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The Quality and Independence of British Journalism

Tracking the changes over 20 years

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SUMMARY

There is no shortage of comment about the state of British journalism. Critics point to the increasing role of public relations in shaping news output and financial constraints on the freedom of journalists to report accurately and independently. What is invariably lacking, however, is any serious empirical research on the subject. Our report aims to fill this gap.

Our study is based on a number of parallel investigations. We looked at the number of journalists employed in the national press over the last two decades and the volume of work they are required to do. We studied the domestic news content at the 'top end' of British press and broadcast news in order to establish the extent to which journalists depend on public relations and other media (especially wire services), as well as the presence of information indicating robust journalistic practices. We carried out case studies to paint a picture of the role played by PR, other media and the wire services in shaping news content. We tested the 'news value' of PR inspired stories with a panel of experts, and we asked a number of journalists and PR professionals to tell us how their working environment has changed.

The picture that emerges is fairly clear. **Section 1** documents how most journalists are now required to do more with less time, a trend that inevitably increases their dependence on 'ready made' news and limits opportunities for independent journalism. *While the number of journalists in the national press has remained fairly static, they now produce three times as much copy as they did twenty years ago*.

Section 2 shows that the content of domestic news stories in our quality media is heavily dependent on 'pre-packaged news' - whether from PR material or from wire services (there is, obviously a difference between these two kinds of sources, although, we suggest, not as much as is sometimes supposed). Overall, our research suggests that *60% of press articles and 34% of broadcast stories come wholly or mainly from one of these 'pre-packaged' sources*.

Since our analysis of the influence of PR is based only on those *verifiable* instances where we could find PR source material, it is almost certainly an underestimate. Nevertheless, our findings suggest that public relations often does much more than merely set the agenda: we found that 19% of newspaper stories and 17% of broadcast stories were verifiably derived *mainly or wholly* from PR material, while less than half the stories we looked at appeared to be entirely independent of traceable PR.

The main source of PR is the corporate/business world, which is more than three times more successful than NGOs, charities and civic groups at getting material into the news. This may not be surprising, given the greater resources of the business world, but since two views are often counter-posed (on issues like trade, labour rights or the environment) this suggests a clear political imbalance.

The most PR influenced topic was health, followed closely by consumer/business news and entertainment/sport (a finding that confirms the suspicion of some of the journalists we spoke to). Politics appeared to be less PR ridden, although this may be because government PR leaves fewer traces.

Most journalists we contacted felt that there was less checking and contextualising of stories than hitherto. This is certainly the case in terms of the finished product. Only half the stories in our press sample made any visible attempt to contextualise or verify the main source of information in the story, and in less than one in five cases was this

done meaningfully. Broadcast news does better, with 42% of cases involving thorough contextualisation or verification, although it is clear that this is not the norm in either form of news.

Our data also shows that PR material often finds its way into news via agency copy, which many journalists often see as an authoritative source. This means that the heavy reliance on the wires and other media (47% of press stories rely wholly or mainly on wire copy and other media) is, in effect, a conduit for further PR influence on news. We explored this process in detail in **Section 3**, where we followed stories as they progressed from PR material to news story.

Our case studies suggest that the relationship between the initial PR material, the wire services and the press and broadcast media can be both linear and triangular. In some instances, the wire agencies become the conduit through which PR material is channelled on its way to becoming news. In other instances, communication is triangulated, as journalists refer both to the wires reworking of the PR material and to the PR material itself. In these cases, wire copy may play a role in reinforcing the news value of a story. Finally, there are instances in which journalists ignore the wire copy and refer directly to the PR material.

While there is no doubt that some PR material is genuinely newsworthy, we also wanted to see whether effective PR can distort news values. To test this, in **Section 4** we look more closely at the perceived news value of PR generated news. We seek to establish whether the presence of PR generated news is now a factor in the generation of news, and whether this over-rides more traditional notions of news value.

This picture was confirmed by our survey of journalists in **Section 5**, most of whom felt that the pressure to produce a high number of stories daily has intensified, and that this increased their reliance on recycling material rather than reporting independently. Their accounts, in the context of the other data presented here, are highly credible. They also suggest that if the onset of convergence (required to produce multi-media versions of their stories) is not accompanied by a decrease in workload (and the signs, thus far, are not encouraging), then this situation will only deteriorate.

INTRODUCTION

The suggestion that the activities of public relations professionals may help to shape news content in national and local news media is increasingly commonplace among journalists, academics and PR professionals (Fletcher 2006; Franklin 1997, pp19-21 and 2006). At the same time, concerns about journalists being asked to increase productivity has raised questions about the impact on the quality of their output (Randall, 2007). Taken together, these debates are about no less than the independence of British journalism.

The relationship between journalists and PRs, which has typically been characterised as essentially in conflict, has recently been recast as a "trading" or "exchange" relationship in which under-resourced journalists, working in under-staffed newsrooms, increasingly rely on PR sources for editorial copy while offering access to editorial columns for PR messages in return (Gans 1978, Jones 2006).

The emergence of *Editorial Intelligence*, an organisation headed by Julia Hobsbawm, with an ambition to bring journalists and PRs closer together, underscores this new assessment. John Lloyd argues that:

> "the normal journalistic approach to PRs – i.e. dogs and lampposts – is grossly self serving from the point of view of journalists. It glosses over, ignores or even denies the fact that much of current journalism both broadcast and press is public relations in the sense that stories, ideas, features and interviews are either suggested, or in the extreme actually written by public relations people. Until that becomes open and debated between PR people and journalists, we will continue to have this artificially wide gulf where journalists pose as fearless seekers of truth and PRs are slimy creatures trying to put one over on us. It is not remotely like that" (*Guardian* 10 April 2006, p3).

This report explores the relationship between PR and journalism in the context of economic and employment trends. We have, in so doing, applied empirical tests to some of the claims made about the current state of British journalism, and our content analysis is the first of its kind to document systematically the independence of news output. Taken together, the various forms of evidence we have gathered tell a clear and consistent story. Suffice to say that our findings would seem to confirm many of Lloyd's suspicions. Indeed, as we shall document, the picture may actually be worse than he suggests.

SECTION 1: EMPLOYMENT, WORKLOAD AND PROFITABILITY

In this section we provide an overview of changes in employment, pagination, advertising and editorial content of national newspapers over the last twenty years. Most companies are reluctant to divulge details about employment, and detailed evidence is notoriously difficult to gather. Nevertheless, data from company reports, together with our own analysis of pagination, establishes the broad trends that underpin British journalism.

1.1 Employment: Data, Sources and Findings

Table 1 summarises information taken from the annual accounts filed at Companies House for the major national newspaper groups between the years 1985 and 2004. While employment levels now are slightly lower than in 1985, the data in Table 1.1 suggest a gradual increase in the average number of editorial employees among national newspapers over the last decade.

Table 1.1: Average employment for UK national newspaper companies

Year	Ave. total employees	Ave. editorial employees[1]
2004	1130	741[2]
2003	1169	713
2002	1105	651
2001	1049	583
2000	1118	623
1999	986	523
1998	937	502
1997	932	500
1996	976	530
1995	1033	533[3]
1994	957	497
1993	1010	497
1992	1027	513
1991	941	545
1990[4]	1012	947
1989	1351	552[5]
1988	1571	461[6]
1987	1899	427[7]
1986[8]	2808	555[9]
1985[10]	4337	786[11]

These data are based on the average number of employees and also average editorial staff at the following companies: Express Newspapers Ltd (the *Daily Express*, the *Sunday Express*, the *Daily Star*, the *Daily Star Sunday*), The Financial Times Ltd (the *Financial Times*), MGN Ltd (*Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Mirror*), News Group Newspapers Ltd (the *Sun* and the *News of the World*), the Telegraph Group Ltd (the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Sunday Telegraph*, the *Weekly Telegraph*), Guardian Newspapers Ltd (*Guardian* and the *Observer*), Independent News and Media Ltd (*Independent* and the *Independent on Sunday*), Times Newspapers Ltd (*The Times* and the *Sunday Times,*

TLS, THES, TES) and Associated Newspapers Ltd (the *Daily Mail*, the *Mail on Sunday*, the *Evening Standard*, the *Ireland on Sunday*, and *Metro*).

Collecting comparable, documented information about employment is difficult, so two qualifications should be attached to these figures. While they generally refer to national newspapers, among some groups these figures also include a small number of non-national newspapers or weekly specialist newspapers. The emergence of online news operations within these groups also complicates analysis.

Secondly, within each newspaper group, figures for total employees are available throughout this period, but more detailed breakdowns into different types of employees are not always listed in company reports, or are listed on some years but not others. This makes it impossible for the average figures for editorial employees to always include all newspaper groups. What is included is an average of the figures available for each year (a more detailed explanation of what is included and excluded can be found in the endnotes).

Nevertheless, these figures do offer us the most detailed year-on-year breakdown on newspaper employment currently available, and suggest a number of key trends. Taken overall, total average numbers of employees and editorial employees in the companies listed above have been relatively stable across the 1990-2004 period, with a gradual increase in employee numbers recorded during the latter part of this period, coinciding partly with the development of on-line services by most newspapers.

This follows a greater level of instability between 1985-90, which was characterised by a marked decline in total numbers of employees from over 4000 in 1985 to less than a quarter of that by 1990. The sacking of striking print workers by Rupert Murdoch prior to his companies' relocation from Fleet Street was only the most high profile of a huge number of redundancies across the market sector in the mid to late eighties. While some companies embarked on their mass-redundancy plans earlier than others (the News International companies and the Mirror Group, for example), few workforces survived the eighties unscathed. The biggest impact, however, was overwhelmingly in print and production. While the figures for editorial employees are particularly limited for the 1985-1990 period, those available show little evidence of any similar sharp decline. For example, editorial staff at the Telegraph Group numbered 616 in 1985, declined slightly to 554 in 1989 and remained relatively stable around the 500-550 mark across the 1990-1995 period.

Throughout the 1990s, the total number of employees in these groups remained at a fairly stable average of approximately 1000 employees per group, with average editorial employees also being fairly constant at around 500 employees per group. The period from 1999-2004 has witnessed some gradual increases in employee numbers among a number of key companies*. But this does not necessarily equate to increased editorial staff per newspaper.* In some cases, it is attributable to new acquisitions (sometimes from subsidiaries within the same parent company) and to investment in the development of online news and services. For example, the Independent Group's employee numbers increased very significantly by 300 between 2002-3, but this can be explained by its purchase of the *Belfast Telegraph* and Independent Magazines. Equally, an earlier very substantial increase in employee levels at the paper from 609 to 1058 between 2000 and 2001 was the result of the incorporation of its subsidiary companies with the parent group rather than to new journalistic investment.

To make further sense of these figures we need to look in more detail at individual companies. Some companies have clearly suffered a fall in employment levels. Most dramatically, *Express Newspapers* saw its employee levels virtually halved in the ten

years after 1995, falling from 1457 to 739, with sharp declines by almost 500 between 1996 and 1998 and by a further 250 between 2000 and 2002 (after the company had been bought by the publisher Richard Desmond). Within this, its editorial staff fell from 968 to 532 between 1996 and 2004. One senior UK journalist told us that the *Express* had purposefully "stripped out staff", and that the company seemed to be "living off the remnants of its brand" – a management technique that has been applied to many US newspapers, and is known as "squeezing the lemon".

But other companies have registered overall increases in employee numbers. Most notably, despite only making a profit twice between 1991 and 2000 (and three times recording losses in excess of £10 million), the *Guardian*'s overall employees doubled (from 725 to 1429), and its production staff similarly increased from 442 to 843. The *Financial Times* also increased overall employee levels from 795-1131 between 1985 and 2004, with production/editorial staff increasing from 659 to 869 during the same period. *Times Newspapers* also registered a broadly stable level of employees across the 1990s of around 450 before some fluctuation in employment levels from the 1ater 1990s to 597 in 2000, back down to 499 in 2002 but up to 591 in 2003 and 683 in 2004. The latter figure was higher than at any point over the preceding seventeen years.

So the overall pattern is a mixed one for employment, with some newspapers showing falls but others demonstrating increases and an overall pattern of relative stability and gradual increases since 2000. This, of course, is a period that has seen the growth of online news services.

1.2 Profitability

Taking the sector as a whole, it is clear that national newspapers, while certainly not as profitable as regional papers, have generally retained fairly healthy levels of turnover and profits over the last twenty years, as the average figures across the 9 newspaper groups analysed illustrate (see Table 1.2). Average profit margins across the period 1985-2004 for these groups was 7.83 per cent, and the average across this sector as a whole did not vary significantly if we compare it with the 1985-1994 period (where the average was 7.54%) and the 1995-2004 period (where the average was 8.12%).

These averages hide a variety of performances both across different years and across different newspaper groups which makes generalisations difficult. The *Independent* Newspaper Group suffered a series of heavy losses between 1995-2001 of well over £100 million, but regained profitability by 2002. And the *Guardian* Group made a pre-tax profit on only three occasions between 1991-2004 (the only years for which figures are available for the paper). *Times* Newspapers Ltd, meanwhile, made losses in 5 out of the 10 years between 1995-2004.

In general, it has been the tabloid groups that have demonstrated the most consistent and highest levels of profitability. This is true most notably of the *Sun* and *News of the World* group. Following the post-Wapping rationalisation, the group's profits soared from £16 million in 1986 to £124 million in 1988, with a profit margin of 42%. Throughout the following years the level of pre-tax profits have been very substantial. In 2004, pre-tax profits were nearly £150 million, and the group achieved total profits between 2000-2004 of £580 million.

Table 1.2: Average profits for UK national newspaper companies

Year	Average pre-tax profits	Average turnover	Average Profit Margin (%)
2004	30,354,333	324,175,784	9.4
2003	6,210,778	364,772,778	1.7
2002	48,654,778	351,829,222	13.8
2001	30,193,222	362,395,333	8.3
2000	44,350,444	363,101,000	12.2
1999	37,619,778	337,068,444	11.2
1998	33,568,555	316,363,778	10.6
1997	25,363,778	298,219,111	8.5
1996	18,659,000	285,003,555	6.5
1995	15,517,555	211,296,111	7.3
1994	29,893,444	254,677,444	11.7
1993	29,309,555	240,584,555	12.2
1992	14,041,555	176,147,500	8
1991	-19,452,333	203,821,778	-9.6
1990[12]	28,470,874	229,523,625	12.4
1989	30,091,624	227,910,624	13.3
1988	32,284,125	207,783,375	15.5
1987	10,873,500	180,347,749	6
1986[13]	363,571	214,310,142	0.2
1985[14]	10,564,714	184,184,142	5.7

Similarly if less spectacularly, *Mirror* Group Newspapers have generated high levels of pre-tax profits and profit margins throughout the period, apart from during the 1991 collapse following the death of Robert Maxwell. Pre-tax profits for *Mirror* Group Newspapers were £92 million in 2004 and were £300 million in total between 2000-2004. Associated Newspapers saw consistent losses between 1986-1991, but this was followed by consistent profit levels across the 1990s and impressive results across the 1999-2004 period when £545 million was made in pre-tax profits. More detailed breakdowns of profit and loss figures for each newspaper group can be found in the appendix. So, while the profit and loss picture is a mixed one, the image of national newspapers as consistent loss makers clearly needs to be substantially qualified.

1.3 The Impact of Online News

It is difficult to research the impact of online news and services on employment and profitability levels in the UK media, mainly because much of the information relating to the subject is regarded as commercially sensitive, and media workers are understandably reluctant to go into details that might be used by competitors. However, we were able to gather some off-the-record information from senior figures in the field about the history of the development of online news and approximate numbers of employees working in the sector.

The development of internet news and services at national media companies has gone through a number of distinct phases in its short history. Two important events mark the beginning and end of this initial period: the launch of the online 'Electronic Telegraph' (the *Daily Telegraph* was the first UK newspaper to provide online content) in 1994, and the launch of the 'Guardian Unlimited' in 1999. This period saw cautious

investment that rose slowly until the end of the decade, as did the numbers of editorial and other staff employed to work on the web content. The end of this period also saw a lot of forecasts for market growth, web advertising revenue, and growth in classified advertising online that turned out to be gross overestimations.

Because investment in online service remained fairly cautious in the industry, the dot-com crash in March 2000 *did not* effect employment or profitability at national newspaper companies adversely or significantly. The bust was followed by a period of quiescence in the early years of the new millennium, during which time few of the major newspaper companies (with the exception of *Guardian* Newspapers Ltd) invested heavily in online services.

A turning point may have come in April 2005 when Rupert Murdoch made a landmark speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, in which he admitted having ignored the internet for too long, and pledged that his company would invest heavily in new media. This appears to have had a galvanising effect on the industry, and been followed by significant investment across the board, especially into buying up the dot-coms that survived the crash of 2000, and at the moment the internet is the only sector of the news market that is showing growth in advertising revenues (although we should note that this growth comes from a low base, and its potential is still unclear).

Different UK newspaper companies have taken differing approaches to the internet. The *Guardian* has had the most success with its online news product, but they have also invested far more than any other firms. The unique aims of the Scott Trust, of course, mean that *Guardian* Newspapers Ltd are not subject to the same short-term economic pressures as companies which have to report to shareholders, and they have consequently been able to invest in the long-term future of their internet news portal *Guardian Unlimited* while absorbing some fairly substantial losses. Indeed, it is worth noting that by far the most successful British online news providers – the *BBC* and the *Guardian* – have both had their operations subsidised. This may indicate the commercial limits of online news services.

The *Guardian* has by far the largest dedicated internet staff amongst the national newspapers. Their editorial staff number around 60 journalists. The *Daily Telegraph*, after a recent dip in editorial employee numbers working on web content, now employ approximately 50 people, and there is a similar number at the *Times* newspapers. The *Independent* has kept their investment in the internet very low. The owner of *Independent* News and Media Tony O'Reilly has remained sceptical about the web, preferring to concentrate on print journalism.

In terms of overall editorial numbers, then, the internet has clearly had an impact – albeit fairly modest - on numbers of editorial staff.

1.4 Pagination in National Newspapers, 1985 – 2006

Taken in isolation, the overall trends in journalistic employment appear to paint a fairly rosy picture. What they disguise, however, is the significant increase in journalistic productivity. In order to gauge productivity levels, we measured pagination over the same period.

Table 1.3 shows that there has been a very substantial increase in the overall size of selected national daily newspapers between 1985-2006. Using a constant broadsheet page unit of measurement and converting tabloids and supplements accordingly, we

find that national newspapers have, on average, two and a half times as many pages as they contained twenty years ago.

Table 1.3: Pagination in national newspapers, 1985 – 2006

	1985			1995			2004			2006		
	Total pages	Ads	Total minus ads	Total pages	Ads	Total minus ads	Total pages	Ads	Total minus ads	Total pages	Ads	Total minus ads
Mail	21	9.4	11.6	36.8	14.2	22.6	47.2	14.7	32.5	48.7	15.8	32.9
Times	31.7	11.9	19.8	56.7	21.8	34.9	75.6	21.5	54.1	82.5	26.1	56.4
Sun	15.5	5.6	9.9	19.3	13.7	12.5	41.6	13.8	27.8	40.3	12.8	27.3
Teleg.	33.7	14.7	19	60.2	18.7	41.5	62.7	20.8	41.9	66.7	21.3	45.4
Mirror	15.8	6.2	9.4	23	8.3	14.7	40.9	13.6	27.3	39.4	12.7	26.7
Guard.	28.5	10.7	17.8	56	24	32	73.6	23.1	50.5	89.3	31.6	57.7
Ave.	**24.4**	**9.7**	**14.6**	**42**	**16.8**	**26.4**	**56.9**	**17.9**	**39**	**61.5**	**20**	**41**

NB: The basic unit of measurement is one broadsheet page, which all other measurements have been converted into. One tabloid page counts as half a broadsheet page, and a berliner page counts as two thirds of a traditional broadsheet page. The ratios of all non-standard sized newspaper supplements have also been calculated and converted into the equivalent number of broadsheet pages. For each year, averages are calculated from randomly chosen full weeks (Monday to Saturday) in April from each year.

Although the number of pages devoted to advertising has doubled, this does not account for most of the increase. Indeed, the *proportion* of total newspaper content taken up by advertising has actually fallen slightly, while editorial/news content has risen dramatically. Over the last two decades, *the average number of editorial/news pages across the national newspapers almost tripled*, rising from a 14.6 page average in 1985 to 41 pages by 2006. Newspaper main sections are bigger and the number of supplements have increased, particularly in the Saturday and Sunday editions, but also, increasingly for the more upmarket papers, in their daily editions as well.

These figures cast a very different light on employment levels. *Although the last twenty years has witnessed a slight increase in employment, today's editorial employees are, on average, expected to produce three times as much content as their counterparts twenty years ago.* Average editorial content amongst this sample increased from 14.5 pages in 1985 to 26.4 in 1995, and the relative stagnation in advertising pagination between 1995-2006 was not reflected in editorial content, which continued to substantially increase, to an average of 39 editorial pages in 2004 and 41 pages by 2006.

While there are significant differences in *overall* pagination (including advertising) between different newspapers (especially between tabloids and broadsheets), almost all newspapers show a consistent pattern of increase. The *Sun*, *Mirror*, *Times* and *Daily Mail* all have around 2.5 times as many pages in 2006 than they did in 1985. Two slight variations are visible within this pattern. The *Daily Telegraph*'s pagination doubled between 1985-2006 while that of the *Guardian* tripled. After increasing its pagination more than any other newspaper between 1985-1995, the *Telegraph*'s size increased only slightly over the following ten years. In 1995 the *Telegraph* had more

pages than any other publication in the sample, yet by 2006 it lagged behind its high-end competitors, offering an average of only 66 pages compared with the *Guardian*'s 89 and The *Times*' 82.

Included in the figure for 'Advertising' are all advertisements, advertorials (also called 'Advertising Features'), and classified ads. Total advertising in newspapers has seen a marked rise since the mid 1980s. In 1985 the red-top tabloids averaged approximately 6 broadsheet pages of advertisements per issue, the *Daily Mail* averaged 9.4, and the broadsheets carried around 12. By 1995 this had risen somewhat, with all newspapers except the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mirror* doubling the average amount of advertising.

During the last decade advertising content has remained fairly stable, with only the *Guardian* significantly increasing its number of advertisements from an average of 24 pages in 1995 to 31.6 in 2006. This limited growth, despite the overall increase in content between 1995-2006 charted below, may reflect the decline in the attraction of newspaper advertising, given both their continued circulation decline and competition for advertising from newer media. It should also be noted that while total advertising has increased, advertising as a percentage of total content has actually declined slightly. In both 1985 and 1995 it accounted for 40 per cent of total pages, but in 2004 and 2006 it had declined to around a third of all pages.

1.5 Employee Levels v Pagination: An Analysis of the *Sun*

The *Sun* newspaper provides an interesting example of the general pattern in which increases in newspaper sizes is also accompanied by little increase in numbers of journalists. In the mid to late 1980s editorial employee numbers at News Group Newspapers (which produces both the *News of the World* and the *Sun*) varied between 381 and 420.[15] In 1985 the average daily amount of broadsheet pages of editorial content included in the *Sun* was 9.9. By 1995 the average number of employees had remained relatively constant at 417, but the average number of editorial pages had increased by a quarter to 12.5. This disparity became even more marked in the following decade. Between 1995 and 2004 editorial employee numbers at News Group increased by only 15% (from 417 to 485), a figure that would obviously include extra staff employed on the new online editions of these papers, as well as those for the *News of the World*. But this slight rise barely begins to match the enormous expansion in the *Sun*'s editorial content, which more than doubled during this same period.

In 1995 417 employees produced a daily average of 12.5 pages of editorial content (along with the *News of the World*). But in 2004 485 staff had to produce 27.3 pages of content. The overall pattern this reflects is a situation where journalists are expected, on average, to produce far more output than they would have done previously. Even given the possible impact of new technology in improving levels of output and efficiency, it is hard to believe that this increase does not impact on the amount of time and quality that can be devoted to stories. These findings are borne out by journalists themselves (see **Section 5**) most of whom report a marked increase in their workload.

SECTION 2: THE CONTENT ANALYSIS

In this section we examine the extent to which UK journalism depends on public relations, wire services and other media for its content. The fact that this is the first empirical research of its kind is, perhaps, a function of the difficulty in devising solid measures for establishing the reliance of journalists on PR and agency copy.

Our aim was to examine the 'top end' of British journalism (i.e. the places where we would least expect to find a reliance on pre-packaged news). To that end we looked at two weeks of domestic news coverage (one in late March, 2006, one in late April, 2006) in the 4 main quality British daily newspapers (the *Guardian, Independent, Times* and *Telegraph*), as well as the *Daily Mail*, BBC and ITV evening news bulletins, Radio 4's *World at One* and the *Today* Programme.

Every domestic news item/article was analysed by our research team. The aim was to establish, in every case, whether there was any PR/wire/other media content that related to the article/news item, and then assess the extent to which the article/news item depended upon the PR, wire or other media material. As we anticipated, this was extremely time consuming, as PR or wire content was rarely used explicitly, and researchers were sometimes required to follow a number of possible leads.

While the research team became adept at tracing PR material, it is important to begin with a strong word of caution. Public relations activity – particularly the more sophisticated kind – may leave few traces. So, for example, when we spoke to Noel Edmonds' publicist Mark Borkowski in relation to a flurry of stories about the presenter's recent comeback, it was clear that his promotion of his client was far more subtle than simply sending out promotional material. On the contrary, he told us that "the strategy we put in place is that we didn't seek any publicity". Instead, he explained, his firm 'seeded' interviews in a few carefully chosen media outlets.

They concentrated on tightly controlling the flow of information and rumours about the growing popularity of his new game show by 'filtering out' selected sound-bites to journalists using personal contacts. "Press release dissemination," states Borkowski, "doesn't really work now. We prefer a system of short sharp sound-bites, e-mail releases to specific people, not blanket mailing."

In short, he emphasised the importance of "understanding how journalists think" and the conditions under which they work, over the more scattergun approaches of more conventional PR. This, of course, makes tracking the role of PR in news much more difficult. Because our figures on the presence of PR generally relied on verifiable evidence, they are inevitably conservative, and almost certainly underestimate the true extent of PR activity, which many PR specialists suggest is very high. PR expert Julia Hobsbawm, for example, suggested to us that "at least 60% and more commonly 80% of any broadcast or broadsheet outlet has got a PR element in it." Despite this, our researchers were able to uncover a wealth of PR material behind the news.

2.1 The Samples

Our press sample involved a total of 2,207 stories from our five newspapers (this is the data set for press figures in tables unless indicated otherwise). As Table 2.1 indicates, most of these (71%) were standard news articles, the bulk of the others being small News in brief items (Nibs).

Table 2.1: Published Newspaper Items by Type

Type of Story	Number	Percentage
Article	1564	**71**
News in Brief	561	**25.5**
Opinion[16]	67	**3**
Picture only	9	**0.5**
Other	6	**-**
Total	**2207**	**100**

Our broadcast sample was based on 402 news items of television and radio news. Table 2.2 shows the range of stories included in the sample, from packages on location to two-ways between anchors/presenters and reporters.

Table 2.2: Number of Broadcast News Items and Formats

Type of story	Number	Percentage
Anchor/presenters only	115	29
Reporter on location	96	24
Interview/discussion	41	10
Anchor package	25	6
Reporter studio package	71	18
Reporter/anchor 2 way	23	6
Donut	29	7
Total	**402**	**100**

These articles and news items covered a wide range of topics and could be categorised under 32 different headings, from the arts to transport (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3: News Items by Subject Focus (As Percentages)

Topic	Press	Broadcast
Crime	**20**	**26**
Domestic issues (e.g. NHS, Education, immigration)	**15**	**20**
Politics	**15**	**17**
Business/consumer news	**12**	**13**
Health/natural world	**10**	**7**
Entertainment/sport	**10**	**3**
Accidents/disasters	**5**	**4**
Defence/foreign policy	**2**	**5**
Other	**12**	**5**

If we combine some of these categories under more general headings, the most common subject is crime (20% of press stories and 26% of broadcast new stories – with most being coverage of individual crimes rather than issues or trends), which receives more coverage than all domestic issues (such as the NHS, education, the environment, immigration etc.) put together.

The other main areas covered are politics (15% in the press and 17% in broadcast news), business/consumers news (12% and 13% - a high figure given we did not include business sections in our sample), health (10% and 7%) and entertainment (this category being much more prevalent in the press than broadcast news). It is worth noting here that *none of the top three categories is traditionally associated with PR activity* – a point we shall examine shortly.

2.2 The Role of Wire Services and Other Media

Most newspaper articles (72%) were written by named journalists (the unnamed journalist category refers to labels such as 'Daily Mail Reporter') and in nearly a quarter of cases were there was no clear identification of who had written the story (as is often the case with Nibs). Only 1% of stories were directly attributable to PA or other wire services (see Table 2.4). At first glance, then, these data suggest that the *newspapers give the impression* that they depend on their own journalists rather than wires or other outside sources

Table 2.4: Source of story in newspapers (as percentages)

Named Journalist	**72**
Unnamed Journalist	**2**
No ID	**24.5**
PA	**1**
Other	**0.5**
Total	**100**

However, when we looked at the copy produced by wire services (PA being the most dominant on domestic news), the data suggest that *the press were far more dependent on wire services and other media than this initial impression suggests* (see Table 2.5). Indeed, 30% of the stories in our press sample replicated wire service copy almost directly, and a further 19% were largely dependent on wire copy. In other words, nearly *half of all press stories appeared to come wholly or mainly from wire services.*

Table 2.5: Stories in which news wires/ other media are replicated (as percentages)

	Press	Broadcast
All from wires/other media	**30**	**16**
Mainly from wires/other media	**19**	**11**
Mix of wires/other media with other information	**13**	**20**
Mainly other information	**8**	**18**
Wire covered story but not used	**5**	**5**
No evidence	**25**	**30**

Moreover, direct replication is rarely attributed as such. We found many stories apparently written by one of the newspaper's own reporters that seem to have been cut and pasted from elsewhere. So, for example, a front page story from the *Daily Telegraph* about the problems at the Wembley stadium site ('Now Wembley has broken sewer pipes', *Daily Telegraph*, March 24th 2006, p1) was attributed to reporter Richard Alleyne. Most of the key facts and quotations, however, are also present in the Press Association copy from the day before, and the remaining information replicates that found in two articles in the *Sun* and the *Evening Standard* from the previous day.

We also found a small but significant group of stories attributed to a newspaper that replicated wire copy entirely. The *Daily Mail*, in particular, often attributes agency stories (or less often, stories from press releases) to a 'Daily Mail Reporter'. So, for example, a story about the health risks of eating oily fish ('Why oily fish might not be so good for your health after all', Daily Mail Reporter, *Daily Mail*, March 24th 2006, p7) directly replicates facts and quotations taken from two Press Association stories, and another from the regional news wire Mercury.

We expected to find a number of stories that provided a mix of information from the wires/other media with new material added by the journalist, although this kind of story made up only 13% of our press sample (less than half the number that added nothing to available copy). An example of this kind of story was a front page article on the Food Standards Agency's policy climb-down over recommended salt levels after pressure from food industry lobbyists ('U-turn on salt could kill up to 14,000', Sean Poulter, *Daily Mail*, 22nd March 2006, p1). The Press Association article offers a fairly straightforward report of new guidelines governing salt levels in food. The *Mail* article uses much of the basic information provided by PA, but writes an adversarial piece which relies heavily on extra contrary research and opinion provided by health campaigners.

By contrast, only 8% of articles used available wire copy sparingly, depending mainly on information from other sources, while we found few examples of articles in newspapers which did not make use of *any* wire copy if some existed (only 5%). In these instances, the story is often solely or principally based around personal perspectives or case studies that have been researched by individual journalists. This was the case with a long piece on the Victims Advocates Scheme for the relatives of murder victims published in the Guardian ('Relatives have their say on murders that shattered their lives', Duncan Campbell, *Guardian*, 24th April 2006, pp10-11).

We would expect the influence of wires and other media to be less in broadcast news, and our data bears this out. Nonetheless, over a quarter of broadcast news items (27%) contained information that appeared to be mainly or wholly derived from wires or other media. Typically, when a broadcast news item is very short, it is far more likely to rely on other news or wire and PR copy, and less likely to leave space for any new journalistic input.

So, for example, a piece that was aired on the BBC evening news on 27th April 2006 about the American gangster rapper Snoop Dogg's arrest for brawling with the police at Heathrow airport lasted only 15 seconds, and was highly reliant on information previously published in the *Sun* and on the PA news wire. Where more time was allocated to a story, however, broadcast news often develops a story more than print outlets. This development can take many forms, for example: an in-depth interview or discussion with a news story's protagonist; basing a news item around a case study and asking someone to talk about how an issue affects them; or vox-pop interviews with the public.

The most commonly used journalistic source for domestic stories was the PA wire service (47% of press stories in our sample replicated at least some copy from PA), followed by Mercury (17%), with 11% of stories replicating information from other media.

It is possible, of course, that journalists used the same sources as the wire services and ended up producing the same information, language, quotations etc. as the wire copy *without* referring to that copy. However, since most journalists look at wire copy on subjects they are writing about, often ahead of other sources, this seems unlikely.

What is more plausible is that wire agency stories will themselves be based on PR material, a process we trace in our case studies. And as we report in **Section 5**, the PA reporters we spoke to described a heavy workload based on writing up to ten stories a day, thereby making them heavily dependent on 'pre packaged news'.

2.3 The Role of Public Relations

2.3.1 Undiluted PR

Despite the covert nature of much PR activity, we expected to find examples of PR playing an agenda-setting role. However, in many cases the influence of PR goes much further. We found that nearly one in five newspaper stories and 17% of broadcast stories were verifiably derived *mainly* or *wholly* from PR material or activity (Table 2.6) – which suggests that the practice is rather more typical than John Lloyd's critique suggests.

Table 2.6: Stories in which PR materials are replicated (as percentages)

	Press	Broadcast
All from PR	**10**	**10**
Mainly from PR	**9**	7
Mix of PR with other information	**11**	**14**
Mainly other information	**11**	**21**
Looks like PR but not found	**13**	**6**
No evidence	**46**	**42**

A surprising number of longer print pieces were also coded in the 'All from PR' category (although long broadcast items consisting solely of PR copy were very seldom found). For example, a *Times* story headlined 'George Cross for Iraq War Hero' (Michael Evans, *The Times*, 24th March 2006, p27) is an almost verbatim repetition of a press release issued by the Ministry of Defence.

Similarly, an article about a new hay fever vaccine from the *Mail* reproduces a private press release from the drug company Cytos without adding any original material ('The hay fever vaccine', Brendan Montague, *Daily Mail*, 26th April 2006, p18). Other stories included in this category are those based on co-ordinated media events that exist solely for publicity purposes. 'Just what Blair needs: B'stard is back, and in his Cabinet' (Nigel Reynolds, *Daily Telegraph*, 21st March 2006, p3) consists of publicity material, an interview, and a photograph generated by a publicity stunt in which Rik Mayall, and the writers of the 1980s television programme *The New Statesman* held a 'press conference' in Parliament Square (to advertise a new stage play which revives the character Alan B'stard).

An example of a print story that *mainly* consists of information from a single source of PR material is an article in *The Times* about a new league table of UK Heart Surgeons ('Hand on heart, who is the best surgeon?', Nigel Hawkes, *The Times*, 27th April 2006, p16). The article is almost wholly derived from a press release issued by the Healthcare Commission, and only differs in the provision of some minor facts about gaps in the data included in the league tables. A broadcast news item placed in this category involved the resignation of Rod Aldridge (the ex-chairman of PFI firm Capita) who had just resigned in the wake of the loans for peerages scandal (BBC evening news, 23rd March 2006). Half of the piece is taken up with the businessman's official statement to the press.

Figure 1: Broadcast news reliance on PR by news format

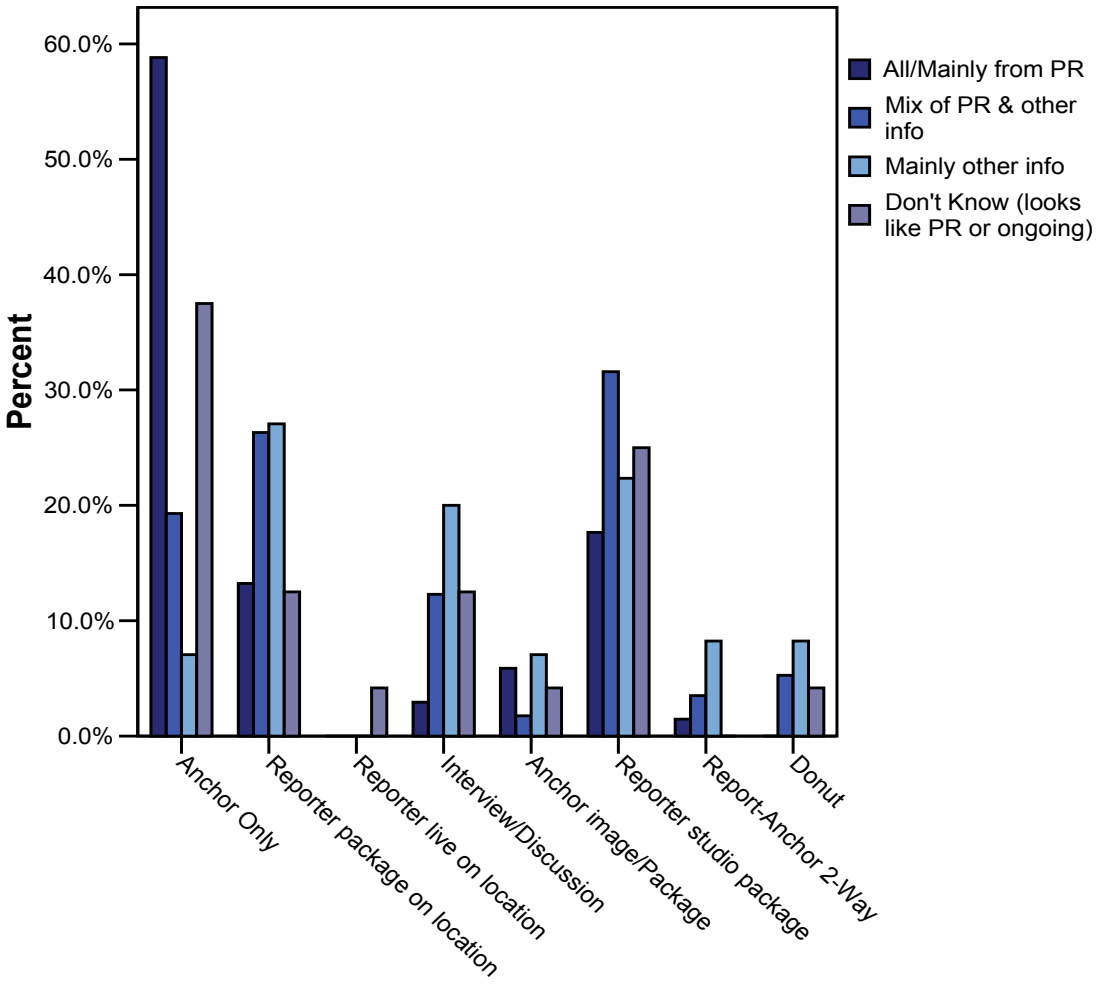

Figure 1

In both press and broadcast news, shorter items are particularly likely to be based on PR material. As Figure 1 shows, many short items of broadcast news – generally those presented by news anchors or presenters are based mainly or wholly on PR material. Indeed, the majority of broadcast stories based wholly or mainly on PR was presented by anchors in the studio. Stories by reporters – whether in the studio or on location - were much more likely to include other information

Similarly, Figure 2 shows that a majority of Nibs derive wholly or mainly from PR. What is also notable about Figure 2, however, is extent to which longer newspaper articles are also influenced by PR. Over 60% of the PR-based press stories in our sample were longer articles.

Figure 2: Newspaper items' reliance on PR by editorial format

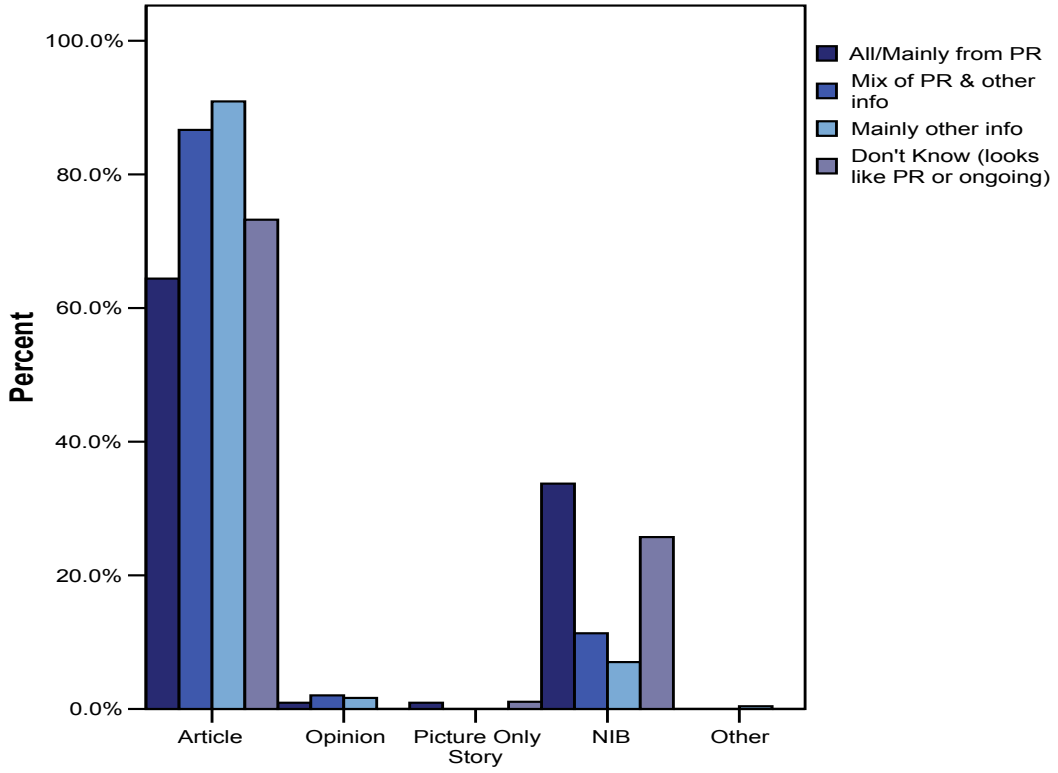

Figure 2

2.3.2 PR Sets the Agenda

Many stories (11% of press and 14% of broadcast), whilst still verifiably reliant on PR for much of their content, nonetheless consult a range of sources. PR is, in these instances, playing more of an agenda-setting role. A piece from the *Independent,* for example, used a range of press releases to tackle the complex subject of international trade negotiations ('Oxfam withdraws backing for trade talk deals', Phillip Thornton, *Independent*, 27th April 2006). The article offered a detailed analysis of the politics of international development, and yet was almost wholly composed of press release information from Oxfam, the International Development Committee, and the World Development Movement, and quotations from a public relations statement made by the Department of Trade and Industry.

In a number of cases, especially in broadcast news (21% of broadcast stories, 11% of print) PR may play an agenda-setting role, but the story itself appears to rely mainly on other sources.

In other words, where PR material was used, more contextual information was found in the broadcast media than in print. One news item from the *World at One* (23rd March 2006) about the government's dropping of its proposed new mental health bill illustrates well how broadcast news can take advantage of its format and provide more context. Whilst it does rely minimally on press releases (one from the Department of Health, and one from the pressure group Mental Health Alliance), most of this 5-minute segment consists of extra contextual information provided by a studio interview with a spokesman for Mental Health Alliance, and an exclusive interview with the government minister Rosie Winterton.

Overall, then, our data suggests that while broadcast news often uses PR to prompt a story, they are more likely than the press to develop that story independently. So, for example, Radio 4's *Today* programme carried a piece based on recently published research claiming that young people are becoming more impatient (24th March 2006). The research had been commissioned and publicised by the online finance company Easymoney in order to obtain media coverage for its new online mortgages. In the press, the press release was fairly uncritically reproduced. The radio programme, however, after introducing the topic with reference to the publicity material, devotes a number of minutes to an on-air debate between the owner of the 'Easy' brand Stelios Haji-Ioannou, and psychologist Oliver James. In this case, the addition of another voice is significant, as the psychologist not only criticises the worth of the report's findings, but also finds fault with the use of hastily constructed research for PR purposes.

A further 13% of press articles and 6% of broadcast news items were categorised under the heading 'looks like PR but not found/ongoing'. Stories were classified under this heading for two related reasons. First, when it seemed likely that there was some PR content to a story, but we were unable to verify this (e.g. by finding a press release). So, for example, the story 'Up above all other series, "Rainbow" is flying high' (Ciar Byrne, *Independent*, 23rd March 2006, p20), was an article about 'Rainbow' having topped a survey to find the nation's favourite children's television programme. The research was commissioned by a BBC magazine *CBeebies Weekly*, but the research team was unable to locate PR activity that might have prompted the newspaper article. It is, however, hard to imagine the BBC's PR department making no attempt to promote this story.

Other stories were categorised under this heading simply because the age of the story made pinpointing the PR content difficult. So, for example, a short piece in the *Daily Mail* before a budget - which sought to tax cars with high fuel consumption - gave information about Rolls Royce's long-standing plans to develop steam-powered cars ('The new steam Roller', *Daily Mail*, 25th March, 2006, p57). Again, it seems likely that PR material would have informed this story.

Overall, we were able to verify that *41% of press articles and 52% of broadcast news items contain PR materials which play an agenda setting role or where PR material makes up the bulk of the story* (although we should note that broadcast news items are much more likely to involve the former). As we have suggested, this is a conservative, baseline figure. *If we add those stories in which the involvement of PR seems likely but could not be verified, we find that a majority of stories* (54% of print stories and 58% of broadcast news stories) *are informed by PR.*

This does not mean that the 46% of print stories and 42% of broadcast stories in our sample are 'PR free', simply that we found no evidence or clear signs of PR activity in those cases.

2.3.3 Where Does PR Come From?

If we look at the *kinds* of stories generated by PR (Figure 3, which combines press and broadcast samples), we can see that despite the publicity given to 'spin', political stories in the press contain less identifiable PR material than any other kind (even less than crime, which we would not expect to be a PR driven area).

This should, perhaps, be taken with a pinch of salt. As Julia Hobsbawm told us:

> "take a sample of stories in business, politics and a couple of other sectors and see how often the phrase 'sources close to' appears…on the one hand it's an absolutely admirable and necessary pillar of journalism that sources remain anonymous… on the other hand it's become a by-word for not having to justify insufficient research because you can just rely on one source."

In political coverage as elsewhere, this 'source' may have been part of a deliberate PR exercise (Price 2005).

As we might expect, consumer/business and entertainment stories score high on PR content. However, the area with the most PR generated material is health, where 37% of stories are based mainly or wholly on PR material (see Figure 3). This reflects the volume of PR material that comes from the health and pharmaceutical industries, as well as the pressure on health reporters to produce a high volume of stories. One of the most damning comments made to us about the role of PR came from the Health Editor of *The Times*, who told us that "We are 'churning' (out) stories today, not writing them. Almost everything is recycled from another source" (see **Section 5**).

Figure 3: Extent of Reliance on PR Materials by Story Subject Focus (as percentages)

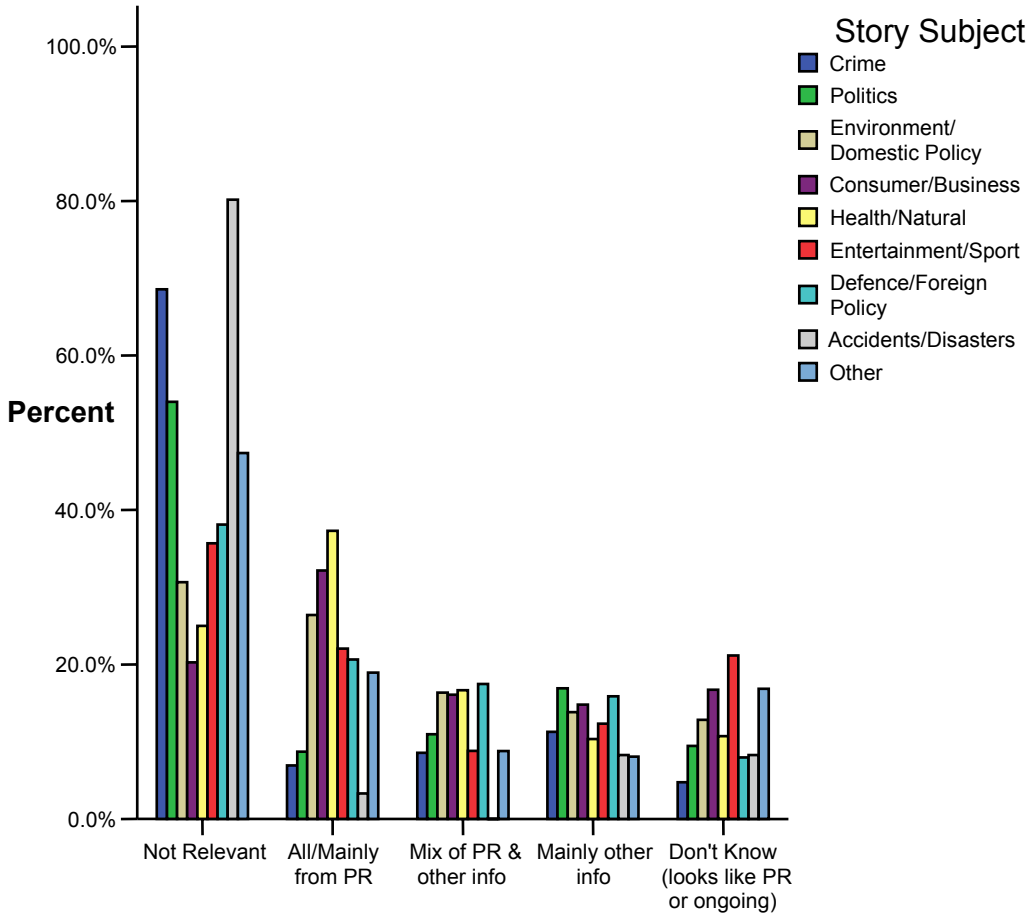

Figure 3

Since the most PR laden topics are health, business and entertainment, it is not surprising that the main source of PR activity overall (Table 2.7), is the business/corporate world, which was the source of 38% of the PR material that found its way into press articles and 32% of broadcast news items. This compares with PR from NGOs and charities – which might be expected to promote a rather different world view – being used in only 11% of press articles and 8% of broadcast news items. In short, when it comes to getting information in the news, the most successful 'spin doctors' come from business rather than from NGOs, charities or pressure groups.

When it comes to governmental PR, we find a striking difference between the press and broadcast news: on TV and radio, use of government PR dominates, with 39% of PR material coming from this source. The proportion for the press is just over half this figure (21%). This may reflect the style of BBC journalism (where most of the broadcast sample comes from), which research suggests tends to favour 'official', often governmental sources (Lewis, Cushion and Thomas, 2005).

Table 2.7: Origins of PR Materials
(press n=1,343, broadcast n=236, figures as percentages)

	Press	Broadcast
Professional Private	**38**	**32**
Professional Government	**21**	**39**
Public Body	**23**	**14**
NGO/Charity	**11**	**8**
Professional Association	**5**	**4**
Citizen(s)	**2**	**3**

Stories that use business PR material varied widely in their scope and subject matter. Some stories that used PR material from businesses did so in order to replicate straightforwardly the message of the promotional press release. Stories like this include 'Coleen lands a £1/2 million office job' (*Daily Mail*, April 28th 2006, p31), which reproduces a small piece of text explaining how Coleen McLoughlin has signed a lucrative deal to advertise LG mobile phones alongside a page-length picture of the celebrity.

Other pieces coded in this category included rather more defensive press releases or statements issued in response to a company's perceived wrongdoing. An article in the *Guardian* - 'Capita chairman quits after criticism of loan to Labour' (David Hencke and Andrew Clark, *Guardian*, 24th March 2006, p4) is based around a statement by Rod Aldridge the former boss of Capita, and includes defensive statements from the company that aim to distance it from the Labour loans for peerages scandal.

Press releases from government either get released directly by an individual department, by the central Government News Network at the Central Office of Information, or both. We also had access to other forms of government PR, such as the Prime Minister's press conferences and briefings, which are published on the 10 Downing Street website. Some forms of government PR however, inevitably passed under our radar. We are unable, for example, to code for the kind of high-level, contact-based, PR, spin, and counter-spin that surrounds and informs so many of the big political stories.

Governmental PR is wide-ranging, and goes beyond Westminster. So, for example, 'Action to shield public after anthrax kills cows' (James Meikle, *Guardian*, 24th April

2006, p5) details the death of two cows on a Welsh farm, and gets most of its information from a release issued by the Welsh Assembly Government.

The greater use of governmental PR by broadcasters may also be a function of more sceptical treatment by unsympathetic newspapers, whose more adversarial position may lead them to ignore such information. Alternatively, government PR is sometimes used selectively by the press to highlight problems. A rather dry press release from the Department for Education and Skills about new guidelines for school nurses was turned into a very critical and sensationalist front-page article by the *Mail* under the Headline: 'A birth-control nurse for *all* schools' (Sarah Harris, *Daily Mail*, 24th March 2006, p1).

The range of public bodies that issue PR material is broad, and this constitutes the second biggest source of PR used by the press (in 23% of cases). They include the police, the emergency services, hospitals, NHS trusts and universities. Crime stories about which the police had issued statements or press releases make up a large proportion of articles in this category. So, for example, the story 'Brothers killed in gang attack' (Adam Fresco, *The Times*, 24th April 2006, p10), was largely based on a statement describing the crime released by the Metropolitan Police.

Stories that use press releases from universities are often about science and health. Most major quality newspapers rely on a steady stream of 'new research' stories, and use university PR accordingly. One example among many is 'Flu pandemic would peak in UK within four months' (Alok Jha and Ian Sample, *Guardian*, 27th April 2006, p15), which explains new research from academics at Imperial College that predicts the likely consequences of an outbreak of bird flu in the UK. It makes use of a press release pack issued by the college which included descriptions of the research, a collection of quotations, and a large full-colour graphic that was printed alongside the story. The story is also influenced by a press release issued by the journal *Nature*, in which the findings were published, and a statement by the government's chief medical officer, who welcomed the research.

Releases from NGOs and charities are occasionally used as the basis for a story, but more often a quotation from one of these groups will be used to provide a contextual or opposing viewpoint to the main focus of a piece. One of the rare examples of a press release from a charity being used as the factual backbone of a story was found in 'The big branch names taking over woodlands' (Ben Fenton, *Daily Telegraph*, March 21st 2006, p6), which is about a survey of woodland birds undertaken for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Almost all of the quotations and facts, as well as two large colour photographs, came from a press release put out by the RSPB.

A more conventional use of NGO material is a story about the new trend towards mainstream consumers choosing green energy sources in their homes ('Alternative energy inspires new power generation', John Vidal, *Guardian*, 21st March 2006, p16). The story is a largely independent piece of journalism based around a case study of a suburban family who have converted their house so that it is powered by sustainable energy. To contextualise the piece PR material is used from a University research group, and a number of politicians. Also cited is research from the environmental NGO Greenpeace, and a statement from the independent charity Green Alliance.

More occasionally, smaller charities manage to use PR to gain news coverage. 'Stores urged to drop super-skinny mannequins' (Kristina Pedersen, *Daily Mail*, 28th April 2006, p39), is an article inspired by a piece in *The Times* the week before, and the *Evening Standard* the day before. It details the fact that even though women's bodies are larger than ever before, shop window mannequins seem to be getting smaller, and

makes much of a statement from the Eating Disorders Association, a small charity based in Norwich.

Rarer still are stories in which PR from a trade union dominates the news angle of the story. Where trade union material was present it was usually to provide an oppositional voice. One example is 'Class sizes increase in infant schools despite 1997 pledge' (Richard Garner, *Independent*, 28th April 2006, pp4-5), which was mainly based on a press release and press statement from the Department for Education and Skills, but which was supplemented by quotations from a statement made by the National Union of Teachers.

Not surprisingly, citizen generated PR is by far the smallest category of public relations material that we encountered. When PR was used in the composition of a story, in only 2% of cases it derived from ordinary members of the public. In most of these cases, the story was not published in the national media first, but was picked up from the regional press or regional news agencies.

One such story was about a campaign to encourage appreciation of the local dialect in schools in Norfolk. A type-written press release was sent by the small 'Friends of Norfolk Dialect' group to a number of regional news outlets and agencies. It was picked up by local radio and news agencies, and after this, by the *Times*, the *Guardian*, and other national news outlets ('"He'yer fa'got a dickey bor?" isn't rude… in Norfolk', Jonathan Richards, *The Times*, 23rd March, 2006, p5, and 'Norfolk schools seek to reclaim derided dialect', Patrick Barkham, *Guardian*, 23rd March, 2006, p15).

Peter Brooks, the group's chairman, told us that 'I sent the press release to a total of 13 regional outlets, and the result has been very encouraging, with national dailies and TV stations along with the BBC coming to us for more information and help with producing programmes'. As our figures show, however, Mr Brooks' amateur PR success is clearly not the norm.

Finally, we looked at the primary sources used for news stories themselves (i.e. those people quoted). Table 2.8 suggests it is politicians and government who are most successful at getting their voices into news stories (although we should note that many of these stories are negative).

Table 2.8: Sources most frequently cited in stories (n=4418 sources)

Party/Politician	in **28%** of stories
National Government	in **23%** of stories
Law & Order	in **22%** of stories
Business	in **17%** of stories
Pressure Groups/NGOs	in **13%** of stories

The high use of police or judicial sources is a function of the prominence of crime stories. Once again, business figures do better than NGOs/pressure groups, while trade unionists are hardly used at all (in only 1.5% of stories, which is around the number that deal specifically with industrial relations disputes). As other research has shown, 'information rich' sources, such as the academy (9%), medical/science/technology (8%) and think tanks (1%) tend to be used less often (Lewis, Cushion and Thomas, 2005).

2.4 The Role of Independent Journalism

The picture painted by our analysis thus far is that, even in a sample based on the UK's most prestigious news outlets, journalists are heavily reliant on pre-packaged information, either from the PR industry or other media (notably wire services). In order to measure the overall degree of independent journalism, we looked at the number of stories that *did not* replicate either PR and/or wires and other media. The figures here (Table 2.9) are especially striking. *In short, fewer than one in five press articles (19%) appear to be based mainly on information that does not come from pre-packaged sources.* Indeed, 60% of press stories rely wholly or mainly on pre-packaged information, and only 12% are entirely independent of such material.

While broadcast news also makes extensive use of pre-packaged material, the more typical use of such material is to use it as a prompt for a story or as part of a mix (45% of broadcast news stories do this), rather than relying wholly or mainly on it.

Table 2.9: Stories with content deriving from PR, news wires/ other media (as percentages)

	Press	Broadcast
All from PR, wires/other media	**38**	**21**
Mainly from PR, wires/other media	**22**	**13**
Mix of PR, wires/other media with other information	**13**	**25**
Mainly other information	**7**	**20**
All other information	**12**	**18**
Unclear	**8**	**3**

If we take out the small percentage of cases that are unclear and break this down by newspaper, we see more similarities than differences. Nonethless, the *Times* and the *Telegraph* appear to replicate a significantly higher percentage of wire/PR material than the *Guardian*, which, according to these data, is the most independent of the newspapers. While just over half the stories in the *Guardian* come wholly or mainly from pre-packaged sources, this compares with around two thirds of the stories on other newspapers. By the same measure, the *Guardian* is also more likely to use a mix of information or to get information from other sources (Figure 4).

In the broadcast sample, television news, perhaps because of resources and the need for visual information, is less dependent on pre-packaged news than radio. The biggest user of PR material was the *Today* programme, and the heaviest user of wire agency copy was the *World at One*.

Figure 4: Stories replicating PR and Wire materials by Newspaper Title (as percentages)

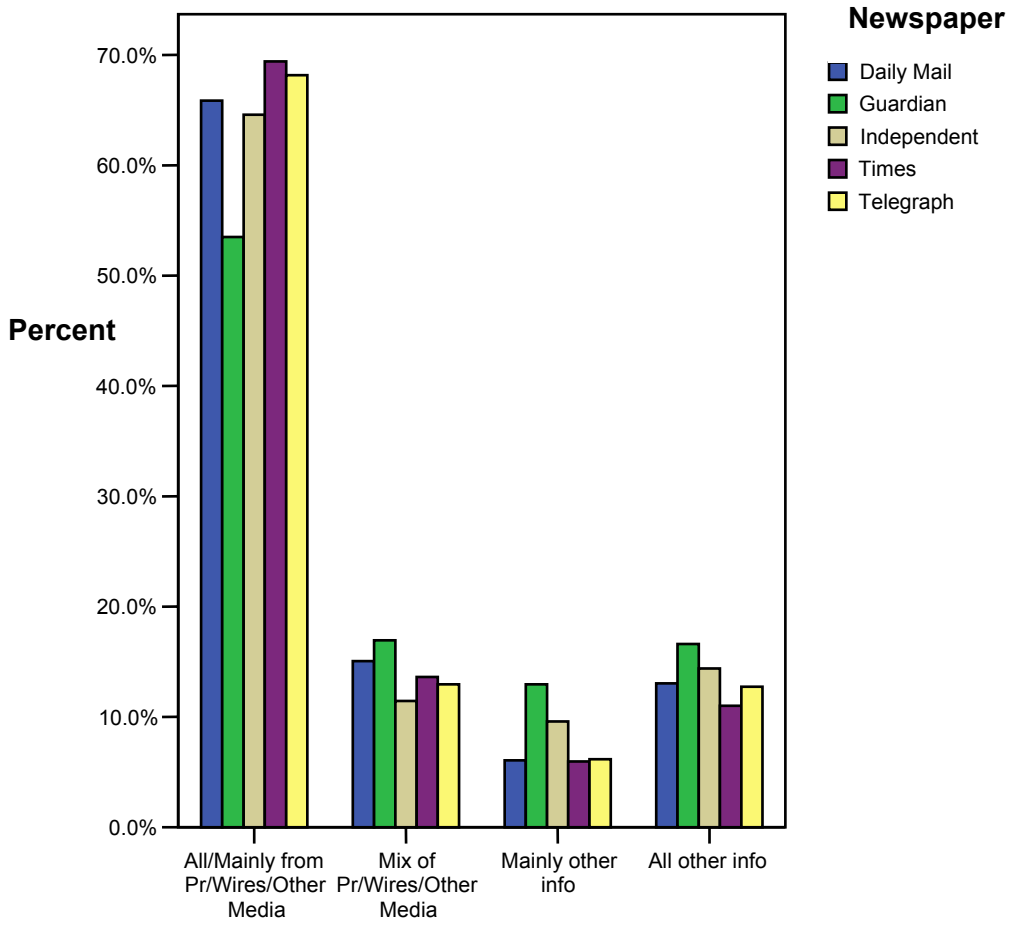

Figure 4

Our data also suggest that while PR material may be used directly by journalists, *PR often finds its way into stories through the wires.* Indeed, if those 259 stories in the sample that appeared to be based wholly on public relations material are isolated, a high proportion - 47% - closely replicated wire copy. This suggests a clear linear process in which PR material is reproduced by agency journalists whose copy is, in turn, reproduced in the news media (we examine this process in more detail in the next section).

The data in Tables 2.10 and 2.11 tell a similar general story. Most of the stories we looked at - 87% - are based on a single primary source. However, in the press, *in only half these cases was any visible attempt made to contextualise or verify this information, and in less than one in five cases was this done meaningfully.* Broadcast news, once again, does better, with 42% of cases involving thorough contextualisation or verification, although it is clear that this is not the norm in either form of news.

Table 2.10: Is the main source/information contextualised with other substantive info/views? (percentage figures based on 87% of the sample)

	Press	Broadcast
Yes, throughly	19	42
Yes, briefly	31	30
No	50	28

Examples from one issue of the *Guardian* illustrate these different levels of context and verification. One comprehensively researched story that quite clearly contextualises copy from wires or other media with new information is 'Fortnight of job cuts across financially ailing NHS' (John Carvel and Riazat Butt, *Guardian*, 24th March 2006, p9). There was no evidence of any PR input in the story, but a small amount of the information contained in the story was attributable to previous articles on the PA and Mercury news wires and a story on the BBC website from the day before. The rest of the piece consists of quotations and facts obtained by methodically interviewing representatives from a large number of NHS trusts.

A story that was categorised as *briefly* contextualising the main source of information with other views was 'Drug Cuts Chances of Breast Cancer Returning, say Scientists' (Polly Curtis, *Guardian*, 24th March 2006, p16). The story is based largely around a well-written press release from the pharmaceuticals company Novartis, which already provides the journalist with a number of different sources of information about the drug Femara (both researchers and cancer pressure groups are quoted in the release, and a great deal of background information is offered). The newspaper article contextualises this information with a brief quote from an alternative academic source (a cancer expert from UCL).

An example of an article with no contextual information was a piece about the trial of an Estonian former prostitute for the murder of her elderly husband ('Former prostitute found guilty of murdering the husband she had thought was a millionaire', Vikram Dodd, *Guardian*, 24th March 2006, p7). This high-profile crime story was covered on both the PA and Mercury news wires the day before, and although some of the wording of the piece differs from the agency copy, all of the facts and quotations used are the same.

We also looked at those press articles in which the news story is based on specific factual claims (Table 2.11).

Table 2.11: When factual claims are made are they corroborated? (n=112 - as percentages)

Yes, throughly	12
Yes, briefly	18
No	70

What is striking, first of all, is how few articles this applies to (just over 5%). Within this sample, *in 70% of cases, these claims are completely uncorroborated, and in only 12% of cases are they corroborated thoroughly*. These findings are consistent with other research. So, for example, a study of the UK media coverage of the 2003 Iraq war found that even misleading claims by the military were routinely unattributed and rarely questioned or verified (Lewis, Brookes, Mosdell and Threadgold, 2006).

One of the few stories to corroborate thoroughly its factual claims came from the *Telegraph*, and deals with the viability of burying the UK's nuclear waste ('Hole in the ground solution to nuclear waste', Charles Clover, *Daily Telegrap*h, 28th April 2006, p13). The news angle concerns the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management's release of a long-awaited report. A detailed press release was issued by the Committee itself, along with a more critical release from Friends of the Earth. In other newspapers on the same day these two documents provided the bulk of the information presented to the reader. The *Telegraph*, however, added substantial extra corroborating information and expert opinion from two more academic sources.

'Middle-aged women "facing same angina threat as men"' (Jenny Hope, *Daily Mail*, 22nd March 2006, p19), on the other hand, is less rigorous in its corroboration of claims. Based mainly around a press release from UCL, the story adds a very short qualifying statement from an academic spokesman for the British Heart Foundation at the end.

This, in turn, is more than can be said for an article that appears a few pages later in the same edition of the *Mail*. 'Boozy Britain is just like Gin Lane, says liver expert' (Emily Cook, *Daily Mail*, 22nd March 2006, p35) is based around an eye-catching release from the Royal Society of Gastroenterology, and does not include any corroborating voices. While the story makes the source of the claim clear, there is no attempt to provide context of verification.

2.5 Summary: Plagiarism by Any Other Name?

Taken together, *these data portray a picture of the journalistic processes of news gathering and news reporting in which any meaningful independent journalistic activity by the press is the exception rather than the rule*. We are not talking about investigative journalism here, but the everyday practices of news judgement, fact checking, balance, criticising and interrogating sources etc., that are, in theory, central to routine, day to day journalism practice. News, especially in print, is routinely recycled from elsewhere, and yet *the widespread use of other material is rarely attributed to its source* (as in 'according to PA…' or 'a press release from X suggests that…'). Such practices would, elsewhere, be regarded as straightforward plagiarism; certainly in the academy.

This is not to say that PR material is, by definition, problematic. On the contrary, many agencies – especially those involved in forms of public service – use PR to put useful and significant information into the public domain. It does, however, raise questions about the nature and sources of PR. As we have seen, *it will favour those – notably business and government, best able to produce good PR material*.

It would also be grossly unfair to blame journalists for relying on pre-packaged information. In the context of the figures outlined in **Section 1** (and confirmed later in **Section 5**), it is clear that most journalists are restrained by economic and organisational factors and thereby required to draft and process too many stories for publication to be able to operate with the freedom and independence necessary to work effectively. The danger signalled here is that the best values of journalistic integrity will become a luxury.

SECTION 3: CASE STUDIES

We have, thus far, focussed on quantitative data about journalistic productivity and news content. In this section we want to take a more qualitative approach to describe two processes touched on in **Section 2**: first the way in which public relations material enters the news via wire service, and second, the way in which news migrates from one media outlet to another.

3.1 How Public Relations Makes the News

As we suggested in **Section 2**, a significant proportion (47%) of those stories we found that appear to derive wholly from PR material seem to have been taken from wire agency copy. This overlap is an issue we explore in our three case studies, which are typical examples of the overlapping textual relationships between public relations material, press agency copy, and print and broadcast media. In addition to showing general levels of reliance on press release and wire copy in the articles analysed, each study pays close attention to the journey a story makes from the initial PR text to its final destination as a news article. The case studies were chosen from three very different PR sources: private business; government and a prominent academic journal.

The first example shows how reliant press agency copy can be on PR material by comparing closely a release from the private sector (a mortgage company) with the wire stories that followed it. The second study shows how a government press release relating to the tax credit scheme instigates a story that then migrates across a wide range of media (through the Press Association wires, into a number of national newspapers, and from there to important radio and television outlets). The third case looks at a release about an academic article to be published in the *British Medical Journal*, and pays particular attention to newspapers' wholesale repetition of wire material, material that is itself highly dependent on PR copy.

3.1.1 Homes Will Turn into 'Ant Hills'

This story is an example of how effective a private company can be in using PR to place stories in the national media after targeting the Press Association. Two different but related press releases issued on behalf of Friends Provident Pensions Ltd were released on Thursday 23rd March 2006 (embargoed until Friday 24th March). They both dealt with a piece of research commissioned by the company and conducted by the trend forecasters 'The Future Laboratory'.

The first release suggests that family homes are becoming like 'ant hills' as parents and their thirty-something children increasingly share living spaces due to financial pressures on the young. It then points out how provision for new 'fractional' or collective pensions is needed to allow co-habiting families to save for their futures more effectively.

The second release goes into detail about 'new social groups' identified by the report. These include: elderly entrepreneurs (dubbed 'elderpreneurs'); 'Bridge Careerists' in the late 50s and 60s choosing new jobs so they do not have to 'cease to function in society and as consumers'; twenty-somethings full of fear and uncertainty about the future after leaving full-time education (called 'FUDutantes' by the report); and people in their 30s still living at home who haven't started to think about their future financial security. Both releases begin with information about the report, and are based around a set of quotations from the head of pensions marketing at Friends Provident.

Press releases that refer to privately-commissioned research sometimes aim to plug a specific product. In this case, the aim appears to be to associate the company more broadly with investigations into future market trends and products that consumers might need (a form of 'branding').

The Press Association published the story '"Ant hill" families "working for common good"'(Nicky Burridge, 23rd March 2006) on its news wires soon after these press notices were issued. Since all but one of the facts and all of the quotations come from the PR copy, the journalistic effort here involves some rewording, selection, and re-ordering.

A detailed textual comparison will illustrate this. The article begins:

> Homes are being turned into ant hills, as cash-strapped people in their 30s move back in with their parents, research claimed today. Young people who are struggling with mortgages, bills and debts are increasingly returning to the family home to pool their financial resources with their parents, according to a report by The Future Laboratory carried out for life insurer Friends Provident.

Similarly, the first press release states:

> British families are beginning to resemble ant colonies. Parents and their thirty-something children, struggling with mortgages, bills and debts will increasingly be moving back in with each other. […]This new trend of clubbing together to share the costs of future needs has been identified by trend forecasters The Future Laboratory. The 'Lasting Lifestyles' report commissioned by FTSE 100 life and pensions company Friends Provident indicates that fractional pensions could be the new tool that these families will need.

The PA story continues:

> The research claimed the trend, which has been sparked by young people spending extended periods of time in higher education and work experience, could lead to families saving for pensions together, once they saw the benefits of joining financial forces. It said so far, an estimated 3.5 million people in their 30s had returned to the family home, and it has dubbed the trend 'ant hill families', because people are working together for the greater good of the group.

This is a paraphrase from a section of the second press release which identifies the new social group 'Twixters':

> Twixters are in their early 30s and still live with their parents, having spent an extended period of time in higher education and 'work experience'.

And it also draws on this section of the first release:

> As they see the benefits of joining financial forces, the report predicts that they will next be setting their sights on pooling their retirement resources.

The only statement the PA article makes that is not present in the release is a claim that the report estimates 3.5 million people in their 30s had returned to live in the family home. As there is no mention of this figure in either release, it is fair to assume that the reporter must have also looked briefly at a copy of the report. The wire story continues:

> Jeremy Ward, head of pensions marketing at Friends Provident, said: 'These family homes are beginning to resemble ant hills as children move back in and club together for the common good, paying one set of bills and clearing down one mortgage. The natural progression will be for families to try to build a retirement fund for all.' He said the trend highlighted the need for a new type of collective pension or fractional pension that would enable a group of people, such as a family, friends or work colleagues, to save into the same pension pot at an agreed rate. He said this would enable people to benefit from the accrued effects of a much bigger pension than the one they could build up as an individual saver. Mr Ward said: 'But at the moment there is not a way for all the family members to pay into one pension fund and derive benefit from it. Creating a fractional pension which everyone could pay into and derive benefit from could mark a major change in long-term savings. The most forward-thinking parents have realised that by pooling their money, the family unit is pulling together to build a secure future for each member - this is teamwork at its best and a new social and financial trend.'

This echoes the first release when it states:

> Jeremy Ward, head of pensions marketing at Friends Provident, said: 'These family homes are beginning to resemble ant hills as children move back in and club together for the common good, paying one set of bills and clearing down one mortgage. The natural progression will be for families to try to build a retirement fund for all. But at the moment there is not a way for all the family members to pay into one pension fund and derive benefit from it. Creating a Fractional Pension which everyone could pay into and derive benefit from could mark a major change in long term savings. Fractional pension holders would invest money at an agreed rate, all making the same contribution and all benefiting from the accrued effects of a much bigger pension pot than the one they could access as an individual saver. Some mums and dads are realising that they have to stop spending the kids' inheritance and work together with their children to make sure that everyone in the family can afford to retire on a suitable income. The most forward-thinking parents have realised that by pooling their money, the family unit is pulling together to build a secure future for each member - this is teamwork at its best and a new social and financial trend.'

From here the Press Association story shifts to a précis of some of the 'new' social categories outlined in the report:

> Meanwhile the research also identified two groups of older people who were putting off retirement altogether. It said a growing number of people were launching new businesses in a bid to top up their pensions. But it said far from resenting the need to work, they were actually doing something they had always wanted to do but had not previously had the time for. At the same time it said there was a group of people in their late 50s and 60s

> who didn't want to retire and were instead planning to carry on working indefinitely. Motivated by the thrill of a new challenge, it said these people were increasingly finding "bridge careers" which they expected to pursue well into their late 70s.

This is all information which is provided by the second press release in its description of ‘elderpreneurs’ and ‘bridge careerists’:

> A growing band of silver entrepreneurs investing in last-chance-saloon businesses to top up their retirement income and pensions. But far from resenting the need to work, they are undertaking the work they have always wanted to do, except that their career has simply got in the way. […]In their late 50s to 60s and motivated by the thrill of a new challenge, Bridge Careerists don't want to retire. Instead they are preparing themselves to keep on working indefinitely. Many are still at the top of their careers, have broad ranging interests and are uneasy at the thought of ceasing to function in society and as consumers. They are increasingly finding "bridge careers" to stave off the need to give up work and expect to have these careers well into their late seventies.

Of the national newspapers, only the *Telegraph* covered the story (‘Debts will turn family homes into “ant hills”’, Rosie Murray-West, *Daily Telegraph*, 24th March 2006, p14). Three quarters of the text is directly attributable to the two Friends Provident press releases, and there is also considerable overlap in terms of content and news angle between this article and that distributed by the Press Association.

It does, however, contain some copy from the original releases that the news wire story does not include, which suggests that the *Telegraph* text is influenced by both the PR and the wire agency material . The new information offered by the piece consists of some quotations from a 28 year-old who lives with her parents, and a sentence about a network of advice centres being set up in England and Wales to deal with problems such as debt.

3.1.2 The Tax Credit Overpayment Fiasco

This case study illustrates a number of trends identified thus far. First, the dependence of wire agencies of PR material, and the subsequent dependence of newspapers on wire agencies (and thereby on the PR material). Second, that this process can involve a high degree of replication – especially in the press. Third, while PR material sets the agenda, broadcast news is more likely to develop the story by adding independently gathered information.

The story concerns £2.2 billion in overpayments in the Tax Credit system for 2004-5, after similar problems in 2003-4 had already led to £2 billion being paid out in error. It originated with a press release from the Commons Public Accounts Committee that was issued on Monday 24th April which was embargoed until Tuesday 25th. In response to this press release two more releases were issued on the same day, one from the Conservatives (the Shadow Paymaster General Mark Francois), and one from the Child Poverty Action Group.

The Press Association wrote up the story soon after the Public Accounts Committee’s release, and two supplements to the story were distributed on the wires after the other related press statements were released. In essence the PA’s role here was to process the press releases. These disparate sections were then collated into one article and

marked as embargoed until Tuesday 25th April ('Tax Credit blunder happened again', Andrew Woodcock, Press Association, 24th April 2006).

Although some of the PA story paraphrases sections of the three press releases, almost every fact and quotation is taken directly from them. The only extra piece of information comes in the form of a two-sentence quotation from an official statement made by HM Revenue and Customs that was not issued as a press release. All but the last two sentences of the piece, then, can be traced to press releases attributable to a public relations exercise.

The level of similarity between the PA copy and the press releases can be demonstrated with reference to an individual passage. For example, the PA story states:

> HMRC paid out around £15.8 billion in child and working tax credits to five million families in 2003-04 and a similar amount in the following year. But in each year, around £2.2 billion was overpaid to about 1.9 million families - more than double the amount expected when the system was set up.

The press release is worded differently, but says something very similar:

> In 2004–05 HM Revenue and Customs (the Department) paid £15.8 billion of Tax Credits. The Department recalculates each award annually and has identified that for 2003–04 it overpaid some £2.2 billion to some 1.9 million families. The Department estimates that there will be a similar level of overpayments for 2004–05 awards.

The PA piece actually misattributes the £15.8 billion figure to the years 2003-4, possibly because of inattentive reading of the release (a mistake which is replicated in the *Express* the next day). The reference to 'five million families' is not taken from the committee's release, but is traceable to part of the HMRC official statement that is included in earlier versions of the PA wire story (and re-used in later press and broadcast pieces) which states that 'around six million families' claim tax credit. It is reasonable to assume that the 'five million' figure is another mistake. Aside from these small differences however, the parity between the two paragraphs is obvious, and is representative of the rest of the piece.

The *Daily Mail*, the *Express*, the *Guardian*, the *Mirror*, and *The Times* all carried the story on Tuesday 25th April. Most of these articles are very similar to the one circulated by the Press Association.

'Families face hardship again as tax credit is clawed back' (Helen Nugent and Rosemary Bennett, *The Times*, 25th April 2006, p14) is a slightly shorter piece than the article provided by the Press Association, but there is a strong textual overlap between the two. Aside from some rewording, and the addition of information from one extra source, the article's facts and quotations are the same as those reproduced by the wire copy. The additional information comes from the Citizens Advice Bureau, which provides a short comment on the confusion and hardship caused by the government's mismanagement of the tax credit system, but this only makes up around one tenth of the piece.

The *Daily Mirror*'s 'The big tax clawback: poor hit by £2 billion overpayment again' (Rosa Prince, 25th April 2006, p20) is equally reliant on the same facts and quotations presented by the Press Association. The wording is different in places, and the language used is more racy ('a report' in the PA story becomes a 'shock report' in the

Mirror, for example), but around 95% of the article's facts and quotations are repeated. The extra information is one line from the Tory party press release that the PA article does not use.

The *Mail* and the *Express* both approach the story in much the same way, although they differ in their reporting of the number of families affected by the fiasco. The *Daily Mail* ('2 million families are hit in £2.2bn fiasco over tax credit', Tim Shipman, 25th April 2006, p2) claims that 'nearly two million' families have suffered, while the *Express* ('Families are hit by new £2.2bn tax credit fiasco', Gabriel Milland, 25th April 2006, p2) says that it was 'hundreds of thousands'. Whatever the true number was, however, both figures are present in different parts of the Press Association article, as are most of the facts and quotations provided by both newspapers. The *Express* adds some contextual information about related previous stories (for example, the elderly losing out after similar mistakes the year before, and organised crime gangs defrauding the system) but is still around 85% reliant on the press releases and the wire agency copy. The *Mail* adds even less information, and approximately 95% of its text is echoed in the wires. The only fact not already contained in previously existing PR or PA material is one line stating that the amount of money overpaid would have been 'enough to pay for 40,000 nurses'.

Only the *Guardian* provides readers with a substantially different angle to the news agency copy. 'MPs attack Labour for deal on EDS fiasco' (David Hencke, 25th April 2006, p22), concentrated less on the amount of money overpaid and the number of families affected, and chose to highlight the unsatisfactory nature of the compensation the government got from EDS, the software company responsible for the gaffe. Whilst the piece does use some of the same information included in the original commons committee and Conservative Party press releases (and re-presented by the Press Association), it uses it rather differently. It also provides new information not printed anywhere else about the role of HM Revenue and Customs in the affair.

The piece was also covered in all of our sample broadcast outlets on Wednesday 25th April. It was the fourth short news headline on BBC Radio 4's *Today* Programme. Only 12 seconds of airtime was devoted to the story, and it closely follows the line of the original instigating press release, and consequent PA story.

It was given much more time on Radio 4's *World at One* (more than 12 minutes). The news core of the story is based around the Public Accounts Committee's press release, and key facts and quotations are taken from this text. The piece subsequently goes into much more detail, and adds more information than any other media outlet in our sample. For example, there is more information given about what the Tax Credit system actually is, there are various interviews used to develop the story (with a claimant affected by the problem, with a member of the right-leaning think-tank the Institute of Fiscal Studies, with Edward Leigh the Conservative MP who chairs the Public Accounts Committee (and who is quoted extensively in its original press release), with the former Labour welfare minister Frank Field, and another with the Labour chair of the Treasury Select Committee John McFall). No member of the government directly related to the fiasco would comment on air, but the announcer does read from the same HM Revenue and Customs statement that is used by the Press Association news story from the day before.

The BBC news at 6pm ran a two-minute piece on the story. The report consists of an on-location interview with a family that had been overpaid and faced a bill of £1500, another short interview with Edward Leigh MP, and some more on-location shots and interviews at a centre in Leeds that offers financial advice to low-income families. It makes minimal use of the original press release and PA story.

ITV evening news covers the story very sparsely, devoting only 15 seconds to it, and giving hardly any detail. As is usually the case with very short pieces like this, it is very reliant on the facts that were laid out in the press release and recycled in the wire copy.

3.1.3 No Clear Health Benefits to Oily Fish

The story was instigated by one of the regular press releases from the British Medical Journal (BMJ) to publicise its latest issue. These weekly releases, along with PR material from other major journals, usually present separate information on four or five of the weeks' most newsworthy stories next to web links to an abstract and early access to the article. The individual summaries of these stories are written by qualified PR professionals, and aim to give enough information for a journalist to write a newspaper story without having to read the journal article in full. Judging by the levels of parity between these releases and the editorial that they generate, they are successful in this endeavour.

This release was issued on Thursday 23rd March, and summarises the results of a major research project that examined all of the important research into the health benefits of eating the omega 3 fatty acids found in oily fish. Contrary to widespread opinion the study found that there was no clear evidence that these fatty acids are good for us. The authors conclude that more research is needed, and that in the meantime, we should still keep eating oily fish in moderation.

In response to this press release, and on the same day, another was issued by the British Heart Foundation (BHF) emphasising that people should not stop eating omega 3-rich foods or taking health supplements because of the report. It also stated that the Food Standards Agency advice remains that people should eat four portions of oily fish per week, but that however much fish one eats, its impact on risk of heart problems is tiny compared with the possible benefits of stopping smoking, exercising regularly and eating less saturated fats.

Soon after the issue of these releases the Press Association published an article on the wires that makes extensive use of both of them ('Omega 3 oil: "no clear benefits"', Jane Kirby, Press Association, 23rd March 2006). The first section of the article is heavily reliant on the BMJ release, rewording it slightly, but only offering one piece of extra information (the fact that earlier in the week a story broke that suggested omega 3 oils prevented the spread of prostate cancer to other parts of the body). The second section of the PA story is composed wholly from the information provided by the BHF press release (mainly from a series of quotations from a statement by the group's director of prevention and care Dr Mike Knapton).

Also released was a piece on the Mercury News Wire (a service that collates and distributes articles from the biggest local and regional agencies) by a staff writer at the National news agency. The piece does not make use of the BHF's public relations material, and instead bases itself entirely on the original BMJ release. Aside from some cursory rewording, it simply replicates the release.

The story was covered with differing degrees of detail and independence in a number of national newspapers on Friday 24th March. The *Daily Mail*, the *Mirror*, the *Sun*, the *Express*, and the *Guardian* did run it, but they did not devote resources to adding contextual information to the story. The *Evening Standard*, *The Times*, and the

Independent, on the other hand, all made an effort to do more that simply regurgitate the PR and wire copy.

The *Mail*'s 'Why eating oily fish may not be that good for you after all' (Daily Mail Reporter, 24th March 2006, p 7) was a 400 word half-page splash accompanied by a photograph of some dead mackerel. The lack of a by-line and the attribution of the story to an anonymous 'Daily Mail Reporter' follows the convention used by the newspaper whenever a story is copied from another source such as a press release or a wire story without any real journalistic input. In this case the story is taken from the Mercury Newswire story that is itself nothing more than an almost verbatim repetition of the BMJ press release. The similarities between the two articles are illustrated well by comparing them. For example, the Mercury newswire piece states:

> UK guidelines encourage the general public to eat more oily fish, and higher amounts are advised after a heart attack. Researchers analysed 89 studies to assess the health effects of the omega 3 fats on total death rates, heart disease, cancer, and strokes. Each study involved a treatment group and a control group and investigated the effect of omega 3 intake on health for at least six months. Pooling the results showed no strong evidence that omega 3 fats have an effect on total mortality or combined cardiovascular events. […] The authors cannot say exactly why the results of this trial differ from the other large studies in this field. They therefore conclude that it is not clear whether omega 3 fats reduce or increase total mortality, heart disease, cancer, or strokes.

And the corresponding section of the *Mail* article goes:

> UK guidelines encourage us to eat more oily fish. After a heart attack higher amounts are advised. Researchers analysed 89 studies to assess the effects of omega 3 fats on death rates, heart disease, cancer, and strokes. The studies all looked at the effects omega 3 had on health for at least six months. But when the results were pooled, they showed no strong evidence that omega 3 fats had an effect on mortality or the other serious conditions. The authors of the study, which was published online by the British Medical Journal, could not say why the results of this trial differed from the other large studies in this field. It is not clear what effect omega 3 fats have on death rates, heart disease, cancer, or strokes, they concluded.

The pieces in the *Mirror*, *Sun*, and *Express* are equally reliant on the Mercury wire copy, but they are all much shorter (the shortest consists of 67 words and the longest 124), and all are anonymous. The *Guardian* offers a short (274 words) article headlined 'Omega 3 may not prevent heart disease' (Sarah Boseley, *Guardian*, 24th March 2006, p7), which rewords and summarises the content of the first press release, but does offer some new information regarding the specifics of the Food Standards Agency's recommendations about eating oily fish.

The *Independent*'s coverage, on the other hand, was more thorough. 'Debunked: the health benefits of oily fish; no evidence omega 3 fats protect against heart disease' (Jeremy Laurance, *Independent*, 24th March 2006, p1) ran on the front page, and was almost 1000 words long. Although it was clearly initiated by the press releases, around half the material presented in the article is new, with significant contextual detail (about previous 'medical shibboleths' that have been disproved, and about older studies into the health benefits of omega 3). This is probably the most independent of the articles that report the story, but it remains reliant on the press releases for its main body and the news angle. Not only does it use many of the same facts as the BMJ release, but it

repeats verbatim the quotations from the BHF public relations material without adding any of its own.

The Times' 'The benefits of fish and linseed oils as elixir of life are another health myth' (Nigel Hawkes, *The Times*, 24th March 2006, p9) is unique in presenting information from the BMJ article itself, rather than simply the press release puff. Indeed, it appears that Nigel Hawkes was the only journalist of the many who dealt with the story who actually cited the primary source on which the story was based. Approximately half of the item's 665 words are taken from the release, and half from the journal article itself. In addition to providing the reader with re-nosed information gleaned from the original PR, it also gives details about the previous studies that the journal article analyses, and gives extra quotations from the authors. Neither *The Times*' or the *Independent*'s articles show any real signs of repeating copy from the wire stories.

The other major newspaper to cover the story on March 24th was the *Evening Standard*, and it provides a slightly different angle to the wire articles and the other newspapers ('Don't stop eating oily fish, says heart expert as study questions benefit', Simon Atkinson and Mark Prigg, *Evening Standard*, 24th March 2006, p9), although this is also press release based.

Due to its later publication time, the newspaper was able to make its article seem like a reaction to the morning's headlines by emphasising the British Heart Foundation's response to the British Medical Journal's report. Despite this difference in emphasis, however, the article is still around 70% reliant on the PR material and the press agency copy. The extra information comes in the form of some claims about the methyl mercury content of oily fish that are themselves present in the earlier *Times* article, and some 'soft' context for the story such as the fact that celebrity chef Jamie Oliver is an influential proponent of omega 3 oils. The reliance of this article on both the press release and the Press Association article can be inferred from a brief textual comparison. The BHF release states:

> Responding to the findings Dr Mike Knapton Director of Prevention and Care at the British Heart Foundation said: 'People should not stop consuming omega 3 fats or eating oily fish as a result of this study. Until now, medical research has demonstrated a benefit from omega 3 fats in protecting people from heart and circulatory disease. This systematic review of numerous studies concludes that there is no clear evidence either way. More research is needed to establish why some studies have shown a slightly increased risk associated with eating very high amounts of oily fish, which is possibly related to mercury levels. The current Food Standards Agency advice for most people is to consume no more than four portions of oily fish a week. This is still sensible advice. It is worth remembering that eating lots of any one type of food is rarely best for your health and that eating a varied and balanced diet is the sensible approach.'

The Press Association article reads:

> Dr Mike Knapton, British Heart Foundation director of prevention and care, said people should not stop taking omega 3 fats or oily fish as a result of the study. He added: 'Until now, medical research has demonstrated a benefit from omega 3 fats in protecting people from heart and circulatory disease. This systematic review of numerous studies concludes that there is no clear evidence either way. More research is needed to establish why some studies have shown a slightly increased risk associated with eating

> very high amounts of oily fish, which is possibly related to mercury levels. The current Food Standards Agency advice for most people is to consume no more than four portions of oily fish a week. This is still sensible advice. It is worth remembering that eating lots of any one type of food is rarely best for your health and that eating a varied and balanced diet is the sensible approach.'

And the *Standard* article, rather similarly says:

> The head of the BHF today urged people to continue eating fish. Dr Mike Knapton said: 'Until now, medical research has demonstrated a benefit from omega 3 fats in protecting people from heart and circulatory disease. This systematic review of numerous studies (in the BMJ) concludes that there is no clear evidence either way. The current Food Standards Agency advice for most people is to consume no more than four portions of oily fish a week. This is still sensible advice. It is worth remembering that eating lots of any one type of food is rarely best for your health and that eating a varied and balanced diet is the sensible approach. More research is needed to establish why some studies have shown a slightly increased risk associated with eating very high amounts of oily fish**,** which is possibly related to mercury levels.'

The only one of our sample broadcast programmes to cover this story was Radio 4's *Today*. The three-minute piece is centred on a studio interview between the presenter Sarah Montague and the lead researcher on the project, Dr. Lee Hooper from the University of East Anglia. Apart from the presenter's very brief introduction, the segment is not at all reliant on the press releases or the wire copy, and is almost entirely composed of Dr. Hooper going into more detail about the project than any of the print articles do. Again, the role of PR here is more to set the agenda than to provide copy.

3.1.4 Analysis of the Case Studies

All three case studies show that the relationship between the initial PR material, the wire services and the press and broadcast media can be both linear and triangular. In some instance, the wire agencies become the conduit through which PR material is channelled to become news. The repeat of the mistake made in the wire copy by the *Express* is a good example of this linearity. In other instances, communication is triangulated, as journalists refer both to the wires reworking of the PR material and the to PR material itself. Finally, there are instances in which journalists ignore the wire copy and refer directly to the PR material.

The wire agencies thus play a role in channelling PR material into the news, but that role may be complementary or bypassed altogether when journalists refer directly to PR material themselves. In some cases, the presence of wire copy may play a role in amplifying the news value of the original PR material.

The cases also illustrate the way in which PR material operates at different levels of influence (as described in **Section 2**). In some cases, the press are almost entirely dependent on pre-packaged copy (either from the PR material, the wire's reworking of that material or both). In other cases this material sets the agenda and news angle, but is complimented by other material gathered independently. Examples of this kind of story development tend to be found more in broadcast versions of the story than in the press. And in a few cases, the PR material/wire reworking is used more sparingly to

tell a different story (such as the *Guardian's* interpretation of the tax credit story, which shifted the focus to the company responsible for the mistake).

Instances of journalists attempting to verify the truth of the claims being made are the exception rather than rule, illustrating a point made in **Section 2**. Similarly*, we see few instances of journalists returning to primary source material*, whether it is Government data or a scientific journal article. This second point was the subject of discussion following the failure of the media to interrogate claims made by Andrew Wakefield linking the MMR vaccine with autism (Lewis and Speers, 2003).

Finally, these examples illustrate that PR material can be genuinely newsworthy, but that it is not necessarily so. While the tax credit and oily fish stories were both newsworthy and of public interest, the story initiated by Friends Provident Pensions Ltd was neither.

3.2 Copy and Copying

We now turn to look at another way in which information is recycled, as stories migrate from one news outlet to another. Overall, as we might expect, we found varying degrees of overlapping news agendas between the different news outlets in our sample. Here we look at the various ways in which this occurs.

3.2.1 The Influence of Press on Broadcast News

It is widely held that the national press has significant influence over the broadcast media's daily news agenda, and that broadcast news regularly 'cannibalises' the content of the national daily newspapers. This was borne out during our research, and is illustrated by the broadcast news we examined on Tuesday 25th April. Of the stories covered in our sample broadcast programmes, 48% originated in the same day's newspapers, 42% were stories broken by the broadcast media that were taken up by the press that afternoon or the next day, and 10% were exclusive to broadcast and were not covered in the press at all.

Two points are notable here. First, there is a high degree of crossover (90%) between press and broadcast news. Second, because of the time-lag in press production, we would expect broadcast news to influence press stories, and yet the more common flow of news appears to be the other way around (i.e. press to broadcast). News is, in this sense, less about immediacy than the filtering of information. In this relationship, the press provide a filtering function for broadcast news.

A clear example of the press influencing television news can be found in the BBC 6 o'clock news piece on cruelty to animals at Bernard Matthews' Norfolk turkey farm (BBC evening news, 24th April 2006). The story was broken earlier that day by the *Mirror* ('The Bird Batterer', Jeremy Armstrong, *Daily Mirror*, 24th April 2006, p9), and details how a 'sick Bernard Matthews worker' smashed 'live turkeys with 5ft wooden pole in a sadistic game of rounders' while a local animal rights activist secretly filmed him. It adds very little to the information given in the newspaper article, although the piece does include footage of the abuse and an interview with one of the activists involved with filming it.

There were many examples of newspaper stories feeding radio news during our sample period. One typical instance of this relationship is the story about a parliamentary committee's report on public funds being wasted on the troubled memorial fountain for Princess Diana (21st March 2006). It was first covered by the

Press Association on Monday 20th March, and the next morning the *Daily Mirror* ran a substantial article along with an editorial opinion piece. This then led to a news bulletin on BBC Radio 4's *World at One* programme, which goes into considerably more depth, including interviews with the parliamentary committee chairman, the chief executive of the royal parks agency, and the chair of the Memorial Fountain Committee, as well as a statement from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. Both the ITV and BBC evening news also covered the story, as did a number of other national newspapers the next day.

3.2.2 The Influence of Broadcast News on the Press

The ability of broadcast news to influence the next day's print news agenda is also a constant process, especially since the development of 24-hour television news. In every major newsroom there are a range of news channels playing in the background, and breaking stories often influence the content of the next day's edition. During our research team's periods of data gathering at the *Guardian* newsroom, for example, key events such as the release of the hostage Norman Kember, the heckling of the Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt, and Luis Filipe Scolari refusing to be England's next football manager (among many others), each had an organising impact on the stories that would appear in the next day's edition. As Michael White, Assistant Editor at the *Guardian* told us, 24-hour news channels have become a rival service to the big news agencies, "you leave [BBC] News 24 or Sky on in the corner, it's a talking wire service".

Aside from this rolling, events-based, influence, television news also impacts on print news in relation to individual investigative pieces (for instance with stories broken by *Newsnight* or other flagship TV news shows such as *Dispatches* and *Panorama*). An example of such a story from our sample period is an item dealing with a spate of NHS redundancies. Despite claims from the Chancellor Gordon Brown that only a small number of hospitals in the UK were in deficit, original research undertaken by *Newsnight* showed that the total deficit of NHS trusts in England could be as much as £760 million (23rd March 2006). This segment spawned a number of follow-up stories in the next day's press.

Broadcast news pieces can also influence the press by adding new information to a developing story, for example by airing an interview with a high-profile politician. On Thursday 23rd March the *Today* programme aired an exclusive interview with Gordon Brown ostensibly to talk about the Labour Party loans scandal. This 20-minute interview deals with the state of the NHS, the education system, the housing market, transport, Iraq and foreign policy, as well as the loans for peerages row, and is quoted from in every major newspaper the next day in varied stories on a wide range of subjects.

3.2.3 The Influence of the Local Press on the Nationals

'Animal lonely hearts part two: The pining penguin' (Daily Mail Reporter, *Daily Mail*, 23rd March, 2006, p41) is a good example of a story that came through the regional press, and made its way to the pages of nationals. This story, about a recently bereaved jackass penguin called Pugwash, follows another *Mail* story earlier in the week about a depressed widower sea lion. It is an almost complete reproduction of a story that was published in the *North Devon Gazette* the week before. The piece originated in a pub conversation between a local journalist Tony Gussin, and Dawn Butcher, the owner of the Combe Martin Wildlife Park. Once it had been used by the local newspaper, the Archent Group (who own the *North Devon Gazette*) sold it on to a

number of national publications including the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Express*. From there the story was picked up by national television news outlets, *GMTV*, and the *Richard and Judy Show* (who interviewed Miss Butcher live on air with the lonely penguin).

Another, slightly different, example of this kind of story can be found in the same edition of the *Daily Mail*. 'Framed… by a camera on a policeman's hat' (Brendan Montague, *Daily Mail*, 23rd March, 2006, p37), first hit the local media after a county court case in which the decisive piece of evidence was provided by video tape recorded by a new high-tech camera mounted on a police officer's hat. After being published in the *Mail*, the story went global, appearing in US newspapers and on CNN. Despite the fact that the under-resourced manufacturers (Cylon System) had not issued any press releases, and were waiting until they had sold more of their cameras before launching a PR offensive, they were obliged to issue numerous press statements in answer to the many calls they received as the story snowballed.

SECTION 4: HOW NEWSWORTHY IS PR GENERATED MATERIAL?

In the previous section, we looked in detail at examples of PR generated stories with varying degrees of news value. These examples suggested that, in principle, PR material can be both newsworthy and informative. So, for example, universities, public agencies or research institutes will often use their PR/press departments to publicise new research findings, and these may well be of general interest rather than simply self-serving. But there are also clearly occasions when well crafted PR of no pressing news value seeps into mainstream news. Our case study of the Friends Provident Pensions Ltd story in the previous section is a case in point, and recalls John Kronsnik's analysis of the coverage given by the *New York Times* by a questionable survey commissioned by the Aetna Insurance Company (Kronsnik, 1989). In both cases, a survey is used as part of a PR exercise and reported as news.

In this section, we look more closely at the news value of PR generated news. We are aware of the complex debates about the notion of news value (Harcup and O'Neil, 2001): what we are seeking to establish here is whether the presence of PR generated news is now a factor in the generation of news, and whether this over-rides more traditional notions of news value.

4.1 The Content Analysis, PR and News Value

In our content analysis (see **Section 2**) we also tried to discern the extent to which PR activity generated stories which clearly possessed news value. The very presence of a PR generated story on the news or in a newspaper might seem to suggest that it was, by definition, newsworthy. It quickly became clear, however, that some PR generated material seemed to be, at best, 'filler' that could just as easily be excluded, and at worst, a self-serving item of PR dressed up as news.

After carrying out more concrete forms of analysis, our research team therefore ranked each story in terms of its PR content *and* its news value. While this was our most subjective coding category (and inevitably so, since news value is a subjective notion), it does allow us a glimpse of the extent to which PR can override notions of news value.

Table 4.1 indicates that around half the articles we examined in the press (49%) appeared to be newsworthy in their own right and/or with PR activity playing only a peripheral role. One such story detailed a series of police blunders related to the case of 'Wearside Jack', the hoaxer who claimed to have been the Yorkshire Ripper ("Drifter who derailed enquiry and left investigation chief a broken man', Andrew Norfolk, *The Times*, 21st March 2006, p7). There was no discernable PR activity behind this story, and minimal overlap with some of the press agency copy, but it is undeniable that the subject is, in a traditional sense, newsworthy.

Of those with more PR involvement, most (37%) were also newsworthy. One such story, 'Nurses threaten to strike as Blair warns of more job cuts' (George Jones and Celia Hall, *Daily Telegraph*, 25th April 2006, p1), contains information from a PR statement released by the Royal College of Nurses as well as information from other sources. While these stories had news value, it is not clear that they would have appeared without PR activity to prompt them. *In these instances, PR material sets the agenda, but does so on matters of public interest.* In other words, the fact that these

stories had news value does *not* mean that PR was not influential in getting them onto the news agenda.

Table 4.1: News value of story in the press? (as percentages)

Clear news value and/or little or no PR found	49
Clear news value, with PR involved	37
Appears to have made the news because of PR	12
Little news value, little PR	2

12% of the articles we examined appeared to be there only because of PR activity. Articles in this category were commonly based on minor research, or polls, commissioned by private companies in order to obtain editorial for their products 'through the back door'. A piece in the *Independent*, for example, 'Women find household chores "therapeutic and empowering"' (Arifa Akbar, *Independent*, 24th April 2006, p20), publicises the results of 'an online study' commissioned by the Discovery Home and Health TV website. Most of the article is drawn from the company's publicity material, with a small amount of extra context added.

Figure 4: News value of story in broadcast news? (as percentages)

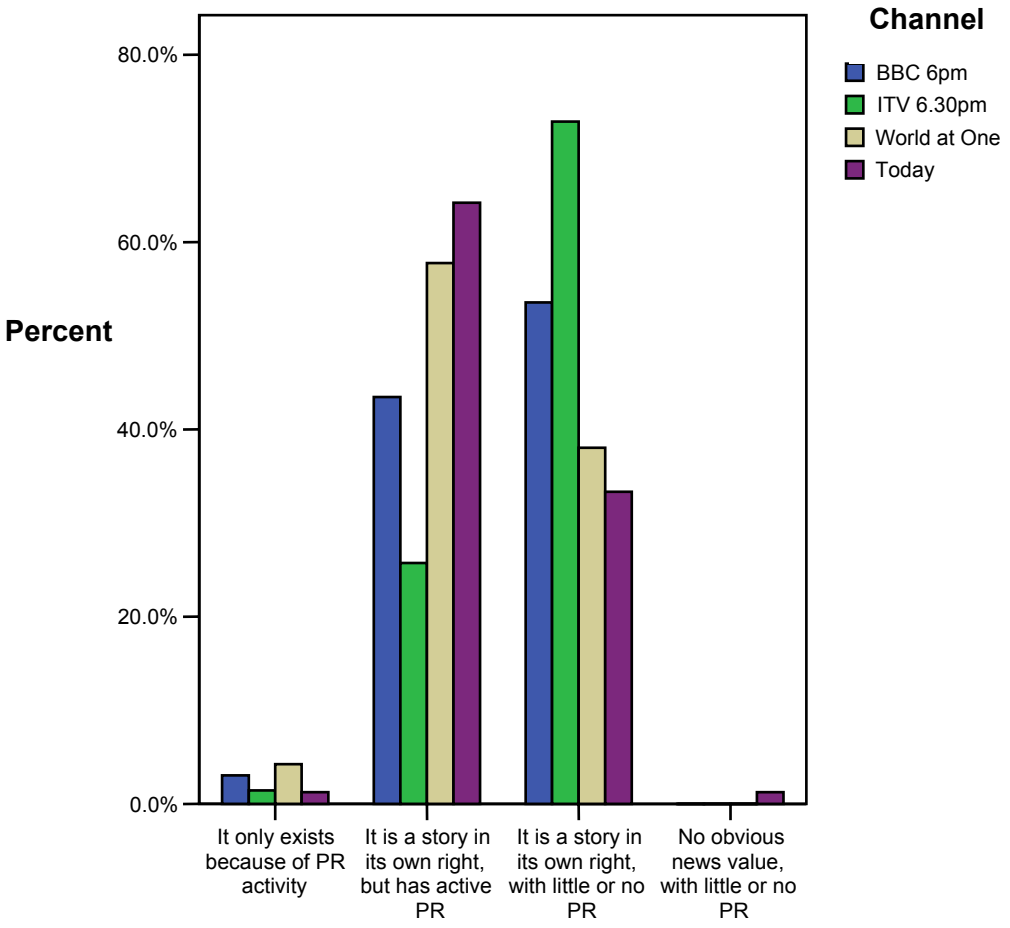

Fig 4

This compares with only 2% of stories which had little discernable PR content but which were also judged to have little news value. This suggests strongly that in even the most serious newspapers, *PR appears to increase the proportion of stories with little news value*. Expressed differently, only one in 25 non-PR stories were of little

news value, compared with a ratio of one in four for PR influenced stories. In short, PR activity would appear to be distorting news values.

In our broadcast sample we found few examples of stories – whether PR influenced or otherwise - with little news value (Figure 4). We should not read too much into these comparisons, since when we break the broadcast sample down the data sets become fairly small. However, on this evidence, the two radio programmes, the *Today Programme* and the *World at One*, appear to be the most prone to PR influence (as indicated by other data in **Section 2**) with around 60% of their stories containing active PR. This may be because the television news programmes we looked at have more resources per story and more time for preparation and analysis. Television news is also dependent on a visual dimension which is often self-generated. In this sample, ITV news would seem to be the least PR influenced (somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, given the BBC's resources).

Combined, these data suggest that PR plays an important agenda-setting role. Moreover many PR generated stories generally have *some* news value, although there is a significant body of PR generated stories, especially in the press, that are more questionable.

SECTION 5: THE VIEW FROM THE NEWSROOM

> *We are "churning" stories today, not writing them. Almost everything is recycled from another source […]. It wouldn't be possible to write so many stories otherwise. Yet even more is expected, filing to online outlets is now considered to be part of the job. Specialist writing is much easier because the work is done by agencies and/or writers of press releases. Actually knowing enough to identify stories is no longer important. The work has been deskilled, as well as being greatly amplified in volume, if not in quality.*
>
> (Nigel Hawkes, Health Editor, *The Times*)

We canvassed the opinions of 42 journalists working on national newspapers, at major broadcast news companies, and at the Press Association, as well as public relations practitioners. This gives us a snapshot of industry opinion very much in line with our previous findings, and suggests that journalists' increased workloads impact on their working practices. Broadly speaking they reported producing more stories, and are consequently relying more on public relations material and copy from wire services. The opinions canvassed also suggest that the time to confirm claims made by sources has been, and is still being, eroded. Some journalists we spoke to were prepared to speak on the record, but the majority preferred to remain anonymous.

5.1 Workload

The average number of stories produced in a day by our respondents was 4.5, although the press agency journalists we contacted appear to be producing the most copy, writing roughly double the number of stories as their counterparts on national newspapers. More than two thirds of those surveyed (30 out of 42) declared they believed that journalists were now producing more stories than they were a decade ago (split equally between those who said they were generating "considerably more stories", and those who said "a few more stories").

The few journalists who told us that they were writing less stories than they did before (4 of the 42) was made up primarily of people who had taken on editorial positions or "special correspondent" roles which require more research on fewer articles. Michael White, Assistant Editor at the *Guardian*, for example, told us that the volume of his output varied hugely, "in my prime I might have written 3,500 words for publication in print next day on a busy day" but that "nowadays I do less than I did, it can be one or none. On the other hand it can be three or four, including [articles for] the web which is increasingly important".

This case is an unusual one, however, and the more general state of affairs is summed up better by a national newspaper journalist who has concerns about the ways in which new technology and scarce resources had impacted on her workload:

> I'm exceptionally busy. Part of that is down to changes in technology, for example I now get perhaps 150 emails a day on top of a foot of post, and there is no one but me to sort these. Journalism has always required investment in time for contacts but invariably these are now made on my own time – at breakfasts and dinners as lunch is nigh on impossible – as we like so many newspaper offices are not in the centre of town. Budgets are very tight so sometimes it's difficult to get the support you might like.

The same appears to be the case in broadcast news, as this foreign correspondent told us:

> (I do) far more stories, for the same rate of pay, and far longer hours - also for the same rate of pay. We are now expected to produce tri-medially, and occasionally for 24 hours at a stretch on a breaking story, for no extra pay at all.

A veteran journalist and section editor at a national daily newspaper told us that "the volume of stories we produce in a day has increased a lot. When I started out, in the days before the electronic revolution, I was producing one or two stories a day. Today it's not uncommon to be knocking out 5 or 6 in a day – and when you're doing that you rely more on the wires and on PR than you did before". Similarly, an assistant news editor at a different national daily stated "there is no doubt that fewer journalists are producing the same amount of stories, placing extra pressure and meaning longer hours for those in the news room".

The situation is analogous in the national news agencies. One agency journalist told us that although she enjoyed the challenges of her increased workload, there were also clear negative side-effects:

> The most significant change to working as an agency journalist is the need to multi-task. Not only are we expected to file news stories for the national and regional wire but increasingly we are also expected to take our own photographs and video footage. I can only imagine the importance of video footage for internet and mobile phone use will become more important and more demanding in the future. This has a positive impact on working conditions in the sense you are learning new techniques and the company is investing in new technology. However, the negative aspects are an increased workload and less focus on writing (the reason I became a journalist in the first place).

An Industry Correspondent at the Press Association was more emphatic: "I'm definitely busier and write more stories these days. I average about 10 a day. When I first joined PA 25 years ago I used to write no more than three a day. The main difference has been the growth in 24-hour news stations which need stories all day and night, so there is no peace for an agency journalist. […] I don't usually spend more than an hour on a story, otherwise I wouldn't be able to write so many".

These accounts are very much in line with the data presented in **Section 1**, which showed that journalists are producing far more copy now than then ever, as well as adapting stories to different media formats.

5.2 Checks on Stories

When asked how many checks they made on a story the average number for those who answered was more than 3. However, more than half of the respondents said they could not answer the question because the amount of checks varied so widely from story to story. If the information came from a trusted source, for example, there might not be any need to check on its veracity, and if the information in a story was particularly controversial a huge number of checks may be needed (including consultations with legal experts, etc) before it goes to press.

What most journalists agreed on, however, was that the number of checks that the typical journalist made on a story was decreasing. Only one journalist thought that checks had increased (due to the internet), while two thirds said they thought the number of checks made on source material had decreased.

A correspondent for a major national newspaper confided that "newspapers have turned into copy factories. This leaves less time for real investigations, or meeting and developing contacts. The arrival of online editions has also increased demand for quick copy, reducing the time available for checking the facts". Another told us, "I insist on making at least two check calls on every story (one for each side of the story is a minimum) but this is becoming increasingly difficult to do because of time constraints". A reporter from a different national daily said that the lack of time available to check facts on complex stories meant that important but complicated issues are simply not covered: "I think the time available to be thorough has decreased […] the main consequence of that is that if things require lots of work, they are less likely to be embarked upon". And a broadcast journalist told us that "many more stories are demanded by London desks straight from the wires, with few or no checks."

This lack of checks extends to the content of press agency copy. "Checking info has decreased, and what is worse it is not expected by the […] news desk – I cannot tell you the number of times I am told to 'take it off the wires and knock it into shape', which is just terrible", said one national news correspondent. Given that the editorial staff at most wire agencies are equally if not more overworked, under pressure to produce ever more material, and reliant on PR copy themselves, this does not bode well for the quality of the final news story.

Indeed, this adds weight to the point raised in **Section 2**, in which wire copy may be assumed to be independent of PR – something our data clearly refutes. Despite this, taking news from the wires is generally regarded as more legitimate than from PR copy (it is harder to imagine journalists being told to 'knock PR releases into shape').

We also specifically asked respondents whether journalists tended to check the content of PR material they used. The majority (34 of 42) said they thought it was checked "always" or, more commonly, "more often than not". A few, nonetheless (7 out of 42), suggested that this happened "rarely". One journalist in this category told us, "sure, I try and check up on factual claims made in press releases, but how do you do that with sponsored surveys or research by some company that 'proves' there's a market for their product? You can't, but you use it anyway".

It is worth noting that the data in **Section 2** suggests that, if checks are made, this is usually invisible to the reader. In the press, only half the stories we looked at contained any contextual or verifying information, and in only one in five cases was this done with any thoroughness.

5.3 The Influence of Public Relations Material on News

Only two of the journalists we contacted (both broadcast) claimed that public relations material never influences their work. Most (28 out of 42) stated that PR informs their stories "sometimes", and the remaining 12 said they use it "often". The great majority (38 out of 42) indicated that PR plays a greater role in today's newsroom, suggesting that the use of PR has increased over the last ten years.

We received a range of comments on the use of PR material. Some pointed out that there is "good" PR out there. As one national newspaper correspondent put it: "It's

sometimes useful to alert you to a report, event or a concern you haven't heard about." NGO material, for example, was seen by some as a useful as corrective to government PRl. However, he continued to suggest that "much of what comes in via email is a hindrance, that just needs to be deleted every day".

Others said that more was used simply because of the volume being produced, and because the quality of PR had increased so much. As one national broadcast journalist put it:

> The quality of PR material on offer is much better these days, and there's much more around. The armed forces and emergency services have their own camera teams; developers and businesses have their own graphics teams; football clubs run 'underground' or 'grass-roots' magazines and campaigns, for example.

Despite a few comments about the usefulness of PR, however, there is much bitterness about the volume of material journalists have to deal with and the increasingly important role it plays in their working lives. Nigel Hawkes, the Health Editor for *The Times* is particularly critical:

> There is much more PR these days. I get hundreds of press releases in my mailbox every day, and I get lots of calls from drugs companies offering to pay for me to go to this international conference or that convention. […] It's become a lot easier to use PR because of the technology. It's very easy and convenient, and as we're producing so many more stories, we use it.

He continues: "if you're not feeling too energetic it's almost as if you could surf this great tidal wave of PR all the way in to the shore and not come up with any original material all day".

There are noteworthy differences in the use of PR across different media platforms. Most broadcast and newspaper journalists claimed PR informed their work "sometimes", and some admitted it "often" influenced the news they produced. However the ratio is reversed for news agency journalists, with three quarters stating they "often" use public relations copy, and only one quarter saying they "sometimes" use it.

The Press Association's Industry Correspondent Alan Jones provided us with an insight into an agency journalist's exposure to and use of PR.

> PR has changed massively. Everybody seems to do it now. […] I've got dozens of contacts who work in PR […] some of them are really sound and have a lot of integrity, but there are so much consumer PR where the bottom line is placing the name of a product in a newspaper and they'll bombard people like me with surveys, reports, research, or studies, basically wrapped up as a story, but really it's just a blatant attempt to get a company name in the paper…and the trouble with being so busy and having to write so many stories in a day is that you don't always get time to research some of these things as thoroughly as we should. You know, the more blatant ones are obvious, […] but other times it's not so obvious.

He went on to give a typical example of the kind of public relations material he routinely writes up every day, and sees in print in the national newspapers the next. "I've virtually given up now", he says:

> Every day, stuff comes in to me that I think is ridiculous, I write it up and it ends up being a page lead or a splash in a national newspaper.

He concluded our interview on a note of despair about the role of PR in dominating the news agenda at the Press Association. “One day, I just thought OK, I’m not going to bother now. I’m just going to churn out everything that comes in. This nose for news value which we all think we’ve got, […] this great mystery about what makes a story. I don’t think it is a mystery now. The agenda has totally changed. All bets are off, really”.

5.4 The Use of Press Association and Other News Wire Copy

As we suggested, the use of news agency copy is clearly much more acceptable to journalists than the use of public relations material. The great majority of our press and broadcast respondents (30 out of 34) said they used Press Association or other news wire services “often”, and nobody claimed to never use the wires at all. There was also a general feeling that the Press Association’s services were used more frequently than hitherto, with 27 out of 34 press and broadcast journalists indicating that this was the case (and only one claiming agencies were used “less often”).

One member of the minority who claimed that usage of wires has remained the same stated, “Wire has always been a vital aid for daily journalism, a vital starting point for stories. Some overworked people just re-write wire but that too has always happened”. This pragmatic attitude is repeated by the *Guardian’s* Michael White, whose attitude to the use of the wires is that “often, it's good raw material in appropriate circumstances and – also important – it saves typing time”. Talking of wires and PR material, he went on to say, “you use them both as straw to make bricks”.

Some of the journalists we spoke to, however, see the increasing use of wire copy as yet more evidence that they have less time to do their jobs than they would like. This high-profile journalist for a national newspaper (who would only talk to us under the strict condition of anonymity) clearly sees the use of agency material fitting into a general picture of overwork in a context of resource-starved newsrooms:

> I love writing for the internet edition, I love writing a blog, I love three or four by-lines in the paper every day. But doing all of this all day every day, six days a week, is a nightmare (yes I work Sundays too). These working conditions also prevent me from going on the road to find stories, from conducting interviews and from going out to develop contacts. After a twelve-hour day of relentless writing – often just rehashing wire and TV material – I am done in.

Richard Garner, the Education Editor at the *Independent*, whilst stating that he does still have time to develop contacts and meet with sources face-to-face, also stressed the prevalence of agency copy:

> We try and get out to visit schools to do news features as often as possible, but I think in terms of general news reporting staffs are smaller and reporters are more office-bound and relying on PA and other agencies that

> send stuff in more than they used to in the past. For instance if there is a court case or a disciplinary involving a teacher, and it comes through on one of the wires, I'll get asked to do 300-400 words on that and I'll use the wires.

As our content analysis showed, levels of reliance on agency copy tended to vary. This was reflected in our responses from journalists. As one put it: "I think wire copy usage varies enormously. On the desk here we rarely use it at all except for picking up on stories we've not been alerted to elsewhere. I know some of our opposite numbers feel they have to use the wires to get their stories out on time".

Most journalists were aware that their colleagues are becoming increasingly dependent on them as a resource. Indeed, some journalists are frustrated with the amount that they are expected to reproduce without any real individual input or extra work. One section editor at a national daily told us that:

> We've always been reliant on wire copy, but we use it a hell of a lot more these days – it's quite common for us to cut and paste a story off PA, re-nose it a bit to mask where it's come from, and then put it out there as our own.

Another concern raised by one reporter was that increasing use of wire copy results in a more homogenised end-product across different news outlets.

> I worry that greater workload demands and overload of information, via wires, email, and the internet, etc, means it is harder to focus and investigate a story in depth. Some news editors we work to do not have time to read beyond news headlines and the 'urgent' stories on the wires and PA. [There is a] danger of too much 'generic' material meaning everyone ends up echoing the same platitudes.

5.5 The Decline of Independent Journalism

While we did find some pockets of optimism, there is no doubt that the picture painted by journalists overall is a depressing confirmation of our other findings. One change that received a more positive response was the development of new technology. As one journalist said simply: "Blogs and internet news sites have become more useful as sources of news stories".

And in one case this approval was effusive:

> The internet has made us all more accountable and therefore much more responsible. It has also made retrieving information so much less stressful than it used to be. It has truly empowered us. In my view, it has never been such an exciting, interesting and rewarding time to be a journalist.

Most, however, were far more equivocal about the role of technology:

> Technology is the biggest change. Mobiles are ubiquitous so there's rarely such a thing as being out of touch from the office. The internet is now an everyday, but suspect, source of information.

Another reporter on a national newspaper told us that:

> The Internet makes the job much easier because so many extra sources of information are instantly available and email makes it a simple matter to contact any source around the world and get a swift response. It also provides a greater challenge because journalists used to have privileged access to a lot of information and be able to present it to readers as new. Today, the readers can already access many original sources of information themselves so the journalist has to produce something which the reader cannot find on the Net - based on the journalist's own sources and contacts, background knowledge and interviewing skills.

Many, however, clearly felt that journalists were finding it harder get out of the office to meet that challenge, and that the internet was a lazy substitute for more independent, traditional journalistic practices. As one put it:

> Today's general news reporter, though, is far more office-based and reliant on PA and agency copy. I often think one of their best contacts is Google.

Or as a correspondent on a national newspaper told us:

> The ease of hoovering up material electronically has tended to seduce journalists away from the traditional footslogging door knocking vox-popping techniques.

The internet has, in this sense, contributed to an information overload that makes the journalists' job more difficult. This point was made by an agency journalist:

> The internet and email has clearly made a massive difference to the way we work, speeding up production of copy but perhaps making stories less in-depth. My father was a journalist for Reuters for 25 years and the working conditions were completely different. Stories would take much longer to put together, but when they were, they were more likely to be accurate and close to the truth. Even if we fight to get past it, it's very hard to avoid the spin agenda nowadays!

A foreign correspondent for broadcast news told a similar story of being increasingly desk bound:

> Sadly, at the ripe old age of 39, I believe the glory days of foreign news are now long behind us. Maybe technology and access to the wires makes us quicker off the mark, but usually it simply chains us to our desks and makes us spout wire copy for broadcast, as opposed to being given the time and freedom to go and find out stories for ourselves.

Indeed, the over-riding impression from journalistic accounts of changes in the newsroom confirms the data presented in Section 1, in which we see journalists chained to their desks as they are required to produce increasing amounts of copy with a decreasing proportion of independent journalism: Unequivocally, journalism has become a desk-based job.

> The job is far more office-based, with news desks often lacking the resources to send reporters out on stories.

> I suspect that the answer involves spending more time in the office than previously.
>
> The most significant change to working as an agency journalist is the need to multi-task. Not only are we expected to file news stories for the national and regional wire but increasingly we are also expected to take our own photographs and video footage. I can only imagine the importance of video footage for internet and mobile phone use will become more important and more demanding in the future. This has a positive impact on working conditions in the sense you are learning new techniques and the company is investing in new technology. However, the negative aspects are an increased workload and less focus on writing (the reason I became a journalist in the first place).

And for some, this increase in workload is clearly perceived as being accompanied by, if not responsible for, the subsequent decline in standards:

> When I started in the NY bureau five years ago we were a team of five, three journalists, a researcher and a receptionist. Now I work alone, from home as we have no budget for an office. I have no holiday cover, no lieu day cover, no sick cover.
>
> While covering the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, I noticed a real difference to the way we covered Kosovo or Chechnya. In Kosovo and Chechnya, I had the freedom to disappear for days on end, to research and find news stories. By Afghanistan and Iraq, my bosses could ring on the satphone every hour of the day or night, and by then we were 'chained' to satellite dishes for up to 18 hours a day, regurgitating wires. Rooftop journalism does indeed exist, to the detriment of real news. When not regurgitating wires, I was occasionally able to film first-hand stories – but back in London, most TV bulletin editors preferred to receive a 'wrap' of the agency pictures they had already seen – preferring those to taking a chance on the work of their own staff. This is not only infuriating but deeply stupid.

While there may be reasons for not taking some of these accounts entirely at face value, what is alarming, for us, is that they tend to confirm the many forms of analysis presented in this report.

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APPENDIX: PROFITABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION FOR INDIVIDUAL UK NEWSPAPER COMPANIES.

Express Newspapers Ltd.
(*Daily Express, Sunday Express, Daily Star, Daily Star Sunday*)

Year	Pre-tax profits (000s)	Turnover (000s)	Profit Margin (%)	Employees	Production (Printing)	Editorial	Sales and Distribution	Admin
2004	-3,625	308,980	-1.17	739		532	144	63
2003	-7,400	275,349	-2.69	688		500	136	52
2002	408	247,356	0.16	653		458	142	53
2001	12,564	249,923	5.03	706		502	152	52
2000	10,951	252,381	4.34	909		623	216	70
1999	15,057	255,651	5.89	957		627	239	91
1998	7,874	268,058	2.94	997		694	216	87
1997	15,332	270,182	5.67	1092		766	232	94
1996	17,776	295,306	6.02	1457		968	308	181
1995	10,989	310,147	3.54	1692				
1994	31,814	304,009	10.46	1622				
1993	27,719	300,373	9.23	1580				
1992	35,722	295,303	13	1554				
1991	25,009	280,963	8.9	1545				
1990	26,592	267,720	9.93	1702				
1989	23,201	266,514	8.71	2842				
1988	30,867	284,487	10.85	4020				
1987	30,444	278,585	10.9	4518				
1986	2,572	420,620	0.6	5228				
1985	20,489	279,131	7.3	6746	3739	956	1082	969

1986 Large turnover explained by fact that the figures include accounts for 1.5 years. The Annual report also includes details of a ‘manpower reduction plan’ alongside the introduction of new printing technology. This plan cost £75,758,350.

1987 Restructuring of the company's printing facilities at a cost of £105, 769,038.
1989 Further restructuring costs of £81,690,657.
1991 Acquisition of *Daily Star*, *Scottish Express*, and *Sunday Express*.
1996 New restructuring programme begins.
1997 3 of the company's printing concerns sold off.
1998 Cost of restructuring listed under 'Exceptional Items' at a cost of £6,711,489.
2000 Company sold to Northern and Shell (Desmond), and new restructuring programme introduced to carry on into 2001.
2002 Launch of *Daily Star Sunday*.
2003 £33.7 million in chairman's 'emoluments' and 'pension contributions' are paid.
2004 Directors pleased with higher turnover and increased advertising revenue despite losses. £37.3 million in chairman's 'emoluments' and 'pension contributions' are paid.

The Financial Times Ltd.
(*Financial Times*)

Year	Pre-tax profits (000s)	Turnover (000s)	Profit Margin (%)	Employees	Production	Admin and distribution
2004	996	195,696	0.51	1131	849	282
2003	-31,992	193,519	-16.53	1199	848	351
2002	516	185,926	0.28	916	704	212
2001	17,325	232,774	7.44	994	758	236
2000	72,558	273,032	26.57	992	757	235
1999	58,064	213,453	27.2	838	663	175
1998	47,689	176,202	27.06	780	629	151
1997	34,391	147,513	23.31	771	604	167
1996	7,641	131,409	5.81	900	686	214
1995	-24,401	124,345	-19.62	1095	841	254
1994	20,100	118,483	16.96	892	640	252
1993	-6,206	108,695	-5.71	856	613	243
1992	-855	103,719	-0.82	881	641	240
1991	-5.073	102,708	-4.94	905	652	253
1990	11,873	116,492	10.19	899	649	250
1989	20,439	115,036	17.77	871		
1988	23,154	106,861	21.67	869		
1987	21,437	103,875	20.64	822		
1986	23,087	98,482	23.44	800		
1985	14,465	78,825	18.35	795		

1986 Relocation of printing concerns and rationalisation post-Wapping.

1987 Rationalisation continues.
1990 £9 million dividend paid out to shareholders.
1995 Commenced printing in Sweden, Los Angeles, Leeds, and Madrid.
1996 Transferred primary printing facility in East India Docks to 3rd party printers in Leeds.
1998 Halt in the expansion of company's global production base, and the start of these international ventures starting to show a return.
2001 Large dividend (£45,020,000) paid out to shareholders.
2003 Financial Times internet businesses (online news and recruitment businesses) were transferred to the company at the start of the year accounting for a rise in staff levels. These acquisitions cost £80,089,000, and could account for the drop in profits. A large interim dividend of £28,284,000 was paid out.

Mirror Group Newspapers Ltd, changes to MGN Ltd in 1991
(*Daily Mirror*, *Sunday Mirror*, *People*)

Year	Pre-tax profits (000s)	Turnover (000s)	Profit margin (%)	Employees	Sales, distribution, and admin	Production and editorial
2004*	91,744	426,723	21.50	1149	---	---
2003	70,316	401,358	17.52	1326	517	809
2002	55,906	397,875	14.05	1330	533	797
2001	63,081	420,253	15.01	1325	534	791
2000	24,961	425,750	5.87	1822	931	891
1999	50,397	418,745	12.04	1425	839	586
1998	62,118	407,352	15.25	1259	778	481
1997	49,999	408,681	12.23	1333	882	451
1996	65,029	416, 062	15.63	1296	835	461
1995	56,535	400,967	15	1149	580	569
1994	135,468	368,455	36.77	1204	629	575
1993	51,437	384,455	13.38	1309	597	712
1992	-51,023	377,855	-13.5	1481	686	795
1991	-285,372	257,398	-110.87	1472	638	834
1990	57,811	337,356	17.1	1522	575	947
1989	77,030	316,356	24.3	1360	397	963
1988	52,472	287,217	18.2	943	345	598
1987	23,318	256,634	9	842	300	524
1986	15,979	236,287	6.8	765	251	514
1985	18,513	233,068	7.9	6116	1607	4509

The post-Maxwell annual reports yield very little information. For example, there is hardly ever anything but the most perfunctory explanatory detail in the director's comments at the beginning of each report.

1984 Robert Maxwell acquires Mirror Group Newspapers from Reed International Plc.

1985 Rationalisation leading to 'substantial savings in production costs'. Many print staff were transferred to a related subsidiary company, and some were made redundant.

1986 Distribution changed from rail to road. *Sporting Life* and *Sporting Life Weekender* sold to related subsidiary company.

1991 Records no longer filed under the name Mirror Group Newspapers Ltd, but instead a new company (MGN Ltd) is formed. The report for this year states that, 'after the death of Robert Maxwell it became clear that there had been significant misappropriation of assets from the Mirror Group Newspapers Plc pension schemes'. Significant losses made due to transactions with Maxwell companies that had since passed into administration.

1999 Merger of Trinity Plc and Mirror Group Plc.

News Group Newspapers.
(*News of the World*, *Sun*)

Year	Pre-tax profits (000s)	Turnover (000s)	Profit Margin (%)	Employees
2004	147,169	639,320	23.02	485
2003	93,581	557,441	16.79	529
2002	139,153	571,157	24,36	563
2001	104,312	561,575	18.57	478
2000	97,250	521,756	18.64	524
1999	64,720	488,848	13.24	438
1998	76,863	483,475	15.9	415
1997	69,166	479,893	14.41	439
1996	43,234	463,479	9.33	413
1995	78,884	396,315	19.9	417
1994	38,998	346,431	11.26	356
1993	78,252	363,733	21.51	335
1992	87,964	375,598	23.42	366
1991	63,286	329,965	19.18	382
1990	68,097	318,475	21.38	386
1989	84,090	334,183	25.16	381
1988	124,125	293,818	42.25	425
1987	34,093	223,592	15.25	Start:1356
				End: 420
1986	16,237	232,083	7	3881
1985	28,688	222,966	12.87	5040

1985 Bought new equipment for new printing plant in Tower Hamlets at a price of £33,565,678. See Appendix 6.

1986 Sacking of print workers after strike explains drop in employees. See Appendix 7.

1987 End of the pickets.

Telegraph Group Ltd

(*Daily Telegraph*, *Sunday Telegraph*, *telegraph.co.uk* and *Weekly Telegraph*.)

Year	Pre-tax Profit (000s)	Turnover (000s)	Profit margin (%)	Employees	Editorial Staff
2004	19,208	313,437	6.13	1,158	599
2003	-109,677	305,388	-35.91	46	14
2002	39,660	310,204	12.79	38	10
2001	30,307	327,646	9.25	36	9
2000	75,622	363,583	20.80	32	10
1999	51,703	333,880	15.49	33	10
1998	37,024	326,209	11.35	32	10
1997	13,143	293,593	4.48	28	10
1996	41,391	282,409	14.66	29	12
1995	35,472	254,826	13.92	1,059	558
1994	45,042	252,076	17.87	1,075	552
1993	60,183	255,701	23.54	1,054	540
1992	44,357	237,194	18.70	1,035	535
1991	40,544	219,120	18.50	1,019	523
1990	38,527	222,069	17.35	1,017	499
1989	40,100	234,097	17.13	1,363	554
1988	29,149	210,145	13.87	1,837	521
1987	578	180,493	0.32	2,757	450
1986	-8,932	156,253	-5.72	3,629	597
1985	-969	144,912	-0.67	3,392	616

1985 The main reason for the losses over the following few years was an extraordinary payment of £102 million to be paid for the 'replanting' of printing operations in London and Manchester (new equipment and premises). The first payment was made in 1984, and subsequent payments followed up until 1987. Because of the restructuring, redundancy payouts, the cost of workers' resistance to job losses in Manchester, and a slump in advertising revenue in a competitive market, and despite the sell-off of shares in Reuters, large losses were suffered. According to the annual report of the chairman Lord Hartwell, the company came close to 'disaster'. Conrad Black acquired substantial shares in the company.

1986 New printing plants, significantly reduced staff, and a new London office (away from Fleet Street) meant the 'end of the new beginning for The Daily Telegraph Plc' according to the chairman Lord Hartwell. The cost of the changeover was high, offset again by small profit from the sale of more Reuters shares. Hollinger Inc. (Conrad Black's company) became a 57.8% shareholder.

1987 Conrad Black became new chairman of the company (with Hollinger Inc. owning 70% of shares). There were further redundancies on a 'large scale' mainly in the printing concerns (750 in production, maintenance, and clerical departments, and a further 94 with the

closure of the Manchester printing plant). The company acquired the *Spectator*.

1988 Profits after restructuring started to show.

1989 Company previously called The Daily Telegraph Plc in 1989 became "The Telegraph Plc.

1993 Yet another move of printing facilities: from South Quay (on the Isle of Dogs) to Canary Wharf.

1994 Price wars result in a newspaper price-cut, and a smaller pre-tax profit. The *Daily Telegraph* became the first UK paper to publish content on the internet.

1995 Company changes name from The Telegraph Plc to Telegraph Group Ltd, at which point the majority of staff engaged in publication are employed by a subsidiary called Telegraph Publishing Ltd. For information concerning this company see following table.

1996 Further investment in the website makes the *Electronic Telegraph* the busiest European site on the Web. Large dividend (£44,783,000) paid out to shareholders.

1997 From this year on the company stopped publishing large, detailed, glossy annual reports, and there is very little useful information to be got compared with previous years under Conrad Black.

2000 Conrad Black owns over 90% of shares. £18 million in dividends paid out.

2003 On November 17th 2003 Black announced he would step down as CEO of Hollinger International. The move followed findings of a special committee that Black and other senior Hollinger executives received $32.15 million in unauthorized payments.

2004 The Barclay brothers purchased Hollinger, and with it the *Telegraph*, for around £665m in late June 2004.

Telegraph Publishing Limited

Year	Pre-tax Profit (000s)	Turnover (000s)	Profit margin (%)	Employees	Editorial Staff	Production	Sales, Distrib, & Admin
2003				1148	546	66	536
2002				1165	541	68	556
2001				1177	573	80	524
2000				1193	602	82	509
1999				1116	552	50	514
1998				1063	530	53	480
1997				1072	536	54	482
1996				1033	524	55	454

The company reports for Telegraph Publishing Ltd are very bare, and yield no information on profit and loss, but they do break down the employment figures for the company in quite a detailed way.

Guardian Newspapers Limited

(*Guardian*, *Observer* and *Guardian Unlimited*.)

Year	Pre-tax profits (000s)	Turnover (000s)	Profit Margin (%)	Employees	Production staff
2004	718	224,624	0.32	1,429	843
2003	-6,437	216,267	-2.98	1,392	809
2002	-18,960	208,547	-9.09	1,436	803
2001	1,084	216,275	0.50	1,309	741
2000	255	200,643	0.13	1,196	701
1999	-2,918	175,991	-1.66	1,030	532
1998	1,186	163,689	0.72	975	522
1997	-11,375	145,011	-7.84	941	511
1996	-13,400	135,584	-9.88	931	527
1995	-8,217	131,717	-6.24	930	550
1994	-15,204	118,010	-12.88	931	568
1993	-4,118	78,929	-5.22	734	450
1992	-5,986	72,172	-8.29	698	434
1991	-7,928	72,165	-10.99	725	442

The goals of the Scott Trust allow them more leeway than a commercially-driven newspaper and consequently their financial performance is often poor. This alone does not account for some of the very heavy losses reported in our sample time-frame, but unfortunately neither do the rather information-sparse annual reports.

1985-90 The company annual reports for these years were devoid of useful information. They state that 'all transactions relating to the activity of the company have been recorded in the books of the holding company'. The holding company is 'The Guardian and Manchester Evening News Plc', the forerunner of 'The Guardian Media Group Plc'. The information included in these reports contains data about a range of publications and concerns that are irrelevant to our project and not comparable with the data for 1991-2004 that we have for 'Guardian Newspapers Ltd'. 1991 – Manchester printing facility moved from Deansgate to Trafford Park, and £1,594,000 spent on severance payments.

1991 Manchester printing facility moved from Deansgate to Trafford Park. Costs included £1,594,000 in severance payments.

1993 The *Observer* acquired by Guardian Newspapers Ltd.

1994 Exceptional redundancy costs of £5,568,000.

1999 Launch of *Guardian Unlimited*.

Independent News and Media Ltd (2002-)

(*Independent* and *Independent on Sunday*.)

Year	Pre-tax profits (000s)	Turnover (000s)	Profit Margin (%)	Employees	Editorial staff
2004	2,392	139,078	1.72	1,137	729
2003	23,840	149,117	15.99	1,364	888

2002	2,874	115,793	2.48	1058	650
2001	-15,848	75,172	-21.08	609	372
2000	-9,958	74,543	-13.36	483	306
1999	-12,926	68,367	-18.91	448	300
1998	-22,912	65,265	-35.11	440	270
1997	-15,147	67,125	-22.57	249	234
1996	-14,717	65,641	-22.42	286	280
1995	-19,505	58,155	-33.54	351	342
1994	-50,781	84,617	-60.01	537	355
1993	-486	81,360	-0.60	623	382
1992	28	81,829	0.03	597	373
1991	-10,340	79,445	-13.02	639	386
1990	-7,859	77,067	-10.20	616	370
1989	3,252	61,938	5.25	485	277
1988	-1,563	44,056	-3.55	425	238
1987	-9,466	27,756	-34.10	368	222
1986		-3,420		78	52

1986 Launch of the *Independent*.

1989 In its third full year the *Independent* reached a circulation of 418,000 (a high to which it has not yet returned). Advertising revenue was 60% higher than in the previous year.

1990 *Independent on Sunday* launched (at a cost of £3,852,000), but did not get as many readers as was hoped for in the context of a 'deep recession' in the advertising industry.

1991 Further recession led to poor advertising revenue. The daily and Sunday titles were integrated to cut costs (the exceptional cost of redundancies was £1,900,000).

1993-95 A price war waged in a very competitive market (the weekly price dropped by 20p), and advertising revenue continued to be very poor.

1994 Close links with Mirror Group News forged when they acquired one third of Newspaper Publishing Ltd shares. The *Independent* moved to Canary Wharf, where it shared a range of facilities and services with MGN newspapers. Exceptional costs of this 'reorganisation' (including redundancy payoffs) came to £24,939,000.

1995 In March 1995 Newspaper Publishing Ltd, the company that owned and set up the *Independent,* was restructured, splitting the shareholding into Independent News & Media (43%), MGN (43%), and Prisa (the company that published *El Pais*, 12%).

1996 Another refinancing ended up with MGN and Independent Newspapers Plc both owning 46% of shares. Job cuts explained by 'further rationalisation of costs'.

1997 The Newspaper Publishing Ltd name becomes defunct, and Independent Newspaper UK Ltd become sole shareholders (a subsidiary of Irish media baron Tony O'Reilly's Independent News and Media company). More job cuts.

1998 Average weekly editorial staff numbers increase from 234 to 270, and admin staff numbers go up from 15 to 170. The extra admin staff are attributable to the split with the Mirror Group, which the company had previously paid for the 'provision of printing, distribution and management services'.

1999 Editorial staff numbers were 'increased by 11% over 1999 underlining the continued commitment to editorial excellence' of the new owners.

2000 Move to new premises in Docklands. 'Cost benefits' achieved through 'the centralisation of departments and activities for several of the UK companies'. 'IT, Production, Purchasing, and Facilities Management have all been consolidated. In addition, sharing of editorial material and resources across the UK companies has increased. More centralisation is planned with Finance, Group Sports Publishing and Group Newsprint Buying all being targeted in 2001'.

2001 Increased consolidation across UK companies. The company 'bought' Independent Newspapers (Regionals) Ltd, and Independent Educational Publishing Ltd from within the parent company, increasing the staff numbers on the payroll.

2002 The company's name is changed to Independent News and Media Ltd, and it bought Belfast Telegraph Newspapers Ltd (from Trinity Mirror), and Independent Magazines (UK) Ltd..

2003 The *Independent* switched from broadsheet to tabloid format. Eight London regional titles are sold to the media company Newsquest.

Times Newspapers Ltd

(*Times*, *Sunday Times, TLS, TES,* and *THES*.)

Year	Pre-tax profits (000s)	Turnover (000s)	Profit Margin (%)	Employees
2004	-40,061	400,641	-10.00	683
2003	-28,650	377,910	-7.58	591
2002	-16,318	364,085	-4.48	499
2001	19,210	412,502	4.66	519
2000	22,148	400,901	5.52	597
1999	22,556	367,729	6.13	489
1998	17,074	325,608	5.24	473
1997	14,757	295,327	5.00	461
1996	-12,379	251,062	-4.93	464
1995	-7,153	211,607	-3.38	451
1994	17,604	198,939	8.85	436
1993	18,657	188,325	9.91	444
1992	-1,649	172,132	-0.96	448
1991	9,028	200,654	4.50	446
1990	53,417	223,077	23.95	420
1989	60,834	243,444	24.99	434
1988	20,558	203,162	10.12	524
1987	10,810	170,539	6.34	513
1986	-27,512	164,013	-16.77	904
1985	6,943	154,605	4.49	3,691

1986 – Strike, dismissal of workers, transfer to Wapping. The cost of the transfer was £38,814,000.

Associated Newspapers Ltd

(*Daily Mail*, *Mail on Sunday*, *Evening Standard*, *Ireland on Sunday* and *Metro*.)

Year	Pre-tax profits (000s)	Turnover (000s)	Profit Margin (%)	Employees
2004	54,648	806,606	6.78	2,260
2003	52,316	752,742	6.95	2,284
2002	202,018	765,520	26.39	2,328
2001	39,704	765,438	5.19	2,328
2000	105,367	755,320	13.95	2,348
1999	91,925	710,952	12.93	2,131
1998	75,201	631,416	11.91	2,028
1997	58,008	576,647	10.06	2,032
1996	33,356	524,080	6.36	2,012
1995	12,266	449,878	2.73	2,185
1994	46,000	420,077	10.95	2,133
1993	38,350	403,690	9.50	2,158
1992	17,816	388,415	4.59	2,191
1991	-4,212	291,978	-1.44	1,338
1990	-31,972	273,933	-11.67	1,531
1989	-68,213	251,717	-27.10	1,869
1988	-25,505	232,521	-10.97	3,530
1987	-24,226	201,308	-12.03	4,015
1986	-18,886	192,433	-9.81	4,415
1985	-6,176	175,782	-3.51	4,581

Historical employee breakdowns are unavailable, but we were able to obtain information on staff in employment in 2005. The types of employees listed include: administration, distribution, sales, building service, health/safety/medical, and editorial. The figure breaks down like this:

Administration	358
Distribution	96
Sales	517
Editorial	1143
Building services	13
Management	25
Health/safety/medical	4

1986	Post-Wapping restructuring. £12.8 million paid out for redundancies.
1987	Spent £38,237,000 on buildings and technology for a new plant in Rotherhithe.
1988	A further £71,621,000 was spent on the Rotherhithe plant and new offices in Kensington, as well as £26,493,000 on redundancies.
1989	A further £41,520,000 was spent on the new editorial and production sites, and an additional £56,716,000 on redundancies.
1990	Reorganisation and redundancy costs now down to £7,653,000.
1991	The Evening Standard Company was bought for £12,185,566, which explains some of the rise in staff figures.
1998	Approximately £4,500,000 spent in preparation for the millennium bug.
1999	*Metro* launched, and money invested in online content.
2001	Continued investment in online content. *Femail* internet portal launched.

ENDNOTES

[1] Because of different accounting practices between the national newspaper companies, it has not always been possible to include an average number of editorial employees for every firm in these calculations.
[2] Between 1985 and 2004 there are no editorial staff figures for Associated Newspapers Ltd included in the average.
[3] Between 1986 and 1995 there are no editorial staff figures for Express Newspapers Ltd included in the average.
[4] Between the years of 1985 and 1990 there are no figures for Guardian Newspapers Ltd included in calculations for any of the average figures.
[5] As well as not including numbers for Guardian Newspapers Ltd this figure could not include a breakdown number of editorial staff for Express Newspapers, The Financial Times Ltd, or Associated Newspapers.
[6] As well as not including numbers for Guardian Newspapers Ltd this figure could not include a breakdown number of editorial staff for Express Newspapers, The Financial Times Ltd, or Associated Newspapers.
[7] This average figure does not include Guardian Newspapers Ltd this figure could not include a breakdown number of editorial staff for Express Newspapers, The Financial Times Ltd, Associated Newspapers, or News Group Newspapers.
[8] In addition to this year not including figures for Guardian Newspapers Ltd, there are no figures included for the Newspaper Publishing Ltd, which published the *Independent*, as although the company came into existence during this year it did not start printing the newspaper until 1987.
[9] This average figure does not include Guardian Newspapers Ltd this figure could not include a breakdown number of editorial staff for Express Newspapers, The Financial Times Ltd, Associated Newspapers, News Group Newspapers, or Times Newspapers.
[10] This year does not include data for Guardian Newspapers Ltd or Newspaper Publishing Ltd (the *Independent* was not set up until 1986).
[11] Only the Telegraph Group and Express News Ltd provide information on numbers of editorial staff for this year. Other companies which provide separate staff figure breakdowns give one figure for editorial and production staff, making it impossible to compare with later figures which do not include production staff.
[12] Between the years of 1985 and 1990 there are no figures for Guardian Newspapers Ltd included in calculations for any of the average figures.
[13] In addition to this year not including figures for Guardian Newspapers Ltd, there are no figures included for the Newspaper Publishing Ltd, which published the *Independent*, as although the company came into existence during this year it did not start printing the newspaper until 1987.
[14] This year does not include data for Guardian Newspapers Ltd or Newspaper Publishing Ltd (the *Independent* was not set up until 1986).
[15] The first numbers for editorial staff we have at the *Sun* are for 1987, as pre-Wapping the annual accounts include print and editorial employees in the same category.
[16] These were opinion pieces that were in the domestic news sections. We did not include op/ed sections in the analysis.