to the public sphere model. However, the dominance of media logic means that in political contexts media logic competes with and hypothetically becomes more important than political logic<sup>88</sup>.

Despite reservations about the concept of media logic, Couldry (2008) concedes that politics is a field in which the interdependencies with the journalistic field are so intense that it does still make sense to say that political logic has come to a large degree to incorporate media logic. But the interplay of politics and media is broad and multi-faceted as politicians compete for citizen's attention through the media. Media logic includes the time cycles of politics and news and the overall construction of what politics is. Couldry cautions against limiting the concept of media logic to cover the multiple ways in which media outputs become the primary aim of political action; the term media logic seems fitting to capture the force that media have in contemporary politics. This does not mean that the outcomes of this media logic are simple and straightforward. If all political actors are driven by this logic then any large-scale political strategy becomes unstable, liable to interruption by other actors, externally and internally to the institutions involved.

Strömbäck and Dimitrova (2011) break the interactions between politics and media down into four phases by which mediatisation can be judged. The first phase is the extent to which the media constitute the most important source of information and channel of communication about politics for citizens. The second phase examines the media's independence from other social and political institutions as it is governed by its own logic, rather than by that of other institutions. The third phase looks at

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<sup>88</sup> Deacon and Stanyer (2014) warn that the example of political parties adapting to and internalising media logic needs to be seen alongside other system level factors, such as professionalization in political parties or spin doctors' perceptions about the importance of specific media. While there is a supposition that all political actors adapt to and internalize media logic this does not take account of other responses to media logic: e.g. efforts to control the media.



the degree to which media content is governed by media logic or political logic, while the final phase explores the degree to which politicians are governed by media logic or political logic. This deconstruction of the different phases of mediatisation helpfully plots the creeping scope of mediatisation within the political sphere. While the first two phases are present within Habermas' theory of the ideal public sphere and would be widely recognised as pre-conditions for democracy, the third phase encapsulates the point at which media and political power hang in the balance. This is the tipping point at which media logic can begin to dominate, resulting in the eventual subsumation of individual politicians to media power. The final phase is when political and other social actors not only adapt to media logic and predominant news values but also internalise these and, more or less consciously, allow the media logic and standards of newsworthiness to become a built-in part of the governing process.

Kepplinger's (2002) study of the interdependencies between politics and mass media in Germany over five decades highlights the progression through these four stages. While this process is slow and long-term, Kepplinger observes that it has been accelerated in the last two or three decades because of growth in the importance of the news media, the experience of an increasing number of politicians in dealing with the media and the growing importance of professional media advisers in politics.

Kepplinger concludes that the mediatisation of the German Parliament's work had remarkable consequences on the size and activities of the government apparatus. He identifies feedback loops, whereby media coverage changed the way in which events were arranged or statements were constructed by politicians. He concludes that politics is not independent of media coverage; in fact, what the media present as politics is partly the consequence of the conditions set by the mass media. The increasing importance of media has both established politicians and journalists as dominating forces in the process of political communication (2002:983). Yet the media hold the upper hand, with the political system forced to accept the media's criteria of success largely because of the media's ability to sway the formation of

public opinion. Politics has not only adapted to the media but, in some aspects, it has become subservient to it<sup>89</sup>. These findings are supported by Van Noije et al's (2008) study of media and parliamentary agendas in the Netherlands and the UK. The results of their longitudinal study of newspaper coverage of Parliamentary debates in both countries show that media and parliamentary agendas influence each other but that the balance of power has shifted in favour of the media agenda.

This interdependence between media and politics might lead to the assumption that the news media is full of politics. Yet mediatisation of politics has not led to an increase in political reporting – rather the reverse. Negrine (1999) charts the decline of Parliamentary coverage in the UK press, illustrated by the abandonment of a page dedicated to Parliamentary reporting in the broadsheet newspapers. He cites a more commercial approach to newspapers, and greater attention paid to readers' requirements as reasons for this shift in focus (1999:348). In his evidence to the Leveson Inquiry, former Home Secretary, Justice Secretary and Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, also observed a decline in the reporting of political news: 'There has never been a 'golden age' in political reporting; but in my perception there has been a significant decline in the straight reporting of what Parliament and local authorities are doing - the decisions they are making.... A significant amount of the work of government and Parliament is both very important, and consensual; but this is scarcely reported because it is seen as boring' (Inquiry 2012). The dominance of media logic provides the media with greater freedom to pick and choose the issues on which it reports. Only the events which conform to the newsworthiness criteria that the logic demands are given space, irrespective of their perceived political importance.

Strömbäck and Dimitrova's (2011) comparative study of the mediatisation of US and Swedish election news supports this assertion. They concluded that in the USA – the more mediatised environment – politicians had adapted their presentation to accommodate the demands of the media, for example through shorter soundbites

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<sup>89</sup>The recent phone hacking scandal is a case in point, where the demands of the media, and in particular the tabloid media, for exclusives and 'scoops' led to the illegal interception of voicemails of public figures in an attempt to uncover information about their personal lives.

crafted for maximum impact in a time-constrained TV news reports. Journalists' role in mediating politics meant that their spoken explanation of events would often be played over politicians' words in a broadcast news report, and politics were framed more as a strategic game, where the competition between parties, opinion poll lead and tactics would generate coverage alongside the issues. In his study of the UK Parliament, Davis (2007) also concludes that intense media attention on issues can shift political agendas and policy development, and that British MPs consciously shift their policy agendas with future news reporting in mind. His research shows that politicians are frequently the sources behind news campaigns and use news and interaction with journalists to understand what other politicians think are the main news issues.

While the media may be the most important communication channel about politics for citizens, its impact on politics is not always welcome. Schudson (2003) is scathing that mediatisation has corrupted political life and discourse, pointing out that media institutions, unlike politicians, are not accountable to the public. Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) describe the 'growing intrusion' of media into the political domain and claim that mediatised politics is politics that has lost its autonomy and interferes with political processes. The risk is that the media will usurp political institutions, by constructing the public sphere of information and opinion and controlling the terms of their exchange. In so doing, the media sharply differentiate the roles of actors and spectators: it is left to the media to decide who will get access to the public. In addition to conferring status upon actors by giving them attention, the media also assign political relevance and importance to social problems by selecting and emphasising certain issues and neglecting others. Giving evidence to the Leveson Inquiry, Jack Straw highlighted the risk of the relationship between politicians and journalists becoming 'incestuous, manipulative and self-serving.' While such relationships are 'critically important' and there is a duty on senior politicians in a democracy to have such relationships, he suggested that politicians could allow themselves to be influenced by agendas generated by media organisations in order to secure favourable coverage for themselves, their party and their government (Inquiry 2012).

The literature about the presentation of Islam in the UK press reviewed in Chapter 1 suggests that at first glance, the presentation of Islam is heavily mediated. The overarching conclusion of studies of Islam and media suggests that it is the media's preferred presentation of the religion and its followers which predominates, rather than a presentation shaped by any other type of logic. In particular, the repeated framing of Islam in a context of conflict and politics, rather than a social or theological context, may suggest that in the UK the representation of Islam and Muslim communities has been subsumed into the wider mediation of politics.

Uitermark and Gielen's study of the mediation of politics in an Amsterdam neighbourhood (2010) evidences how this works. When a Muslim group came into conflict with local government in an ordinary Amsterdam neighbourhood over plans to build a mosque, both sides turned to the media to convey their points of view and assert their authority. The authors describe how the conflict led to a general proliferation of media attention on the dispute. Individuals representing both the mosque and the local government turned to the media to promote their differing points of view. In time, both sides resolved their differences and worked together in order to promote positive media images about their shared neighbourhood (2010:1341). Uitermark and Gielen quote the chairman of the neighbourhood government explaining his growing understanding of the benefits of media exposure: 'You can think, 'It's just a neighbourhood.' ... [But] there are phenomena on all kinds of levels: the family, the street, education, health, the city, the world—and that all comes together in this one neighbourhood. So if *you want to be player in that game*, you have to use the media. I think that the government should *use* the media. The media also like to be used, because there is a wonderful possibility for team work. The media wants a story and we have a story. We give the story' (Uitermark and Gielen 2010:1331, their italics). The authors conclude that the media played an increasingly important role in shaping the exchange of power between the neighbourhood government and the mosque. The media's effects changed over time and showed its potential to both create tensions between opposing sides and also to strengthen connections between them.

This case study highlights the mediatisation of a particular neighbourhood situation, with both sides of the conflict turning to the media to advance their cause. Both sides appointed public relations representatives to 'play the game' and work directly with the local newspapers, building relationships. Unusually, perhaps, the resolution of the dispute was followed by both sides continuing to work together to promote a positive representation of their area within the media. Once again, Islam was politicised through the media as the decision to build a mosque – a place of religious worship – came into conflict with the rules and regulations of the local neighbourhood authority. More pertinent to the experience of mediatisation however, is the recognition that both sides of the conflict changed as a result of the media interest and that this process of change continued. Some of the impact of the media is summed up in the quote from the neighbourhood chairman, detailed above – the acceptance of the need to provide a story which has to be constructed from the events that are taking place. The appointment of public relations agents, and the development of the structures around which their work was based, are further evidence of the impact of mediatisation.

To date, other studies of Islam and media have not delved deeply enough into the relationship between the religion and the press to provide further robust evidence of mediatisation. A study of mediatisation requires not only an examination of press reporting, but an understanding of the conditions within which the institution or field subject to mediatisation is operating. The studies of Islam and media discussed in the first chapter of this thesis have not yet gone this far. The predominant focus on media coverage means that a comprehensive examination of what impact the media narratives about Islam have had on Muslim communities in the UK still needs to take place. This thesis makes a first step at redressing this omission, through its fieldwork with representatives of Muslim groups operating within the political field. However, in its focus on how individual representatives of Muslim groups are responding to the media, this research falls far short of a full understanding of the impact that particular media narratives may have.

The media may not be as omniscient as the theory of mediatisation implies. Strömbäck and Van Aelst (2013) concur that increasingly political institutions are dependent on and shaped by mass media but point out that they nevertheless remain in control of political processes and functions. The increasing intrusion of media in the political process is not necessarily synonymous with a 'media takeover' of political institutions. Instead, views of the media's omniscience are based on misinterpretation. In Europe, the media systems and political systems interact with patterns that protect each from the excessive influence of the other. The existence of undoubted media power is counterbalanced and quite often exceeded by the power of political parties and institutions (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999). In their study of mediatisation of politics in Denmark, Green-Pedersen and Stubager (2010) acknowledge the effects of mass media on politics, but point out that media coverage on particular issues is only fuelled by opposition parties' reaction if it is an issue that they want to politicise in competition with the ruling party. Issues which are not the subject of competition between political parties are not likely to be given political attention; making them of less appeal to the media. In this sense, parties can exert political control over the media, by choosing which issues to draw media attention to. They also point out that sensational issues, which individuals may not have direct personal experience of – such as law and order – are more likely to be mediatised than subjects such as the economy or the welfare state, where people can rely on their own experience to make judgements. While this observation supports the mediatisation of Islam, it also lends itself to an interpretation of mediatisation which serves to emphasise the dramatic rather than the mundane. While the criteria for what makes news may involve such distinctions, the process of mediatisation is neutral in its reach. Mediatisation's power comes from its potential to take the routine or the mundane and reframe it according to the logic of the media.

The theory of mediatisation provides a convenient framework within which to build an understanding of the relationship between the media and society and politics in particular. The concept of media logic sits within this framework and acts as a rationale for the effect that the media has and the demand that it places on other

institutions and social fields. Mediatisation assumes that other social fields operate according to the forms and strictures of the media and within the political field this assumption is largely borne out by evidence about the relationships between Parliament and politicians and the media. Yet empirical knowledge of how mediatisation works is still patchy with an over-reliance on theory building based on media studies, rather than other disciplines. Even within the political field, the most considered in this area, studies of mediatisation focus on the institution of Parliament and the effect of the media on the behaviour of politicians, rather than taking a broader perspective of the field, including looking at central or local government agencies. This is important for any study of the mediatisation of Islam, where such an approach would require a much fuller understanding of the Muslim field. Studying mediatisation from the perspective of the media alone can provide a distorted view, which may over-emphasise the media's importance and effects. By implication, any approach to mediatisation that begins with the media will only observe where mediatisation has happened, rather than areas in which the media are less dominant. By beginning with the end result - the mediated state - such a study risks misinterpreting or being blind to the actions of agents or institutions other than the media.

The current expression of mediatisation is somewhat myopic in its analysis of how the media influence other societal institutions. As we have seen, mediatisation currently fails to distinguish between different types of media, assuming similar patterns of influence for a national newspaper newsroom as a mobile phone. One reason for this may be that much of the focus of the way in which mediatisation works has rested on technology, with less attention paid to the role of human agents. Yet the newsroom is staffed by humans, and the mobile phone is used by humans, and increasingly is presented and shaped in ways most appropriate to meet individual needs.

Despite the rapid growth of media across society in the last few decades, media may not reach as far or as deeply into all societal institutions as mediatisation theory implies. Instead, media and institutions may be dependent on intermediaries to

facilitate interactions between them. While the role of technology as an intermediary or facilitator of change is being assessed, the role of human intermediaries needs to be further defined and clarified. Their role may be one of translation - helping institutions adapt to media logic – or information giving, providing the media with information and resources not easily available to it by other means. Such intermediaries may bring the logic of the institution they represent, or even their own logic, to the transaction, and may even require the media to adapt in order to benefit from the exchange. They may serve to speed up the process of mediatisation, or to resist it or slow it down. The intermediaries may represent particular institutions, or seek to play a role in the interaction between media and institutions for other reasons.

## Public relations

The nature of public relations practice is explored later in the thesis but an early definition is useful. This is because social theories of media do not wholly ignore public relations practice, but where public relations activity is considered, it is rarely described as such. Instead, it is often depicted in pejorative terms, rather than as an integral or enabling factor in the interaction between media and society. As Schudson (2002) points out, it is a rare study that has examined news production from the view point of the news source, rather than the news organisation<sup>90</sup>. Even those studies which do approach news from a different perspective, (e.g. Cook 1989) overlook the specific nature of public relations practice. Instead PR practitioners are categorised with other 'government officials' (Schedler 1998; Kepplinger 2002; Schudson 2002). Only Edwards (2006, 2008, 2009) centres her sociological research on practice which is explicitly identified as public relations and, in doing so, she explores the availability of social and cultural capital to PR agents. Her conclusions are discussed later in the thesis.

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<sup>90</sup> For example, see Klinenberg's ethnographical study (2005) of a US newsroom.



In the interviews conducted for this study, it has been common to hear interviewees reflect that PR practitioners have neglected to use their skills to promote their own profession. In studies where public relations practice is named and identified as an activity in its own right, it is often interpreted as an artifice: depicted as persuasion or propaganda, or from the perspective of journalists dependent on information provided by public relations practitioners<sup>91</sup>. While some organisational or social-psychology approaches look at the success, or otherwise, of PR in promoting corporate agendas and ideals to the public, again these rarely begin from the perspective of the PR practitioner, instead assessing the audience's propensity to be persuaded of a particular viewpoint or narrative (Pooley and Katz 2008)<sup>92</sup>. Perhaps then, it is unsurprising that while there is scope within the sociological approaches of Alexander (1998; 2006) and, in particular, Jacobs (1998; 2000) for a more detailed study of the relationship between power dynamics and public relations practice, in the end public relations is merely a sideline within their argument.

Schedler's work (1998) examining public information programmes in the Netherlands is an example of this apparent discomfort with public relations activity.

Theoretically, her approach is sympathetic to the aims of this study, as she moves away from a transmission model of communications<sup>93</sup> to looking at the social and cultural context in which information programmes are produced, distributed and received. Schedler does this using field theory, in order to understand the power relations, social conflicts and tensions at play as public information programmes are produced and disseminated. However, while Schedler acknowledges the power available to 'public information officials' (her terminology) the purpose of her study is not to explore their role or power in particular, but rather the material which make up public information programmes and the impact it has. This approach risks looking at the output of these officials in isolation; without considering the nature of

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<sup>91</sup> Schudson's description (2002) is telling here: describing government officials, their media advisers and spokespeople as 'parajournalists, seeking to prompt journalists to provide favourable coverage'. In this description, public relations practitioners do not have their own identity, but are merely replicating the activities of journalists.

<sup>92</sup> This is an argument put forward by Pooley and Katz (2008) who, in their short history of the sociology of media studies in the US, observe that the field of public opinion and the social-psychology of short-term persuasion dislodged the study of media.

<sup>93</sup> Schedler argues that a transmission model of communications explores the mechanics of the communications process, but does so in isolation, failing to consider the wider social context in which the communications appear.

their practice, their relationships or the nature of the fields from which their work emerges.<sup>94</sup> Kepplinger (2002) also refers to the activities which are intended to convey information to the parliament, the media or the public. He describes them as follows: 'The primary purpose of these activities, even when they occur in connection with personnel or policy decisions, is to direct the attention of the parliament, the media or the public to certain issues or aspects of these issues. At the same time, they offer the members of parliament the opportunity to portray themselves in a good light...' (2002:974). This is Kepplinger's understanding of what would be called public relations activities. While these activities may well be included in other understandings of public relations practice, the scope of them falls far short of the type of activities practitioners articulated during the fieldwork conducted for this study and which are described in subsequent chapters. However, Davis offers a warning about placing too much activity on the shoulders of public relations practitioners. He cautions not to underestimate the direct contact that politicians have with journalists. In his study (2007), all government ministers, shadow ministers and a slim majority of back-bench MPs talked to national reporters on a regular basis. In all, just over two-thirds talked to journalists on average at least once a day and usually several times a day. (This was often with local newspaper journalists in order to retain constituency support).

Schedler (1998) Kepplinger (2002) Schudson (2003) and Cook (2006) all situate public information work clearly within the political field. Davis' landmark book on public relations (2000) supports this by stating that historically most interest in PR was in its role in the political process and its role in aiding politicians and state institutions in their attempts to manage the media. However Pieczka (2002) critiques Davis, by pointing out that he too shifts the study of PR from a political perspective to a media studies one, which views PR as a media source and focuses on issues of access, participation and audience response. This, she points out, has

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<sup>94</sup> Schedler does not refer to the agents in her study as public relations practitioners, but arguably this is what they are. In the UK, Gregory (2011) highlights the significance of the development of government communications and public information provision to the emergence of PR, citing efforts by the Post Office to promote savings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>94</sup> as the beginning of mass public communication. It was a former General Post Office Public Relations Officer, Sir Stephen Tallents, who set up the Institute of Public Relations in the UK in 1948.

bypassed the experience of individual practitioners and their practice, instead maintaining the focus on PR as a means of fulfilling organisational objectives<sup>95</sup>.

If public relations has been largely overlooked in theories of society and media to date, this is likely to be because media studies is traditionally approached as a sociological discipline, but most studies of public relations come from a management or organisational discipline. In their review of literature about European public relations Vercic, Van Ruler, Buttschi and Flodin (2001) identify four prevailing definitions of public relations practice, the first three of which are managerial, operational and educational respectively. While these three definitions are all situated within management theory, only the fourth definition views public relations in a societal context, and even this definition suggests that the role of PR is to help an organisation adjust its standards and values in accordance with the changing values in society. PR is overwhelmingly defined as an instrument of commerce, and most commonly seen from a technical and functional perspective, placing focus on the production of communications as a tool to achieve organisational ends (Hutton 1999; Baker 2002; Vercic et al 2001; Grunig and Grunig 1989; Botan and Taylor 2004). It is only within the last decade that a more cultural approach, exploring meaning-making as a purpose of public relations, has come to the fore.

As a result, a review of the literature of public relations does not provide extensive sociological insight into the relationship between public relations practice, the political sphere and the media. An alternative starting point is the ongoing debate about the inter-relationship between media and society where there is no shortage of literature to consider. While none of the existing theories give due weight to the role of public relations, they provide a useful framework within which a study of public relations practice can be situated. As the fieldwork described in Chapter 4 demonstrates, the role of public relations practitioners is to negotiate and move between the journalistic field and the political field and, this thesis seeks to find a

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<sup>95</sup> Curtin and Gaither (2005) explain that the management perspective has lent a corporate focus to PR – driven by the need to prove its effectiveness in supporting corporate goals. As long as public relations is defined in terms that make it an instrument of commerce, economic functionality will remain the foundation on which PR theory is built. This is an interesting perspective, which belies the political foundations for PR which many of my interviewees referred to.

place for them within existing theoretical frameworks. As they do this, public relations practitioners seek to use the media to shape the reputation of institutions and influence public opinion and behaviour. The role of public relations in conducting these processes and transactions is crucial to understanding the nature of the media's influence. The nature of the transactions will depend on the institution concerned – transactions between the media and the military, for example, will operate differently from interactions between the media and religion. Here, the process of change that mediatisation facilitates may not be as profound or as linear as the theory may imply.

## PR logic

With its focus on human interaction, rather than institutional or technological processes, the theory of mediatisation has the potential to accommodate the activities and interactions of public relations practitioners as a mechanism for helping to shape media narratives. The concept of media logic opens the possibility of a parallel PR logic – which acts as a bridge between civil society, the state and the media, enabling the institutions that make up civil society to approach and communicate with the media on the media's own terms. PR logic assists the process of mediatisation, by enabling companies to accommodate the logic of the media without being subsumed by it. This logic operates through the activity of the public relations practitioner who applies filters to potential media content before entering into the media space and negotiating directly with the journalist. This practice of filtering can have a significant effect on the PR sponsor and the way in which it operates. It is not a practice that occurs outside the sponsoring institution, but within it. Thus the PR agent can change the way in which the PR sponsor operates, shaping their activity as well as their presentation of that activity in accordance with the logic of the media<sup>96</sup>. The power of the media to construct and perpetuate narratives justifies the need for such a practitioner: without the filters provided by

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<sup>96</sup> For example, an interview with a government PR practitioner as part of the fieldwork conducted for this study revealed that the process for managing bonus payments to senior civil servants had been changed in order to minimise negative press coverage. The PR practitioner had played a central role in advising on the change, despite not having any responsibility or decision making authority about the award of the payments themselves.

public relations such content risks falling short of the demands of media logic. This failure to conform with the demands of the media could apply to the nature of the content - not newsworthy enough - or the production of it.

In fulfilling this role, the public relations agent is not replicating media logic but substituting for it. While he or she has a role to play in filtering potential content according to the demands of media logic, they are also required to accommodate the logic of their sponsor organisation, and represent this in negotiations with the journalist. The interaction is a negotiation whereby the practitioner is required to conform to the logic of the media while maintaining the meaning of the message from their sponsor. If media logic is a particular way of seeing, covering and interpreting social, cultural, and political phenomena, then PR logic has the same definition but comes from a different perspective.

Here, the nature of PR power comes to the fore. As with media power, there is the potential to create narratives and to create normative values within institutions and society, and this may take place in conjunction with the media. Such narratives will serve the purposes of the sponsor organisation or institution and may reduce the role of the media to one of disseminating information without testing or challenge to the validity or objectivity of that information<sup>97</sup>. Even when the media exerts its own power through editorial independence and objectivity, the public relations agent has the potential to respond by controlling access to information or sources; or through the provision of information that is shaped or presented in certain ways. This creates the possibility of a shift in the balance of power away from the media towards the PR sponsor. But the daily, even hourly demands of the 24 hour news cycle creates a constant shift of power between journalist and PR agent: a cycle in which PR and media are mutually dependent on each other for the continual reformulation of content which makes news.

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<sup>97</sup> Research by the Cardiff School of Journalism shows that 41% of news stories in four British broadsheets contained PR materials that played an agenda-setting role, or made up the bulk of the story (Lewis, Williams, Franklin et al 2006).

Within civil society there is the opportunity for public relations practitioners to be agents in the creation and dissemination of the codes that bind narratives together. Here, the PR agent works in collaboration with the media, helping provide the necessary content and experience the media needs each day and filtering it to meet the media's demand for novelty and impact. The filter is a form of PR logic that conforms with the logic of the media. It may appear unfiltered to the final audience, but the journalist is a participant in the creation and use of such filters. Newspapers and public relations practitioners can demonstrate flexibility here, bringing particular issues to the fore<sup>98</sup>. Thus the media, and this thesis argues public relations practitioners too, allow public opinion to be organised responsively on a mass basis. Alexander (1981) describes this as collusion between a news reporter and his sources (1981:33), suggesting that the reporter must stretch into the socially unknown, establishing intimate and trustworthy contacts from whom he or she then withdraws in order to process and judge the information according to independent norms. This thesis suggests that it is often the public relations practitioner who performs the 'stretch' - meeting the reporter on their own terms, offering such sources up, pre-prepared and filtered, for easy assimilation as content. In this way a relationship of trust is played out, with both sides conforming to a similar logic: reporter and PR practitioner working together to achieve a mutually satisfactory outcome.

The power of public relations also affects the sponsor organisation as they gradually shape and form their activities to meet the demands of the media. In the interviews described in later chapters of this thesis, public relations practitioners describe their close working relationship with senior organisational leaders and the significance of their role on the Board of organisations, setting strategy and direction. The growth in public relations over the last two decades reflects the increasing influence and significance of PR logic for the way in which organisations represent themselves to the media and in society. Without PR logic, an organisation may be unable to conform to the logic of the media, thus restricting its ability to respond to the

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<sup>98</sup> Public relations practitioners interviewed for this research spoke about the power of PR to set agendas and change behaviour, citing campaigns against drink driving, or wearing seatbelts as examples of how PR has a mass impact.

demands of the media's agenda and disabling it from being able to exert its own influence more broadly.

Thus, PR logic applies to both the PR sponsor and to the media. For the sponsor, it can require a re-engineering of their activity to provide media content filtered according to the media's demands for news, and constructed in a way that is compatible with the media's timing, technology and limitations on space and time. For the media, it may require an acceptance and tacit agreement of the perspective and positioning of the narrative provided by the public relations practitioner and the terms under which such information is provided – for example, on an off the record or background basis.

Strömbäck and Dimitrova put forward four phases of the mediatisation of politics. This thesis argues that through PR logic, public relations can be part of the process of mediatisation. As such, it proposes four equivalent phases of public relations' contribution to mediatisation. These phases do not supersede or replace the process of mediatisation, but contribute to it and reflect the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of the relationship between media and state. If, as described above, the four phases of mediatisation help to deconstruct the processes by which media power takes effect, adding four phases of public relations serves to add greater detail to this understanding of how mediatisation works, breaking down the linearity of the relationship.

The first phase is the use of public relations within the political field as a channel of communication with the media. This recognises the centrality of the media to politics as a form of communication, and puts forward public relations as a mechanism for managing that communication for the benefit of both parties. As is described in later chapters, PR practice is not uniformly utilized across the political field and this can make it harder for individuals and groups to establish themselves within the media and political environment. But for those at the centre of the field, seeking approval and engagement of citizens in order to secure and enhance their position,

public relations can provide the mechanisms and structures for communication through the media.

The second phase is the utilisation of PR logic in bridging the divide between an independent media and other social and political institutions. Without PR logic acting as a filter between them, political and media power would be in a continual state of confrontation. This would render public relations practice powerless, continually subject to the whims of the media. Instead, PR logic has the potential to reconcile media and political power by enabling both parties to benefit from information provision. It does this by taking information originating from a sponsor organisation and shaping it in a way in which it can conform to the media's demands. PR logic is a means for a two way exchange of power, whereby the media's demands become accommodated in the operational functions of the sponsor organisation.

The third phase looks at the extent to which PR logic can exert control over the media through the provision of information or by controlling access to particular sources. Research by the Cardiff School of Journalism (Lewis, Williams, Franklin, Thomas and Modsell 2006) which studied two weeks' worth of news stories in five national newspapers<sup>99</sup> and some broadcast news programmes suggests that such PR logic is effective. The researchers concluded that the impact of public relations was much greater than they had assumed. While they had expected to find an 'agenda setting' role for PR (2006:17), in fact they found that 41% of national newspaper articles studied had some evidence of public relations content within them. Nearly one in five newspaper stories (19%) were verifiably wholly or mainly derived from PR material, while less than half of stories had no discernible trace of PR. The research concluded that journalistic dependence on PR is shaping news stories and keeping more newsworthy items out of the news (2006:4). Lewis et al suggest that pressures on news budgets are a significant factor in this increased dependence on ready-made news. A report by the House of Lords Select Committee on Communication found that in contrast to a proliferation in the number of ways to

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<sup>99</sup> The Guardian, The Times, the Daily Telegraph, The Independent and the Daily Mail.



access the news, there has not been a corresponding expansion in professional journalism. Traditional sources of news dependent on original journalism - such as daily newspapers - are in decline with falling readership and advertising revenues while repackaged news, delivered via news aggregator sites such as Google, are proving increasingly popular. Such sites do not invest in original reporting themselves but combine content generated by existing sources, including public relations practitioners<sup>100</sup>. This dependence on public relations has led to a shift in relationships between PR practitioners and the press. Historically public relations practitioners and journalists have been cast in conflict, but exchanges between them now are increasingly being viewed on both sides as a transaction or exchange.

The fourth and final phase of public relations looks at how the sponsor organisation changes its own practice and way of operating in order to conform to PR logic. This might include changes to the way information is collated or presented, which in turn might change the way in which an organisation operates or functions. One interviewee who took part in this study is a senior PR consultant working outside government. He explained how within less than twelve months of working part-time for an organisation he had ended up with a speaking slot at the annual general meeting, making the case for the organisation to change its name. Although not formally on the Board, in doing this he had the full support of both the organisation's chief executive and chair. The argument he put forward for the organisation changing its name stemmed partly from negative media coverage and partly from a consideration of the views of competitors within the organisation's field of operation. He described the decisive factor in his recommendation as the prospect of being able to negotiate support from a government department for an additional and separate course of action, if the organisation changed its name. He explained: 'And it was clear to me that although overtly, the [government] Department could have no influence on this, I believed that in fact behind the scenes they could have an influence and that if the [name of the organisation] demonstrated its willingness to change its title, the Department could probably help to facilitate this other change'.

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<sup>100</sup> *The Ownership of the News*, The House of Lords Select Committee on Communications, Volume 1 Report, The Stationery Office, 27 June 2008, p.9.

His intervention was successful and, directly as a result of his recommendation, the organisation voted to change its name and subsequently its branding. Ultimately, the public relations practitioner drove through a change of name in order to enhance the organisation's reputation and relationships with bodies more influential (and with greater economic resources) than itself. His perspective on what was happening outside the organisation, in the journalistic and political spheres informed this, and he brought these influences back to the organisation, utilising PR logic to persuade member of a particular course of action.

The subsequent chapters of this thesis provide the evidence, from fieldwork, to support this emerging theory of PR logic and power. Alongside interviews with public relations practitioners working in the political field, the fieldwork includes the experiences of those representing Muslim groups, also operating within the political field. These interviews, combined with the prevalence of particular media narratives about Islam and Muslims, demonstrate the absence of PR logic in the way Islam is being represented to the UK press. The fact that this logic is not being utilised, the thesis suggests, may contribute towards the development of a more extensive rationale about why the media narrative about Islam is as it is and how it can be challenged or changed.

As yet, PR logic and its potential has not been the subject of extensive scholarly consideration. As the theories outlined in this chapter reveal, public relations seems to be a powerful but relatively invisible medium, overlooked by media and social studies, or viewed through a distorted lens of propaganda. This thesis proposes that the role of PR be re-evaluated, not only within media studies but within wider theories of public communication and society. To do so provides a richer and more in-depth understanding of the potential and limitations of media power and the way in which narratives within society are created and disseminated.

## Chapter 3: Studying public relations through field theory: the methodology of this study

Some of the broad sociological questions about the way narrative is constructed within the public sphere and the presentation and representation of particular groups, events or news stories have been discussed in the previous chapter. The theoretical approaches of Habermas (1992), Alexander (2006), Jacobs (2000) and others provide different perspectives on the role of the print and broadcast news media, the way in which the media helps to construct particular narratives and discourses and how it transacts with different actors and institutions within society. The theory of mediatisation supports and develops these perspectives by examining the dynamics of power and influence involved in these processes and how they contribute to the changing and transformational impact that the media can have on other aspects of society.

These are theories of media power and dominance and its capacity to shape or change narratives which go on to become common currency in society. As theoretical approaches, they help to frame the social and cultural contexts in which such narratives are constructed, but do not explain the processes and interactions by which those narratives appear or how they might be challenged or changed. While the previous chapter has painted a broad picture of the theoretical platform on which this work is built, this chapter on the methodology used for the research outlines work to fill the gaps in those theories. It begins by detailing the gaps in current scholarship, outlines the route taken to filling them through the application of another theoretical approach – field theory, and in particular the use of field theory within the political field - and discusses the practical implementation of this through fieldwork.

The current theory of mediatisation, described as the capacity of the media to effect change on other institutions, is expressed predominantly as a structural theory which seeks to explore how the media, as one institution, impacts on other social and

cultural institutions<sup>101</sup>. It provides an overarching perspective on the impact that different types of media can have upon society and how society can change to accommodate and absorb the media's logic and ways of operating. In doing so, it provides a macro understanding of the dynamics between media and society; it identifies the change that is effected by the media without examining the granular detail of the processes and interactions that enable this change to happen. Mediatisation theory alone cannot provide an adequate explanation for or a solution to the challenges of media coverage facing Muslim groups in the UK, challenges which are outlined in the first chapter. It provides an effective theoretical framework through which to understand the dominance of particular media narratives, but it cannot be used to effect change. Instead, an additional and more empirical approach is needed. Such an approach needs to have the potential to understand the micro-processes of interactions and relationships between different communities and, most importantly, to understand the exchange of power between them. In doing so, it will help to create the building blocks which, when joined together, contribute to theory of mediatisation and develop it. It does this by helping break down the linear nature of mediatisation theory, by providing a more multi-dimensional perspective, which acknowledges the role of human agents and provides a more stratified understanding of power and its exchange.

The previous chapter explores the relationship between mediatisation and public relations, concluding that the two are intertwined. As the description of the history of public relations described in Chapter 4 demonstrates, public relations has grown alongside mediatisation – as the dominance of the media over other social institutions has demanded a response. That response has been to develop a function which can manage the demands of the media and even exert control over them. However, mediatisation is not an appropriate methodological approach for studying public relations. The media's impact comes from the institutional

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<sup>101</sup> For a discussion of the news as an institutional, rather than organisational product, see (Alexander (in Katz and Szecsko 1981). Here, Alexander argues that an organisational approach to news tells us little about the routines or about the content of news. The news media, despite different technologies, deadlines and audiences, are structured similarly in their internal organisations, the way they interact with sources, the formats they use and in the content they provide. This consensus in the way the news media operates strengthens and enhances its power both organisationally and institutionally.

production of symbolic patterns that create layers of meaning and identity within society at a cultural level. These patterns are crucially important in constituting the very sense of society for those who are within the boundaries of society and those who are outside<sup>102</sup>. While mediatisation theory helps to explain how the media uses those symbolic patterns for influence, and a study of the newsroom may explain the process by which such patterns are produced<sup>103</sup>, neither approach provides a comprehensive insight into the interactions, relationships and dynamics of power which helps to shape those patterns and confer them with meaning.

Alexander (1981) suggests that in order to decode these symbolic patterns it is necessary to discover what particular kinds of evaluative judgements the news media produce and under what conditions they do so. He argues that just as individuals continually try to organise their experience in terms of formulating different normative explanations, newspapers do this for society at large. It is only by continually finding new, unfiltered and unforeseen societal experiences that the media can perform their normative function effectively. In order to create news a journalist must stretch out into different, and possibly hitherto unknown fields. Yet the mechanisms by which journalists do this are uncharted by mediatisation theory. It is here that public relations practitioners have a role to play, by connecting journalists with the new, the novel and the newsworthy; filtered and presented in a way that conforms with the logic of the media. The role of the PR practitioner is to provide the journalist with an expert guide to different and unknown fields and at the same time make them known, visible and accessible.

Current debates relating to mediatisation traverse the gap between media and society in too big a leap, without providing the means for examining the transactions that enable the process of influence to happen. Couldry's (2008) observation, as discussed in the previous chapter, is that mediatisation theory assumes a 'one size fits all' model, whereby social institutions are subject to a process of change emanating from the media with journalists as the primary agents for enacting that

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<sup>102</sup> For a further discussion of the role of the media's normative function within society, see Alexander (1981).

<sup>103</sup> For an ethnographic study of news production see Klinenberg (2005).

process. This approach to mediatisation assumes that power rests predominantly with the media as an institution and that other cultural institutions are, to a greater or lesser degree, subsumed into this. This power is expressed through media logic, whereby other social or cultural fields, such as politics, religion or language, begin to see and interpret social affairs and shape their response in a way that conforms with the operations and interpretations of the media. Yet the role of agents in enabling or facilitating this expression of power, and in particular the role of journalists as agents, remains largely undefined.<sup>104</sup> Crucially for this study, the intermediary role of the public relations practitioner as a negotiator between journalists and the hitherto unknown fields has also been largely overlooked. As such, what mediatisation needs, as Lundby (2009) suggests, is more empirical analysis to support it.

The second gap in scholarship which this research aims to fill relates to the representation of Islam within the public sphere and, in particular, the media. While this thesis uses discussions of the public sphere as a theoretical foundation, it is not intended to supplement or supplant those broader debates or analyses of public discourse. Nor does it intend to approach a study of media power through a Habermassian lens<sup>105</sup>. Instead, as discussed in earlier chapters, it focuses on one particular narrative prevalent within the current public sphere, that which relates to Islam and Muslims and their engagement in the UK national political arena.

The current literature about Islam and media, discussed in the first chapter, has so far failed to provide a convincing account of the processes by which media content about Islam is developed or shaped. While national newspaper coverage about Islam has grown in volume over the last two decades and there is broad consensus that it is overwhelmingly negative, to date there is still no comprehensive rationale as to why this should be so. Instead, much of the current literature creates a self-fulfilling prophecy, relying on stereotypes about media coverage which places responsibility for the stereotypes on society at large, rather than examining the individual role of agents in its construction (Hafez 2009).

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<sup>104</sup> For a discussion on the role of agents within mediatisation, see Hjarvard (2008).

<sup>105</sup> As described in earlier chapters, for Habermas, the ideal public sphere is a place of rational debate where power is not present in discourse. Instead, discourse is intended to lead to consensus with all participants being given an equal opportunity to engage. Such an ideal runs counter to the existence of the types of media narrative about Islam described in chapter 1.

Much of the current literature begins its analysis by focusing on coverage of a particular media event – such as the Danish cartoons affair, the 7 July 2005 attacks on London, the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States, or a military conflict. This means that the literature around Islam and media repeats the patterns it identifies within the press, associating Islam with terrorism, war and fanaticism. While these are the events that have brought the discussion of Islam and the public sphere to the fore, by starting with the end result – the media coverage – the results of any study are already skewed. Instead, by studying the environments in which such coverage appears and the processes and transactions that lead to it, it will be possible to make more informed judgements about the coverage itself, and the reasons for it.

Instead of a detailed discussion of the role of the public sphere in the media's coverage of Islam in the UK, the current debate has rested largely on an assumption that the media is autonomous, generating particular types of coverage as a result of its own perspectives and bias. A different argument suggests that the media are 'done to' as a result of propaganda generated by governments preoccupied by security or military concerns. (For a discussion about the use of propaganda during the Gulf Wars of 1991 and 2003, see Brittain 1991; Fialka 1991; Bennett and Paletz 1994; Chrisco 1995; Arnett 1991; Collins and Glover 2002; Gunter, Russell, Withey and Nicholas 2003). Familiar themes such as Orientalism or the clash of civilisations – outlined in Chapter 1 of this thesis - have been used to contextualise certain types of media coverage. While these theories interpret media content through a particular lens and within a particular historical or political context, they fail to explore the processes or interactions from which particular narratives emerge. It is indisputable that such themes predominate within current media reporting but a more rounded analysis would provide greater insight about how and why they appear.

The prevalence of journalism studies as a starting point for discussion of Islam and media means that the focus emphasizes the final printed or broadcast piece and the

audience reaction rather than the source material and how this information reaches the journalist. As such, the role of public relations practice in communicating and disseminating messages pertinent to Islam and Muslims in the UK has not yet been explored in the literature. How the media receive or generate the imagery and messages they currently convey is not adequately answered by the current literature. Nor is there any understanding of how the demands or logic of the media feed back to the sources of those messages, and the impact therefrom.

This is where this research can contribute to ongoing scholarship. Studying the construction of public relations messages, the environments within which they are framed and developed and the logic that they work to, provides a fuller rationale about how such media coverage relating to Muslims or Islam appears in the UK. In particular, by exploring the role of public relations agents in intervening in the dynamic between the media and society, this research offers insight about why such coverage is as it is, and the potential for it to be changed. Furthermore, by providing empirical evidence of the relationship between Islam and public relations, this research aims to be able to add a new and previously unexplored dimension to the current literature.

The research focuses on both public relations and the representation of Muslim groups within the UK political sphere. While Islam and public relations both operate within numerous other social arenas, the political context was chosen because of the politicization of Islam and Muslims through the media. As has been described in previous chapters, the media's association of Islam in the UK with political issues, such as asylum, benefits and security, and the politicization of religious characteristics – such as the veil or arranged marriage – means that the political sphere is likely to be the most revealing for the purposes of this research. In particular, the research focuses on the public relations activity around the launch of the current government's Prevent strategy. This strategy and its consequences were a recurring theme in fieldwork with representatives of Muslim groups and firmly places Islam and Muslims within the UK political field. It has also been subject to continuous high levels of public relations activity and this is demonstrated in Chapter 5.



The fieldwork also includes interviews with public relations practitioners, many of whom are working or have recently worked within Parliament or for government bodies. Several interviewees work at the heart of government as senior practitioners leading the public relations function for central government departments. These interviews provide compelling insight into the relationship between politics, PR and the media.

## The research questions

A series of research questions were developed which initially focused on the use of public relations by Muslim groups and organisations in the UK. These questions were then broadened to encompass a more general understanding of public relations practice within the political field. This examination of public relations practice was approached from a sociological, rather than an organisational or media studies perspective, seeking to understand public relations as a social and relational activity. To do this, the research examined the nature and strength of power that public relations practitioners bring and utilize by focusing on the relationships and interactions they have with other agents, both within and external to their sponsor organisations. To achieve this, fieldwork with public relations practitioners focused on how they see themselves and the skills and experience they bring to their roles. These questions relating to public relations practice were focused in particular on public relations within the political field. This was to garner an in-depth understanding of this type of public relations practice, and the factors which make it successful. While the questions were structured around the relational nature of PR practice, the questions did not explicitly seek to explore practitioners' relationships with journalists. Instead, questions sought to elicit a greater understanding of public relations practitioners' interactions and encounters with others within their field of operation – including those agents in positions of greater power and influence. The final questions focus on the use of public relations practice by agents responsible for undertaking PR on behalf of Muslim groups and organisations. These questions were honed down further as the research continued in response to the emerging findings which demonstrated that the circumstances of practice were not directly

comparable. Thus, those responsible for public relations practice for Muslim groups had a different understanding of what public relations practice meant. As a result, questions became more focused on their experience within the political field and how far public relations practice is understood and being utilized by these groups.

The final research questions were:

- **What is public relations? How is it defined and what role does it play?** These questions draw on existing scholarship, which looks at public relations from organisational or management perspectives. The different definitions of public relations were elicited through both desk research and fieldwork. Each of the public relations practitioners interviewed was asked to define their role and the position that they saw themselves holding within the organisation.
- **What is the nature of PR practice in the UK political field? How are PR practitioners positioned within this field and what sources and level of capital do they have access to?** With a focus on the political field, these questions seek to establish the use of public relations within and by central government. For the purposes of this research, public relations within the UK political field is defined narrowly - and even geographically - to the activity which takes place within Westminster and in connection with Parliament and the central government departments that are located there. The questions ask about the purpose of public relations within the political field and seek to understand the balance of work it encompasses, including the provision of public information, the management of news stories and political positioning: managing the reputation of political parties or government departments and their agencies.
- **How do PR practitioners within the political field relate to other agents in their own field, and agents in other fields? What tensions exist between the capital that PR practitioners possess and others in the field?** These questions open up the perspective of public relations as a social field and network of relationships. In order to answer this question,

interviewees were asked about the different types of capital – including professional and educational qualifications and career experience – they possess. They were also asked about their networks and the types of capital, or power, which they receive as a result of the contacts and relationships they have, both within their sponsor organisation and externally. This approach seeks to elicit how public relations agents are positioned within their sphere of operation, and in particular what their role and their skills contributes which cannot be found elsewhere.

- **What influence do PR practitioners and PR practice have on the institutions they represent? How does this influence work and what impact does it have?** These questions set out to understand the two way nature of relationships that public relations practitioners hold and the flow of power and capital within those relationships. While earlier questions examined the position of public relations practitioners vis à vis others in the field, these questions focus on the logic of their work and the processes of change and transition that it can effect.
- **How are those practitioners who undertake public relations for Muslim groups located within the UK political field? What sources and level of capital do they have access to?** These questions focus in particular on those representing or working on behalf of Muslim groups within the political field. As these groups may not be well embedded within the political field, it begins by asking how the practitioners are positioned in relation to other agents, as well as what power that have access to more generally within the field. This is not intended to be a comparison between between those undertaking public relations for Muslim organisations and other PR agents, but to understand their relative positions in the field.
- **To what extent do Muslim groups use public relations practice in order to compete or change their position within the political field?** Having established how PR logic can support public relations practitioners, this question seeks to understand how far PR agents working for Muslim groups utilise this practice for their own benefit, or for the benefit of the groups they represent. This question evolved during the course of the

fieldwork as it became apparent that understanding of PR practice varied considerably among these groups and the practitioners who worked on their behalf.

Answering these questions requires an understanding of process and practice, interaction and relationships that Habermasian and mediatisation theories do not satisfactorily provide. Most critically, it requires an explanation of the motivation and role of agents and a perspective which interprets broad, structural theories from the perspective of the actions of individuals. This demands a theoretical model which enables an analysis of the relationships and interactions through which power is exchanged. To achieve all this, I have chosen to utilise the field theory first espoused by the French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu.

Bourdieu was born in 1930 in a rural area of southwestern France. Initially a student of philosophy, his focus shifted to social sciences after he was drafted into the French army and sent to Algeria at the height of its war of liberation (1956-1962). He took up a post as lecturer in the faculty of Algiers and sought to understand the clash between the Algerian people and French colonialism by studying the economic and social structures of the indigenous peoples, and in particular the Kabyles and the Berbers. In so doing, he became an observer of large-scale social change and the organisation of social practices and how the material and symbolic combined to establish hierarchies within the society. He identified the notion of 'playing the game', or undertaking the correct action in order to succeed as he witnessed the struggles of peasants from the villages to adapt to the games of the city (Calhoun 2006). This observation pertaining to the rules of the game in different social environments and, in particular, the ability of different agents to compete depending on their experience and position within that sphere, and the types of capital – economic, cultural, social or symbolic – which they have access to provides the genesis of Bourdieu's field theory.

## About field theory

Field theory provides an investigative framework for this research which helps understand the mechanics and movement of power between agents engaged in the media, in public relations practice and the sponsor organisations or groups which they represent. This chapter describes how field theory has been applied to answer the research questions listed above and to support and develop the theory of mediatisation in the context of this research. It explains how field theory has been used to structure fieldwork among public relations agents working within the political field and among those undertaking public relations for Muslim groups operating within that field. It goes on to explain how the results of that fieldwork can contribute to the larger structural and institutional questions that mediatisation poses.

Field theory views society as a number of structured spaces, known as fields, with their own rules and laws of functioning. Bourdieu (1993) describes a field as a social universe (e.g. politics, economics, education or journalism), usually forgotten or ignored, in which social agents exist, as well as the institutions which support them. Fields are semi-autonomous from the wider social space and it is the connection and struggle between fields, and between the individual agents within fields, that influence dynamics of power and change within society. The study of a field involves an examination of the relationships within the field, both between individual agents and between agents and the structures that exist within the field. Couldry (2011) describes the benefits and flexibility of field theory in helping to identify the nature and order of what individual agents do.

In his study of the literary field, Bourdieu (1993) observes that the field glorifies great individuals but that this can be at the expense of understanding the structural relations between social positions that are occupied and manipulated within the field. To explore the literary field it is not enough to identify great writers, there needs to be an examination of their positions within the field and in relationship to each other, and the way in which these positions impact on how their literature is

perceived by the wider reading public. In this, Bourdieu posits that a literary giant's kudos and reputation stems from their situation in relationship to other writers as well as from the distinctiveness of their work. This insight is of particular pertinence when looking at the position of those undertaking public relations practitioners for Muslim groups in the UK. The understanding which field theory yields about the literary giant and the other writers is not a comparative one. Instead, understanding the positioning of the individual writers within the field sheds light on the resources, status and power which the other writers possess. Agents within a field – be they writers or public relations practitioners – are connected through their collective endeavours within the field and the competition which results between them. This competition may not be explicit but instead takes the form of a continuous movement within the field, with those nearer the centre having greater access to the power and influence that the field possesses.

Relationships within and between fields are based on power and the struggle for power and are central to how fields function. Fields are arenas in which individuals and organisations compete, consciously and unconsciously, to increase the power they possess. As a result, some individuals within a field will dominate and others will be dominated. The occupants of different positions have strategies to help them defend or improve their positions: strategies which depend for force and form on the position each agent occupies in the power relations (Bourdieu 2003). This means the field is continually changing and this change is driven by and impacts on the positions of individual agents with the field. Those agents less dominant within the field, or at the margins of it, are more likely to struggle as a result of that change, which tends to be driven by powerful new entrants or the actions of those closer to the centre of the field.

The actions and reactions of agents within a field are dictated by the rules and forces specific to that field, including the capital, or sources of power, within the field. There are three types of capital: economic, cultural and social (Bourdieu 1986) and the rules of how the field functions legitimise the capital and establish the different types of value capital has. The specific form of economic and cultural

capital within each field varies, economic capital is money or assets that can be turned into money. Cultural capital is embodied in individuals as well as available through cultural goods such as books, instruments or pictures and, institutionally, through educational qualifications (1986:47). Social capital – defined by Bourdieu as ‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition.’ (1986:51) - is borne out of the resources available to an individual as a result of their networks and relationships and the attributes they bring which enable these to succeed. As a result, the amount of capital agents possess will determine their position in the field and the strategies they use to function. An agent with increased amounts of capital will be positioned strongly and centrally within the field, while an agent with less capital will be peripheral within the field. The possession of capital enables agents to adapt to changes within the field – for example, within the political field an agent possessing a high degree of social capital is more likely to be insulated from the impact of a change of government following a general election than one who has less effective networks on which to rely. The political field is structured around social capital meaning that an agent’s contacts and relationships are as likely to be as or even more helpful in securing their position than any qualifications they may possess.

This research into public relations practice is situated with the political field, the arena where political parties and politicians compete for the attention and approval, and the right to speak on behalf of citizens who are situated outside of the field. Like other fields, it is a field of struggles, but it is also a field of forces; it aims to change itself – and the world around it – from within. Words uttered within the political field have the weight of a manifesto for action or change as agents within the political field are seeking to persuade others of the legitimacy of their vision; it is the ultimate site of power where the symbolic character of power itself is at stake. It is the competition between agents within the field which creates the policies, concepts and political products which ordinary citizens can choose between.

Bourdieu's mapping of the political field forms a central tenet of his sociological approach. Bourdieu's sociology is inherently political, developed in close connection with political events during his time in Algeria (Wacquant 2005). He charts the development of the political field as it emerges through transition, from the household of the king, where power is situated within the identities of a few individuals, into a field of forces and struggles oriented towards the monopoly of the legitimate manipulation of public goods (2005). As the field emerges, power is diffused and differentiated, no longer held as hereditary power within a single dynasty but spread among different roles and forces within the state. As the field of power develops, it is linked to education, competence and merit – highlighting the emerging importance of cultural capital above the riches and the wealth held centrally in the household of the king. A properly political order is conceived and grows with its own laws, logic, values and language. The political field becomes public, rather than private, and a bureaucracy develops which of itself becomes a relatively autonomous administrative field, independent of politics and the economy, obeying the specific logic of the public.

Unlike the household of the king, the political field is not a monolith with a single source of capital; instead it is made up of a series of linked institutions which use their capital to wield their own particular type of power (Bourdieu 1994). This differentiation of power is important because each of those institutions contributes to the capacity of the field to dominate those outside the field. Their contributions are the tactics of politics – including opinion polls, campaigning and public relations – which are conducted from within the field in order to shift and sway the opinions of those outside of the field. It is only through an understanding of how these tactics work, and the power that underpins them, that the power within the political field can be fully understood<sup>106</sup>.

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<sup>106</sup> In his study on the social uses of and reactions to public opinion polls, Champagne (Wacquant 2005) identifies polls as one of the techniques used by politicians to garner the support of audiences. Champagne argues that polls are journalistic devices, explicitly intended to be published and commented on (2005:125). The methodology of opinion polling may not always be statistically robust (because, as Field (2007) observes, of a lack of rigour in the development and analysis of questions) but works to accommodate the logic of the media. In this sense, it is the political reading of opinion polls that is seen as most important, rather than their technical analysis. Champagne comments that these types of surveys allow journalists to intervene directly in the political struggle with a legitimacy of their own as they can interview politicians based on 'neutral' data. As a result,



The political field is very powerful: with high levels of all types of capital - economic, social and cultural. As individuals, politicians possess both personal and professional capital. Their personal capital comes from the recognition they achieve, while their professional capital is based on the resources they have available to mobilise support from others within and outside the field.

At its heart, the political field is imbued with symbolic power – or capital – which transcends and encompasses the personal and professional power that politicians hold. Couldry (2003) distinguishes between the symbolic power that Bourdieu ascribes to the state and the field of power, the social space occupied by the elite (Bourdieu 1993:43) which Couldry defines as politicians, civil servants and those passing through the public school system (2003:6). Symbolic power is the capacity to intervene in the course of events, to influence the actions of others and to create events by means of the production and transmission of symbolic forms (Thompson 1995). It is a power which serves to construct reality and one which tends to establish the immediate meaning of the world. Symbolic capital creates the power of political words and slogans – a belief in the legitimacy of words and of those who utter them. It is not the words alone which carry symbolic power, rather is it the recognition and belief held by those who hear and respond to the words and slogans that creates symbolic power.

Symbolic power is a power which the submissive person grants to the person who exercises it because the person who submits to it believes that it exists. It is founded on the belief or recognition by which agents confer on a person the very powers that they recognize in him or her. It is a power that can be exercised only if it is recognised – that is, misrecognised as arbitrary (Couldry 2003). This type of power is endowed with legitimacy – and presupposes active complicity on the part of those exposed to it. The free flowing nature of political capital is based on belief and credibility. It is because politicians are dependent on the credit accorded to them by

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journalists become the spokesmen and interpreter of what citizens really think, rather than the journalists they interview.

non-professionals that they are especially vulnerable to suspicion and scandal: precisely because their power is symbolic they must constantly nourish and sustain it. This can only be maintained by avoiding that which might discredit those which hold it, such as inconsistency, untruth or scandal.

The power and capital within the political field grants it a considerable degree of autonomy but it is not completely independent of other fields and forces. In order for the different institutions – and agents within them – to succeed and serve their purpose, they must appeal to groups situated outside the field. It is the necessity of these relationships – which, as discussed in the previous chapter, can include the demands and logic of the news media - which place constraints in the production of political discourse. These relationships are with agents, groups and institutions operating to a different logic and understanding, with different experience, social, cultural and economic capital. Thus, when the political field reaches out to the journalistic field to convey its vision for action and change to citizens, it needs to understand and conform to journalistic logic in order for its messages to be received and disseminated. For those working within the political field, this appeal must be continuous as politicians are continually dependent on the approval and credit of those outside the field in order to maintain their own status within the political field.

The outcome of these internal struggles depends on the power that the agents and institutions involved in this struggle can mobilize from outside the field. Here, the role of public relations practitioners comes to the fore. As the fieldwork among public relations practitioners outlined below demonstrates, PR practitioners are endowed with symbolic power by their sponsor organisations. Contained within this symbolic power is the belief that public relations practitioners can manage relationships with the media and exert control over them. Their relationships, both within the political field and outside it, enable them to access and utilise power which gives them the capacity to intervene. Through this intervention they are able to do what other agents within the political field cannot: shape, produce and convey messages which conform with media logic and result in media coverage. Thus the strategies of the public relations practitioners converge with the strategies of the media.

Bourdieu (1994:179) describes politics as a game and nothing is demanded more absolutely by the political game than the fundamental adherence to the game itself. The political field is pointless and inaccessible to the majority of people who do not play the game and do not understand the compulsion to do so. It is the feel for the game which enables politicians to predict the stances of other politicians and what makes them predictable, ready to play the role assigned to them.

Speech is an important expression of symbolic power, dependent on the recognition and reaction of those outside the field. As Bourdieu explains, ideas only become a political movement when they are recognised outside the circle of those that developed them (1994:189). A significant part of the output of the political field is speech: slogans, soundbites, promises and pledges, intended to build up credibility in the eyes of those on the receiving end. These types of speech are imbued with symbolic power – representing the power to change laws and policies and to make a difference to ordinary people’s lives. Yet, despite the potency of speech, politicians have, to some degree, conferred responsibility for this symbolic power onto public relations practitioners acting on their behalf. This then is the role of the public relations practitioner within the political field – to preserve the belief and credibility placed on the professional politician and to avoid that which might discredit him or her – scandal<sup>107</sup>. The public relations practitioner also has the task of mobilising support from outside the political field – through different means, most obviously for the purposes of this research, through the media. The role of the public relations practitioner is to build belief in the legitimacy of the political party or government that they represent. In this, PR practitioners benefit from political capital, although they are rarely visible holders of it themselves. They also work within structures – which allow them to organise and campaign to encourage support and belief, as well as dispositions of loyalty, or credibility.

This conferred capital provides public relations practitioners with the authority to act, or even speak, on behalf of the politicians they represent. Bourdieu writes of the

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<sup>107</sup> There are different types of public relations agents operating within the political field. Those working for political parties have responsibility for promoting their party policies and reputation. Those employed as civil servants are bound to be politically independent.

authorized speech of the spokesperson, stating that an authorized spokesperson can display the force from which he derives his authority by calling on the group to mobilize and by effectively mobilizing it, thus leading it to manifest itself (1994:107). The way in which the group is represented – via giving it a name, a logo or descriptors – accords power to the public relations practitioner that is derived directly from the group – what Bourdieu calls a misrecognized ‘circular circulation of recognition’ which is at the root of the capital and symbolic power that the mandated agent holds over the group (Wacquant 2005:61) This dual role of looking out from the group and back to it is something which is characteristic of the power of public relations practitioners and is discussed further below. Bourdieu does not define who spokespeople are; they may be professional politicians or inexperienced amateurs or anything in between.

Couldry (2003) identifies a growing symbiosis between symbolic capital and the media, suggesting that the increasing influence of the media over what counts as symbolic capital will lead to the increasing convertibility of symbolic capital derived mainly or exclusively from media exposure or access across social space as a whole. In this, Couldry reflects Bourdieu’s assertion of the dominance of the journalistic field. Bourdieu (1998) describes how the journalistic field exerts an increasingly powerful hold on other fields. This is not a result of the power that journalists hold as individuals, but is the result of the relationships between the journalistic field and other fields. The journalistic field increasingly imposes its constraints on all other fields, particularly the fields of cultural production, such as social sciences and politics. In doing so, the journalistic field does not necessarily reinforce the power of the status quo, but under certain conditions it may actually transform power relations in other fields.

The power of the journalistic field does not mean it operates without constraints. Bourdieu suggests that as the journalistic field increasingly becomes subject to the constraints of the economy and politics; it imposes its constraints on all other fields more and more, thus strengthening the impact of external forces in each of those other fields (Bourdieu quoted in Benson et al 2005: 31). Some of the constraints on

the journalistic field are economic, such as the need to produce content which will serve to maintain or increase circulation and advertising revenues. Other constraints are political, such as the state setting limits on access to or publication of certain kinds of information or opinion. The journalist's position is a powerful one in its effects, but at the same time, his or her operation is strongly dominated and controlled by other fields, especially the economic and the political.

Couldry (2011) describes one of the benefits of field theory as providing a useful understanding of the media's role in the relations between, and operations within, specific fields of social competition. The relationship between the journalistic field and the political field is fundamental: enabling the journalistic field to produce a particular vision of that discourse which is imposed upon the public. This relationship places the journalistic field as part of the field of power; that is, it tends to engage first and foremost with those agents, such as politicians, who possess high volumes of capital. Bourdieu (Benson et al 2005) argues that such constraints work both ways - while politicians dictate conditions and rules of access and designate certain events and issues as important by providing an arena for them, journalists can and do take this material while deciding whether something is interesting enough to cover and then how to craft it into a coherent narrative. Sources may make themselves available but sources cannot make news unless and until they conform with the news criteria of the journalistic field. Similarly, the state can be enabling as well as restrictive, for example when it enables the media to exist or thrive indirectly by means of technology or distribution networks, or directly, such as via the provision of licences to broadcast or financial aid.

The centrality of the journalistic field within field theory is significant for this research, but the perspective that field theory offers - of bounded social spaces in which hierarchies of power and capital prevail - applies across society. For example, Anheier et al (1995) used field theory to study the hierarchy and relative social status of fiction writers in Cologne, while Sallaz (2006) used field theory to conduct a comparative study of the gambling industry in South Africa and California. Warde's study (2004) locates the practice of eating out within the culinary field while Skille

(2007) plots the changing landscape of sport in Norway using field theory. And as has already been discussed, Uitermark and Gielen (2010) use field theory to explore the mediatisation of politics through conflict between Muslim groups and local government in Amsterdam.

In particular, Anehier et al's work (1995) illustrates the way in which access to capital can be used to position agents individually and collectively within a field. In questionnaires and interviews Anehier et al asked writers about their knowledge of other writers and their work, their social and professional contacts with others, and their membership of different writing organisations. From the results, they were able to map a network of social capital made up of an 'elite' and a 'periphery' of writers within the field, linked to economic capital (represented by income). They concluded that his study shows strong support for Bourdieu's hypothesis that actors are distributed in social space both by the overall volume and relative composition of capital.

Champagne and Marchetti's (2005) work presents an alternative perspective on field theory. Their case study of a public scandal in France, about young haemophiliacs being given blood infected with HIV, uses field theory to illustrate how changes to agents in one field can have a lasting impact on other fields and on society more widely. They present the case for changes in the journalistic field, including the retirement of long-standing medical journalists and arrival of generalists writing about medicine, leading to a new economy of medical information based on the misunderstanding of science. The result was the construction of a public scandal about young haemophiliacs being given blood contaminated with HIV which included a misrepresentation of the debate. The new entrants in the journalistic field – the generalists - were unable to discern what information was scientifically accurate and what was not, reporting misinformation as fact, creating a scandal.

This use of field theory is particularly pertinent to this research. Not only does it focus on the construction of a media narrative, but it illustrates how the actions of agents can intertwine to influence changes within more than one field. Champagne

and Marchetti's study points out that it was not just the journalistic field which changed as a result of structural developments and new entrants, but the medical field changed too. The changing capital within the journalistic field became dominant within medicine, undermining the practice of medical research according to purely scientific principles.

As described above, a field is a relatively autonomous structured domain or space which has been socially instituted and, as a result, it needs to have a definable but contingent history of development. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) set out a model for identifying a field which involves first, sketching the development of the field through its history; second, identifying the relations between the actors struggling for specific capital within the field; and finally analysing the structure and change of the field. This is the approach taken by Sallaz (2006), who begins his comparative study of the gambling industry in South Africa and California by recounting the history of gambling legislation in each region, using Parliamentary debates, legislative histories, government reports and what he describes as 'media propaganda' (2006:32). As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, defining the nature of a field through its history is one of the ways field theory has been applied within the context of this research.

The nature of capital within a field helps define its characteristics and the dispositions of the agents within it. To enter a field, agents must have particular knowledge and skills required to act within the field<sup>108</sup>. Those entering the field for the first time can only establish themselves by marking their difference from those already operating within the field. The arrival of new agents can serve either to transform or conserve the practices of the field, and the struggle is for the power to impose the dominant vision of the field. Yet these struggles are always based on the fact that even agents in competition with each other accept a certain number of presuppositions that are fundamental to the very functioning of the field. These characteristics of a field mean that the actions of individual agents are, in themselves, pre-constrained by structure. The hypothesis of this is expressed

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<sup>108</sup> This is the second stage of a definition of a field, as defined by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992).

through Bourdieu's theory of habitus<sup>109</sup> - or 'durable, transposable dispositions' (1990:53) - which constrains and enables the actions and choices of individual agents. Habitus is fundamental to the ways in which society shapes individual actions (and vice versa) and assumes that individuals' predispositions, assumptions, judgments and behaviours are the result of a long term process of socialisation, for example in the family or through education. Any explanation of attitudes, discourses and behaviour of agents must draw on an analysis of both structural position within the field and the habitus by which an agent arrived at that position. It is the encounter between the habitus of the agent and the characteristics of the field which determines the nature of practice within the field. As the fieldwork reveals, it is the particular form of habitus that public relations practitioners bring to a field heavily loaded with cultural and social capital that determines the highly relational nature of their work and the exchange of power through those relationships.

In his study of ongoing change within the Norwegian sporting field, Skille (2007) explores the habitus within that field, describing the competitiveness that exists within and between individual sports and the power of sporting organisations. As well as the desire to win among individual athletes and their teams, this capital is also defined by the way in which sports compete for funding and the profile that can be granted by the sports' governing bodies in Norway. Skille identifies snowboarding as a new entrant to the sporting field and explains how it is challenging the field's current conventions. Snowboarding, he explains, was developed by 'unorganised adolescents' and, with an emphasis on experience rather than competition, it presents a heterodoxy compared to the established sporting field (2007:111). Its entrance into the sporting field exposes it to the influence of sporting capital, and the potential for it to change and conform to the field's conventions of competitiveness, desire for funding and profile.

Like the theory of mediatization, Bourdieu's field theory includes a central premise about the dominance of the media. Field theory's assertion of the dominance of the

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<sup>109</sup> Bourdieu (2007) also describes habitus as 'a structuring structure, which organises practices and the perception of practices' (2007:170).



journalistic field echoes the changing influence of the media and the wider social and political consequences of the media process that is central to the theory of mediatisation. Through mediatisation other social or cultural fields are subsumed to some extent into the logic of the media and may even assume media form. Bourdieu's description of the interaction between the political and journalistic fields is an example of this logic: the political field needs to create 'news' that conforms with the demands of the journalistic field. If the political field fails to do this in the right way, or to provide the right elements for the narrative, the 'news' may be ignored or may be reported in a manner that is undesirable to the political instigators.

In contrast to mediatisation's structural and institutional approaches for examining this logic, field theory opens up a new unit of analysis for media research – an examination of the roles of individual agents and media organisations within the journalistic field as well as their influence as a collective whole. In particular, field theory assigns levels of capital or power to individual agents within fields and, as such, field theory offers the potential to supplement mediatisation rather than supplant it.

The relationship between field theory and mediatisation has already been explored (Couldry 2003, 2004, 2008, 2011; Benson 2005; Hjarvard 2009; Uitermark and Gielen 2010). Couldry (2011) argues that the mediatisation debate rests entirely on the basis that it looks for an understanding of 'media power' where it cannot be found – at the level of society as a whole rather than in the specific operations of the media field and its interrelations with other fields. In contrast, field theory looks at the micro-processes by which power is obtained and utilised. As a result, there is a risk of a stand-off between field theory and mediatisation debates. As Couldry observes the former never refers to the latter and the latter rarely refers to the former (2011:3). In attempting to align the two theories, Couldry describes the influence of the media as a form of meta-capital through which dominance is exercised over other forms of power (Couldry 2004). This meta-capital, he suggests, might work in two ways: by influencing what counts as capital in each field and by

legitimising representations of the social world that may be adopted or taken up by any field. This second type of influence introduces the media's agenda setting role across many specific areas of life and the media's role as the frame within which the generality of social issues get expressed and settled.

Couldry (2003) observes that one limitation in Bourdieu's field theory is that by itself it has no way of accounting for how representations made by actors in one field can influence the actions and thoughts of agents in another field. Couldry cites Champagne (2003:9) stating that he attempts to harness the question of media influence on non-media agents back into field theory by claiming that people's ability to work with the media somehow reflects a mysterious interrelationship between the workings of the media field and the workings of the quite different fields in which those actors are players. Champagne introduces the notion of a new specific type of capital – 'media capital' – to capture people's relative ability to influence journalistic events based on the capital they have already acquired elsewhere. But there is only the briefest explanation of this new term, even though it implies an effect of capital acquired for use in one field on actions in another that field theory cannot easily encompass (2003:662).

Champagne's empirical point is that people, through their sense of what performances, or images, work in the media and their own capacity to deliver them, are increasingly drawn into, and influenced by, the specific constraints of the journalistic field. What is needed, however, to provide some theoretical coherence, is a model that allows for the fact that one field (media field) can influence the workings of another (the political field), and which shows the mechanisms through which that influence can occur. It is interesting that even one of the most sophisticated recent exponents of Bourdieu's field theory for media analysis, Benson, is also drawn to a similar problem when he claims that journalism is a 'crucial mediator among all fields' (1999: 471) but, no more than Champagne or Bourdieu, does he integrate this into the overall field theory.

While power is central to the relational nature of field theory, and despite Couldry's description of media meta-capital, the role of power within mediatisation is less clearly defined. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, Krotz (2009) describes mediatisation as the long term process of changing social institutions and modes of interactions in culture and society due to the growing importance of media in all strands of society, while Hjarvard (2009) posits that mediatisation involves an extension, substitution, amalgamation and accommodation of face to face encounters with mediated encounters. Both definitions may involve the exertion of power, but I would suggest that it would be premature to assume that the nature of the influence is the same as expressed in field theory. Mediatisation provides an overarching rationale for the change and impact that the power of the media can have on society, rather than a rationale for power itself. While field theory's understanding of power stems from its study of the relationships between agents within a field, there is little place for agents within mediatisation theory, which relies on the interplay of institutions. As such, it would be overreaching to attempt to explain the structural influence that mediatisation describes by assuming that this is solely brought about by transferring or magnifying the power of the journalistic field. Similarly, the reciprocal power exerted over the journalistic field by economic and political capital is a key tenet of the relational aspect of field theory. This type of constraint, and the impact it has on media, is not so evident within the theory of mediatisation. Mediatisation explores the changing impact of external forces, and technology in particular, on media, but this is presented as an enabling force, rather than a restricting one. Alexander (1981) presents a challenge to mediatisation here, arguing that because of its very flexibility the news media cannot be a self-conscious organiser of norms in the way that institutions in other dimensions are: it does not formulate basic goals, which is a political responsibility, or basic values, which is a cultural one. Instead, he states that the news media reflect the conditions of society around it and, as a result, is vulnerable to external pressures.

Hjarvard (2009) argues that mediatisation is fundamental to habitus formation, suggesting that the media intervene in the creation of structures through their interaction with society. This suggests that mediatisation is not merely a

consequence of field theory, but an integral part of it. The journalistic field fulfils a cycle of influence which turns in on itself, as its agents collectively operate according to a structure which they have themselves helped to create<sup>110</sup>. Benson (2005) echoes this when he says that field theory serves to highlight processes of change – how the media field affects other societal sectors and how it is itself transformed. Hjarvard (2008) goes on to suggest that examining the mediatisation of different fields can help to bridge the gap between structures and agents. The media produce a continuous representation of our contemporary society that makes accessible today's political realities, contemporary problems and history. In doing so, media outlets actively link various networks of audiences and become part of the reproduction and renewal of cultural and social distinctions in the population. Here, Hjarvard suggests, mediatisation provides the opportunity to rethink habitus. In habitus, Bourdieu has tried to transcend the contradiction between the demands of the external and objective social world and the inner and subjective dispositions that guide the action and interpretations of the social actor. By habitus, Hjarvard refers not to social or cultural identity, but the way in which an individual relates to and interacts with his or her surroundings. Lundby (2009) agrees, suggesting that studying the mediatisation of different fields such as political communication and democracy, economics or entertainment, can help extend the knowledge of how mediatisation works. He suggests that media in mediatised societies are a means for transporting norms and rules to people, although he cautions that this assumption needs empirical analysis to find out how this happens and in which field.

Benson (1999) also suggests that field theory provides a theoretical and empirical bridge between structure and agency, describing it as having a place between

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110 Timothy Cook's (1998) examination of the relationship between journalists and their sources can be used to develop this further in order to illustrate how field theory and mediatisation intersect. Cook argues that journalists and their sources have some interest in co-operation and collaboration, particularly in building a stable exchange relationship whereby journalists receive information in exchange for the publicity they offer sources. This interdependence on sources may require journalists to stretch into new fields, which may be previously unknown to them, and establish relationships of mutual trust in order to elicit information in return for publicity. For the information to feature prominently in the media, the source must be powerful and authoritative within their own field. Yet, the source, while dominant within their own field, is not able to communicate their message without the filtering influence of the media. Cook explains that once the journalist has secured the information they require, they then withdraw to their own field, in order to process and judge the information according to journalistic norms. The encounter with the journalist is likely to have a changing impact on the source, as they make judgements about what and how much information to make available, how to present it and how to respond to the subsequent publicity.

institutional and micro-organisational approaches to media. It provides the opportunity to examine how structures are linked to organisational routines and journalistic practices through the behaviour and interrelationships of agents and organisations. While organisational studies merely emphasise the bureaucratic constraints imposed on journalists by their employing organisations and by the official agencies who serve as their chief sources, field theory offers a more systematic attempt to incorporate empirical data on individual journalists, newsbeats and media organisations, into progressively larger systems of power.

As outlined above, field theory provides an approach to examining the detailed interactions of an institutional media which affects change on other institutions. As such, it provides scope to understand one aspect of mediatisation. But this does not mean that the two theories fully intertwine. The news media may be a product of the journalistic field, but mediatisation as a theory does not restrict itself to the news media alone. Instead it includes the changing impact of technology, entertainment and electronic media<sup>111</sup>. Similarly, the journalistic field is not the only field involved in the creation of media, which includes other fields such as design, production, technology or distribution - all of which may have an impact on mediatisation.

Field theory provides a route by which the researcher can look at the role of individuals within the context of a particular social space and understand their actions within that space and in relation to other spaces. To achieve this, field theory looks at the access to capital for individuals and how they utilize that capital to establish their respective positions within that space. This methodology alone provides a useful and relevant framework for this research, but the dominance of the journalistic field adds a further dimension. The strength of the capital within the journalistic field means that other fields submit to the dominance of that field, adjusting their rules of operating to accommodate the logic of the journalistic

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<sup>111</sup> For a discussion of the role of technology in mediatisation see Schofield Clark (2009). An over-emphasis on the technological developments in media risks straying into technological determinism. Bourdieu's field theory is distinct from technological determinism, but whether technology has a place within field theory is unclear.

field<sup>112</sup>. This research attempts to identify the role of public relations agents as mediators and participants in this process: bridging the gap between fields and, through their capital, adapting the processes and rules of one field to the demands of the journalistic one. It explores how the role of public relations agents can be a substitute for, or extension of, the role of journalistic agents within field theory, and that public relations practice carries a logic which is akin to the logic of the media. Their role as substitute does not imply that PR agents are journalists by another name. PR agents are not part of the journalistic field, and their practice is not to publish news. Yet this thesis will examine whether their practice carries its own logic – a PR logic – which by its very nature conforms to the logic of the media but also places its own expectations and demands on the field in which the PR practitioner is situated. As we will see, this is evident in the political field, where the PR practitioner negotiates and mediates between the demands of the politician and the demands of the media.

Understanding the relationships between fields and the agents within them is at the heart of this research. The centrality of relationships to PR practice means that field theory is an appropriate way to analyse the way in which power is symbolised and operationalised within PR<sup>113</sup>. This would not be achievable by relying on the Habermasian model of the public sphere as the operational theory for my research. Poupeau (2000) observes that both Habermas and Bourdieu want to combine, in a single theory, an analysis of the nature of domination and the mechanisms by which it occurs and is legitimised but they differ in approaches to achieving this. Habermas' approach is to understand human action from the perspective of a society founded on the universality of reason, while Bourdieu takes social interaction as his starting point in order to study the conditions for the emergence of reason. Habermas elaborates a theory of society where power relations are replaced by relations of meaning, where reason and the force of rationality enable agents to

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<sup>112</sup> Benson (1999) observes that relatively autonomous fields may be wary of journalists, although once allowed in, journalists can provide crucial support to those inside agents closest to the heteronomous pole who seek to overturn existing hierarchies within the field.

<sup>113</sup> The nature of power in PR has been the focus of Edwards' work (2006, 2008 and 2009), through both quantitative and qualitative research. She explores the different types of social and cultural capital available to PR practitioners and how this reflected the capital possessed by more dominant groups in society as a whole.

reach agreement and thus give rise to consensus. For Bourdieu, reason serves to legitimate the force of power relations and domination and it is the legitimation of domination from which meaning is derived. Those who have the greatest power within society also possess the power of reason, which comes from the habitus of the field. The dominant groups derive their authority from the loyalty of the dominated and legitimate their own interests, while the dominated acquiesce in the principle of their domination.

Benson (2005), too, highlights the differences between Bourdieu and Habermas, observing that Habermas' conceptualisation of the mass media's relation to the public sphere largely revolves around the single variable of commercialisation. The press lacks defences against the market and the mass welfare state, making it vulnerable to the blunt instrument of editorial control through commercialisation or propaganda. In contrast, Bourdieu's understanding of the journalistic field possesses both autonomy and capital, and this expands and contracts through relationships with other fields.

In his study of the journalistic field, Benson (1999) observes that the first step towards understanding how and why journalism functions as it does is to locate it vis à vis other fields. This involves locating the journalistic field in its immediate environment of cultural production and then within its immediate structural environment – the ensemble of fields. Benson proposes that this be accomplished through a mapping exercise, consisting of ethnographic observation and statistical analysis, followed by an analysis of the constitution of the particular subjectivities of the actors in the field. An understanding of the function of public relations can be similarly understood by studying public relations not as a single entity, but in terms of its relationships with other fields. To do this, this research has examined the history of the PR field and analysed the types of capital available to agents within it. Having built up a picture of the habitus of the PR field, it continues by exploring PR practice within the political field, its interaction with other fields and the use of capital within this.

This study of practice within a field is an approach taken up by Warde (2004) who, in his study of the culinary field, examines the relationship between practice and fields<sup>114</sup>, describing eating out as a practice which takes place within the culinary field. Eating out is not a field itself, but is a part of the field and a practice within it. It is a form of behaviour which emerges from the economic and social development of the culinary field, including competition between chefs and restaurants, the growth in popularity of different types of cuisines, and the emergence of restaurant guides and critics. Using interviews with consumers, Warde comes to a definition of the practice of eating out, arguing that although there are differences both socially and materially in how different consumers view eating out, there are also common factors<sup>115</sup>.

Finally, this research looks at how far PR practice has been adopted by individuals acting on behalf of Muslim groups operating within the political field. This includes a consideration of the availability of capital to Muslim agents within the field. This is not a comparative study between Muslim agents and PR practitioners, but instead is intended to explore the dynamics between different agents operating within a single field, the different levels of capital available to them and the implications this has for their influence on the presentation of narratives for use by the journalistic field.

## The research process

This research has engaged with field theory in different ways and the type of engagement has changed during the process of the fieldwork. While the work of Anheier et al (1995), Skille (2007), Uitermark and Gielen (2010) and others tends to utilise field theory within a single field<sup>116</sup>, when the research began, its parameters were not so clearly defined. During the course of the fieldwork those parameters have become clearer, shaped to a large extent by the emerging findings.

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<sup>114</sup> Warde argues that Bourdieu 'abandoned' practice theory with his multiple uses of the term having resulted in its failing to fulfil any effective function in empirical analysis.

<sup>115</sup> For example, eating out takes place away from home, it does not involve the consumer in labour and it involves eating a meal, rather than a snack.

<sup>116</sup> The fields that these types of literature use vary from a network of writers (Anheier et al 1995), to a sport (Skille 2007) to activities defined within a particular geographical area (Uitermark and Gielen 2010).



The starting assumption was that public relations practice operates across fields as a trajectory which begins in the field in which the sponsor organisation is located and concludes in the journalistic field<sup>117</sup>. In between, the PR practitioner might engage with one or more intermediary fields and the agents within those fields. For example, public relations activity about the UK government's work to prevent young Muslims from being drawn into terrorist activity would be conceived in the sponsor's field, which would be the political field. The aim of the PR activity would be to secure press coverage promoting the government's work to prevent terrorism in order to reassure the electorate and to position the government as alert and responsive to the threat of terror. The PR practitioner, usually working for a government department or agency, would construct a narrative about the government's Prevent work, based on the rules and logic of the political field in which they are based<sup>118</sup>. The practice of public relations would require the practitioner to make this story newsworthy and of maximum interest to the journalistic field. This might involve engaging with the Muslim religious field to develop the narrative by including human interest stories about the impact of the preventative work on young Muslim men, or endorsement from Muslim leaders of the effectiveness and relevance of the approach within their community. The final narrative would then be presented to the journalistic field, by means of a press release, or a media interview, possibly resulting in a newspaper or broadcast news story. The Muslim religious field might also be encouraged to engage with the journalistic field by putting up spokespeople for interview, or inviting the broadcast media to film in or around a mosque.

As the expert in this process, the public relations practitioner would guide and direct the narrative's trajectory, leading the engagement with the different fields, either by imposing the rules and structures of their own field on others, or by entering other fields and adapting their rules and ways of operating. This conceptualisation of how

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<sup>117</sup> This assumption stems in part from my own professional experience as a senior public relations practitioner operating in the political field.

<sup>118</sup> For an example of such a narrative, see Home Secretary Theresa May's interview with The Daily Telegraph (8 June 2011) about the government's work to counter the radicalisation practices taking place in British Universities. In the interview, which was published to coincide with the launch of the government's new Prevent strategy, Mrs May said that the government would challenge and oppose groups operating on university campuses which did not espouse 'British values'. This narrative echoed a speech made by the Prime Minister in February 2011 where he referred to communities 'behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values' (Cameron, 2011).

PR works relies on the expression of power, or capital, by the PR practitioner as they manage their engagement with other fields according to the shape of the narrative they wish to develop and then filter the contribution from other fields to ensure it conforms with their requirements. Here, the concept of PR logic comes to the fore, as the other fields adapt their ways of seeing, or operating, in order to conform with the requirements and expectations set by the public relations practitioner. Yet in the final stage, the public relations practitioners themselves are required to operate according to the logic of the media because the narrative in its final form has to conform to the demands and expectations of the journalistic field.

In order to substantiate this assumption, my fieldwork began with an assessment of the different types of capital held by PR practitioners. It is from the amalgamation and utilisation of capital within and between the sponsor's field and the journalistic field that PR logic evolves. This examination took place via a series of interviews, which are described in more detail below. As the interviews progressed, the strength of the connection between public relations practice and the political field became clear. Most of my public relations practitioner interviewees either worked or had worked within the political field,<sup>119</sup> or described the significance of the political field to the emergence of public relations in recent years. At the same time, it became clear in my interviews with representatives of Muslim organisations that all had experience of operating within the political field.

While the emerging findings highlighted the significance of the political field to my research, they also suggested that PR could be construed as a field in its own right, albeit a newly emerging one<sup>120</sup>. That PR is a social universe is clear: definitions of public relations place relationships at its essence and all of my interviewees spoke

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119 Clearly this is also a result of my sampling, which is covered further below.

120 This view of public relations as a young and emerging discipline is supported by the professional body in the UK, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR). In A CIPR report described as 'the next stage in the evolution of our profession' (Centre for Economics and Business Research, 2005), prominent PR practitioners describe PR as still 'growing up' and suggest that opinion is still divided as to whether PR consultancy is a 'serious career.' Despite these growing pains, the report states that the UK PR industry is made up of 48,000 professionals with a £6.5billion turnover.

about the importance of communication skills and relationships for their work<sup>121</sup>. Yet to be defined as a field, public relations would also need to be an autonomous social space, with its own history, structures and habitus. Work to establish whether PR could be classified as a field included a literature review relating to the history of PR, engagement with the professional body for public relations in the UK, the Chartered Institute for Public Relations (CIPR), and interviews with PR practitioners. The results of this are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Although public relations is commonly linked with advertising or journalism, its autonomy from those fields came out clearly through interviews; but the relationship between public relations and the political field is more complex. While many interviewees spoke at length about the recent history of public relations, none of them attributed significance to any public relations activity that took place prior to the 1990s. However, the associations between public relations and the contemporary political field are very strong: most interviewees linked the growth of PR as a profession with recent political history, citing the 1992 US presidential campaign of Bill Clinton or the Labour Party's 1997 General Election campaign in the UK as examples of both the effectiveness and increasing recognition of the value of public relations<sup>122</sup>. These events, they argued, supported by the prominence of political communicators such as Alistair Campbell and Bernard Ingham, helped to establish PR as a profession, although one which has now grown beyond the political field<sup>123</sup>.

The interviews suggest a common and recognised history for public relations, as well as a broadening of the profession's remit away from an exclusively political focus. But history and variety alone do not constitute a field. According to Bourdieu's definition, a field is autonomous or quasi-autonomous, with its own structures and laws of functioning; it is independent of politics and the economy. For public

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121 These relationships varied from relationships with senior management (Chair or Chief Executive), to journalists, different public groups and colleagues throughout their organisation.

122 One senior practitioner, outside government explained: 'I think that the Blair campaign, the Labour party campaign in the run up to the 1997 campaign was just a perfect lesson in how to use communications in a way that's going to persuade people to your cause'.

123 This is supported by a survey by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (2005) which cites retail, manufacturing, utilities and finance as examples of sectors engaging with public relations.

relations to be a field in its own right it must be autonomous, distinct from the political field from which it has emerged and in which it is so prevalent. This can be demonstrated, by examining the structures which help to shape PR today.

The scope of public relations activity is clearly defined and structured: interviewees provided a consistent picture of the different activities that made up their role<sup>124</sup>. These core activities are well established and recognised and acknowledged within the organisations they serve. While the role is established it is also expanding. Almost all my interviewees acknowledged the growing importance of social media, particularly Twitter, to their role<sup>125</sup>. Of the interviewees who worked in-house, most were supported by, or part of, established in-house teams structured according to the different activities undertaken.

The structures of the PR field are emerging: PR involves a clearly defined and recognised set of activities and there is a developing career path being championed by the industry's professional body<sup>126</sup>. The majority of PR practitioners work in-house, with broadly common grades and salaries according to their seniority and role<sup>127</sup>. The position of PR practitioners within organisations is often very senior, and this too is a recent development. A senior practitioner outside government explained: 'I think that one of the things that we've seen in the last 20 years is a genuine recognition in the role of communications at senior level. So when I started my career, we were the Cinderella making a noise at the back of the building. And I think it's a very different set up now if you go and talk to people working in communications departments. They, their status and their role is much more firmly recognised and that's key.' PR practitioners have a distinct position within

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<sup>124</sup> These typically included media relations, managing websites, events and stakeholder management.

<sup>125</sup> Although most of my interviewees accepted that social media is now part of a PR practitioner's remit, only one, senior practitioner within a government body spoke with confidence about tweeting; others were less certain and expressed nervousness about their lack of experience.

<sup>126</sup> This includes the introduction of 'chartered status' for senior practitioners, a form of professional recognition similar to that of chartered accountants, or surveyors. This is clearly an attempt to put the industry on a more professional basis, introducing a hierarchy of experience and skills, but it is also an example of the industry's struggle to introduce a professional structure that would be recognised outside the field. According to one senior practitioner outside government there are only 30 chartered practitioners in the UK – suggesting a reluctance or ambivalence on the part of senior practitioners to participate.

<sup>127</sup> The CEBR survey found that 81% of PR practitioners worked in house with comparable salaries across job roles.

organisational structures: while the most senior practitioners expect to be on the Board, even more junior PR staff have direct access to senior management. Finally, PR practitioners rely on strong internal and external networks through which they can gather information and apply their influence. Yet while Bourdieu describes the competitive nature of the journalistic field in terms of journalists competing with each other for scoops, this type of competition was not evident in the PR field<sup>128</sup>. The PR practitioners interviewed did not suggest that they were competing with other PR practitioners to get stories on the front page<sup>129</sup>.

Having identified the characteristics of the emerging PR field, the research sought to achieve similar clarity in relation to a Muslim, or Islamic religious field. This proved more challenging and ultimately, beyond the scope of this study. Islam as a religion, or Muslims as followers of that religion, could be included in any number of fields, including but not limited to, religion, education, fashion, arts or science. Exploring Islam as a religious field itself did not fall easily within Bourdieu's model of definition for a field. Attempts to characterise the Muslim or Islam religious field faltered, partly because the disparity and lack of homogeneity within the field meant there could be no contingent history or habitus within the field<sup>130</sup>. To define the Muslim religious field would require a broader spectrum of fieldwork than was possible within the confines of this research.

The decision not to define the Muslim religious field challenged the assumption of a PR trajectory as outlined above. The existence of such a trajectory assumes clear delineation between fields and a linear approach to the construction of narrative whereby the public relation practitioner guides the narrative in and out of fields before laying it to rest in the journalistic field. As the fieldwork demonstrated, the

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128 Bourdieu argues that the journalistic field exerts an increasingly powerful hold on other fields. This was not evident from my interviews; in fact, several interviewees spoke of the way that the growth in media had weakened the power and resources available to journalists.

129 Junior and senior practitioners, inside and outside government all talked in detail about interactions with journalists but spoke of their work in isolation, with no suggestion that they needed to persuade the journalist that their story was stronger or more appealing than someone else's.

130 Much of the literature about the nature of the Muslim religious field is constructed by those outside the field, including agents within the political and journalistic field. Often this narrative is politically biased, or inaccurate. For example, the Muslim religious field is hugely diverse, but may be depicted as homogenous. Similarly, the extremist views of small numbers of people within the field may be presented as representative of the whole field.

reality is more complex and multi-layered, with some public relations practitioners remaining fixed within the political field and some representatives of Muslim organisations joining them there. What emerged from the fieldwork is that all interviewees were positioned to some extent within the political field or had direct and recent experience of working within it, and it is within this context that the research is situated.

## Sampling

There were two different cohorts among interviewees: public relations practitioners and those representing Muslim organisations operating within the UK political field. Interviewees who were public relations practitioners were selected by snowball sampling, beginning within my own professional network of former colleagues and other contacts.<sup>131</sup> (My professional biography is included in Annex 3). The sample consisted of 10 men and 11 women, who were all white and, with one exception, based in the South East of England, mainly in London. The practitioners worked in-house, as freelancers or for PR agencies and had between six months and over thirty years' experience in public relations. In nearly all cases, initial contact was made by email, or through the LinkedIn social network. Where the sample 'snowballed' (e.g. through recommendations from an interviewee), the names of possible new interviewees came up spontaneously during the course of the interview rather than at my request.

A strong interconnection between public relations practice and the political field emerged during my interviews and this was reflected in the sampling and enhanced by the snowball effect. Most interviewees had a current or former role that was situated within the political field. For most, this meant employment within the public relations or communications function of a central government department or agency, but others had been employed in local government or by political parties. This

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<sup>131</sup> To avoid a conflict of interest between my professional role and my research, no-one I work with currently (either within my organisation or among professional contacts outside my organisation) was approached for interview. It was made clear to all interviewees that the research was unconnected with my professional role and all interviewees were given contact details (e.g. email address and phone number) that were separate from my professional contact details.

pattern was influenced to a large extent by the sampling method which began with my own contacts, reflecting my own professional networks within the political field. The sample was not restricted to practitioners within the political field, yet even interviewees who were employed by different agencies (in the fields of advertising, education and finance) spoke of the political nature of their role - responding to or seeking to influence changes in legislation or other elements of public policy.

While snowball sampling cannot claim to produce a sample that is representative of public relations practice, it has one significant advantage. Through snowball sampling within a relatively limited professional sphere it was possible to gain access to senior practitioners – for example those with the job title of Director of Communications in government departments and communications practitioners at 10 Downing Street - which would have been more challenging via another sampling method or approaching them cold. In total, just over half (11) of my interviews were with senior public relations practitioners and could be categorised as 'elite' interviews<sup>132</sup> (Aberbach and Rockman 2002; Berry 2002; Goldstein 2002; Neal and McLaughlin 2009; Moore and Stokes 2012). This categorisation, which is based on the seniority of their professional role or the location in which they worked<sup>133</sup>, served to position these agents at the centre of the political field before the interview had even begun and shaped my approach to the encounter<sup>134</sup>. Despite their senior position, the process of the interview was similar to those undertaken with other practitioners.

The dominance of practitioners within the political field means that, for the purposes of this research, interviewees have been grouped according to their employment and characterised as practitioners either within government or outside government. Those outside government often had political aspects to their role and were not necessarily operating outside of the political field. As many of the interviews were

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132 An elite is constituted of individuals and collectives that form a separate and distinct echelon or grouping in a given society or section of society. Elites are in a minority but typically can be seen to have knowledge, influence, control and power in a given setting or situation.

133 For example, an interviewee working in a communications role at 10 Downing Street was categorised as 'elite', although they were not in the most senior communications role.

134 In general, this categorisation as 'elite' was reinforced by the findings of the interviews, although sometimes for reasons other than their professional seniority.

among senior practitioners, an additional grouping of interviewees as 'junior' or 'senior' practitioners has been introduced. In this instance, a 'senior' practitioner is an in-house Director of Communications or agency equivalent, responsible for leading the public relations activity within their organisation (and usually a department or team of staff) and reporting directly to a Chief Executive, Permanent Secretary or other organisational leader. A 'junior' practitioner would typically be a press officer or agency account manager who engages directly with the media as part of their role but is not responsible for leading the public relations activity within their organisation.

All the interviews were secured through personal contact with a first approach being made by email or via LinkedIn either by me, or someone else making an introduction on my behalf. In this first approach it was made clear that the interview would focus on the nature of PR practice, rather than on the particular political or other context in which the interviewee was employed. This generated a response rate of over 90% with interviewees responding very quickly to the request – often sending a response email within minutes of receiving the initial contact. Despite demanding jobs and busy schedules, interviews were usually arranged within a week of the first approach, with interviewees stating their willingness to accommodate the research timetable, which they assumed was pressing<sup>135</sup>. Interviewees often showed a high degree of enthusiasm or interest in my research, with several using language such as: 'I would love to take part' in their acceptance, or expressing their enjoyment of participating in research of this nature.

The interviews, which were taped with the interviewees' consent<sup>136</sup>, took place face to face, and in one case, by telephone at the interviewee's request<sup>137</sup>. All the meetings took place at a venue of the interviewee's suggestion, usually a central

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135 In fact, my timetable was never fixed and I made requests assuming that interview dates would need to be scheduled weeks or even months ahead.

136 One interview was not taped, at the interviewee's request. This interviewee, who fell into the 'elite' category of interviews, expressed the view that they could be more open about their work if not on tape.

137 This interviewee had a disability which made travel difficult.



London bar or coffee shop and lasted no more than 45 minutes<sup>138</sup> and followed a semi-structured format based around open ended questions. This structure evolved somewhat during the course of the research and as the sample became more senior. When interviews were requested, all interviewees were informed of the nature of the research and my status as a doctoral researcher. Where snowball sampling had taken place, reference was made to the person who had made the introduction and the route by which they were known to me. Interviewees were given the assurance that the interview would stay focused on their professional roles and responsibilities; rather than delve into any aspect of their personal lives. It was also emphasised that my interest as a researcher was not focused on their employer but on their professional practice. This was reiterated during the course of the interview. When interviewees were asked to give examples, it was stressed that this could be from any stage of their experience. (In fact, without exception, all public relations practitioners spoke openly and fluently about their current roles.) Additionally, all interviewees were given the assurance of anonymity. At the meeting and before the interview began, interviewees were asked to sign a consent form signalling their agreement to participate in the research and this form is included at Appendix 2. They were also advised that at any time they could ask for the tape recorder to be switched off. Two public relations practitioners made this request this during the interview – on both occasions they recounted stories about named senior politicians which have not been included in this thesis.

Typically, the conversation began by asking the interviewee to describe their role, followed by a question about their career path to date. Interviewees were not given a steer about how to respond to this question and most responded with a timeline of their career beginning with an undergraduate degree. They were then asked to talk in detail about one particular piece of public relations work they had been involved in, with particular probing about the processes they had followed during this piece of work. In later interviews, as the importance of social capital emerged, this changed

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138 I set a time limit of 45 minutes for all interviews (with one exception where the subject volunteered that he was happy to talk for longer). This was based on my professional experience that, including time to settle in and wrap up, senior people would be reluctant to devote more than an hour of their time to a non-work related request. The time frame of 45 minutes was mentioned when I first contacted them asking for an interview.

to specific questions about their professional networks and the influence they had within their organisation. Finally, all interviewees were asked to explain how they thought the practice of public relations had changed during their career, and what, in their view, made a good public relations practitioner. For the more senior practitioners, who led communications teams or departments, this question was framed by asking them what they looked for when hiring junior staff.

Literature about elite interviewing (Aberbach and Rochman 2002; Goldstein 2002; Moore and Stokes 2012) suggests that a high degree of research into interview subjects is helpful in advance of the meeting, in order to give the researcher added credibility. Here, my own professional experience in public relations provided an advantage as I approached the interview with an in depth knowledge of the professional role my subjects fulfilled and, very often, understood the broad organisational structures within which they were operating. All of the public relations practitioners I interviewed acknowledged me as an agent within their field and this gave me peer status among senior practitioners<sup>139</sup>. Some of the junior practitioners acknowledged the seniority of my experience during the conversation.

On balance, my professional experience was an advantage during my fieldwork, helping secure access to senior practitioners in the political field and conferring a high degree of credibility during the interviews. I shared a common language with the interviewees and, by and large, their views about public relations as a profession. This familiarity built rapport and empathy with the interviewees, but risked a certain myopia in developing a critique of the nature of their practice. During the interviews with PR practitioners, I was regarded as an 'insider' within the profession rather than as an academic researcher<sup>140</sup> and this may have meant they were more open with me than they would otherwise have been. My 'insider' status was perpetuated by the context in which the interviews typically took place in the

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<sup>139</sup> Typically this was acknowledged by a reference to shared experience or shared professional contacts, or language such as 'As you know yourself...'

<sup>140</sup> This was evident in conversation before and after the formalities of the interview questions, when my interviewees by and large asked me about my professional work rather than my academic endeavours.

middle of a normal working day<sup>141</sup>. My professional experience carried a high degree of reflexivity too. As we shall see in the next chapters, interviewees portrayed a strong sense of mystification in their responses: suggesting an unwillingness or inability to reveal the exact processes or methods by which they worked. My participation in the same professional arena meant that I was part of that mystification<sup>142</sup> and so less likely to probe what lay behind it. Thus, during the interview it was harder for me to spot when interviewees glossed over the processes of their work, using phrases such as 'and so I just sorted everything out...' or 'I spoke to the journalist and it all worked out from there.' These phrases mask the detail of what actually took place but risked going unchallenged by me as a researcher, because I assumed I knew what the interviewee meant having undertaken similar processes in my own professional role.

Almost without exception, the interviews produced a rich flow of conversation and depth of response. Initial questioning about their background appeared reassuring to participants and often led spontaneously to reflection about the nature of public relations as a career and the authority and influence it inferred. My interviewees were skilled and practised performers, providing well-structured and controlled answers to questions. They rarely lost track of what they were saying and, even when answers were lengthy, referred back to the original question. They made little or no reference to my interpretative power as a researcher: this may be because they were reassured by my insider status or because their professional experience talking to journalists meant they were less likely to be affected by the capital I brought to my work as an academic researcher.

My interviewees' experience of engaging with the journalistic field was evident on occasion when they lapsed into what seemed to be a rehearsed spiel about their place of work or, to a lesser degree, their career path. Interviewees were clearly

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<sup>141</sup> This meant that I arrived at the interview straight from my place of work and returned there afterwards, thus reinforcing my status as a PR practitioner and peer, rather than a researcher.

<sup>142</sup> As well as being a participant in the mystification displayed by my interviewees, my role as researcher and communications practitioner carried with it its own mystification. While I attempted to delineate between the two roles when sourcing interviews and at the beginning of the meeting, this may have become more blurred as the meeting went on because of my 'insider' status.

used to answering questions about their place of work and although this was not the focus of the interview, their answers often framed their organisation in a positive light. Although they gave the impression of talking both fluently and freely, the control they were exerting over what they said was evident as most examples and vignettes were framed in a positive light, both for them as individuals and for their organisations. One senior practitioner, working inside government, peppered his narrative with disclaimers and caveats. For example, when talking about how Government Ministers listened to advice he added: 'I'm particularly talking of the communications function but I could apply it equally to the rest of the [government] department. I could probably apply it to other departments too if I had that experience'. At a separate point in the interview, when talking about communicating messages to the media he said: 'It's like that typical Sun headline where there's some scandal – we don't get caught in scandal – where there's some scandal and it doesn't matter whether it's a pound, ten thousand or a million, it's 'They spent a pound on this!'` The care taken to avoid any potential negative interpretation of what he said suggests the interviewee was used to being interviewed and was well aware of the potential of what he said being misconstrued.

This somewhat scripted approach could be disrupted by a return to questioning about the nature of PR practice. While my interviewees were clearly used to communicating a particular narrative about their own career or their employer, they were less well prepared to answer questions reflecting on the nature of their professional practice. As a result, these types of questions could be met by a brief pause for thought, with answers prefaced by the words 'I guess' or 'I think' , or an articulation of interest in the question, such as 'That's an interesting one...'. In contrast, questions which were answered with reference to their employer organisation were rarely answered with such initial hesitation. This suggests that answers to questions about public relations practice were less rehearsed and less familiar to participants than other narratives expressed during the interview.

The approach to interviews with representatives of Muslim organisations was similar, but the results were somewhat different. Again, snowball sampling was attempted,

beginning with some of my own contacts and approaching some of the biggest Muslim organisations in the UK on a 'cold calling' basis. LinkedIn was not a viable access route for these groups; not all potential interviewees could be found on the site and for those who did have a profile, my extended network did not include them. Instead, contact was made by email<sup>143</sup> or by phone and, on one occasion, via Twitter. I proactively shared a synopsis of my research and professional biography with potential interviewees. These are included at Appendix 3.

The success rate was much lower (less than 30%) than among the PR practitioners and ten interviews took place in total. Most potential interviewees did not respond to contact of any kind, even when the contact came from another interviewee making an introduction. Of those who did respond, several observed that they received numerous interview requests from researchers, particularly with regards to Islam and media. Here, my professional background carried no advantage, and even served to confuse some interviewees who seemed uncertain on what basis I was approaching them.

The interviews followed a similar format, lasting no more than 45 minutes with a series of open ended questions. Interviewees working on behalf of Muslim groups were given the same assurances of anonymity and asked to sign the same agreement form. Unlike my interviews with PR practitioners, which took place in a variety of locations, the majority of these interviews took place in respondents' offices<sup>144</sup>. Here, my status as an outsider was confirmed as my ethnicity, dress and sometimes even gender stood out within the office environment<sup>145</sup>. These interviews felt more formal, sometimes even stilted, and my interviewees were more likely to enquire about the academic credentials and status of my research.

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<sup>143</sup> Emails were sent from my University of Kent email address to provide reassurance of my status as a doctoral researcher.

<sup>144</sup> In two instances it took several exchanges of correspondence before the address of my interviewees' office was revealed. The interviewees said this was for security reasons.

<sup>145</sup> I made some adaptations to my approach reflecting my 'outsider' status: for example dressing conservatively and, where my interviewee was male, waiting to see if he would offer to shake my hand on meeting me.

The questions asked during these interviews changed over time: initially intended to probe respondents' familiarity with public relations practice, it quickly became clear that this was not a concept with which respondents were familiar or comfortable talking about. Instead, questions were framed in terms of media coverage of Islam and Muslims and the success or failure of work to challenge or change the media narrative. Questions did not assume interviewees' engagement with the political field but this was always raised by the interviewee. It was clear that each interviewee had worked with or alongside the UK government in recent years. Usually this related to the prevention of terrorism, but also to community cohesion or acting as an advisor on international affairs.

All the interviews, with both PR practitioners and representatives of Muslim groups, were transcribed and the transcripts analysed. Because of the political and potentially sensitive nature of the content of some of the interviews, all interviewees were offered the opportunity to review the transcript and redact any content if they wished to. Only one interviewee, a senior government public relations practitioner, asked to see the transcript and he did not make any redactions.

The transcripts were analysed in terms of content, tone and language with a particular focus on identifying references to types of capital and habitus. This was done through examining and comparing responses to questions about skills and success in public relations and by probing the process of how public relations practitioners worked, especially in relation to the networks utilised to achieve professional goals and the conferring and receiving of authority within their organisations. Representatives of Muslim organisations were similarly probed in relation to the skills and capabilities among their professional network and their interactions with other agents in the UK political field. For both groups, repeating characteristics or themes were drawn out: within the two groups of interviewees there were some clearly identifiable patterns of language and style of responses. In particular, within the public relations practitioner grouping, there was an evident mystification about the nature and process of their role. This is discussed in more

detail, together with the wider results emerging from this methodology, in subsequent chapters.

Field theory has proved to be a suitable methodological approach to help operationalise the theory of mediatisation and shape a response to some overarching questions about the construction of media narrative within the public sphere. It has provided a range of access points to engage with structural theories and enabled an exploration of the dynamics of power. These access points have included an exercise in defining fields which helped to shape the parameters of this research, resulting in a more detailed examination of the practice of public relations and the engagement of Muslim organisations with that practice, within one particular field. Other ways of engaging with field theory have included looking at the history of relevant fields, the examination of structures within fields and, finally, the fieldwork among agents within fields.

For a researcher, mediatisation theory, field theory and the nature of the practice being explored – public relations – sit well and comfortably together. Field theory's focus on journalistic capital means that it is particularly apposite for research examining the wider environment of media influence and effects, while its emphasis on relationships and interactions between agents found ready respondents in PR practitioners. The operationalisation of field theory in interviews, through questioning relating to capital and habitus, has been notably effective with PR practitioners. These practised elites, fluent in promoting themselves and their employers, readily engaged with questions about the social and cultural resources open to them as well as the skills and experience they brought to their roles. The result has been a rich flow of qualitative data, relating to their own status and their relationships with others, both within and outside the political field.

The experience of using field theory to engage with representatives of Muslim organisations in order to support and enhance the theory of mediatisation has proved more challenging. The extensive work needed to scope and define the Muslim religious field is outside the remit of this research and, although all the agents interviewed voluntarily positioned themselves within the UK political field, it

has been more difficult to situate their relative positions within that field. The networks and capital available to them have been less readily evident through the interviews, particularly with regards to public relations practice. However, it is here that the benefits of exploring power relations by establishing the relationships between agents comes to the fore. While the interaction between representatives of Muslim organisations and public relations practice (and indeed the journalistic field) is varied and unclear, an examination of their relationships and interactions with others both within and outside the field provides a way forward. The results are discussed in the next chapter.



## Chapter 4: The field of public relations

The research questions set out in Chapter 3 provide an exploratory framework for an examination of public relations practice. Previous chapters have established the theoretical framework and methodological approach which sit behind the questions. In particular, the discussion has set out the rationale for a sociological rather than management or organizational understanding of public relations, and its use primarily within the political field. By understanding how public relations practitioners make use of their networks, relationships and access to different types of capital the research aims to provide a more rounded perspective on public relations practice than some of the literature has previously achieved.

This chapter addresses the first four research questions set out in Chapter 3. Through a discussion of existing literature and fieldwork it seeks to understand the role of public relations within organisations, including those operating in the UK political field. The definitions that emerge are developed into a deeper understanding of the nature of public relations practice and the sources and type of capital that practitioners have access to. To do this, the fieldwork narrows its focus to the UK political field and seeks to understand how public relations functions within this particular sphere. The questions are intended to elicit an understanding of the different resources practitioners have to draw on in their work – including their professional networks, their skills, educational qualifications and professional experience. The final question seeks to understand how public relations practitioners' work can affect the organisations they represent. In particular, this area focuses on the logic of their work and the processes of change and transition that it can effect. What emerges from the fieldwork is a form of mystification of practice which is discussed in detail below. This mystification, which is perpetuated by practitioners themselves, takes the form of seemingly casual and dismissive descriptions of how they achieve what they do and the processes they are undertake. This mystification is an oblique expression of the symbolic power that practitioners hold as they contribute to the transforming process of mediatisation. Practitioners are aware of the potential of their work to influence both the media and

society more widely, but are reluctant to disclose the exact mechanisms by which this is achieved.

In particular, this chapter seeks to understand the relationship between public relations practitioners and the field in which they operate and their relative positioning within that field. It uses field theory to evaluate the contribution that public relations can make to the emerging discipline of mediatisation. It begins by asking if PR can be considered as a field in Bourdieusian terms, and considers the nature of professionalism in PR and the correlation between the emergence of a profession and the emergence of a field. To do this, it maps out public relations as a field in its own right, with a discussion of the emergence of public relations as a social arena, the distinctiveness of practice emerging through a debate about professionalism and the different types of resources or capital which public relations practitioners have to draw on. This combination of practice and capital helps to determine the habitus that practitioners bring to the field; it explores the structuring structures which characterise public relations and which help practitioners to succeed. The research goes on to draw conclusions about what this means for practitioners' ability to engage with others outside their field, and the expectations placed on them to do this. In keeping with Bourdieu's field theory and using the results of interviews with public relations practitioners, it goes on to establish the different types of capital available to PR practitioners and discusses PR as a relational practice which negotiates between differing fields. The chapter then goes on to look in detail at the role of public relations in the political field based on interviews with senior public relations practitioners working within government. Finally, it assesses the contribution this research makes to the role of PR in mediatisation and, in particular, to the emergence of PR logic.

## Definitions of public relations

Nearly 100 years ago, Bernays (1928) famously described public relations as the attempt by information, persuasion and adjustment, to engineer public support for an activity, cause, movement or institution. That definition proved to be the first of

many, and the history of attempts to define public relations is probably as long as the history of the profession itself. Fifty years after Bernays, Harlow examined 472 definitions of public relations in an attempt to arrive at one, definitive version (Harlow, 1977). Despite this effort, literature on public relations still approaches it through a range of disciplines including management, psychology, mass communication, economics or organisational studies (Ihlen and Van Ruler 2007). Perhaps unsurprisingly having considered such a large volume of interpretations about what public relations is, Harlow's final definition is a long one, which encompasses a range of functions for PR – from tracking public opinion to serving the public interest, utilizing change and serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends. Most fundamentally, Harlow concludes that public relations is a 'distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding and acceptance and co-operation between an organisation and its publics' (1976:36)<sup>146</sup>.

Today, the debate about what PR is, and where it is situated as a discipline has yet to be settled (Hutton 1999; Vercic, Van Ruler, Butschi and Flodin 2001; Baker 2002; Botan and Taylor 2004; Curtin and Gaither 2005; Van Ruler, Butschi and Flodin 2007; Ihlen and Van Ruler 2007; Crawford and Macnamara 2011). The early definitions, cited above, originated from America and PR is still dominated by American theory and practice (Vercic, van Ruler, Butshci and Flodin 2001). In 2012, Harold Burson, founder of one of the biggest global PR agencies, Burson Marsteller, criticized efforts by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) to come up with a new definition for public relations. The PRSA had concluded that PR was 'the management of the relationship between an organisation and its publics'. In response, Burson wrote: 'What I am talking about is best summarized in the rapper line 'if you're going to talk-the-talk, you gotta walk-the-walk.' I don't know of a more succinct definition of public relations' (Burson, 2012).

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<sup>146</sup> Like Bernays, Harlow was an American who founded and became president of the American Council on Public Relations (New York Times 1993). There are differences in approach to defining public relations between Europe and America. Van Ruler, Butschi and Flodin (2001) argue that in Europe at least, the translation of the term 'public relations' into different European languages influences the meaning and definition of the discipline. For example, the German term for public relations – Öffentlichkeitsarbeit – means public work and is explained as working in the public sphere, with the public and for the public, while in America, definitions revolve around the concept of PR as the 'management of the relationship between an organisation and its publics' (PRSA no date).

These differences in approach to defining public relations summarise the core of the debate about what public relations is: a management function or an activity focused on improving the quality of the public sphere through discourse and the free flow of information. This latter understanding of public relations includes a reflective responsibility to analyse the changing standards and values and society (Sharpe 2000; Curtin and Gaither 2005). The management perspective is that the role of the public relations practitioner is to convey these changes back to their sponsor organisation and to adjust the standards and values of the organisation regarding social responsibility and legitimacy (Hutton 1999). This perhaps is reflected Burson's appropriately soundbite like definition – 'you gotta walk-the-walk' – which encapsulates PR logic, but also in the other approaches to defining PR which suggest that organisations change (either through influence or through the building of mutually beneficial relationships) as a result of PR practice (Vercic, van Ruler, Butschi and Flodin 2001). These suggest not only that PR is a discipline dependent on effective relationships, directing the interactions that a sponsor organisation has with other groups, but also that it has the potential to affect significant change within its sponsor organisation. Thus, PR is not merely a discrete set of actions which can be started or halted at any time; but it goes to the heart of what an organisation does and how it operates.

Hutton (1999) chooses to define PR as a management discipline, identifying four different roles for public relations. These are managerial, operational, educational and reflective. The first three are activities that take place within an organisation, helping it manage relationships with external parties and prepare the way it communicates. The fourth, the reflective role, relies on the capability of the practitioner to operate outside their sponsor organisation, reading and reacting to the external environment. Sharpe (2000) errs towards the notion of public relations as a social function, suggesting that public relations is a form of communication which leads to understanding. The achievement of public relations is not through management performance, but through social behaviours with dialogue at the core. Public relations cannot be successful until an organisation achieves open, two way

communication, and changes in accordance with the outcome of that communication.

To understand public relations as a purely management function is to rely on a functional and one-way, transmission model of communication. As has been discussed in Chapter 2, this transmission model of communication fails to explain adequately the exchange of power and response between a communicator and their audience. To move away from a functional theory of public relations also demands a departure from a linear based communication model to the model of a more discursive process. This emphasizes the meaning-making of public relations and its relationship to culture rather than management. Aldoory (2005) attempts to reconcile these two approaches, arguing that dialogue, power and social meaning have become key concerns for both organisations and their publics because they affect relationships and relationship outcomes.

## The history of public relations and politics

For the scholar, there is a second debate to get to grips with concerning the definition of public relations. This is the historical approach: an attempt to define public relations by its evolution. Hutton (1999) dates the modern beginnings of PR to the early 20th century, tracking its evolution from 'a guide to social conduct' (1940s), to 'interpreter, devil's advocate and catalyst' (1950s and 60s) to 'distinctive management function' (1970s) (1999:201). He sums this up by suggesting that PR has evolved from: the public be fooled to the public be damned; the public be manipulated; the public be informed; and finally, the public be involved or accommodated<sup>147</sup>.

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147 Crawford and Macnamara (2011) observe that attempts to construct histories of public relations are characterised by their propensity to be about public relations for public relations. They suggest that the history of PR shows a trajectory (summarised by Hutton 1999) in which the relationship with publics evolves from indifference and even contempt towards the public to a full-fledged two-way relationship. This, they argue, permits PR practitioners and future practitioners to envision themselves in space and time with a clear picture of their collective accomplishments and contribution. While this observation reflects the risks of my own position as a practitioner and a scholar, it may also be applicable to studies of other fields. Nevertheless, Crawford and Macnamara may not be surprised that some of the most prominent scholars of public relations in the UK today, notably Professor Anne Gregory, and Dr Lee Edwards, are both practitioners.

In the UK, Gregory (2011) highlights the significance of the development of government communications and public information provision to the emergence of public relations, citing efforts by the Post Office to promote savings in the 19th century<sup>148</sup> as the beginning of mass public communication. It was a former General Post Office Public Relations Officer, Sir Stephen Tallents, who set up the Institute of Public Relations in the UK in 1948<sup>149</sup>. Davis (2000) supports this and states that historically, most interest in public relations was in its role in the political process – aiding politicians and state institutions in their attempts to manage the media<sup>150</sup>.

This association, between government or political communications activity and PR, was reflected by almost half my interviewees who cited examples such as the Labour Party's 1997 General Election campaign as central to the increasing recognition of the value of public relations.<sup>151 152</sup> These events, they argued, supported by the prominence of political communicators such as Alistair Campbell (who provided PR support to Tony Blair) and Bernard Ingham (who supported Margaret Thatcher), helped to establish PR within the political field. However, those interviewed referred merely to two or three decades of history, with little reference to any existence of PR before the 1970s. None of them attributed significance to any PR that existed prior to the 1990s. One interviewee was particularly dismissive of government communicators in the UK at the time of the 1982 Falklands war: 'You know, a little man with glasses who came out and read from a piece of paper at a set time each night, who wasn't seen as somebody who knew or shaped what was going on.' While this may seem like a casual dismissal of historic PR, it also sets a standard for

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148 She describes the Post Office's campaign to encourage savings in 1876 as the first government mass advertising campaign and the development of the Office of Special Inquiries and Reports in the Board of Education in 1895 as the first specialised information unit in Government.

149 The Institute, now with a Royal Charter, defines PR as 'about reputation - the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you' (Chartered Institute of Public Relations, no date).

150 The growth in the number of government communicators is evidenced by figures provided by the Cabinet Office to the House of Lords Communications Committee, which showed a 72% increase in the number of government press officers in central Whitehall departments between 1998 and 2008 (from 216 to 373). There was a corresponding increase in the number of staff employed in 'communications' by government departments in the same period (from 795 to 1,376) (House of Lords Communications Committee, 2008).

151 One senior practitioner said: 'I think that the Blair campaign, the Labour party campaign in the run up to the 1997 campaign was just a perfect lesson in how to use communications in a way that's going to persuade people to your cause.'

152 In similar vein, one interviewee spoke of a time when journalists would ring a local council leader direct to speak to them, whereas now local councils have teams of press officers.

the current day practitioner as someone who does know and does shape what's going on.

Grunig and Hunt (1984) made the first attempt to use the historical development of public relations to define different models of PR. They described the models as either one-way or two-way. For one-way PR, the behaviour and activity rest with the organisation conducting the PR. This can include 'propagandistic public relations', that seek media attention in any way possible, or the provision of public information (for example, via the production of organisational newsletters or magazines). The two-way models demand both change from the organisation conducting the activity and a response from the invited audience. In the model identified by Grunig and Grunig as most successful (1989) the organisation would use bargaining, negotiating and conflict-resolution strategies to bring symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes and behaviours of both the organisation and its publics (for example, through contact with the public via events or roadshows or more informal research). This was the first attempt to connect types of public relations practice with organisational success, and again suggests the impact of some type of PR logic, whereby the most successful public relations activity has an impact on the sponsor organisation as well as the intended audiences.

While management, organisation and publics continue to be dominant components of public relations activity, a more contemporary definition is that PR is about 'managing strategic relationships'. Hutton (1999) argues that there are many metaphors for PR, such as campaigner, image maker, reputation manager, but only one model, which is relationship management. Botan and Taylor (2004) take this one step further, describing PR from a 'cocreational' perspective, whereby PR practitioners and the public created shared meaning, interpretation and goals that go beyond any one organisational objective. This approach to understanding PR via the outcome of the relationships it manages and holds has been adopted by the industry's professional bodies, both in the UK and in the USA<sup>153</sup>.

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<sup>153</sup> The UK body for public relations – The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) defines PR as: 'Public Relations is about reputation - the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. Public

The lack of a common definition of public relations generates ongoing theoretical and academic debate and can also lead to confusion in terminology around PR practice. When asked how they defined their role, my interviewees described themselves as either communications or PR professionals and these two terms seemed to be interchangeable. This apparent ambiguity about how to describe their role did not seem to concern them and both descriptions seemed to encompass the same type of activity and, importantly, the same status and nature of relationships within their sponsor organisation. Similarly, interviewees did not seem perturbed or confused about the overall purpose of their role, and in this they appeared to bypass the theoretical debates about whether public relations is primarily a management function or one which focuses on discourse within the public sphere. Instead, they overwhelmingly presented their role as one which had always been focused on the creation of discourse and narrative within the public sphere (usually via their responsibility for managing relationships with the media) but which was now becoming more widely recognized within organisations. Alongside this recognition was a shift towards public relations as more of a management function, with associated accountabilities for performance (for example, measurement and evaluation), operational processes (for example appropriate sign off and approval of press releases and other documentation) and managing relationships internally (for example, utilizing internal networks for the creation of news and events).

While the debate about what public relations is continues, the scope of activity within the discipline seems more clearly defined and structured. All my interviewees provided a consistent picture of the different activities that made up their role<sup>154</sup>. This picture provided a more consistent 'bottom up' definition of what public relations involves than the theoretical debates. These core activities are well established and recognised and acknowledged within the organisations they serve. Yet, as the interviews demonstrated, while maintaining an organisation's contact with the media (sometimes described as 'media relations', 'press', or even 'spin') is a

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Relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics' (CIPR: About PR).

154 The activities include media relations; and it is to this element of their work that I shall primarily refer, using the term 'public relations' or 'PR'



significant part of PR<sup>155</sup>, it is just one part of a changing mix of communication practices<sup>156</sup>. Interviewees' exposure to other areas of communications' work (such as managing a website, organising events or using social media) depended on their organisation, their role and, to some degree, their level of experience.

As we have seen above, with a comparatively short history, public relations continues to change with ongoing debates about a theoretical and practical definition of PR practice. While history provides a useful context about the emergence of PR, evidence from my interviews suggests that its role in the workplace is still developing for both practitioners and their sponsor organisations. As one interviewee explained: '...whereas maybe in the past, issues' management was seen as separate to PR and comms. You do the fluffy comms bit, and we do the serious issues management. More and more I think they're merging, so comms is taking on a more strategic role, linking comms to business outcomes and employee engagement to business outcomes and seeing the value, rather than 'oh we just need you to fanny around with that document, or make that look pretty.' I think as a comms professional you're asked to do more now.' This explanation suggests a change in attitude from the sponsor organisation and a previous lack of understanding about what public relations does and can achieve. If public relations' focus on the public sphere is an accurate depiction of its purpose, it also suggests that this organisation has not previously been concerned with its position in the wider public sphere.

The ongoing debate about what PR is articulates its place and purpose within organisations and suggests a form of logic whereby PR can have an impact on both the organisation which sponsors the PR activity as well as on the recipients or audiences of the PR activity. This logic is dependent on the receptiveness of the sponsor organisation, as well as the expertise of the practitioner. If adopted, PR logic has the potential to change the way in which the organisation functions and

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155 According to a recent COMRES survey, the majority of in-house PR practitioners (78%) are likely to be involved in media relations (COMRES, December 2012).

156 This is supported by research by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations among communications professionals in the not-for-profit sector which reveals that while 91% of practitioners' organisations view their role as 'media relations', the practitioners themselves say they are responsible for activities including website development, organising events, developing strategy, fundraising, producing publications and public affairs (not defined) (CIPR Fifth Estate in partnership with Amazon PR, 2011).

relates to the public sphere. The aim of this research is not merely to provide a definition of PR, or a descriptor of the current activities that public relations practitioners undertake within their sponsor organisations, particularly within the political field. Instead, it seeks to establish how PR works as a social function, using field theory to understand the way in which practitioners negotiate between different fields or spaces – primarily that of their sponsor organisation and the journalistic field. In doing so, field theory supports an examination of dynamics and interplay of power between agents, and fields and the power or capital that the PR agent wields to achieve their goals. As we have seen, definitions of PR allude to the influence that it can have, but to apply field theory to public relations as a discipline a more rounded examination of how PR operates as a social function is needed. The power and capital that practitioners bring to their role, and the way in which they utilize this power, are important here, as this dictates how they are received by others both within their sponsor organisation and more widely. As has been discussed in chapter 3, it is only through understanding an individual agent's position in relation to others in the same field that it is possible to understand the distinctiveness of their role and contribution to the field. To achieve this, this chapter begins with a discussion about the professional status of PR as an industry and its position as a field.

## PR and professionalism

A discussion of professionalism within PR supports discussion of the nature of the PR field; Noordegraaf and Schinkel (2011) and Schinkel and Mirko (2011) observe that while Bourdieu discredited the notion of professionalism, he substitutes 'fields' for professions – seeing both as distinctive social spaces, held together by institutionalised practices (Bourdieu 1987, 1993). Like fields, professions have histories and are communities where different types of capital – such as education, networks and connections – prevail (Bourdieu 1986:241)<sup>157</sup>. All my interviewees made claims for increasing professionalism within the industry: one senior

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<sup>157</sup> The medical profession and legal profession are two examples of profession/fields: each with their own distinct practices, relationships between members and ways of operating.

practitioner outside government said he felt it was important that PR should be recognised as a profession in the same way as accountancy or law. Yet the drivers of this professionalism are not yet explicit and, as we shall see, this may impact on public relations' status as a field.

Sociological approaches (Johnson, 1982; Evetts 2011; Noordegraaf & Schinkel, 2011; Schinkel & Mirko, 2011) describe professionalism as the organisation of work by workers themselves, in contrast to the more hierarchical or managerial control of organisations. The concept of professionalism is linked to workers' initiatives to control themselves; deciding who can legitimately act as 'professional' members of the group and how members should behave. Membership of the group is achieved by having the right qualifications, training and education as well as adopting the right behaviour, or through compliance with particular codes of practice.

By setting its own standards, a profession becomes self-defining: it is the member practitioners who determine the qualifications or draft the codes of practice which are used to admit or exclude new members to the profession. Johnson suggests that this self-definition means that 'professional skills' are non-transferable: and this is what defines the professionalism of a particular community. Should others acquire them, the profession loses its value (1982:66).

This self-valorization is expressed in discourse within and about professions. Nearly all the interviewees asserted that PR is becoming more professional and they also defined themselves as PR professionals and talked about their professional status and professional experience. Within public relations, this discourse helps protect the status of individual practitioners, distinguishing them from those who are less expert, less experienced, or less knowledgeable. There is a distinction made between those who are proper professionals and those who are merely dabbling in PR as an afterthought or addition to a different role. As Johnson describes, the claims for professionalism are themselves the major conditions for professionalization. The discourse and language of professionalism act as a point of similarity between members of the same profession, while preserving their individual and collective distinction from others.

Johnson suggests that in setting standards for themselves, workers are taking over the historical role of the state in defining both professional work and professionalism by authorising licenses for certain types of work and setting standards of practice and regulation. Yet Evetts (2011) suggests that this is changing as professionals now work for employing organisations and professionalism is, for the most part, constructed and imposed from above, by employers and managers. Johnson calls this 'corporate patronage' (1982:66), where the professional shares the values and, to some extent, the status of their employer-patron, who makes judgement on and evaluates performance and success. Thus, the professional takes on the social origins and characteristics of those who use their services and defers primarily to their employer rather than their 'professional' community. As the interviews show, practitioners may choose to align themselves with their employers, but within the PR field there is a drive to support, or even supplant, the standards of employer organisations, with standards set across the industry, including the 'gold standard' of chartered status.

The public relations industry has a 'professional' body, The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR)<sup>158</sup>, which promotes formal educational structures and career paths for PR practitioners. It has a code of conduct and qualifications for members and provides training for members and non-member practitioners. The CIPR has just over 10,000 members (CIPR 2013)<sup>159</sup>, while its own research suggests that there are nearly 50,000 PR practitioners in the UK (Centre for Economics and Business Research, 2005). In 2005 the institute achieved a royal charter, enabling its members to apply for individual chartered status.

According to the CIPR, anyone with Chartered status is a senior public relations professional whose experience, knowledge and insight has been tested by the professional body for PR practitioners in the UK. The test involves a three stage assessment process, involving an academic thesis, demonstration of practical experience and an interview (CIPR: Chartered Status FAQs, no date). The CIPR

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<sup>158</sup> [www.cipr.co.uk](http://www.cipr.co.uk).

<sup>159</sup> In 2013, total membership stood at 10,401, of whom 1,073 were students taking PR qualifications (CIPR 2013).

claims that chartered status represents an increased professionalism within PR. A member of staff told me: 'It [chartered status] was part of the CIPR's new aspiration to present the PR profession more professionally – for it to aspire to be a profession really, rather than a craft or a ... you know....a sort of... I suppose, you know, from time to time the PR profession has aspired to have that kind of professional status, but it actually needs some symbols and some evidence base to show that and I think that chartered practitioner was very much part of that.' This response suggests an historic ambiguity about public relations' status as a profession, along with a desire to redress this. However, in order to achieve professional status, an evidence base needs to be created. The Chartered Practitioner scheme attempts to utilize the experience of senior practitioners to fulfil this. This tautological approach is mirrored by research by Grunig (1990:135) in which she measures public relations practitioners' professionalism. However, in this approach professionalism is gauged partly by practitioners' participation in their professional body – a self-serving activity which does not reflect on practice or status outside of the profession.

Despite this, only a small number of senior practitioners have applied for, and achieved, the award<sup>160</sup>, suggesting that attempts to drive professionalism by introducing a hierarchy of accreditation are not important to practitioners within the industry<sup>161</sup>. While the industry is dominated by graduates with degrees covering a range of subjects, few have a public relations degree or PR related qualification. This was supported by the interviews among PR practitioners, where, of those who took part, although all were graduates, only two had a public relations or related qualification. According to the CIPR, the need for qualifications is increasingly recognised by practitioners<sup>162</sup> and several interviewees named this as a symptom of

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<sup>160</sup> An interview with the CIPR revealed that the number of chartered practitioners was 'about 40'.

<sup>161</sup> The CIPR provide a range of qualifications for practitioners at different stages of their career. While a less experienced practitioner can register for 'accredited' status, only the most senior can apply for an individual charter. This career path is actively being reviewed. A member of staff explained: 'It isn't a kind of, necessarily a seamless transition from accredited practitioner to chartered practitioner, so perhaps that's one of the things we might look at because they're very different processes.'

<sup>162</sup> Speaking on behalf of the CIPR, a spokeswoman said that: 'In the last 18 months, two years, we've actually seen an increase in applications, in enrolments for professional qualifications, which in a still difficult economic context is quite heartening and encouraging.' She speculated that the difficult economic climate might be one reason for this as practitioners looked to qualifications as a means of gaining competitive advantage for jobs. The CIPR Annual Report 2012 reveals that student membership was up by 259% in that year, compared with the previous twelve months (CIPR 2012).

professionalism, with one citing the 'enormous array of events, lectures, books, measurements, professional qualifications.' Despite this acknowledgement of the existence of professional qualifications, take up appears to be comparatively low. This is likely to be because other attributes unrelated to academic achievement, such as high levels of social and cultural capital, such as that utilised through high value informal networks, are more relevant to success.

Johnson rejects efforts to find out what the special attributes of a profession are, arguing that there is no single ideal profession against which others can be judged and that assumed professional attributes differ widely across occupations<sup>163</sup>. Instead, he suggests it is more useful to examine the circumstances in which people in an occupation attempt to turn it into a profession and themselves into professional people. Johnson suggests that this is about group mobility and the sources of power that are available to occupational groups. This seems particularly apposite for PR as an occupation, where the professional body is seeking to acquire more professional status and recognition among its members. While the interviews with practitioners echo this yearning for professional recognition, they also reveal a reluctance to take part in the more structured activities promoted by the professional body.

This short summary of some of the main themes around the nature of professionalism raises some pertinent questions for this research. While nearly all interviewees spoke of increased professionalism within PR, this is not strongly supported according to the characteristics of professionalism described above. For most of interviewees, the idea of 'professionalism' in PR did not mean achieving a particular accreditation, but meant being more business-like and working more closely with other business functions. Interviewees also expressed a desire for the contribution that public relations makes to be more widely recognised and understood within their organisations. As one interviewee explained: 'I think business has demanded that communications gets more professional. I think... I

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<sup>163</sup> Johnson lists some of these attributes, including skill based on theoretical knowledge, provision of training and education, testing the competence of members and adherence to professional code of conduct (Johnson, 1982).

think as you move to take a seat at the board table or to align yourself with strategic goals you have to be more professional, more considered and more robust. Robust around things like measurement and return on investment, because business is driving that, the industry has had to respond.... you hear less of the 'PR girl' and it's becoming a real profession.' This suggestion, that PR professionalism is linked to an understanding of business and is being driven more by demands of employers than by the industry itself, is supported by the low take up of chartered status<sup>164</sup> and comparatively low membership of the professional body.

The low numbers of practitioners participating in setting standards and control for the industry suggests that public relations' self-determination of professionalism is weak. There is no industry-wide agreement about who may legitimately act as a PR professional, and no proactive regulation of professional behaviour. In contrast to the protection and distinction of expertise that Johnson refers to, the PR practitioners I spoke to suggested that their skills were transferable. One interviewee explained: 'I think that what communications people do, what they bring to the party that is extra, is time and resources to do their job. This is their job. So while other people are doing what their jobs are, although they could be good communicators, they haven't got time to do it.' Not only does this casual dismissal of PR skills counter any suggestion that PR is a profession with a unique set of skills, it also suggests that PR people are given what others are not: time and resources to do a job. This conforms with Evett's argument and Johnson's model of patronage: the conditions needed to do PR are conferred by the employer, rather than pre-existing within a separate professional community.

As is described below, practitioners are adept at creating a mystique around their work by, on the one hand, claiming that there are no specialist skills required to succeed in PR, while on the other, remaining vague and elusive as to the details about how they operate. This lack of clarity about what PR is or how it works counters the emergence of professionalism, suggesting that there is no elite or

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<sup>164</sup> The CIPR annual report does not reveal how many chartered practitioners there were in 2013, but simply says that seven practitioners were awarded the accreditation (CIPR 2013).

highly skilled group of practitioners – anyone with time and common sense can undertake the tasks. This mystification is part of the logic of public relations practice. The introduction of professional standards would help to make this logic more visible but, at the same time, could potentially also diminish it by attempting to standardise something which is currently given credence as a result of its ambiguity and the difficulties in defining it.

## Professionalism and field theory

While sociological approaches to the study of professionalism concur that to be a professional worker means to be appropriately educated and well behaved, Bourdieu goes further, suggesting that the professional worker behaves according to the logic of the professional field in which he or she occupies a position (Warde 2004:15). A profession's self-defining emphasis on qualifications, codes of practice and other standards strengthen the capital within the profession and make it legitimate. As Noordegraaf and Schinkel explain (2011), professional capital must be acquired in order to become professional, but this is a competitive struggle: if professionalism were open to everyone, it would lose its value. It is the distribution of economic, cultural and social capital that determine who is able to acquire professional capital and how it is done.

Thus, they suggest, professionalism is a form of symbolic capital which contributes to the autonomy of the field. The self-defining nature of professionalism creates a shared recognition and legitimacy of the capital; workers whose behaviour conforms with the logic of the field will gather more of it. The more capital a worker possesses, the greater their influence within the field: it is this conflict and struggle for capital that is intrinsic to all fields.

Bourdieu illustrates this approach in his study of the juridical field (Bourdieu, 1987) which outlines the protocols, assumptions and behaviours professionals in the field used to define their own activity for themselves and for others outside the field. Within the legal field there is a clear history, strong traditions, distinctive language



and patterns of relationships which help deliver autonomy to the field, reinforcing the position of those within it, and keeping others out. These things give agents within the field a secure identity, a status, and above all a body of powers (or competences) that are socially recognized and therefore productive.

Like other fields, it is a site of struggle; Bourdieu describes it as the site of a competition for monopoly of the right to determine the law (1987:817). The practical meaning of the law is really only determined in the confrontation between judges, lawyers and solicitors: each motivated by different interests. The logic of the juridical field is determined by two factors: first, the specific power relations which give it its structure and which order the competitive struggles which occur within it, and, on the other hand, by the way it functions – the written and unwritten rules which constrain and determine the actions of agents within the field and which determine what it means to be 'juridical'. For Bourdieu, one of these is the use of juridical language which is a mixture of specialist, technical and common language. The distinctive nature of juridical language, he argues, creates a rhetoric of impersonality and neutrality that characterises the operation of the field. Bourdieu gives the example of the judgment of a court (1987:838), which establishes the facts and truth and which makes decisions on conflict or matters that have not been decided elsewhere. The judgement, he explains, is a performance, representing authorized, public and official speech: spoken in the name of and to everyone. Thus, he concludes, a judge succeeds in creating a situation in which no one can refuse or ignore the point of view, the vision, which they impose.

Bourdieu's description of the juridical field provides an opening to a similar analysis of PR. While the juridical field is the site of a competition for monopoly of the right to determine the law, the definitions of PR described above suggest that the PR field could be the site of competition for reputation. Yet the weakness of PR's self-determination of professionalism, together with the views expressed through interviews, suggest that standards of professionalism within the industry are being driven by employer organisations rather than collectively by practitioners themselves. If this is the case, it is employers' recognition of the value and

importance of PR – and their requirements for greater accountability and measurement of performance - that is leading to greater demands of practitioners. As the interviews suggest, this is supported by an increasing and reciprocal expectation among PR practitioners that they will be influential in an organisation's decision making and represented on its Boards.

This is a comparatively recent development: almost thirty years ago, Broom and Dozier (1985) identified a separation between PR and the dominant coalition of executives who were influential within any given organisation. The isolation of PR from decision makers, they argued, limited its practice to the role of explaining and justifying others' decisions. This conclusion was echoed by Grunig's review of research (1990) which concluded that CEOs considered PR as 'marginal at best', seeing the function as a myopic, necessary evil (1990:122). While her study found a perception of a widespread understanding of public relations and little opposition to it from senior management, this does not equate to value.

## The value of PR

Grunig's research (1988, 1990) attempts to define the different elements that contribute to the value organisations place on the public relations department or function. Although this research would contend that her conclusions are now out of date, her analysis of the different criteria that contribute to value in PR still resonates today. For Grunig (1990), there are five broad categories of PR's value: its position in the organisational hierarchy; the authority of PR practitioners; the autonomy given to the PR department; the involvement of top management in public relations and the education, specialised training and professional involvement (for example, with professional bodies) of individual practitioners. The first and last of these two criteria are discussed elsewhere in this chapter; concepts of autonomy and authority within PR are discussed below. These issues relate to the power experienced by public relations practitioners: the power to act and make decisions.

Grunig (1990) assesses levels of power and autonomy by asking practitioners about the ways in which these are demonstrated in their work. Authority includes the power to hire staff, to set up media interviews or approve expenditure, while autonomy is measured in part by the extent of the 'clearance process' within an organisation – this means approval for the content of news releases and other written articles.

Most participants in Grunig's research indicated that they experienced a limited degree of authority and autonomy and gave explanations for this including sexism, newness to the office, being in a regional office rather than headquarters or restrictive government policy. None of these issues was raised by interviewees, and the most constraining factor in Grunig's work – a lack of education in PR on the part of the dominant coalition of senior managers – seems to have been circumvented in today's organisational structures. This research has not made the same quantitative evaluation as Grunig, but while interviewees may still be subject to formal approval processes, few referenced these in detail. Instead, they associated their authority with the relationships they had, and their membership of the 'dominant coalition' (1990:117). While CEOs and other organisational leaders may not understand PR, all the interviewees claimed a widespread acceptance of the need for it and its centrality to their organisation's operation. As one senior practitioner inside government explained: 'If you think about what government does, it thinks about, consults on, creates, persuades on, articulates and ultimately, disseminates policy. Policy is an intangible and it is brought to life through communication. So most of the people who are here [within the government department], most of the good ones, are themselves good communicators'. Communications, or public relations, is at the heart of what government does, not only in terms of communicating finished policy but in the development of it. The same interviewee went on to describe the communications' function which he leads as the 'DNA' of the government department in question.

Grunig asserted that the characteristics of PR practitioners themselves were a significant factor in their own failure to influence, citing lack of broad business

expertise, passivity, naiveté about organisational politics and inadequate education, experience or organisational status: 'For whatever reason, public relations professionals rarely enjoy an influential position within their organisation. As a result, one can only hypothesize about the effects of a powerful public relations department' (Grunig 1990:148). In comparison with the present day, exclusion from the Board room was given as an example of PR's irrelevance, while Grunig noted that the effect of this would be to inhibit the professional development of individual practitioners and of the entire field of public relations.

The speed in which the PR industry has changed in recent years is illustrated by Hon's research (1997), published seven years after Grunig's. Based on interviews with both PR practitioners, CEOs and other managers, Hon identifies different attributes of PR effectiveness and, already, a broader understanding of business is evident. Hon's list of attributes includes managing risks, building relationships, achieving goals and affect legislation, as well as more functional attributes, such as fostering media relations, increasing understanding and disseminating the right messages. Whereas relationship building is absent from Grunig's review of existing literature, Hon identifies this as one of the major dependent variables for public relations effectiveness. The other is earning respect. These two, Hon suggests, contribute to reputation, the overarching measure of PR effectiveness.

This discussion suggests that PR is struggling to emerge as a profession in its own right. The interviewees unanimously supported this struggle, identifying themselves as professionals who made a valuable contribution to their employer organisations. Yet the evidence for self-determination is weak, and here PR practitioners seem to rely on the patronage and judgement of their employer organisations to define their status. Only a minority of practitioners conform to the standards developed by their peers, via the CIPR's educational qualification and other accreditations.

PR has changed and is changing fast. While the industry in the UK may have originally emerged from the political field, the range of sectors in which practitioners operate has spread significantly to include charities, retail, utilities, manufacturing,

finance and the public sector. This is backed up by figures which show the reach of the industry: in 2005, the UK PR industry employed 48,000 practitioners, with a £6.5 billion turnover (Centre for Economics and Business Research, 2005: 35). Six years later, in 2011, a different survey estimated the value of the industry in the UK to be £7.5 billion, and that 61,600 people were employed in public relations (Public Relations Consultants Association, 2011). While practitioners view the industry as still very young<sup>165</sup>, there is no doubt that the PR industry is growing. As one interviewee described: 'When I first turned up at [names county council] in 2001 it was just the county press officer. There used to be a county press officer. Now that team is 20 and it's one of the smaller ones. There are just so many more people in PR.' Few other organisational functions or departments would have grown to twenty times their original size in less than two decades, particularly in organisations funded by the public purse.

As a profession, or a field, PR is not comparable with law or medicine or accountancy but its changing value to business is clearly not a series of isolated events. I would contend that it is emerging as an autonomous field: a separate social universe, with its own laws of functioning, independent of those of politics and the economy (Bourdieu, 1993:162). Bourdieu describes a field as a 'social universe' and PR is clearly that. Definitions of public relations place relationships at its essence and all of the interviewees spoke about the importance of communication skills and relationships for their work<sup>166</sup>. The centrality of relationships to PR practice means that field theory is a useful way to analyse the way in which power is symbolised and operationalised within PR<sup>167</sup>. The importance of relationships means there is potential for high levels of social capital<sup>168</sup> among practitioners: in other

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165 In the CEBR report, the President of the CIPR, himself the Chief Executive of a PR consultancy, describes PR as a 'maturing, confident, growing profession', while other practitioners write that the opinion is still divided about whether or not it is a serious career (Centre for Economics and Business Research, 2005, pp. 4-7).

166 These relationships varied from relationships with senior management (Chair or Chief Executive), to journalists, different public groups and colleagues throughout their organisation.

167 This approach has been tested and validated by Anheier et al in a study of the social network of writers in the German city of Cologne which confirmed that writers' position within the social hierarchy was determined by the volume and composition of the relationships available to them (Anheier, Gerhards, & Romo 1995).

168 Bourdieu defines the concept of social capital as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition' (Bourdieu:1986) .

words, the opportunity to accrue benefits through networks and relationships<sup>169</sup>. However, although as a practice, public relations meets the criteria set out for a field, the practitioners who took part in this fieldwork looked to their employer or sponsor organisation's field first and foremost. As is evidenced by the low take up of professional qualifications and Chartered status, public relations practitioners do not seek to enhance their position with the PR field, but within the field in which they are currently operating. When asked about their career history, none of the practitioners questioned made reference to competition for jobs within the PR field. Instead, they presented their careers as seamless transitions from one role to another; any notion of a struggle with and between other agents in the same arena was notable by its absence. Some practitioners spend their career within a particular field (for example, several interviewees had spent a large part of their career working within the political field), while others move between fields, utilizing their social and cultural capital to do so. What was clear from the interviews was that it is the sponsor organisation's field which benefits from and acts as a source of capital for the practitioner rather than the public relations field.

## Public relations and social capital

In an ethnographic study of PR practitioners within a particular organisation, Edwards identifies high levels of social capital among the practitioners she observed. She describes a reliance on strong internal and external networks in order to gather information that can be subsequently used to apply influence. While some of the interviewees for this research acknowledged this reliance on others in their organisation for information gathering<sup>170</sup>, others were dismissive of its significance and talked with more emphasis about how they can use that information and networks to exert influence over others<sup>171</sup>. For example, one interviewee recalled

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<sup>169</sup> In her ethnographic case study of the Corporate Affairs team of a large passenger transport company in the north of England, Edwards (2008) concludes that the most fundamental requirement for corporate affairs to conduct its job effectively was access to extensive networks.

<sup>170</sup> For example, one interviewee talked about her reliance on colleagues to provide her with information that she could use in constructing press releases about her organisation.

<sup>171</sup> Several interviewees talked about using their network to find new jobs. One spoke of being 'poached' from one role and being offered another through his network. Another interviewee who had a particular PR specialism, talked of having 'made a bit of a name for myself, I had a bit of a reputation.'

how he helped a membership organisation respond to inaccuracies broadcast about it in a BBC TV programme. The organisation had failed to respond to the programme's producers when they had made contact in advance of broadcast. He explained: 'Their own internal processes were poor, because they had been approached by the TV company but they hadn't really... but the TV company's approach hadn't gone to the right person, or that person hadn't really understood the severity of or seriousness of the issue and hadn't taken action at the right time. If their own internal systems had been better, they would have had months to assemble a case and make a proper case to the broadcaster.' This answer implies that a 'proper' response to the broadcaster could have been assembled had the organisation's own processes been slicker, allowing it the time to respond. The interviewee is not concerned that the organisation may not have had the relevant information to hand because this data could have been assembled or created. Rather, he is more concerned about the failure to manage relationships with the media appropriately.

These responses begin to elicit a sense of the different styles of working that public relations practitioners have, compared with others in their organisation. For practitioners, the continuing challenge is to influence others to their way of thinking and operating. This sense of influence and authority is fundamental to success for practitioners; they cannot operate alone, but need others to support and reinforce their professional behaviour. By utilising their social capital, they can claim access to resources possessed by their associates. Talking about how he sought to influence others, one interviewee explained: 'I think that in this profession you can make the case quite strongly and there are other ways to get your way, in terms of the internal organisation....you can use various other people... you pre-brief other people, your contacts internally, and ensure you're all singing from the same hymn sheet.' The use of contacts reinforces a circle of influence for the practitioner; not only is he responsible for what is said, but he also decides who gets to say it. One interviewee gave a revealing description of how his social capital enabled him to acquire a single piece of information which he used to both influence and access the

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resources of an economically powerful network. Having found out over a drink with a government adviser that the Prime Minister was planning to announce a change of policy affecting the industry in which he worked, he texted his Chief Executive that same evening and brought together a network of senior business leaders who, within a period of about four months, committed £200 million to funding an alternative course of action. While his organisation had not provided any of the funding, the interviewee described how he positioned himself at the heart of this activity: 'I guess I was coming up with ideas and I was also the strategist. But also I was doing a lot of work on documentation, documents, proposals, liaising with the different stakeholders wherever they were and keeping all the balls in the air.' His personal social capital was enhanced by this activity, as the government accepted the proposed alternative, and his network then extended to include civil servants, politicians and PR agencies.

As a researcher using snowball sampling, my contact with the interviewees was made possible as a result of their, and my, professional networks and is likely to have contributed to the social capital held by both sides. As described in an earlier chapter, many of the contacts were made using the LinkedIn networking site, and have resulted in 'LinkedIn' connections being made either before or after the interview. The practitioners interviewed were prepared to invest their time in taking part in the interview and, despite their busy schedules, all the interviewees assumed I would want to meet within a week of my first request<sup>172</sup> and suggested times and dates to meet that accommodated this. Several of them asked about my professional standing and how my research would enhance it. Others referred to my professional role, having researched my background in advance of the interview, or expressed the view that I would know about their background as the result of similar research. More than one interviewee expressed pleasure at the prospect of contributing to, and possibly being quoted in, original academic research.

One of the most striking elements arising from the fieldwork is the social capital that practitioners gain from their access to some of the most senior people within their

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<sup>172</sup> This was not a priority for me, and I made no reference to time frames in my request for interviews.



organisations. The practitioners who took part had between six months and thirty years' experience in PR, and every single one had a network that extended directly to the most senior management of the organisation they worked for, irrespective of their own role in the organisational hierarchy. Talking about the influence she had early on her career, one now senior practitioner said: '...you know, it always struck me, you know as flying without a safety harness sometimes, because of that disparity of seniority. So if you're good, and you're making the right calls, then yes, it can be hugely influential, but at that level of experience - I look back now and think oh gosh, did I do that, did I have that level of access?' Social capital, then, belies seniority of position within an organisation; instead it is something that PR practitioners have access to, and learn to utilize, very early in their careers.

This is reinforced by an annual '29 under 29' feature in the PR industry's trade magazine, PR Week – a list of practitioners under the age of 30 who the magazine deems to show particular promise (PR Week 2011). There are no published criteria for determining their inclusion, but their accomplishments extend beyond business acumen, or success in media relations, to include skills and characteristics which illustrate the high levels of social and cultural capital successful PR practitioners must possess. In 2011, the list included a 24-year old, who had set up her own PR agency and is a violinist, a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, speaks fluent German and Spanish and has run two marathons. Another practitioner featured has just three years' experience and 'is a comms counsel to senior government officials and ministers' while a third aged 28, 'in little more than a year in the job, has established herself as a trusted adviser to senior leaders and the global comms function [in her employer, a multi-national organisation].' In common with the evidence from my interviews, the success and potential of these young practitioners is judged, at least partly, on the basis of their relationships with senior politicians and business executives.

For practitioners lower down the hierarchy, working as press officers, their relationship with senior management is often functional, rather than strategic and comes from being able to determine what the organisational leader says, or even

speaking for them. Describing his conversations with journalists, one junior practitioner, working outside of government said: 'It is very much up to me what I say and how I phrase it. When one thinks about authority and power... I don't really have the authority but I have quite a lot of power to choose to say whatever I want really, or put whatever kind of spin or angle on it.' This distinction between authority and power reflects the different kinds of status that public relations practitioners can possess. While they may not have the authority that stems from a senior position in the organisational hierarchy, their power stems from their networks both within their organisations and among journalists and the exclusive access they have. Access to senior management confers status on the press officer that can be used to influence others: another junior practitioner working outside government described how he persuaded a national newspaper journalist to come and conduct an interview with his chief executive despite not having a particular story to offer. He put together a briefing for his chief executive which he used as a basis for a conversation with the journalist : 'We just wanted a meeting with a journalist and whatever comes out of that is a bonus, but actually it was about increasing and improving the profile of our chief exec... and I spoke to [the journalist] and he said: 'Well if I come in and see you what will you talk about' and I was like 'Well you might be interested in this, this and this', and then it just grew organically from there.' The press officer's casual description of the conversation belies the fact that he is constructing and directing a media event. The organisation has no particular news to present, simply a desire to increase the profile of the chief executive. Despite this, the press officer works to generate interest from a national newspaper journalist by constructing news which both influences what the journalist eventually writes about and shapes the message that comes from his organisation. The press officer's role is to be a bridge between his organisation and the journalistic field; in doing so he negotiates between the two, recognising and responding to the demands of each. The end result benefited all parties: the journalist was credited with the publication of a two page feature while the chief executive welcomed the recognition and status national newspaper coverage accorded him.

The press officer's role as bridge gives them a type of power which is unrivalled within their sponsor organisation; the power to determine how the organisation presents itself and how it is represented through the news media. With journalists increasingly seeking news from existing digital or other news sources (Klinenberg 2005), interviewees were aware that journalists are dependent on them as sources of material. This dual dependence – from both the journalist and their sponsor organisation - places public relations practitioners in pole position to influence both what their sponsor organisation says publicly and what it is written about it. As one senior interviewee operating within government explained: 'And you know now, the number of times I send out press releases these days and the whole damn thing is reprinted ...these days if you send out a long press release the whole damn thing will be reproduced, and in quite significant journals... And so there's a complexity in that change in that quite often journalists will come to you; particularly when they're doing the sensitive issues and they will not have a clue at all, and so you are starting right at the base level... It can be quite difficult if somebody comes at you from a particular angle because actually you need to educate them from the base line and they need a lot of support in delivering the story.' Here, the journalist is not just dependent on the press officer because of limited access to economic or other resources in terms of news gathering, but also because of their own lack of cultural capital or knowledge and experience in particular subjects. The practitioner can compensate for this by providing information which becomes news and which is framed by the interviewee as providing support to the journalist in doing their role. In this, public relations logic begins to take shape, as the practitioner chooses how to represent their organisation and their words are reprinted without significant editorial challenge.

At a more senior level, practitioners increasingly expect their network to extend to Board level within organisations. As one senior interviewee inside government put it: 'I mean look at the old board level diagram. PR used to be a line that was going off from marketing, it wasn't even on the page, and now I think there's usually a direct line from the Board with many PR directors at Board level.' Such a senior position

gives practitioners the status to influence and direct important organisational decisions.

My interviews suggest that PR practitioners clearly enjoy and, to a large degree, expect to have a high level of social capital within their field. This social capital is prevalent within their organisation and beyond, in particular to the journalistic field. There is a clear valorisation present within the relationships and networks that deliver this capital: as the PR practitioner confers status on the leaders of the organisation through their work, so the leaders rely on, and confer authority on the PR practitioners. Often this leads to a close working relationship between leader and PR practitioner<sup>173</sup>. When asked how he influenced strategic decisions within his organisation, on senior interviewee working outside government explained: 'I guess it was in [chief executive's] office. Then [decisions] would go to Board level – to the Council and Executive, but it was my direct relationship with [chief executive]. I was trusted.' Here, the social capital is conferred on the practitioner by his admittance to the room where decisions are made; this generates trust, which in its turn reinforces social capital as decisions are referred up the organisational hierarchy to the Chair and Board.

What is less clear from interviews is what it is that enables this social capital to be acquired. The practitioners I spoke to were vague about where the authority comes from which enables them to exert such influence. While all acknowledged the influence that PR people carried, their explanations about how that authority was conferred were varied, ranging from claims that the authority was given in response to public relations' increasing effectiveness, to an acknowledgement that it was important to be in the Chief Executive's office when key decisions were made. If there is no obvious means by which this authority is conferred, neither does it come from having a distinct or high-value skill set. Although, as is described below, public relations practitioners generally possess high levels of cultural capital, my interviewees were, on the whole, modest about the skills needed to do their roles.

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<sup>173</sup> This is recognised by the practitioner themselves; several of my interviewees referred to the relationship between Tony Blair and Alistair Campbell as an example of the way in which the value of PR is being increasingly recognised.

They claimed that a good PR professional requires little more than good verbal and written communication skills, the ability to spell, common sense, and a connection with the truth<sup>174</sup>. Having such a generalised set of skills did not seem to have disadvantaged the people I spoke to: all my interviewees described their transitions from one role to another as effortless, giving no indication of struggle or anxiety. They described careers in which they had had a variety of opportunities, providing different types of fulfilment<sup>175</sup>. As is described below, their backgrounds and qualifications may have contributed to this, along with their social capital, but this was generally not acknowledged.

### Mystification of practice

Deliberate or not, this reluctance to elaborate on the nature of their individual contribution suggests a certain mystification to PR practice which makes it hard to pin down. This may be because of the weak participation in industry standards outlined above or because each practitioner is largely dependent on their employer's evaluation of their success. Mystification hides the absence of common standards for both the individual practitioner and the industry as a whole. Talking about how he produced written briefing materials which would be shared with journalists one junior interviewee, working outside government in the financial sector, said: 'All I got from everywhere I looked was middle class feeling the squeeze, banks putting the squeeze on middle classes, banks putting the squeeze on small businesses, banks, middle classes, small businesses, banks, middle classes, small businesses, squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, recession, squeeze, recession, squeeze, recession, squeeze. So I took all those words and reworded them in terms of the order that I wanted, and there you go – done.' This process, he said, had generated stories for his client in the national newspapers, but from the description quoted above it is hard to work out how. While this process was effective in securing press

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<sup>174</sup> One interviewee was clear that PR did not need particular skills: 'One of the things that one of my early bosses said to me, was that you need two things to be good at PR – you need 50% common sense and 50% creativity. And I thought that that was a very good mantra, and obviously I've remembered it because I've just shared it with you.'

<sup>175</sup> The fulfilment is not always financial. One interviewee described himself as 'getting bored' in one role, while other interviewees talked about the appeal of increased seniority and influence, meaning influence within their organisations as well as the influence to drive societal or cultural change.

coverage, the description of it given in the interview does not suggest the process was particularly rigorous.

The press officer described above who secured an interview for his chief executive provided a similarly abstruse explanation for how he achieved this. The journalist asked what would be talked about if he came in for the interview. The press officer replied: ‘...and I was like ‘Well you might be interested in this, this and this’, and then it just grew organically from there’. This casual summation of what eventually went on to become a two page national newspaper feature belies any sense of effort, planning or expertise on the press officer’s part. It is presented as a casual, almost offhand exchange in which the press officer presents subject areas in such a way as to pique the journalist’s interest. He did not describe in any detail the topics he used to tempt the journalist to agree to conduct the interview and the researcher is left none the wiser as to how such a scoop had been achieved. In fact, the description of what took place is so vague that it is not even possible to ascertain whether this is the same type of practice described in other interviews. Unlike the unwritten rules of the juridical field, the mystification within public relations is not structured and there is nothing to suggest that different practitioners follow the same pattern of mystification in their work. Instead, it is presented as an ambiguity of practice, and this is reflected in the equivocation that interviewees employed when describing what they do. This mystification serves to enhance perceptions of the practitioner’s power: they are not prepared to reveal the tactics they use to exert influence over the media. The symbolic status given to the media (cf Couldry 2003; 2004) enhances the PR practitioner’s status here and those around them are left guessing and perhaps with some admiration at the PR practitioner’s ability to take control of the news media.

This is PR logic at work: the press officer presents a narrative about his organisation in such a way that it tempts the journalist to leave the journalistic field and enter the field occupied by the organisation concerned<sup>176</sup>. The resulting press coverage

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<sup>176</sup> In this instance, the journalist literally entered the field occupied by the organisation concerned as the interview took place in the Chief Executive’s office.

confers authority on the press officer's representation of events, reinforcing the narrative he has presented as true. At the same time, he has briefed his Chief Executive about what to say and how to say it during the interview, ensuring that the PR logic takes effect within both his sponsor organisation and the media institution which publishes the interview. But while the logic is evident in the impact that the press officer's activity has – resulting in the two page feature – there is no clear indication of the process by which the logic works. The practice that this mystification shields is tied up with the practitioner's social capital, because it is utilized through the relationships they have as they work to convince both their internal organisational sponsors and journalists of the merit of what they are trying to achieve.

Within the interviews there was some implication that what lies behind the mystique is not always the type of activity that a practitioner would want to see exposed. One practitioner working outside government explained that his role was to stop his chief executive from having to get his hands dirty, while another also working outside of government said: 'I think it was always relished that there was a grey area – you know, like *In The Thick Of It*<sup>177</sup>– the dark arts, you can push boundaries, influence change. I think there's an appreciation now that you can only do that for so long now or you get found out so aren't you better placed to set up structures...' The mystification may subvert or at least in part be a substitute for structures and standards, but public relations practitioners are alert to the fact that they may soon be found out.

The interviewees were candid about the existence of such mystification, even if they were reluctant to dwell on it. One interviewee described it as creativity, Edwards (2008) calls it 'instinct'. Another interviewee called it a 'Spidey sense' developed after a decade in the business, while a third referred to it as 'thinking outside the box'. This mystification may be intended to shield practitioners from scrutiny of the lack of widely adopted professional standards within public relations, but Edwards observes

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<sup>177</sup> A BBC television comedy series that satirises the inner workings of the British government where the lead character is a media strategist, known for his Machiavellian ways of working

that it both forms the basis of PR practitioners' claim to influence and power and enhances the industry's reputation for competence. As one of my interviewees, a junior practitioner operating outside government observed, laughing: 'I have had to manage expectations, and I think that there are people who imagine I can do things that I can't do.' As such, mystification becomes a common pattern of behaviour and absence of certainty about PR practitioners' role makes their success, failure or behaviour, equally difficult to judge.

The interviews provide some clues that disrupting the status quo and creating new norms is part of this mystification. As one senior practitioner, operating within government, explained: 'Well, it's an influencing tool. I mean, communications is an influencer. So you can interrupt the way that people are thinking are about something. You can interrupt people's plans for things, by talking about something new or something different or something changed.' This capacity to interrupt or intervene is part of the transformation process that PR can enact. Another interviewee explained how his role was a creative one helping to shift not just perception but also reality. Speaking about his current role, he said: 'It turned out to be a similar job [to my previous role] in the end... it turned into thinking outside the box, not doing what people expected, thinking of a more positive alternative that's more attractive to people and persuasive than what otherwise might have been.' This creativity belies the clearly established and shared standards of behaviour Bourdieu identifies in the juridical field; it suggests that an element of what makes PR valuable is its unpredictability and ability to divert from what is expected. Thus the mystification becomes a form of logic for the field, a way of operating that shields practitioners from external scrutiny and creates a style of working that is only understood by those within the field. This is a logic that comes from human agency – from the instinct or creativity of the practitioner - rather than from external structures. Without widespread professional structures and standards existing as barriers to entry to the field, mystification is perpetuated by those within the field as a criteria for membership and success.



A more tangible source of influence for PR practitioners is their ability to forge effective networks and relationships and this was named by interviewees as a key asset. The way that this ability is used to influence is evident throughout the interviews: it leads to the adoption of particular types of discourse by journalists and others and drives the way in which issues are presented in the public sphere<sup>178</sup>. As the examples detailed in this chapter illustrate, the ability to influence can be deployed in situations as varied as a phone call to a journalist encouraging him to do an interview, or a speech to a formal meeting persuading decision makers to change an organisation's name, or corralling senior figures in industry to donate hundreds of millions of pounds to support a cause that will, in its turn, influence government policy. This influence is sourced partly from the nature of their networks which place them as key advisers to organisational leaders, and partly from the cultural capital embodied within them as individuals. It is the combination of social and cultural capital that practitioners possess which creates a distinctiveness to their role, emphasized by their access to senior management.

The cultural capital practitioners possess serves to confer distinction and prestige,<sup>179</sup> and the authority it confers both enhances and is enhanced by their interactions with journalists who are as eager to report on the activities and views of senior executives as those senior executives are for positive press coverage. As an organisation's main contact with the media, PR practitioners act as an effective gateway for reputation, fostering a reliance on their skills and networks by journalists and senior managers alike. One interviewee, a senior practitioner operating outside government, illustrated this point: 'One of the very interesting little nuggets that I discovered about Alistair Campbell was that he was absolutely charming to deal with, a delight. He's got this reputation as being a bull terrier, but

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<sup>178</sup> This power is highlighted by Bourdieu (1991) who regards language as one of the main tools through which symbolic power is perpetuated. Bourdieu (1998) characterizes certain professionals – journalists, politicians, public relations practitioners – for whom language is at the heart of their work, as symbolic producers, transforming or disguising interests into disinterested meanings and legitimizing arbitrary power relations. Like Edwards (2008), Motion and Weaver (2005) also interpret the way in which PR exercises this power: through creating misrepresentation in communications that masks the real organisational interest in the activity. By persuading audiences of a particular point of view, practitioners work to maintain or improve the position of their employing organisations in society.

<sup>179</sup> Bourdieu (1986:47) explains that cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state (in the long lasting dispositions of mind and body), in the objectified state (form of cultural goods – pictures, books, dictionaries) and in the institutionalised state, a form of objectification which must be set apart.

in order to have a successful career he has to be able to get on with people. He has to know, how do I manage this person in order to get what I want? And that's a key skill.' This quote suggests that a degree of mystification is also embedded in practitioners' relationships, where the practitioner's personality is shielded behind a protective screen of toughness and/or charm. But other senior practitioners in government were more direct about the qualities they valued in their public relations staff. They identified qualities such as courage, judgement and good grace as being necessary for success in public relations. These attributes are part of the cultural capital that a practitioner possesses; they are not something which can easily be learned but rather pre-existing capabilities which the practitioner brings to the role.

Such cultural capital embodied within practitioners derives from their background and education. It is illustrated by the higher than average levels of education and income PR practitioners enjoy (Centre for Economics and Business Research 2005; COMRES, December 2012) and perhaps particularly their facility with words and language<sup>180</sup>. The public relations industry is largely a graduate one; over three quarters of practitioners have an undergraduate degree and just over half (51%) claim to speak a foreign language. While it is predominantly a role occupied by women (Centre for Economics and Business Research, 2005; COMRES 2012), men are more likely to hold senior positions. It is overwhelmingly white (Centre for Economics and Business Research, 2005; Edwards 2010) with a clear bias towards London and the South East — with a quarter of all public relations workers living in London, and in excess of a further quarter (27%) live either in the rest of South East or East England — in commuting range of the capital (Centre for Economics and Business Research, 2005)<sup>181</sup>.

In their study of German writers, Anheier et al (1995) concluded that cultural capital was the determinant of dominance within the writers' social network, determining

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180 Recent discussions by senior practitioners for the industry body suggested that the current emphasis on writing skills is as much of a disadvantage as the industry's lack of diversity. Describing a 'worst case scenario' for PR in 2020, practitioners wrote: 'It is white, mono-cultural and ageist, and dominated by the use of writing skills' (White, 2011).

181 The Chartered Institute of Public Relations reports that two thirds of its members are based outside London although it is not clear how many of its members live within commuting range.

who was seen as elite and who was seen as peripheral. While the PR field is different from the field which writers inhabit, this conclusion is supported by Edwards who notes that the weekly trade magazine for PR, PR Week, runs regular profiles on practitioners which consistently associate practitioners' success with their personal style, creativity, or background (2010).

This focus on cultural capital is supported by my own experience of meeting interviewees. Without exception, they were polished performers, socially confident and happy to talk on tape and at length about their work and role. I met with them in places of their suggestion – often West End bars or coffee shops within walking distance of their place of work<sup>182</sup>. Without exception these were boutique style, independent coffee shops or patisseries, or expensive and fashionable bars, where my interviewees were evidently used to spending time and where they chatted with familiarity to the serving staff. While I approached each interview expecting to buy refreshments for my interviewee, more often than not they offered to foot the bill. During one interview, which took place late one afternoon in the interviewee's office, one of her colleagues brought in a glass of champagne for each of us<sup>183</sup>. Only one of my interviewees – one of the oldest among them - wore a full suit and tie; the others were dressed more informally. While none of them wore jeans and all appeared smartly and fashionably attired, even those who worked in the formal setting of central government were casually dressed in comparison with other professional roles.

The high level of cultural capital interviewees possessed was evident as the interviews began. When asked about how they began their PR career, most of them began by describing their education – all were graduates and several had post-graduate qualifications. They spoke confidently about subjects which appeared to be outside their direct sphere of expertise; they demonstrated an ability and willingness to take part in debate, even if they knew little about the subject. For example, even

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182 In two instances the meeting took place in venues that were restricted to members only, where the interviewee was a member and signed me in as a guest.

183 It was explained that the champagne was from an employee's leaving do in the same offices. Yet reviewing the tape afterwards, it is striking how the incident did not distract the interviewee from her flow. She merely thanked her colleague for the drink and continued, as if nothing unusual had happened.

those with no evident direct connection with Islam spoke with some degree of knowledge about the current debates surrounding Islam and media, presenting an informed approach to current affairs. Two interviewees, on hearing a summary of the research presented at the beginning of the interview, spontaneously began to opine about Islam without a single question being asked. This was despite the fact that, to my knowledge, they had no specialist interest or expertise in Islam and this was not what I wanted to ask them about.

Edwards (2008) suggests that the cultural capital PR people possess entitles them to create discourses that generate consensus about reality, simultaneously misrepresenting the real interests that underlie that reality so that those who are subject to it are not aware of them. All my interviewees spoke about creating narratives or messages that presented a particular picture of reality – from one man who outlined the events leading to the creation of a discourse that encouraging physical exercise was better than banning advertising for unhealthy foods, to another who spoke about the power of PR in changing culture, for example in persuading people to stop smoking or changing perception of ethnic minorities through press reporting. As he explained: 'You are creating culture in PR. In a very little way, but in an important way. You are always dealing with the stories people tell about themselves, with the lies they tell.'<sup>184</sup> This suggests that the role of PR is to recast stories which other people tell and using them individually and collectively to create a broader societal narrative.

Public relations activity produces press releases and other documentation which both legitimise these narratives and justify their existence; without such tools the discourses would be merely ephemeral and fleeting. Press releases are one of the the main mechanisms by which information is passed to journalists, often published on organisational websites. They carry the authority of being an official source of news, while at the same time, presenting the organisation's information in conformity with the logic of the media. These documents are themselves forms of

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<sup>184</sup> Social capital, as well as cultural, is important in the construction of messages, as these are usually produced on behalf of, and for the approval of the organisation's leadership.

cultural capital and, as my interviews revealed, PR practitioners use the skills embodied within the cultural capital they themselves carry to produce them. As one junior interviewee, operating outside government, explained how he drafts press releases: 'I guess writing it...knowing that it is going to be for different audiences, and trying to make it as appealing as possible in terms of language used. It's looking and thinking about The Mail and The Sun and the Telegraph and thinking about how it can play there, thinking about how it can appeal to the masses.' The use of the term 'the masses' suggests that the practitioner sees himself as separate from this group but able to understand their needs, although a special effort is needed to ensure that particular language appeals to them.

### Public relations habitus

The interviews conducted for the fieldwork provide a flavour of the habitus – or structuring structures (Bourdieu 2007:170) – of the public relations field.

Interviewees were asked to describe 'how they got into PR' and most took the opportunity to describe high levels of education, with all participants having at least an undergraduate degree. While other studies show that such high levels of education are common among all practitioners (CEBR 2005), the interviews reveal that professional networks take priority and provide a structure within which activity takes place. Thus, practitioners are able to progress within the field as a result of who they know, as well as how they manage relationships with those more senior to them and agents outside the field, including in the journalistic field. This means that to succeed agents within the field need to be sociable with strong interpersonal skills, able to get on with and communicate with people within and external to their sponsor organisations. Interviewees demonstrated how they regularly blurred the lines between social and professional contact, for example by meeting peers from outside the field for drinks in the evening to exchange information<sup>185</sup>.

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<sup>185</sup> This blurring between professional and personal was also illustrated by the fact that most interviewees were happy to take time out of their working day to meet me.

Public relations practitioners adopt the habitus of the political field: this was perhaps more evident among the practitioners operating within the political field than among those working in other fields (such as financial public relations, or transport<sup>186</sup>). The exchange of information and knowledge is important within the political field; this is a key resource which public relations practitioners trade and rely on. Practitioners are keen to be seen to be knowledgeable and informed about a range of subjects and take time to keep up with current affairs. There is a visibility to public relations practice; for practitioners being known and visible within their sponsor organisation's field is critical and they rely on this visibility to help maintain and enhance their social capital. Practitioners demonstrated curiosity and were continually on the lookout for new opportunities. The practitioners I spoke with were all well versed in using technology to keep up to date and in touch with a range of professional and social networks.

Those interviewed for the research displayed a sense of social confidence and self-assurance in the way they spoke and presented themselves. This was evident in their choice of venues for the interview, their style of clothes and their easy negotiation of the social etiquette of the encounter in which they offered to pay for the refreshments. All began the meetings with relaxed small talk which focused on what we had in common – be it professional acquaintances or shared professional interests. Despite this confidence, career ambition did not appear to be a unifying factor among interviewees. Few described a drive to get to the top, and many referred to the way in which their professional role had been undervalued by organisations in the past. Similarly, none disclosed that they were motivated in their job by economic considerations – either personal or on behalf of their organisations<sup>187</sup>. Instead, the capacity to influence - both internally and more widely with journalists and other groups – seemed to drive satisfaction and enjoyment. This is supported by Grunig's observation (1990) that power, or the

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<sup>186</sup> It should be noted that those working in the political field had, on average, spent more of their career in that single field than practitioners working in other fields. Those outside the political field were more likely to have moved between and across fields in the course of their career, for example from transport to education or finance.

<sup>187</sup> This may be skewed by the high proportion of interviewees from inside government where public relations would not be expected to contribute to the bottom line in the same way that it would in a commercial organisation.

perception of power, is a key driver in PR practitioners' job satisfaction. Those practitioners interviewed clearly valued the opportunity to engage with the most senior people in their organisations, and to hold relationships (for example with journalists) that no-one else in their organisation did. This suggests that there is a perceived exclusivity, or uniqueness, within the public relations field which practitioners enjoy and are keen to protect.

The mystification of practice is also part of the habitus of the field; acting as a shield against those seeking to challenge the practitioners' sources of power and serving to reinforce their authority within their sponsor organisation. Practitioners were reluctant to identify the particular characteristics they brought to their role, dismissing these as little more than common sense or having the time to do things that other people do not have time for. This could be false modesty, as the practitioner is aware that no-one else has access to the same networks and relationships as they do, but at the same time there is the possibility of an underlying realisation that the skills they bring are relational rather than based on technical skill or specialist knowledge. The mystification of practice is itself a structure beyond the nature of PR practice; this is harder to define because of the dismissive and blasé manner in which practitioners articulate what they do. These two structures – social networks and mystification – make it harder for new entrants to challenge the dominance of those already in the field. For a new entrant, uncovering how public relations really works will be a challenge that can only be addressed through experience. Practitioners spoke of the time it had taken them to reach the centre of the field, building up networks and relationships as they went. The nature of the field means that it is difficult, if not impossible, to arrive at the centre quickly, irrespective of economic capital that is available.

## Public relations in the political field

As is discussed above, high levels of social and cultural capital were revealed as common across all PR practitioner interviewees, irrespective of the field occupied by their sponsor organisation. This suggests that capital is intrinsic to the role itself and

the skills and experience the practitioner brings to the role, rather than the organisation worked for. The nature of the research means that interviews focused in particular on PR practice within the political field and eleven interviewees had worked in this environment, either for a political party or in a government department. Five of the eleven had very senior experience of public relations in the political field – for example, they had worked or were working as a Director of Communications for a central government department. This job role meant that they were regarded as the most senior PR practitioner within their organisation and that they interacted on a daily basis with the Secretary of State. One of the five had worked at 10 Downing Street in a communications role. The results of these five interviews help to establish how PR operates at the heart of the political field.

The interviews revealed a striking consistency in the way individuals were positioned within the political field. All had begun their career in communications working for political organisations, and during the course of their careers they had moved closer into the heart of the political field. The interviewees were at the centre of the political field not only because of where they worked, but also as a result of their senior positions, which gave them access to Ministers and, as one interviewee described it, 'leverage'. Their level of familiarity with senior politicians was evident; they all described the difficulties and opportunities of working directly with government ministers and spoke of them with familiarity, with some referring to Secretaries of State by their first names.

While being at the centre of the field gives these government communicators access to the most powerful decision makers, it also highlights a greater tension in relationships than was revealed by other interviews. This tension is partly because of the neutrality of their position as civil servants but also as a result of their role as communications practitioners. Two interviewees talked about giving advice to government ministers that might not be listened to, while others emphasised the responsibility of government communicators to be the voice of integrity within the organisation. This was described as being the 'conscience' of the organisation: organisations had to be prepared to be honest about their weaknesses if



communications was to succeed. This tension puts demands on senior PR practitioners to be credible so that they are taken seriously by government ministers or senior civil servants. The need to maintain credibility while at the centre is an urgent one, not necessarily because of competition from other government communicators, but because of the tension in the relationship with politicians.

These interviewees were more specific about what qualities were needed to succeed at the centre of the political field. They talked about intangible qualities such as courage, judgement and good grace which are separate from technical communications skills. While these qualities are not unique to the political field, interviewees emphasised them as particularly important when building and maintaining relationships with those at the centre of the political field. These skills are acquired through experience and a willingness to learn from mistakes, suggesting that reaching the centre of the field is dependent on both length of career and hard bitten experience, rather than communications skills. When talking about their experience, few interviewees referred to the type of learning that comes from making mistakes. Instead, they described the knowledge they had acquired during the course of their careers in the context of understanding people and relationships. Career milestones were not described in the context of vocational qualifications, or promotions to different job titles. Instead, interviewees described career shifts in the context of going to work for someone new, often someone prominent in the public sphere, such as a government minister.

The interviewee who had worked at No.10 Downing Street providing a revealing example of the authority that working there provided: 'So a lot of what No.10 does is trying to unravel what's been said by other people as truths, which are not. So a lot of what we are doing is trying to unravel this, to explain what is actually government policy and not what's been perceived by others, or misunderstood. So a lot of it is trying to put right what people think we're trying to achieve.' 'Truth' is held at the very centre of the field – at the Prime Minister's office and the authority of the government communicators working there is such that they are able to 'put right' the untruths communicated by others. The 'truth', as defined by PR

practitioners at No.10, then gets cascaded through departmental press officers out to the news media.

This interviewee went on to describe the challenges for press officers working in central government departments drafting press materials which were changed and added to by numerous officials without public relations experience. The job at No.10 was to 'cut through the crap and say I don't understand that and I can't have three paragraphs to answer a single point. This is what the line will be.' The authority held through working at 10 Downing Street could be shared with junior press officers in departments and could also extend beyond public relations practitioners to influence other officials: 'They're not stupid, they know that what they've dished out - because they don't have leverage - is basically not fit for purpose. So if No.10 can help by saying, you know that it's rubbish, this is what we're going to say, go back and tell your officials that this is what No.10 say.' In this way, the centre of the field confers its authority on the rest of the field and the communicator at No.10 is able to delegate authority to colleagues in other departments. The impact of this delegated authority empowers the press officer or public relations practitioner, to challenge officials in their own organisation who may be more senior in the organisational hierarchy than they are.

Another interviewee referred to improving 'comms literacy' among colleagues in other areas, describing the challenge of announcing civil servant bonuses to the media: 'And what I mean by that [comms literacy] is being able to spot that bonuses is going to be a big issue, and maybe we should think about planning ahead, rather than wanting to contact the press office the day before because they see comms as an add-on, rather than intrinsic to the issues that they're dealing with.' This interviewee went on to say that the ideal from their perspective would be for communications to be a deciding factor in how bonuses were managed within the organisation. This ideal reflects the potential for PR logic; where the public relations practitioner's preferred way of working shapes how the organisation operates. As the interviewee stated, public relations becomes intrinsic to decision making, rather than an add-on.

Interviewees at the centre of the political field described the environment in which they worked as very highly structured, with a clear hierarchy of relationships established within and between departments<sup>188</sup>. Each of them ascribed a similar purpose for the work of government communications: that of providing information which is of value to citizens. The role of communications is as a 'translator' – providing clear and 'plain English' explanations of government policy for the public. As one interviewee explained: 'Now the people who are working on policy, often they don't speak the same language that you and I might speak, so the role of professional communicators is to help policy officials speak to members of the public, different stakeholders, in language that they understand.' This description of the role of communicators suggests that without their work the political field would struggle to be understood, because it speaks a language that other fields cannot understand. Being able to translate this language enhances the cultural capital of government communicators and reinforces their position in both the political field and other fields. This engagement is important, but according to my interviewees it is achieved remotely, or by using third parties. For example, two interviewees spoke about the importance of using research agencies to find out what the public was thinking, while another talked of conducting public consultations. None of the interviewees talked about direct engagement with the public by them or their staff. The government communicators are positioned at the centre of the political field and their role is to help the political field communicate with other fields, but they do this by staying within the 'bubble' rather than by venturing outside it. The centre of the political field has geographical boundaries, described as the Westminster 'village' or 'bubble'. One interviewee described it: 'The village is the bit that way towards [Westminster] Abbey and it goes down White[hall]...' By describing it as the 'village' the interviewee reinforces his or her own and others' social capital. Like a country village, Westminster is a small, strongly inter-connected community where everyone knows each other. Although small geographically and in numbers of people, the

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<sup>188</sup> The communications function has a clear position within departments, and relationships between PR practitioners and politicians and permanent secretaries operate according to a defined Civil Service Code and more recently, agreed definitions of what communications is and how it operates. For all five practitioners, such structured frameworks were necessary for success: ensuring consistency and providing clear boundaries within which communications can operate.

community is an elite space. Only those who are part of it understand the rules and how the community operates. By setting boundaries around the village – both geographic and in terms of rules of behaviour – the village remains exclusive, making it harder for others outside to breach its borders.

The public relations practitioners interviewed identified themselves as part of that elite community, although it is primarily a political community rather than a public relations one. By naming Westminster as their personal sphere of operation, they associated themselves with the symbolic power that Westminster represents: the power represented by the Palace of Westminster – Parliament - to determine legislation and make decisions affecting people's lives. By describing the centre of power as a village, they are asserting their place within it. While this claim to symbolic power was most evident within this particular interview, assimilation into the political field was evident throughout the interviews, particularly with the most senior practitioners within government. They saw themselves positioned at the heart of the village, or the political field, and were deeply embedded in its structures and ways of operating. Interviewees spoke about the social rules within the village, which are very well established: 'And in the village, the only papers that matter are The Times, The Telegraph, The FT and, if you're very lucky, The Guardian. Nobody reads The Mail.' The interviewee is so confident of his own network and the behaviour of others within the village that he can state with certainty which newspapers they read. The role of government communicators is to persuade those within the village of the benefit of communicating with people outside its boundaries and to do that communication for them using channels of communication – such as The Daily Mail – that people within the village don't access.

Within the 'village' there is a high level of social capital, expressed through active professional networks<sup>189</sup>. This importance of knowing the rules is enhanced by the entry requirements into the field which are primarily based on social capital.

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<sup>189</sup> One interviewee asked me who else I was talking to (this information was not disclosed), while another spoke about their recent regular get together with other Directors of Communications in government departments. Although my interviews were secured through snowball sampling, four of five people whose interviews were arranged this way knew of me, and I knew of them, although we had never actually met.

Interviewees described the need for chemistry (one called it a 'chemical fit') when recruiting and the need for new recruits to be someone that government ministers would get on with. As one interviewee explained: 'For example, if we are hiring, as we will be hiring shortly, a Secretary of State's press officer, that person has to know the media and be able to deal with a situation in the moment and all of that, but the key question is actually, will this person get on with [the Secretary of State]?'<sup>190</sup> A second interviewee expressed similar sentiments and acknowledged that such criteria for recruitment may conflict with organisational HR policies. Despite this, the dominance of social capital means that finding the right chemistry is the most important criteria for recruiting.

The existence of PR logic was as evident in the interviewees with senior political practitioners as with the wider cohort of public relations practitioners. The nearer the centre of the field, the more authority is conferred on the practitioner. At the heart of the political field, 10 Downing Street, PR logic serves to determine what is 'truth and untruth' within government and to influence the actions and responses of officials across departments. One interviewee talked about the development of a single 'core narrative' for government which included official messages about what the government is working towards. For the interviewee, authority coming from the centre is welcome, helping government departments to communicate a more consistent message and operate more effectively together.

The influence that these senior practitioners described exemplifies PR logic – their practice affects the organisations they represent and, in the case of 10 Downing Street, has an impact across government. However one aspect of PR logic was less evident within this cohort than with others and this was its relationship to media logic. References to the media were less explicit than in other interviews and interviewees referred as often to the driving influence of 'strategy' or 'stakeholders' as to the media. Nevertheless, the connection between PR logic and media logic was present and interviewees described themselves as a translator, helping the organisations they worked for to adapt to media logic and providing the media with

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<sup>190</sup> Here, the interviewee referred to the Secretary of State by their first name.

information and resources not easily available to it by other means. The media have a primary role in disseminating the information which PR practitioners generate in order to reach different audiences, including the public.

The interviews revealed how PR logic contributes to the process of mediatisation by enabling the centre of the political field to accommodate the logic of the media while maintaining its existing geographical and other structures. To do this, the PR practitioner does not replicate media logic, but substitutes for it<sup>191</sup>, through a process of translation and information provision. Importantly, it is the role of human agents which is central here; interviewees did not refer to technology or other structures in this context.

PR logic demands the continual exchange of power with journalists on behalf of the organisation. The PR practitioner controls the journalist's access to information and has the power to present information in a certain way, while the journalist's power is vested in their ability to write and publish copy which carries the authority of news. PR logic also impacts on the sponsor organisation: the role of the PR agent is to leave the 'bubble' (either literally or metaphorically) or to ensure that someone else does so<sup>192</sup> in order to engage with other fields, including the journalistic field. In achieving this, practitioners are aided by high levels of social and cultural capital, which confer on them the authority to speak on behalf of their organisation and to interpret the information they receive. The consequences of these external encounters are reported back to the sponsor organisation and may result in its changing its way of working; it may become more accessible to citizens, or adapt to media logic.

The fieldwork described in this chapter was designed to answer research questions relating to the role of public relations, the power and capital that PR practitioners possess and the relationships they utilize as a demonstration of that power. The results of the fieldwork have demonstrated the high levels of social and cultural

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<sup>191</sup> For example, by engaging with the Daily Mail – a newspaper which is not read within the bubble.

<sup>192</sup> Some interviewees described how they relied on external research agencies to provide them with information about what different audiences were thinking.

capital, and the power that practitioners possess. Practitioners bring a confidence and assurance to their role, borne out of a high level of education and a keen interest and curiosity in the world around them. This enables them to exert their relationship-building skills, and the scope of their professional networks extends both to the very heart of the political field and to the very top ranks of the organisations they work for. Even those practitioners not situated at the very centre of the field are well positioned in comparison with other agents as a result of their access to the most senior decision makers in their sponsor organisations.

At the same time, the nature of their role provides them with unrivalled opportunity to speak on behalf of government ministers or senior executives, often putting words into their mouths. Public relations practitioners' confidence and self-assurance means that they are better at articulating the organisation's points of view than the chief executive may be, and part of their role is to control and script his or her media exposure. Public relations practitioners position themselves as their organisation's best player in the game between politics and the media. Without the benefit of their direction – and the logic that shapes their influence – their organisation would flounder on the playing field. The mystification of practice which practitioners readily demonstrate means that this positioning may go unchallenged or unchecked; it results in the practitioner having the power to symbolize and articulate what an organisation stands for. This power can also be exerted over others outside the sponsor organisation, including the journalistic field. Here, public relations practitioners act as a gateway, controlling access to information and sources and communicating data in a way that conforms with the logic of the media. The public relations practitioner sits at the hub of a multiplicity of relationships, translating, persuading and corralling others to act in certain ways.

The interviews with PR practitioners, particularly those operating within the political field, provide little doubt of the significance that they attribute to their role. According to the narratives that they themselves have developed, they successfully exert power and control over the news media and within their organisations. This, they suggest, largely works to everyone's benefit and reinforces the need for their

endeavours. The fieldwork conducted with individuals responsible for public relations for Muslim groups reveals a very different story.



## Chapter 5: Islam, public relations and the political field

This chapter returns to the question of representation for Muslims and their faith in the UK news media. In contrast to the literature review in Chapter 1, which explores current scholarship about the media representation of Islam, this chapter focuses on the interaction between Muslim groups and public relations practice within the UK political field. In so doing, it seeks to address the research questions which explore how Islam, and those engaged in public relations on behalf of Islam or Muslim groups, are located within the political field and the sources and levels of capital do they have access to. As well as seeking to derive information from representatives' position within the political field, the fieldwork seeks to ask directly to what extent practitioners acting on behalf of Islam or Muslim groups use public relations in order to compete or change their position within the political field.

It is important to note from the start that this chapter is not intended to be a comparison between the activity of those undertaking public relations for Muslim groups and other public relations practitioners operating in the political field. Such a comparison would provide little value or insight because the roles have different purposes, contextual frameworks and intent. The public relations practitioners whose interviews are described in the preceding chapter are in paid employment, working for government or other political organisations as part of a broader PR career. While they may have had a series of different roles within the political field, those that were civil servants expressed no political affiliation or preference while undertaking their role. In contrast, those working for Muslim groups were not all in paid employment and for some, PR was not the primary purpose of their role. Unlike the government practitioners, most did not identify themselves as PR professionals but instead saw their work as contributing to the broader purpose of their organisation or group. These significant differences would render any comparison of practice largely futile.

Instead, this thesis posits that public relations practice can help to position agents, and the groups they represent, in positions of power and influence within and

between fields, including the political and journalistic fields. Previous chapters have highlighted how public relations practitioners achieve this and the access they have to social and cultural capital which supports them in doing so. This chapter explores the extent to which those representing Islam as a religion, or specific Muslim groups, have adopted similar techniques and practices in order to respond to what is a contentious representation of their faith and religious practice in the media. As we shall see, while Muslim groups and organisations are drawn into the political field, the techniques and tactics of PR are not widely adopted in order to influence or change their positioning within it. As the fieldwork described here shows, the agents interviewed (most of whom are paid representatives of Muslim groups) are not using public relations techniques, or PR logic, in order to engage with the political field and, in some cases, do not acknowledge a need for it. In fact, some interviewees explicitly rejected the need for public relations practice in this context.

## The fieldwork sample

The sample of people who took part in interviews is referred to as those representing Muslim groups, or undertaking public relations on behalf of Muslim groups operating in the UK political field – admittedly a somewhat clumsy collective phrasing<sup>193</sup>. Most of the people interviewed did not define their role as doing public relations, nor was this their job title. None had a big team or department behind them, and several worked alone in their particular role. However, they acknowledged that their responsibilities included representing the particular group they worked for, or their faith more broadly, to different audiences, including the government, other politicians and the media. For the purposes of this research, this refers to individual agents in paid full time or part time employment for groups which seek to advocate, represent, or progress the interests of the Muslim community/communities or the Muslim faith within the UK and, in some instances, internationally. These groups include think tanks, broadcasters, commercial businesses, academic organisations and membership bodies. There is one exception

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<sup>193</sup> The difficulty in finding a suitable collective term for this sample reflects the lack of coherence in the use of public relations practice by Muslim groups and organisations.

to this categorisation among the cohort of interviewees - a media professional who does not work for an organisation with Muslim interests, but who self-identifies as a Muslim<sup>194</sup>.

In total, 30 organisations or media and public relations professionals working on behalf of Muslim groups were approached for interviews, initially by email and, in some instances, with follow-up phone calls. Thirteen individuals responded expressing interest in taking part and the remainder did not respond at all. No-one sent a response declining to take part. Of the thirteen who responded, interviews were secured with ten of them – eight men and two women. Of the ten interviewees, eight were individuals in paid employment for groups which operated within or on behalf of the Muslim community or communities, all with a role of advocacy, representation or public relations. The remaining two interviewees were Muslims who worked in broadcasting: one of whom worked for a Muslim broadcast channel. As with the cohort of public relations practitioners, snowball sampling was attempted but was unsuccessful in generating responses.

The response rate can be attributed to a number of factors. First, approaches were often made cold, without any prior contact or introduction<sup>195</sup>. A summary of the research was made available to all potential interviewees, but those who did respond were often unclear about the subject matter of the interview. Among those who did reply, a common response was that there are many researchers looking at Islam and media and the area is currently over-researched<sup>196</sup>. This made it difficult to secure any kind of interview and to achieve a consistency among interviewees in terms of job title or responsibility<sup>197</sup>. Finally, one interviewee suggested that Muslim organisations, such as those approached, are typically underfunded and under-

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<sup>194</sup> All the interviewees were given a commitment to anonymity. The comparatively small number of organisations from which interviewees could be drawn presents a risk of identification of individuals in the analysis and discussion of interviews. As a result, some of the descriptions of interviewees have been left deliberately vague.

<sup>195</sup> Where introductions were made using snowball sampling, it did not increase the response rate.

<sup>196</sup> One interviewee referred to organisations having a waiting list of PhD students who had made interview requests.

<sup>197</sup> As the results of the interviews demonstrate, this was not just a sampling problem, but stems from the different approaches and perspectives taken by individuals and organisations.

resourced, raising the possibility that organisations did not have the capacity or resources to respond to numerous requests from researchers.

Despite the difficulties in generating a consistent cohort of interviewees to participate, all the interviewees except one had direct experience of working within the political field, either as an adviser to government, working with politicians, or in seeking to influence the political or media agenda. Eight worked for organisations or groups that had a charitable, educational or commercial role in representing or advocating on behalf of the Muslim community in the UK. Of these at least two groups had received funding from either the current or previous government. The remaining two interviewees, who worked in media, both identified themselves as Muslim. One was a presenter on a Muslim TV channel. Job titles of those interviewed varied and have not been disclosed to help maintain anonymity, but most interviewees were responsible for media relations, policy or public relations within their organisation, or engaged with media as a broadcaster (either in front of or behind the camera). Without exception, all interviewees were very familiar with the interactions between Islam and the political field and in particular, in relation to the challenges and activities relating to counter-terrorism.

Typically, it took four or five weeks to secure interviews, most of which took place in the interviewee's work environment: usually offices within the greater London area.

Two interviewees expressed initial reluctance to share their office location for security reasons; this was only supplied after several exchanges of information about the study and the researcher. Two interviews took place in coffee shops local to their place of work, at the interviewees' suggestion. These were cafés chosen for the convenience of their location – one was the café of a high street department store, the other was a 'greasy spoon' style café next to a central London tube station. One interviewee suggested meeting outside a well-known London mosque and the interview was conducted in a branch of a high street sandwich shop chain. As with the public relations practitioners, the interviews followed a semi-structured pattern of questioning which began by asking interviewees about their experience of public relations. The structure then continued to ask interviewees about how

negative media narratives about Muslims and Islam could be changed and their experience of undertaking such work.

## Islam within the UK political field

Many of the interviewees had direct experience of working in the political field through their involvement in counter-terrorism work following the events of 11 September 2001 and 7 July 2005. The events of these dates and, more recently the murder of Fusilier Drummer Lee Rigby in South London in May 2013, provided a common frame of reference that all interviewees referred to. Some worked for groups that had been set up following the events of 11 September 2001 and as such, the purpose of their group was to respond to the consequences of those events. While the perspective of interviewees varied, all approached the discussion through the lens of the prevention of terrorism (known in government as the Prevent programme) and the response of the Muslim community or communities to various central or local government initiatives. This was the case even where the interviewee's expertise was not directly connected with the Prevent programme; inevitably they approached a discussion of their specialist area through a Prevent lens<sup>198</sup>.

This common experience of the political field among interviewees merits further discussion. While issues relating to security and counter-terrorism were familiar to all interviewees, their experiences and approaches differed, as did their positioning within the political field. For some, their experience of security and counter-terrorism was secondary to, but related to, issues such as Islamophobia, immigration or equality. Others had played a more central role in advising government ministers on policy or engagement with Muslim communities, as part of the government's counter-terrorism strategy. Before elucidating further on the outcome of the interviews, this chapter explores the interaction between Islam and the political field

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<sup>198</sup> For example, one interviewee had a lot of experience in the area of equality and diversity, particularly with regards to the Muslim community. Throughout the interview this interviewee used Prevent as a frame of reference for talking about equality, comparing and contrasting the approaches to the two.

with reference to the Prevent programme - the common frame of reference for all interviews. This is not a study of Prevent per se, but exploring it provides two benefits for this study in particular. First, it provides useful a indicator of how Islam has been brought into the political field within the UK. Second, a study of Prevent provides explicit links between Islam, politics and the dominant media narrative about Islam, as well as public relations (for a discussion of how public relations activity can be used as one of the responses to terrorism, see National Co-ordinator for Counter-Terrorism in the Netherlands 2010; Home Affairs Committee 2009; Rogers 2008; Armstrong et al 2008). While it is important to emphasise that this study does not seek to compare the public relations efforts of different agents within the political field with regards to Prevent, it is a common factor for agents within the field.

## The Prevent Programme and the UK political field

The Prevent programme (commonly referred to as just Prevent) is one part of the UK government's broader counter-terrorism strategy, currently led by the Home Office. Launched from within the UK political field<sup>199</sup>, and aimed at audiences ranging from school teachers and imams to the police and the security services, the Prevent programme cuts across a range of different fields, agents and relationships, including religion, politics, education and culture. Like other aspects of the UK's counter-terrorism strategy, it is supported by Parliamentary legislation<sup>200</sup>.

The UK's first counter-terrorism strategy – known as Contest – was developed by the government following the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001.

Completed in 2003, the first Contest strategy was a restricted document that was not available publicly. It was not until after the London bombings of 7 July 2005 that more information about the government's response to the terror threat was made public.

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<sup>199</sup> The current Prevent programme was launched by Home Secretary Theresa May in July 2011.

<sup>200</sup> Since 2000, the UK has enacted five main pieces of legislation to deal with terrorism.

From the beginning, Contest had four strands of work relating to counter-terrorism: Prevent, Protect, Prepare and Pursue. Although little information is in the public domain about the 2003 strategy, in its inquiry into Contest in 2009, the Home Affairs Committee observed that when Contest was first published, Prevent was the least developed strand (Home Affairs Committee, 2009). Instead, the strategy's focus was on protecting the public from the immediate threat to life, rather than understanding the factors driving radicalisation.

Two significant events changed this. Following the London bombings of 7 July 2005 and the airline plot of August 2006, the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT) was formed in March 2007. Under the control of the Home Secretary, OSCT was created to provide advice to ministers and develop policy and security measures to combat the threat of terrorism. The aim was to stop radicalisation, reduce support for terrorism and violent extremism and discourage people from becoming terrorists.

Following the formation of OSCT, a new Contest strategy was published on 24 March 2009. Unlike its predecessor, it was placed in the public domain and, according to OSCT, was deliberately conceived as a different kind of document, intending to take account of the evolution of the threat and developing understanding of the factors driving it. The refreshed strategy states that, following 11 September 2001, the government realised that legislation alone was not enough to find practical ways to prevent an attack, to understand why people become involved in terrorism or to work out how the UK can best protect its infrastructure or to understand how the government can assist the general public and the business community in being more resilient to the threat of terrorism. This shift in thinking by the government led to Prevent becoming the most important strand of Contest (Home Affairs Committee, 2009).

The expansion of the Prevent strand of the counter-terrorism strategy began following the attacks on the London transport network in July 2005, when the then government convened seven working groups under the sponsorship of the

Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). A year later, in 2006, DCLG formally took over responsibility for the Prevent Extremism Campaign. The department's first Prevent report, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, published in April 2007, stated that a security response was not enough to counter the terror threat. Instead, the report argued, winning hearts and minds was crucial, as was preventing individuals being attracted to violent extremism. The report emphasises the importance of 'shared and non-negotiable values'. With an action plan targeted at work with Muslim communities, the report says that the government will support individuals and organisations that uphold those values and will respond robustly when those values are transgressed (2007:4). This was followed by the launch of the Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund the same year and a £6m fund to support around 70 local authorities in challenging violent extremism.

The financial resource and political focus made available to the Muslim community as a result of the emerging Prevent strategy has been described as a 'watershed' for Muslim representation (O'Toole, Nisson DeHanas, Modood, Meer, & Jones, 2013). The groups convened by DCLG following the attacks on London of 7 July 2005 were comprised of a 'diverse range of people' from the Muslim community, with different skills and knowledge. The groups' aim was to identify a small number of proposals for community and government led actions that would help prevent extremism and improve partnership working between the Government and Muslim communities (Islam et al., 2005: 98). The report of the groups' recommendations, welcomed by the Government when it was published in October 2005, acknowledges that the discussions were almost entirely focused on Muslim communities. Many of the recommendations highlight the need to improve the perceptions and understanding of Islam within the UK, including 'building a national campaign which increases the visibility of Muslim women' and 'designing a publication that highlights and promotes good practice from among mosques, Islamic centres and imams in the UK.' (Islam et al, 2005:9). The recommendations do not differ significantly from those outlined by other government, charity or non-governmental organisations which are discussed in Chapter 1.



Challenging the extremist ideology coming from Al Qaeda and supporting mainstream voices was the first objective of the 2009 Prevent Strategy (HM Government, 2009: 81). This is described as developing a 'counter-narrative' - developing the arguments to discredit Al Qaeda's narrative and disseminating those arguments among those likely to be receptive to Al Qaeda's messages.

Responsibility for this sits with the Research, Information and Communications Unit<sup>201</sup>, a department within the Home Office.

The Research Information and Communications Unit was established in June 2007 as part of OSCT, with approximately 35 staff specialising in audience insight and communications, marketing, digital media, anthropology and pan-Arab media from across government and the private sector. Divided into two sections – External Delivery and Audience Research and Knowledge – RICU is funded by the Home Office, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department for Communities and Local Government. RICU describes its role as: '...supporting policy makers and communications professionals by developing a better understanding of our target audiences and a clearer understanding of terrorist propaganda and dissemination. We provide guidance on effective communications, particularly on audiences, messages and delivery channels.' (Research, Information and Communications Unit, 2008).

RICU's Communications Guide suggests that narratives can be used as an opportunity to 'bust myths'<sup>202</sup>. The Ministerial foreword to the guide begins: 'We know that violent extremists use a powerful narrative, mixing historical fact with

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201 The Director of OSCT, Charles Farr – a civil servant - summed up the government's perspective when, in his evidence to the Home Affairs Committee, he explained: 'The only other thing I would add is that when [Home Secretary John] Reid and the Prime Minister [Tony Blair] reported ... they also argued that another area we had not got right in this country was counter-terrorism related communications. They meant by that I think two different things: one, outward-facing official communications, what we said both about the threat and about our response, but secondly, and I think very importantly, they also meant that we were not challenging the messaging that was coming to us from Al-Qaeda, the propaganda that was coming to us from Al-Qaeda, directed on the Internet' (Home Affairs Committee, 2009, p. Ev21).

202 The Prevent strategy itself acknowledges that this work can rarely be done directly by government. Instead, the onus is on local communities, organisations and institutions to identify 'credible mainstream voices' which can refute the '*extremist narrative*' through community voices and expose '*false theological and historical arguments*'. This activity will provide support to British Muslim identity, undermine the myths and half-truths being peddled by violent extremists and equip communities with a counter-narrative' (HM Government, May 2008, p. 18).

half-truth and conspiracy theory when targeting British Muslims... But there is another story to tell: about Muslim men and women who are proud to be British, who share the aspirations and concerns of many others in this country, and who are part of that overwhelming majority of people who reject the terrorist narrative and abhor terrorism as a criminal act.' (Research, Information and Communications Unit, 2010). The guidance goes on to explain that RICU is at the centre of the Government's efforts to 'communicate it's (sic) counter-terrorism strategy and to use messaging to disrupt the Al-Qaida narrative.' (2010:8). The existence of RICU and the materials which it produces situates public relations at the centre of the government's counter-terrorism activity. Aimed directly at public relations professionals, their materials are intended to support a unified and consistent approach to talking about Islam and its response to terror which conforms with government approaches to security.

### A new approach: the 2011 Prevent Strategy

The previous government's approach to Prevent was reviewed by the Coalition Government in November 2010. Announcing the review and a public consultation via a press release (Home Office, 2010), the Home Office said that the review would make Prevent more effective and would separate counter-terrorism work from integration work. The review was overseen by Lord Carlile of Berriew whose report was published alongside the new strategy and the report of the public consultation. It is possible to track the progress and outcome of that review through the subsequent public relations activity that followed. This comprises a framework of carefully constructed messages which join together to create a particular narrative about Prevent. This framework is discussed in some detail here because, although several interviewees referred to the events which took place around the review of Prevent, none of them was able to identify the public relations activity that helped shape the narrative.

In February 2011, while the Prevent review was still underway, Prime Minister David Cameron delivered a speech which gave a clear indication of the political direction

the review would take (Cameron, 2011). The press release for the speech said that segregation and separatism were key issues behind Islamic extremism and this extremist ideology should be confronted in all its forms. To do this, the press release continued, we need a 'shared sense of national identity' (Number10.gov.uk, 2011). The speech itself contained the following paragraph that was widely reported: 'Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream. We've failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We've even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values' (Cameron, 2011). This final reference to segregated communities opposing British values received widespread media coverage and the speech was interpreted as an attack on multi-culturalism (Doward, The Observer 2011; Wright and Taylor, The Independent 2011; Watson, O'Neill and Bird, The Times 2011).

Unsurprisingly, considering the findings of much of the literature about Islam and media discussed in Chapter 1, responses to the consultation raised a range of concerns about communications issues and representation, including the need to reduce negative stereotyping of Muslims and to set norms among the public through messaging activity in education and the media. Other responses called for the strategy to tackle propaganda by using communications to directly challenge views, point out flaws publicly, provide guidance on how to challenge it and help build public solidarity against terrorist organisations and activity. Journalists were identified as a group the government should be working closely with in delivering Prevent work (HM Government, 2011: 22).

Described in the accompanying press release as 'radical', the new Prevent strategy was launched in June 2011 with a fresh emphasis on preventing radicalisation and extremism and the importance of British values and identity. The press release stated that the new Prevent programme will: 'deal with all forms of terrorism and target not just violent extremism but also non-violent extremism ... [and] challenge the ideology that supports terrorism and those who promote it.' (Home Office:

2011). Within the new strategy, 'extremism' is defined as 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values' and a clear link is made between radicalisation and ideology which sanctions the use of violence. It says: 'Work to deal with radicalisation will depend on developing a sense of belonging to this country and support for our core values.' Radicalisation is clearly located within the context of Islam: 'So we believe that radicalisation – in this country – is being driven by: an ideology that sets Muslim against non-Muslim, highlights the alleged oppression of the global Muslim community and which both obliges and legitimises violence in its defence...The [Prevent] strategy is based on this assessment.' (HM Government, 2011: 18).

## Public relations activity in support of the launch of the Prevent Programme

The revised Prevent strategy was launched on 7 June 2011 with a statement in Parliament by Home Secretary Theresa May (Secretary of State for the Home Department, 2011) and a press release issued by the Home Office (Home Office, 2011) accompanied by the full strategy (HM Government, 2011). A Freedom of Information Act request from this researcher asking the Home Office for details of the communications plan detailing the public relations activity in support of the launch was rejected on three separate occasions. The first reason given was that the request was too extensive; the second that the information requested was relevant to the formation or development of government policy and was therefore exempt under the Freedom of Information Act,<sup>203</sup> and the third reason given, on appeal, was that the information requested was no longer held by the department. The second reason given for refusing to supply the requested information – namely that the communications plan for the launch of the 2011 Prevent strategy relates to the formation or development of government policy - is particularly interesting, suggesting that communications plans are synonymous with government policy. This could imply a PR logic that goes right to the heart of government decision

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<sup>203</sup> Information determined by the relevant department to be related to the formation or development of government policy is exempt under section 35 of the Freedom of Information Act.

making. However, as this is just one of three different reasons given as to why the information requested could not be supplied, it should not be taken too seriously. As a result, all the analysis here comes from material placed in the public domain at the time of the launch – either via the Home Office website or printed in newspapers.

The launch of the new strategy was heavily trailed in advance in the media<sup>204</sup>, and Home Secretary Theresa May gave an advance interview to the Daily Telegraph (Gardham, 2011). In the interview, Theresa May explicitly linked the Prevent Strategy with the Prime Minister's speech to the Munich Security Conference four months earlier, saying: 'There's an ideology out there that we need to challenge and when we first came in as a government one of the things we were very clear about here at the Home Office was we needed to look at extremism, not just violent extremism.' She continued to repeat the messages of the Munich speech, saying that the Government would cut funding to any Islamic group that espoused extremist views, and alluding to the 'key British values' to which those seeking support must subscribe. The interview concludes by quoting Theresa May as saying: 'Sending clear messages about our values is part of the information we want to put out.'<sup>205</sup> The Home Secretary also introduced a new perspective on Prevent, when she said that universities were not taking the issue of radicalisation seriously enough and that it was 'too easy for Muslim extremists to form groups on campuses without anyone knowing'. This particular perspective was echoed in the other pre-publication reporting of the strategy.

The way in which the pre-publication coverage was achieved is worth further exploration. While there is no material publicly available to show what information was shared with the media in advance, or how this was done, the pre-publication reporting focuses almost exclusively on two themes: the Government's criticism of

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<sup>204</sup> Other supporting documents made available at the same time included Lord Carlile's report (Lord Carlile of Berriew, May 2011), a summary of responses to the consultation (HM Government, 2011), an equality impact assessment, and summary versions of the Prevent strategy in Arabic and Urdu. With the exception of Lord Carlile's work, none of these latter documents were referenced in the press release, or in the Home Secretary's statement to Parliament or in any of the press reporting.

<sup>205</sup> The link between British values and work to counter extremism has continued to be a theme in the government's communications. In June 2014, following the Birmingham 'Trojan Horse' affair, the Prime Minister David Cameron wrote an article for the Mail on Sunday in which he said that British values should be promoted to every child in every school in the country (Cameron, British values aren't optional..., 2014).

universities for failing to tackle radicalisation on campus, and the strategy's requirement for NHS staff to be trained to identify patients at risk of radicalisation. The consistency with which these two themes appear in pre-publication press reporting suggests that public relations activity is responsible for the stories rather than the stories being the result of an unplanned or unauthorised leak. In its piece headed '40 UK universities are now breeding grounds for terror', the Daily Mail stated that it had seen a 'soon to be published Whitehall report' (Daily Mail 6 June 2011), while The Independent predicted that: 'A crackdown on Islamist extremists, centring on a ban on hardline groups at universities, is set to be approved this week by David Cameron' (The Independent 6 June 2011). The Daily Express declared that: 'NHS staff to be trained to spot Islamic fanatics' (The Daily Express 6 June 2011) while The Daily Telegraph, The Independent and The Guardian focused on the same story, albeit with slightly more moderate language. Additionally, The Times and The Telegraph ran pre-publication stories stating that the 'Anti-terror budget has been wasted overseas' (The Times, 7 June 2011) reporting the new strategy's assertion that 'millions' had been wasted by the previous government on flawed Prevent activity abroad.

On the day the strategy was launched, Home Secretary Theresa May made a statement to Parliament at 5.08 pm and a press release was issued to the media and made available, together with the strategy itself and supporting documents, on the Home Office website<sup>206</sup>. Under the heading: 'Radical new Prevent strategy launched', the press release began with a statement echoing the Prime Minister's Munich speech, saying that the Prevent programme would target non-violent as well as violent extremism and would ensure government funding and support cannot reach organisations with extremist views who do not support mainstream British values. These messages are repeated in a quote in the press release attributed to Home Secretary, Theresa May. The release states that the strategy will support particular institutions where there is risk of radicalisation, including universities and prisons. It goes on to specify particular activity focused on the internet, schools,

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<sup>206</sup> The release of the strategy was supported by PR material, including You Tube videos and blogs.

universities and prisons and concludes with a quote from Lord Carlile, in which he endorses the new strategy.

Once again, the strategy received wide coverage in the broadsheet media and some of the tabloids. The news reports were led mainly by the messages in the 522 word press release, although the full strategy (of over 100 pages) was made available to the media at the same time (and, as described above, may even have been given to them in advance).

The message about the strategy's adherence to British values was widely picked up in the national media with The Times, The Telegraph, The Guardian and The Observer all running headlines that linked prevention of extremism with British values. These were not the only headlines reporting on the launch of the new strategy but the use of public relations to establish a link between the Prevent strategy and the promotion of British values emerges loud and clear. Not all the newspaper reports were supportive of the strategy, but the accompanying PR activity – including the press release, the speech and the introductory text within the strategy - constructs a framework in which it is reported. The Prevent agenda is complex and multi-dimensional yet within the PR material for the launch of the strategy, just four or five messages were chosen to frame the narrative. One of the main messages, situated high up in the press release was that public money would not reach organisations with extremist views and who do not support 'mainstream British values'. The press release goes on to emphasise the breadth of Prevent work – including schools, universities and prisons within its remit - and includes a quote from the Home Secretary which reiterates the scope of Prevent work and the message about cutting off financial support for those who do not subscribe to society's 'core values' (Home Office 2011). Although these messages were not dissimilar to the ones that were reported by the newspapers a couple of days before, they proved effective in directing media coverage and were repeated widely in the national newspapers, including The Times, the Daily Telegraph, The Independent, The Daily Express and The Mirror. The final four messages within the press release (including reference to the Prevent budget and a supportive quote from Lord Carlile)

received no coverage at all. A detailed breakdown of how some of the key messages in the press release for the launch of the new Prevent programme on 7 June 2011 were reflected in related media coverage is included at Annex 1. The launch of the most recent Prevent strategy was clearly stage-managed using public relations techniques that originated from within the political field, with the Home Secretary to the fore. These techniques resulted in carefully worded press releases and other materials, setting out language and messages that were repeated again and again. Some of these messages – such as those promoting British values – have already been identified as prevalent in media coverage of Islam and Muslims within the UK. The use of these messages for the launch of Prevent provides them with political legitimacy, as they are sourced from the very centre of the political field. Including these messages in media coverage is not merely the result of journalistic subjectivity, but the result of a targeted campaign to influence the media. For those undertaking public relations for Muslim groups, the challenge of how to respond remains. Yet as the discussion of the fieldwork below will show, while all interviewees were familiar with these messages, none of them identified the public relations practice as the source of them.

### Fieldwork among representatives of Muslim groups

The fieldwork among representatives of Muslim groups was aimed at probing their experience of public relations and their response to the dominant media narrative, in particular with regards to issues surrounding Prevent. The questions began by asking interviewees about their experience of public relations. Following early interviews, where this question led to confusion about what public relations is, the question changed to one about dominant media narratives and work that could be done to shift or change these.



With one exception, all interviewees positioned themselves directly within the political field through their description of the work that they undertook<sup>207</sup>. One interviewee had worked directly with RICU, advising on communications to Muslim communities, while another had been recruited to advise Ministers and civil servants on different aspects of Prevent. When I arrived for the interview with a third, my interviewee apologised for having to cut our time short because they were up against a deadline to influence the government's expected announcement on press regulation. Another interviewee had recently been asked to join a cross-government working group advising on issues relating to the Muslim community, while a fifth described meetings with government ministers and advisers behind the scenes – encounters that were not publicly acknowledged by either side. A sixth interviewee worked for a group that had received government funding for Prevent related work.

Interviewees' familiarity with the political field was evident as they were able to describe in detail their engagement with government ministers and civil servants through taking part in meetings or work on particular projects and initiatives. Often, the level of engagement and experience of the political field that was described seemed quite significant, as interviewees related stories about disagreements between different personalities in government or errors that had been made in decision making or in implementation of government policy. These anecdotes, sometimes retold with a degree of astonishment on the interviewee's part, suggested a level of personal participation in the political field, but also a sense of novelty about the way in which the political field operated. In all these examples, the interviewee was an observer, or sometimes an unwitting victim of the mistake or disagreement, rather than a direct participant.

Several interviewees used language typical of the political field, for example using phrases such as 'targeted interventions' or 'community cohesion' when referring to

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<sup>207</sup> This level of political engagement is growing across the Muslim community, according to a report on Muslim participation in governance which argues that Muslim activism has successfully provided opportunities for Muslims to enter and engage with the political field (O'Toole, Nisson DeHanas, Modood, Meer, & Jones, 2013).

government activity within the Muslim community<sup>208</sup>. This suggested that they had adopted some of the characteristics of the field, although this language was also used to frame critiques of what the government was doing. Beyond their own personal experience of the political field, interviewees also spoke with familiarity about Muslim members of Parliament and politicians and the potential for influence that they had. Talking about increasing political engagement among the Muslim community, one interviewee explained: 'I think it's because there are more Muslims involved in government, it's as simple as that. I think that the process of Muslims getting involved – people like Saeeda Warsi [Minister of State for Faith and Communities]- at the highest levels of British politics is very, very welcome and I think it's very encouraging and they are obviously, maybe just by being there, by intervening, by the fact they are there, people will take more notice of Muslims.'

While this interviewee was able to name other Muslims as being at the centre of the political field or 'at the highest levels of British politics', they did not appear to perceive themselves within the same environment. Others referred to political parties courting the 'Muslim vote' as a trend that was likely to continue.

However, the individuals' positions within the political field could also be seen as tenuous, either because of changing circumstances within the field or because of attacks from outside the field. One interviewee talked about how the organisation they worked for had fallen out of favour with the government of the day over policy, thus alienating them from within the political field. Another expressed frustration at the tendency of Ministers to prefer to meet with their organisation behind closed doors out of the public eye: 'They're doing it in private and they say, 'we want to listen to you but we can't tell anyone we're talking to you because we fear that The Telegraph will come along and say that we're talking to Islamist terrorists or something like that.' This suggests that the dominance of the media dictates the nature and form of engagement: it has to be behind the scenes for fear of media exposure. There is also an underlying assumption here that the media exposure would be negative. The interviewee acknowledged that in any political negotiations

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<sup>208</sup> This contrasts with the one interviewee who had no direct experience of the political field who used much more religious language during the interview, quoting from the Qur'an and hadith to support the points made.

there would always be activity that took place behind the scenes, but expressed frustration at being deliberately excluded from the public face of such activity. Once again this suggests that positioning within the political field is precarious, reliant heavily on other, more established agents for the legitimacy of operating within the field and vulnerable to exposure and possibly exclusion.

A third interviewee's positioning as an outsider or visitor within the political field was illustrated when he found out from a friend while abroad that a piece of his work on Prevent had appeared in a national newspaper report: 'And when I came back I found out that [name of government minister] had asked... I don't know how much of this we can put into your PhD or whatever... I found out that [name of government minister] had asked one of their policy, political advisers – 'spads'<sup>209</sup> – to work with one of their media people to put this story out because they needed to show Number 10 that they were doing something on the agenda. And the point I'm trying to make is that just as some of us were trying to address the issue, we weren't able to do it because it wouldn't get the right headlines, or they were used for political purposes, out of time out of place.' The interviewee felt overlooked, or ignored as his work was released to the media without his knowledge or any reference to him. As the interviews with public relations practitioners show, this type of political manoeuvring is not unusual within the political field, but the anecdote also reveals that the interviewee's intentions to address the issue at hand were hampered by his lack of understanding of how the political field operates. While the interviewee was happy to work outside of the media spotlight to get the job done, the demands of the political field for publicity took precedence, and to his cost. The interviewee associates himself with those outside the political field who are trying to address issues, whereas those within the political field were merely chasing headlines.

Being present in the political field is not always a comfortable or pleasant place to be and interviewees were very clear about the challenges of crossing between fields –

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<sup>209</sup> 'Spad' is a widely used abbreviation within the political field for Special Adviser – political appointees who work for Ministers. Unlike civil servants, spads are employed by political parties.

from their religious community to the political field. They often spoke of this in negative terms and from personal experience. They recognised that their motivations for being in the political field were often very different to those who had been in the field for longer or who sought out a career within the field. Several interviewees referred to politicians' motivations as 'chasing headlines' or seeking good publicity, while one contrasted his motivation on Prevent – to find the right solutions – with that of civil servants: 'The people who came to Prevent, I felt, were people who saw Prevent as a hot topic in Whitehall and saw it as an opportunity for going places in their careers. You know, it was the sexy thing to do, it was the area that had the most resources and the most attention in Whitehall. So if you wanted to build your career quite quickly, it was the train you would jump on. [They were] people who were chasing the next job up, rather than focusing on addressing the issue and getting the right solutions.' In this, the interviewee identifies the competition within the political field and the importance of utilising networks in order to be able to work on the most high profile and well-funded programmes. However it is not something they relate to, suggesting they had a preference for sticking with the job in hand rather than scanning the field for the next career opportunity.

Interviewees described their religious or social identity as Muslims as a factor which could isolate them within the field, or push them out of it. Sometimes, this is because others within the field do not share this identity, or even know much about it. One interviewee spoke of his discomfort working alongside special advisers on Prevent: 'I think that most of the special advisers had very, very little knowledge of the Muslim community or Islam. One adviser was a political appointee. Another adviser was someone who was just left over from various jobs. They didn't know where to place him so they just placed him as a special adviser.' This implies an insularity within the political field and, perhaps, a homogeneity among those participating in it. The interviewee contrasted this experience with that of working in other fields, where work with non-Muslim agents had felt much more collaborative and inclusive.

Interviewees expressed an awareness that certain types of Muslim were acceptable within the political field while others weren't. Talking about the challenges of political representation, one interviewee explained: 'It's not about us and them, but it's more about who is the more acceptable.. it's a question of who is... who is the more moderate. It's a question of who is the moderate Muslim vs who is the non-moderate Muslim... The challenge is who defines the good Muslim and the bad Muslim.' As this quote suggests, participation in the political field is dependent on acceptability, according to subjective criteria, applied by those within the field itself. The good Muslim, defined not by the Muslim community, but by the political field, is entitled to speak for Muslims with the authority of the field, while those who are not deemed to be acceptable are silenced. None of the interviewees challenged the assumption that others within the political field had the power to define who was 'good' or 'moderate' within their community, and neither did they suggest that others would be better placed to make these judgements. While this may not be unique to Muslims' experience of the political field, it serves to highlight the factors that can drive exclusion.

For another interviewee, as he moved further towards the centre of the political field by taking on a new job with greater political associations, he became the subject of negative press coverage as a result of his work. Suddenly, he explained, he had become the 'other': 'When I was a teenager, when I was in 6<sup>th</sup> form, I used to read Private Eye because they were laughing at things that I considered to be the other, like the Conservative Government, or whatever. And those people who were writing it then, they're still running it and now they see me as being the other.' This otherness, he felt, was due to his religious Muslim identity which was discussed explicitly within the press articles. The articles questioned his ability to make decisions which impacted upon other faiths, because he is a Muslim. This interviewee's experience of moving towards the centre of political the field was not characterised during the interview as one of increased access to capital, or authority. Instead, it was an experience which heightened his sense of difference from the other agents within the field. This sense of difference was, at least in part, created by a particular type of media coverage.

This sense of otherness is not restricted to individuals' experience. One interviewee talked about the 'management' or manipulation of the Muslim community through communication in the context of Prevent: 'I mean I wonder a little bit about the kind of paternalism that the idea of RICU intimates. I mean, you know, the sense of the Muslim community has to be managed a little bit, or has to hear certain things from government in order to... I mean it's a little bit like being mollified or placated...' While this observation relates to communications activity which is intended to reach across fields, it also illustrates the perceived sense of 'otherness' – that Muslims have to be treated differently from the political field.

While the aims and goals of Prevent were very familiar to interviewees, and they were very aware of the political context from which it stemmed and the media headlines it generated, they professed less awareness of the type of public relations activity around Prevent that has been described here. This was initially unexpected in the context of a topic which has generated so much press reporting and in early interviews it led to some confusion around terminology which had to be corrected in the approach to later discussions.

Of the interviewees who expressed a lack of awareness of public relations, their response took three main forms. First, some interviewees sought clarification about what public relations meant. One response was typical: 'What do you mean by that? Public relations? Errrr... what does public relations mean?' While this reaction may not be unusual among people who are not public relations practitioners, I would posit that it displays a certain naivety from someone whose role is to represent their group to the media, particularly in the context of a discussion about Prevent, which is frequently reported in the media and about which all interviewees demonstrated a heightened level of awareness and knowledge.

Another interviewee conflated public relations with advertising; talking about paid for advertising campaigns rather than media materials. Only three of the ten interviewees talked unhesitatingly about the practice of public relations. Of these,

one described it as 'events and publications', while a second explained: 'So it's about talking to the wider community, telling them that one, Muslims are not the threat that you perceive them to be... part of the public relations aspect is finding out different avenues of propagating that message as such.' Neither explicitly mentioned working with journalists or the media in the context of defining public relations. And while this latter description would strike a chord with the public relations practitioners who took part in this research, the other responses to public relations reveal less confidence about what the practice is or what it can deliver.

A second response to references to public relations was to dismiss it as irrelevant to Islam and narratives about Islam. While interviewees suggested a lack of familiarity with public relations, the language and concepts of narrative and discourse were very familiar. One interviewee spoke at length about narrative and discourse in the context of media narrative and framing, suggesting that certain narratives around security, equality or cohesion originated from within the political field. The same person went on to say: 'I'm not sure there's much of a role for public relations. I think there probably is a role for the media in terms of news reporting, but I wouldn't, I would struggle to identify public relations in this debate, mostly because it is what might be considered high politics – security of the realm and that sort of thing...'<sup>210</sup> This suggests a reluctance to engage at all with public relations within the political field; perhaps ironically because it is too political. The interviewee is implying their preference for staying at the edge of the political field, responding to events that occur within it, but from the sidelines, rather than further in.

In another interview, the interviewee talked in detail about the process for developing narratives about Islam, but was less confident about what the 'dissemination strategy' for the narrative should be, saying: 'You find your key ambassadors, you find your audiences that you need to tap into, this is more your

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<sup>210</sup> This was reinforced in a second discussion, where the interviewee spoke of the risks of certain narratives creating stereotypes and acting as a barrier to progress: '...So this idea that all Sufis are cuddly, or that all revivalist Muslims are dangerous, or that all Islamists are bad... and dangerous. That kind of thing. So it resulted, because people were out to grab headlines, or whatever their particular interest may have been, it meant that you never got down to developing a nuanced piece of work which would lead towards a better solution.'

neck of the woods.’ By passing the metaphorical baton to me in my professional role as a PR practitioner, the interviewee distanced themselves from the process; acknowledging that this is something that others do. A third interviewee revealed themselves to be knowledgeable about the launch of the Prevent review, but saw no role for public relations within it: ‘So you know, statements that the Home Secretary has made in announcing the Prevent review, and then the publication of that review, the speech by the Prime Minister in Munich in 2011, all of that I know to be reported in the news media, but I haven’t seen anything which identifies public relations as part of that exercise.’ This suggests that the speaker views public relations practice as being conflated with political activity: the two are one and the same and cannot be separated. While the interviews with PR practitioners within the political field have shown that this can be the case, the interviewee does not demonstrate any insight into how public relations practice can influence political positioning. The interviewee demonstrates an in depth knowledge of the government’s position and activity around Prevent, but does not identify the mechanisms by which it has been communicated. In a final example, when I explained that my contention is that there are activities, such as the work of press officers, which influence what journalists write about Islam, another interviewee responded by explaining that the current narrative about Islam is the product of historical and political events, such as the Crusades, the British Empire and the oil price hikes in the 1970s. This acknowledgement that particular narratives exist, but dismissal of any suggestion that they are managed or constructed, reinforces the argument that those representing Muslim groups are not central to the political field, but that their involvement is managed by other, more powerful agents within the field.

The third response recognised the role of public relations but suggested that it should only take place at a very basic level, because the actions of individual Muslims could be more important. One interviewee, who defined their role as that of a public relations agent explained: ‘I mean the simple question is would Islam as a religion be better if we had better PR? I suppose, at the very basic level, the answer is yes if it was targeted at journalists and by PR I mean, just making sure journalists check their facts... I think what works is the community going out and reaching out



and making friends with people and mosques opening their doors and helping society become a better place.’ Interviewees did not see PR activity, or engagement with the media, as an authentic or credible activity on behalf of Islam or the Muslim community. The same interviewee continued: ‘People just need to be who they are and not necessarily go out and say they’re doing this for PR purposes because I just don’t think that’s – I’m saying this as a PR professional....It’s not authentic, right, people can see through it.’ This response suggests that activity to change or improve the perception of Islam is best approached in other fields, through engagement of individuals in local communities, rather than political activity.

Another interviewee explained: ‘So my point is this, the Muslims who are doing it [public relations] I’ve never heard of; they’re not players. So I don’t think we have a bunch of players on all sorts of levels. One because they’re volunteers and there’s nothing wrong with that. And secondly, they’re being paid to do this kind of stuff and if they were really, really good...they’d be doing something else. And I mean, you know, if they were really good at PR, this wouldn’t be a job they’d be doing; in my opinion.’ This suggests a vicious circle – Muslims who are doing PR are not recognized, because they are not playing the game at the right level. Those who do know how to play the game would not be doing it to promote Muslim groups, but would be operating within a different arena.

When probed, this dismissal of public relations within or on behalf of the Muslim community, revealed a strong consensus among interviewees that Muslims lacked the skills or knowledge to embark on PR practice. One interviewee spoke about how they were invited to give presentations about Islam as a substitute for imams from local mosques: ‘So perhaps they would have invited an imam in, but he might have talked hellfire... so, I mean I’ve heard that happened a few times’. As a former teacher, this interviewee suggested they had the skills and understanding to be able to relate the tenets of the Muslim faith to their audience's needs, be they primary school children or television viewers. Another interviewee described the different ways he sought to influence print and broadcast journalists who wrote about his work, but was more dismissive of other Muslims and their lack of PR nous. Speaking

about how he had been approached by representatives of other faiths during his career, he said: 'And, if I'm honest, in those 11 years, the one particular group of people that actually don't ask for as much, and you could argue don't have the media literacy skills maybe, or the ability, or the don't have the networking, I think, capabilities and knowledge are the Muslims....Because they haven't got the ability, the knowledge, the wherewithal, and quite frankly, the chutzpah to talk to me about what could be done.' This suggests that Muslims are not able to operate effectively in fields other than their own because they lack the social and cultural capital to do so. The quote, which is supported by other interviews, suggests not just a lack of capital, but a complete absence of understanding about how different fields operate<sup>211</sup>. A third interviewee, responsible for leading public relations and communications within the organisation for which he worked described his struggle to build connections with the British media. Relationships with the ethnic media were better, because they carried mutual understanding: 'We do... I think... we still, we're not at the stage where we have a perfect relationship with the British media...but I think we have a better relationship with the ethnic media. They will contact us or they will run stuff if we do something on [names a subject] for example, they will run stuff rather than the mainstream media.' The interviewee went on to describe a growing awareness of the political influences on the mainstream media: 'And I found a lot of what I said was not politically... I won't say not politically acceptable because ... I wasn't as critical say ...as The Guardian would like and so they wouldn't run that. You know, but others would. So I also found that it's not just the politics of the person who's writing but the politics of the organisation that's running it as well.' The interviewee's experience was not that his political views were unacceptable, but that he had not been able to navigate his way through the politics of media ownership and editorial to find the right newspaper, or other media vehicle, which would support his views by printing an article or other piece of coverage.

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<sup>211</sup> However, it is not just a lack of social and cultural capital which prevents Muslims from entering other fields. Economic capital is also a factor. One interviewee summed it up the reasons for the lack of public relations activity from within the Muslim community: 'It's not an easy...it's not an easy answer, but I think the biggest, simplistic answer is not enough people, not enough ability, not enough money'.

This was reinforced by several other illustrations of how Muslim leaders or representatives had demonstrated a lack of understanding about UK cultural or media norms.<sup>212</sup> As one interviewee explained: 'There's no communication, there's no ability to communicate, they [Muslims] don't know how to communicate. They feel they can't talk to their MP. They may not know how to use surgeries or whatever. So there's a general lack of information or education about it.'

Another interviewee recounted how after 11 September 2001 the police 'wanted to set up these regular meetings with the Muslim community, so they invited these leaders from the Muslim community, and for about 45 minutes different leaders from the Muslim community went on about how the media has treated them, and how the BBC has treated them....all negative experiences. And the Assistant Commissioner at the time who was responsible for counter-terrorism but also for dealing with the Muslim community, after about 45 minutes he said, look, I appreciate all of this, but I'm not the BBC, I'm the Met [laughs].... So, just the understanding about who to speak to and about what issues; wasn't there.' In this instance, the leaders of the community had not understood the differences between fields, or how to navigate between them.

One interviewee had a more optimistic perspective. Describing the involvement of his organisation in the Stop the War Coalition, in the run up to the 2003 Iraq war, he explained how a common cause had brought Muslims into contact with groups they would normally not engage with: 'It was one of the first times the Muslim community was beginning to get out of the intellectual ghetto it found itself in and engaged at that public level, collectively...To engage with Stop the War, to engage with Respect, to engage with stakeholders it would never have found itself... the socialists, gay and lesbian alliance: I mean these were partners you would never, ever consider...' This example was echoed by other interviewees who talked about the way in which different Muslim organisations were addressing British issues, such

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<sup>212</sup> For example, one interviewee cited small groups of Muslims burning books during the controversy over Salman Rushdie's 'Satanic Verses'. This, he explained, showed a lack of understanding that art is as sacred in the West, as religion is in Muslim countries. 'So once you understand that, your approach to Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses will be different. You will not be burning books, because you will understand what Hitler did, and what that resulted in.'

as homelessness or teenage pregnancy, rather than restricting their concerns to issues more targeted at their own community. Another interviewee spoke of different attitudes within the Muslim community itself: 'There are people who are still in a defensive mode, there are people who are in a 'let's educate the wider public about us' mode, and there are people who are like in sophisticated mode, which is, well, the best way to educate people is to try and rebuild the narrative, not just for Muslims but for Britain.' However these examples were presented as currently the exception, rather than the norm. Where Muslim organisations had attempted to engage Muslims on 'British issues', response had been poor and there was no indication that, having reached out to other fields, individual Muslims or organisations were particularly comfortable in that position.

The interviewees were quick to disassociate themselves from the types of people they described, who had no knowledge, skill or resource to navigate through different fields in order to change or reshape the narrative about Islam. This suggests that they perceived themselves to be active and potentially powerful or influential participants within the political field while other Muslims were not. Their self-perception in this area was sometimes contradicted by other elements of the interview but served to make them distinct from how they perceived other Muslims to be. One interviewee described the need to be a 'player in the game', saying: 'Because the difference [between me and other Muslims] is, no-one is at the level that I'm at. So they don't quite grasp what I'm on about.' Another recounted how he had chosen to file away a complaint sent to their organisation by a Muslim member of the public about a particular painting in the National Gallery that the complainer found offensive: 'We thought the best way of dealing with this was to keep quiet about it, because not many Muslims would find out about it anyway, there's not a huge culture of going to National Gallery in the Muslim community.' These statements reveal a series of judgements made by the interviewees, including, in the latter quote, a decision not to take action on something found offensive and a judgement on the cultural preferences of the Muslim community. Interviewees also distanced themselves, and sometimes their organisation, from explicitly being part of a religious field, suggesting a separation from other Muslims.

One interviewee challenged a reference to his employer as a Muslim organisation: '...we never call ourselves a Muslim organisation, we call ourselves Muslim inspired. So from our perspective we're Muslim inspired but we're not a Muslim organisation. We don't want to paint ourselves as the bog standard Muslim organisation.' On further probing, the interviewee revealed that being a Muslim organisation created perceptions from both the Muslim and the non-Muslim community about what the organisation could or should be doing. From a Muslim community, the expectation was primarily religious – about provision for places of prayer, or use of certain language, or adherence to particular methods of religious expression such as the hijab. From the non-Muslim community, the interviewee explained the expectation of a Muslim organisation was one of extremism, or even links with terror. Attempts were being made to counter this, including a refusal to take on work addressing solely 'Muslim issues', such as the Middle East, or Islamophobia.

These insights raise particular questions about interviewees' own personal positioning within fields. As discussed above, while nearly all interviewees had experience of operating within the political field they were not fully embedded as part of that field; they were often seen as outsiders and reliant on the co-operation of other political agents to be able to participate. The isolation that some interviewees experienced within the political field stemmed in part from diminished levels of capital in comparison to other agents within that field, and also from a lack of understanding about how the field operates. Interviewees did not have easy access to the social capital which is so prevalent in the political field. Identified as 'different' and with different priorities and ways of operating, the networks that other agents in the field utilise successfully were not available, or of less relevance, to those working for Muslim groups. In contrast, interviewees suggested that they had greater networks among the Muslim communities, but there was a divide there too. The separation between interviewees and the religious field did not come from a lack of religious belief or conviction, but, as the quotes imply, from their perception that they have a greater knowledge of politics, history or media, or cultural or societal literacy, in comparison with the wider Muslim community.

The interviews revealed a sense of habitus which seemed to sit at odds with the dominant characteristics of the UK political field. Interviewees appeared less confident and self-assured than the political field might demand. Their focus was as much on the traits and experiences of Muslims outside the political field as on other agents within the political field. As outlined above, one or more interviewees spoke disparagingly of the drive for publicity and self-promotion within the political field, aligning themselves with a preference to get the job done properly and find solutions rather than soundbites. The interviews revealed a motivation among interviewees to change the current situation and often a strong personal drive to do so. At the same time, they were realistic about the scale of the task, describing the outsider status that was prevalent within the Muslim community(ies). This outsider status was not necessarily something that they as individuals appeared to relate to and in this they sometimes expressed confusion or bemusement at the behaviour of media or political agents that they came into contact with. Interviewees expressed a strong sense of awareness of diversity, not only in their own community(ies) but in others too, and they showed a willingness to work with others to achieve joint goals. This contrasted with their sense of frustration at working within the political field, where their collaboration was not reciprocated in the way that they might have hoped for.

The interviewees each described to me their own area of specialism and (often academic) expertise and their networks in the political and other fields. They offered critiques of government policy and described the Muslim community as still 'maturing' with no unanimity of action or purpose about how to change the narrative about Islam in the UK today. As one interviewee succinctly put it: 'Ok, so there's no doubt that British Muslims haven't put their case about their religion as well as other religions have, in the public sphere. So Christianity doesn't need to do much PR, right, it's the dominant religion. But I think that other dominant religions, be they Hindu, Jewish, whatever, have done a much better job ... So Muslims have always come across as being at odds with Western civilisation but they haven't, I mean, Islam isn't incompatible but they haven't made the link strongly enough, so maybe that is a PR failure... Now, I put that down as an institutional failure – first generation migrants built mosques but didn't know how to send out press releases,

or didn't think open days were a great idea.' This acknowledgement of failure to communicate their religion effectively was shared by other interviewees, who suggested that the best way to tackle it was to have a debate within the Muslim community itself, rather than within other fields: '...there's a conversation we need to have with the Muslim community. The pressure is for them to understand that they need to contribute, they need to engage. For a long time, they have been very content with just talking to themselves and not really engaging with the wider society.' If this conversation is to take place within the community it will do little to enhance the standing or position of Muslim groups within the UK political field. It is only when the conversation begins to take place more widely, and according to the logic of other fields, that the position of Muslims will begin to change.

Despite having stated aims of driving engagement and understanding about Islam, several interviewees suggested that Muslim organisations had not been the most effective at driving this forward. Interviewees described a 'disconnect' between organisations and the leadership, with individuals having different aspirations and expectations from the organisations which sought to represent them. Partly, this was because of the huge diversity of the Muslim community, but also because grassroots activism and the work and lifestyle of individual Muslims were seen to be more effective. One interviewee explained: '...many Muslims of my generation have woken up to the fact that there is something they can do to counter these perceptions. But it's still very ad hoc. And the question is who should do it right, and how they should do it, right. It's all such a fierce debate. And nobody can speak on behalf of all Muslims, right, we're such a varied community and I think that ummmm... I think what gives me inspiration is that there are many ordinary Muslims doing amazing things. They're all over the UK and they're slowly, through their actions, and being who they are, they're slowly changing perceptions.' This type of response was echoed by others, who suggested that the way forward was to encourage civic and political participation, engagement and debate among ordinary Muslims. One interviewee went further, articulating the need to develop leaders – '...young leaders, men, women... young men, young women .... you don't have this in the Muslim community, it's very, very difficult.' While not explicit, this observation

seems to suggest an absence of political social capital, with little debate or networking taking place among those who could be positioned as new entrants to the political field. Without such leaders entering the political field, it will be difficult for others to follow.

The interviewees were clear about the scale of the challenge in front of them and had identified a way forward within the Muslim community itself. But none of the interviewees was explicit about this solution – the development of young leaders, or the changing of perceptions as a result of the amazing things that ordinary Muslims are doing – being situated within the political field. Instead, the implication is that young and ordinary Muslims will affect change within their own professional or other fields through their everyday life and actions. While acknowledging that individual Muslims should become more politically active, interviewees did not go so far as to suggest that they needed to develop the skills and access the types of social and cultural capital necessary to become powerful agents within the political field. The people who took part in the fieldwork did not identify public relations as a way forward; even going so far as to dismiss it entirely, or reduce its significance to fact checking for journalists. The public relations practitioners spoken to as part of this research would suggest that here interviewees are missing a trick. As we have seen in earlier chapters, public relations practitioners demonstrate a clear sense of PR logic – the process by which their practice can influence the institution which employs them, thus helping it to transverse and engage with other fields, and in particular the journalistic field. I would suggest that the absence of an understanding of PR, demonstrated in the interviews described above, diminishes the opportunity to drive change within Muslim institutions, or to cross between fields as a result of PR logic. While there are other ways to build greater understanding and empathy between fields than through public relations alone, the overwhelming concern among those I spoke to, and more widely within the Muslim community, about media narratives around Islam and the significance of PR within the political field suggests that without effective PR practice and logic, this will be hard to achieve.



The title of this thesis is 'Playing the game'. At the heart of this doctoral research is an examination of the game (or, as described by Sparrow (2006), the dance) played between the news media and politics, with public relations practitioners situated in the centre of the playing field. It is this focus on the relationships and interactions between the different contributors to news coverage which distinguishes this research from the literature discussed in Chapter 1. Those accounts of news media reporting of Islam do not take account of public relations practice, or the significance of interactions between different fields in shaping news coverage. As a result, the literature about Islam and media has yet to present a full understanding of how and why particular news coverage about Islam appears. The existing literature provides a useful starting point for the examination detailed here, offering clarity about the type of media coverage that appears and the association of Islam with broader political issues such as security and threat, immigration, discrimination and violence. Yet unlike much of the existing literature, this study does not take news coverage as its starting point. More recent studies of Muslim participation in different aspects of society (Field 2007, Spielhaus 2010, O'Toole et al 2013) propel the understanding of Islam and media out of the newsroom and into a broader social context. This study goes one step further, by exploring the participation of Muslim groups and organisations within one particular field – the political field – and the nature of the relationships and practices that aid or hamper that participation. As has been argued, participation in public relations practice can help to shape news media reporting and it is from this perspective that the study approaches the representation of Islam in the news media. This develops the existing literature by providing a fuller and more rounded understanding of the practices that sit behind news coverage and by demonstrating that these practices are not restricted to journalists alone. Instead, the research has illustrated the different players involved in playing the game, and the potential consequences for those who do not participate.

The phrase 'playing the game' is used by Bourdieu (1994) to describe the behaviours demanded of actors within specific social fields: an actor needs to compete according to the rules of the particular field in order to succeed. The game played

between media and politics is one where power is exchanged, a continuous game of cat and mouse, where the media seek to report that which is most novel, contentious or significant and the politicians seek to influence media reporting which will enhance their reputation with the electorate. For the game to take place, the news media must play by the rules of the political field; acknowledging its symbolic power and authority within society. At the same time, politicians must play by the rules of the news media, adapting their presentation of policy and decision-making to conform to the media's criteria for compelling and commercially viable news. According to the theory of mediatisation, discussed in detail in Chapter 2, while both sides are powerful, the upper hand in the game is with the media. The media's dominance over the political field subsumes politics to its rules to a greater extent than politicians are reciprocally able to control the press. Yet while both sides publicly assert their independence and autonomy, the real secret to the game is that behind the scenes the two sides are interdependent. The media rely on accurate briefings and reliable information sources for a steady stream of news and politicians are dependent on the oxygen of good publicity to maintain their visibility and credibility with the wider public. In this, the media logic inherent in mediatisation is translated and extended into a logic contained within public relations practice. Media logic cannot provide a steady stream of reliable news to feed a 24/7 news cycle. In this the news media are reliant on the way public relations works within organisations and more widely within fields, constructing and disseminating their own narratives to conform with the logic of the media.

But not everyone involved in politics chooses to play the game. The fieldwork conducted among representatives of Muslim groups operating within the political field demonstrates their reluctance, or their inability, to engage properly with this type of jousting. Despite their presence within the political field, they are primarily observers of rather than participants in the ruckus on the playing field. Yet although they may be on the edge of play, as observers they are not invisible. Instead, they are drawn ever closer onto the field of play through an increasingly embedded media narrative associating Islam with the politics of central government in the UK. It is not possible for Muslim groups and individuals in the UK to diminish the

dominant media narratives by ducking out of the game. A retreat from politics in an attempt to be shielded by a more religious identity provides no escape. As is discussed in the literature review in Chapter 1, the predominant narrative about Islam in the UK not only associates Islam with political priorities such as conflict, war, terror and immigration, but it also serves to politicise that which is more closely linked to Muslim's religious identity, such as veiling. With the game swirling around them, the only alternative to being overwhelmed is to begin to play.

Public relations practitioners have shown themselves to be some of the most expert players of the game between politics and the news media. Their presence on the playing field makes for a smoother and more equally matched encounter; they counter the dominance of the media, assert the value of the organisations they represent and ensure effective communication between the two. Their role is to manage the relationships between the different players on the field for the ultimate benefit of all. By supplying a steady stream of news and information, public relations practitioners help to assuage the media's demands while helping to shape and build the reputation of their sponsor organisation. PR practitioners are able to achieve this because their skill as expert players rests not only in their ability to develop tangible resources for the media to use, but also in the scope and breadth of their relationships across the area of play. Their intervention makes the game more complex and more nuanced, but without their presence on the field, those relationships would fracture and the media would return to dominance.

The fieldwork with representatives of Muslim groups suggests that public relations is not yet fully part of the game they are playing with the media. Some groups are standing on the sidelines while others are pushing their way on to the pitch, but without the network of relationships that support effective game playing. The results of interviews suggest that this is because they are not fully operating within the political field. Instead, their focus is divided between the demands of the media and the political game and those of the communities they represent. These separate interests rarely appear to coincide, operating in different social spheres, with diverse priorities, networks and sources of power and capital available to them.

Some remain unconvinced of the merits of playing the political game at all, arguing that their community(ies) are better represented by individual Muslims engaging with other fields as part of everyday life. But whether Muslim groups take part or not, the game goes on and, according to the theory of mediatisation, it is becoming ever more intense.

## Conclusion

This concluding chapter considers the success, or otherwise, of this research in contributing to a greater understanding of the representation of Islam in the UK media. It discusses how far the research questions elicited responses helpful to the discussion and identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology used. The chapter goes on to set out the contribution that this study has made to existing research and in particular to understandings of public relations, the theory of mediatisation and the literature around Islam and media. The chapter draws to a close with suggestions for further work in this area.

## The research questions

Since its conception, the aim of this research has been to understand more about the response of Muslim groups in the UK to the dominant media narratives about their faith and communities. The urgency and enormity of this dilemma is apparent from the sheer volume of literature relating to Islam and media which has emerged in the last two decades. Yet despite the amount of attention devoted to it, this thesis contends that there is still no satisfactory approach to answering the question about why the prevalent media narrative about Islam is so overwhelmingly negative and how it can be challenged or changed. To date, the scale and complexity of this task has either been underestimated, with responsibility for changing the tone of press coverage placed solely in the hands of journalists, or dismissed as too vast and too difficult and someone else's problem. Too often these responses to understanding the reasons for particular types of media coverage begin with the media themselves or wider cultural frames, rather than looking beyond the media content at the interactions and influences which help shape media narratives. The presentation of recurring themes and tropes in media coverage as outlined in Chapter 1 provides a valuable perspective on how Islam is represented through the media. The theories of media and society discussed in Chapter 2 illustrate the impact that such media content can have on citizens and society more widely. But

studying the media in order to understand how to change what they report is akin to trying to deduce the process of making a cake as it comes out of the oven. The questions that this thesis sets out to answer are intended to reveal the different mix of resources that are involved in the construction of media coverage, with a particular focus on one element which to date has been overlooked in discussions of Islam and media - the role of public relations.

The research questions outlined in Chapter 3 aimed to establish the nature of public relations practice, and in particular within the UK political field, with an understanding of the nature of power and how it is utilised in PR. These questions encompass a sizeable social and professional arena: the UK political field and a particular element of practice within it. With a few exceptions<sup>213</sup> the literature relating to this practice – public relations – has not approached it as a social field, instead the literature has explored public relations from a management or media studies perspective. As a result, the research questions within this thesis relating to public relations covered a breadth of practice, beginning with attempts to define what public relations is, and continuing by exploring the relationships and networks practitioners have access to and the power and capital they hold.

These research questions alone would have sufficed for a study of public relations per se, but the locus of this research sits somewhere different – in an attempt to contribute to the urgent question of why particular narratives about Islam and Muslims dominate in the UK media. To achieve this, the research questions then honed in on the experience of representatives of Muslim groups operating in the UK political field, with the intention of establishing how far their experience, skills and resources were akin to those prevalent among PR practitioners more generally. Again, these questions covered a vast sphere of activity and even within the political field there were many different routes which could have been explored. The results of early interviews revealed that wide ranging questions about the effectiveness of public relations on media coverage were largely redundant, leaving participants uncertain about the focus of the discussion. These questions had been based on the

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<sup>213</sup> Most notably Edwards (2006, 2008, 2009).

assumption that representatives of Muslim groups would be engaging in public relations practice at a similar level to other practitioners but this proved to be erroneous. Consequently, instead of framing discussions around the practice of public relations among Muslim groups, the questions reverted back to a more generic approach, which sought to explore how Muslim groups, and their representatives, were positioned within the UK political field and whether or not they were using public relations to shape media narratives. This focus on the positioning within the political field was intended to elicit an understanding of representatives' participation in the behaviours of that field, their access to sources of capital within it and the extent to which they shared its habitus. This insight has been used to assess the likelihood of Muslim groups successfully embarking on public relations within the political field.

The intention of the research has never been to generate a comparison between the nature and effectiveness of public relations conducted by representatives of Muslim groups and the practice more widely. Such a comparison would provide little further insight into the question at hand, merely highlighting the differences between two very different and separate groups. Furthermore, this would have required the research questions to focus on the public relations field as the arena where practice could be compared. As the research developed it became apparent that such a comparison would be difficult to make as the public relations field appears largely uncompetitive. While appearances may be deceptive and a struggle for position within the field of public relations may be taking place unseen, on the surface at least practitioners are more involved in a struggle within the field in which they are employed; for example the political field.

As a result, the final research questions sought to understand the positioning of agents representing Muslim groups within the political field. In doing so, the questions take their lead from Bourdieu's approach to the literary field (1993) and Anheier et al's adoption of this (1995) by understanding how agents are positioned relative to others in the field. As Bourdieu's analysis of the literary field reveals, not only does this reveal more about the distinctiveness of the agents being studied, it

also reveals more about how they known and perceived by others external to the field.

## The methodological approach

This research differs from other studies which also explore the depiction of Islam in the UK press. While this thesis begins with a literature review about Islam and media it swiftly moves on to focus on the relationships and activities that sit unseen behind the final published story. This has proved to be a robust methodological position which frees the researcher to concentrate on studying the construction of Islam through social fields, rather than from the perspective of journalism studies. It reflects the reality of the processes of media production and avoids the trope of journalistic prejudice or bias. While the discussion of the portrayal of Islam in the news provides a useful context for this research, this approach avoids drawing a binary distinction between 'positive' or 'negative' coverage and instead comes to more nuanced conclusions.

The methodological approach to this research – using field theory to determine the relative positions of actors responsible for public relations within the UK political field – proved to be a reliable and insightful mechanism for understanding how power is captured and utilised. In this the research was aided by the high levels of capital demonstrated by interviewees, who (particularly as demonstrated by the public relations practitioners) were willing and articulate participants, prepared to talk freely and at length about their role and practice. The very high success rate in sampling was a result both of the snowball sampling method used (and the benefits of my own contacts and reputation within the field) and practitioners' strong external focus in their role. Snowball sampling worked particularly well because of the high value placed on professional networks – this meant that respondents were familiar with an informal and speculative approach. They proved themselves to be comfortable with answering questions, and on tape, with little challenge or questioning about the purpose of the interview, other than for personal curiosity.



The methodology did not prove so effective among representatives of Muslim groups operating in the political field. While there are numerous groups which could take part, many have limited resources or rely heavily on volunteers. This group of interviewees was notably more insular than the public relations practitioners and, without the benefit of personal or professional networks, it proved much harder to gain access. When respondents recommended other contacts as potential interviewees the contact failed, perhaps because of a lack of time and resources and a growing demand amongst researchers for access. Among those representatives of Muslim groups who did take part, awareness of public relations practice seemed much more limited than had been assumed and, while this was revealing in itself, it restricted the depth of the conversation about the potential of PR. As a result, the balance of the thesis has had to shift from its original intention, which was to explore the mediatisation of Islam in a greater depth. Instead, the findings offer a first pass in an area which merits much further study.

One of the original intentions of this study was to follow the trajectory of a news story from its conception as a PR construct within a sponsor organisation to its final arrival in the journalistic field, tracking the role and intervention of different agents as the story developed<sup>214</sup>. The aim of such a case study would have been to illustrate the interventions that public relations practitioners make in shaping and refining content which eventually is reported as news. With regards to Islam and media in particular, the study aimed to reveal how PR practice can result in particular narratives or perspectives being reported in the press. For practical reasons it was not possible to pursue this line of enquiry. While individual practitioners were happy to be interviewed about their role, a more forensic examination of PR material proved harder to achieve. As is explained on page 201, attempts under the Freedom of Information Act to obtain public relations materials produced by government for the launch of the Prevent strategy were unsuccessful and this, combined with the difficulties in gaining access to different Muslim groups and communities meant that such a case study was not possible to pursue. Instead,

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<sup>214</sup> On a smaller scale, this is similar to the approach taken by Lewis, Franklin, Williams, Thomas and Modsell (2006) who track PR influence in a range of news stories.

the deconstruction of the publicly available PR material about the launch of the Prevent strategy in Chapter 4 attempts to highlight the same contribution that public relations can make to press coverage.

The addition of quantitative research methods may also have added something further to the insight generated by this research. While qualitative interviews provide a rich seam of content for analysis and discussion, the novelty of the research into public relations practice among Muslim groups may benefit from a more robust quantitative basis on which qualitative conclusions can subsequently be based. Previous studies (Edwards 2008, 2009; Grunig, J 1984; 1999; Grunig L 1990) provide this data for public relations practice and this is supported by information collated on behalf of the trade body. For Muslim groups this information is absent and would be a useful addition in understanding aspects of social, cultural and economic capital that representatives have access to. Similarly, better insight into the nature of the Muslim religious field would have enabled more incisive interpretation of the position of Muslim agents in the political field. As the fieldwork showed, representatives of Muslim groups often seemed uncomfortable within the political field but an absence of insight into the Muslim religious field makes it difficult to develop this observation further.

### Contributions to existing scholarship

The work to answer the research questions has made three significant contributions to existing scholarship. These contributions span across studies of public relations, the relationship between Islam and the news media and the theory of mediatisation. Most importantly, the study provides a clear and common thread between all three of these disciplines which has not previously been established, through its understanding of their interaction with politics as a social field. This common thread extends through the different contributions that this research makes and, by establishing it, the research has opened up new dimensions for understanding mediatisation, public relations and Islam and media, all of which have potential for further quantitative or qualitative study. The implications of the research may also

extend to the work of practitioners themselves, as a means of identifying critical success factors for public relations in the UK political field.

### Public relations and the political field

First, the study has established the existence of public relations as a social field and separately, its place as part of the UK political field. While public relations' participation in the political arena is well established (Davis 2002; Gregory 2011;) there has been less attention given to the nature of public relations as a field in itself, with its own structures, habitus and ways of operating. The findings of the study build on the work that has been done by Edwards (2006, 2008, 2009) in this area. While Edwards' work to date has focused on ethnographic studies of public relations functions within particular organisations, this study attempts to paint a broader picture of public relations within the UK political sphere, with a particular focus on how the practice operates at the centre of that field<sup>215</sup>. In particular, the elite interviews with Directors of Communications for central government departments conducted for the purposes of this study provide an original insight into the use of public relations at the very centre of the political field. This type of practice is often overlooked, dismissed or treated pejoratively, but this study demonstrates that no study of the relationship between the political field and the media is complete without it. To categorise public relations practitioners under the catch-all of 'government officials' belies the relationships and power that they hold and can exert.

Whereas much of the existing literature about the mediatisation of the political field has focused on Parliament or individual politicians, this study extends that understanding of the political field to include government departments and agencies and the civil servants who work in public relations roles within them. Although apolitical, these PR practitioners are at the heart of the political field, with government ministers often dependent on them for reinforcing the characteristics of the field and communicating the government's main messages externally. Although

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<sup>215</sup> As is described in Chapter 4, the study defines the centre of the political field as Westminster.

firmly situated within the Westminster 'bubble' or 'village', the role of these agents is to look beyond the boundaries of Westminster geography, providing information to citizens and acting as translator between the political field and those fields beyond it. While this role should not be exaggerated as politicians themselves have direct contact with both the media and citizens, public relations practitioners create a structure around which communication between the political field and citizens can take place, using the news media as a tool to achieve this.

Public relations agents are situated throughout the political field and their position is contingent on who they are working for or representing. Those who are working on behalf of other agents nearer to the centre of the political field are positioned correspondingly and the authority held at the centre of the field is conferred on to the public relations practitioner. The appeal of this power is compelling. It was notable in interviews that public relations practitioners referred to themselves more readily as participants in the political field, or any other field in which their sponsor organisation is situated rather than their own professional field. The importance of social capital to PR practice means that the networks they form within the political or other fields are important conduits of power and authority. Thus when the PR agent who had worked at No.10 Downing Street issued instructions to press officers in other government departments, she was speaking with the authority of No.10 and was using this authority not only to influence the press officers but, through them, to exert control over officials in other departments. The field of public relations only appears relevant to individual practitioners in so far as it serves to enhance their social capital, or their position, through networks within other practitioners. As an interviewer who shares a lot of the characteristics exemplified by PR practitioners, interviewees approached our meeting with interest in how the encounter would enhance their social capital – or what the interview would do for them. This was backed up by the high levels of participation in the LinkedIn social network: all practitioners had a profile and used it to communicate both with me and with other potential contacts.

The social capital practitioners possessed came from networks within and outside their sponsor organisations – and these networks revolved around the practitioner's role. For example, networks were based around other professionals who could contribute to the practitioner's success – either through the provision of information, or funding or with people in more senior positions. Others talked about how they had used their network to secure jobs. Networks outside the sponsor organisations included journalists and again, these were seen as useful contacts who could be persuaded or influenced to write positive press articles or features. More difficult relationships, such as with individuals or groups critical of the sponsor organisation had to be minimized, with the influence of these critics diminished and, as far as possible, the critics themselves pushed towards the far edges of the field.

This focus on the field in which their sponsor organisation was situated minimized the sense of competition among practitioners within the public relations field. Even competition for jobs was made light of, with appearance of a seamless transition from role to role, sometimes relying on others within the network in order to secure new positions. There was no sense of competition, either for jobs or for press coverage, within sponsor organisations' fields. Instead each practitioner seemed confident of their own sphere of influence and that it would remain uninterrupted by competitors. PR practitioners also have a high level of cultural capital: they are educated, articulate and able to converse about a range of subjects. Education is important to them, but having the ability to manage relationships through good interpersonal skills and good contacts is more important than particular educational credentials. The importance of managing relationships includes the capability to relate to senior people – including government ministers – and being the 'right fit' was particularly important.

The sense of mystification that emerged from interviews is an important contribution to understanding the function of public relations and how practitioners operate. This obscurity of practice meant that how PR practitioners undertake their role was not clearly defined or articulated, despite probing. This gives the impression of effortless work, not fully understood or replicable by others and something that only

public relations practitioners can do. While this may be particularly difficult for me to pinpoint because, as a practitioner myself, I may also be likely to gloss over the detail, it was also evident in its absence from interviews with those representing Muslim groups. In contrast, they often expressed bewilderment at how public relations practice worked, whereas PR practitioners dismissed the detailed processes of what they did as the reordering of a few words, or the tossing out of a few ideas to a journalist. This sense of mystery about what PR actually is, is reinforced by representations of the practice in popular culture. For example, it is never explained how the hapless Edina Monsoon in the TV sitcom *Absolutely Fabulous* is able to build and maintain a successful PR business, nor how the character Malcolm Tucker, a media strategist in the TV comedy *In The Thick of It*, is as Machiavellian as he is unstoppable and powerful. These are characters who know how to 'play the game', but as with interviewees, the rules of the game are not explained, making it difficult for others to take part.

One of the reasons that this mystification was so evident during the course of the research was the focus on public relations as a social field, and the understanding of the positioning of practitioners in relation to other agents. This is a revealing insight into how PR works and is essential to understand the connection, and exchange of power and capital, that practitioners have with other agents. There is more work to do here in future research, in particular understanding the relationship of practitioners with others outside the field, including journalists.

### Developing understanding of Islam and media

The second contribution this study has made to existing research is to further the understanding of the relationship between Islam and media. This understanding has not come from analysing press coverage, but by looking at the interaction between Muslim groups, the political field and the media. By taking this perspective, the research begins to build connections between Islam, the political field and the news media which have not previously been explicitly articulated. The thread links these

three together, showing how none can be fully understood in isolation from the others.

The literature review in Chapter 1 takes an alternative perspective in comparison with previous studies by revealing the inherently political nature of media coverage. Taking this as its starting point, it moves away from the perspective of the newsroom to explore the understanding of the workings of media power through mediatisation and the implications for Islam and the way it operates in the political field. While the literature review suggests that Islam in the UK may have been heavily mediatised - to the extent that it is subject to media power - as yet there is no indication of what impact this is having on Islam as a faith, or on its communities of believers in the UK. The findings from fieldwork suggest that there is no unified response to media narratives from Muslim groups operating within the political field. Instead, individuals representing Muslim groups are situated at the edges of the political field, as observers rather than full participants. Their positioning within the field seems an uncomfortable one. When they are drawn in further towards the centre by other agents within the field they appear disconcerted by the behaviours and actions they witness or which take place around them. In this, the challenges of their position become apparent. They differentiate themselves from those within the Muslim field but are reluctant to associate or become full participants of the political field.

While the literature review offers some suggestion that those politicians operating at the centre of the political field are seeking greater interaction from individual Muslims or those representing Muslim groups (O'Toole et al 2013), it is also clear that this participation needs to take place according to the rules of the political field. The prevalence of messaging about the need for Muslims to conform with British values in the public relations material surrounding the Prevent strategy suggests that only 'moderate' Muslims would be considered to take part. However, the fieldwork suggests that even those Muslims who may meet this criteria appear reluctant to engage fully within the political field. This is likely to be because they do not share

access to the same levels of social and cultural capital which dominate within the political field.

In order to challenge or change prevailing media narratives, it is necessary to adapt or adopt characteristics of the political field and, in doing so, to move further into the field itself. Moving towards the centre of the field provides greater access to the different types of power which it holds, and the potential for utilising that power more effectively through public relations practice. At present, representatives of Muslim groups appear to be positioned on the edges of the field, although the issues with which they are associated in the news media – for example terror and violence or immigration - feature strongly at the very centre of the political field. As individuals, those representatives of Muslim groups demonstrated higher levels of the type of social or cultural capital dominant within the political field than they seemed to suggest were prevalent in the Muslim community more widely. But despite this, they were still not fully engaged in the practices of the political field. This marginalization may not just be the effects of their limited understanding of how to play the game, but the effect of others in the political field to keep them at arm's length because of the tensions that could arise should they secure a position closer to the centre of the political field.

This partial participation of Muslim groups within the political field offers a challenge for other agents within that field. The public relations materials produced for the Prevent programme attempts to highlight the differences between those who are acceptable and those who are not, but this differentiation is drawn according to whether or not individuals and groups subscribe to 'core' or 'mainstream' British values. This message is repeated consistently in the materials around the launch of the Prevent strategy, and remains a feature of the government's approach to counter-terrorism as it is one of the main narratives within the Prime Minister's Munich speech. This suggests that acceptability by the field – and the relationship between media, state and society is important here – is conditional on possession of a certain type of cultural capital: values that are associated with being British. This message is perpetuated from the heart of the political field; and is shaped in



accordance with PR logic and repeated to the media. The media's role within the public sphere, and mediatisation, means it has an influence on the way society operates; and this is reinforced by the breadth of Prevent work to include institutions such as schools, prisons and universities. Those who do not conform to mainstream British values are, by implication if not explicitly, designated as 'the other' – denied the economic capital that would come from funding via the public purse and designated as 'extremist'.

Muslim groups' lack of engagement or adoption of public relations practice requires further examination. While the small sample who took part in fieldwork cannot be said to be a statistically reliable representative of the Muslim field it provides an insight into the responses that Muslim groups perceive as being available to them. Attempts to engage with the media have not always been successful, although often engaging with the media was described as attempts to challenge writing by individual, named journalists. More generally, a lack of knowledge of public relations practice was demonstrated through the interviews, as well as a preference for Muslims within other fields (rather than in the political field) taking action to challenge or change perceptions stemming from media narratives. I would suggest that that refusal or lack of capacity to engage with PR practice does not stem from lack of skills or capability, but by peripheral positioning within the political field. The current media narrative and its links with the political field mean this a difficult cycle to break into and one in which all Muslims are characterized as the same, i.e. as part of a single community. Those that attempt to do so suggest that it is an uncomfortable experience and show reluctance to join in a framing of Muslims which is at odds with reality. But Muslim participation in contemporary governance suggests that this is changing and offers an opportunity.

### Developing mediatisation theory

The third area in which this research has contributed to the literature is its development of mediatisation theory. This has taken place through a more empirical understanding of mediatisation and through its extension to include the concept of

PR logic. Here, the common thread provides a link between public relations and media power and how they intersect.

The interviews with practitioners outlined in this thesis, together with the growth of the PR industry, suggest that organisations are becoming increasingly dependent on PR and its logic, and the interviews also provide evidence as to how this is relevant within the political field. If the claims of the public relations practitioners interviewed within this research are true, then the process by which mediatisation takes place is itself mediated, through the intervention of public relations; which both constructs news and affects the workings of organisations to enable them to do so. This, the research argues, happens through a process of PR logic; a concept not previously discussed in mediatisation theory and developed in more detail in Chapter 2.

It is the contention of this research that current debates about mediatisation cross the gap between media and society in too big a leap without examining the processes or transactions that allow such influence to happen. Mediatisation is predominantly a structural theory which explores how media structures, such as technology or the structural workings of television and newspapers, impact and influence society. This research approaches a discussion of mediatisation from the perspective of the human agent, and considers how mediatisation works within a particular context or field. It does this in several ways and in doing so, broadens understanding of the relationship between media and society, and the role of different agents within this and the interplay of power between them. This is an extension of mediatisation theory which provides more empirical research into how mediatisation occurs. Furthermore, it extends understanding of the sphere of media influence in by exploring the process of how mediatisation happens and who is involved.

The research identifies the potential power of public relations practice to interrupt or subvert existing media narratives. This power is utilized to varying degrees, depending on the willingness of the sponsor organisation to adapt itself to PR logic. This study only reveals the existence of this logic from the perspective of the practitioner themselves, but the sponsor organisations of those interviewed appear

to have demonstrated a willingness to adopt PR practices, and increasingly to accommodate such practices within or close to the dominant coalition that leads the organisation. PR practitioners act as the organisation's voice or official spokesperson – the single, authoritative source of information, often putting words directly into the mouths of the most senior executives. Others described themselves as the conscience of the organisation – a description that suggests they see themselves as holders of an element of symbolic capital: that which is right, and truthful. It is their high levels of conformity with the other characteristics of the field in which they operate – in particular cultural and social capital – that enables them to lay claim to this status.

Through an extension of mediatisation public relations has become integrated into the operations of sponsor organisations and this gives a distinct form of power to the public relations practitioner. While their role is to act in service to their sponsor – and this makes them dependent on their sponsor for delegated authority and resource - as the interviews have shown, practitioners can also operate according to their own specific logic, speaking on behalf of senior executives and perpetuating a mystification which makes their work hard to understand and control. PR logic, which practitioners utilise, is a particular way of seeing, covering and understanding information and data which has the potential to become news. In particular it PR logic approaches information from a relational perspective, with the purpose to use it to influence others within both the sponsor organisation and the journalistic field. PR logic sets the formal and informal rules by which PR people operate and these rules were evidenced through the process of the interviews and the way they were conducted as well as through what practitioners said. PR logic is a substitute for media logic, but goes further in its use of relationships to persuade organisations to change their way of operating. In this sense, PR logic is primarily a relational way of operating, rather than a logic of grammar, structure or form.

## The circle of logic

The concept of PR logic has been developed within this thesis and needs further, quantitative as well as qualitative examination. In particular, the extent to which it differs from media logic needs further consideration. Within the context of the political field, this research posits that PR logic is distinct from media logic and is held by actors who are not employed by the media. These actors take on a responsibility which the media do not, which is to help their sponsor organisation adapt to the demands of the media, that is to act as a filter for media logic (which is in itself a form of filtering). Thus PR logic and media logic combine to form a circle of logic within the political field through which news and information is filtered from state (or other sponsor organisation) to citizens. The different stages of the circle of logic in relation to politics are described below:

1. The circle of logic rests on the necessary connection between the news media and wider society, whereby the news media acts as a means of communication with citizens and a substitute for the ideal public sphere.
2. The process of mediatisation means that social institutions, including those institutions within the political field, are subsumed into the logic of the media and, to a greater or lesser extent, become dependent on its power.
3. The political field relies on the news media in order to communicate with citizens and to give credibility to individuals and political parties within the field and the policies they espouse. To achieve this, politics must adapt to media logic – providing information and news in accordance with the media's preferred form of both content and production.
4. Public relations practitioners perform this adaptation on behalf of their sponsor organisation. The PR logic that they hold enables sponsor organisations within the political field to adapt to the logic of the media; thus keeping the media's power at bay. Public relations practitioners capture, filter

and manage media power and turn it to the advantage of their sponsor organisation. They do this by accepting the dominance of the media, and by playing the game so successfully that the media are compelled, through convenience or newsworthiness, to engage.

5. But politics is not without its own sources of power. The media rely on accurate information from the very heart of the political field and also the political legitimacy which maintains their independence and autonomy. The public relations practitioner uses their logic to present this information in a way which benefits the sponsor organisation and conforms to the logic of the media. They do this through the management of effective relationships and this may include restricting the media's access to information, or directing a journalist's gaze in a particular direction. PR logic is an extension of media logic and the filter through which institutions approach their relationships with the media.
6. The power that the public relations practitioner holds, through PR logic, completes the circle. This power extends both outwards, towards the media, and inwards, within the organisation. The power is incumbent in the relationships that PR practitioners manage. PR logic is utilized through individual agents and actors, rather than through organisational structures. The actions of individual public relations practitioners can enhance the power of the political field (or the sponsor organisation within it) by introducing new structures according to the nature of their practice.
7. Without PR logic, it is harder for an individual or organisation to challenge or change media narratives and the impact that these have on society, because those seeking to do so are starting from a position of powerlessness.

What this study has not ascertained are the implications of this circle of logic for organisational practice, or the extent to which it has been operationalised within the political field. Interviews with public relations practitioners suggest that their sphere

of influence within their sponsor body is significant, but this has not been verified objectively. As the interviewee who suggested that the government department she worked for should rethink the way it handled bonuses inferred, the adoption of PR logic in the handling of this announcement was an afterthought, rather than an intrinsic part of how bonus payments were managed.

This research has particularly looked at the experiences of Muslim groups with regards to this circle of logic. The literature review in chapter 1 reveals how heavily mediatised Islam, and Muslims within the UK are. The media frames Islam within a political setting, associating it with political issues such as immigration and asylum, terror and war. At the same time, religious issues such as mosque building, veiling or arranged marriages are politicized through the media; often with the tacit support of politicians. Organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain become political footballs and individual Muslims in the public eye are characterized as extremist or moderate, often dependent on their position on these political issues. While politicians may be sensitive in terms of the remarks they make, the media is less cautious, with commentators making explicit connections between Islam and political agendas.

Yet while media power over Islam is evident in the way the press represent Islam, Muslim groups in the UK have not necessarily responded in kind. Instead of engaging with the media or adopting PR logic, Muslim groups have, to an extent, stayed away from the media game, or are choosing to operate behind the scenes. This creates a vicious circle. Representatives of Muslim groups interviewed for this study expressed concern about the difficulties of accessing the journalistic field. The barriers to such access do not come about because of a lack of newsworthiness, since newspapers carry stories about Islam every day. While the messages that representatives of UK Muslim groups might want to convey will differ from the overall negative narratives so predominant in the UK media, this research suggests that the restrictions on access are likely to be more a result of a failure in relationships. Without PR practice working within this type of circle of logic, the positive narratives about Islam and Muslims become more difficult to articulate

This is an area for potential further research, either within the political field or in the religious. Exploring this circle of logic in more detail could help shed light on the value and purpose of PR, motivations for organisational decision making, as well as the impact that the news media truly has. And as already outlined above, it would provide further insight into the relationship between Muslim groups in the media, and their potential to challenge or change media narratives.

The headlines cited at the very start of this thesis provide a glimpse into the misperceptions, misinformation and misunderstandings about Islam and Muslims that can prevail in the UK news media. For those most closely affected, seeing their identity and religious faith misrepresented and maligned by these headlines must be frustrating and distressing. The full impact of this has yet to be fully understood outside the Muslim community. To date, attempts to unravel the reasons for such narratives have been situated firmly within the journalistic sphere. This research has attempted to take a fresh perspective, by unravelling some of the processes and interactions which sit behind the headlines and which, in cumulative fashion, can serve to influence what ultimately ends up in print. It does not pretend to offer a solution to a seemingly intractable problem, but hopes to offer fresh thinking and a fresh perspective on the challenge. In doing so, it may, in time, bring some benefit to those for whom the interaction between politics, media and Islam is much more than merely a game.

## Annex 1: Press reporting linked to Prevent Strategy press release

This table demonstrates how key messages taken from the press release about the Prevent Strategy (Home Office: 2011) were repeated in media coverage the following day. All quotes from the press release are verbatim. Quotes from media coverage are summarized, unless in quotation marks. The press release also made reference to the fact that the full strategy was available on the Home Office website.

<b>Verbatim excerpts from the press release stating what the new Prevent programme will do:</b>	<b>Summary excerpts from subsequent media coverage</b>
Ensure government funding and support cannot reach organisations with extremist views who do not support mainstream British values	<p>The Express, June 8 2011: 'Muslim groups that refuse to renounce extremism will be cut off from Government funding under a strict new counter-terrorism policy'.</p> <p>The Independent, 8 June 2011: 'organisations applying for public funds will have to prove they espouse "mainstream British values" before they receive taxpayers' money.'</p> <p>The Times Leader, 8 June 2011: 'Unless organisations share the most basic presumptions about democracy, free speech and the rights of all citizens, then they should not receive money and recognition from the State. Or, indeed, from institutions of higher education'.</p>
Support sectors and institutions, including universities and prisons, where there are risks of radicalisation; and	<p>The Mirror, 8 June 2011: 'Home Secretary Theresa May wants universities, colleges and prisons to train staff to "recognise the signs of radicalisation"'. The Express, 8 June 2011: 'This review calls for more focus on ungoverned areas such as the internet, prisons and universities but there is no plan for tackling extremism on campuses head-on'.</p>



	The Independent, 8 June 2011: 'The Home Secretary Theresa May promised a drive against the spread of hardline ideologies in universities, prisons and community groups as well as fresh measures to control their dissemination online'.
Be evaluated rigorously to ensure effectiveness and value for money	The Times Leader, 8 June 2011: 'We take reassurance from the Government's promise that, in future, we will know exactly how this money has been deployed and to what effect'.
Quote from Home Secretary Theresa May: 'Prevent is an integral part of our counter-terrorism strategy and aims to stop people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. 'Our new Prevent strategy will challenge extremist ideology, help protect institutions from extremists, and tackle the radicalisation of vulnerable people. And we will not fund or work with organisations that do not subscribe to the core values of our society. 'Above all, it will tackle the threat from home-grown terrorism.'	<p>The Express, 8 June 2011: 'Theresa May said groups must subscribe to 'mainstream British values' and undergo stricter value-for money controls.'</p> <p>The Mirror, 8 June 2011: She added: 'We will not fund or work with organisations that do not subscribe to the core values of our society. 'Above all, Prevent will tackle the threat from homegrown terrorism.'</p>
Tough action to exclude foreign hate preachers	The Mirror, 8 June 2011: 'Mrs May also said there would be a crackdown on Muslim hate preachers and extremist websites'.
Work to tackle terrorist use of the internet	The Express, 8 June 2011: 'In addition, the policy calls for a renewed focus on the internet and a 'national blocking list' of violent and unlawful websites. Computers in libraries and schools would be blocked from accessing them'.

<p>Work with schools to ensure extremists are not participating in the education of young people</p>	<p>The Independent, 8 June 2011: 'Warning over pupils at risk of violent extremism'.</p> <p>The Mirror, 8 June 2011. Headline: 'Teachers 'to spot terror'; schools will target extremists'.</p> <p>'Teachers will be encouraged to inform on extremist students as part of a Government counter-terrorism strategy.... She also said the Government would increase inspections at schools to root out extremist teachers'.</p> <p>The Telegraph (website) 7 June 2011 8.43pm. Headline: 'Islamic radicals are in schools, government report says'.</p>
<p>Greater support for universities and colleges: training staff to recognise signs of radicalisation</p>	<p>The Express, 8 June 2011: 'The Government will also seek to encourage education and healthcare providers to look out for signs of radicalisation in students and patients'.</p> <p>The Express, 8 June 2011, Leader (page 12) Headline: 'Threat of campus extremists must never be ignored'.</p> <p>The Times Leader, 8 June 2011: 'The coalition has understood what some agencies and universities apparently do not, that once you buy the anger-fuelled ideology the rest is tactics'.</p>
<p>Renewed efforts in prisons to stop people becoming radicalised and to de-radicalise others</p>	<p>The Telegraph (website) 8.42pm, 7 June 2011 Headline: 'Prisoners are not de-radicalised'.</p> <p>'The new strategy will issue updated instructions to prisons on managing and reporting extremist behaviour, provide new training to staff and introduce a national intelligence system for prisons.'</p>

## Annex 2: Interview Consent Form

# Consent Form

For research conducted by Claire Forbes [email address], Tel: [number]

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research for my doctorate thesis, which I am undertaking at the University of Kent. This form gives you more information about my research and your involvement in it.

The purpose of my research is to understand the construction of Islam in the UK public and political spheres.

The benefits of the research will be:

- To identify the techniques and types of resources used to influence news and media representation in the UK
- To understand different responses to the current representation of Islam in the news and how this representation might be changed

I am using one-on-one interviews to conduct my research. Our discussion will be audio taped to help me accurately capture what you say. The tapes will only be heard by me for the purpose of this study. If you feel uncomfortable with the recorder, you may ask that it be turned off at any time.

Your interview, together with those of other participants, will be used in my thesis, which will be read by my academic supervisors and examiners. While direct quotes from you may be used in the thesis, your name and all other identifying information will be kept anonymous.

You also have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. If you choose to withdraw all information about you (including tapes) will be destroyed and omitted from the final thesis. You can contact me at the e-mail address or telephone number listed above.

By signing this consent form I certify that I, [name of participant], agree to the terms of this agreement.

Signature:

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[Date]

## Annex 3: Summary of research and biography

### **The construction of Islam in the UK public sphere**

Claire Forbes, University of Kent. Supervisor: Professor Gordon Lynch.

The aim of this study is to explore the use of public relations techniques in the construction of Islam within the UK public sphere.

Since the terrorist attacks in New York and London in 2001 and 2005, Islam and Islamism have dominated the news agenda. While much of the research to date has focused on the media's representation of Islam (Moore, Mason, Lewis 2008; GLA 2007; Poole 2002), fewer studies have examined what influences the news media to report stories relating to Islam in a particular way. This study views the construction of Islam through the lens of public relations technique and practice. It contends that public relations practice exerts particular influence on the construction of Islam in the UK today. The study seeks to uncover the nature and method of this influence.

Pierre Bourdieu's field theory and the developing theory of mediatisation are the main theoretical approaches for this work. With its dual focus on dynamics of power and the specifics of human agency, field theory is a useful starting point for a consideration of how change occurs within particular settings. The nature of public relations practitioners' interaction with the journalistic, religious and political fields will be instrumental to this research.

Mediatisation and the notion of media logic provide an orientation frame, or lens through which to view how media drives change in society (Lundby 2009; Couldry 2003). This study seeks to establish a supporting theory of PR logic to determine the change that public relations practice has on the fields with which it interacts. In this way, field theory and mediatisation synthesise, with field theory providing an empirical route to determining how PR logic works to shape the way in which Islam is presented.

The research is seeking to establish:

- How public relations is used by non-religious fields (e.g. the political field) in the construction and dissemination of messages about Islam
- The processes public relations practitioners undertake to construct a 'story' (an event or narrative supported by imagery and messages) about Islam and the interplay of power and capital within those processes.
- The extent to which media logic influences the construction of particular images of Islam by public relations practitioners
- The impact that this public relations activity has on Islam as part of the religious field

This research could cover many different fields, including, but not limited to, theology, education, feminism or literature. In order to explore one area in depth, a case study on public relations activity associated with, and in response to, the UK government's Prevent strategy (HM Government, 2011) is being developed. This strategy, intended to respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism; support vulnerable people and work with key sectors such as education, faith, health and criminal justice, was launched in June 2011. There is a wealth public relations material about Prevent and responses to it available. The PR activity behind Prevent encapsulates many of the dimensions significant to the way in which messages about Islam are constructed in the UK public sphere today. These include strong political capital; an interpretation and selection of cultural capital through managed interaction with Muslim groups (and others) and a careful use of language, intended to construct particular messages that sit comfortably across both the religious and political fields.

### **Claire Forbes – Biography**

Claire Forbes is a part-time PhD researcher at the University of Kent and a full time communications practitioner. Claire's research explores the construction of Islam in the UK public sphere. She has an undergraduate degree in Religious Studies (University of Newcastle) and a Masters degree in Islamic Studies (University of London).

Claire is a qualified Marketing and Communications Director, and has most recently worked as Director of Communications at the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman – a UK Parliamentary body. She has previously worked as Director of Communications at the Youth Justice Board (Ministry of Justice) and the Advertising Standards Authority.

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