Annex 7: Media plurality and news - a summary of contextual academic literature

Annex to Ofcom's advice to the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport

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Contents

Summary

1.1 Introduction

Purpose of this summary

We have prepared this high-level summary of selected academic literature to provide contextual background to our advice on media plurality that we submitted to the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport and Lord Justice Leveson.[1]

It covers a range of topics and consequently encompasses a spectrum of schools of thought. It includes works from academics active in a range of disciplines: communications studies, ethnography, sociology, political science, psychology and economics. A number of these authors are based outside the UK.

The purpose of this annex is to provide a high-level summary of this range of academic literature, in order to indicate the sorts of debates and balance of opinions that exist and add context to our advice on media plurality. It provides a framework for understanding the wider landscape of debate around media issues, rather than directly answering the questions from the Secretary of State.

Scope of study

The document covers the following areas:

- The effects of the media on audiences and on the political process.

- The news industry and journalism.

- Media plurality and democracy.

- Political communications and plurality in the devolved nations.

In compiling this report, our aim has been to represent accurately the views of each author. We have not sought to make any analytic judgements about the relative merits of the selected literature that we have reviewed.

In seeking to cover such a wide range of topics, we have had to be selective in which authors have been included. Our priority has been to ensure that both sides of relevant arguments are represented; but there is the possibility that this process will have been imperfect. To be clear, this study is not intended to be a fully-comprehensive and exhaustive review of academic literature.

We note that several members of the academic community have engaged with Lord Justice Leveson's Inquiry, and we also received several responses to our Invitation to Comment which we published in October 2011. Where relevant, we have reflected these responses in this overview. We have also engaged more broadly with the academic community through attending events and seminars.

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[1] Published 19 June 2012.
http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/consultations/measuring-plurality/statement/statement.pdf

We encourage interested readers to refer to the original literature as outlined in the bibliography (Section 6), and to other work, for the fullest understanding of these subjects.

1.2　Summary of findings

We provide a summary of each section below. Overall, this review shows us that there is a consensus on the democratic importance of media plurality. Beyond that, there are many other areas of debate where there is far less agreement. As such, we have primarily used this study to provide context and depth to our work, rather than to rely on particular academic positions in formulating our recommendations to the Secretary of State on the questions that we were set.

Section 2 – Effects of the media on audiences and the political process

Current research into media effects uses a diverse range of methods including economics, political science, sociology, psychology and communications studies. It includes a range of techniques such as public choice theory, the statistical analysis of datasets (for example, identifying relationships between media consumption and polling data), interviewing subjects, and experiments in which the researchers expose individuals to media in controlled environments.

There appears to be some consensus in the research that the media have the potential to influence the topics that audiences think about. This is often described in the literature as an 'agenda-setting' effect. McCombs notes that there have been over 300 studies since the early 1970s which have identified this effect in national and sub-national elections in a range of countries.

Researchers including Norris, Curtice and Scammell have looked at the role of media coverage in UK general elections. The findings of these studies suggest that newspaper coverage within campaigns does affect readers, although they differ as to the exact nature of these effects. However, it is also suggested that coverage does take public opinion into account. Several authors note that the impact of the press may be greater when considered over a longer period, or when testing for the ability of the media to influence which issues are used by audiences to form political judgements. These effects are sometimes referred to as media 'priming effects' in the literature.

Some of the literature discusses the role of non-news genres in relation to plurality and democracy, although the role played by these genres is seen as being different from that of news.

Section 3 – The news industry and journalism

There appears to be a broad consensus in the literature that current ways of funding news and journalism are under pressure; noted by Freedman and Picard among others. There is general concern about the potential for these pressures to affect the quality of journalism, and to result in a shift towards 'softer' news.

Researchers in this area have adopted a range of techniques. These include observation of newsrooms and journalists at work (an ethnographic approach), content analysis, and interviews with journalists. Examples of newsroom practices that authors such as Currah, Fenton and Phillips have identified as of concern include unattributed use of public relations releases, the use of a limited range of sources and reduction in staffing levels.

Researchers have found differences in practices and culture between newsrooms operating within the same media platform, for example, between Sky News and the BBC TV

newsroom, and between tabloid and broadsheet newspapers. Cushion notes that while the BBC and Sky both increased the proportion of items and time on their news channels as "breaking" news stories between 2004 and 2007, only a quarter of these items were classed as such on both channels.

Section 4 – Media plurality and democracy

There appears to be consensus in the political theory literature that people need information to play a role as citizens in democratic societies, and there is consensus that media plurality is important for democracy.

Within the literature, writers have discussed a range of models of democracy. The role that media plurality plays in these models differs. Several authors note the 'watchdog' role of the media in 'liberal' conceptions of democracy (noted by Curran, McNair, and Baker, among others). In deliberative models of democracy, the media have been described as acting as the 'public sphere', acting as a space for rational discourse for society. In pluralist views of democracy, the media's role is seen as providing outlets for a diverse range of viewpoints in society.

Authors such as Doyle, Karppinen and Klimkiewicz define plurality in a range of ways. The concept of plurality is generally perceived as being more than simply multiple owners of media in a market. One key distinction which is made and discussed in the literature is between 'external plurality', which occurs when there is a range of suppliers of content, and 'internal plurality', which relates to the expression of multiple viewpoints by a single media organisation.

The literature suggests that qualitative factors, including the type of ownership, should also be considered when thinking about plurality. Some writers in this area, including Barnett, have suggested that regulation to promote quality journalism (a form of positive content regulation), rather than a focus on media ownership rules, may be a way to secure outcomes in the public interest.

Section 5 – Political communications and plurality in the devolved nations

Within the United Kingdom, devolution has shifted responsibility for certain areas of administration from London to the national legislatures and administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. However, there is comparatively little published research focusing specifically on plurality and political communications in the nations.

Themes of the literature in this area include media coverage of the devolved administrations (both within the nations, and how they are portrayed across the UK) and the relative strength of UK-wide media in these markets (in particular newspapers).

Media effects

In this section, we address the literature which discusses the potential for audiences to be influenced by news media.

There is a range of disciplines and methodologies used in this area of research. This section discusses research relating to:

- The nature of media influence on audiences.

- The impact of the media on election campaigns and the outcome of elections.

- The impact of the media on political understanding and policy-making.

- The impact of non-news media.

2.1   The nature of media influence on audiences

There are multiple ways in which media may influence audiences and behaviour

The potential effect of media on audiences is a subject that continues to be debated by researchers in the area. Franklin (1994)[2] notes that the findings of the many studies which have been carried out in this area "have often been contradictory and highly contested" [p. 205]. McQuail (2000)[3] states: "The entire study of mass communication is based on the premise that media have significant effects... yet there is little agreement on the nature and extent of these assumed effects" [p.416].

McQuail distinguishes between 'media effects' (the consequences of mass media) and 'media power' (seen as a potential to have effects, normally planned). He notes that there are several ways in which media effects can be categorised, and identifies 19 separate media effects, categorising them as either long or short term, and either planned or unplanned, some of which are areas of focus for researchers examining the impact of news. Key concepts discussed by McQuail (2000) include: news diffusion (a planned long-term effect concerning the awareness of news events); agenda setting (a short-term planned effect in which the relative attention given by the public to an issue is influenced); and framing (a short term planned effect which provides particular context to a public policy issue). Iyengar (2010)[4] discusses two types of frame in US TV news – the more common episodic frames (which take a person- or event-centric view to a story) or thematic frames (which take a more abstract approach to an issue).

Druckman (2001)[5] suggests that framing is not in itself evidence of audience manipulation, as frames can aid understanding of complex issues. Other media effects identified include

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[2] Franklin, B. (1994) *Packaging Politics: Political Communications in Britain's Media Democracy*, London: Edward Arnold

[3] McQuail, D.(2000) *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, London: Sage

[4] Iyengar, S. (2010) 'The state of media- effects research', in Curran, J. (ed.) *Media and Society*, London: Bloomsbury

[5] Druckman, J. (2001) 'On the Limits of Framing Effects: Who can Frame?', Journal of Politics, Vol 63 No. 4, pp.1041-1066

persuading (the ability of the media to change what an individual believes) and priming (the effect of the quantity of coverage on audience attitudes)

Theories as to how media influence audiences have evolved over time

Research and attitudes on media effects have evolved over time. Research conducted in the 1920s and 1930s, examining the effect of propaganda, suggested that the media could be used to change public opinion (Franklin, 1994; McQuail, 2000; Iyengar, 2010). Franklin (1994) notes limitations in these early studies, including their failure to take into account the diversity and sociological attributes of audiences, and methodological challenges; for example, separating media effects from other sources of influence (such as family).

Later research, from the 1930s to the early 1960s, suggested that media effects were not as direct as suggested by earlier work (McQuail, 2000). Examples of research at this time include Katz & Lazarsfeld (1955)[6] who suggested that the media influenced the public in a two-stage process. They argued that the media influence most people *indirectly*, via key influencers who have themselves been exposed to the media (the two-step approach). However, McQuail notes that this idea: that the media have only a limited effect, has not been accepted by all researchers, noting some researchers' interest in television and their belief that it has powerful long-term effects. Some of these studies suggested that TV acts to 'cultivate' beliefs over a protracted period of time (Newbold 1995)[7]. Criticisms of the two-step approach are noted by Franklin (1994); these include a concern that by focusing on short-term effects, studies may underestimate the effect of the media on audiences; he also argues that the division of audiences into active and passive members is too simplistic.

Later reviews of research done in the 1970s tended to emphasise the importance of the social context of the individuals receiving the communicated message, and of 'negotiated meanings'[8] (Franklin, 1994; McQuail, 2000). Franklin (1994) notes a range of studies including those by Morley (who looked at audience reactions to the BBC TV news magazine programme *Nationwide*), which suggest that the way audiences interpret media relates in part to social factors. He notes that some studies from the late 1970s and the 1980s suggested that the media, and television in particular, could have long-term effects.

Philo (1990)[9] examines media effects by asking a range of groups to construct news stories using images taken from the 1984 miners' strike. He finds that differences in political culture and class influence the stories produced by the groups, and suggests that, because the language used in many of the constructed news bulletins closely reflects the language used in actual news bulletins, audiences interpret the themes in news reporting using their own cultural knowledge. For example, a group of US students interpreted the images in a way said to be consistent with that of a US industrial dispute. While individuals in the study groups used their own personal experiences to challenge the news accounts, the media do appear to have had an impact - some who were sympathetic to the miners accepted news accounts of picket violence (the most frequently-cited memory of the strike) while others (sometimes unsympathetic to miners) drew on their own personal experience and understanding of news values to challenge the news accounts. McQuail (2000) suggests that media power may vary between different times and may, for example, be more influential in times of crises.

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[6] Katz, E. and Lazarsfeld, P.F. (1955). 'Personal Influence: the Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications', Glencoe: The Free Press pp.15-42, 309-20 Reprinted in Boyd-Barrett and Newbold (eds.) (1995) *Approaches to Media: A Reade*r, London: Arnold
[7] Newbold, C. (1995), 'The Media Effects Tradition', in Boyd-Barrett, O. and Newbold, C. (eds.) (1995) *Approaches to Media: A Reader*, Arnold: London
[8] A theory in which meaning is constructed by both the content creator and the audience, reflecting individual and cultural perspectives
[9] Philo, G. (1990) *Seeing and believing: The Influence of Television*, London: Routledge

Various studies suggest that the ability of a source to influence an audience depends on a range of factors. Druckman (2001)[10] concludes that this ability is dependent on the source's credibility in the eyes of its audience. In an experiment examining framing (the effect of media that makes audiences focus on particular aspects of an issue), a framing effect was seen when subjects were exposed to a source seen as credible. This effect was not replicated when the source was perceived to be less credible.

In situations where audiences face competing frames, Chong and Druckman (2007)[11] find that the strength of the frame is more important than the frequency of exposure. Subjects exposed to competing frames concerning one of two public policy issues (growth vs. conservation or a hate group rally vs. free speech) were found to evaluate frames in a more deliberate way, although personal value preferences were also found to be important when predicting how subjects would respond to frames. The authors conclude that while democratic debate and exposure to multiple frames suggest that citizens will become better at evaluating arguments, the stronger frames may be constructed by those with the most resources, with the result that the strongest frames might not be those with "the most sound or meritorious arguments according to empirical, analytical, or normative standards" [p.652].

Since McCombs and Shaw (1972)[12] suggested the agenda-setting ability of the media in the 1968 US election, McCombs has stated that "more than 300 hundred published studies worldwide have documented this influence of the news media" (McCombs, 2002: p.3)[13]. Agenda-setting effects have been seen at both the national and sub-national levels. As a result of the increased prominence of topics, citizens are more likely to form an opinion. However, he argues that the media agenda "alone does not determine the public agenda" [p.8], as citizens must perceive stories to be relevant. Relevance to the situation, and the degree to which an individual feels they understand a topic, determine the extent to which the media is able to set agendas. McCombs says that a media priming effect (in which particular attributes of a topic or candidate are highlighted) is a consequence of the limited attention which citizens can pay to a topic. Media priming is seen to be more important than agenda setting: "Influencing the focus of public attention is a powerful role, but arguably, influencing the agenda of attributes for an issue or political figure is the epitome of political power" (McCombs, 2002: p.8).

Iyengar (2010) suggests that the growth in audience fragmentation means that audiences are more likely to be self-selecting, and to hold strong opinions on a topic. He concludes that this suggests that persuasive media effects have become less important, although agenda setting and priming may continue to be important.

Coleman, Anthony and Morrison's (2009)[14] examination of trust in the news suggests that audience trust is a broader concept than accuracy, and is linked to how audiences perceive that the news media meet their expectations in providing them with information and understanding useful for their lives. Coverage of the 2008 US primary elections by the UK media was said to be accurate, but not understood by audiences. In contrast, some

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[10] Druckman, J. (2001) 'On the Limits of Framing Effects: Who can Frame?', Journal of Politics, Vol 63 No. 4, pp.1041-1066

[11] Chong, D. and Druckman, J. N. (2007) "Framing Public Opinion in Competitive Democracies", American Political Science Review, Vol 101, No 4, pp.637-655

[12] McCombs, M. and Shaw, D.L (1972) 'The agenda setting function of mass media', The Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol 36, Colombia University Press, New York, 1972 pp.176-87 Reprinted in Boyd-Barrett and Newbold (eds.) (1995) Approaches to Media: A Reader, London: Arnold

[13] McCombs, M. (2002) 'The Agenda-Setting Role of Mass Media in the Shaping of Public Opinion', Paper presented at Mass Media Economics Conference, The Suntory and Toyota International Centres for Economics and Related Disciplines, London School of Economics, London, 28-29 June

[14] Coleman, S., Morrison, D. and Anthony, S. (2009) Public Trust in the News, Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism University of Oxford

audiences felt that they understood some domestic news topics, such as binge drinking, better than journalists, whose coverage was said to be misrepresentative.

2.2   The impact of the media on elections

This section addresses the reporting of politics and media influence in relation to the UK and other countries

Studies have addressed a range of questions about the relationship between news media and electoral processes, both at the individual and at the macro level. Several researchers have suggested that the UK provides an interesting case study to examine media effects, because it has a nation-wide press not subject to impartiality regulation. Several studies have investigated whether or not news media have influenced the outcomes of elections.

Norris (2005)[15] notes that there are differing views on the effect of the media on voting and the outcome of elections. She contrasts one school of thought (particularly prevalent in the US) which holds that media effects in election campaigns act to reinforce existing patterns of support, with another (said to be held by many researchers and practitioners), which holds that media do have the potential to have a direct impact on election campaigns and outcomes through the effects of priming (agenda setting), persuasion and mobilisation (getting voters out to the polls).

The methods used in these studies include audience surveys, content analysis, and the analysis of aggregated media consumption and opinion-poll time series data. As several studies note, the media effects seen during election campaigns may differ from those of long-term media exposure.

While this section focuses on UK-wide elections and media, where relevant we also draw from examples at the sub-UK level. We discuss studies of political communications with specific relation to the devolved nations in Section 5.

Summarising a number of studies on the influence of press and TV on political knowledge and attitudes, Franklin (1994)[16] notes that their conclusions vary for both TV and press. He describes how assessments of the power of the press have varied over time – from the immediate post-war period until the 1980s, studies suggested that newspapers had relatively little influence. He suggests that this view had changed by the 1990s, based on analyses of 1980s' UK elections, noting work on this by both Newton and Miller, which suggested that newspapers did influence voters. However, Miller found that the evidence for this was complex and that the effect was not uniform.

Considering TV (which is regulated for impartiality), Franklin notes that some studies have suggested that exposure to TV may increase turnout and increase political knowledge; electors have reported that TV coverage helps them to decide whom to vote for (this effect is said to be stronger for floating and first time voters). Certain studies have suggested that TV exposure during an election campaign has particular benefits. However, Franklin also notes Miller's arguments - that while TV may be effective at providing information to the electorate, evidence from the 1987 election campaigns suggests that TV actually follows public opinion, as changes in how the campaign was covered on TV reflected changes in the public's priorities. However, Miller is said to note that TV may have greater influence over the longer term.

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[15] Norris, P. (2005) 'Did the media matter? Priming, persuasion and mobilizing effects in the 2005 British general election' Elections, Parties and Public Opinion, September 2005
[16] Franklin, B. (1994) Packaging Politics: Political Communications in Britain's Media Democracy, London: Edward Arnold

Several studies discuss the media impact on, and coverage of, UK general elections

UK general elections 1992 – 2005

Norris (2005)[17] sets out to understand the role of the media and its potential to prime, persuade and mobilise the UK electorate, using the 2005 general election as a case study, with data from the British Election Survey. She concludes that none of the media 'channels' (broadcast, newspapers, internet and 'people intensive') had a consistent agenda-setting effect in 2005. Greater evidence was seen of persuasion effects - party election broadcasts by the Conservative and Labour parties were seen to have had an effect on perceptions of government economic competence and its policy on asylum-seekers. Readership of a Conservative or Labour newspaper was also said to have an impact on perceptions of the asylum policy. A persuasion effect was absent from canvassing and online material. Some voter mobilisation effects were seen with Labour election broadcasts (though not those of the Conservatives) and the reading of Labour newspapers.

Stevens, Banducci, Karp and Vowles (2011)[18] use the issue of the Iraq war to examine newspaper priming effects in the 2005 election. They argue that by focusing on media consumption and voting behaviour rather than content, many accounts underestimate the ability of the media to influence voters in UK. Examining both the tone and quantity of stories about the Iraq war in a range of newspapers both before and during the election campaign, they conclude that newspapers did have a priming effect in the campaign – defined as a "change in the standards that people use to make political judgements" [p.547]. They also find evidence that a polarisation of views about the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, occurred as a result of media coverage of Iraq during the campaign.

Franklin (2004)[19] notes differences in attitudes between journalists and audiences as to the relevance and importance of issues in West Yorkshire local newspapers' coverage of general elections. Using content analysis and semi-structured interviews, he finds that between 1987 and 2001 coverage of general elections in local newspapers focused increasingly on local issues and candidates, while reader letters were more likely to focus on national issues. He suggests that this disparity may be one factor in explaining the decline in voter engagement with elections.

Examining survey data from the 1992 and 1997 general elections, Newton and Brynin (2001)[20] assess whether national newspapers in the UK have a statistically significant correlation with voting patterns. They compared voting patterns between those who did not read a paper, those who read a paper consistent with their voting behaviour ('reinforcement') and those who read a paper at odds with their political outlook. Controlling for a range of other variables, they find evidence for a link between newspaper readership and voting. This suggests that newspapers do have a media effect beyond reinforcing existing beliefs. They find that this effect is more pronounced among Labour than Conservative voters, and in 1992 than in 1997 (i.e. the effect is greater in closer elections). In close elections, they speculate that this effect could have influenced the outcome of the election.

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[17] Norris, P. (2005) 'Did the media matter? Priming, persuasion and mobilizing effects in the 2005 British general election', Elections, Parties and Public Opinion, September 2005

[18] Stevens, D. and Banducci, S. and Karp, J. and Vowles, J. (2011) 'Priming time for Blair? Media priming, Iraq, and leadership evaluations in Britain', Electoral Studies 30 (2011) pp.546-560

[19] Franklin, B. (2004) 'Talking Past Each Other: Journalists, Readers and Local Newspapers' Reporting of Election Campaigns' Journal of Public Affairs Vol. 4 no. 4

[20] Newton, K. and Brynin, M. (2001), 'The National Press and Party Voting in the UK', Political Studies, Vol 49 pp. 265-285

Curtice (1999)[21] seeks to examine whether or not the UK press can influence how individuals vote, and hence, the outcome of elections. To do this, he focuses on a time when a newspaper switched political allegiance; in this case, The Sun, to examine whether or not newspapers can influence votes. He argues that this approach helps to get around the issue of cause and effect (i.e. that readers may choose titles which reflect their political outlook) and the challenge of identifying effects among long-term readers of newspapers. Using data from the 1997 British Election Campaign Study, he finds some evidence of a media effect in influencing electors in the 1997 general election. However, the impact of this is said to be limited and was not a major influence on the outcome of the election (support for Labour fell during the campaign). Curtice finds some evidence to suggest that in 1996, readers of The Sun (which switched its support to Labour) were more likely to switch to Labour than were readers of Conservative-supporting titles and newspaper non-readers. However, he notes that Labour voting intentions fell between 1996 and 1997, despite some titles shifting their support towards Labour.

Scammell and Harrop (1997)[22] argue that it is more accurate to say that the press followed public opinion in the 1997 election than *vice versa*, noting that support for Labour among all newspaper readers (including those of pro-Conservative titles) grew between 1992 and 1997, and that any effect of The Sun's decision to switch support to Labour would have been small in comparison to the overall trend towards support for Labour. Noting the decline in editorial coverage between the 1992 and 1997 elections, Scammell and Harrop suggest that this reflects political 'de-alignment' of the press, reflecting changes both in newspapers and in the wider political environment.

Larcinse (2007)[23] tests a rational-choice model of information demand and supply in electoral constituencies, which suggests that demand for political information is higher in closely-fought contests. He suggests that there was more news about Conservative marginal constituencies in the 1997 general election than about other constituencies, (as newspapers target news according to the characteristics of the electorate) and that use of quality and local newspapers tended to be higher in marginal constituencies.

Harrop and Scammell (1992)[24] suggest that there is some evidence that newspapers had an impact on the result of the 1992 elections, pointing to a shift towards Conservative support in the final week of the election, at a time when Conservative newspapers increased their attacks on Labour. However, in contrast to the prevailing belief at the time, Harrop and Scammell conclude that the evidence for the press having only a limited effect is stronger, pointing to the absence of a late swing against Labour in earlier elections, despite the partisanship of titles being as strong as in 1992. They note that over longer periods, press effects may be seen, noting a 9% swing to the Conservatives for Sun readers between the second half of 1991 and 9th April 1992, compared to a 1% swing among Mirror readers.

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[21] Curtice, J. (1999), 'Was it the Sun wot won it again? The influence of newspapers in the 1997 election campaign', Working Paper 75, Centre for Research into Elections and Social Trends, University of Oxford

[22] Harrop, M. and Scammell, M. (1992) 'A tabloid war' in Butler, D. and Kavanagh, D. *The British General Election of 1992*, Basingstoke: Macmillan

[23] Larcinese, V. (2007), 'The Instumental Voter Goes to the Newsagent: Demand for Information, Marginality and the Media', Journal of Theoretical Politics, 19(3), pp. 249-276

[24] Harrop, M. and Scammell, M. (1992) 'A tabloid war' in Butler, D. and Kavanagh, D. *The British General Election of 1992*, Basingstoke: Macmillan

The 2010 general election

Several researchers have discussed the 2010 TV election debates. Coleman, Blumler, Dutton, Shipley, Steibel and Thewell's study of the *Prime Ministerial Debates* (2011)[25] suggest that the debates did not lead to increased interest towards politics (Chapter 3). However, the debates were said to have had an impact on voters – 87% of those surveyed said they had discussed the debates with others (Chapter 5). Members of younger age groups are reported as being more likely to say that the debates had made them more interested in the campaign, and had helped them to decide how to cast their vote. Scullion, Jackson and Molseworth (2011)[26] conclude that audience discussion about the debates focused on the participants' performance in the debates, rather than broader discussions about politics. Broadcast media dedicated most attention to the debates, while the 'quality press' had the least coverage (Wring and Deacon, 2010)[27].

Looking at newspaper content and reader voting behaviour, Wring and Deacon note that despite falling newspaper circulations, the sales figures in 2010 were as large as the TV debate audience, and argue that "this is a primary reason why the oldest mass medium still retains the ability to influence politicians' thinking, if not necessarily their readers' voting". Although some newspaper titles had shifted their political support, Wring and Deacon believe that it is also important to consider the strength of title partisanship. They believe that the 2010 election marked an increase in the depth of partisan affiliation, as certain tabloid titles shifted their (qualified) support for Labour to support for the Conservatives, while certain Conservative titles were said to have reacted to increased support for the Liberal Democrats by adopting an aggressive line.

Wring and Ward (2010)[28] argue that while the TV leadership debates did not necessarily influence the outcome of the election, they did influence the direction of the campaign by focusing attention on the leader of the Liberal Democrats. Examining print media, they argue that the 5% swing of Labour to Conservatives among newspaper readers was "broadly in keeping" with the national 5% swing, noting that this swing was 13.5% for Sun readers, for which Wring and Ward argue the Sun had been the most partisan since 1992. Wring and Ward reject the idea that 2010 was 'the internet election', arguing that the internet remains "a medium for partisan elites and activists" [p.816]. Despite this, they note the survey data about the increasing use made of the internet by voters looking for political information, which doubled between 2005 and 2010. They also discuss the relationship between online and traditional media; for example, political bloggers appearing on TV, and the use of social media, including its role in 'spoofing' – the parodying of traditional political communications. They also note the spikes in hits on election-related websites following the leadership debates.

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[25] Coleman, S. (ed.), Blumler, J.G., Dutton, W and Thelwall, M., Steibel, F. and Shipley, A. (2011) *Leaders in the Living Room - the Prime Ministerial Debates of 2010: Evidence, Evaluation and Some Recommendations*, Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford
[26] Scullion, R. Jackson, D. and Molesworth, M. (2011) 'Performance, Politics and Media: How the 2010 British General Election leadership debates generated 'talk' amongst the electorate'. Journal of Political Marketing, special edition
[27] Wring, D. and Deacon, L.(2010) 'Patterns of press partisanship in the 2010 General Election', British Politics 5, 436–454
[28] Wring, D. and Ward, S. (2010),"The Media and the 2010 Campaign: the television Election?", Parliamentary Affairs, Vol 63, no. 4

2.3 The impact of the media on political understanding and policy-making

Coverage of domestic and social policy

In addition to the election campaign coverage, we have looked at some of the literature that examines media coverage of domestic and social policy more widely.

Jackson (2011)[29] studies stories about the UK joining the Euro, and suggests that the strategic framing of news (where a story is presented in terms of its impact on political contests) leads to high levels of cynicism about the issue. He finds that this effect is smaller among those who are politically engaged and knowledgeable, and notes that these findings support some studies, but contradict others.

Negrine (1996)[30] uses two case studies: the James Bulger case and the closure of mines in 1992, arguing that press coverage of the largely apolitical Bulger case showed the press as a reflector and 'organiser' of public opinion [p.110]. Looking at the mines closure story, Negrine suggests that although at the start of the coverage of the story (when Parliament was in recess), there was little attempt by the press to include measures of public opinion in its reporting of the story, specific features were reported, which, "when taken together come to represent something which we may call the opinion of the public" [p.120]. These features included a march in Cheltenham, cross-party support, opinion polls, letters to newspapers (and reader responses to newspaper campaigns) and concern among the government's back-benchers, giving the story a feature of political crisis. Negrine argues that the press gave the public an opportunity to express its opinion, noting that even after the government had made concessions, and the story had become less prominent, opinion polls suggested that the public was still critical of the government.

Schlesinger and Timber (1994)[31] note that despite a lack of evidence linking press and TV exposure to the public perception of crime, politicians still believe in a causal effect. The authors conclude that that the reporting of crime statistics gives an opportunity for parties to highlight positional differences.

Foreign policy

There have been various debates about the power of media (particularly TV coverage) to influence foreign policy at times of conflict.

Hopkinson (1995)[32] suggests that a range of factors determine whether or not humanitarian crises are covered by the media. Examining a range of humanitarian crises, he suggests that TV images may highlight policy problems, but that there is evidence, in the cases of Somalia and Yugoslavia, that media coverage was not a cause of policy responses. This contrasts with views that TV images played a direct role in withdrawal from Vietnam and the ending of the first Gulf War.

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[29] Jackson, D. (2011) 'Strategic Media, Cynical Public? Examining the Contingent Effects of Strategic News Frames on Political Cynicism in the UK', The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics, 16 (1), pp. 75-101
[30] Negrine, R. (1996) *The Communication of Politics*, London: Sage
[31] Schlesinger, P., and Tumber, H. (1994). *Reporting Crime: The Media Politics of Criminal Justice*. Oxford: Clarendon Press
[32] Hopkinson, N. (1995), 'The Impact of New Technology on the International Media and Foreign Policy', Wilton Park Paper 97, London: HMSO

Using the Bosnian war as an example, Gowing (1996)[33] argues that the perception that real-time TV coverage of conflict directly results in foreign policy responses fails to explain adequately the relationship between TV coverage and foreign policy. He argues that although technological developments have made it easier for journalists to report independently from war zones and broadcast graphic images, responses to these are short-term and local in nature. Gowing notes that influence on policy may be indirect, via op-ed columns written by editors who (in contrast to political leaders) consume significant amounts of rolling news coverage. He also notes that TV may be used by politicians to support existing policy, for example by demonstrating additional complexity in the conflict.

Gadarian (2010)[34] concludes that media coverage of terrorism impacted US public opinion on foreign policy, increasing support for 'hawkish' responses. Experiments suggest that this effect is greatest when the news items are presented in an emotional style, supporting the modelling which suggests that TV had a bigger impact than newspapers on attitudes to foreign policy. Media effects were seen in those who felt threatened.

The role of the wider media environment varies between countries

Researchers have also examined wider features of the media environment and the extent of their impact upon how politics is reported and perceived. Some researchers have used a comparative approach to draw out salient differences between geographies.

Examining a range of 18 countries in Western Europe and North America, Hallin and Mancini (2010)[35] describe three models of media system. First, they identify a 'polarised pluralist' model, seen in countries including France, Italy and Spain. They associate this model with strong state intervention and an 'elite, politically orientated' press which grew out of political parties, and relatively limited journalistic autonomy. In the 'democratic corporatist' model (which includes Germany, Netherlands and Sweden, among others) newspaper circulation is high, and journalists have relatively high autonomy, though titles tend to maintain a particular ideology. State intervention to promote representation of viewpoints and different groups in society is said to feature in these countries - strong public service broadcasting systems are often associated with this model, though the UK and Ireland are also said to share this feature. Example of countries with a 'liberal' media model are said to be the US, Canada, Ireland and the UK. Features of these countries include relatively limited state intervention and a commercial press with a focus on information rather than commentary. Within these models, they suggest that plurality is delivered differently. High levels of external political pluralism are often associated with the first two models (in particular newspapers), while the liberal model is associated with a more politically neutral press and associated with high levels of internal pluralism. However, Hallin and Mancini argue that there are differences within the 'liberal model. "US and British newspapers do share an emphasis on information and narrative, rather than Continental-style commentary. But a much higher degree of political parallelism [how the media reflects the main lines of political division] in the British press is probably due both to differences in political culture – British parties have been more unified and ideologically coherent – and to differences in media markets....Britain has a competitive national market in which newspapers have an incentive to differentiate their product through their political stances" [p. 117].

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[33] Gowing, N. (1996) 'Real-time TV coverage from War: Does it Make or Break Government Policy', in Gow, J. and . Paterson R. and Preston, A. (eds.) *Bosnia by Television*, London: British Film Institute
[34] Gadarian, S. K. (2010), 'The Politics of Threat: How terrorism News Shapes Foreign Policy', The Journal of Politics, Vol 72, No. 2, pp469-483
[35] Hallin, D. C. and Mancini, P. (2010) 'Western media systems in comparative perspective' in Curran, J. (ed.) *Media and Society*, London: Bloomsbury

Cushion (2011)[36] argues that competition between networks in the deregulated and commercial US environment has led to political fragmentation in audiences.

Curran, Iyengar, Lund and Salovaara-Moring (2009)[37] examine differences in levels of political knowledge in countries with different media environments. Political knowledge did not appear to vary between groups with different educational levels in European countries with a tradition of publicly-funded PSB, in comparison to the commercially-driven US market. A key difference noted was the scheduling of news programmes, which tended to be shown in peak time in the European markets, but which, due to commercial pressures, tended to be shown outside peak time in the US. While wider cultural factors than the media environment were found to be more important predictors of political knowledge, Curran et al conclude that the media environment is a salient factor, and suggest that further deregulation could lead to lower levels of political knowledge.

Lewis, Inthorn and Wahl-Jorgensen (2005)[38] study representations of citizens and citizenship in the US and UK media. While citizens are portrayed in the media, their opinions are used to illustrate rather than to initiate stories, because stories are designed to reflect the political agenda. Lewis, Inthorn and Wahl-Jorgensen see coverage generally portraying citizens as passive (in that they are unlikely to express a political opinion, or say what they think should be done to address issues). They find that the public opinion, which is portrayed, tends to lean towards the political right. They see this as evidence that journalists' views of public opinion are influenced by stereotypes about 'normal people' (such as 'middle England' and 'middle America'), rather than being based on polling data.

Overall, 30-40% of stories were said by Lewis et al. to make some reference to citizens or public opinion – but 95% of the references to public opinion did not directly refer to evidence. UK news is found to give greater coverage to foreign public opinion than US news, which tends to focus on public debate within the US. While they do not blame declines in voter turnout on media representation of citizenship, they argue that concerns about coverage of citizenship could be improved through greater use of vox-pops and better use of opinion polls, and a greater focus on connecting political stories to the everyday lives of the audience.

2.4   The impact of non-news TV genres

The role of non-news content in relation to power and politics

In addition to studies which focus on the role of news and journalism, some writers have discussed the role of non-news content in relation to power and politics. The wider role said to be played by non-news genres is also raised by two academic submissions from universities to Ofcom's Invitation to Comment (ITC). Both the Centre for Cultural Policy Research (CCPR) (2011)[39] and the Centre for Competition Policy (CCP) (2011)[40] argue that plurality in non-news genres is important for cultural reasons.

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[36] Cushion, S. (2011) *Television Journalism*, London: Sage

[37] Curran, J. Iyengar, S., Lund, A. B. and Salovaara-Moring, I. (2009) 'Media System, Public Knowledge and Democracy: A Comparative Study', European Journal of Communication, 24 (1), pp. 5-26

[38] Lewis, J. and Inthorn, S. and Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2005) *Citizens or Consumers: The Media and the Decline of Political Participation*, Maidenhead: Open University Press

[39] Centre for Cultural Policy Research at University of Glasgow (CCPR) (2011), Response to Ofcom Consultation on Ownership and Plurality in the UK Media, Available from http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/consultations/916359/responses/ccpr.pdf [accessed 21/2/2012]

Several studies have looked at the impact of the rise of the political comedy genre in the US (such as *The Daily Show*). Cushion (2011) concludes that despite a range of studies, there are no definitive conclusions as to the genre's positive or negative effect upon political engagement. However, he notes that there are studies which suggest that those who watch political comedy shows are more likely to watch news, and that liberals are more likely to watch *The Daily Show*.

Curran (1996)[41] argues that a weakness of the traditional concept of the democratic role of the media is the failure to consider entertainment genres. He believes that the traditional explanations of non-news media content, which are concerned with the development of entertainment as a genre, treat entertainment as separate to public affairs, or alternatively, focus on cross-over genres of entertainment with political content, and see these to be inadequate (Curran, 2010[42]). He sets out a range of arguments about the ways that entertainment genres have democratic meaning. Firstly, entertainment may uphold different collective or individualist values. Secondly, entertainment content may play a role in social identity, changes in which have been seen to have political effects. Thirdly, entertainment content may play a role in setting out how users view and understand the world. For example, films and TV series are said to have played a role in setting out and reinforcing conceptions of war and US national security (Curran 2010).

Franklin (1994) notes that changes in the way politics is presented have led politicians seeking to communicate with the electorate to by-pass news and current affairs outlets and instead use other programme genres such as chat shows. Audiences for these non-news and current affairs genres may be larger than those for news and current affairs programmes.

Schlesinger and Tumber (1994)[43] suggest that programmes such as *Crimewatch* may fall between genres. In contrast to news, *Crimewatch* relies on a single official source (the police), and uses reconstructions, sitting between fact and fiction. Schlesinger and Tumber note studies which suggest that programmes in this genre have led to increased fear of crime. They also suggest that the mobilisation effects of this genre may differ between social groups and crimes.

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[40] ESRC Centre for Competition Policy (CCP) (2011), Ofcom Invitation to comment on measuring media plurality, available from
http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/consultations/916359/responses/ccp.pdf [accessed 11/06/12]
[41] Curran, J. (1996) "Mass Media and Democracy Revisited" in Curran, J. and Gurevitch, M. (eds.) *Mass Media and Society*, London: Bloomsbury
[42] Curran, J. (2010) 'Entertaining Democracy' in Curran, J. (ed.) *Media and Society*, London: Bloomsbury
[43] Schlesinger, P., and Tumber, H. (1994) *Reporting Crime: The Media Politics of Criminal Justice.* Oxford: Clarendon Press

The news market and journalism

3.1 Theories on the production of news

There is a broad literature on the production of news

Reviewing some of this literature, Schudson (1996)[44] discusses three perspectives in the literature on news production. He identifies these as the political-economic, sociological and cultural perspectives, later adding a fourth perspective (Schudson, 2010[45]) to reflect economic developments.

Literature from the economic perspective has examined links between ownership of news organisations and coverage – links which Schudson believes are difficult to determine. The sociological perspective is seen as focusing on topics including the social construction of news, journalistic values and reporter-source studies, including the role of official sources. Cultural accounts are seen to be relevant for understanding "news judgement", which reflects the culture in which journalists write. This impacts both the content of journalism but also its form and varies between countries.

Golding and Murdock (1996)[46] argue for a broader concept of political economy (which they call 'critical political economy') than Schudson or Chomsky[47], highlighting the importance of understanding the role of the cultural industries and how they create meaning in society. They give an example of understanding how economic mechanisms promote certain cultural forms, which regulate public discourse. The approach described by Golding and Murdock also takes into account monetary and social barriers to the consumption of cultural goods.

3.2 The news value chain under pressure

Traditional business models face disruptive change

A wide range of literature, including Picard (2010)[48], Currah (2009)[49], Freedman (2009)[50], has pointed to the significant structural changes in media business models driven by digitisation, with significant implications for journalism and journalistic output.

However, other literature highlights other structural changes and sources of disruptive change. Authors including Curran and Seaton (2010) and Freedman (2009) argue that business models for the press in the UK have been forced to adapt over time, and

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[44] Schudson, M. (1996) 'Sociology of Journalism' in Curran, J. and Gurevitch, M. (eds.) *Mass Media and Society*, London: Bloomsbury

[45] Schudson, M. (2010) 'Four approaches to the sociology of news revisited' in Curran, J. (ed.) *Media and Society*, London: Bloomsbury

[46] Golding, P. and Murdock M. (1996) 'Culture, Communications and Political Economy' pp. 11-30 in J. Curran & M. Gurevitch (eds.) *Mass Media and Society*, London: Bloomsbury

[47] Referred to in Golding and Murdock (1996)

[48] Picard, R. (2010) 'The Future of the News Industry,' in Curran, J. (ed.) Media and Society, London: Bloomsbury

[49] Currah, A. (2009) *What's Happening to our news? An investigation into the likely impact of the digital revolution on the economics of news publishing in the UK*, Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism University of Oxford

[50] Freedman, D. (2009) 'The Political Economy of the "New" News Environment' Fenton N. (ed.), *New Media, Old News: Journalism and Democracy in the Digital Age*, London: Sage

MacGregor (1997)[51] focuses on the impact that technological developments have had on TV news.

Picard (2010) summarises the five key changes being faced by the media market – abundance; fragmentation and polarisation; portfolio development; the eroding strength of media firms; and a power-shift in communications. Abundance, fragmentation and polarisation are seen as challenging traditional advertising-funded models of newspapers and TV news providers. Changes in advertising are discussed by Currah (2009) and Freedman (2009) who argue that much of the growth in online advertising has been in classified and search advertising, rather than display advertising, which has led to advertising revenues flowing away from traditional news organisations. Currah notes that news providers have struggled to increase online revenues in the face of declining circulations, and consumer unwillingness to pay for online news. Picard (2010) notes that the relatively small proportions of heavy news consumers makes consumer payment models challenging, particularly as much news is available for free.

McNair (2011)[52] argues that despite the 'online news revolution', journalism will continue and may even prosper [p.51], as in a market with many players, audiences will be attracted to providers that meet their information needs, who will then attract revenues from advertisers. Picard (2010) and Freedman (2009) adopt a similar stance, arguing that despite the pressures on business models, there is still a role for journalism.

Discussing the relationship between traditional news media and social media, Newman (2011)[53] notes that social media networks are often used in conjunction with traditional media. Traditional news organisations and their high-profile employees generate large followings on Twitter (which is seen as a way to broadcast information), while social networking sites such as Facebook are an increasingly important source of traffic to the websites of traditional media firms, despite their competition for advertising revenues.

Alternative forms of ownership have been suggested as partial solutions to these developments

In response to these developments, a range of authors including Picard (2010) suggest that a greater range of organisations and funding sources are likely to play a role in the news industry, including public broadcasters and large commercial media corporations, as well as smaller companies and not-for profit organisations.

Currah (2009) argues that changes to UK law should be considered to make it easier to establish charities for newsgathering. Fowler (2011)[54] discusses alternative ownership arrangements for newspapers, noting the benefits that alternative structures, such as charity ownership, could bring to a title and the community it serves. Examples of publications with alternative ownership structures include the *Maidenhead Advertiser* (Baylis Trust) at the local level and *Which?* at the national level. However, he argues that the status quo in UK commercial news media - the ongoing profitability of many titles and a belief that news

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[51] MacGregor, B. (1997) *Live, Direct and Biased? Making Television News in the Satellite Age* London: Arnold

[52] McNair, B.(2011) 'Managing the online news revolution: the UK experience' in Meikle, G. and Redden, G. (eds.) *News Online: Transformations and Continuities,* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

[53] Newman, N. (2011), *Mainstream Media and the Distribution of news in the age of social discovery*, Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism

[54] Fowler, N. (2011) 'Regional Press Challenges Promote Calls for New Ownership Forms and Legal Bases' in Levy, D. A. L. and Picard, R. G (eds.) *Is There a Better Structure for News Providers? The Potential in Charitable and Trust Ownership*, Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism University of Oxford

media should not receive state support - acts as a barrier to the development of alternative business models.

For Levy (2011)[55], alternative ownership structures may provide some shelter from the structural and cyclical pressures being faced by the industry, and help to protect investment in journalism. He notes that there has been particular interest in alternative ownership models for local and community media. Barnett (2010a) also notes that alternative ownership structures and hyper-local sites have a role to play in promoting public interest journalism against the backdrop of the challenges facing the wider news sector. Levy and Picard (2011)[56] note that while charities', trusts' and foundation support for news organisations may be a useful alternative to traditional ownership structures, they do not remove the need to develop sustainable business models.

3.3 Ownership and control within news organisations

Degrees of journalistic autonomy

Phillips (2009)[57] argues that journalism can be seen as a 'weakly autonomous' field as conceived by Bourdieu[58], as it is neither fully controlled by the state or capital, nor is it fully independent of these. In the field of journalism cultural capitalism, i.e. the ability to define and influence events, is valued. This means that newspapers must balance providing a return to their shareholders and maintaining influence.

Phillips, Couldry and Freedman (2009)[59] argue that the limited job security enjoyed by journalists and editors in UK newspapers demonstrates that the owners of UK newspapers retain power, and reiterate Bourdieu's argument that job insecurity is a form of censorship.

Journalists are said to have greater autonomy when acting collectively or when they are established names (Phillips et al.). Hargreaves (2003)[60] argues that, in general, journalism is an individualistic profession and that in many cases, organisations run by the profession such as professional associations or unions have not functioned well.

Within news organisations, commercial incentives are said to mean that news desks put pressure on journalists to write stories reflecting search engine query trends (Phillips et al., 2009, Currah 2009). Newman (2011) suggests that this type of news also performs well in social networks.

Phillips et al. state that in general, at broadsheet newspapers, journalists tend to write to topics suggested by the news desk, while in tabloids, editors tended to play a greater role in writing the actual stories. Phillips (2009) argues that journalists are motivated to seek to stand out and gain recognition from their peers; in particular, younger journalists may be

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[55] Levy, D.A. L (2011) 'Why look at Charitable and Trust Ownership of News Organisations?' in Levy, D. A. L. and Picard, R. G (eds.) Is There a Better Structure for News Providers? The Potential in Charitable and Trust Ownership, Oxford: University of Oxford

[56] Levy, D. A. L. and Picard, R. G (2011) 'What We Now Know about Charitable and Trust Ownership of News Organisations' in Levy, D. A. L. and Picard, R. G. (eds.) Is There a Better Structure for News Providers? The Potential in Charitable and Trust Ownership, Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism University of Oxford

[57] Phillips, A. (2009) 'Old Sources: New Bottles' in Fenton, N. (ed.) New Media, Old News: Journalism and Democracy in the Digital Age, London: Sage

[58] Referred to in Phillips (2009)

[59] Phillips, A. and Couldry, N. and Freedman, D. (2009) '"An Ethical Deficit: Accountability, Norms and the Material Conditions of Contemporary Journalism' in Fenton, N. (ed.) New Media, Old News: Journalism and Democracy in the Digital Age, London: Sage

[60] Hargreaves I. (2003) Journalism: Truth or Dare, Oxford: Oxford University Press

prepared to work extra hours to write their own stories, in addition to those determined by the news desk. Newman (2011) discusses the ways in which journalists from media organisations have been able to strengthen their personal brand through direct engagement with audiences via Twitter.

Hargreaves (2003) suggests that the typical leader of a media company is likely to be a professional manager, with his or her focus primarily on financial and business issues across multiple media and genres, rather than on news. Curran and Seaton (2010)[61] argue that proprietor control and partisanship have varied over time, noting an increase in ownership concentration and the 'press barons' of the 1920s (whose willingness to intervene in editorial matters varied) through to government regulation during the Second World War and post-war decentralised editorial control. The late 1970s and 1980s are described as a time of political shift to the right under more interventionist proprietors. Curran and Seaton argue that this shift has had implications for politics in the UK, and, in particular, the radical tradition.

Newsroom cultures and practices

Becker and Vlad (2009)[62] discuss news story generation and construction, noting similarities and differences between TV and newspapers in the way newsrooms are organised and stories generated. Discussing the literature on news 'beats' (which are described in a range of ways by different authors, but relate to the way in which journalists are organised to cover different geographies and organisations) they note that beats have implications for the power of journalists and their relationships with sources. Citing studies which examined newsroom practices, they concluded that differences in the use of beats between newspapers and TV newsrooms (which tended to use specialist reporters rather than beats) reflect differences in the way ideas for stories are generated.

Noting that differences in journalistic culture are evident between countries, Cushion (2011)[63] cites examples which suggest that in the UK, impartiality and independence are seen as important attributes by TV journalists, even when engaged in another medium. Schlesinger (1979) notes that the BBC's definition of impartiality gives rise to a description of a model news employee as one who is seen not to reveal his or her own political preference. This contrasts with a study of US TV newsrooms cited in Cushion (2011) in which a producer is quoted as encouraging anchors to "be themselves" and a belief that anchors are "number one, Americans, and number two, human beings, as well as journalists" [p.94].

Within TV newsrooms in the UK, Cushion notes differences between the BBC and Sky News. Both increased the proportion of time spent on breaking news stories between 2004 and 2007. However, there was little commonality between BBC and Sky News in the choice of breaking news stories. Cushion discusses differences in the perceived approaches to breaking news stories – comparing Sky News's emphasis on being the first to break news, to that of the BBC, both before and after the *Lambert Report on BBC News Channels*, which suggested that the BBC was too cautious in breaking stories. Cushion notes that the BBC moved to get facts on air more quickly in the 2005 London terror attacks. However he states that the BBC is still seen by some in the industry as slower than Sky News when breaking stories.

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[61] Curran, J. and Seaton, J. (2010) *Power Without Responsibility*, London: Routledge
[62] Becker L. and Vlad, T. (2009) 'News organizations and routines' in K. Wahl-Jorgensen and T. Hanitzsch (ed.), *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, New York: Routledge
[63] Cushion, S. (2011) *Television Journalism*, London: Sage

Comparing TV news content over a 35-year period, Barnett, Ramsay and Gaber (2012)[64] conclude that evening news bulletins on the terrestrial channels have in general remained focused on what they describe as 'broadsheet' news items. The exception to this is said to be Channel 5, whose output in 2009 they characterised as 'tabloid'. Barnett et al. note a consistency in the BBC's evening news bulletin output since 1975, and consistency in the ration of 'broadsheet' to 'tabloid' items in the ITV bulletin since 1999. Of all bulletins, Channel 4 News' output had consistently the highest proportion of items categorised as 'broadsheet'. Examining the treatment of particular stories in 2004 and 2009 by the PSB evening news services, they also argue that, despite differences in the presentation of items and time given to the common news stories, similarities in running order and production techniques (such as the linking of related stories) are evidence for a common UK news culture.

3.4   The impact of market developments on journalists' use of news sources

Changes in the news value chain have made an impact on the ways that sources are used by journalists

Phillips (2009)[65] argues that the pressure of modern newsrooms force journalists to focus on trusted sources rather than spending time cultivating new ones. Phillips reports that journalists said they made limited use of user-generated content and, with the exception of political correspondents, blogs. But Newman (2011) notes the increasing use of Twitter by journalists as a news source, and notes the different ways in which broadcasters such as Al-Jazeera and the BBC seek to verify social media sources, such as the identification and cultivation of Al-Jazeera's network of trusted bloggers.

Economic pressure and the 24-hour news agenda have encouraged the increased use of news agencies by 24-hour news channels (Cushion, 2011, Paterson, 2011). Paterson notes that some channels which launched following deregulation in the 1990s have always used a high proportion of agency footage, although some broadcasters have tried to rationalise the use of agencies, or have tried to launch their own agency services. While there has been some new small-scale entry into this area, Paterson sees no evidence that this will result in fundamentally different wholesale news products, as agencies are subject to commercial constraints. Paterson concludes by arguing for publicly-funded wholesale television news providers, which would provide a different perspective from the commercial news agencies.

For Redden and Witschge (2009)[66], the cross-checking of stories with stories from other media organisations, and the use of agency material, has led to homogenisation of output, more so in tabloids than in broadsheets. In this context, specialist reporters are seen as an important source of heterogeneity for broadsheet newspaper titles.

Phillips, Couldry and Freedman (2009)[67] place these trends within an ethical context, citing concerns that the use of unattributed agency copy and the unattributed editing of journalist

[64] Barnett, S. and Ramsay, G. N. and Gaber, I. (2012) "From Callahan to Credit Crunch: Changing Trends in British Television News 1975 – 2009" Available from http://www.westminster.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/124785/From-Callaghan-To-Credit-Crunch-Final-Report.pdf [accessed 04/04/2012]
[65] Phillips, A. (2009) 'Old Sources: New Bottles' in Fenton, N. (ed*.) New Media, Old News: Journalism and Democracy in the Digital Age* , London: Sage
[66] Redden, J. and Witschge, T. (2009) 'A new news order? Online news content examined' in Fenton, N. (ed.) *New Media, Old News: Journalism and Democracy in the Digital Age* , London: Sage
[67] Phillips, A. and Couldry, N. and Freedman, D. (2009) "'An Ethical Deficit: Accountability, Norms and the Material Conditions of Contemporary Journalism' in Fenton, N. (ed.) *New Media, Old News: Journalism and Democracy in the Digital Age* London: Sage

copy by sub-editors reduces story transparency and threatens the ethical principle of sincerity, in other words that what is written is actually believed by the authors, given that journalists may have little control over what is put against their name.

N. Davies (2008)[68] argues that the increasing commercialisation of news has led to newspapers producing more stories, with fewer staff. This has led to what Davies calls 'churnalism' as reporters increasingly work from their desks relying on official sources and PR. Commissioning a survey of content in The Times, The Guardian, The Independent, The Daily Telegraph and The Daily Mail, from Cardiff University, he notes that, overall, 60% of stories were wholly or mainly drawn from newswire or PR copy. The researchers could only be sure that 12% of stories were fully generated by the reporters themselves.

Researchers in some universities are developing software tools which use a range of artificial intelligence and mathematical techniques to analyse online news content. This enables researchers to identify which stories are being picked up by the media and the sentiments which these stories express, and potentially to track the spread of stories between publications and organisations.[69]

The relationship between public relations and news forms a part of the literature on news sources

The relationship between public relations, journalism and democracy has been discussed by a range of writers. Dinan and Millar (2009)[70] note that much debate concerning the role of PR has revolved around its impact on the public sphere and the impact on different models of democracy. Phillips (2009) argues that the use of PR sources by the media is not bad for democracy *per se*, as it may enable groups to challenge established groups for access to the media.

According to Dinan and Millar (2009), pressure in newsrooms has led to increased use of 'information subsidies' provided by PR outlets. Furthermore, in the UK, some steps have been taken towards the convergence of media and PR; Dinan and Millar cite United Business Media, and a joint venture between ITN and Burson Marsteller, in addition to networking events which include journalists, PR people and lobbyists.

Fenton (2009) argues that the increased role played by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in modern society (including delivery of public services), and trends in news production, have combined to require NGOs to adopt PR tactics. As NGOs appear unable to change the news agenda or definitions of news, they have tailored their approach to the commercialised news environment. By tailoring their output to meet the needs of journalists (including researching and writing full stories), NGOs are able to use traditional media to get their message across. In this environment, disparities between resource-poor and resource-rich NGOs have become more important – as larger NGOs are better equipped to gain access to key news outlets trusted by audiences, where stories are picked up by other media outlets.

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[68] Davies, N. (2008) *Flat Earth News,* London: Vintage

[69] Coverage of these techniques is outside the scope of this review. However, examples of work in this area include Media Cloud, a system developed by MIT/Harvard in the US and NOAM, developed at Bristol University in the UK. For a discussion on the use and methodology behind Media Cloud see: http://www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/2011/03/28/how-restless-a-searchlight-using-media-cloud-to-measure-the-change-in-media-cycles/ [accessed 11/06/12]. For examples of studies carried out at the University of Bristol, see: http://mediapatterns.enm.bris.ac.uk/node/38 [accessed 11/06/12]

[70] Dinan, W. and Miller, D. (2009) ''Public Relations, Spin and Journalism', in Wahl-Jorgensen, K. and Hanitzsch, T. (eds.) *Handbook of Journalism Studies*, Routledge: London.

For Currah (2009), PR should be seen as part of the broader media landscape. While he notes concerns about PR-led news agendas (for example in relation to disease awareness stories), and a lack of transparency of news story sources, he argues that PR may also be seen as a form of 'vertical disintegration' in the news value chain, resulting in greater efficiency as fewer internal resources are needed within the news value chain. Currah also argues that PR techniques enable the dissemination of socially valuable information across society.

Media plurality and democracy

4.1 Conceptions of, and attitudes towards, media plurality

Forms of media pluralism

Doyle (2002)[71] describes two forms of media pluralism. Firstly, 'political pluralism' relates to the representation of a range of political opinions necessary for democracy. In contrast, 'cultural pluralism' relates to the need for the diverse groups in society to have access to the media. Doyle sets out three linked determinants of media pluralism in addition to diversity of ownership: market size (which constrains the resources available to media); the consolidation of resources (the extent to which different media products draw on the same resources); and diversity of output. She notes that there may be trade-offs between these factors – for example, in small markets, diversity of output may require a more consolidated market structure, with relatively few outlets.

Noting a large body of literature on definitions of media diversity and media plurality, Karppinen (2010)[72] notes the complexities in defining media pluralism and media plurality, and states "...there is no commonly agreed definition of either media pluralism or media diversity, let alone their relationship to each other" [p.94].

With reference to McQuail's distinction between media pluralism and diversity, Freedman (2008)[73] argues that 'pluralism' can be seen as relating to the political environment in which the media is situated, while 'diversity' as a concept concerns the ability of media to deliver a range of content which relates to current differences in society.

Despite being a policy that is viewed as having broad merits, and being important for democracy, media pluralism is complex and can be interpreted in different ways (Klimkiewicz, 2009[74]). In relation to media policy, key concepts have been internal plurality (diversity of media content available to the public) and external plurality (plurality of autonomous and independent media).

Czepek (2009)[75] notes that freedom of the press is seen as an important feature in democracies. Content pluralism can be seen as a measure of press freedom. Journalism which is free from state interference, and interference from economic interests, is necessary to give citizens the information they need in a democratic society and to enable citizens to participate in debates. Levels of content pluralism may indicate levels of self-censorship.

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[71] Doyle, G. (2002), *Media Ownership*, London: Sage
[72] Karppinen, K. (2010) *Rethinking Media Pluralism: A Critique of Theories and Policy Discourses*, Publications of the Department of Social Research 2010: 4, Helsinki: University of Helsinki
[73] Freedman, D. (2008) *The Politics of Media Policy*, Cambridge: Polity
[74] Klimkiewicz, B. (2009) 'Is the clash of rationalities leading nowhere? Media pluralism in European regulatory policies', in Czepek, A. and Hellwig, M. and Nowak, E. (eds.) *Press Freedom and Pluralism in Europe: Concepts and Conditions*, Bristol: Intellect
[75] Czepek, A. (2009) 'Pluralism and Participation as desired results of press freedom', in Czepek, A. and Hellwig, M. and Nowak E. (eds.), *Press Freedom and Pluralism in Europe: Concepts and Condition,* Bristol: Intellect, pp. 37-4

Writing about plurality, Terrington and Ashworth (2008)[76] argue that the concept of plurality can be said to be relevant throughout the TV value chain. For Terrington and Ashworth, plurality is a way of securing choice, quality and efficiency. This is said to be achieved in one of two ways: firstly through competition between 'large numbers of players'; secondly, through "expert judgement" exercised by a 'smaller number of players' whose institutional values are aligned to secure the three outcomes Terrington and Ashworth have identified[77].

Discussion of media ownership

Writing about media ownership, Baker (2007)[78] sets out three main arguments for the widest possible dispersal of media ownership. Firstly, he argues that wide ownership of the media supports a democratic distribution of communicative power, because an egalitarian distribution of communicative power is fair in democracy. Secondly, he argues that dispersed ownership acts as a democratic safeguard – reducing the risk that communicative power is abused by individuals or groups to subvert democracy, both in relation to public opinion, and electoral processes. This also reduces the chance of corruption of media so that they do not perform the watchdog role. Summarising this argument, Baker argues that this can be seen as analogous to the separation of powers under the US Constitution. Finally, Baker argues that the positive externalities associated with journalism mean that profit-maximising owners will under-invest in journalism. Profit maximisers are more likely to be large corporate owners than the smaller, more local media owners.

Baker also sets out additional 'pragmatic' reasons for a broad range of media ownership, arguing that conglomerates including media business can be subject to pressure by government or advertisers due to activities in other parts of the business, and that journalists working for conglomerates may be under pressure not to criticise the wider group. He argues that synergies created by mergers between media firms have tended to result in a shift in expenditure from socially valuable activities to the bottom line.

Karppinen (2009)[79] argues that conceptions of plurality must go beyond the number of media owners in a particular market, and that relying on multiple owners to secure democratic outcomes is not enough. Karppinen believes that it is necessary to consider media plurality broadly: "In the contemporary media environment, questions about the distribution of communicative power can hardly be reduced to any simplistic measurement of media ownership or content diversity" [p. 166]. In the light of this, he argues that it is necessary to consider broader questions about the distribution of communicative power in society (i.e. which groups and organisations control communications channels). Furthermore, he raises a key question about whether plurality should be conceptualized from the perspective of promoting informed public deliberation, or from promoting consumer sovereignty in the market.

Klimkiewicz (2010)[80] defines the concept of structural media pluralism as a "condition where diverse, independent media entities exist with a system and are arranged in a particular way"

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[76] Terrington, S. and Ashworth, M. (2008) 'Plurality: What Do We Mean by It? What Do We Want from It?' Gardam T. and Levy, D. (ed.) *The Price of Plurality*, Oxford: Oxford Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism/Ofcom

[77] Terrington and Ashworth use the term 'players' to describe the range of content providers and entities that are contributing across the value chain

[78] Baker, C. E. (2007) *Media Concentration and Democracy: Why Ownership Matters*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

[79] Karppinen, K. (2009) 'Rethinking media pluralism and communicative abundance', Observatorio (OBS*) Journal, 11, pp 151-169

[80] Klimkiewicz, B.(2010) 'Introduction: Structural Media Pluralism', International Journal of Communication, 4, 2010 pp 906-913

[p. 907]. This system-level conception of plurality is contrasted with the traditional internal/external media plurality concept, which is from the perspective of a single media organisation. It is noted that it is possible to classify structural pluralism in several ways including function, constitution or financial structure, geography, and political attributes.

Klimkiewicz argues that similar types of ownership structure may give rise to different levels of service diversities, as owners may have different attitudes to the breadth of viewpoints in their own media. Modern ownership structures and the use of joint ventures and alliances are said to make classification by ownership more difficult. Demand-side attributes are said to be important when considering structural plurality, as users' ability to access different platforms and content, and to engage critically with media, also play a part in the concept of structural media pluralism.

Approaches to measuring plurality

Napoli (2011)[81] argues that given the increase in the range of content available to audiences, understanding which sources are actually used by audiences (i.e. exposure diversity) has become more important. He argues that US media policy in the past has focused on 'source diversity' (i.e. the number of content providers in the media system, as this can be measured). He notes that the link between this and 'content diversity' (describing features including the range of viewpoints or styles available to audiences) has been assumed, and that the evidence for this is contradictory. Contradictory evidence concerning the relationship between content diversity and exposure diversity poses questions for public policy, including whether or not exposure diversity should be a policy goal, and how exposure diversity may impact upon policies designed to promote source and content diversity.

A multidimensional approach to plurality is also taken by the K.U Leuven et al. (2009)[82] report on indicators for media pluralism, prepared for the European Commission. The report identifies political, structural, cultural, geographical, and content dimensions to plurality. It notes that policy interventions concerning plurality typically fall either into approaches which place an emphasis on promoting competition, or those which aim to promote the potential of the media as acting as a public sphere (i.e. a space in society which individuals and groups can discuss and debate social and political issues). It proposes a risk-based Media Pluralism Monitor as a tool to identify and monitor risks to plurality.

The Media Pluralism Monitor examines several 'risk domains' which span the broad definition of pluralism. These relate to areas including pluralism of media ownership and capital, plurality of media types and genres (for example the public service content in new media), cultural pluralism in the media (relating to cultural identity and representation of groups), geographic pluralism in the media (relating to representation of geographic areas or local communities), and political pluralism in the media (the ability of political groups to access the media, and the media to reflect a broad range of political opinions). Against these risk domains, which contain a total of 43 risks, a total of 166 economic, socio-demographic and legal indicators are identified. The 'basic domain' refers to certain pre-conditions for media plurality, relating to freedom of expression and independence of regulatory bodies. The scope of the measurement framework is wide, giving consideration to TV, and radio, national and local/regional newspapers, magazines, online and book publishing.

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[81] Napoli, P. M. (2011) 'Exposure Diversity Reconsidered', Journal of Information Policy 1 pp.246-259
[82] K.U.Leuven – ICRI (lead contractor) and Jönköping International Business School – MMTC, and Central European University – CMCS and Ernst & Young Consultancy Belgium, (2009) "Independent Study on 'Indicators for Media Pluralism in the Member States – Towards a Risk-Based Approach'

Just (2009)[83] notes the potential for 'value conflict' in policies towards the communications sector, given that media are both economic and cultural goods, resulting in a tension between objectives to promote competition and promote media plurality. She sees this tension being present in debates concerning where responsibility for communications regulations should fall, and debates surrounding the relaxation or removal of sector-specific competition regulation. In response to this, and to the rapid pace of technical change, new ways of assessing market power and plurality have been adopted by several countries. Examining the 'novel' approaches taken by the US, Germany, Italy and the UK, Just concludes: "The analysis of the new approaches and the problems they tackle shows how defining media concentration and its effects – just like earlier attempts – proves to be resistant to scientific empirical evidence and replicable causal generalization" [p.113]. This means that that normative judgements remain central to communications policy.

The issue of measurement of plurality is also discussed by the Centre for Competition Policy (CCP) (2011) which says that most appropriate metrics (e.g. reach, share of references and HHI) chosen to measure external plurality will depend on what element of plurality is deemed most important. Measurement of internal plurality is said to be more complex, and may include measures of screen time given to different political parties.

Some writers have suggested that scale has benefits, and that the public interest may be served by forms of regulation beyond media ownership rules. For example, Seaton (2008)[84] distinguishes between news as "original and reliable knowledge" and opinion. She argues for the need for scale in a news-gathering organisation such as the BBC, given the economics of news-gathering.

Barnett (2010a[85], 2010b[86]) argues that economic pressures on journalism require a re-conception of media ownership rules and structural regulation. Positive content regulation which recognises the relationship between journalism and democracy is argued to be a way of balancing economic pressures (which promote consolidation) against public interest outcomes, to promote plurality of output and critical journalism.

4.2   Media and democracy

Curran (1996), McNair (2008a)[87] and Barnett (2009)[88] provide discussions of the function of journalism in democracy.

Curran (1996) critiques three of what are described as conventional functions of the media in democracy. The first is said to be that of the media acting as a 'watchdog'; highlighting abuses of power. Curran notes that this role has led to arguments that in order to fulfil this role, media must be free from government control, and consequently regulation.

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[83] Just, N. (2009) 'Measuring media concentration and diversity: new approaches and instruments in Europe and the US', Media, Culture and Society 31(1), pp. 97-117

[84] Seaton, J .(2008) 'A diversity of understanding: The increasing importance of Major Public Service Broadcasting Institutions' in Gardam T. and Levy. D. (ed.) *The Price of Plurality*, Oxford: Oxford Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism/Ofcom

[85] Barnett, S. (2010a) 'Media ownership policy in a recession: redefining the public interest' Interactions, Vol.1 No.2, Autumn 2010, pp217-232

[86] Barnett, S. (2010b) What's wrong with media monopolies? A lesson from history and a new approach to media ownership policy, Department of Media and Communications Electronic Working Papers Series, n.18

[87] McNair (2008a) 'Journalism and Democracy' in Wahl-Jorgensen, K. and Hanitzsch, T. (eds.) *Handbook of Journalism Studies*, Routledge: London

[88] Barnett, S. (2009) 'Journalism, Democracy and the Public Interest: rethinking media pluralism for the Digital Age', (2009), Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford

The second role Curran identifies is that of representation, citing arguments that the media articulates and responds to public opinion. The third traditional function is described as informational, the free market allowing self-expression, and collective self determination. Curran critiques these, setting out alternatives. The first of these is the media giving the public access to multiple perspectives across genres other than public affairs. Second, media should have a representation role, allowing groups in society to express alternative viewpoints. Thirdly, according to Curran, the media should aid resolution of conflicts and agreement of objectives, through democratic processes – in particular by providing electorates with information about the choices in elections, and highlighting the existence of civil-society groups (Curran 1996). McNair (2008a) stresses the importance of objective and balanced reporting when fulfilling this role. The importance of the media in relation to civil society groups is also highlighted by Freedman, Witschge and Fenton (2010).

Building upon the role of representation, Barnett (2009) identifies a campaigning role for media in a democracy, in which the media initiate public interest campaigns on behalf of their audiences. Curran (2010) sees a role for diverse partisan media in promoting political debate, priming political conflict, and acknowledging the role of non-state actors. McNair (2008a) argues that this role of journalism is not new and can be traced back to the English Civil War.

Linking the role of media to different conceptions of democracy, Benson (2009)[89] identifies three broad models in the literature on democratic theory: 'elitist', 'deliberative', and 'pluralist' models of democracy. Each of these is said to be associated with different normative theories on the role of media. The normative theory associated with the elitist model is the concept of the role of the press as a watchdog. In the second, i.e. deliberative, model, the media play a role in encouraging discussion and debate within society. For the pluralist model, normative media theory highlights the role of the media in supporting citizen empowerment and mobilisation, inclusion and expression, through a range of communicative styles.

Schudson (1995)[90] contrasts the classical conception of democracy as being composed of rational and active citizens with the arguments of Lippmann, Lindholm and Huntington, who argue that such a model of democracy is unrealistic. Schudson cites Dahl's view: that in classical democracy, citizens require an 'adequate understanding' of political issues in order to 'discover' their own preferences. Schudson believes that this is the role that the news media should play; they should act as if the classical form of democracy were possible (for example, by ensuring that incumbents are not over-represented in the coverage), while also responding to the needs of citizens living in the existing political environment; for example, by holding public bodies accountable to their stated goals, and reporting about single-interest groups, who play important roles in today's society.

The approach of the political economy school to consider these issues uses economic models to explore media influence and the impact of the media on political processes. Noting that much of the literature in this area dates from after 2000, Prat and Strömberg (2011)[91] review a range of studies in this area, and conclude that: plurality and the commercial incentives of media players make it less likely that the media will be used by governments for their own ends; that media scrutiny increases political accountability and

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[89] Benson, R. (2009) 'Futures of the News: International Considerations and Further Reflections in N Fenton (ed.) *New Media, Old News: Journalism and Democracy in the Digital Age*, London: Sage
[90] Schudson, M. (1995), *The Power of News*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press
[91] Prat, A. and Strömberg, D. (2011), 'The Political Economy of Mass Media', LSE Department of Economics working paper Available from http://econ.lse.ac.uk/staff/prat/papers/mediasurvey11.pdf [accessed 20/02/12]

leads to better policy outcomes; and that the media do affect voter information and outcomes.

4.3   The role of new technologies

Golding (1994)[92] discusses the impact of new technologies in the context of the increasing exposure of the media in the UK to market forces, and against the backdrop of growing inequality of incomes and the centralisation of the state. Golding argues that one should think of the 'media society' rather than the 'information society', if people must pay to access information. This has consequences for equality, as those with lower incomes are less likely to have new communications goods and services, leading to a gap between the information rich and poor.

Gurevitch, Coleman and Blumler (2009)[93] argue that despite significant changes within the media ecology, television remains important for political communications, but its role in political communications has changed with the rise of new media.

Much recent debate has been around the role of the internet, between those who argue that the internet is disrupting traditional patterns of power, and those who see existing power structures being maintained or new forms of power emerging. Karppinen (2009) describes the landscape between those who believe that the internet removes power (or creates new power relationships), and those who see old power hierarchies remaining. Some players such as search engines may be said to act both as mediators, reflecting existing power structures, as well as having power of their own. Castells (2009)[94] describes the concept of 'enclosure', whereby online players are able to act as gatekeepers.

In addition to debates about the longevity of traditional power structures, debates about the role of the internet have also covered the topic of audience fragmentation. Karppinen (2009) suggests that that the individualisation and fragmentation of media may mean there is now too much diversity, as audiences focus on their small segments. He argues that the empirical evidence does not support the idea that the availability of sources leads to individuals using more sources. This fragmentation, it is said, may lead to polarisation, with citizens no longer being exposed to a wide range of views, resulting in a decline of shared experiences (Karppinen) and a reduction in the interpersonal communication within families which is seen as important in political socialisation (Gurevitch et al. 2009).

Karppinen (2009) notes that web traffic patterns suggest that fragmentation may in fact be limited, and that the effect is also limited as online media consumption supplements traditional media.

According to Curran and Witschge (2010)[95], the belief that some authors place in an international public sphere enabled by modern technologies is misplaced, as information about public affairs is TV-focused and typically about domestic issues. While the internet creates the potential for global consumption of news media, barriers still exist, and the majority of internet use is not for accessing news or information on public affairs. Citing a

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[92] Golding, P. (1994) 'Telling Stories, Sociology, Journalism and the informed Citizen', European Journal of Communication Vol 9, pp.461-484
[93] Gurevitch, M., Coleman, S. and Blumler, J.G. (2009) 'Political Communication - Old and New Media Relationships', The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 625(1) pp.164-181
[94] Castells, M. (2009) *Communication Power*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
[95] Curran, J. and Witschge, T. (2010) 'Liberal Dreams and the Internet' in Fenton, N. (ed.) New Media, Old News: Journalism and Democracy in the Digital Age London: Sage

transnational online journalism site, they conclude that there is as yet no revenue stream to enable online sites to operate independently of major public and private international media.

Examining the sources of news items from online news providers, Paterson (2007) argues that despite an abundance of news outlets, only four organisations (Reuters, AP, AFP and the BBC), carry out significant amounts of international reporting in English. Because of this concentration in news gathering, and in particular the positions of Reuters and the AP, Paterson believes that the democratic potential of the online news sphere is yet to be realised.

Intervention to promote an online public sphere to promote discussion is discussed by Karppinen (2009) and argued for by Gurevitch, Coleman and Blumler (2009). Gurevitch et al., propound the creation of a publicly-funded agency, independent of government, to take advantage of the potential of online communication to create a space for interaction between citizens, groups and government, allowing government to be held to account.

Political communications and media plurality in the devolved nations

The perspective from the nations

Media use and availability varies throughout the UK, including between the devolved nations (Ofcom 2011)[96]. Although all devolved nations have dedicated BBC nations' radio services, and BBC and Channel 3 nations' and regions' programming, there are differences between the nations as to the availability and distribution of non-English language services, commercial radio and print media, as well as the nature of devolution (Ofcom 2009)[97].

For Cushion (2011), devolution in the UK has posed additional complexity for broadcasters, given the differences between the media landscapes of the nations. Schlesinger (2008)[98] argues that this complexity extends to questions of media and cultural policy, where the frameworks are "asymmetrical and inconsistent" because broadcasting policy is not devolved, despite the link between cultural and broadcasting policy. Arguments for the devolution of certain aspects of broadcasting regulation have also been made for Wales (IWA 2011) [99].

Cushion (2011) highlights differences in the way news is reported. Comparing news output between 2007 and 2009, the BBC increased its share of devolved politics coverage, but commercial coverage of devolved politics fell. Cushion argues that differences in regulation have played a role in the level of coverage that news outlets provide.

Scotland

McNair (2008b) argues that Scotland's media reflect its distinctive public sphere to the wider UK, and this is seen in its political journalism. Devolution is said to have provided a source of stories about Scotland in the UK, including criticisms of the Scottish Parliament, relationships between journalists and politicians, and, since 2007, the constitutional settlement. He argues that until 2007, the press in Scotland tended to support the Union (though noting that in 1992, the Scottish Sun supported the SNP, in contrast to the UK Sun's support for the Conservatives), but that by the 2007 Scottish Parliamentary election, with opinion polls reporting an SNP lead, some titles were indicating a more pro-nationalist stance, although the majority of coverage had been pro-Unionist. McNair suggests that critical coverage of the Scottish Parliament and the impact of the Sheridan case on the Scottish Socialist Party may have influenced the outcome of the election.

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[96] Ofcom (2011) Communications Market Reports: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales Available from http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/market-data/communications-market-reports/cmr11/downloads/ [Accessed 29/02/12]

[97] Ofcom (2009) Local and regional media in the UK: Nations and Regions case studies [Available from http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/tv-research/lrmannex2.pdf [Accessed 29/02/12]

[98] Schlesinger, P. (2008) 'Communications policy' in: Blain, N. and Hutchison, D. (eds.) The Media in Scotland Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

[99] Institute of Welsh Affairs (IWA), (2011) *Taking responsibility for our media: Response to the National Assembly Task and Finish Group inquiry into the future outlook for the media in Wales*, Cardiff: Institute of Welsh Affairs

Wilson (2008)[100] expresses concern that since devolution, Scottish-based media have focused on coverage of Holyrood at the expense of their coverage of the UK Parliament at Westminster, failing to reflect the division of powers between the two Parliaments.

Wales

Barlow, Mitchell and O'Malley (2005)[101] suggest that a key theme in the academic literature on media in Wales is the idea that there is a "media, cultural or communications deficit of one form or another" [p. 22]. While the cultural and communications deficits are about the way in which Welsh media portrays Welsh identity, and the relationship between public and media processes in Wales, the media deficit relates to concerns about a lack of plurality and diversity in Welsh media. This lack of plurality is said to result in a narrow range of political perspectives expressed in Welsh media, and militates against the development of the Welsh public sphere. In Wales, there is no Wales-focused newspaper with national circulation, and UK-wide titles, with very limited coverage of Wales (apart from sport), form the majority of circulation (IWA 2011).

Noting a long-term decline in Wales correspondents for UK newspaper titles, G.T. Davies (2008)[102] notes very limited coverage of the 2007 Assembly elections in UK newspapers, citing the example of The Sun, which was said to have thirteen words covering the election result, located in a story about the results of the Scottish Parliament elections. Highlighting a concern about a lack of plurality in the Welsh press, he argues: "The print media deficit in Wales has a qualitative dimension to it. It is not just facts we are missing, nor merely an understanding. It is, rather, we do not have sufficient competing understandings of our circumstances" [p301]. Noting debates about the size of the Welsh market and its ability to support a range of titles, Davies argues that the current situation of two newspapers owned by the Trinity organisation in North and South Wales would not lead to a loss of plurality if merged because *The Daily Post* and the *Western Mail* circulate in different areas, and the merger may also strengthen content offerings.

Thomas, Cushion and Jewell (2004) argue that the political media had a limited positive impact on turnout in the 2003 Welsh Assembly elections. They argue that Wales-focused journalism has not strengthened since devolution, noting the strength of UK-wide news sources in Wales. Comparing coverage of the 2001 UK general election by UK-wide media and the 2003 Assembly elections by Wales-based media, the general election was given greater prominence in UK media than the Welsh election in Welsh media. The public's views were not found to be prominent in election coverage, and when they were, the most common issue discussed was voter apathy rather than views on policy issues. Thomas, Cushion and Jewell find that coverage was focused on 'public apathy', and failed to discuss the complexity of public attitudes to voting. It also conflated voter apathy with attitudes towards devolution.

Northern Ireland

McLaughlin (2006)[103] opens his review of media in Northern Ireland by stating: "an audit of the local media in Northern Ireland presents a picture of seemingly rude health and vigorous media pluralism" [p. 60], noting a large number of print titles and broadcast services relative

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[100] Wilson, B. (2008) 'A view from Westminster' in: Blain, N. and Hutchison, D. (eds.) *The Media in Scotland,* Edinburgh University Press , Edinburgh, pp. 227-242

[101] Barlow, D. M. and Mitchell, P. and O'Malley, T. (2005) *The Media in Wales: Voices of a Small Nation*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press

[102] Davies, G. T. (2008) *At Arm's Length*, Bridgend: Seren

[103] McLaughlin, G. (2006), 'Profits, politics and paramilitaries: the local news media in Northern Ireland', in Franklin, B. (ed*.) Local Journalism and Local Media: Making the local news*, London: Routledge

to the size of the population. McLaughlin argues that the large number of newspaper titles reflects a media market fragmented along sectarian lines, and argues that a key issue is the lack of a Northern Ireland progressive title appealing across the sectarian divide. In contrast, he notes that broadcasters are subject to impartiality requirements, and argues that they fulfil this by trying to find a "middle ground" [p.67]. McLaughlin also expresses concern about a decline in prime-time news and current affairs coverage on the BBC and UTV.

Wilson and Fawcett (2004)[104] examine media coverage of the 2003 Northern Ireland Assembly elections. They conclude that "it is hard to see that the media, with honourable exceptions, assisted electors to make an informed choice in this election" [p.63]. They argue that media coverage of the election did not inform electors as to what they were voting for, and the election was portrayed as 'gladiatorial contests' between the SDLP and Sinn Fein, and between the UUP and DUP.

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[104] Wilson, R. and Fawcett, L. (2004), 'The media election: Coverage of the 2003 Northern Ireland Assembly poll', Democratic Dialogue Available from:
http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/dd/papers/dd04mediaelect.pdf [accessed 27/02/12]

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