Exploring the Challenges Faced by UK Local News Production by Mainstream and Nonmainstream Media in a Local News Oasis

Andrew John Nelmes

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Abstract

Due to falling audiences and advertising revenues local journalism is in crisis, both in its economic viability and its ability to fulfil its public interest and community sustaining goals and aspirations, as such news deserts and news black holes have drawn attention from scholars and policy makers. In contrast, the news ecosystem in Bristol, one of the UK's largest cities and one with entrenched social and economic divisions, has been called a news oasis because of the diversity, variety and plurality of its media, ranging from nationally owned traditional news organisations and the publicly owned BBC, to independent community-focused initiatives. This thesis examines the contributions of established news media and emergent alternatives to citizenship and democracy in meeting the critical information needs of the various communities in the city. The theoretical method adopted by this thesis is the media power lens which combines political economy, cultural studies and sociological approaches, which, along with Bourdieu's field theory and Putnam's ideas around bridging and bonding social capital, give an insight into relations between the local media and local power structures.

Through a content analysis and interviews with local news workers this thesis compares the journalism produced by the local media organisations, and highlights the knowledge gap in the city due to the unequal distribution of socio-political knowledge along socioeconomic lines, which contributes to falling democratic participation and the spreading of misinformation.

This research demonstrates a concern with how local journalism can undermine community cohesion, journalistic authority and trust through alienating and erasing the marginalised from the public sphere and how this is due, in part, to newsroom practices such as networked copy sharing, relying on non-local news and the pressure to maximise page views, which are hallmarks of current revenue maximising strategies by the nationally owned local outlets.

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This project is the product of years of hard work—the sheer depth of knowledge needed to understand local journalism and cities is staggering but, the journey has been ultimately rewarding—and, while I initially undertook the PhD fully expecting (or hoping) to be able to devote the time to uninterrupted study and research, life isn't like that, and events have a nasty habit of disrupting plans. So, I must especially thank two people who helped me negotiate the bumps I encountered, one inside the university, and one outside. Helen Szewczyk, as I'm sure so many PhD students have found, is a reassuring source of good humour, discretion, advice and patience, and helped me get extensions when a combination of adverse circumstances meant that keeping to deadline would be impossible. The other person for whom thanks is too small a word is my sister Liz, who, along with my brother-in-law Alan and niece Sophie (and the cats), opened their home to me and gave me a place to study, when house moving plans fell through, and while we waited out the subsequent global pandemic ("it was just one thing after another!"). Thanks also to my nephew Jasper, for showing an interest in my work.

The impetus for my research came from many years of working in local media and seeing, with increasing despondency, its decline. Meeting and interviewing a group of Bristol's finest journalists was a pleasure and cause for feeling that all is not lost.

A tip of the hat should go to the Colston statue protesters and Mayor Marvin Rees, with his tireless reminders that his life in Bristol has always been experienced through “the prism of race and class”, for providing the key to make sense of the city and its various communities.

I want to dedicate this thesis to my parents Valerie and John, who are no longer with us but to whom I owe so much—I couldn’t have wished for a better start in life, and I miss them every day.

Chapter 1: Introducing an In-Depth Analysis of Local Journalism

"Local" newspapers earned that name because they were locally owned, locally produced, employed local people as journalists, reported local concerns of consequence and were read by local people.

(Franklin, 2006b, p. 12)

"We are collectively responsible for the way we understand our city. Politicians are responsible, but so is the way we craft our journalism and choose what stories we tell about ourselves. The city belongs to all of us."—Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol 2016 to 2024, the day after the statue of slave trader and philanthropist Edward Colston was pulled down in Bristol city centre by hundreds of Black Lives Matter demonstrators in June 2020.

(BBC Points West, 2020)

Irresponsible journalism results from commercial pressures that privilege particular types of news coverage over others, not the malfeasance of a few bad journalists or news organisations ... in the end, commercial logics, and, specifically, the need to maximise profits via advertising revenue over all other concerns, drives contemporary digital journalism. Ultimately the commercial nature of our media system enables and amplifies misinformation.

(Pickard, 2020, p. 134)

Capitalism and political power have long required forms of obfuscation to conceal the grim reality of inequality and uneven labour relations that they create. But it is crucial to understand that they also attack our means of learning about those systems, attribute the problems they generate to other causes, and use cultural means to incorporate people into their invisibility or make themselves more appealing.

(Gilroy-Ware 2020, p. 75)

> To be quite honest, I don't see any point in studying media unless one does so within a moral or ethical context ... in thinking about the media from a humanistic point of view, one must take into account the obvious fact that people will have different ideas about what is good for them and bad for them.
>
> (Postman, 2000, pp. 11-12)

1.1 Researching a News Oasis—Aims and Objectives

1.1.1 Thesis Subject

This thesis is an in-depth, geographically bounded investigation into the diverse and varied news ecosystem (Anderson, 2010, 2013a, 2016a; Local News Lab, n.d.) in one of the United Kingdom's largest cities, Bristol, in South West England. The diversity variety and plurality[1] (Picard & Pickard, 2017) of the local media have led to the city being called a "news oasis" (Kersley, 2022l; Mitchell et al., 2023; Public Interest News Foundation, 2023; Sharman, 2023g), and, in some ways this makes the city and its news organisations outliers in current journalism research, with its predominant *narrative of decline* and focus on the democratic, economic, civic, social and professional crises in the media, nationally and internationally. These, recent and long-term, problems are discussed in detail throughout this thesis, but the research here concentrates on two specialised aspects of journalism—reporting on a large urban area with deep social and economic divisions, by large local media organisations; and the efficacy of smaller community-focused journalism in approaching the same challenges within the city-wide news ecosystem—with a view to adding to the smaller body of academic work which is characterised by a *narrative of reinvention*.

1 *Pluralism* refers to the range of ideas and views available in a media system, *variety* to the mix of genres and types of media content, and *diversity* to difference in characteristics and form (Pickard, 2020, p. 120). McAllister and Proffitt (2020) contend that a diversity of owners and ownership structures is also "democratically healthy" (p. 469). For Ofcom (2022c) the UK's media plurality regime "means we all have the opportunity to access a wide range of views from a variety of sources, and that no one media owner or voice has too much influence over public opinion and the political agenda" (p. 1).

Bristol is host to legacy national conglomerates and institutions, such as the BBC, (referred to as *mainstream* in this thesis—I discuss these labels below) as well as emerging one-man/woman hyperlocal[2] operations, and other types of alternative, independent media displaying varying degrees of professional and organisational sophistication, ambition and orientation (Carlson & Usher, 2016; Harte et al., 2016, 2017, 2019; Usher, 2017) (referred to as *nonmainstream*). There are also two BBC-funded Local Democracy Reporter Scheme (LDRS) reporters who provide public interest news copy for most of the local media. The number of journalists and news organisations in the city make it an important test bed for studying the strengths and weaknesses of mainstream and nonmainstream media in their competition for audience attention and trust in a closed system. According to Hatcher (2012) "if anything, in the presently changing media landscape, large media are experiencing a rapid decline of power and influence, while community media are gaining recognition" (p. 146). With this in mind the research aimed to compare the various organisations in their attempts to fulfil journalism's normative aspirations, as identified by McNair (2009)—watchdog; disseminator of information; voice of the citizens; and community champion. These are important to journalistic authority (Carlson, 2017) and the gatekeeping function (Vos, 2009) essential to the public sphere (Habermas, 1989) and a democratically engaged citizenry (Lewis, 2006). This thesis compares coverage of public interest and community news, and local focus, as well as the professional discourses of people working for the various news organisations.

For Friedland (2012), metropolitan journalism currently presents the biggest challenge for journalism, with the central problem being the "rapidly changing structure of community itself" (p. 151), where identification with, and allegiance to, places is losing ground to a focus on interests beyond geographical boundaries, thanks to the globally networked nature of digital communications, as discussed below. This presents a problem for local media, as they profess to cater for an imagined community (Anderson, 1991)—"a" single community (Friedland, op. cit., p. 151) of local citizens seeking

2 As discussed in more detail below, I use the term "hyperlocal" in two distinct ways, organisationally and geographically. This thesis utilises Lin and Song's (2006) Ladder of Localness, with multiple geographic levels. The "hyperlocal" level is the smallest in area and refers to wards, housing estates or streets, within cities, where communities show socio-demographic and cultural differentiation through accents, customs, kinship structures, stereotyped images, ethnicities, deprivation indices and voter turnout, for example. The term "local" is used for cities, towns and adjacent regions but is also a catch-all term for these smaller communities. Organisationally, "hyperlocal", or more frequently "nonmainstream", is used to refer to *independent* media which operate at both (or either) a city-wide and hyperlocal level.

reassurance that they live in the midst of like-minded folk, but, by and large, never meeting them face to face.

The media also have to contend with the size, complexity, and social heterogeneity of cities, in which social solidarity becomes strained (Wirth, 1938)—as Friedland (op. cit.) notes, the urban landscape is often seen as a "patchwork of smaller communities". Like cities everywhere, marginalised communities in Bristol are marked by ethnic diversity, profound inequality and place-based stigmatisation, and their absence or inclusion, and the ways they are represented, by the local media also forms an important part of this thesis. This point is necessary for understanding another distinction between the varieties of local journalism in the city—that some outlets (all the mainstream ones and some nonmainstream) cover the whole city, and others (nonmainstream, but not all the nonmainstream outlets in the sample) purposefully restrict their coverage and distribution to smaller communities. In effect, the former create communication and information channels between disparate, and otherwise isolated, communities; while the latter are inward looking, and bolster in-group self-esteem in the face of territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant, 2007, 2008, 2014; Wacquant et al., 2014) and negative geographic reputations (Harte et al., 2019), by giving the community a stronger, positive sense of itself (Hatcher, 2012, p. 140). This fits Putnam's (2000) description of two types of social capital—*bridging* (or inclusive) and *bonding* (or exclusive) (p. 22). The latter "is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilising solidarity" (there are positive and negative aspects to this, as there is always the danger of creating populist, isolationist entrenchment and out-group antagonism), whereas the former "are better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion" (ibid.). The city-wide media therefore exhibit the "strength of weak ties" (Granovetter, 1973), the positive effect of coming into contact with the previously unfamiliar, which provides opportunities and resources for advancement, rather than stasis. A similar distinction can be made between the two broad categories of journalistic content under review—public interest news gives people information about things they do not know with a view to making an important contribution to democratic engagement; whereas community news reinforces commonly held perceptions and strengthens already existing bonds.

A personal and professional interest formed the basis of this research. I have worked as a local print journalist (news and features writer, court reporter, local government correspondent, subeditor, production editor, chief subeditor and deputy editor) for both mainstream (Reach newspapers in the region and national public-sector-focused magazines) and nonmainstream media (*The Big Issue in the South West*) in Bristol and other towns and cities in southern England—with first-hand experience of the

precarious and changing nature of journalism, through having to contend with increasing workloads, shrinking newsrooms, technological change, redundancy and freelancing. I also have a strongly felt commitment to the functioning of local democracy and tackling inequality in society, as well as a desire to see a sustainable future for local news workers and news organisations. I therefore carried out this research in the spirit of Zelizer's (2009) injunction that "inquiry ... is not just an intellectual act but a social one too" (p. 31) and hope that this thesis will contribute to a fuller understanding of the pressures faced by local journalism, in its many guises, and point to possible solutions.

1.1.2 Narratives of Decline and Reinvention

Throughout this thesis I refer to Blumler's (2010) "two-legged crisis" of journalism as a lens through which to understand the current journalistic landscape, its problems and the need to embrace opportunities for change. In Blumler's view, the two aspects of the crisis are, firstly, a long-term and gradual failure of journalism to fulfil its normative aspirations, which threatens its relationship with its *audience*; and, secondly, a more recent collapse of a *sustainable business model*. Nielsen (2016b) also adds a *professional* crisis as news workers adapt to the demands of a changing news landscape. All three aspects are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 but here I consider briefly the narratives of decline and reinvention in current journalism studies research.

The media landscape in the UK is large and complex and ranks second globally to the US (Hess & Waller, 2017, p. 63). Nine in ten (93%) UK adults read, watch or listen to at least one type of local news (Ofcom, 2025b, p. 22), with trust and accuracy being its most valued elements (ibid, p. 24), and more people access news online than television, radio or newspapers (ibid, p. 5). Legacy news might retain "a dominant role in the news ecology due to its influence on the rest of the news cycle as an agenda setter" (Firmstone, 2024, p. 13) but, as Coleman et al. (2016) argue, there is a *narrative of decline* in academic, policy and industry discussions (see also Engel, 2009; Hunter, 2024; Ponsford, 2024c among others) on the future of local journalism. Like the journalism industry throughout the Western world, the UK's local media are in the midst of an immediate and profound crisis—there were 293 local newspaper closures in the UK between 2005 and 2024 (Hunter, 2024; Ponsford, 2024c)—which is intricately linked to the collapse of the advertising model (Picard, 2008). How the crisis relates to sustainability, democratic and civic relevance, trust and credibility (Alexander et al., 2016; Barnett, 2002; Boczkowski & Anderson, 2017; Currah, 2009; McChesney & Pickard, 2011) is the focus of much current scholarship, policy and industry attention, and is embodied in the rhetorically emotive images of news

deserts, black holes and drylands (Abernathy, 2018, 2020, 2022, 2023; Barclay et al., 2022; Ferrucci & Alaimo, 2020; Howells, 2015; Mathews, 2022; Napoli et al., 2018; Qin, 2024, 2025; Usher, 2023), ghost or zombie newspapers (Abernathy, 2020; Climenhaga, 2012) and "chronic news drought" (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p. 163). The Media Reform Coalition (2023) identified 23 (of 374) Local Authority Districts (LADs) across the UK (2.6 million people; 3.9% of the UK population) not served by a single newspaper, with an additional 64 LADs served by just one title (9 million people; 13.6% of the UK population), which means approximately 11.7 million people (17.5% of the UK population) live in news deserts or suffer news drought (pp. 17-18). Research by the Public Interest News Foundation found news deserts are not evenly distributed across the UK, with more in urban areas than rural, and more than one in three outlets belong to just three companies—Newsquest, Reach and Iconic Media (formerly National World) (Bisiani & Mitchell, 2025). Among the other challenges local media is contending with is the digital revolution with its global horizons for attention, and ever-expanding competition for revenue, which has forced a reorientation of production practices, adoption of new technology and the search for new markets and audiences.

Nostalgic accounts of a "golden age" for local journalism present a past as enduring and unproblematic (Matthews, 2020). Whether or not the supposedly gilded era was free from the kind of problems which dog an apparently doomed present—falling audience share; loss of advertising; compromised watchdog role; dwindling workforces; limited newsroom diversity; and exclusion or misrepresentation of the marginalised, among them—is a matter for media historians to debate (Reardon, 2013; Usher, 2010). The historic roots of these contemporary failings are acknowledged throughout this thesis. What is clear, though, is that the local news landscape has been fundamentally altered by the disappearance, through the rapid consolidation, mergers and partnerships by national conglomerates (Curran, 2018; Davie, 2025; Engel, 2009; Murdock, 1982; Ofcom, 2025c), of independent, often family-owned small businesses, which held a monopolistic (or duopolistic) grip on their home patches (sometimes, but not always, adverse to questioning the status quo, but were at least locally focused, accountable and embedded) (Franklin, 2006a; Murphy, 1998; Williams, 2006). Curran and Seaton (2018) note democratic concerns over the concentration of media ownership, that the press has become an instrument of large business conglomerates with political interests, or the means of ideological domination which helps to maintain class domination. These large companies serve bigger regions than their independent forebears, and produce "news with less and less relevance for local people" (Hess and Waller, 2017, p. 63). What this means for an informed citizenship is summed up in

Pickard's (2022) contention that "a dwindling number of newspapers failing to produce even a bare minimum of news that society requires isn't just a journalism crisis—it's a democracy crisis" (p. 38).

This thesis acknowledges the problems of scale, both from the perspective of social/urban geography (cities as patchworks of smaller communities) and how organisations are run—there are therefore three levels to be taken into account, the first being ward-level media, where the community is self-contained, and a non-hierarchical/horizontal form of organisation is suitable; the second is city-wide media, which can connect disparate, but geographically close, communities, and again, because its business goals are limited, a non-hierarchical/horizontal form of organisation is suitable; and thirdly, nationally owned media, which, because of the size and complexity of the overall organisation, and the need to maximise profits, requires a hierarchical form of organisation (Harvey, 2019b, p. 69). It is easy to assume that if the local concerns bought out by the larger companies acted as a mutually supportive collective, the kind of local journalism we see today would be very different. A report by the Media Trust (Fenton et al., 2010) concluded communities "feel disempowered, unheard and irrelevant", and noted a latent demand for "the rapidly disappearing truly 'local' newspaper" both for its role in local democracy and as a "key tool in bringing back a sense of community" (p. 3). Franklin (2006b) has noted local newspapers are now local in name only and Waschková Císarová (2017) suggests there is little distinction between local press chain titles and national newspapers (p. 112). With this in mind it appears that the conglomerates have a parasitical, extractive and exploitative relationship with their local (satellite) titles, which are seen mainly as platforms to maximise exposure of promotions by national advertisers, including free and native advertising (Carlson, 2015; Carlson & Locke, 2022; Ferrer-Conill, 2016); and the means by which audiences are directed to their national titles through branded networked copy.

The crisis, or crises, is not a static condition of the sector, but a dynamic and change-orientated process—"a perpetual state of flux" (Carlson & Usher, 2016, p. 566)—which the media, and media workers, must negotiate with a combination of strategies (Gallagher, 1982, pp. 154, 157). This means the adoption of new technologies and new business models (Carlson & Usher, 2016), market reorientation and a "growing trend to look toward audiences" (Zelizer, 2004b, p. 104) among them. For Picard (2014) "change is producing opportunities" (p. 501) but it is debatable "over whether one should try to preserve the current *forms* in which news is provided or whether one should try to preserve the *functions* of journalism" (p. 508, emphasis in original). Downie and Schudson (2009) recognised that new forms of news organisation had entered the field, but asked "can the new array of news media report on

our nation and our communities as well as—or better than—journalism has until now?" (p. 2). There is a frequent need, therefore, to revisit the question posed by Deuze (2005), "what is journalism?", and remind ourselves that "journalism continuously reinvents itself" (p. 447). The crisis can be seen as a transformation, or multiple transformations, and, for some, these threaten journalism's core values and structures (Alexander, et al., 2016), such as objectivity, information monopoly and the right to be listened to, while for others change is producing opportunities for quality journalism—Picard (2014) posits the possibility of a "new dawn".

The narrative of decline is therefore mirrored by a *narrative of reinvention*, or revival in fortunes, which emphasises the democratic potential of "autonomous, vernacular expression and insight, as a new means by which local experience can be articulated, shared and negotiated" (Coleman et al., 2016, p. 1) through digital technology, alternative media business models, and a testing of professional boundaries and reconceptualisation of journalistic ethics when reporting on the marginalised (Anderson, 1990; Borden, 2010; Borden & Bowers, 2020; Coddington & Lewis, 2024; Fidalgo, 2009; Firmstone et al., 2022; Frost, 2006; Nechushtai & David, 2025; Steel et al., 2025). Among the emerging non-traditional forms of journalism are hyperlocals (Harte et al., 2016, 2017, 2019), community-centred journalism (Wenzel, 2020), blogs (Reese et al., 2007), citizen journalists (Ostertag & Tuchman, 2012; Robinson & DeShano, 2011a, 2011b; Wall, 2015), produsers (Bird, 2011a; Bruns, 2006), social media interest groups and other unconventional ways of reporting the news. These share some of the characteristics of the politically-focussed alternative journalism of the 1960s and 70s but with, in many cases, a wider adoption of entrepreneurial business models (Atton, 2002, 2003, 2009, 2010; Fuchs, 2010; Harcup, 2005, 2011, 2016; Hess & Waller, 2016; Holt, et al., 2019; Sandoval & Fuchs, 2009). A recent report by the United States-based Institute for Nonprofit News found that revenue growth among its independent, and innovative, small-scale, news start-ups, membership is rising along with an increasing number of local outlets joining the field (Holcomb et al., 2025), and the UK-focused Enders Report also noted optimistic trends for UK local news publishers (Maher, 2023b; McCabe, 2023; McCabe, et al., 2023). Other scholars, notably Wenzel (2020a) and Harte et al. (2019), have been keen to extol the virtues of community-centred journalism and the different varieties of hyperlocal endeavours in engendering the social capital and social trust needed to strengthen the democratic and community-enhancing value of local journalism, particularly among marginalised communities (see also Carlson & Usher, 2016; Konieczna, 2018; Konieczna, & Robinson, 2014; Konow-Lund, 2019, 2024; Robinson, 2014a; Robinson & Johnson, 2024; Robinson et al., 2025; Usher, 2017).

Schlesinger and Doyle (2015) and Wahl-Jorgensen (2017, 2019a) are among those who contend that Schumpeter's "creative destruction" paradigm is helpful for understanding how journalism's institutional failures can lead to a re-composition of news media, with the latter arguing "to find hiding places of hope for the future of local journalism, we must assume that innovation and rebirth are impossible without failure and disruption" (2019a, p. 165) and that the current crisis in journalism is a process rather than a terminal condition. Local news operations have survived doomsday predictions before—the rise of television and cable among them—by adapting to technological change through adoption and experimentation (Pavlik, 2000). In his political writings Stuart Hall (2015) refers to Gramsci's observation that social and economic crises have a "conjunctural" aspect where "'incessant and persistent' efforts ... [are made] ... to defend and conserve the status quo" in the face of "political and ideological work ... [which attempts] ... to disarticulate old formations, and to rework their elements into new ones" (2021n, p. 43). The processes of invention and erection of defensive mechanisms to safeguard journalistic values are evident throughout the history of the press, where arguments about the role and status of journalists' professional boundaries and occupational ideologies, and the conflict between local media's normative democratic, social and business aspirations, are constantly played out.

The twin narratives of the decline *and* reinvention of local news inform the focus of my research; my research question—"to what extent, and in what ways, does coverage of community and public interest news in the Bristol news ecosystem differ between local mainstream and local nonmainstream journalists and news organisations?"; and the discussion in the literature review chapter, Chapter 2. As this thesis is concerned with several factors—the structural practicalities of media production, consideration of local journalism's democratic and social value, the symbolic effects of its products (Cottle, 2003), and boundary discourses of its practitioners (Carlson, 2015a; Carlson & Lewis, 2019; Konow-Lund, 2019; Maares & Hanusch, 2023; Schapals et al., 2019)—an interdisciplinary and critical approach was adopted, which is discussed next.

1.2 Empirical Outline

1.2.1 Empirical Context

While academics, industry figures and policy makers are justifiably concerned by the rise and spread of news deserts, this thesis presents an opportunity to research various forms of local media, and compare their relative strengths and weaknesses, in a news oasis, albeit one buffeted by a multi-faceted journalism crisis (Section 1.3.1 below considers current research on news deserts and news oases, and Section 2.3.2 discusses journalism's crises). The variety, diversity and plurality of the news ecosystem

under investigation gives important insight into different types of local news organisations—and the people who work for them—and their journalistic and business goals. The organisations include legacy and new actors, with socially, culturally and economically different target audiences; a diversity of formats—print, broadcast and online—and frequency—daily or less frequent; varied size of distribution/circulation/broadcast areas; diverse ideological and commercial foci; and hierarchy of influences, seen in flat/horizontal and multiple/vertical management tiers. This thesis is interested in the different professional and economic pressures faced by the diverse elements of the news ecosystem, and how these influence conceptions of journalism's role in society, and can facilitate best practice.

In contrast to the broad sweep of national or international (macro) level comparative surveys of local journalism, scholarly focus on news ecosystems at local, i.e. city/regional (meso), and geographically hyperlocal, i.e. ward/place-based community (micro), levels can give an important perspective on the finer, and more nuanced, differences (and similarities) between legacy local media (in its traditional print and broadcast, and, more recent, digital incarnations) and its alternatives, as argued in Section 1.3 on the field of local journalism research, and Section 2.4 on variety in news organisations below. Consideration of a (relatively) self-contained news environment is useful in testing the ability of local media organisations and journalists in fulfilling the normative roles of watchdog; disseminator of information; voice of the citizens; and community champion (McNair, 2009) in delivering democratically important (explored in Section 2.2.6) and community sustaining news (discussed in Section 2.2.2) in a city notable for the inequality, diverse information needs and representational problems of its various communities; gauging professional boundaries (the subject of Section 2.2.8); and identifying constraints on autonomy (Deuze, 2005; Hanitzsch, 2011; McAllister & Proffitt, 2020; Phillips, 2015a; Reich & Hanitzsch, 2013; Singer, 2007; Sjøvaag, 2013). The problems of empirically accounting for non-local and non-original networked content, which is apparent in local mainstream output, are discussed below. This deeper and narrower focus is especially important at a time when the potential of small-scale, hyperlocal media and similarly niche endeavours to fill the growing deficit brought about by the shrinking of traditional media, is generating academic and policy-orientated attention (Barnett & Townend, 2015; Harte et al., 2016, 2019; Jangdal, 2019; Karlsson & Hellekant Rowe, 2019; Kurpius et al., 2010; Metzgar et al., 2011; Thurman et al., 2012; Toomer, 2024; Williams et al., 2015a, 2015b).

This research is based on a multiplatform, comparative, multimethod investigation—a quantitative content analysis (CA) of news output; and qualitative thematic (TA) and critical discourse

analyses (CDA) of news worker interviews. The field of local journalism research and the epistemological context of this thesis are discussed in Section 1.3 below but here I consider the research question, and sub-research questions, and the empirical basis of the research. I discuss the difficulties of adopting a workable typology for classifying local journalism outlets, given that the news organisations under investigation boast a healthy diversity of ownership, business goals, target audiences, ideological foci, financial dependencies, size, formats, circulation/distribution/broadcast areas, and frequency of publication/broadcast; this is followed by an introduction to the research subject—the media in Bristol; the concept of professional roles among news workers and the gap between role conception and role enactment; and the methodology adopted, which is explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.2.2 The Research and Sub-Research Questions

The research question was designed to make explicit the research goal of comparing two sectors of local journalism, and to reflect their normative democratic and social responsibility aspirations:

> RQ. To what extent, and in what ways, does coverage of community and public interest news in the Bristol news ecosystem differ between local mainstream and local nonmainstream journalists and news organisations?

There is a tension—evident in the gap between role conception and role enactment—between the demands and affordances of structure, i.e. news organisations with management-imposed goals, specialised roles and resource limitations; and agency, i.e. the ability of frontline news workers to pursue their professional aims. Structuration is useful for understanding how the agency and autonomy of journalists are affected by their structural surroundings (Sjøvaag, 2013). Giddens put forward two core assumptions that "structures are always enabling (providing the conditions and resources for action) as well as constraining (placing limits on what is possible and feasible)" and "relations between situated actions and general formations, local choices and prevailing circumstances are dynamic and two-way—that 'structures are constituted through action' at the same time as 'action is constituted structurally'" (cited in Deacon et al., 2021, pp. 10-11). There is, therefore, a need to compare normative aspirations with output, and this need informed two sub-research questions, the first quantitative, an analysis of content (the subject of Chapter 4) produced by the local media organisations under investigation, using a variety of variables including sources present, a Critical Information Needs (CINs) framework, reliance on non-original content, local focus and community representation; and the second qualitative, an examination of journalistic discourses (discussed in Chapter 5) about role conceptions

and professional legitimacy in relation to expertise (skills and knowledge necessary for carrying out watchdog roles and holding power to account), duty (social responsibility or public service, especially in relation to marginalised communities), and autonomy (working within organisational constraints) (Örnebring, 2013).

> Sub-RQ1. What news gets covered in the Bristol local news ecosystem, by whom, and in what ways?
>
> Sub-RQ2. How do news workers in Bristol see their roles and how do these role conceptions depend on professional, cultural and social norms, and the institutional practices and commercial imperatives of the organisations they work for, whether mainstream or nonmainstream?

The subject under research was not a completely closed system. As noted, mainstream local media are subservient to the demands, and dependent on the infrastructures, of larger organisations and rely on non-local and non-original content to varying degrees, which adds weight to the contention that these should be seen as hybrids of local and nationally produced news. The local news workers gave important insight into the nature of the locally produced content but there was an empirical difficulty—discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 on methods—in connecting data from the content analysis—which included content derived from non-local journalists and news agencies—and evidence gathered from local journalists about their role conceptions. While this prevented the construction of a theoretical framework based on the gap between role conceptions and role enactments, the concept did provide important context to the research. Section 2.2 below gives an overview of academic theories in relation to the importance of geographical location to local journalism and affective attachment/embeddedness/trust/social capital, especially in an era when digital networks have opened virtually unlimited avenues of global connectedness and effectively eliminated the problems of communication across distances.

1.2.3 News Workers: the Gap Between Role Conception and Role Enactment

As demonstrated by this thesis's two sub-RQs, there are two empirical aspects to this study: the public interest news and community relevance of the manifest content produced by mainstream and nonmainstream news organisations; and the professional conceptions of local news workers in fulfilling their normative democratic and social responsibility objectives and marking professional boundaries with respect to expertise, duty and autonomy, as observed in their discourses and rhetoric**.** The research contends that structure, i.e. the organisational set-up of the media under review, is the dominant factor

marking the differences between mainstream and nonmainstream media production, and that structure restricts the agency of the news workers, which can be seen in the gap between role conception and role enactment. Coleman et al. (2016) found, in their Leeds research, that what the news workers they interviewed said "might not correspond in all respects with the kinds of news the services actually produce", and this was confirmed by their content analysis (p. 118). Mellado and van Dalen (2014) noted the connection between role conception and practice is a matter for debate (pp. 859-860), with some scholars arguing for a solid relationship between attitudes and behaviour, and others placing an emphasis on different levels of influence (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017; Hellmueller & Mellado, 2015; Mellado et al., 2020; Tandoc et al., 2013). According to Mellado and van Dalen (2014) the gap is inevitable (p. 873)—abstract journalistic role conception involves justifying actions with regard to theory or normative roles (a shared professional ethos), as revealed by discourses; whereas concrete role enactment, as shown in practice and empirically evident in content, is often dictated by external forces, which include commercial orientation, available resources and social capital.

As explored in the discourse analysis discussed in Chapter 5, the news workers in the Bristol news ecosystem expressed in their interviews strongly felt affiliations to the ideals of democratic (expertise) and social (duty) responsibilities, especially in a city with unequal communities. This was equally evident in the responses by former and current mainstream and nonmainstream news workers, as well as cross-over journalists. There were also criticisms of management-imposed changes which they felt compromised their professional values (autonomy).

The three mainstream news organisations in the sample—Reach, National World and the BBC—have all recently seen industrial action and other organised criticism and reaction against management plans by frontline workers—a clear demonstration of both resistance and solidarity, and commitment to an idealised notion of occupational motivation (BBC 2022b; Booth J. 2022a; Booth, M. 2022b, 2023b; Bristol Post, 2023; Cork, 2023a; Frost, 2023; Gogarty, 2020; Kersley, 2022c, 2022d, 2023; Linford, 2023b, 2024e, 2024i; National Union of Journalists, 2022, 2024; Press Gazette, 2022b; Private Eye, 2023b, 2023c, 2024a, 2024b; Raval, 2023b; Sharman, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d, 2023h, 2023i, 2023j, 2023k, 2023l, 2023m, 2023n, 2023p; Stone, 2023a; Sutherland, 2023; Tobitt, 2023b, 2023d, 2023f, 2023g, 2024e). Nationwide, local BBC journalists held strike action over plans to reduce local radio output and make local radio journalists redundant. This happened on the day the UK Government delivered its annual budget, a busy news day, locally and nationally. There were picket lines outside the BBC Bristol's Broadcasting House in Clifton, and the day's *Points West* and *Radio Bristol* news bulletins were cancelled. Reach journalists have repeatedly struck

over pay, with picket lines outside the *Bristol Post* building. There was also strong reaction to plans for page view targets from frontline reporters, who complained about damage to the quality of the journalism they would be expected to produce and the consequences of losing contact with local audiences, and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), fearing for journalists' wellbeing, which led to them being withdrawn (Kersley, 2022b, 2022i, 2022k; Linford, 2024o; Sharman, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d, 2022e; Tobitt, 2024p). NUJ members working for National World also sent a letter to the company's HR department saying that morale was at "rock bottom", and singled out then-chief executive David Montgomery for criticism, alleging he was steering the news content to reflect "right-wing and socially conservative politics". This letter came after large-scale, group-wide redundancies and a vote of no confidence in the chief executive by staff (Maher, 2023a, 2023c, 2023e). NUJ representatives also passed a vote of no confidence in the chief executive of Reach (Raval, 2022b).

1.2.4 Mainstream and Nonmainstream News Organisations 1

Mainstream and nonmainstream media are often seen as opposed or significantly divergent along political, ideological, professional and organisational lines (Eldridge, 2014, 2016, 2019; Hanusch & Löhmann, 2023)—and I discuss the myriad, and debate-provoking, ways in which traditional and emerging local media can be defined in Section 2.4 below—but I contend that, from the point of view of local audiences, the inherent limitations, and the relative strengths and weaknesses, of both forms in format, frequency, target audience, distribution area, staff numbers and other resources, when they occupy the same news ecosystem, results in a complementary, though competitive, relationship, i.e. they fulfil the different news and information needs of diverse communities in fragmented and specialised ways. It should be remembered that local journalism maps onto a social landscape in the UK that varies widely between, and within, rural areas, small towns and large multicultural and metropolitan cities, and this diversity offers opportunities for specialisation and experimentation within the local media.

Metzgar et al. (2011) noted that hyperlocals are "not purposeful in developing a news organisation that might provide *complete coverage* of community issues" (p. 779, emphasis added) and they make this observation critically. Whereas I contend that the limitations of each component of a news oasis need not be a hinderance to the overall function of the news ecosystem. It is *not* the goal of this thesis to find reasons to suppose that nonmainstream media can *replace* mainstream as it declines, nor is it the goal to *uncover* the most financially sustainable formula for local journalism—however, the goal of the current research is to discover how the strengths of the respective specialisms can be

identified and encouraged, without condemning one sector and valorising the other on ideological grounds. This can be demonstrated by comparing ownership and organisational goals and aspirations (financial imperatives, market orientation and audience construction, geographical focus, aims of funding bodies, industry recognition, brand identity); organisational structures and workplace systems (vertical or horizontal management, quality control, performance monitoring, working environments, targets, analytics, digital innovations, workforce diversity, retention and promotion); journalistic practices and routines (news and source selection, workloads, "beats"); role perceptions (metajournalistic discourse over professional identity and boundaries, objectivity, impartiality, news values, gatekeeping, authority, trust, legitimacy, authenticity, embeddedness); and ideals (autonomy, public service, democracy, watchdog roles, social value, social capital, critical and ideological stance); and reaction to the ways professional boundaries are policed, constructed, maintained, granted, accepted, challenged and defended by actors outside the profession, such as audiences, sources, subjects and critics. The need to understand the difficulties of conceptualising the varieties of local news organisations on offer, and the professional identities of news workers, are discussed next.

1.2.5 News Organisations 2: Towards a Workable Typology of Local Media Producers

Throughout this thesis comparisons are made between different types of local media outlets and, as such, it was necessary to address the problems of categorisation at the earliest stage—terms commonly found in debates over the need for a workable typology in current journalism studies literature, such as mainstream, nonmainstream, legacy, digital, hyperlocal, alternative, community-centred, ethnic etc, are discussed with reference to current scholarship in Chapter 2 (Section 2.5). An illustration of the difficulties of applying labels is the ill-defined concept of "hyperlocal". This is applied to small-scale (geographically meso- *and* micro-level—operating throughout a whole city/region *or* only at a ward/parish/community level) independent media, but includes commercial and non-commercial outlets; single (print, digital *or* broadcast) or multiple formats; daily, weekly, monthly and less frequent publication; as well as highly productive news sites with dedicated news teams and one-person part-time projects. Barnett and Townend (2015) have drawn attention to the difficulty of generalising about hyperlocals, noting "both in terms of their own self-images and in terms of the functions they perform within their own community, there is a huge range and diversity of operations" (p. 344). Some hyperlocals are entrepreneurial news businesses, dependent on advertising and often run by experienced and formally trained ex-mainstream journalists—Harcup's (2005) cross-over journalists—who have retained mainstream news practices and news values. These share several important

characteristics with traditional, commercial media—profit motives, for example, although the distinction between reasonable profits and profit maximisation (Granovetter, 1985; McManus, 1992) is an important difference and is discussed in Section 2.3.2 below. But the term is also used for grant-dependent and issue-focused media organisations which have an explicit critical and alternative ethos and are often run by news workers with fewer professional credentials. This subsection explains why a cautious approach was undertaken for the initial stages of this research. The adoption of a workable typology, and the relation between organisational setups and distinctions evident in their output regarding ideology, critical information needs, geographical focus, and social responsibility towards marginalised communities, for example, are reflected upon in the concluding chapter (Chapter 6).

While acknowledging the difficulties of consigning media organisations to strict categories, the first stage of this study (CA) divided the sample in three discrete and easily verifiable ways according to organisational set-ups: *ownership* (nationally owned legacy—commercial and public service—mainstream media; and locally owned, independent, emerging—commercial and non-commercial—nonmainstream media); *format* (print; online; and broadcast—newspapers were regarded as separate from their sister websites); *frequency* (daily; and monthly or less frequent—there were no weeklies). *Reach* (city-wide/regional—meso; or smaller place-based community/ward-level—micro) was also considered in relation to coverage of areas—the geographical concentration of news—within the city. The categories were adopted at the earliest, data-gathering and organising, stage of the research to postpone, until the analysis level, the need to account for the subtleties, nuances and fluidity (and occasional contradictions) of ideological, and commercial/audience, orientation; the ability to exploit social capital through community embeddedness; and the contingencies and pragmatism brought about by resource limitations.

Ownership: The mainstream media in this research are *hybrid* (local *and* national) organisations. They have *local* branding, part-production and limited autonomy, but are part of a *national* infrastructure, with a hierarchy of influences (Reese, 2001, 2016) or control (Breed, 1997; Gallagher, 1982) seen in vertical layers of management, and nationally set business goals. They also benefit from economies of scale, the consolidation and centralisation of functions, and information subsidies, including non-local and non-original content—for example, a copy of the *Bristol Post*, published during the research period (19 July, 2022) was 36 pages, 13 of which were Bristol news pages, plus three local sport pages, the rest being networked and pre-set/"page-ready" feature pages on lifestyle, health, family health, celebrity wellbeing, weather, television, UK and World News, puzzles and stars, as well as

classified advertisements, and Press Association reports on national and international sport, plus a four-page pullout on the Pride of Scotland Awards. In contrast, the nonmainstream (solely local) demonstrate greater focus on the city and the communities within it, more autonomy and independence through simpler management structures and a greater reliance on original and local content. This thesis follows the definition adopted by the Public Interest News Foundation that independent outlets are those which have annual revenues below £2m (Mitchell et al., 2023, p. 23)—access to detailed financial information was restricted so educated guesswork was relied upon.

Format: This reveals differences in adapting to technological advances and competition for attention and advertisers. It is the contention of this thesis that digital local journalism opens up new (non-geographically specific) audiences, and places more emphasis on maximising advertising exposure than other (geographically restricted) formats, such as print and broadcast, through the increasingly pervasive influence of analytics and page views. This is an aspect of the changes being faced by local journalism which is discussed in the next subsection.

Frequency: This determines news content in relation to the news value of timeliness. It is a factor in the temporal routines of production (Cottle, 2003, p. 15) and the event orientation of the news—daily media generally focus on "episodic" or sensationalist reporting and events which have an often negative short-term immediacy, such as road traffic accidents with their dependence on the emergency services as sources of up-to-date information, in contrast to the less frequently produced media which can devote more time and resources to a "thematic" analysis of wider issues of social structure and longer-term processes of change (Gavin, 2021).

Reach: This concerned the geographic size of the distribution, circulation or broadcast areas of the media organisations within the city and was a factor in considering local (meso) and, geographically, hyperlocal (micro) focus and social capital in *bridging between* socially separate but geographically proximate communities, or *bonding within* self-contained communities. The local (meso and micro) or non-local (macro level, i.e. national, international, non-geographically specific) focus of the content, while mapping onto ownership, was considered during the content analysis and not at the construction of categories stage.

1.2.6 News Organisations 3: The Changing Face of Local Mainstream News Production

This subsection looks at those aspects which, for the purposes of this thesis, set mainstream local media production apart from nonmainstream—financial priorities, target audiences and organisational set-ups

and processes. The mainstream news organisations featured in this research are semi-autonomous local/national hybrids—a newspaper and websites owned by two large media conglomerates; and the local television, radio and online operations of the national public service media organisation, the BBC. These organisations are contending with the fullest effects of an ongoing journalism crisis, which is discussed in Section 2.3.2. below. The collapse of the traditional advertising model (Picard, 2008) is having a profound effect on commercial mainstream organisations, while the BBC is under obligation to maintain an audience share of at least 50% over any length of time (Murdock, 1982), which puts it in direct competition with its commercial rivals to offer comparable products, in the face of similar financial pressures and uncertainty, related to heated political debate over the licence fee and Charter expectations, as well as reduced income from its commercial enterprises (Tobitt, 2024l).

The opportunities brought about by the digital revolution in journalism mean audiences are no longer restricted by geographically limited distribution/circulation/broadcast areas but can extend to communities formed through (non-geographically aligned) shared interests (Billard, 2023; Hess, 2013a; Hess & Waller 2014; Reese, 2009). There is a commercial logic to increasing audience reach for the conglomerates, a factor which has probably had the greatest influence on local mainstream news practices. Many local news websites have been launched over the past 15 years in the UK with "Live" branding, instead of adopting sister print publication mastheads, partly because of management perception that their legacy print products were no longer popular. There was, therefore, a need to attract new audiences online locally, but this also opened opportunities to bring in audiences from beyond the local area. The former chairman of National World, David Montgomery, announced a strategy in 2024 for the company to "transition from a media business with a specific expertise in news journalism, restricted by geographic focus, to a wider content agenda distributed across all platforms" (Linford, 2024f) and stressed the need to "attract viewers both nationally and internationally" (Tobitt, 2023c). Reach has adopted a Customer Value Strategy (CVS) to create a "more data-led, digital business", which relies on page views, while also gathering data about customer online engagement behaviour, valued by advertisers. According to Reach "the more our customers engage, the more we learn about their preferences, enabling us to further enhance and personalise their experience. The more we understand the behaviour of our customers, the more valuable their profiles become, which enables advertisers to more accurately target their own customers through us" (Reach, n.d.-b). Paul Rowland, editorial director of the Reach Live network, wrote to staff that page views: "may not be a perfect metric, but as a directly monetisable digital unit, it's the best thing we've got right now" (Linford,

2024o). While, according to another senior editorial figure at Reach, "page views are our currency" (Tobitt, 2024p). Plans for page view targets of between 80,000 and 850,000 page views per month per reporter, with bonuses for meeting, and penalties for missing, those targets, were announced by Reach in 2022, but were withdrawn following angry reaction over fears for reporters' wellbeing, damage to journalism quality and the consequences of losing contact with local audiences, from frontline news workers and the National Union of Journalists.

The most lucrative revenue stream for the conglomerates has traditionally been national advertising, booked centrally, and displayed throughout national networks of local outlets. While this exposure has been exploited by the conglomerates in their print products for decades, the reliance on digital business is relatively recent. While initially, this was forecast to bring in high returns, legacy media have dramatically lost ground to the dominant social media platforms in competition for classified and display advertising (Phillips & Witschge, 2012; Pickard, 2018)—Section 2.3.2 contains a discussion of advertising-dependent journalism. According to Edwards (2023), "the economics of providing local news digitally are all but impossible: local audiences are too small to generate the page views needed to fund them via advertising. As a rule of thumb, an individual reporter needs to drive millions of page views per month to generate enough ad revenue to cover newsroom costs. And even if a local publication could get that level of traffic, local advertisers don't have big enough budgets to sustain them". The need to maximise audience attention means search engine optimisation, and analytics which identify online trends and gather information on audience usage, have been the biggest drivers in the evolution of mainstream business practices. This makes online news organisations increasingly vulnerable to changes in Google and Facebook/Meta search ranking criteria (Adams, 2024; Bell, 2016; Buttle, 2024a; Edwards, 2023, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c; Higgerson, 2021a; Linford, 2024a; Maher, 2024g; Majid, 2023b, 2024; Miller, 2024; Pickard, 2018; Ponsford, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; Reach, n.d.-b; Sharman, 2023f; Shealey, 2024; Turvill, 2022a, 2022b; Waterson, 2022).

The need to maintain audience share means the BBC is under similar pressure to expand its digital offering—through local news websites, podcasts, videos etc—and to make more use of social media. In 2022, the BBC's Across the UK plan reduced the number of local journalists but increased investment in "digital first" centralised news production (Conlan, 2023; Davie, 2022). Proposals included 131 new jobs in 34 newly created digital local news websites, while 179 local radio and television jobs were lost. According to the BBC, the plan would create "multi-media news operations" across England, that would bring its online, TV and radio teams closer together (Tobitt, 2022b). It is not clear how reliant

the local BBC websites are on centralised news but there are currently fewer local, and more nationally produced, radio programmes being aired—for example, *BBC Radio Bristol*'s output after 2pm each day is shared with neighbouring regional BBC services and guaranteed local programming has been reduced to 40 hours a week (Sutherland, 2023). Many local radio stations were expected to air afternoon news bulletins pre-recorded by neighbouring stations, and share newsreaders (Tobitt, 2024ae), and a networked programme has been introduced in place of local shows on Sunday afternoons (Sharman, 2025b). The move by the BBC to concentrate more resources into local online news was met by strike action from staff. There were picket lines outside the BBC's Broadcasting House offices in Bristol, causing the cancellation of *Points West* and *Radio Bristol* bulletins on the day the UK Government delivered its annual budget.

In July 2024 the BBC announced plans to cut 500 jobs nationally as revenue fell 6% to £5.4bn and local radio stations were expected to share newsreaders (BBC, 2023b; Booth, 2023a; Cork, 2020, 2023a; Davie, 2022; Davies, R. T. 2023; Gogarty, 2020; Harte, 2021; Linford, 2024p; Press Gazette, 2023; Raval 2023b; Tobitt, 2024h, 2024l, 2024j). Further plans were announced in September 2024 to cut 115 jobs in Nations and Regions editorial production, "around 3% of the division's staffing". According to *Press Gazette* "the BBC's target for annual savings is currently £500m but (BBC director-general) Davie said earlier this year this needed to rise, meaning an extra £200m in savings per year is needed" (Tobitt, 2024l). The BBC's annual report for the year to the end of March 2024 stated that the freeze on the licence fee meant the organisation is now £1billion worse off a year than it was in 2010/11 (Maher, 2024e).

The nonmainstream media under research have largely escaped this pressure to evolve and, in many ways, are relying on pre-digital business models, such as free newspapers, as well as subsisting on lower advertising revenues, through smaller operations and geographically limited audience size and advertising reach, as well as, in some cases, relying on paid subscriptions (Edwards, 2023). While both mainstream and nonmainstream are exploring technological and operational innovations, increased competition has forced the former into accelerating cost cutting and consolidation of functions throughout their national networks.

Complexities of scale (Harvey, 2019b) in mainstream media mean there is a tiered and vertical structure to management, with major business goals being determined centrally, and local outlets having limited autonomy over content. For Reach, the local outlets have editors, some of whom oversee

several—geographically scattered—titles, and these come under regional "editors-in-chief", who report directly to the company's chief content officer. There is also a head of news, overseeing and coordinating national and local news operations (Linford, 2025f, 2025h, 2025; Sharman, 2018b). Economies of scale are evident in the specialisation and division of labour, and rationalisation, centralisation, or consolidation, of operations such as national advertising booking; production, design and subediting; and printing and distribution networks. The reliance by both the commercial organisations and the BBC on nationally/regionally/centrally produced network content is an information subsidy (Lewis, Williams & Franklin, 2008a; Gant & Dimmick, 2000), which offers the "prospect of not merely 'cheap news' but 'free news'... [which] ... allows news organisations opportunities to 'square the circle' between cost cutting (by reducing journalists' wages and the numbers of journalists employed) and sustaining, if not substantially increasing, news output" (Franklin et al., 2010, p. 204). At a time when mainstream media are making frontline local reporters redundant in unprecedented numbers (Linford, 2025l) Reach and National World/Iconic Media have increased recruitment to central "traffic-driving content hubs" staffed by Trends Writers (Higgerson, 2021b), for the former, and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) writers, for the latter. In 2024 Reach announced plans to move 300 regional journalists (from about 2,000 editorial staff) into a so-called Live News Network—"dedicated live news teams"—to serve the company's local and national "brands", which include the *Mirror* and the *Daily Express* (Linford, 2024h, Tobitt, 2024d). Reach also has an "overnights team" based in Australia to "break stories on a fully 24/7 basis" (Linford, 2025g).

This copy sharing reduces the local—but increases the homogenous and consumer-orientated—nature of the content (Whittington, 2020). In 2025, Reach's editorial director for news, Paul Rowland, told staff "our biggest USP [is] having more journalists situated across the UK and Ireland than any other commercial publisher" and added there was a need to "publish at scale on the populist topics that can help us bring in the big numbers" (Linford, 2024o), including "quick turnaround stories" (Tobitt, 2024p). For the commercial organisations at least, the networked content is "blander [and] softer ... [appealing to a] ... wider, but less invested audience network" (Firmstone & Whittington, 2021, p. 85, 89) and often carries the hallmarks of clickbait—the editorial selection, and reuse, of stories based on their potential to generate referral traffic rather than their value as sources of public interest news (Ball, 2022; Blanchett Neheli, 2018; Tandoc, 2015)—and Davies' (2009) churnalism—"repeating facts assembled elsewhere" with little or no journalistic effort (Ponsford & Davis, 2022).

A strategy employed by commercial mainstream organisations is "ripping", "versioning", or "cannibalisation" (Duffy et al., 2018; Franklin et al., 2010; Phillips, 2011, 2012; Ponsford & Davis, 2022), where copy from one local title is rewritten, often by an in-house artificial intelligence (AI) tool (Santos, 2023; Tobitt, 2024g, 2024n), and posted on sister websites "to get more traffic out of the same content" (Maher, 2024a). This strategy carries with it the risk of inaccuracies, libelous or otherwise, being published which would normally be picked up by locally knowledgeable sub-editors and editors (Linford, 2025e; Private Eye, 2025c, Sharman, 2025). McAllister and Proffitt (2020) note part of the strategy behind networked news production is the "synergistic plugola" where the company's multiple news brands are promoted throughout its local outlets, which absorbs "valuable news time/space that could be devoted to other stories" (p. 472). Mainstream journalists have also been asked to add "inline links" to their stories—hyperlinks to other articles with no relevant connection—to help drive traffic (Private Eye, 2025d, 2025f).

These developments in non-original and non-local media production, commercial pressures, market orientation, and tiered hierarchies of influence, are significantly different from those found in the nonmainstream outlets under investigation and are explored throughout this thesis in relation to normative, professional and audience expectations regarding local media around trust, autonomy, journalistic authority, community representation and embeddedness, social capital, ideological ethos and social value/responsibility aspirations and expectations, geographical relevance and the fulfilment of public interest, democratic and critical information needs.

1.2.7 News Organisations 4: Research Subject—The Media in Bristol

Chapter 3 discusses the selection criteria employed in constructing the sample of news outlets and Appendix D includes more detailed information on the organisations, such as founding dates, circulation/distribution figures, staffing, business models and funding arrangements but here I give a brief overview of the research subject. The mainstream media in the sample were the print and online *Bristol Post/Live* (owned by Reach); online-only *Bristol World* (owned by National World/Iconic Media); television *Points West* (BBC). These are all published, updated or broadcast daily and (despite their branding) cover an area wider than the city itself (often featuring regional, national and international content and programming). Despite alternative business and funding models, as well as diverse editorial foci, the independent hyperlocal and community news providers in the city were brought together under the umbrella term, nonmainstream, and were *Bristol 24/7*; *Bristol Cable*; Local Voice Network (LVN—*Bishopston Voice; Fishponds Voice; Henleaze and Westbury Voice; South Bristol Voice*); North

Bristol Press (NBP—*Bradley Stoke Journal; Stoke Gifford Journal*); *The Bristolian*; *The Knowledge*. The frequency for these media ranged from daily to monthly or less frequent, and formats covered digital and print. I also interviewed media workers involved in the community radio stations which cater for Bristol's ethnic and diasporic communities—*BCfm* and *Ujima Radio*—as well as freelancers, podcasters, bloggers and citizen journalists.

While Bristol was host to a healthy rivalry between many daily newspapers in the 19th and early-20th centuries, the daily print presence has been whittled down to one, *The Bristol Post*—which marked its 90th year in 2022 and is now owned by the national conglomerate, Reach—with a sister website, *Bristol Live*. The BBC began local radio broadcasts in the 1920s—now called *Radio Bristol*—and daily regional television news bulletins from the late 1950s—*Points West*—with local commercial television news following in the late 1960s. *Bristol World* was launched online only by National World (now called Iconic Media) in 2021 (Sharman, 2021c). These are part of nationally controlled larger organisations which set the market orientation and goals of their local outlets, such as page view targets, as well as utilising centralised and networked content creation.

The city has also been a magnet for other media businesses, including independent television and film production and magazine publishing (Norton, 2018b), and small-scale radio stations, including pirates (Limbu, 2024). There is also a strong activist, counter-cultural, bohemian and creative tradition in the city which has inspired and provided a springboard to Do-It-Yourself (DIY)/independent-minded and community-focused entrepreneurship and influenced the ethos of some of its hyperlocal publications, websites and community radio stations (Byrne, 2012; Owen, 2013; Templeton, 2005).

The nonmainstream media are just about holding on in a climate of precarious grant dependency and uncertain advertising revenues (Carnegie UK Trust, 2015; Harris, 2016; Konow-Lund, 2019). Some are online only—exploring the potential for the digital transformation of journalism and activism (Fenton, 2010a, 2016; Pickard & Yang, 2017)—and others rely on traditional formats such as print. Among the different models and innovations are membership involvement; podcasts and videos; ethnic broadcasting by volunteers; and door-to-door delivery in small catchment areas. They are also carrying out boundary-blurring or -challenging work such as solutions journalism and featuring user-generated content. Citizen journalism, represented by bloggers and tweeters, is also present in the city (Bruns et al., 2008; Canter, 2013a; Glaser, 2010; Örnebring, 2013; Paulussen & D'heer, 2013; Paulussen et al., 2007; Reese et al., 2007; Robinson & DeShano, 2011a, 2011b; Wall, 2015). *Bristol 24/7* is a daily

online operation, and the rest are published in print on a monthly or less frequent basis, with their sister websites updated irregularly. *Bristol 24/7*, *The Bristol Cable* and *The Bristolian* are city-wide news operations, while the LVN and NBP publications, and *The Knowledge* focus on smaller areas, such as wards.

The independent nonmainstream organisations have emerged in the city over the past ten to 15 years, with some being set up by redundant mainstream local journalists—Harcup (2005) identified these as cross-over journalists, with experience of working in both mainstream and nonmainstream media and are examples of the need to regard category boundaries as potentially porous, as discussed above (Section 1.2.4)—with a goal to fill gaps in the market, including lifestyle and entertainment news, local classified advertising and news focused more explicitly on social justice. There is an ongoing struggle to survive and thrive (Heawood & Padania, 2023, p. 18), but, as Bruno and Nielsen (2012) contend, survival for new media start-ups "in itself must be recognised as a form of success" (p. 102). To illustrate the unstable nature of news ecosystems, as my research got underway, *Bradley Stoke Journal* ceased print production but remained online (Sharman, 2022f); *Bristol 24/7* revived its print edition after a three-year hiatus due to the Covid pandemic (Sharman, 2022q); and the BBC cut back its local radio programmes, replacing them with nationally or regionally produced content, and increased its online presence (*Bristol Post*, 2023; Tobitt, 2023a). This research was also an opportunity to investigate the effectiveness of the BBC-funded Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) in the city, as two reporters cover the activities of the local authorities and other public bodies, and their copy is published by most of the local mainstream and nonmainstream news outlets. The important contribution of this publicly subsidised public interest news reporting service to the local news ecosystem is discussed in Chapter 6.

Bristol is marked by stark social stratification (Cork, 2018, 2025; Gouk & Farell Roig, 2024; Runnymede Trust, 2017) with some parts of the city reaping the benefits of, and being transformed by, a gentrifying boom and inward migration, while other place-based communities, characterised by race, class and strongly felt identities and heritages, contend with poverty, high crime rates and discrimination (Palmer, 2019). This is reflected in the local journalistic provision—some outlets offer city-wide coverage, with a catholic conception of their audiences, while others focus on smaller, socioeconomically and culturally distinct, parts of the city and have a remit to address the economic inequalities suffered by marginalised communities and the stigmatisation which is, often inadvertently, replicated in local news coverage. To illustrate the social and historical context the local media work

within, Appendix K contains some historical examples of negative representation and erasure in the Bristol media and the reactions from those parts of the community which have been adversely affected.

To add to analogies about the present journalistic crisis—deserts, black holes, droughts, oases, savannahs, ghost and zombie newspapers—what we may be seeing in Bristol is a news mirage, or as Gilroy-Ware (2020) warns, "a simulacrum of journalism" (p. 273). There is a conundrum within this thesis, that a city as well served by the media as Bristol, has dramatically varied degrees of political engagement. This closely reflects poverty levels—voter turnout in the 2024 local authority elections in Bristol's most affluent ward was 51.67% (down from 60.56% in 2016) and, for a ward at the other end of the city council's relative income table, turnout was 14.23% (down from 27.31% in 2016) (Bristol City Council, 2019, n.d.-b)—and indicates, not a lack of (democratically important) information but a disengagement from (and alienation by) the media and local politics in marginalised areas, which is discussed below. While my research found a great deal of exemplary reporting on local events in both mainstream and nonmainstream media, I also noted clumsiness, repetition, duplicated effort, plagiarising (unedited, or lightly edited, PR copy published under in-house bylines) and an inappropriate (for local media) focusing on non-local events, mainly in the media linked to national networks, as well as selective coverage of the city's various communities. Following Nielsen's (2016a) three "folk theories" of local journalism—our/their/what newspaper?—this thesis makes it clear that media coverage and reception vary from community to community within the city. As media production becomes more challenging, the diversity of voices and information needs tests the ability of the local media to fulfil its goals regarding normative democratic and social aspirations.

1.2.8 Methodology

The research methods employed in this research, and the strengths and weaknesses of a multimethod approach, are discussed in detail in Chapter 3 and the findings are presented in Chapters 4 and 5, but here I give a brief introduction. To answer the first sub-RQ a content analysis (CA) was carried out of the *total* local news output in Bristol over a two-week period, July 8 to 21, 2022 (N = 1,649 news items, with an average of 118 stories per day). This was then *disaggregated* into the output of the separate news organisations, to allow comparisons to be made in four ways: 1) ownership—mainstream or nonmainstream; 2) frequency—daily or monthly plus; 3) format—print, online or broadcast; 4) reach—regional plus, city-wide or ward-level. The content was scrutinised for presence of public interest news; (negative or positive) coverage of marginalised communities; and geographical relevance, particularly the concentration of news at ward level to determine which parts of the city have a high profile and

which are ignored. A Critical Information Needs (CINs) framework was adopted to assess public interest news coverage. CINs relate to the information about health, education, transportation, economic development, and political life, which is essential for communicatively integrated communities, and which allow *all* citizens to participate in the public sphere (Friedland, 2001, 2012; Napoli et al., 2015, 2017, 2018). The first filters in assessing CINs are the localness and originality of the content—non-local and non-original content does not fulfil the public interest news criteria for this methodological approach. A mapping exercise was therefore carried out on the content to establish the geographical relevance of each story and the sources used—whether it was relevant locally (meso: i.e. Bristol and the immediate surrounding region); hyperlocally (micro: ward and place-based community level); or was non-local (macro). The geographically hyperlocal data allowed an assessment of the positive/negative representation of place-based communities, place-based minorities and the marginalised and their absence or presence, especially in regard to concerns about democratic deficits (Barnett & Townend, 2015; Moore, 2014) and digital divides (Coughlan, 2019; Fox, 2019; Jung et al., 2001; Newman, 2022, 2024; Newman & Cherubini, 2025; Newman et al., 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025; Pipe, 2021a; Schradie, 2013; Sharman, 2019a; Sparks, 2013; Toomer, 2024; Trevana, 2021) which contribute to political disengagement and voter apathy (Crouch, 2004; Dahlgren, 2005, 2006, 2009; Hackett, 2005; Hayes & Lawless, 2018, 2021; Mair, 2023).

The second sub-RQ was mainly answered by thematic analysis (TA) and a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of semi-structured interviews with 18 local media practitioners, past and present, to examine the practices, autonomy, professional role conceptions and boundary markers of local journalists and how they are situated within an organisational level of influence and in the wider social processes and transformations taking place in changing times for the news industry (Dickinson et al., 2013) (Appendix J details the selection process and relevant biographical details, such as journalistic history, training and demographic information). TA gave a descriptive overview of their work, and CDA was used to give a qualitative insight into the motivations, discourses and ideologies behind their statements, and allowed conclusions to be made over and above the limitations of CA. This was a more discursive investigation into the ways journalists and other media workers make sense of their professional worlds and the way they respond to the social landscape they are situated in (Deacon et al., 2021, p. 7).

In addition, the research was informed by a literature review (Chapter 2) which covers academic theory and research, and is supplemented by industry reports and analyses; interviews and opinions

published by industry news sources, and blog posts and speeches on business updates and strategies for the future by management, to give context where necessary.

1.3 Researching Local Journalism

1.3.1 News Deserts, News Oases and The Field of Local Journalism Research

This section positions the thesis in relation to existing empirical and theoretical local news research, and explores the problematic binary of news deserts and news oases. While a helpful base for giving an overview of the current landscape in local journalism, a comparison of *numbers of outlets* in a *given area*, is reductive, simplistic and relies on quantity as a crude measure of value. This overlooks a nuanced, qualitative reading of the journalism on offer, such as *democratic*, *social* and *local relevance*; *socio-economic gaps* in news provision due to market orientation and historical exclusion of the marginalised (Abernathy, 2023; Örnebring, 2019); and the *types* of news organisations present in relation to ownership, format, frequency, ideological or commercial goals, financial resilience and available resources. Usher (2023) warns of a "moral panic" (p. 1) over news deserts — "physical, geographic locations that lack regular access to credible and comprehensive local news" (ibid) — and the decline of local journalism generally which "reinforce[s] a false nostalgia for the role of local newspapers in communities and focus[es] on saving local newspapers as they are rather than reimaging what local news could be" (p. 2). Usher also argues that a "terminological haziness" about how to quantify news loss "muddies potentially actionable empirical data". As such, Usher calls for more reflexivity about communities that have been historically marginalised (ibid), and greater attention to place-based social identities which "might better link news losses to other concerns, including declines in trust in media ... and democratic processes" (p. 6). This is in addition to a warning that holding up mainstream newspapers as the "gold standard for community information and mythologised for their presumptive role in community cohesion and civic engagement" hinders a better understanding that local journalism has, at times, been insufficient in serving many communities and has been harmful to democratic life (p. 3).

This thesis argues that, while news deserts, and a fragmenting media landscape, are the focus of greatest concern among academics, policy makers and those within the news industry around the societal impact of the erosion of the public interest news and community sustaining functions of contemporary local journalism, and the pressure to evolve organisational practices, studies of so-called news oases can reveal a great deal about best practice, market orientation and commercial goals, and

help illuminate current debates over "what is journalism?" (Deuze, 2005). Despite the difficulties of defining news oases with a high degree of academic rigour, as discussed below, they are, for the purposes of this thesis, dynamic news ecosystems (Anderson, 2010, 2016a; Local News Lab n.d.) noted for the variety, diversity and plurality of media organisations in a bounded geographic area. Of central importance to this thesis is that news oases, rather than being the acme of local journalism and the mirror image of news deserts, are made up of imperfect elements, and it is the study of the intrinsic imperfections, overlaps and gaps, which make them valuable test beds, while shedding light on under-researched areas. Comparing innovative and diverse experiments in delivering news can give important insight into how frontline news workers and new actors show commitment to normative journalistic values, and construct and maintain professional boundaries in regard to expertise, duty and autonomy (Örnebring, 2013)—such as reporting democratically vital information and holding power to account; community bonding and bridging aspirations, especially regarding the marginalised; and working under the influence of contrasting organisational goals and constraints. Focusing on a city with a variety of media outlets can shed light on the local journalism which is in a place, rather than what has been lost (Usher, 2023, p. 10). Despite this, a longitudinal study of changes in local journalism would be a valuable consideration for future research, but was beyond the resources and ultimate intentions of this thesis.

Studies of local journalism frequently make comparisons at scale, nationally or cross-nationally, which identify broad geographic trends and reveal connections between media concentration and relative affluence, as shown by the United Kingdom Government's *Cairncross Review* (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2019) for example. These are important for giving an overview of the current journalistic landscape and inform arguments which champion the potential of local media to challenge mis/disinformation, the fraying of community networks and solidarities, and democratic disengagement. In the UK in recent years there have been valuable studies mapping the distribution of local news producers—identifying news oases and news deserts—from the Public Interest News Foundation (PINF) (Bisiani & Mitchell, 2024; Mitchell et al., 2023) (as noted in Subsection 1.1.2 above); investigating ownership, and the connection between national conglomerates, hedge fund shareholders, and local outlets, as well as identifying monopolies, from the Media Reform Coalition (2023); and market analysis of the sector from Enders Analysis (McCabe et al., 2023).

These studies have been important sources of information for this research, but data-gathering exercises such as these rarely have the scope or resources to investigate the quality, and local relevance, of the journalism present (Mitchell et al. 2023). The factors which make "ghost" or "zombie"

newspapers problematic—limited original and local reporting and minimal staff numbers (Abernathy, 2020; Climenhaga, 2012)—are rendered invisible by this approach. Problems with the concept of spreading news deserts, identified by Usher (2023), are that it "flattens place" by overlooking "where news is lost and where journalists are located is not just a matter of physical location—places have their own cultures and histories, with economic, social, and political dimensions"(p. 2), and a narrative of decline obscures an understanding of historical news deserts. Also, related to this, PINF's headline research compares local authority areas irrespective of population density, so for example, the county of Cornwall (1,375 square miles and a population of 585,655) and the city of Bristol (42.3 square miles and a population of 494,399) are both lauded as news oases with similar numbers of news outlets (26 and 23 respectively) despite the vast difference in the size of area they cover and types of communities they serve (Sharman, 2023g). PINF, while acknowledging its mapping exercise is a work in progress, is also vague about what constitutes a news outlet, beyond being legally incorporated, having the provision of local news as its principal purpose, and recently updated. It should be noted PINF's Local News Map project also contains research controlled for population, i.e. local authority districts per local news outlets per 100,000 population, but this has made less of an impact than their news oasis/deserts findings. Napoli et al's (2015, 2017, 2018) Critical Information Needs (CIN) framework is a method utilised in this thesis, which identifies public interest news published by individual outlets within a bounded geographic area, and screens out non-original and non-local content. It has also been designed with scalability in mind, so it can be applied to cities or regions of any size, or social/economic demographic make-up, to allow comparisons to be made.

Large-scale, national projects in the United States have also been influential in methodological design and conceptualising the extent of the local journalism crisis throughout the West. The State of Local News Project (Abernathy, 2022, 2023; Metzger, 2024, 2025), maps local news provision across the whole of the country, and reports by Tow Center (Ali & Radcliffe, 2017; Radcliffe & Ali, 2017; Radcliffe & Wallace, 2021) and Pew Research Center (Mitchell et al., 2015), compare a range of conurbations nationally, while also charting the decline in employment in local media. International comparison studies of the impact of the journalism crisis on news ecosystems have also been conducted by Anderson et al. (2015) and Powers et al. (2015), between cities in the UK and the US, for the former; and France and the US, for the latter, which provide useful insight into how nation-specific models of media systems, and public and philanthropic funding, compare.

In contrast, this study takes a narrower, in-depth approach in a geographically bounded area which gives equal attention to the agenda-setting legacy media, such as the local daily newspaper, its website and the BBC, and the variety of small-scale niche endeavours which continue to emerge within the news ecosystem, as well as taking into account the work of the Local Democracy Reporting Scheme (LDRS), which is currently under-researched. Mainstream and nonmainstream news output and approaches are usually considered separately as distinct news forms, either abstractly, or in national, or international, surveys, and studies comparing these sectors are rare. This thesis is an attempt to address this gap in scholarly knowledge, as Zelizer (2004b) contends about research which "furthered the separation between mainstream news and news of a different order—alternative, tabloid, oppositional. Lost were the nuances that legitimated both as part of one world" (p. 110), and is an opportunity to test the parameters of professional practice (p. 112) by exploring Deuze's (2005) argument that there is a "dominant occupational ideology" among journalists across media (p. 445). Wahl-Jorgensen (2017) has warned that journalism research is being skewed towards a small set of elite news organisations at the expense of "marginal and unfashionable practices" but, as this thesis argues, the latter can help inform a fuller appreciation of the fragmentation of local journalism and assist in the interrogation of the assumption that the boundary between professional and nonprofessional, or interloper, journalism can be understood as a clearly defined binary, as reflected upon in the discussion on categories, and cross-over journalists, above (Section 1.2.4). While a place-confined approach cannot give insight into broad trends it does have the advantage of being replicable. It seeks to explore how variations in a common professional ethos, and commitment to normative role conceptions, can produce a variety of news content from news workers in the same news environment. It can also investigate the importance of local focus and affective attachment (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2023) for local media in the context of relatively recent digital innovation, which opens up new audiences, and a geographic turn in journalism studies, which acknowledges journalism's affective representation of place-based communities (Schmitz Weiss, 2015, 2018, 2020) (see Section 2.2 below). Such an approach is more sensitive to an understanding of how local journalism can, and should, adapt to different information needs in a society with marked cultural, economic and ethnic diversity (Örnebring, 2019), such as that which is indelibly etched into the social landscape of the UK (Crossley, 2017; Hanley, 2007; Reardon & Bischoff, 2011).

Two important UK-based quantitative and qualitative studies were models for this thesis: the first was carried out on the news ecosystem in Leeds, a post-industrial city in the north of England (Coleman et al., 2016; see also Anderson et al., 2015; Firmstone, 2016). This study was motivated by "a

simple civic concern: unless people know what's going on in the areas where they live and work, what hope is there that they will form wider social attachment, awareness and engagement?" (p. 3) and concluded that "the sustainability of civic democracy cannot be left to the vagaries of the marketplace" (p. 227). The second was a longitudinal examination into the decline of locally based journalism and the growing democratic deficit in a "news black hole" after dedicated media withdrew from Port Talbot, an economically struggling town in South Wales (Harte et al., 2019; Howells, 2015). Both studies influenced my choice of research methods—CA and semi-structured interviews with media personnel. I did not follow Howells in carrying out audience focus groups or making longitudinal comparisons, as resources were limited, but these methods would be considered for further research.

While city-wide news ecosystems in the UK, and especially those with a (relatively) healthy media mix (and LDRS reporters), have only rarely been the subject of research (Firmstone, 2016), a number of US-based studies of city news ecosystems have been carried out, including New York (Ford, 2018; Rafsky, 2020a, 2020b), Chicago (Mayer & Clark, 2009; van Duyn et al., 2018), Baltimore (Pew 2010), the San Francisco Bay Area (Ramos et al., 2013), and Philadelphia (Anderson, 2013a), the latter being especially important in revealing how legacy news organisations and their institutional practices are rapidly changing in response to an emerging online news challenge. These studies bring together a mass of valuable data on the market failure of local journalism in the US and explore potential remedies including non-profit journalism, public funding and the creation of a media environment conducive to experimentation (Ford, 2018). These cities are larger than most in the UK, with bigger news operations—Usher (2021) refers to these as Goldilocks newspapers, while being the "authoritative voice of a city or region" they "face a shared financial dilemma because of their size. They aren't big enough to have regular national audiences, but they aren't so small or specialised as to have niche audiences" (pp. 11, 132). The content studies reveal the type of news and information most prevalent in each of the cities, the reliance on elite sources and news triggers as well as the relationships between traditional media and their newer rivals. Several of these studies (notably van Duyn et al., 2018) note the problem of marginalising communities through lack of coverage, source selection or negative framing. Rafsky (2020a, 2020b) warned that even a media capital such as New York City is in danger of becoming a local news desert—according to Usher (2021), it is more comparable to a savannah "with dry spots in poorer and more diverse neighbourhoods". Hayes and Lawless (2018, 2021) have also produced important work pointing to a strong correlation between cuts to local political coverage and reduced engagement in democratic politics, which is echoed in the findings of Schulhofer-Wohl and Garrido (2013) on the fall

in voter turnout following the closure of the *Cincinnati Post*, and Shaker (2014) on the decline in civic engagement after newspapers in Denver and Seattle folded.

Research into hyperlocal news operations (Fink, 2025; Wahl-Jorgenson, 2023; Williams et al., 2015a) has given insight into the social and cultural impact of smaller journalistic endeavours in marginalised communities or news drylands such as South Los Angeles (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001; Broad et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2018), Kentucky (Wenzel, 2020c), the east end of London (Harte et al., 2016, 2019), and Germantown in Philadelphia (Wenzel & Crittenden, 2021; Wenzel et al., 2018), among others. While these provide valuable insight into the motivations of news workers, their journalistic practices, methods of engagement, professional ethos, and the funding and business sustainability of these operations, empirical comparisons between these organisations and their mainstream rivals, are rare.

Section 2.5 below explores current thinking regarding the oppositional or counter-hegemonic positioning of alternative media in relation to their mainstream, legacy counterparts. This stance is evident in Harcup's (2003) "ideological analysis" of the coverage of the July 1981 riots in the Chapeltown area of Leeds by the mainstream *Yorkshire Evening Post* (*YEP*) and the alternative *Leeds Other Paper* (*LOP*). The analysis showed the *YEP*'s dominant message was a "law and order" one, echoing the priorities of the national media (p. 363). Whereas the *LOP* "contextualized the events within a framework of poverty, unemployment, low pay, alienation and racist attacks" (p. 365). Harcup's research pointed to counter-hegemonic journalism as a way of presenting alternative ways of seeing the world and allowing other stories to be told (see also Farrar, 2012, for a discussion of the conflicting frames of 'rioting or protesting'). While this helps in the understanding of mainstream and nonmainstream in a news ecosystem as being oppositional, Harcup (2005) has also produced valuable research into cross-over journalists, who have experience of both sectors, which has also guided the present research, and is discussed throughout this thesis.

1.3.2 Epistemological Context

The aim of this thesis is to assess the strengths and weaknesses of two different types of local media organisations—mainstream (nationally owned) and nonmainstream (locally owned)—in meeting the normative journalistic goals of being a trusted public interest news provider and community champion, by comparing their respective endeavours to fulfil the information and social needs of local communities. A study of local journalism calls for a broad epistemological approach as it needs to take

account of many connected and disparate elements—journalists' normative aspirations; a hierarchy of influences; professional boundaries; organisational sustainability; market orientation; and community representation and reputation, among them. Hatcher (2012), when discussing the academic approach to the concept of community journalism, also noted that "from a theoretical perspective, [it] is a vagabond, wandering among geography- and identity-based definitions applied by scholars from myriad disciplines" (p. 129). What draws these scholarly approaches together is a desire to explain how individuals form and maintain groups while embracing concepts of identity, place, culture, governance, ideology, and social values, which is especially pertinent in an age of technological and global transformation, as discussed below (ibid.).

As academic traditions political economy, cultural studies and mainstream sociology are often uneasily pitched against each other (Fenton, 2007; Garnham, 1995; Grossberg, 1995; Hardy, 2014a, 2014b; Phillips, 2015a; Zelizer, 2004b), and, for Schudson (1989), while all three approaches have strengths and weaknesses, they have "thus far fallen short of a comparative and historical social science of news production" (p. 266). While acknowledging the limitations of these academic approaches, this thesis draws on Hess and Waller's (2017) media power lens concept, a combination of democratic, sociological and cultural theories, which, rather than seeing the separate approaches as being in conflict, they argue these are "part of a necessary and helpful continuum" to tackle the big questions about local journalism from its "roles in politics, community formation and social change to its various relationships with audiences and how questions of power, place, labour and technology link the local with the world" (p. 34). This approach is indebted to Bourdieu's field theory and what it can tell us about journalistic autonomy and the importance of social capital to community embeddedness (Benson, 2006; Benson & Neveu, 1995; Bourdieu, 1989, 1995), and which is referred to throughout this thesis.

Political economy relates news production to the economic structure of news organisations "to understand the fundamental consonance between profit-seeking industry and conservative, system-maintaining news" (Schudson, 1989, p. 266). It calls for an understanding of the impersonal laws of the marketplace and the success and long-term viability of media industries (Cottle, 2003, pp. 4, 9). According to Schudson the mainstream sociological approach centres on journalists' professed autonomy and decision-making power and how they are constrained by organisational and occupational routines (ibid). While cultural studies interrogate the ways in which messages, meanings and ideas, such as "community", are generated within texts, discourses and signifying practices (Cottle, 2003, p. 11). Zelizer (2004b) highlights the problematic relationship between the objective positioning of

journalism—"when facts, truth and reality are God-terms"—and cultural studies' focus of inquiry, which is informed by notions of relativity, subjectivity and construction (p. 100). For Schudson, this involves finding "symbolic determinants of news in the relation between ideas and symbols" (op. cit., p. 275). This research considers the meanings, symbols and symbolic systems, ideologies, rituals, and conventions "by which journalists maintain their cultural authority as spokespeople for events in the public domain" (Zelizer, 2004b, p. 101). Through acknowledging the symbolic importance of "place" (Massey, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1998, 1999, 2005; Usher, 2019), and a concern about territorial stigmatisation in relation to inequality (Crossley, 2017; Dorling, 2015a, 2023; Hancock & Mooney, 2013; Harvey, 1998; Slater, 2018, 2021; Slater & Anderson, 2011; Wacquant, 2007, 2008; Wacquant et al., 2014), this study is an investigation into how the media represents local identities and includes local communities, especially those which are marginalised by race and/or class (Hall, 2013a; Konieczna, 2018, 2020; Konieczna & Robinson, 2014; Robinson, 2018, 2023; Robinson & Culver, 2019; Wenzel, 2020a, 2023b).

This thesis takes an integrated, interdisciplinary and empirical approach, so that, in addition to political economy and cultural studies, it also includes insights from urban studies; political theory; postcolonial studies; economic sociology; social identity theory; critical social theory; social history; social geography; race and poverty studies; anthropology; management and organisational studies; systems theory; and communication theory. The work of a wide range of scholars has informed the theoretical underpinnings of this research, among the most prominent being: Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy on race and representation and the media; Robert Park and James W. Carey on journalism's relation to the larger social and cultural fabric; Benedict Anderson on imagined communities; Pierre Bourdieu and Robert Putnam on field theory, habitus and economic, cultural and social capital; David Harvey on global and urban neoliberalism, and uneven development; Colin Crouch and Peter Mair on post-democracy political disengagement; Doreen Massey on power geometry; Jürgen Habermas and Nancy Fraser on the bourgeois and proletarian public spheres; Christopher Ali, Nikki Usher, Kristy Hess and Lisa Waller on place and localism in journalism research; Gaye Tuchman, Michael Schudson, Herbert Gans, Chris Anderson, Seth Lewis, Barbie Zelizer and Matt Carlson on the sociology of news production, professionalisation and boundaries, interpretive communities, newsroom cultures, and news ecosystems; Bob Franklin, Victor Pickard, James Curran, Andy Williams, Dave Harte, Tony Harcup, Chris Atton, Natalie Fenton, Des Freedman, Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, Andrea Wenzel, Sue Robinson, Sandra Ball-Rokeach, Magda Koniecza and many other important voices who see the journalism crisis as an

immediate civic crisis, and are endeavouring to envisage a brighter future through explorations of community-centred, grant-funded, alternative, not-for-profit, hyperlocal, citizen-led, engaged and solutions journalism; Danny Dorling, Richard Sennett and Loïc Wacquant on inequality and urban stigmatisation; Leslie Kern, Peter Marcuse and Anna Minton on gentrification and community resistance; and Foucault, Althusser, Gramsci, Raymond Williams and other Marxist and post-Marxist theorists on class, power, discourse, ideology and hegemony.

1.3.3 Summary of Findings

The results of this thesis's CA, TA and CDA are discussed in detail in Chapters 4 and 5, and brought together with a critically reflective discussion about the significance of the findings in relation to the wider field of local journalism research in Chapter 6, while here I give a brief review of the headline similarities and differences I found between mainstream and nonmainstream journalists and news organisations in the Bristol news ecosystem in relation to my RQ and sub-RQs.

This study reveals a complex news ecosystem in the city of Bristol, and, in terms of the variety, diversity and plurality of the news organisations present, numbers of news workers, and the volume of public interest news and community enhancing content produced, it is an outstanding example of a news oasis. Holistically, its various elements work in a complementary fashion, because, individually, the local news outlets display both strengths and weaknesses, and only limited capacity to meet the city's critical information needs, as well as those of its poorest communities. At a time when fears about the democratic and social consequences of the journalism crisis, both in terms of local news outlets closing and contracting work forces, and the way journalists face profit-versus-public good compromises in their aspirations and normative role conceptions, a multimethod, and multiplatform (mainstream and nonmainstream; print, broadcast and digital; daily and less frequent; city-wide and community-level media), study of local journalism in the city can shed light on best practice and innovation among legacy news organisations, the local public service broadcaster and independent alternatives, as well as professional boundaries, especially in relation to cross-over journalists. Two BBC-funded Local Democracy Reporting Service journalists, who report on local authority and other public sector activities for most of the local news organisations, have proved to be highly beneficial to local public interest news coverage in the city, although there is uncertainty over the scheme's long-term future. The contribution of the LDRS reporters is discussed in Chapter 6.

Some of the difficulties faced by the news organisations are common to all—financial sustainability, the dominant presence of elite (mostly male) sources, and the problem of holding power to account (especially in the way the city's mayor used race and class representation to his advantage in a fractious relationship with the local media), among them—but others are linked to specific organisational limitations—the commercial and efficiency needs of relying on non-original and non-local networked content, the consequences of the "restructuring" of parent companies, the desk-bound nature of contemporary news work, and reduced embeddedness, social capital and audience trust for the mainstream organisations; and stretched resources, and uncertain grant dependency, among the nonmainstream outlets, for example.

Journalism studies often takes the view that, in contrast to their national counterparts, local journalists practice a specialised form of journalism, where pragmatic objectivity, social capital, affective attachment, embeddedness/"lived experience" and community bridging and bonding—through balancing positive and negative coverage to address (inter-community) reputational geography and territorial stigmatisation, and (intra-community) self-esteem—play a strong role in authenticity, authority and trust building with audiences. My findings point to the need to look more closely at the categories of local journalism, though—hybrid local/national conglomerates at one end of the scale, and community-centred, hyperlocal and citizen journalism, at the other, with different types of revenue systems also playing a part, advertising-led, licence fee or membership and grant dependency—and the ways these relate to the normative roles of watchdog; disseminator of information; voice of the citizens; and community champion, their audience size (city-wide or ward/community-level) and the market orientation of the respective outlets.

For frontline news reporters in both mainstream and nonmainstream local media, their social responsibilities, as well as a conception of the democratic importance of their jobs, and how professional boundaries are maintained, carry rhetorical weight in the discourses they express around expertise, duty and autonomy. Whether or not social value has always been a strong motivating factor among local journalists is a matter for debate but recent challenges to hegemonic views of society and culture, especially in relation to race and class, such as, locally, the introduction of community radio stations and the pulling down of the Colston statue, have led to a greater awareness of diversity and inequality. This can be seen in both the discursive framing of role conceptions by individual journalists but also a more market-orientated impulse by the organisations they work for to appeal to larger and more diverse (and niche) audiences—the introduction of Reach's diversity newsletters, *Bristol 24/7*'s

community reporter scheme, the *Bristol Cable*'s solutions journalism projects, a joint anti-knife crime campaign and the BBC's plan to increase race and class representation in its workforce, for example.

The discourse analysis in Chapter 5 strengthens the contention that structure determines agency—that there is a common professional ethos among frontline news workers, irrespective of the sector they work in, and acknowledged through their discussion of the way autonomy is compromised by a hierarchy of influences, especially in relation to changes in business demands over time (a "golden age" framing) and current industrial action (labour solidarity and resistance to management-imposed goals and targets). However, a close look at the practice (or role enactment), as seen in the content produced by the news organisations, does reveal distinct differences along organisational lines, in relation to ownership, format, frequency, and geographical focus. The mainstream organisations (Reach, National World and the BBC) have the advantage of high numbers of staff, many with their own specialisms or "beats", and a historical, agenda-setting profile in the city, which means they are highly productive and allows greater access to, and coverage of, local politics, business activities, court proceedings and local sports, for example.

The mainstream *Bristol Post*, *Bristol Live*, *Bristol World* and BBC *Radio Bristol* also rely on, to a greater or lesser extent, non-original and non-local content—a 36-page copy of the *Bristol Post* typically contains only about 13 pages of local news and locally produced content for *Radio Bristo*l has been reduced to 40 hours a week. The centrally produced content comes from specialised journalists in the organisations' national networks, and is mostly bland, shallow ("quick turnaround") and commercially orientated (algorithmically and search-engine optimised) rewrites of already published material. This content is a product of consolidation and economies of scale, as well as a commercial strategy to appeal to wider audiences online (especially those beyond the local area) and, for the local print products, it is linked to national advertising spread and the expectation of high pagination in the face of newsroom cutbacks. But this content displaces local news, hampers the ability of these outlets to meet local CINs and contributes to an ongoing erosion in local audience trust. Networked and locally irrelevant content, such as this, is not present in the output of the local nonmainstream outlets and the local BBC television news show, *Points West*.

There is an ambivalent attitude towards outsider journalists in the Bristol news ecosystem. These newcomers lack "lived experience" or social or cultural connections to Bristol's many separate marginalised communities, which can damage trust with audiences and lowers respect from

experienced colleagues. But an outsider perspective has also been credited with challenging an otherwise complacent relationship between the local media and local power structures.

Community-focused news is reliant on organisational resources—the communities on the outskirts of the city are hard to reach—and commercial orientation, when affluent audiences which appeal to advertisers are being sought, but several of the news organisations use community reporters (staff, freelance, and volunteers) with a remit of covering marginalised communities. The ward and community-level outlets, all of which were nonmainstream (the Voice network, *The Knowledge*, *Ujima Radio* and *BCfm*), demonstrate a greater capacity than the city-wide media for meeting the CINs of communities and contributing to community bonding, through their geographically hyperlocal focus and embeddedness. The interviews with nonmainstream journalists, particularly the former editor of the Knowle West-based *The Knowledge*, showed an awareness that areas with high levels of deprivation suffer from negative coverage in most of the local media, whereas positive developments and events often get overlooked. The city's nonmainstream media, especially that produced on a monthly or less frequent basis showed a greater emphasis on positive coverage, whereas much negative news, such as disasters, accidents and criminal incidents have a short-term nature, which makes it more newsworthy for the daily media.

1.4 Chapter-by-Chapter Outline of Thesis

There are six chapters which make up this thesis. This chapter has introduced the thesis subject, researching a news oasis, against a background of narratives of decline and reinvention for local journalism. It included an outline of the empirical basis of the research, introduced the research subject, the mainstream and nonmainstream media in Bristol, and its efficacy in meeting its normative public interest news and community bonding aspirations; set out the research question and sub-research questions; as well as giving an overview of the research methodology, a content analysis of news output and semi-structured interviews with news workers. It also included an epistemological context for researching local journalism and placed this thesis in relation to similar studies, including a justification for using a media power lens approach, combining political economy, cultural studies and sociology, as well as a critical evaluation of the news oasis/news deserts dichotomy. This chapter concluded with a look at the historical and social context for understanding race, class and the media in Bristol.

Chapter 2 is the literature review which sets out a critical perspective on the decline and reinvention of local media, against a conjunctural moment where conflict over journalism as a way to

make a profit or as a public good is set against a "golden age" discourse. A hierarchy of influences and Bourdieu's field theory are employed to illustrate a discussion of structure versus agency in relation to journalistic autonomy and authority. The geographic turn in journalism studies in discussed with an investigation of the idea of "local" in a globalised world, and journalism as a craft of place. There is a brief history of the press, its role in community formation, its commercial development and the evolution of a professional journalistic ethos, as well as its role in democracy and the public sphere and the emergence of alternative media. It concludes with a discussion of journalism's multifaceted crisis.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology for the research and discusses the advantages of a multimethod (triangulated) approach to answering my research question and sub-research questions. The methods considered are a content analysis of news output over two weeks by nine different mainstream and nonmainstream news organisations; and a thematic and discourse analysis of semi-structured interviews of 18 past and present news workers in the Bristol area.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the content analysis and gives an overview of news output in the Bristol news ecosystem. It looks at provision of public interest news, critical information needs, source selection, coverage of marginalised communities, and the geographic focus of the mainstream and nonmainstream news output. The analysis confirms that the former rely heavily on networked, non-original news, while the latter focuses on community bonding.

In Chapter 5 the discourses in the semi-structured interviews with local news workers around expertise (professional knowledge), duty (public service) and autonomy (within organisations) are discussed in relation to category entitlement and strategic rituals, where relations with the city's political elite and marginalised communities; hierarchies of influence; resource constraints (practical ideologies); and "lived experience"/social capital/embeddedness frame the analysis. This gives an indication of the gap between professional role conceptions and role enactments.

Chapter 6 contains concluding remarks on my analysis of mainstream and nonmainstream media in the Bristol news ecosystem, with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of both forms, the need for a workable typology of categories of local journalism, an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Local Democracy Reporting Scheme in the city, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review—The Decline and Reinvention of Local News

2.1 A Critical Perspective on the Decline and Reinvention of Local Media

2.1.1 Scope of Literature Review

The literature discussed in this chapter encompasses broad academic traditions in addressing this thesis's RQ and sub-RQs—the differences between mainstream and nonmainstream media in a bounded geographic area. By its very nature local journalism combines the business of media production with meeting public interest news needs, and ethically covering socially differentiated and unequal communities, and must contend with the, often contradictory and divergent, pressures of making a profit and being a public service. The first part of this chapter argues that the current state of local journalism, and predictions over its future, need to be addressed through narratives of both decline *and* reinvention. Local journalism can be seen to be at a conjunctural moment, where current conflict between seeing journalism as a profit-making enterprise or a public good is often judged in relation to a "golden age". The tension between these goals can be examined through Bourdieu's field theory approach and an understanding of a (structural) hierarchy of influences behind the gap between journalist role conceptions and role enactments, which raise questions about the autonomy (agency) experienced by news workers. Following this I introduce the key ideas around the media's role in community formation, the public sphere and representation. There is then a discussion of the interdisciplinary need to combine political economy, cultural studies and sociological perspectives through a media power lens (Hess & Waller, 2017) approach. I also look at the geographic turn in journalism studies, the idea of "local" in a globalised world, and journalism as a craft of place. The main body of the chapter roughly integrates the key ideas with a historical sketch of the development of the press from its early role in creating imagined communities, its democratic role in the public sphere, to the present need to engage with communities, through bonding and bridging social capital and confronting territorial stigmatisation and reputational geographies. I also take into account the commercial imperatives, and ideological directions, which have shaped the form of mainstream and nonmainstream/alternative media along the way. There is then discussion of three aspects of the current crisis facing journalism—its economic model; its relationship with its audience(s); and the changing, and challenging, nature of journalism as a profession.

2.1.2 A Conjunctural Moment for Local Journalism

The current state of local journalism is often judged in relation to a golden age, with the implication that something has been lost by the pursuit of profit driving out some higher goal. But, Matthews (2020) argued, such comparisons are flawed through a "lack of evidence that titles have ever put purpose before profit" (p. 27). Usher (2010), also wary of a rose-tinted backward glance, pointed out that nostalgia is a source of comfort "that may mask the imperfect reality that existed prior to the changes" (p. 923). Gans noted: "the golden age communicates mainly the journalists' feeling that their profession is currently in decline and suffering from collective downward mobility ... feelings of downward mobility are always painful, whether justified or not, but they also inhibit people from thinking clearly about their condition and reacting constructively" (cited in Reardon, 2013, p. 168). In contrast, this thesis notes, opportunities are being created to think again about the core values of journalism and its function in society through the crisis, or crises, it faces today. As noted in the introduction, instead of seeing the trajectory of local journalism as being on an inevitable, entropic, slope, from an idealised zenith to the nadir of widespread news deserts/sea of misinformation—according to Heawood of the Public Interest News Foundation "news deserts are not devoid of information, they are information landfill sites, where anything gets dumped" (Linford, 2025w)—this thesis is also concerned with the potential to reinvent journalism, and reconsider its importance to local audiences and their critical information needs, in its investigation of emerging experiments in alternative and nontraditional media.

A conjunctural moment (Hall, 2015) such as this is not unprecedented in the history of the media. Phillips (2015a) points out that while there is "no objective matter that can be described as 'news'" (p. 5) journalists follow rules and criteria to gather, process and transmit the information we need to know, and these change from time to time, sometimes slowly and sometimes suddenly, due to new entrants and external influences, such as technological advances, wider competition and cultural change (p. 23). Schudson (1989) makes the important point that "in general, historical studies of the press reveal significantly different patterns of newsgathering and newswriting over time" (p. 280), it is helpful therefore to place the current state of local journalism in historical context, as attempted in this literature review.

2.1.3 Profit or Public Good in Mainstream and Nonmainstream Local Media

Sonwalkar (2005) asked "whose interest do the media uphold?" (p. 261). This is partly answered by considering how journalism orients itself regarding the public sphere, as well as where it directs its profit-making efforts. According to Schudson (1991) "the news media have always been a more

important forum for communication among elites (and some elites more than others) than with the general population" (p. 156), while Herman and Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model sees mass media as being "interested in attracting audiences with buying power, not audiences per se; it is affluent audiences that spark advertiser interest today" (p. 18). Both these views underline concerns that the media excludes the marginalised and erodes audience trust.

On the one hand local journalism is valued as a public good, on the other it is sustained by business principles which can compromise its democratic and socially important aspirations (Pickard, 2022; Williams, 2006). While not mutually exclusive—even the most commercially driven news businesses see the value of newsworthy stories, and hyperlocals have to raise money to survive—the journalistic content we consume is largely influenced by normative expectations and professional standards, as well as the economics of the industry. This thesis contends that this is manifested, structurally and organisationally, through the conflict, negotiations, accommodations and compromises between the commercial and public service goals and who gets the final say within media organisations over the direction of editorial priorities, market orientation and choice of target audiences (Gallagher, 1982).

Curran (2018) argues against a simplistic Whig history of the press—the progression from an instrument of government and party to being the voice of the people—which prevailed among academics into the late 20th century (pp. 3-7). This saw key legislative developments such as the abolition of the Court of the Star Chamber (1641), the end of newspaper licensing (1649), Fox's Libel Act (1792), and the repeal of newspaper taxes in the period 1853-61 as major advancements in the struggle against state censorship and towards serving the people (ibid.). In an influential reassessment of press history Curran contends that the middle of the 19th century inaugurated "not a new era of press freedom but a system of censorship more effective than anything that had gone before"—market forces were the mechanism which succeeded in conscripting the press ("dominated by oligarchs"—the press barons) to the prevailing social order (ibid.). He also makes the point that the motives behind liberating the press from direct taxes were based on indoctrinating the masses rather than being influenced by contemporary ideas about freedom. He concludes that much of the press since the 19th century has chosen "to side with privilege, and in some cases to actively bully the vulnerable" (ibid.).

The media is caught in the double bind (Hall, 1974) of reproducing consensus—which involves reinforcing dominant assumptions about society and how it should operate—while opening itself up to

the criticisms of those who lie outside the consensus. Understanding of the role of "broker" institutions such as the communications media, allows us to investigate the *structure of legitimation* behind the *hegemonic domination* of one sector over all the others (Hall, 2021l, pp. 138-143, emphasis added) and the cultural challenges and defences—cultures of resistance, preservation and survival—which emerge *from below* (Hall, 2021m, pp. 162, 172, emphasis added) in the complexity and differentiation—the "differentiated specificity/complex unity"—of "plural societies" (Hall, 2021l, p. 142). This is further explored in the discussions below on how the bourgeois public sphere emerged, through the development of the press, to represent the concerns of the privileged, the arguments for addressing an emerging proletarian public sphere, and the radical expression of autonomy seen in independent media.

The principal aim of this thesis is to make an important contribution to both academic studies and policymaking through a comparison of two types of local media in Bristol in south west England: three larger *mainstream* news organisations (traditional; legacy; owned by national—commercial or public—parent companies and organisations, with commitments to shareholders and charter objectives, and having vertical management hierarchies); and six smaller *nonmainstream* (alternative; hyperlocal; community-focused and/or -run; advertising or grant-dependent; independently owned; horizontal management) (Table 3.1 lists the individual organisations). This is carried out through an investigation of their public interest and community news functions (by means of a content analysis based on a combined Critical Information Needs and mapping framework—the methodology is discussed in Chapter 3 and the results in Chapter 4) in the competition for audience attention, loyalty and trust, and the way these are symbolically linked to *localness* and concomitant *community identity/representation*; as well as the discourses apparent in interviews with 18 news workers (by means of textual and critical discourse analyses—the methodology is discussed in Chapter 3 and the results in Chapter 5).

The word "mainstream" is ambiguous and has multiple meanings within media, communications and journalism studies (Steensen et al., 2023), likewise Metzgar et al. (2011) discuss the problem of defining "hyperlocal" media, particularly because of the variety of different models, in terms of organisation, professional self-image, ethos and function, and argue "once one moves beyond the general assumption that there is a geographic—i.e. local—component to the operation, suppositions about similarities must end" (p. 774). Holt et al. (2019) suggest three levels at which distinct differences can be perceived between mainstream media (MSM) and alternative media—the *micro level* with content producers, content and style; the *meso level* with publishing routines and the media organisation; and the *macro level* with its function and impact on the societal structure (p. 865). These

levels are not isolated and each has an effect on others, but, as it is necessary for this thesis to explore the dichotomy between two sectors which show clear differences in their market orientations and the content of the news they produce (the focus of the content analysis in Chapter 4), this research posits *the type of ownership structure* (locally-based independent, or answerable to a national organisation) as the key differentiating and overriding factor in setting the ideological direction of the organisation and the parameters journalists work within, whatever their role aspirations. Harvey (2019b) notes the problem of scale, that community needs and solutions become more complex as one moves away from ward-level, so that horizontal control seen in hyperlocals (with few staff) inevitably gives way to tiered control for national organisations (with many, geographically dispersed staff). Frequency, format and choice of circulation/distribution/broadcast areas also play a part, and are considered in the research content analysis, but these are fundamentally determined by ownership. Owners obviously react to social change—the Black Lives Matter protests and, in Bristol, the pulling down of the Colston statue, prompted changes in editorial policy—but they act differently within organisational parameters.

The differences between the two sectors are therefore apparent in *layers of management*—a minimal or multiple intra-organisational hierarchy of influence (Gallagher, 1982; Reese, 2001, 2016)—and the owners' *symbolic and actual distance from/proximity to* key audiences (Waschková Císarová, 2017), as well as market orientation, specifically the *geographically related* business strategies which prioritise scale and new, geographically non-specific/non-local markets (Cottle, 2003, p. 10) over engagement with geographically specific/local audiences. While the BBC is publicly funded through the licence fee, with a public service remit and obligations, and not directly exposed to commercial, or profit-seeking, pressures, for the purposes of this thesis I regard the organisation as mainstream because its local services (radio, television and online, including social media) are vulnerable to the priorities of keeping a national organisation afloat in the face of financial constraints and a politically sensitive dependency on public funding. The corporation is also overseen by complex management strata. According to Murdock (1982) the BBC cannot let its total share of the audience slip below 50% for any length of time, so "it is drawn into a battle with the commercial companies in which it has to offer comparable products" (p. 121; see also McNair, 2000). As such, there is evidence of *increased standardisation* and *decreased localism* as the regional BBC services compete with commercial rivals for audiences, as well as with other departments for funds.

2.1.4 A Hierarchy of Influences and Bourdieu's Field Theory

Media content is created by individuals acting "in a concerted and predictable fashion" towards a "collective purpose" (Wang & Polillo, 2016, pp. 46, 58) and is enabled—by providing the conditions and resources for action—and constrained—by placing limits on what is possible and feasible—by a hierarchy of influences (Breed, 1997; Reese, 2001, 2016) or control (Gallagher, 1982). The relation between structure and action is "dynamic and two-way—that 'structures are constituted through action' at the same time as 'action is constituted structurally'" (Giddens, quoted in Deacon et al., 2021, pp. 10-11) and influence operates on multiple levels (micro, meso and macro) (Ferrucci, 2015): the individual (journalists and other media workers); communication routines (such as "beats"); organisational (media ownership)—Slattery (2005) notes "a delicate balance of power between editors and their management"; social institutional (the influence of outside organisations such as public relations and the government); and the larger social system (wider constructs such as culture) (Ferrucci, op. cit., p. 198). According to Cottle (2003) "media personnel, whatever their position within organisational hierarchies, are compelled by impinging determinants—economic, technological, ideological—to reproduce media forms and content unconsciously and routinely in predetermined ways" (p. 5). There is a highly competitive jobs market in UK journalism, and high staff turnover, and this should also be borne in mind when considering the level of autonomy practiced by journalists and the power management has over them, as Phillips (2015a), pointed out "people who fear that they will be sacked, or will never get a job, are inclined to do what they are told, rather than risk losing their jobs" (p. 78).

Bourdieu's idea of a journalistic field (Benson, 2006; Benson & Neveu, 1995; Bourdieu, 1989, 1995) as a "structured social space" (Vos, 2016, p. 385) is useful for understanding how the internal division of labour and operation of forces within fields leads to the clustering of those occupying similar positions and specialisms and generates hierarchies and oppositions between these clusters (Wang & Polillo, 2016, pp. 45, 49). Relational actors with strategic goals (Robinson, 2018, p. 18) "jostle for status and control vis-à-vis the economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital at stake in the particular field" (Slater, 2021, p. 5) which is mediated by the positions they occupy within these fields "according to their class, race, professional title, social networks, etc." (Robinson, 2018, p. 21). It should also be noted that fields exist in conjunction with other fields, such as the political field—"embedded and overlapping, but also in competition and in synergy" (Robinson, 2018, p. 24).

Phillips (2010) also noted, Bourdieu's field theory "allows us to see not only how, but also why, changes are taking place in different ways, across different newspapers" (p. 89). While journalists value

professional autonomy in giving legitimacy or credibility to what they do (Deuze, 2005; McAllister, & Proffitt, 2020; Singer, 2007; Sjøvaag, 2013), field theory identifies journalism as weakly autonomous (Phillips, 2015a). Media workers and organisations are located along an axis—"those controlled by the state, or driven purely by the desire to increase dividends for shareholders, lie at the 'heteronomous' pole, of their professional 'field' whereas those driven more by the desire to maintain their cultural position and influence, lie closer to the 'autonomous' pole" (Phillips, 2010, p. 89). The tension between priorities, in a period of transformation, instability or uncertainty—as seen in the crisis in journalism, as discussed below, and the entry of challengers at the boundaries—can result in goal misalignment and the introduction, or strengthening, of mechanisms for internal control by management (Wang & Polillo, 2016, pp. 56-57), such as page view targets, and analytics (Bélair-Gagnon & Holton, 2018; Blanchett Neheli, 2018; Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016; Engel, 2009; Tandoc, 2014, 2015; Tandoc & Thomas, 2015; Tandoc & Vos, 2016; Whittington, 2020), as well as efficiency savings, such as reduced workforces and resources. These compromise individual journalistic autonomy, are tied to market orientation rather than the public interest (Lewis, 2006), and are a factor in job dissatisfaction, retention[3] and insecurity (Reeder, 2023a; Spilsbury, 2017, 2024).

These observations show local journalism must balance its commercial goals with the normative aspirations of being a watchdog; information source; representative of the voice of citizens; and community champion (McNair, 2009). The next section gives a brief overview of the community role of journalism by introducing the ideas of identity, representation and social capital, and indicating their relations to audience trust and credibility.

2.1.5 From Imagined Communities to Communicatively Integrated Community

Society is not homogenous, it is an heterogenous collection of different communities with different information needs and relations to power, and local journalism has traditionally aspired to both helping bond communities, and bridging an uneven social landscape. This chapter looks at some of the key literature to understand basic concepts of how society works and how the media is involved. This involves understanding, at a basic level, that a "community" is a group formed by individuals with a common affinity—*intrinsically*, that is the material conditions of their existence, such as race, class and

3 Pre-Covid figures from the National Council for the Training of Journalists found 13% of graduates leave journalism roles for jobs in PR or the wider economy within three years, and that "less than half of those who qualify with an NCTJ diploma were working in journalism roles within three years after graduating" (Kersley, 2022n, 2022o).

where people live (similarities); as well as *relationally*, in relation to other positions (differences) (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 6). The term community is often used to refer to homogenous and disadvantaged groups, as is frequently found in this thesis, but it is a highly contested term, especially when journalism must contend with meeting the information needs of both place-based and interest-based groups. This raises questions about the geographic focus of local journalism, both mainstream and nonmainstream, which is discussed below.

Anderson's (1991) idea of imagined communities is important in understanding that social groups come about through the construction of commonly accepted values and goals (hegemony) between individuals who never meet but, with whom, they feel socially, culturally and ideologically bonded—the media is one of the channels through which this occurs. The public sphere is an example of how communication over distances facilitates community formation. In the case of Habermas's (1989) original concept, the media helped, initially place-based, individuals—in the coffee houses of Northern Europe—form a new social class, the bourgeois, which transcended place. Identity is another linked concept, it is the way individuals align themselves with like-minded individuals, thus forming communities. But, as the social construction of identity is fluid (Hall, 2021a), we are also members "simultaneously, of several, overlapping, 'imagined communities'" (Hall, 2017c, p. 280)—Du Bois used the term "double consciousness" to convey the experience of living with different identities, in his case being both black and American (Harvey, 2019a, p. 128). Younge (2011) argues that certain identities come to the fore at certain moments, they are not neutral, "they are rooted in material conditions that confer power and privilege in relation to one another" (p.146). This fluidity and complexity underlies the concept of intersectionality (Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), which usefully points to the way social identities, in relation to empowerment and oppression (Foucault, 1977), intersect and overlap.

Edward Said (1994) linked these affinities to place and claimed the media perpetuates myths—"imaginative geographies"—that fix identities, memories, power, and authority. Massey (1993, 1999, 2005) argued for a more progressive and outward-looking sense of place which takes account of the "power-geometry of time-space compression" in which spatiality is both shaped by, and reproduces, power relations in society. Permanence in this case is not guaranteed and so it is worth noting Freeman's (2020) observation that place is "an ever-changing and contested social construction" (p. 525).

Hall (1986) notes the media are "the *machinery of representation* in modern societies" (p. 9, emphasis in original)—if you are white, male, a businessman or a politician or a professional or a celebrity, your chances of getting represented will be very high. If you are black, or a woman without social status, or poor or working class or gay or powerless because you are marginal, you will always have to fight to get heard or seen. The structure of access to the media is therefore systematically skewed in relation to certain social categories. He noted:

> Some things, people, events, relationships *always* get represented: always centre-stage, always in the position to define, to set the agenda, to establish the terms of the conversation. Some others sometimes get represented—but always at the margin, always responding to a question whose terms and conditions have been defined elsewhere: never 'centred'. Still others are always 'represented' only by their eloquent absence, their silences: or refracted through the glance or the gaze of others. (p. 9, emphasis in original)

There are two basic problems which journalism must contend with in relation to communities, one concerns *bonding within* homogenous communities, the other concerns *bridging between* heterogenous communities. Communities depend on solidarity, mutual aid, trust, reciprocity, ideological agreement, social capital, rules and distinctions about membership and ways the Other (non-members) is identified and related to (Bourdieu, 1984; Hall, 2013b; Sonwalkar, 2005), but we live in a social world marked by disparate communities, often living side by side (Amin, 2002; Fryer, 2018; Liu, 2018; Olusoga, 2021). So, while intra-group relationships are important for reassuring stability and self-esteem, it is necessary to also contend with inter-group relationships, this can be seen in Friedland's (2001, 2012) notion of communicatively integrated community. When, as is pertinent to this thesis, communities in multicultural and multiethnic cities exist in close proximity, they do so on a spectrum which moves from integration (with a strong presence of bridging and bonding social capital), to co-dependent alliances of a sort, and tolerance (or disinterest/ignorance), to intolerance, antagonism and violence (Hall, 2021e, 2021f) (with weak levels of inter-group bridging, but strong levels of intra-group bonding, social capital). This thesis argues that the ability of local media to provide bridging and bonding social capital is an important element in its relationship with its audience(s), particularly in relation to trust and credibility, and is linked to its geographic focus. This is demonstrated by the way the insularity felt by those communities suffering from physical, economic and social immobility has increasingly been exploited by reactionary and divisive politics in recent years, so much so that "localism" was a "defining political keyword" in the debates leading up to the referendum on the UK leaving the European Union

(Featherstone et al., 2012; Ince, 2011). Appiah (2019) warns that populists claim to represent 100% of the people, while they dismiss opponents as "not part of the people at all" (pp. 98-9). According to Ince (2011) one of the strategies adopted by the far right—undermining anti-racist efforts—is an attempt to define community in its own terms "by identifying a vague, contested term and ascribing to it an 'authentic' lineage, the BNP [far-right British National Party] seeks to naturalise a particular understanding of community as *the authentic one*" (p. 18, emphasis in original).

The difficulties of carrying out research which, by necessity, combines a wide range of academic traditions is discussed next.

2.1.6 An Interdisciplinary and Critical Approach

The study of journalism is a deeply contested field (Phillips, 2015a, p. 1), traditionally approached through either a *political economy* perspective—how news in a democracy is shaped and limited by market forces (Cottle, 2007)—or a *cultural studies* approach, which explores the discourses and identities (ibid.), and the values and meanings (Deacon et al., 2021, pp. 8-9) embedded in news texts. For Schudson (1989) a cultural studies approach "finds symbolic determinants of news in the relations between ideas and symbols" (p. 275) and the way taken-for-granted values and "the whole ideological atmosphere of our society" (p. 278) appear in news content. Some scholars have found the mythical divide between the two approaches to be unhelpful (Garnham, 1995; Grossberg, 1995; Hardy, 2014a, 2014b; Zelizer, 2004), and Fenton (2007) argued that the distinctions can be less clear-cut—"there is much to be gained from embracing the differences where they do exist and moving towards a dialogic inter-disciplinarity" (p. 8). As both journalists and the organisations they work for are embedded in social relations and social systems, Cottle (2003) also argued for a more *sociologically* informed exploration of a "middle ground" of organisational structures and workplace practices—including the discourses of journalists concerning journalistic authority (Carlson, 2017) and autonomy (Deuze, 2005; Hanitzsch, 2011; McAllister, & Proffitt, 2020; Phillips, 2015a; Reich & Hanitzsch, 2013; Singer, 2007; Sjøvaag, 2013). Cottle (2007) also mentions other theoretical approaches: instrumental arguments about elite control over news media and output; media conspiracy claims involving news media complicity; social compositional accounts of media performance based on the demographic characteristics of journalist recruitment; and postmodernist speculation about the implosion of meaning via mediated spectacle (p. 1). As already noted, local journalism is a specialised form of journalism (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2023). The *market orientation* of mainstream and nonmainstream local news

organisations is intertwined with a *symbolic relationship* with local communities and identities — embodied in social capital, trust, representation, reputational geographies and embeddedness — particularly when niche forms such as hyperlocals and community-centred journalism are considered, with their alternative *professional conceptions* and focus on affective attachment and community involvement. These strands also mirror the three crisis aspects mentioned throughout this thesis — market performance, audience relations, and professional ethos. This thesis has therefore adopted Hess and Waller's (2017) *media power lens* approach, which combines democratic, sociological and cultural theories, as part of a "necessary and helpful continuum" (p. 34).

Golding and Murdock's (2000) critical political economy also focuses on the interplay between the symbolic and economic dimensions of public communications and the production of meaning, through engaging with empirical research and a "critique, a theoretically informed understanding, of the social order in which communications and cultural phenomena are being studied" (pp. 70-71). For Hardy (2014a) the approach "is delineated by attention to political and economic dimensions combined with critical engagement with problems that impede the realisations of social justice, equality and democracy and a sustainable ecosystem" (p. 196) and is an interventionist tradition, the validity and value of which "ultimately resides in contributing to making a difference in people's lives" (pp. 198-199). A sociopolitical and critical stance means questioning arguments or prevailing ideas, and being engaged in and committed to an emancipatory agenda (Fairclough et al., 2013). This is apparent in van Dijk's (1994) injunction to employ a "special focus on social power, power abuse, dominance and inequality (e.g. those of class, gender, race, age, etc) as they are enacted, sustained, legitimated or challenged by text or talk" (p. 435) and to address the need for social change, and is why a critical evaluation of coverage of marginalised communities by local media is important to this thesis.

A critical theory approach to social research is open to accusations that it cannot be value-free or objective (May, 2011) but the subject under scrutiny sets great store on *its* social value, particularly in its watchdog and community championing roles. As Harcup (2005) found, journalists often aspire to "change the world" and investigating the barriers and obstacles they must negotiate is a worthwhile aspiration in itself.

2.2 The Geographic Turn in Journalism Studies

2.2.1 Introduction

The democratic importance of local journalism is matched by its part in a ritual act of communication which facilitates "a sense of identification, community/sociability, security/control, expression, pleasure/entertainment, distraction, and even possession" (Coleman et al., 2016, pp. 210-1). For Carlson (2016a, 2017) journalism is variable, reliant on context, and produced through social relationships, while the media are the means "through which we are connected to the social world" (Couldry, 2003, p. 2). Local journalism is a specialised form of journalism, where "affective attachment", placed-based professional expertise and knowledge, local contacts and embeddedness are important for authenticity and credibility (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2023, pp. 2121-2122), with a social role that is "fundamentally different from that of national and global news media" (Hatcher, 2012, p. 131). Waschková Císarová (2024) notes scholars often speak about the relationships between local media, local journalists and local audiences in terms of "glue" and these relationships reflect "both the spatial and the temporal but also the emotional", systematised in the concept of "closeness" (p. 151). Hatcher (2012), though, makes the important point that "the most dangerous assumption to make in any study of community journalism is that individuals that comprise a community are equals" (p. 132). Differences in class, education, ideology, and ethnicity mean not everyone in a community enjoys the "same rights, freedoms, and access to community benefits. The ramifications of how those differences play out in the relationship between the community and the journalist can be profound" (ibid.). Bristol has a varied ethnic mix with areas of high deprivation, and low voter turnout, which presents a challenge to the local media, as Deuze (2005) contends, "the multicultural society indeed shifts the focus and news values of today's media professionals" (p. 452), and clear differences of approach to reporting on marginalised communities can be seen between the different strands of local media, as noted throughout this thesis. In the face of the practical reality of running media businesses the importance of place in "local news", and its relation to community identities, takes on a contested discursive nature, which is discussed in the next two sections on local in a globalised world and journalism as a craft of place.

2.2.2 Journalism as a Craft of Place

Specific geographical locations are a vital and innate part of local journalism, manifested in centres of production, distribution and broadcast areas, branding, historical affiliations and target audience (Dickens et al., 2015), and its "whole *raison d'être*" (Svith, 2024, p. 62, emphasis in original), indeed, physical location is one of the fundamental "five (or six) Ws", the "who, what, when, *where*, why and how" of basic news story structures. According to Mersey (2009), for local audiences, *geographic* sense of community is stronger than *online* sense of community, with the challenge to local newspapers being

the ability to "stay geographically relevant" in light of dwindling circulation figures nationwide (p. 357). This is backed by Donnelly (2005) who found decreased localism made a significant difference in readers' news awareness and concluded "that increasing the number and the depth of local stories may be the single most important thing newspapers can do to encourage an engaged readership" (p. 63). Usher (2019, 2021) argued proximity is an important element in building audience trust, it indicates "the local nature of news—how close, both physically and psychologically—an event is to the reader" (Donnelly, 2005, p. 59), and Martin (1988), when discussing news bias factors in the selection of sources, noted that when news organisations and their reporters are geographically distant from an event, a greater proportion of high level or official sources are quoted, to the extent that those representing the local community are effectively sidelined, or silenced (pp. 986, 1043). Franklin (2006b), when considering the consequences of consolidated and centralised production by mainstream conglomerates, warned of the consequences of the dislocation (or dis-*location*) of local media from traditional spatial anchors, with local newspapers being local in name only, "the town or city emblazoned on the newspaper's masthead may be one of the few remaining local features of the paper" (p. 12)[4]. Franklin's warning comes from the recognition that the term local "remains emotionally resonant, for both journalists and their fellow citizens" (Pauly, & Eckert, 2002, p. 321) as a way of protecting democracy against "baleful, distant influences" (ibid, p. 310). Usher (2019) also contended place is central to journalism's efforts to position itself as a cultural authority, she noted: "newspaper names often have a place name in them, as if to signal allegiance and special knowledge of a location" and is therefore an important component in authenticity, authority and trust (p. 85).

While conglomeration has been a major factor in local news provision for several decades more recent digital transition (Nielsen, 2012; Pavlik, 2000, 2011; Srnicek, 2017) is also influencing the long-term sustainability, and local relevance (Owen, 2018), of local journalism. For Howells (2015) the local newspaper was once the "bible" of the local community (p. 162) but this dominance has been eclipsed by the rise of social media, video platforms and online aggregators (Newman et al., 2025, p. 10). This research asks if local mainstream journalism in the UK is losing its local grounding through two radical shifts in news production and consumption. The first is the pressure to gain the attention of online

4 Centralised production is a goal for media conglomerates as they strive for efficiency. According to Matthews (2020) cutting inputs to maximise profits has been a "commercial strategy underwritten by corporate managerialism" for half a century (p. 31) with local newspapers "hollowed out, closing local offices and running news-gathering from a hub in a city miles from people's lives" (Armstrong, 2017, p. 156).

audiences (Costera Meijer, 2019) to the detriment of local ones, due to opening up new (geographically nonspecific) markets and audiences[5] beyond (geographically specific) traditional print circulation areas; and the second is the ease, and relative cheapness, with which news production can be centralised and content distributed throughout a network (Jenkins & Nielsen, 2018). McAllister and Proffitt (2020) warn of "increased standardisation and decreased localism; the emphasis on self-interested corporate promotion; and the increased leverage of advertising" (pp. 465-66, 471). These factors, organisational cost-cutting and engagement in a competitive digital "arms race", divert resources, dilute geographic focus (Firmstone & Whittington, 2021, p. 84) and reduce engagement with local audiences.

Smith and Bell (2007) contend, the influence of the media in "reflecting, constructing and expressing culture, politics and social life should not be underestimated" (p. 85). As Walter Lippman observed, we judge the credibility of a news source by its treatment of that part of the news in which we feel ourselves involved (Coleman et al., 2016, p. 34), and, as Coleman et al. also note, "the more local the news, and the more fluently and inclusively it circulates, the more likely we are to feel the benefits of the ties that it generates" (p. 206). The contention within this thesis about the fundamental nature of *local focus* for *local media*, and what this means for journalistic authenticity, should be qualified, though. For a large part of their existence, local newspapers in the UK were printed in multiple editions in the late afternoon/early evening so that readers could catch up on breaking news about national and international events, including sports results, between leaving work and settling down to watch the main evening television news. But the need for, and function of, non-local content in local media has been transformed by production cost-cutting, different work patterns and technological progress. The move away from mass shift work and changes to news industry printing schedules have seen the end of evening newspapers, the exclusivity has been superseded by mobile technology and almost immediate social media updates, and, importantly, the non-local news now published in local media outlets is largely of a trivial nature, "blander and softer" according to Firmstone and Whittington (2021, p. 89).

The erosion of local connections presents an existential problem for local journalism (Ali, 2016, 2017; Usher, 2019, 2021). At the risk of being reductive, especially when globally connected digital

5 Research carried out by trade news website *Press Gazette* in 2022 found that most local news websites across the UK derive a significant amount of their traffic from outside their local region—in February 2022 *Bristol Live* had a total UK audience of 3.1m and an audience share in its main local region of only 14%, almost the lowest (48) of 49 websites (Majid, 2022a).

media are eclipsing print[6] (Newman et al., 2025) in both production and consumption, there is a geographic essentialism to local journalism. This is both strategic—a discourse promoting uniqueness and/or sectarian difference (Robertson, 1995, p. 38)—and reassuring. There is both a phenomenological and an imaginary aspect to this geographical slippage. Harvey (2019a) noted three different philosophical conceptions of space/place—absolute, relative and relational, the first being fixed and the primary space for individuation (where we exist as individual persons); the second depends on different perspectives of the same space by different observers (this can be seen in multiple experiences of living in cities, depending on racial or class-based perspectives, for example); the third describes an event of a thing as being the product of a wide variety of disparate influences (and, hence, situates individuals in wider social, political, economic relations) (pp. 120-124). When critics complain that local media are losing "local" relevance (Franklin, 2006b), they are invoking something more than just coordinates on a map, they are concerned with the fracturing of social ties. In other words, "local"—and the related importance of physical and psychological distance/proximity—can be understood denotatively (i.e. absolute; objective; literal; neutral; near-universally consensualised) or connotatively (i.e. relative; subjective; behavioural—associated with feelings and ideas; strategic—can be more easily exploited and transformed; less fixed/more fluid; agonistic—polemical, combative struggle over meanings) (Hall, 1997; 2021e).

While the study of mass media at a national or international level has a long history (Bennett, 1982; Curran & Seaton, 2018; Curran et al., 1982) wider academic scholarship has tended to view local journalism as mundane or just not "sexy" (Nielsen, 2015a). For Hess and Waller (2017) local journalism is seen as synonymous with being parochial, close-minded, insular and narrow (p. 84). However, they contend that its relationship with the everyday makes "local news an extraordinary barometer for gauging the types of news and information important to audiences, and for providing a unique picture of how news is generated and produced" (ibid.). Local relevance is an essential element in Friedland's (2001, 2012) and Napoli et al's (2015, 2017, 2018) critical information needs (CIN) framework which assesses the quantity of public interest news coverage, is therefore vital to a democratically engaged citizenship and is an important part of the research methodology adopted in this thesis. Carey (2007) also stresses the cultural relevance of journalism as "a craft of place ... it works by the light of local

6 According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025, since 2013 print audiences in the UK have declined from 59% of the population to 12%, while television audiences have fallen from 79% to 48%. The proportion getting their news digitally is 73% (Newman et al., 2025).

knowledge" (p. 4) and creates a permanent public record for communities which is "directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time" (Carey, 2009, p. 5). Allied to this is Carlson's (2017) observation about the "bardic" ability of journalism in preserving and reproducing narratives important to local identities. People turn to local news "to have a voice, to hear stories from their local community and see their local lives reflected" (Fenton et al., 2010, p. 16). Littau (2019) noted communities need local stories to feel connected to the people they live near, and, despite local journalism's "parish pump" parochialism (Pilling, 1998, p. 183) there is a "ritual power" to the reporting of banal, everyday stories (Harte et al., 2019; Peters, 2019), such as births, deaths and marriages notices (Hess, 2015), news about lost pets (Turner, 2015) and the reporting of, for example, the village flower show, because "such local events help to define and galvanise a community" (Firmstone and Whittington, 2021, p. 87). Of course, not everyone participates in flower shows, for example, but the value of reporting on events such as this is cyclical repetition, which reinforces community identity and a sense of social stability.

There is a danger, though, that seeing the virtue of the reassuring banality of local journalism trivialises it and diverts attention from its democratically vital watchdog role, especially when most people pay council tax and are dependent on services provided by local authorities, constrained by multi-million pound deficits and politically convoluted directives. A growing indifference, hostility and mistrust of politics as usual (Stoker & Hay, 2017), and increasing political polarisation (Post, 2018), feeds news disengagement (Glaser, 2018; Robinson, 2023; Thomas et al., 2004) and facilitates the spread of misinformation, disinformation and fake news (Gilroy-Ware, 2020; Johansson et al., 2023; Linford, 2024k; Pickard, 2020; Skippage, 2020; Tandoc et al., 2018) and other aspects of the culture wars (Curran et al., 2019). Added to which, recent years have seen a rise in attacks on the local media (Blackall & Gayle, 2021; Booth, 2021a, 2021d; Sharman, 2021b), lack of cooperation by political representatives (Gavan, 2024; Linford, 2024b, 2024r, 2025r; Sharman, 2025c), and official censorship (Linford, 2024j; Sharman, 2022r). Concerns about the political ramifications of absent or diminished local media add to warnings of reduced scrutiny of the lack of competence, waste and corruption in local power structures (Chakelian, 2019; Davies, 2023; Gao, et al., 2020; Heese, et al., 2022; Nielsen 2015b; Peterson, 2021; Postans, 2022a, 2022b; Starr, 2009; Stewart & Murray, 2023; Whittingdale, 2019), especially in a "post-democratic" political world, with financially constrained local government moving from managerialism to entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 1978, 1989, 2008, 2019a, 2019b) and ushering in the privatisation of the remnants of the welfare state (Crouch, 2004; Latham, 2017; Mair, 2023).

2.3 A Brief History of the Press, its Role in Community Formation, its Commercial Development, and the Evolution of a Professional Journalistic Ethos

2.3.1 Introduction

The early history of the press describes the emergence of an essentially local media due to the geographically restricted nature of printers/proprietors and their distribution networks. A nationwide, and global, media, which is prominent today, is a more recent phenomenon (Hatcher, 2012). As this section follows a loose historical frame of the development of the press, its early years can throw light on the emergence of important normative concepts about journalism's role in society, locally and nationally, as well as its professional boundaries, and the ideal-typical values which give legitimacy and credibility to journalists' claims on authority (Carlson, 2017)—providing a public service, as watchdogs and disseminators of information; displaying objectivity; being autonomous and independent; having a sense of immediacy; and acting ethically (Deuze, 2005, pp. 446-447). This section also considers the organisational, technological and cultural transitions and transformations which have brought about the media landscape we see today from its role in (national and local) community formation during the transition from feudalism to industrialism in early modern Europe; the consolidation of a media industry with the rise of press barons and press empires in the period of High Capitalism at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, leading to the conglomerates and commercialism we see today; the construction and evolution of journalistic professionalism in the 20th century; and the present-day multifaceted crisis in (digital and traditional) journalism, which is occurring on, at least, three fronts—economic viability, audience expectations (especially in reflecting a multicultural and unequal society), and challenges to journalism's professional ethos and its boundaries from peripheral actors and changing organisational pressures.

The next section starts with a description of the beginnings of the press as periodical newsbooks and news sheets in early 17th century Europe, which "while it foregrounded the political, it also sought to surprise and entertain" (Conboy, 2005, p. 4), as well as being entwined with commercialism as an information resource for merchants in the import/export trade; through to the more familiar forms of news sheets and newspapers, and more technologically sophisticated mass media, with their normative roles—such as disseminating public interest news, facilitating the public sphere, holding power to account, and creating and maintaining communities (McNair, 2009). The following sections look at the ways the press became a lucrative medium for commercial exploitation, through the rise of advertising;

the development of large media conglomerates; on to the digital revolution we see unfolding today and the fragmenting of the news landscape into independent players, such as not-for-profits, community-centred media, hyperlocals and citizen journalists.

2.3.2 Local Journalism and Communities I: Imagined Communities

According to Anderson (1991) imagined communities develop through dissemination of a common language, ideas, practices, modes of behaviour, and a widespread social, cultural and political infrastructure, in doing so they bring together different ethnicities, languages, cultures, traditions, and religions under a national project—crucial in creating a sense of nationhood among the people of newly formed post-colonial nation states. And for Bevan (2020): "to buy into this imagined national communality, they also need to forget its inconvenient or darker episodes and, to some degree, forget their differences" (p.239). People belonging to imagined communities "will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, op. cit., p. 6).

The period in which the West, i.e. Europe, moved from feudalism to modern, capitalist industrialism was marked by technological advances in communication, with printing being the earliest and most prominent, and later followed by telegraphy, radio, television and other more sophisticated channels, which facilitated the commercial imperative behind the speed at which news needs to travel to retain its value (Phillips, 2012); and profound changes in social relationships, as populations moved from villages and livelihoods based in rural areas to factory work in cities, with more densely populated housing. This section looks, first of all, through the lens of political economy, at the establishment of the press and how this facilitated social changes, then, through the lens of cultural studies, it considers community formation as a process of group formation by individuals (who mostly never meet) and how social capital— "the value inherent in associations, which individuals and groups can use to achieve social objectives" (Hindman & Yamamoto, 2011, p. 840)—helps in bonding and bridging both within and across social boundaries (Putnam, 2000). As already mentioned, local journalism is a specialised form of journalism and understanding the role of social capital is important for understanding the value of both mainstream and nonmainstream local journalism to their audiences.

Printing developed in early modern Europe as one of the earliest forms of capitalist enterprise (Anderson, 1991, p. 34). Books were among the first modern, mass-produced industrial commodities, with capitalism's "restless search for markets" (ibid., pp. 37-38) being the spark for the first news sheets

and newspapers. The early press efforts were aimed at facilitating mercantile trade, but eventually a wider readership was sought. According to Conboy (2005), periodical print culture, in its earliest forms, incorporated a "struggle between those who wanted to control the flow of public information and those who wanted to disseminate it, whether for political or commercial purposes" (p. 4). Print as a widely distributed *commodity*—and characteristics more specific to newspapers, such as *periodicity* (ibid.), an important element in reproducing and reinforcing consistent worldviews; and *ephemerality*, or built-in obsolescence, which made replacement a continuous necessity and helped reiterate ideological views — also allowed communities to talk "together about the processes of our common life" (Raymond Williams, quoted in Curran, 1991, p. 33.

The rudimentary and evolving media became integral to the creation of imagined communities through *simultaneity*—the feeling that events were being read about at the same time by people who would never meet but were never-the-less assumed to be like-minded—and as part of the wider adoption of *routines* (and more structured time) as daily and economic life moved from feudalism, and religious domination, to capitalism—with its shift patterns, division of labour, mass production assembly lines and deadlines—and parliamentary democracy. Routines not only embedded the workforce in the production demands of the new economy (Thompson, 1967) they also gave the impression of immutability and stability, essential elements in establishing a society with common goals and values, as well as in the construction of a loyal audience for the press. According to Anderson (op. cit.), Hegel observed that "newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers" —a mass ceremony repeated almost ritually, in silent privacy, "in the lair of the skull":

> Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. (p. 35)

People gain a *sense of legitimacy* through affective connections, shared understandings and assumptions about their collective lives and how they should interact and live together (Rose, 1995). Anderson's idea of imagined communities is useful in understanding how political projects attempt to create a shared sense of nationhood from culturally, ethnically and linguistically disparate, and often historically antagonistic, social groups but, as already noted, communities, in the globalised and networked world, are taking on a more issue- or interest-based appearance. The concept of social imaginaries (Taylor, 2002)—which connect people across borders through race and class, and other

aspects of their identities—is another way for understanding the ways in which people seek a sense of legitimacy in society.

2.3.3 Local Journalism and Communities II: Bridging and Bonding Social Capital

The ideas of both Anderson and Taylor are useful for theorising about the importance of communal bonds to the social homogeneity of modern life but the world of the 21st century, and especially city life, is marked by multicultural and multiethnic heterogeneity and a plurality of voices, as well as accompanying inequality. Friedland (2012) has described cities as patchworks of communities and claimed that contending with the problem of journalism's haves and have nots is one of the biggest challenges facing metropolitan media.

The American social thinker, Robert E. Park (1923, 1929, 1940) wrote in 1923 about community media among immigrant populations in large American cities, "the newspaper must continue to be the printed diary of the home community" (p. 278) and had an important role in reproducing the real community of village life—where "everyone knew everyone else" and "gossip and public opinion were the main sources of social control" (pp. 277-278). When community news is cut back or disappears entirely this presents a real threat to social integration, solidarity and mutually supportive social networks. Weil (2002) argued for the need for roots and that an 'uprootedness' results from the destruction of ties to the past and leads to the dissolution of community.

For Tönnies, the influential early German sociologist, there is an "abstract dualism we all instinctively understand" (Sperling, 2020, p. 220) about the tension between rural and urban social life that industrial expansion in the late 19th and early 20th centuries brought about. He identified two types of social groups: Gemeinschaft (community)—"a lasting and genuine form of living together"—and Gesellschaft (society)—artificial relations individuals engage in for their own ends (Hess & Waller, 2017, p. 52). According to Sperling (2020), Tönnies made clear:

> based on a natural economy of matter and energy, the village was held together by the social mortar of trust and ritualized through the bonds of kinship, religion, tradition and mutual aid. The city, by contrast, was structured on centralization, the superficiality of relations, egotism, speculation, and profit. (p. 220)

Hindman and Yamamoto (2011) note that, within smaller social groupings—often the subject of community-focused journalism—social capital forms the basis of social trust, as embodied in feelings of

obligation and "positive emotions associated with the expectation that one's acts of social generosity will, in some ways, be repaid" (p. 840). Social capital is an important element in understanding the value of local journalism, either in its "bridging" form, which facilitates communication between disparate and separate communities, or in its "bonding" form, which strengthens internal communal links and helps foster community pride (Putnam, 2000). Such interpersonal trust reinforces feelings of reciprocity "in which community members look out for each other" (Hindman & Yamamoto, op. cit., p. 840) and is an interpretative repertoire which journalists draw on heavily in a civic values discourse, especially those involved in hyperlocal enterprises (Harte et al., 2019, p. 114). Hoffman and Eveland (2010), though, found it was difficult to find a causal link between community attachment and local media use, but noted the effect of disruptive outside events on communities. Social empathy among journalists was apparent during the Covid-19 pandemic (Olsen et al., 2020; Schudson, 2008) which, according to Cestino (2024), reinforced the perception that local journalism is important and meaningful. Journalists saw their work increasingly consumed and appreciated, and felt it "resonated" with their readers, viewers or listeners (p. 136). A recent Ofcom (2025) report noted social gain as a key to the value of community radio, which is reflected in other hyperlocal media. The report defined social gain as the positive outcomes generated for individuals and communities "such as improving skills and confidence, increasing community participation, giving a voice to underrepresented groups, and promoting social inclusion" (p. v).

2.3.4 Local Journalism and Communities III: Reputational Geographies and Territorial Stigmatisation

According to the Public Interest News Foundation there is a "strong correlation between deprivation and local news coverage with areas characterised by lower incomes, lower employment rates and greater disparities in health and education being covered by fewer local news titles" (Mitchell et al., 2023) and this section looks more closely at arguments relating inequality to geography, as well as territorial representation. In their analysis of the value of hyperlocal journalism Harte et al., (2019) referred to reputational geographies of marginalised communities, and in this case, reputation is relational, i.e. it is the judgement of one group of people about another which is geographically, as well as socially, culturally and economically, separate.

Hanley (2007) pointed out that "much of the stubborn rigidity of the British class system is down to the fact that class is built into the physical landscape of the country" (p. 18). In the 1870s Engels wrote about "the intensity of working-class clustering and oppression" in particular districts of

Manchester (Slater, 2013, p. 377), which, as Rose (2024) noted, was the result of a deliberate practice of building cheap homes close together to house the workforce of the new factories, in doing so linking poor housing and new types of social problems, such as over-crowding, job precarity and disease with occupational class. Sociologist Erving Goffman's (2022) view of stigma as a "negative moral judgement" (Smets & Kusenbach, 2020, p.2) is useful for understanding the negative aura communities attract when labelled "disadvantaged", or any number of other bureaucratic or informal epithets, such as "problem areas" or "sink estates".

Wacquant (2007), when discussing advanced marginality, went beyond the simple social stratifications of class to take in the places and neighbourhoods where groups with negative symbolic capital are confined. He called this territorial stigmatisation and explained "A *blemish of place* is thus superimposed on the already existing stigmata traditionally associated with poverty and ethnic origin or postcolonial immigrant status, to which it is closely linked but not reducible" (p. 67, emphasis in original). Slater (2013) stressed that territorial stigmatisation is "not a property of the neighbourhood, but rather *a gaze trained on it*. Its effects are the effects of symbolic structures applied to the neighbourhood, not those of the neighbourhood" (p. 383, emphasis in original). From this point of view marginalised is less of a noun, describing a community as a victim of endemic deprivation, and more like a verb, in that the marginalisation is an active, deliberate, external force—the community *is being* marginalised, and, as such, the members of the community can therefore be regarded as competent commentators on their lived experiences but are often ignored or misrepresented in the media (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2020, p. 12).

2.3.5 Journalism Entrepreneurs: Exploiting the Commercial (and Local) Potential of Early Print Media

This section looks at how the commercial opportunities of the nascent press attracted investment from printers and publishers with a view to making a profit. By the time of the English Civil War (1642-51) publications in England featured political news while capitalising on opportunities to surprise and entertain (Conboy, 2005, p. 4). Publishers also began experimenting with advertising around this time. According to Conboy:

> Readers were targeted not only as participants in political and broader cultural life but also as consumers who could deliver profits to the printers and publishers. Therefore, the new medium was not solely political but part of a generic hybrid between public information source, topical entertainment, communal identity and profit that together constituted journalism. (p. 5)

A provincial press emerged as printers moved out of densely competitive London in search of new markets. At first the local content of provincial newspapers was minimal, as the main competition was the London-based press, but Conboy (2005) noted that, as the Industrial Revolution gathered pace in the late 18th century and new urban centres grew beyond the metropolis, the emerging provincial press played a role in defining local identities and addressing local political matters. He noted:

> It was these newspapers that first encouraged a local electorate to demand true representation from their local MP. Local political factions throughout the country used the local press as a battleground for the hearts, minds, not to mention wallets of the local population so that the national public was increasingly complemented by a series of local publics. (p. 9)

With a more independent press in the 18th century, political reporting took on an increasingly public nature (Curran, 2002, p. 5) which, in turn, introduced a degree of openness and accountability to government business. The abolition of press taxes in the mid-19th century and increasing literacy meant that more people could both afford to buy and read newspapers (p. 4). According to Curran:

> As newspapers became established in more places, and increased their circulation and political coverage, so they extended the boundaries of the political nation, both horizontally to include peripheral areas distant from London and vertically to include people lower down the social scale. (pp. 5, 6)

The early history of the press was therefore one linked economically to enterprise, commerce and emerging capitalism, and socially, culturally and politically to the rise and entrenchment of the class-ridden, community conscious and more democratically enfranchised societies we see today.

2.3.6 Journalism in the Public Interest: The Role of the Media in the Formation of the Public Sphere and the Emergence of Liberal Democracy

In England, and other parts of Europe, in the 18th century, the press began to flourish as social connections and public spaces opened up for "polite society" and the urban elite. Habermas (1989) identified the *public sphere* as a way in which this new class exchanged ideas and established its democratic potential. "Civil society" emerged as a network of philanthropic, civic, professional and cultural voluntary clubs and associations, although these were only open to a select few (Fraser, 1990, p. 60). The bourgeois class formed among a group of men (not women) "preparing to assert their fitness to govern" by adopting practices and ethos as markers of "distinction" (Bourdieu, 1984) — "ways of defining

an emergent elite, setting it off from the older aristocratic elites it was intent on displacing, on the one hand, and from the various popular and plebian strata it aspired to rule, on the other" (Fraser, 1990, p. 60). Fraser added "it is a measure of the eventual success of this bourgeois project that these norms later became hegemonic, sometimes imposed on, sometimes embraced by, broader segments of society" (p. 60). Hegemony is a central concept in the work of Marxist theorist Gramsci and has been particularly influential in the work of cultural theorist Stuart Hall. Hall (2021h) explained its significance to ways of understanding how society works: "Hegemony is that state of 'total social authority' which, at certain specific conjunctures, a specific class alliance wins, by a combination of 'coercion' and 'consent', over the whole social formation, and its dominated classes: not only at the economic level, but also at the level of political and ideological leadership, in civil, intellectual, and moral life as well as at the material level: and over the terrain of civil society as well as in and through the condensed relations of the state" (pp. 204-205).

The public sphere is an important concept in deliberative and liberal democracy theory. It is considered to be "the space between government and society in which private individuals exercise formal and informal control over the state" through elections and the pressure of public opinion (Curran, 1991, p. 29) and "a space in which citizens could deliberate about common affairs to reach consensus about the common good" (Hess & Waller, 2017, p.15). Both conceptions assume government is accountable to the citizenry and all citizens have equal interests and influence. Why this is not the case is discussed below, but Habermas's initial conception of a bourgeois public sphere has been influential in discussions about how citizens can participate in society and the function of the media in its democratic role as provider of public interest news. For Habermas, a public sphere came into being in the 18th century when a repressive mode of domination in society was replaced with a hegemonic one, "from rule based primarily on acquiescence to superior force to rule based primarily on consent supplemented with some measure of repression" (Fraser, 1990, p. 62). It does this via "circulation of discourses that construct the 'common sense' of the day and represent the existing order as natural and/or just" (ibid, p. 78).

But Fraser has argued the idealised public sphere, as originally conceived by Habermas, is not wholly satisfactory when considering "actually existing democracy" (ibid, p. 57), because, as Schudson (1992) also argued, the concept of the *bourgeois* public sphere does not account for the hierarchical structure of society. Criticism has been voiced over the exclusion of women, the proletariat (Dean, 2003,

p. 96; Negt & Kluge, 2016) and "racialised ethnicities" (Fraser, 1990, p. 63), and Habermas himself also saw the need to rethink some parts of his original concept (Habermas, 1992).

According to Hansen (2016) there are multiple and competing counterpublics, "each marked by specific terms of exclusion (class, race, gender, sexual preference) in relation to dominant publicity, yet each understanding itself as a nucleus for an alternative organisation of society" (p. xxxvi). Fraser (1990) called these "subaltern counterpublics", which are "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (p. 67). Fuchs (2010) situates alternative media (discussed in more detail below) as the communicative dimension of the counterpublic sphere. While acknowledging counterpublics are not always "necessarily virtuous", and suffer their own exclusionary practices, Fraser (1990) states "they help expand discursive space" (p. 67) as "arenas for the formation and enactment of social identities" (p. 68). How the media became professionalised, institutionalised, politically and culturally powerful, and a hugely profitable business is explored in the next section, which looks at developments in the 20th and 21st centuries.

2.3.7 News in the 20th Century I—the Media Industry

After a period which saw the rise and fall of a radical press in the 18th and 19th centuries, a right-leaning, popular and imperialistic press had come to predominance in Britain by the beginning of the 20th century, with the establishment of major national, regional and local newspapers. These attracted large numbers of readers and further consolidated the position of the press as an important "voice" in public affairs (Curran, 2018). The industrialisation of the press was accompanied by a rise in publishing costs, due to more newspapers being printed, with increased pagination, and an increase in staff numbers, which led to the transfer of ownership and control to wealthy businesspeople—the press barons and press empires (ibid.). The 1880s to the 1920s also saw the growth of capitalist "mass society" in the West (Hall, 2015, p. 19), through the rise of mass media, large-scale production, popular culture, consumer markets and ways of meeting newly emerging needs and shaping demand. After the First World War (1914-1918), advertising, marketing and public relations "emerged as a major intermediary between government and business on the one hand, and journalism on the other" (Schudson, 1989, p. 266). The advertising-dependent business model became a major factor in driving the huge expansion of the journalism industry, as its market-orientated nature, and promise of huge profit margins, attracted further investment from press barons and large companies.

Curran (2018) made the important point that, while the press barons are often portrayed as journalist-politicians and politically reactionary propagandists, a "more important aspect of their dominion over the press [was] their demotion of politics" (p. 48). The intense competition between rival newspapers led to circulation wars where entertainment was prioritised over public affairs, with the press barons steering their papers away from politics (p. 50). This happened as the labour movement, and other attempts at social reform, gained political ground in the UK, through a rise in trade union membership, the culmination of the suffragettes' efforts to extend the vote to women, and increasing power for the Labour Party, as well as changes in the global political landscape, such as the Russian Revolution (1917), the rise of fascism (1930s) and the Great Depression (1929-1939).

In contrast to the commercial media this period saw the birth of a great experiment in publicly funded media. According to Seaton (2018b) the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the "great democratic institution ... emerged out of a period of great anxiety ... the 1920s were alarming and unsettled times. One solution came to be the BBC" (p. 195). It became an institution that represented the British public to itself and "developed an image of a common project towards progress to educate, inform and entertain", while also adopting "the priceless values of impartiality and independence" (ibid.). This brought in a new tradition in reporting and a new criteria of selection in the news, "journalists stopped being passionate advocates, saw themselves rather as independent professionals, and their writing as a negotiated product of conflict between partisan views" (ibid., p. 213). "Journalists as professionals" eventually became the dominant frame in understanding how news workers gain status and maintain boundaries (Zelizer, 1993) and is looked at from a sociological perspective in the next section.

According to Curran (op. cit.) the press during the inter-war years was politically reactionary, intensely patriotic and helped police the boundaries of legitimate dissent, whereas during the Second World War (1939-1945) increased solidarity on the Home Front strengthened the impetus towards a collectivist, social democratic, politics, which saw the progressive press become more left wing, in its efforts to attract a working-class readership (pp. 56-58, 76-77). While the minutiae of the social, political and cultural changes seen in the UK in the post-war years up until the present day—and how the media have reflected, and in some cases, helped steer their direction—are beyond the scope of this thesis, there are key developments to note. Among them: the fall of Keynesian welfare economics and liberal democracy, and the rise of neoliberalism (Brown, 2003, 2006, 2018; Hall, 2015; Harvey, 2005; McRobbie, 2016); the influence of Murdoch in changing the press landscape, both through production

consolidation, and a down-market turn, courting right-wing views on law and order (Hall et. al., 2013), and creating moral panics (Cohen, 2011; Thompson, 1998), as well as targeting the poor and migrants (Curran, op. cit., pp. 136-140); the moral decline of the press and the fall in trust in journalists (ibid., pp. 172-192); and culture wars vilifying the British left (Curran et. al., 2019). News in the 21st century is seen to be in a state of crisis—digitalisation, and declining press readership and advertising revenues are among the causes—which affects its relationship with its audience, its profitability and conceptualisation of journalism as a profession and is discussed below.

2.3.8 News in the 20th Century II—Journalistic Professionalisation

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, this thesis takes an interdisciplinary approach. A political economy perspective has been used to describe, in a very condensed way, the way in which major business concerns provided the foundations for the media we see today and how ownership is an influence on the direction of journalistic content, either exploiting its commercial potential or its ability to enhance democracy. The 20th century, though, is also a good vantage point for a discussion, from a sociological point of view, of the rise in professionalisation among journalists (Carlson & Lewis, 2015; Mellado, 2015; Soloski, 1989a). Zelizer (1993), wrote about journalists as interpretive communities from the perspective of American journalism, but parallels can be made with the UK. For Deuze (2005) the 20th-century history of the professionalisation of journalism can be "typified by the consolidation of a consensual occupational ideology among journalists in different parts of the world" (p. 444). According to Zelizer a scattered and disorganised group of writers working in the early 20th century began to consolidate through agreed-upon standards of action to give them a sense of control over work conditions, standards and tasks (p. 220). They generated an aura of authoritativeness over deciding what is news and how it should be reported—objective, neutral and balanced, to deflect accusations of subjectivity and bias (Allan, 1998; Anderson & Schudson, 2019; Carlson, 2017; Schudson, 2001; Soloski, 1989a; Tuchman, 1972). As Cottle (2000) noted:

> Journalists socialised into the professional pursuit of (philosophically elusive) "objectivity" settle pragmatically for balance, fairness and impartiality. To achieve this end and, importantly, to be seen to be so doing by their sources, audience/readers and colleagues, journalists engage in the "strategic ritual" (Tuchman, 1972) of seeking out authoritative voices who they deem to be knowledgeable and socially accredited to pronounce on newsworthy events. (p. 434)

According to Deuze (2005), Hallin identified a period of High Modernism in journalism, roughly from the 1960s to the 1990s, with Watergate and reporting on the Vietnam War being the apogee, when there was a sense of "wholeness and seemlessness in the practitioner's view of professional journalism" (p. 446).

As Tuchman (1978a) argued, news helps to form our notion of reality by not just gathering information about events and presenting it in a detached and disinterested way but also providing frames of understanding with which to interpret it. Journalism's symbolic power (Carlson, 2017) depends on "a discourse that gives particular meaning to these incidents" (p. 129). The work of journalists is, therefore, a "contingent cultural practice involving both the materiality of news and ways of imagining journalism" (ibid, p. 77). What complicates matters is that the occupational monopoly and journalistic expertise around "telling the news" and the conception of a professional status (Witschge & Nygren, 2009) enjoyed by media organisations since their foundation is difficult to classify (Tumber & Prentoulis, 2005) and is increasingly being challenged by the empowering potential of new digital technologies (Anderson, 2008).

Within mainstream journalism, journalists measure potential news items against a range of criteria that have become known as news values (Harcup, 2015, p. 51), and they make selections based on these to a high degree of consistency (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001, 2017; O'Neill & Harcup, 2019). According to Harcup and O'Neill (2017) "*who* is selecting news, for *whom*, in *what medium* and by *what means* (and available resources), may well be as important as whatever news values may or may not be inherent in any potential story" (p. 1483, emphasis in original). For Hall (2021b) it is important to question the normative assumption about news values, and he argued they "are one of the most opaque structures of meaning in modern society" (p. 68). He continued:

> News values appear as a set of neutral, routine practices: but we need also to see formal news values as an ideological structure—to examine these rules as the formalisation and operationalisation of an ideology of news. (pp. 68-69)

The objectivity norm "guides journalists to separate facts from values and to report only the facts" (Schudson, 2001, pp. 150, 152). Gans (2012) explained that journalists exclude conscious values through objectivity but also through "the disregard of implications, and the rejection of ideology (as they define it)" as a defence against actual or possible criticism and demands for censorship (p. 96), but for Peters (2011) the dominance of objectivity as a fundamental paradigm in Anglo-American journalism

has increasingly been called into question. Hall (2019a) pointed out that the media enshrine the operational principles of "objectivity", "neutrality", "impartiality", and "balance" to demonstrate their "relative autonomy" or "relative neutrality" from ruling-class power: "balance, for example, ensures that there will always be a two-sided dialogue, and thus always more than one definition of the situation available to the audience". In doing so:

> The ideological 'work' of the media, in these conditions, does *not*, then, regularly and routinely, depend on *subverting* the discourse for the direct support of one or another of the major *positions* within the dominant ideologies: it depends on the underwiring and underpinning of that *structured ideological field* in which the positions play, and over which, so to speak, they 'contend'. (pp. 332, 333, emphasis in original)

Soloski (1989a) pointed out objectivity may be less to do with neutralising bias than a form of control exercised by management over journalists (pp.213, 225). Whereas Gans (2012) found, without being fully conscious of it, the work of American journalists reflected the ruling ideas of American society. Robinson and Culver (2019) explored the ethical tensions of journalists employing traditional, passive practices of objectivity, such as deferring to official sources and the need for trust building in disadvantaged communities (p. 375).

> Traditional objectivity depends on a divorce of fact from value ... the ways in which stories are woven reflect some ... very conservative values about family, religion, parochialism, moderate capitalism, and the like. Embedded in this is an inherent valuing of powerful and White perspectives and a devaluing of any "other"—be it a foreigner or a minority. Perpetuating such values without a critical perspective cannot be ethically justifiable. (p. 388)

2.4 Journalism's "Multifaceted" Crisis

2.4.1 Introduction

Locally, nationally and internationally, journalism-as-we-know-it is in the midst of a crisis "triggered by technology and powered by economics" (Alexander et al., 2016, p. xv), but, as Zelizer (2015) argued, the notion of "crisis as a unitary phenomenon" obscures our understanding of "a diverse set of technological, political, economic, social, occupational, moral, and legal circumstances" (p. 888)—some of which predate recent paradigmatic shifts—while other commentators also recognise the crisis as being multifaceted (Anderson et al., 2012; Benson, 2010; Currah, 2009; Downie & Schudson, 2009;

Franklin, 2008, 2014; McChesney & Pickard, 2011; Nielsen, 2012, 2015a, 2016, 2019; Singer, 2017; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2017, 2019a; Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2016). For Blumler (2010) the crisis is "two-legged"—a (relatively recent) crisis of viability (McChesney, 2003; Schudson, 2010; Siles & Boczkowski, 2012), principally economic sustainability, where the market failure of the traditional advertising model has led to a severe reduction of once-high revenues (Phillips & Witschge, 2012; Pickard, 2015, 2020), in which loss of advertising to the platform giants is partly responsible (Bell, 2016; Picard, 2008; Pickard, 2018); and a (more long-term) crisis of civic adequacy, which is damaging journalism's ability to meet its public interest news and community obligations (Barnett, 2002; DCMS, 2019; Lewis, 2006).

As noted in Chapter 1, many traditional news businesses in the UK have closed for good—293 gone between 2005 and 2024 (Hunter, 2024; Ponsford, 2024c)—and those which are still operational are struggling to survive, with some no longer printing physical newspapers but continuing as online-only news operations (Thurman & Fletcher, 2018). The National Union of Journalists warned of a spiral of decline in 2006 (Franklin, 2006c, p. 18), before the internet had become a serious force. In the same year *The Economist* described newspapers as an "endangered species" (Williams & Franklin, 2007, p. 7). Contributing factors include the 2008/09 financial crisis and subsequent global recession (DCMS, 2018); increased competition for the attention of audiences by digital media (Fenton et al., 2010; Srnicek, 2017); the flight of advertisers to online platforms (Currah, 2009, p. 38; Picard, 2008) and lack of shareholder confidence leading to a freefall in share prices (Benson, 2010).

Linked to the decline in readership is news avoidance. The Reuters Digital News Report 2025 found the proportion of news consumers who say they avoid news, often or sometimes, has increased sharply in most, if not all, western countries. Selective avoidance in the UK is at 46%, with many respondents blaming the negative effect news has on their mood (Newman et al, 2025, p. 27). Wadbring and Bergström (2017), among others (Kassova, 2024), also noted a transformation process from a generational perspective, that the "youngest generation in our society is abandoning [local] newspapers, regardless of the form in which they are published, and the rate of decline has increased" (p. 175).

The sudden onset of the Covid pandemic in 2020 created unprecedented problems for local journalism but also showed its strengths in meeting demand for reliable news (Bristol Cable, 2020a; Clark, 2024; Fletcher et al., 2020; Mayhew & Turvill, 2020; Nielsen, 2020; Olsen et al., 2020; Ponsford & Mayhew, 2020; Sharman, 2020b, 2021a; Tobitt, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d; Wahl-Jorgensen, et al., 2021). The pandemic was called "an extinction event" (Nielsen et al., 2020) for journalism with predictions that

many news titles would not survive. In the UK, as in other countries throughout the world, a public intervention was necessary—the government made £35m available, in the form of the "All In, All Together" advertising campaign, which mainly benefited the commercial local mainstream media (Heawood, 2021). Jenkins (2020, 2024) also noted that local media drew unprecedented audience figures during this period as people sought credible local information about testing, infection rates and closures. There were also increases in some digital memberships and subscriptions from housebound audiences. But there were massive revenue declines, particularly for those media dependent on advertising events, restaurants and bars, which closed for the duration of lockdown. The loss of income resulted in furloughs, layoffs and, in some cases, closures, and the local media landscape is yet to fully recover, with hybrid (home/office) contracts and flexible ways of working becoming more prevalent (Cherubini, 2022; Cherubini, et al., 2021, p. 12; Newman, 2022). Previous research into the appetite for news during national crises (1990/1 Gulf Crisis and 2001/2 War on Terrorism following the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks) shows spikes in news consumption tend to be short lived (Althaus, 2002), the value placed on journalism therefore becomes more apparent only under certain conditions. Other national and international events have had ramifications on the local media landscape, such as Russia's invasion of the Ukraine, which drove up prices of newsprint (Sharman, 2022f); rises to National Insurance contributions; and the cost-of-living increase in energy bills which small businesses are finding difficult to meet (Limbu, 2024), and have forced some journalists to leave the profession for better-paid jobs (Kersley, 2022n, 2022o; Raval, 2022b).

While the substance of local journalism is suffering, so too is its relative influence and importance within the national media industry. According to the National Council for the Training of Journalists the UK news industry is becoming increasingly London-centric (even in the face of the phasing out of the print edition of the capital's only city-wide publication, *The London Standard*, formerly *The Evening Standard*) with 48% of all UK journalists now based in London and the South East, compared to 8% in the South West, where Bristol is located. This is the result of a sharp decline in the numbers of journalists employed in the local and regional press, down from 46% in 2018 to 25% in 2024 (Linford, 2024h; Spilsbury, 2024). The national press has traditionally valued a healthy local journalism industry for two important reasons—local reporters would uncover the stories picked up by the London-based media, and entry into the profession almost always began with a job on a local newspaper. Media expert Martin Moore has noted:

> There used to be a career route for young reporters on local papers to move to nationals, bringing regional knowledge and a respect for their area. Now there are many national journalists who skip that stage altogether—which is one of the reasons the national media and to some extent Westminster itself can seem out of touch with the rest of the country. (Armstrong, 2017, p. 157)

In this section I look first at journalism's economic crisis, and then the crisis in civic adequacy, followed by a discussion on changing newsroom practices.

2.4.2 Journalism's Economic Crisis

Studies of local journalism from the 1970s describe a "relatively stable world" with only minor changes in the preceding 50 years (Franklin, 2006b, p. 12). For journalists covering local politics the period was marked by continuity and stability, as noted by Cox and Morgan (1973) and Murphy (1976). Most local newspapers at the time were owned by independent, often family-run, businesses, but by the early 1990s conglomeration had become a dominant factor—more than 60% of the British local press was owned by ten companies by then and more than 80% was in the hands of 15 companies. This concentration was not substantially brought about by the launch of new publications, but by existing titles being taken over (Murphy, 1998, p. 80). Titles have closed since then, and media ownership has become more concentrated, with mergers leading to a fall in the number of large national conglomerates (Phillips & Witschge, 2012).

There were 1,189 local newspapers in the UK in 2023, with 71% owned by just six companies. The three largest were Newsquest (264 titles, 22.2% share), Reach (230 titles, 19.3% share), and National World (186 titles, 15.6% share)—the latter two operate titles in the Bristol news ecosystem—and these controlled a greater share of the market than the smallest 157 publishers combined (Majid, 2023a, 2023f; Media Reform Coalition, 2023). Reach also owns national news operations, *The Daily* and *Sunday Express*, *The Daily Star* and *The Daily* and *Sunday Mirror*, among them, and has interests in the Republic of Ireland and the United States—this is an important distinction for this thesis, that one of the largest media companies combines both national and local business interests, which are not always compatible. One factor which adds to the unstable nature of media ownership in the UK is the influence of foreign venture capital which regards titles as "investment vehicles" and "therefore likely to be disposed of when the returns are seen as less profitable than those which might be achieved from other investments" (Murphy, 1998, p. 82; see also Linford, 2025m).

Ownership has changed the face of local journalism since the end of the 20th century and technical developments, principally the digital transformation of communication, have also had a profound effect on legacy news production. The 2024 Ofcom news consumption survey found online had overtaken television—which had been dominant since the 1960s—as the biggest source of news in the UK for the first time (Ofcom, 2024b; Tobitt, 2024m). According to the Ofcom data, 96% of UK adults say they consume news in some form. Television news viewing declined over the previous 12 months, from 75% in 2023 to 70% in 2024; whereas news online rose from 64% in 2018, and 68% in 2023, to being accessed by 71% of adults in 2024. Social media use rose from 47% in 2023 to 52% in 2024, while newspaper brands, in print and digital, saw the biggest fall, down from 51% in 2018 to 34% in 2024. The survey also found traditional platforms outperform online and social media on several ratings, in particular, trust, accuracy and impartiality. It also found that young people are less likely to visit publisher websites. These trends have also been confirmed by the annual Reuters Digital News Reports (Newman et al., 2024) which note similar transformations in media operations internationally.

Until recently, mainstream local media profits were maintained in the face of a growing and long-term fall in sales (Levy & Nielsen, 2010) through buoyant advertising revenues (Franklin, 2006c, p. 15) which have now largely disappeared (Picard, 2008). Williams (2006) noted a "mouthwatering" operating profit margin for Johnston Press (part of JPIMedia since 2018) in 2004 of 34%, the highest in the industry at the time (p. 56). Williams and Franklin (2007) also noted profit margins of between 19% and 38.2% in the UK local and regional newspaper industry in 2005, but since then digital advertising and competition from the platform giants—Facebook/Meta, Google etc—has changed the display and classified advertising model beyond recognition (Edwards, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c; Phillips & Witschge, 2012; Pickard, 2018). Market research company Enders Analysis estimated that advertising spend from Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the UK local press in 2022 was £421m, three-quarters less than in 2008 (£2bn) and less than 5% of the Google SME advertising spend in the same period (£8.6bn) (McCabe et al., 2023). Table 2.1 shows that revenues in the UK newspaper industry (national and regional combined) declined significantly between 2019 and 2021 while income from digital advertising rose both in real terms and as a share of total turnover.

Table 2.1: Estimated UK Newspaper Industry Revenues (£m), by Income Type 2019-21

Revenue (£m)	2019	2020	2021	Change 2019-21 (%)
Print Circulation	1,482	1,349	1,294	-12.7%
Digital Subscriptions	374	401	422	+12.8%

Print Advertising	1,160	729	736	-36.6%
Digital Advertising	556	485	618	+11.2%
Total	3,572	2,964	3,070	-14.1%
% as digital advertising	15.6%	16.4%	20.1%	+29.3%

Based on Media Reform Coalition (2023, p. 11) and Ofcom (2022c, p. 14)

Mainstream news conglomerates operate under a corporate capitalist model, which maximises profits (as well as returns to shareholders, and high executive salaries and bonuses) by increasing productivity through cutting inputs and raising prices over all other considerations, and they are under pressure from shareholders to follow this line of action (Majid, 2023a, 2023f; Media Reform Coalition, 2023; Pickard, 2020; Ramsay & Moore, 2016; Williams & Franklin, 2007). Cutting inputs—mainly through mass redundancies—is not a recent development and has been a "commercial strategy underwritten by corporate managerialism" for half a century (Matthews, 2020, p. 31). These businesses focus on short-term return to the detriment of long-term objectives and must contend with large-scale corporate debt and other financial commitments relating to acquisitions, inherited pension scheme commitments and legal action over historic media scandals (Reach, n.d.-e.). By most standards, profits for the conglomerates are still high but in the first six months of 2025 Reach's combined national and local business saw revenues fall by 3.4%—£256m compared to £265m in the first half of 2024. While the digital side of the business made money, and cost-cutting measures were financially beneficial, major losses were made in print circulation and advertising revenue. Newspapers, especially national institutions such as *The Daily Mirror* and *The Daily Express*, are loss-making financial encumbrances but remain part of the overall business due to their cachet status. Costs for Reach decreased from £221.8m to £212.4m; operating profit rose from £44.5m to £44.8m; digital revenue grew to £61.1m, up 1.8% on the previous year; print revenue fell from £204m to £194.1m, down 4.8%—this consisted of print circulation revenue falling from £149.9m to £144.3m, down 3.7%, and print advertising revenue down 15.4% from £32.7m to £27.7m (Linford, 2025d). In October 2025 the company reported adjusted operating profits for the full year of £99.1m, a 4-5% cost saving target and a £20m bill for "restructuring"—more than 300 redundancies from about 2,000 editorial staff nationally and a heavy investment in centralised news production (Linford, 2025l).

Public service media are also having to negotiate a crisis-hit economic landscape. According to *Press Gazette* "the BBC's target for annual savings is currently £500m but (then BBC director-general) Davie said earlier this year this needed to rise, meaning an extra £200m in savings per year is needed" (Tobitt, 2024l). The BBC's annual report for the year to the end of March 2024 stated that the freeze on

the licence fee meant the organisation is now £1billion worse off a year than it was in 2010/11 (Maher, 2024e). Following a series of cuts over the past half decade, in July 2024 the BBC announced plans to cut 500 jobs nationally, as revenue fell 6% to £5.4bn. Further plans were announced in September 2024 to cut 115 jobs in Nations and Regions editorial production, "around 3% of the division's staffing". RAJAR figures in 2024 showed the BBC's local radio stations in England collectively had a weekly reach of 4.8million people in Q1 2024, down 10% year on year and 2% quarter on quarter (Tobitt, 2024e, 2024h).

Other developments by the BBC have been treated as a threat by commercial local media companies more used to free market competition. Since 2022 the BBC has reduced the number of local reporters and dedicated local news broadcast by its local radio stations, and has diverted funds and resources to both centralised news production and locally branded websites (*Bristol Post*, 2023a; Carter et al., 2023; Gavan, 2023b; Linford, 2023e, 2023g, 2023h, 2024l, 2024s; Maher, 2022a, 2024c, 2024d; Nanji, 2024; Ofcom, 2022b, 2024; Press Gazette, 2023; Sharman, 2023a, 2023q; Tobitt, 2022a, 2022b, 2024an). The News Media Association (NMA) is the representative body for the commercial news trade in the UK and has been critical of the BBC's plans and its use of public subsidy to expand into areas traditionally dominated by commercial media. According to the NMA's former chairman Danny Cammiade: "Publishers are having to make a commercial success of it, the BBC are using taxpayers' money to do it. The NMA needs to keep that as a high priority and make the government aware and BBC executives aware. The only acceptable outcome is for them to withdraw" (Ponsford, 2024d). David Higgerson (2022), Reach's chief content officer, claimed the BBC plans were a "threat far more dangerous than the platforms" to local news publishers. Despite pressure from the commercial companies, and discussion of the issue by MPs sitting on the UK parliament's Public Accounts Committee (Tobitt, 2024b, 2024f), broadcast regulator Ofcom has not yet intervened, claiming the plans would impact commercial online news services by less than 1%, but the interim report for its ongoing review of local media noted the corporation's online content was "the area of greatest contention" and agreed that the BBC's plans were now part of the "headwinds" facing local publishers (Tobitt, 2024q).

While the rise of the digital giants is often portrayed as the most significant obstacle to a return to high profits, there are other factors behind the decline which predate this latest development (Franklin, 2010, 2014). According to some, changes in the patterns in work and lifestyles of readers meant "a paper ... often wasn't in the right place at the right time" (Franklin, 2008, p. 633), although targeting commuters on busy buses and trains seems to have been a successful strategy for free publications such as the *Metro*. Local newspapers were dependent on low-involvement audiences with

little interest in "the significant events and issues of the day" (McManus, 1992, p. 790) — profits were made by producing products with "*minimal threshold appeal* to the maximum number of demographically desirable consumers" (p. 789, emphasis added). Readers bought newspapers at the same time, from the same news seller, day in, day out, out of routine, ritual or habit (Cottle, 2006; Hess, 2016; Peters, 2015, 2019), irrespective of specific content or its quality — "news is often a credence good; it must be consumed on faith" (McManus, op. cit., p. 796). This was disrupted by business decisions which saw the closure of town centre offices; printing moved from late afternoon/early evening multiple editions to just one the following morning, making breaking news stale and redundant — local newspapers often covered important non-local news events and published sporting fixture results, such as cricket and horse racing, ahead of the early evening news; changes in printing schedules were linked to the shutting down and selling off of local print halls for their land value, and a consolidation of printing nationally; cover price inflation; and the end of street-corner newspaper vendors, who were a familiar presence bellowing their distinctive exhortations to "Read All About It! Get Your Stann-ded Here! E'ning Stann-ded!", a difficult-to-miss sense of imperative in busy streets. Competition for browsers, grazers or scrollers by digital media seeks to exploit similar, low-threshold, behaviour patterns in news consumption — today's news consumers "consume news in a steady stream of information bites" blurring the lines between news and entertainment (Bird, 2009b). The slow collapse of audience attention and demand for local media is being compounded by competitive market reorientation by mainstream media, through "blander, softer and less geographically focused content production" in a bid to appeal to a "wider, but less invested audience network" (Firmstone & Whittington, 2021, p. 85, 89). This works against community embeddedness (Vos & Hanusch, 2024) and devalues place-based identities, and, this thesis argues, is a key factor impeding a return to a viable and democratically, and socially, valuable news ecosystem.

A view of the crisis in only economic terms is reductionist and risks framing, or limiting, the problem as one where performance maximisation — "the best possible input/output equation" — becomes the goal, the danger being that knowledge production is commodified at the expense of its wider social and cultural use-value (Lyotard, 2021, p. 46). Classical and neoclassical economics, assumes that for commercial organisations to achieve the goal of profit maximisation they should exhibit "rational, self-interested behaviour affected minimally by social relations" (Granovetter, 1985, p. 481), but, as McManus (1992) pointed out "given the actual news market and the peculiar nature of news as a commodity, the logic of maximising return often conflicts with the logic of maximising public

understanding" (p. 802). However, in a dual economy dominated by corporate elites, small organisations persist in a core-periphery relationship (Bowring, 2014) with a "dense network of social relations ... overlaid on the business relations connecting such firms" (Granovetter, 1985, p. 507) where, instead of seeking to maximise financial capital, embeddedness is exploited or nurtured for its social capital. This is explored in Section 2.5 below which looks at the differences between mainstream and nonmainstream news practices, market orientation and community influence.

Singer (2017) notes that for traditional media the relationship between journalists and their audiences is a unidirectional one—"despite the overarching goal of service to society, journalists only rarely have seen the need to engage directly with audiences to fulfil that role or even to identify what it should entail" (p. 204). This has led to a growing gap between audience interests and legacy media content (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2012; Boczkowski & Peer, 2011). In contrast, entrepreneurial journalists, especially at a local level, need a great deal of concrete knowledge about their audience and must work collaboratively to survive (Singer, 2017, pp. 204-205). Small businesses therefore act "irrationally" (Granovetter, 1985) by placing value in community embeddedness, engagement, commitment (or loyalty) between exchange partners, and "bond-making", mediated social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Hess, 2013b, 2015; Hindman & Yamamoto, 2011; Robinson, 2023; Wang & Polillo, 2016) over profit maximisation. Wang and Polillo (2016) note that "successful discursive and performative actions", such as community campaigns, "can enhance the status even of materially disadvantaged organisations" (p. 57). McAllister and Proffitt (2020) suggested an ethical stance can be made by distinguishing between maximised profits and reasonable profits (p. 474), and contended that media owners, because they are in the media, have "other socio-cultural obligations to fulfil besides those to the shareholders" (p. 475). For Vos and Hanusch (2024) being embedded in one's community provides "journalists with awareness, empathy, and understanding" (p. 5), and, they also argue, "journalists' degree of embeddedness is a plausible factor in explaining the kinds of news content that journalists create" (p. 1)—they identify embeddedness as shared experience, shared values, shared history, shared place, and shared language (p. 5). This is important for gaining and retaining audiences—mediated social capital goes a step further in considering the ability of local media to connect people as a resource of advantage in building or maintaining a position of power (Bourdieu, 1986; Hess, 2013b, 2015; Putnam, 2000). This points to the need to consider the emotional turn in journalism studies (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019b), and how nonmainstream media can capitalise on embeddedness in engaging,

and building trust, with marginalised communities (Robinson, 2023; Wenzel, 2023b), which is discussed in the next section.

2.4.3 A Crisis of Authority

Gitlin (2011) referred to a surfeit of crises—circulation, revenue, attention, authority and deference. He asserted "arguably the erosion of trust is journalism's deepest trouble as well as the one longest in the making. Seen from the public's vantage point, there is a crisis of authority ... credibility or legitimacy" (pp. 97-98). Nielsen (2016b) referred to a crisis of confidence, centring as it does on relations between journalism and its audience(s)—"how it is seen by the public it claims and aims to serve" (p. 91). Other scholars have found trust in the media is at an all-time low, especially among the marginalised (Fenton, 2019; Firmstone et al., 2022; Firmstone, Steel & Saha, 2022; Fletcher & Park, 2017; Hanitzsch et al, 2018; Kohring & Matthes, 2007; Konieczna & Robinson, 2014; Majid, 2022b, 2023d; Massey, B. L., 1998; Murphy, 2020; Prochazka & Schweiger, 2019; Robinson, 2023; Robinson & Culver, 2019; Ross Arguedas et al., 2023; Sambrook, 2012; Tobitt, 2024a; Wenzel et al., 2020). According to the Edelman Trust Barometer (2025)—which reports annually and investigates trust levels in the media, government and business—active distrust in the media is becoming more prevalent. Lack of trust is directly related to low income and feeds a negative spiral which fosters a sense of grievance, erodes social capital and nurtures disengagement from communal debate (pp. 9, 34, 37). The erosion of trust has been compounded by a series of media scandals and other instances of the misuse of press power, such as the phone-hacking revelations which brought about the Leveson Inquiry (Curran & Seaton, 2018), and the perception that the press is colluding with socially detached elites, engaging in obvious bias (McDowell-Naylor, et al. 2021), or fomenting an increasingly toxic media-politics relationship (Coleman, 2012). One of the more recent manifestations of the decline in trust can be seen in the rise of online abuse of journalists, which is causing some to leave the profession, while others claim there have been serious effects on their mental health (HoldtheFrontPage Staff, 2024; Linford, 2024d; Majid, 2023c; Tobitt, 2021a, 2024h).

McDevitt and Ferrucci (2018) remind us that, according to James Carey "the god term for journalism—the be-all and end-all, the term without which the enterprise fails to make sense, is the public" (p. 514), or, in Franklin's (2006b) terminology, when applied to local journalism, "local people". Franklin's observations about the compromised normative functions of local journalism, which are quoted at the beginning of this thesis, are important, but his contention fails to recognise that local people have more than one voice, one representational identity or one set of information needs, as

seen in the discussion of the critical distinction between the bourgeois and proletarian public spheres above. For Hall (2017c) the conception of the "primordial unity of 'one people'" is problematic (p. 277), and, while Franklin was not addressing divisions within society, an umbrella term as vague as "local people" is open to a wide range of interpretations and obscures the multicultural, multiethnic and economically unequal reality of life in most towns and cities in the UK in the 21st century.

2.5 Oppositional or Complementary Forms in a Changing Local News Landscape?

For some scholars there is a confrontational and critical relationship between mainstream and nonmainstream journalism (Atton, 2002, 2003, 2009, 2010; Cushion, 2024; Fuchs, 2010; Harcup, 2005, 2011, 2016; Hess & Waller, 2016; Holt et al., 2019; Sandoval & Fuchs, 2009), with the former characterised as profit driven, while also being engaged in a performative "impartiality" which masks a bias towards the status quo (Cushion, 2021a, 2021b; Cushion et al., 2021; Holt et al., 2019), and the latter led by idealistic, altruistic or anti-establishment motives (Mathisen, 2017; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2023). For Harcup (2005) "alternative media projects frequently define themselves as *existing in opposition* to mainstream media" (pp. 361, emphasis in original)—"a critique of practice, conducted in practice" (p. 362). Steensen et al. (2023) also argued that the concept of mainstream journalism has become "increasingly politicised and weaponised by influential antagonistic challengers of journalism" (p. 668). The prevailing ideology and hegemonic discourse of free-market capitalism is embedded and naturalised in popular "common sense", which, according to Hall et al. (2015), "plays a key role in disseminating, legitimising and re-invigorating a regime of power, profit and privilege" (p. 18) and is a powerful determinant on mainstream media content, its market orientation, and its portrayal of marginalised communities, the places where they live and the social problems they face.

Holt (2018) refined this opposition by positing that nonmainstream media oppose mainstream media through two types of anti-systemness—ideological (direct challenge to the ideological foundations of the system); and relational (how a party positions itself in relation to other parties and vice versa). Some see alternative journalism as an existential threat to mainstream (Cushion, 2024, p.2), others see it as a means to counter the disinformation and misinformation which have led to widespread disengagement and distrust in the media (Costera Meijer, 2013), and for others there is the potential for giving a voice to an alternative or plebian public sphere (Dean, 2003; Fraser, 1990; Harcup, 2005; Negt & Kluge, 2016; Schudson, 1992).

According to Holt (2018), scholarly work about alternative media has in essence taken its cue from Gramsci and the notion of hegemony, positioning it as a "liberating force, empowering and giving voice to groups who suffer from marginalisation in the hegemonic discourse of mainstream 'bourgeois' media" (p. 50). Nelson et al. (2024) warned that news audiences view most news with scepticism, and lack of trust, because they see journalism "as compromised by journalists' perceived prioritisation of profit and financial success in a competitive media environment above all other goals, including the goal of accurate, valuable reporting that best serves the public" (p. 2). Alternative, insurgent or counter-hegemonic media "persist in being less commercial, producing more critical content and being more committed to social change than their mainstream counterparts" (Rauch, 2016, p. 756).

A binary view such as this—while helpful for illuminating the challenges faced by local media attempting to survive a journalistic crisis and contending with covering an unequal social world—can be a hindrance in in understanding a news ecosystem noted for the variety, diversity and plurality of its constituent media organisations. This has been examined in the discussion on categories above (Section 1.2.4, and reflected upon in Chapter 6), where it was noted some independent media combine commercial goals with aspirations towards social responsibility, and mainstream media also occasionally challenge hegemonic discourse, as in the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter protests. Bourdieusian field theory (discussed in Section 2.1.4) demonstrates (Benson, 2006; Benson & Neveu, 1995; Bourdieu, 1989, 1995) commercial forces work against the kind of journalistic aspirations important for local journalism, such as community cohesion and resisting negative stereotypes of the marginalised. News organisations can be placed on a spectrum from weakly market orientated (news as a service) to strongly market orientated (news as a product) (Beam, 2003), with the latter producing fewer hard news stories about government and more, less-costly-to-produce (Ferrucci, 2015), soft news, concerning arts and entertainment, lifestyle and sports (Boczkowski, 2009; Patterson, 2000; Reinemann et al., 2011, 2017). Market orientation is an organisational-level decision that "directly influences the gatekeeping process" (Ferrucci, 2015, p.207)—put simply, it includes some audiences and excludes others. Martin (2000) compared cultural hegemonies and media images in an inner-city neighbourhood and noted that "one form of resistance to the apparent hegemony of the dominant news media is the local press, which offers a grassroots perspective on events and the places where they occur" (p. 382) but also acknowledged that, in many communities, "the local press operates within a discursive framework in which the mainstream press dominates the naming and characterising of marginalised communities and

places" (p. 383). Local presses are therefore often faced with simultaneously articulating elements of the dominant discourse, while also resisting a negative view of communities (p. 383).

It is the contention of this thesis, though, that, for frontline reporters working in either sector at a local, rather than national, level, the differences between media sectors are less clearcut, with legacy journalists championing the social value of their jobs and displaying a "passionate attachment to the local community" (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2023)—as well as producing valuable copy which would be difficult to define as clickbait—and hyperlocals having to contend with the entrepreneurial realities of running small businesses, while dealing with similar problems, editorial discussions and journalistic routines, such as access to sources, deadlines and limits on resources (Eliasoph, 1997; Platon & Deuze, 2003).

Some studies draw close links between legacy media and practitioners on the periphery. According to Deuze (2005) it is possible to speak of a "dominant occupational ideology of journalism on which most newsworkers base their professional perceptions and praxis, but which is interpreted, used and applied differently among journalists across media" (p. 445). Russo (1998) found mainstream journalists showed "a significantly higher identification with the *profession of journalism*" (p. 72, emphasis added) than with their employing newspaper, implying a disconnection between professional values and organisational goals. Harcup (2005) identified a "cross-over group" of journalists who have worked for both traditional media and its alternatives, and have rarely been the subject of academic research. Some hyperlocals are run by former mainstream journalists made redundant through the precarity endemic to the industry today. In many cases small-scale entrepreneurship has provided the opportunity to find employment, and a home for experience, training and a sense of vocation, rather than as a forum to challenge ideological positions; and, rather than resurrecting "archaic" formats of media production, such as print products, they have continued working with these legacy forms, while mainstream media, out of competitive necessity, followed a different path in taking up new digital opportunities (Howells, 2015; Kurpius et al., 2010; Usher, 2010; Whittington, 2020). In addition to the journalists themselves, and media owners and management, audiences are also instrumental in the creation of a binary image, but Cushion (2024) argues "research with audiences has revealed that the distinction between alternative and mainstream is far more fluid than how scholars have historically interpreted them" (p. 80).

Relational terms, such as alternative, radical, counter-hegemonic and ideologically opposed, position a vast and heterogenous variety of journalistic endeavours which, at an organisational level,

have little in common, such as hyperlocal newspapers, community radio stations and citizen journalists, but are often bound by professional standards and values. As Rauch notes, there are multiple meanings of the term "alternative media" (2014, p.137), and there is a continuum "featuring many hybrids and few pure instances" (2016, p. 756). It is my contention that Deuze's (2005) "dominant occupational ideology" as evinced in journalist's role conceptions, especially around autonomy, is compromised structurally—as seen in role enactment and outcomes (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017; Hellmueller & Mellado, 2015; Mellado et al., 2020; Mellado & van Dalen, 2014; Tandoc et al., 2013)—by a hierarchy of influences (Reese, 2001), the most pertinent for the purposes of thesis being media organisation ownership (and related resources, management structure and market orientation), and the social world journalists are situated in.

This thesis argues that, for *local* journalists seeking legitimacy, credibility, trust and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Hess, 2013b, 2015; Putnam, 2000; Vos & Hanusch, 2024) with *local* audiences, it is also important to show a commitment to providing *local* news (Svith, 2024; Usher, 2015, 2019, 2021), but market orientation towards local or non-local audiences is tied to ownership, specifically small-scale entrepreneurialism as opposed to large-scale national concerns. Ownership is the phenomenon which "forms the framework or structure within which things happen", notes Murphy (1998, p. 78). According to Downie and Kaiser (2003) "broadly speaking, three factors distinguish newspapers from one another: ambitions, resources and values. Ownership is probably the greatest influence on all three" (p. 76). For McAllister and Proffitt (2020) media ownership "potentially affects the viewpoint, tone and agenda" (p. 465) of journalism, and this has implications for the media's role in "democracy, for media-worker and media-user autonomy, for diversity, for policy, and for ethics" (p. 466).

Despite mainstream media's normative journalistic aspirations to be the voice of citizens and community champions (McNair, 2009) a more proactive and socially conscious role has often been elusive—through the strategic ritual of objectivity (Hackett, 1984; Schudson, 2001; Skovsgaard et al., 2013; Tuchman, 1972); news values, news selection and market orientation (Ferrucci, 2015); and lack of newsroom diversity and "shared/lived experience" (Lück et al., 2020; Spilsbury, 2023; Robinson & Culver, 2019). There have been attempts by some sectors of mainstream media to address this, although diversity is still not a priority in practice (Maher, 2024b). Following the Black Lives Matter (BLM) events in 2020, the BBC launched 50:50 The Equality Project, and set the goal of 25% of staff from lower socio-economic backgrounds by 2027 (Maher, 2022b). The broadcasting regulator, Ofcom (2018, 2022a, 2023b), has also reviewed representation and portrayal of diversity and lower income audiences

on radio and television, which have resulted in the BBC drawing up extensive guidelines on content diversity, inclusion commissioning, portrayal and regional reporting (BBC, 2021d, 2022c, n.d.-b., n.d.-c, n.d.-d; Saunders, 2024).

An interventionist, engaged and more ethical approach is a boundary challenge for local media as it calls for an alternative understanding of journalistic objectivity, and the associated values of balance and impartiality (Hatcher, 2012; Sambrook, 2012). Hatcher (2012) noted the view of Iris Marion Young, the feminist scholar and political philosopher, that "justice using impartiality as its foundation allows the values and decisions of privileged groups to dominate" which she called "cultural imperialism" (p. 133). In Ward's (2020) concept of pragmatic objectivity "objectivity is not absolute knowledge, achievable by only a minority of people. It is not the reduction of statements to pure fact". He contended journalism is a form of interpretation which should be tested using the best available set of standards (p. 111), which Robinson and Culver (2019) refer to as interpretive reporting (p. 376), in which journalists make sense of communities by interacting with the people who inhabit them, while rejecting "an objectivity that falsely equates diverging sides of an issue or privileges elite sources". There are structural limits which make this more difficult for mainstream journalists—local offices have closed and shrinking workforces and increasing workloads mean they are more deskbound, so "they're not actually out there connecting with the community", according to a local newspaper editor quoted by Franklin (2006c, p. 20), which leads to a reliance on official sources and PR, and a narrow range of sources cited (Davies, 2009; Hamer, 2006; Harrison, 2006; O'Neill & O'Connor, 2008).

Debate over the remit, responsibilities and authority (gained through trust and perceived autonomy) of journalists is especially pertinent with coverage of socially and culturally diverse audiences with a strong image of their place-based identities and difference. These are sometimes celebrated, sometimes manifested defensively, in opposition or resistance, especially when the idea of "home"—as embodied in notions of stability, security and familiarity—is threatened by institutional and social discrimination, including racial prejudice and "institutionalised racism"; austerity-led withdrawal of community services; and gentrification (Cole, 1985; Harris, 2015; Harvey, 1978, 1989, 2008, 2019a, 2019b; Kern 2016, 2022; Lees, 1994; Ley, 1994; Rose, D., 1984; Slater, 2006, 2014; Smith, 1979, 1982, 2010; Zukin et al., 2017). These audiences are situated in vulnerable, place-based communities where the authoritative voice and credibility of local journalists (Wenzel, 2020a; Wenzel et al., 2018) is being eroded through misrepresentation and perceived inaccuracies, as well as under-representation (Ross Arguedas et al., 2023) and the replication of stereotypes. For Gans (2012): "many reality judgements are

stereotypes, accurate or inaccurate, which journalists borrow from elsewhere because of their availability and familiarity both to the journalists and the audience. As Walter Lippman pointed out many years ago, the news depends on and reinforces stereotypes (Dixon, 2008; Dixon & Linz, 2000). At times it also invents them, although more often than not, the stereotypes journalists create coincide with those invented independently by many other people" (p. 102).

It is necessary, therefore, to pay attention to journalistic ethics (Anderson, 1990; Borden, 2010; Borden & Bowers, 2020; Coddington & Lewis, 2024; Fidalgo, 2009; Firmstone et al., 2022; Frost, 2006; Nechushtai & David, 2025; Steel et al., 2025) and alienating practices (Harcup, 2005) in relation to covering the marginalised and disadvantaged. Frost (2006) noted local journalists and local news outlets are more vulnerable to critical backlash than their national counterparts, with proximity to community being a key factor in the different ethical approaches. Local journalists take a thoughtful approach—"a lesser attempt to sensationalise and more attempts to provide balance and allow all sides to put their case" (p. 149)—to the source and the story, and the way the story is used when published, out of loyalty, or duty, to the local community, and reader, enhancing social capital, authority and perceptions of trust in the process.

The need for self-esteem, respect and recognition from others, and belongingness and self-actualisation are two of the five levels of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, and, Marxist theory posits alienation as a fundamental feature of life under capitalism (Williams, 1988, p. 33), which is experienced by "*powerlessness*—an inability or feeling of inability to influence the society in which we live ... [and] *isolation*—estrangement from given norms and goals" (p. 36). While Mathews (2022) found community members felt a sense of isolation and diminished pride following the loss of a local newspaper, this has also been a problem with selective coverage by existing local media. Marginalisation in society combines powerlessness and isolation as an active, sometimes deliberate, external force directed at "isolated and bounded territories increasingly perceived by both outsiders and insiders as social purgatories, leprous badlands at the heart of the post-industrial metropolis" (Wacquant, 2008, p. 67). The alienating effect in local journalism can be seen in the institutionalisation of subtle bias in the editorial process (indirect or "incognizant racism", for example) (Lang, 2015; van Dijk, 1989), such as persistent selection (Gans, 2012; Hall et al., 2013), emphasis and exclusion in news framing (Entman, 1993; Kitzinger, 2007; Redden, 2011; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Weaver, 2007), focus (Bennett, 2023; FrameWorks Institute, 2018; Golding & Middleton, 1982; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2019, 2020, 2023; Moore, 2020; Rose & Baumgartner, 2013; Schneider, 2013) and sourcing (Brown et al., 1987; Gant & Dimmick, 2000; Sigal,

1986; Tuchman, 1979, 1981; Wallsten, 2015); parachute journalism or "more extractive hit-and-run reporting practices" (Radcliffe, 2023; Wenzel et al., 2018); reinforcing and amplifying them-and-us perceptions through "Othering" (Bailey & Harindranath, 2005; Hall, 2013b; Sonwalkar, 2005; Tobitt, 2021b); "un-homing"—the feeling of being not at home (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020; Madden & Marcuse, 2016; Marcuse, 1986, 1989, 2010; Rose, 2024); "disembedding" of elite activities and lives from local territorial contexts, such as gated communities and private security (Davis, 2017); territorial bias—"the favouring of one territory at the expense of other territories" (Svith, 2024, p. 64); territorial and class stigmatisation/stereotyping, including exoticising the poor or blaming them for their "misfortunes", and is often referred to as "poverty porn" or "poverty propaganda" (Bauder, 2002; Bourdieu, 1999; Crossley, 2017; Deveraux et al., 2011a, 2011b; Entman, 1990, 1994; Gans, 1990, 1993; Gavin, 2021; Goffman, 2022; Hastings, 2004; Jones, 2020; Potter & Reicher, 1987; Sennett & Cobb, 2023; Slater, 2018; Slater & Anderson, 2011; Wacquant, 2007, 2008, 2014; Wacquant et al., 2014; Watt, 2020; Watt & Jacobs, 2000; Wiard & Pereira, 2019); agnotology—the production of ignorance and the withholding of knowledge by those with the power to do so (Slater, 2021; van Dijk, 1996); and absence or silencing of subordinate voices (Spivak, 1988, 2006).

It can be argued that in some ways the emergence of hyperlocal and ethnic/community media, is not a reaction to journalism's economic crisis, nor a way of "preserving" journalism for journalism's sake, but a product of the media's persistent bias towards a more educated, socially privileged and affluent audience. For some of the small-scale local projects considered in this thesis, journalism is a means and not an end, and—instead of competing for audience share and advertisers—these projects are a limited intervention to ameliorate the profound social and economic ills faced by the marginalised, by boosting *intra-group bonding* and meeting critical information needs. They are limited as journalistic endeavours because, due to their distribution solely within place-based communities, they do not contribute to the kind of *inter-group bridging* which city-wide media can facilitate. Seen from this perspective these nonmainstream outlets act to fill the gaps which mainstream media has *historically* ignored (Radcliffe, 2023b; Radcliffe et al., 2023; Robinson, 2023; Robinson & Johnson, 2024; Wenzel, 2020a, 2023b; Wenzel & Crittenden, 2020). Examples of this type of hyperlocal have been described by Harte et al. (2019)—such as B31 Voices, a news operation in south Birmingham which is run by a husband-and-wife team voluntarily, with no journalistic training, nor do they earn an income from their work (pp. 137-146)—and Wenzel (2020a)—such as the storytelling network in Philadelphia's black

neighbourhood of Germantown set up to counter disproportionately negative media coverage (pp. 105-124).

2.6 Literature Review Conclusion

In this literature review I have followed Hess and Waller's (2017) media power lens approach which brings together a wide range of disparate scholarship to reflect the fact that journalism functions in different ways at different levels in society, especially in a city marked by huge gaps in wealth and life chances. A political economy approach has been important in assessing different types of media from an organisational perspective, and seeing news provision through a normative lens, that all citizens in a democracy benefit from a healthy and diverse media environment and the public interest news it reports on. Cultural studies also provided important insights in understanding that society, and cities in particular, are not homogenous, they are not equal, and the separate communities to which people show allegiance, whether place-based or imagined, have different information needs and means of representation. To return to a quote from Chapter 1, Friedland (2001) commented "the democratic self is composed of two separate but related bodies. The first are publics of citizens. The second are the communities in which they live" (p. 358). Therefore it is important to recognise the affective nature of local journalism, that it needs to be seen as a specialism (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2023) and that journalistic authority (Carlson, 2017) is dependent on both authenticity and trust. What is concerning is that journalism is in danger of developing into an "elite sport" due to barriers to entry (Tobitt, 2024k) and the commercial digital strategies of the mainstream media are turning away from news with a specific geographic focus, thereby undermining community bonds and diluting local content (Franklin, 2006b; Whittington, 2020).

What makes the Bristol news ecosystem an interesting subject for research is the way local journalists seek to fulfil their public interest and community roles, not just in traditional, mainstream media but also through a wide variety of independent, nonmainstream endeavours as well. Whereas much scholarship within journalism studies concentrates on particular news production practices or business models in isolation, a local news ecosystem approach—which takes in websites; newspapers; television; and radio—shows how the media can respond to civic issues through discursive interconnectedness. An example being the way mainstream media in the city started addressing race issues after the emergence of the ethnic radio stations (Maggs, 2023).

Underlying the normative assumption that journalism is vital for a healthy public sphere (Napoli et al., 2015, 2017, 2018) is the realist acceptance that there are many constraining factors. Bourdieu's field theory shows journalism to be a weakly autonomous field, that it exists within a network of power relations in society—that political power, media ownership and commercial goals shape media discourse, and representation, and the way they are mediated (Vos, 2016). This is what lies behind the observation of Tandoc et al. (2013) that journalists' role conceptions very often diverge from the content of the news stories they produce.

Examining this divergence, journalism scholars, and the media industry as a whole, largely lay the blame on technological change, the emergence of platforms, closures, consolidation and journalism's economic crisis—that the media landscape has journeyed from a golden age to one in which news deserts proliferate. I argue this is only part of the story, although, as far as the immediate economic future of the industry is concerned, it is the most urgent. But for Fraser (1990) and Negt and Kluge (2016), among many others, including Stuart Hall, the problems of misrepresentation and underrepresentation of certain groups in society pre-date the current crisis—and continue to be areas of concern today (Robinson, 2018, 2023; Robinson & Culver, 2019; Ross Arguedas et al., 2023; Wenzel, 2023b)—and are, to some extent, affected by dominant ideology and lack of diversity within the news industry. As my research shows, a diverse and busy news ecosystem has weaknesses, especially when it comes to the dismantling of a feeling of a shared civic life between the city's rich and poor, through un-homing or alienation of marginalised communities (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020; Madden & Marcuse, 2016; Marcuse, 1986, 1989, 2010; Rose, 2024); "disembedding" of elite activities from local territorial contexts (Davis, 2017, p. 119); and territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant, 2007, 2008, 2014; Wacquant et al., 2014), and this is in danger of being overlooked when the attention of academics and policy makers is absorbed by questions of commercial viability, financial sustainability and maintaining the status quo.

The following chapter outlines the methods I adopted to answer my research question about the differences between mainstream and nonmainstream news practices.

Chapter 3: Methodological Approaches

3.1 Aim of the Thesis Research Methods

This chapter covers the aims and design of the *quantitative*—content (CA)—and *qualitative*—discourse (DA) (textual [TA] and critical discourse [CDA])—analyses used in my research, with the findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5. This thesis is an empirical exploration of media diversity, plurality and variety in a bounded geographic area—with a specific focus on the boundary between mainstream and nonmainstream news work, as discussed in Sections 1.2 and 2.5 above. Through adopting Hess and Waller's (2017) media power lens approach, which combines insights from political economy (the economics of news production), cultural studies (representation of diverse identities by the media) and the sociology of journalism (the professional ethos of news workers), this thesis is an opportunity to examine the ability of a news ecosystem, lauded as a news oasis (Public Interest News Foundation, 2023), in meeting the normative aspirations of local journalism—to aid the democratic function of the public sphere and help fulfil community needs (DCMS, 2019; Media Reform Coalition, 2022). The local media in Bristol have to contend with covering a socially, economically and culturally diverse city, as well navigating a widespread journalistic crisis (Blumler, 2010) which has seen the closure of hundreds of local media outlets, mass job losses, and cutbacks in resources in the UK and throughout the West, as well as downturns in audience numbers and advertising revenue. The dire nature of the current local media landscape is an unavoidable factor in the widening gap between journalistic *role conceptions* and aspirations regarding authority, autonomy, trust and community embeddedness, revealed by news worker *discourses*; and *role performance* in meeting these ambitions (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017; Hellmueller & Mellado, 2015; Mellado et al., 2020; Mellado & van Dalen, 2014; Tandoc et al., 2013), as shown by the *manifest content* of their endeavours. The link between production, as seen in professional ideology, motivations and processes, and content is important when analysing the work of journalists and media organisations (Philo, 2007, p. 111), and these two aspects—role conceptions and role performance—inform the multimethod approach described in this chapter.

Coleman et al. (2016) note, there are "fundamental tensions between a set of genuinely meant public purposes and the capacity to implement them" (p. 13) and identifying these is an important step in discovering the respective strengths and weaknesses of mainstream and nonmainstream media in the same news environment. For Cottle (2003) there is a "complex of forces" which variously facilitate, condition and constrain media output. These include economic, political, regulatory, technological, professional, cultural and normative factors (p. 4) and are related to various levels of influence including

organisational goals, professional routines, the way journalistic boundaries are policed, and the wider social and cultural world in which the media exists (Reese, 2001).

With this in mind I sought an empirical comparison of nine media organisations (mainstream—*Bristol Post/Live*; *Bristol World*; *BBC Points West*: nonmainstream—*Bristol 24/7*; *Bristol Cable*; *Voice* network; *North Bristol Press*; *The Bristolian*; *The Knowledge*) (see Table 3.1 and Appendix D). This involved two phases: CA of local news articles (N = 1,649 news items, with an average of 118 stories per day) in a two-week sample period (July 8 to 21, 2022) for Phase 1; and a combination of TA and CDA of semi-structured interviews with 18 news workers for Phase 2 (see Table 3.4). For Phase 1 I made comparisons of the output of the news organisations by ownership—nationally owned mainstream (1,264 news items: 76.7%) and locally owned nonmainstream (385: 23.3%) organisations; format—print (720: 43.7%), online (816: 49.5%) and broadcast (113: 6.9%); and frequency—daily (1,410: 85.5%), and monthly or less frequent (239: 14.5%). A variety of variables were used, as explained below, including public interest news, sources present, a Critical Information Needs (CINs) framework, reliance on non-original content, local focus and community representation. Phase 2 was a more discursive investigation into the ways journalists and other media workers make sense of their professional worlds and the way they respond to the social landscape (Deacon et al., 2021, p. 7), and looked at role conceptions and professional legitimacy in relation to expertise (skills and knowledge necessary for carrying out watchdog roles and holding power to account), duty (social responsibility or public service, especially in relation to marginalised communities), and autonomy (working within organisational constraints) (Örnebring, 2013).

I begin this chapter with a discussion of why a multimethod approach was adopted (Section 3.2). The research question and sub-research questions are returned to with an explanation of the thought behind their formulation and how these informed the methods employed in the research (Section 3.3). In Section 3.4 I discuss the research subject—local journalism in Bristol—in relation to why the city was chosen, its journalistic infrastructure and the criteria for identifying news workers, in the light of contested professional boundaries (Carlson & Lewis, 2019). This is followed by a discussion of why CA was used for Phase 1 (Section 3.5) and how it was operationalised for a broad multiplatform (print, broadcast, online) study of the news output of mainstream and nonmainstream media organisations in the Bristol news ecosystem over the sample period. This gave an indication of the number of stories produced overall and per outlet; the topics covered; their relevance to communicatively integrated communities, through CINs and geographical references; sources used, especially in relation to power

and privilege; representation of marginalised communities; and reliance on wider media networks. There are three subsections to this discussion of CA—the *selection criteria* for the sample in Phase 1, in relation to news items, location and research period; the *coding frame*; and the results of the *intercoder reliability test*.

The following section (Section 3.6) discusses the Phase 2 TA and CDA aims, research context, methodology and analytical processes. Semi-structured interviews were carried out to discover how individual journalists and associated news workers in the city news ecosystem conceived their roles within structural limitations. This section discusses the sample *selection method and criteria*; and the design of the *interview questions*; the *analytical process* used; as well as comparing similar studies and discussing the strengths and weaknesses of this method. The interviews were transcribed and broad themes, such as organisational goals, funding and resource levels, were initially identified using TA. The interview responses were then subjected to CDA to understand the opinions, discourses and interpretative repertories (Zelizer, 1993, 2010) of how these news workers covered community and public interest news in particular; viewed public purpose, news values, audience needs, business models and local competition; and how they approached the professional boundary between mainstream and nonmainstream local journalism (Carlson, 2015a; Carlson & Lewis, 2019; Konow-Lund, 2019; Maares & Hanusch, 2023; Schapals et al., 2019) through strategic rituals (normative role conceptions) (Tuchman, 1972), category entitlement (boundary positioning) (Reardon, 2016) and practical ideologies (negotiating internal and external constraints) (Reardon, 2013), discussed in detail in Section 5.2, below. I also acknowledge the academic arguments for and against discourse analysis in this section. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations of the research (Section 3.7).

3.2 A Multimethod Approach

In this section I briefly look at the arguments for using more than one analytical method in ensuring research robustness. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2019) triangulation by using two or more forms of evidence is a "reasonable technique for validating" interpretations which brings us "closer to a 'true' representation of the world" (pp. 358-359), and Deacon et al. (2021) contend that "many of the most interesting questions facing communications research are best tackled by combining different research methods" to produce "a richer and more satisfactory account" (pp. 4, 12). As Anderson (2020) reminds us, James W. Carey's central argument involved understanding that "communication is as much about *interpretation, texts, and meaning* as it is about production, technology, audiences, agency, and social structure", which, Anderson feels, journalism studies may have forgotten (p. 343, emphasis in original).

CA is a common method in the social sciences for providing "a big picture" to reveal trends, patterns and absences over a large collection of texts—it is essentially concerned with comparisons of extent or occurrences and assigns significance to magnitude or scale (Deacon et al., 2021, pp. 141, 143). It was also necessary for my research to complement this with a more fine-grained approach. This helped give a deeper understanding of news workers' conception of journalistic authority, autonomy, professional boundaries, organisational constraints and the difficulties of holding power to account through the discourses they employ when talking about their roles. Roth and Mehta contend that quantitative measures, are "typically used to establish an 'objective truth of factual events,'" while qualitative techniques, such as TA and CDA used in my research, "probe the 'multiple subjective views' of ... participants" (cited in Lindlof & Taylor, 2019, p. 358). Qualitative research can therefore "provide depth and detail to the more general picture/viewpoint offered by quantitative social data" (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 91). According to Deacon et al. (2021), linguistic analysis reveals more about "language as social interaction" than can be divined from CA of media texts (p. 185). As Hall (2021c) noted:

> Literary-critical, linguistic and stylistic methods of analysis are, by contrast [to CA], more useful in penetrating the latent meanings of a text, and they preserve something of the complexity of language and connotation which has to be sacrificed in content analysis in order to achieve high validation. (p. 145)

3.3 Research Question and Sub-Research Questions

Having introduced and briefly explained my RQ and sub-RQs in Chapter 1 (Section 1.2.2) here I relate them to the theoretical focus of my thesis and the research methods I adopted. In Chapter 2 I argued for the need to combine insights from both political economy and cultural studies, under Hess and Waller's (2017) conception of a media power lens, when approaching a study of local mainstream and nonmainstream journalism. Bourdieu's field theory is also useful for seeing the production of journalism and the cultural role of the audience "as part of a necessary and helpful continuum" (pp. 12, 13). Hess and Waller's theoretical lens draws on democratic, sociological and cultural theories to examine local journalism's roles in "politics, community formation and social change to its various relationships with audiences and how questions of power, place, labour and technology link the local with the world" (p. 12), and relates to the media's "ability to shape and define reality as a potent form of social power" (p. 54). The RQ and sub-RQs were:

RQ. To what extent, and in what ways, does coverage of community and public interest news in the Bristol news ecosystem differ between local mainstream and local nonmainstream journalists and news organisations?

Sub-RQ1. What news gets covered in the Bristol local news ecosystem, by whom, and in what ways?

Sub-RQ2. How do news workers in Bristol see their roles and how do these role conceptions depend on professional, cultural and social norms, and the institutional practices and commercial imperatives of the organisations they work for, whether mainstream or nonmainstream?

The overall RQ acknowledges two highly valued normative roles carried out by local news—as a forum for facilitating local democracy and a way of maintaining community bonds (DCMS, 2019), which were discussed in Chapter 2. It is set against the background of the (economic and authority-related) journalism crises, also described in Chapter 2 (Section 2.4) where I noted that, because of falling audience numbers and advertising revenue, investment in community and public interest news is declining relative to more commercially oriented activities (Media Reform Coalition, 2022). This, in turn, increases the risk of democratic deficit (Armstrong, 2017; Barclay et al., 2022; Howells, 2015; Ramsey & Moore, 2016) and the marginalisation of community identities, due to reduced local coverage (Whittington, 2020), reduced scrutiny of local power structures (Chakelian, 2019; Gao et al., 2020), erosion of trust (Firmstone et al., 2022; Firmstone, Steel & Saha, 2022; Fletcher & Park, 2017), and failure to meet basic critical information needs (Napoli et al., 2018).

The principal RQ sought to compare mainstream and nonmainstream journalists and news organisations in the Bristol news ecosystem. This was split into two sub-RQs with two phases of research. In Phase 1 quantitative data about the print, broadcast and online news output of the mainstream and nonmainstream news outlets in the Bristol news ecosystem over the sample period were gathered using CA—the method design is discussed below with analysis of the study findings presented in Chapter 4. Phase 2 was a qualitative examination of the discourses of journalists and how they see their roles, with insight into the types of organisations they work for and the organisational ethos and limitations which enable, constrain or prevent them in fulfilling their perceived roles. This involved carrying out semi-structured interviews with journalists and editors which were analysed using TA and CDA. The method design is discussed below, and the interviews and analyses are discussed in Chapter 5.

The first stage in addressing the first sub-RQ involved gaining an overview of the whole output of the Bristol news ecosystem (three mainstream and six nonmainstream media organisations) over two weeks—July 8 to 21, 2022 (N = 1,649 news items, with an average of 118 stories per day). The main studies to influence this part of the research were introduced in Chapter 1 (Section 1.3) and were those carried out by Coleman et al. (2016), Harte et al. (2019), Anderson (2010, 2013, 2016) and Robinson (2018). The study by Coleman et al. of the media in Leeds, one of the largest cities in the UK, found there was a great appetite for local news; the voices of non-elites were widely heard and reported; nonmainstream news practices were not always in competition with mainstream journalism but satisfied different needs; and local politics was under-scrutinised (pp. 206-207). Harte et al. highlighted Howells's interrogation of the effects of a news black hole in Port Talbot, South Wales, where dedicated local media has become a casualty of the journalism crisis. Anderson made important contributions to the study of news ecosystems by charting the progress of a news story as it moved between actors in a city's media environment. While Robinson's research explored information flows and networks in the reporting of race and education in an American city and built on Anderson's research by applying Bourdieusian field theory to understand how "thought leaders [in the cities studied] have accumulated so much political and civic capital through their networks that they can dictate what information circulates—and how it gets circulated" (p. 11). An important part of my research was the opportunity to discover which communities within the city under investigation are well-served by the news organisations, which are ignored, and which ones suffer from negative coverage, in addition to exploring any innovations employed by the news organisations studied which sought to challenge prevailing hegemonies. This was carried out by utilising mapping of geographical references, and a place-based analysis of positive/negative framing (Entman, 1993; Kitzinger, 2007), in journalistic coverage, as most of the city's marginalised communities are based in specific geographic areas.

The second sub-RQ looked at internal and external social, cultural and institutional factors faced by news organisations which impinge on the ability of journalists to live up to their normative aspirations. By taking into account a hierarchy of influences (Reese, 2001)—the individual (journalists and other media workers); communication routines; organisational (media ownership); social institutional (outside organisations such as public relations and the government); and the larger social system—this gives an opportunity to explore definitional control over what journalism is, can and should be (Dahlgren, 1992, p. 4.), including the importance of its geographically "local" focus.

In carrying out a similar exercise with news workers in their Leeds study, Coleman et al. (2016) found their respondents made strong representations about the sense of public purpose in their journalism and editorial decision-making, although this was occasionally at odds with other views on other topics and, sometimes, with their output (p. 122). Reardon (2013) notes that examination of variation or inconsistency is valuable in exposing different "regimes of truth" that people draw upon according to specific needs.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Tuchman (1978a) noted that "the act of making news is the act of constructing reality itself rather than a picture of reality" (p. 12) and this insight underlaid the formulation of the second sub-RQ. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 18 news workers to gain an understanding of journalists' role conceptions and the construction of news media narratives — the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) — with an exploration of the objectivity norm and strategic rituals involved in professional journalism (Carlson & Lewis, 2019; Cottle, 2000; Hall et al., 1978/2013; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018; Harcup, 2005; Konow-Lund, 2019; Moore, 2020; Schudson, 2001; Soloski, 1989; Tuchman, 1972, 1978a). Underlying this approach was the assumption that coverage differs from news organisation to news organisation — especially between the two broad sectors of mainstream and nonmainstream, which would come to light in Phase 1. This would depend on many factors, including journalists' own world-views and their conception of news values, the journalistic discourse they employ (Kelsey, 2019), the sustainability of the businesses they work for, the organisational tools employed — such as analytics, minimum page view targets, AI (Santos, 2023), award schemes, and so forth — and the commercial goals and financial imperatives of their employers. This sub-RQ also covered the difficulties faced by journalists in living up to their role conceptions by taking account of the differences in their working environments, such as business models, staff levels, workloads, deadline pressures, resources, staff monitoring, promotion prospects, precarity, feedback, editorial control, relationships with sources, inclusivity and diversity (Akella, 2003; Davis, 2018; Tandoc et al., 2013, Whittington, 2020).

3.4 Research Subject

3.4.1 Introducing the Research Subject—Local Journalism in Bristol

Bristol is the most populous city in South West England — according to the 2021 census, the city has a total population of 472,478, but there is an urban sprawl which goes beyond the municipal boundaries. Bristol City Council (BCC) is a unitary authority consisting of 34 wards and is surrounded by 11 town and

parish councils, or first-tier local authorities, collectively known, with BCC, as Greater Bristol. The city's news provision is healthier than in many other urban areas in the UK and has an interesting and rich mix of established and recently launched local news organisations, making the news ecosystem ideal for a comparison of mainstream and nonmainstream news outlets, their journalistic practices and values, business models, and output. The city is also ethnically and socially diverse, with stark economic divisions and distinct communities. My research gave an insight into the differences in reporting community and public interest news between the various local news organisations and how they cover the marginalised and disadvantaged within the city.

From a personal point of view, the media in Bristol were chosen as the subject of my research as I have worked as a journalist in the city, both for commercial (daily and weekly newspapers now owned by Reach, in the city and the surrounding region) and not-for-profit news outlets (*Big Issue in the South West*). I also have wider concerns about the sustainability of local journalism and its ability to serve communities in difficult times, as well as a deep commitment to the benefits of democracy for all sections of society. In the next section I discuss three elements which set the parameters of the Phase 1 CA and the Phase 2 TA and DA: location; journalistic infrastructure; and news workers and their professional boundaries.

3.4.2 News Outlets by Location

Here I look at locality in identifying the local news outlets and the news producers included in my research. As highlighted in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2) geography is an important element in understanding the relevance of local journalism to its audiences. The wider world constantly jostles with our sense of community for attention and affective attachment, via mass media and informal information networks, such as social media. Despite this, place is central to journalism's efforts to position itself as a cultural authority (Usher, 2019, p. 85) and, for local journalism, proximity (Shoemaker et al., 2007) is important as a news value (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001, 2017; O'Neill & Harcup, 2019).

While Napoli et al. (2017) noted "even something as simple as defining and identifying a source of local journalism is a more complex and challenging process than it once was, and any efforts to do so can be critiqued as being too narrow or too expansive" (p. 378), I chose to study those news organisations which had editorial production facilities (studios and offices), geographic focus, historical associations and circulation/distribution areas within Greater Bristol or the peripheral local authority areas—the suburbs, such as Filton. There were indicators of locality in the names of the news

organisations selected. The word "Bristol" featured in most mastheads or titles, but wards and areas within the city boundaries and other geographical indicators such as *Filton Journal*, *South Bristol Voice* and *Points West* were also present. *The Knowledge* was a play on words, being based in Knowle West. *Ujima Radio* was the exception but the About Us webpage highlights the radio station's local and global (diasporic) outlook, describing Ujima Radio CIC as "Bristol's leading African & Caribbean arts and media social enterprise ... We are a non-profit organisation supplying Bristol with local news, lively discussions across a range of topics, with art and music from Bristol, the Caribbean, Africa and the rest of the world" (Ujima Radio, n.d.). Others, such as the BBC, while based in Bristol and reporting on the city, have a remit to cover a much wider area ("the West Country") and sometimes cover national and international news. The Reach outlets also cover major events from further afield, with some having local relevance, such as disruption on motorways and railways which would affect city commuters. These were included but it was necessary to draw up strict criteria for assessing the local relevance of the news output, as discussed below.

In the section on the Phase 1 research method below I look at how coding for location in news content was operationalised for CA while the next section discusses the local news outlets selected as part of my research.

3.4.3 Journalistic Infrastructure

Wahl-Jorgensen (2019a) argued that while academic study of journalism comes with "some normative investment in the profession itself as a key institution in the public sphere" research often privileges "the most prestigious, elite and well-resourced newsrooms", i.e. legacy media, at the expense of poorly resourced organisations and emerging alternatives, and this leads to an important gap in our knowledge of journalism (p. 165). For my research I was interested in the diversity, variety and plurality (Picard & Pickard, 2017) of the local news ecosystem and so it was important to include both mainstream (which I took to be nationally owned and controlled) and nonmainstream (locally owned and managed) media.

Following Lin and Song's (2006) directions for carrying out a media census, I drew up a list of news organisations using local knowledge, the membership list of the Independent Community News Network (ICCN, n.d.) and a Wikipedia page called Media in Bristol (Wikipedia, n.d.-a), as well as the local media news website *Hold the Front Page* and the online industry news service *Press Gazette*. Table 3.1 lists the local media in Phase 1, these were grouped as: 1) mainstream or nonmainstream; 2) format — print, online or broadcast; 3) reach — regional, city-wide, district-wide (sub-city/multiple wards) or ward-

level; 4) ownership; 5) and frequency—daily or monthly plus (there were no weekly media organisations). I also included the date of foundation to give an indication of how long the outlets have been part of the city's media infrastructure. Firmstone (2024) pointed out "legacy news ... retains a dominant role in the news ecology due to its influence on the rest of the news cycle as an agenda setter" (p. 13). With this in mind, Reach's *Bristol Post* and the BBC's *Points West* are the local examples of agenda-setting legacy media, dating from 1932 and 1957 respectively, and dominate the journalistic field in the city. All the other news organisations were founded this century.

Table 3.1: Bristol Media Organisations in Phase 1

Outlet	Mainstream (M)/ Nonmainstream (NM) (Ownership—founded)	Format	Frequency
Bristol Post	M (Reach—1932)	Print	Daily
Bristol Live	M (Reach—2018)	Online	Daily
Bishopston Voice print	NM (Local Voice Network franchise—2011)	Print	Monthly
Fishponds Voice web	NM (Local Voice Network franchise)	Online	Daily (inf)
Fishponds Voice print	NM (Local Voice Network franchise)	Print	Monthly
Henleaze and Westbury Voice print	NM (Local Voice Network franchise)	Print	Monthly
South Bristol Voice print	NM (Local Voice Network franchise)	Print	Monthly
Bristol Cable web	NM (Bristol Cable Community Benefit Society—2014)	Online	Daily (inf)
Bristol Cable print	NM (Bristol Cable Community Benefit Society)	Print	Quarterly
Points West	M (BBC—1957)	Television	Daily
The Bristolian web	NM (The Committee for Public Safety—2001/relaunched 2013)	Online	Daily (inf)
The Bristolian print	NM (The Committee for Public Safety)	Print	Monthly
Bristol 24/7	NM (Bristol 24/7 CIC—2009)	Online	Daily
Bristol World	M (National World—2021)	Online	Daily
Bradley Stoke Journal	NM (North Bristol Press—2008)	Online	Daily (inf)
Stoke Gifford Journal	NM (North Bristol Press)	Online	Daily (inf)
The Knowledge web	NM (Knowle West Alliance—2009)	Online	Daily (inf)
The Knowledge print	NM (Knowle West Alliance)	Print	Monthly

Key: Daily (inf) = website which can be updated daily, but, in practice, is updated infrequently

For the Phase 1 CA I looked at nine different news organisations—Reach (*Bristol Post*/*Live*); National World (*Bristol World*); BBC (*Points West*); *Bristol Cable*; *Bristol 24/7*; Local Voice Network (LVN—*Bishopston Voice; Fishponds Voice; Henleaze and Westbury Voice; South Bristol Voice*); North Bristol

Press (NBP—*Bradley Stoke Journal; Stoke Gifford Journal*); *The Bristolian*; and *The Knowledge*. I also interviewed media workers involved in the community radio stations *BCfm* and *Ujima Radio*; the local BBC political correspondent whose work appears on television, *Radio Bristol* and online; one of the two LDRS reporters in the city, as well as several cross-over and former journalists, a National Union of Journalists representative, freelancers, bloggers and citizen journalists for Phase 2. The freelancers and citizen journalists I interviewed were identified through their social media activity or published bylines.

To illustrate the unstable nature of news ecosystems, as the research methods were being designed, *Bristol World*, a new website dedicated to Bristol news, was launched by one of the big national publishers, National World; the *Bradley Stoke Journal*, a hyperlocal published by North Bristol Press, ceased its print production but remained online; website *Bristol 24/7* revived its print edition after a three-year break due to the pandemic; and the BBC announced plans to cut back local radio programmes in favour of nationally or regionally produced shared output and an increased online presence, which would affect *Radio Bristol* and see many city-based staff losing their jobs (*Bristol Post*, 2023; Tobitt, 2023a)—the charter review in 2027 is likely to bring further changes. *Rife Magazine*, described as a 'platform for the opinions of Bristol's young people' was also wound up after eight years (Edwards, 2021b; Evans, 2022).

Although initially identified as subjects in Phase 1 research, copies of broadcasts by BBC *Radio Bristol*, *ITV News West Country*, *Ujima Radio* and *BCfm* were not available, however interviews were carried out with representatives of these organisations in Phase 2.

3.4.4 News Workers and Professional Boundaries

Coleman et al. (2016) included the "paranodal"—"those actors and spaces that do not conform to the organising logic of the network" (p. 10) and Napoli et al. (2017) also argued that the inclusion of "*tangential* or *potential* sources of journalism" are necessary for an expansive analysis of journalistic output (p. 378, emphasis in original) and that "social media play a vital role in facilitating interconnectedness and sharing of journalistic content" (p. 380). While taking this into consideration my research was limited to the prominent nodes of the Bristol news ecology. The section on CA below gives a fuller account of the selection criteria I employed in gathering my research sample but analysis of blogs, Twitter accounts, Facebook groups, and so forth—while useful to fully understand a news ecology—was beyond the scope and resources of the present study. Also, the Phase 1 CA involved analysis of 1,649 stories, so occasional postings from the more informal and peripheral actors in the

news ecosystem would not make a significant statistical impact. However, instances where news stories cited (local and non-local) social media posts as sources were noted to give an indication of the influence of, and reliance on, these informal and less direct communication channels—as mentioned below. These have become important sources of news (Linford, 2023a; Newman, 2022; Newman et al., 2022, 2023; Pew Research Center, 2021; Sharman, 2023n; Spilsbury, 2018, pp. 34, 35) and the means by which local stories can "go viral" (Anderson, 2010).

By restricting the research to mainstream and nonmainstream news outlets comparisons could be made between journalists at work in these different organisations (Harcup, 2003); their professional boundaries (Carlson & Lewis, 2015); journalistic authority (Carlson, 2017); autonomy (Sjøvaag, 2013); and their role conceptions (Tandoc et al., 2013). For the interviews in Phase 2 I employed a wider definition of news worker as several of the freelance journalists I talked to posted on their own blogs and made extensive use of social media in addition to occasionally working for the local mainstream and nonmainstream outlets. This gave interesting insights into boundary work (Carlson & Lewis, 2015, 2019; Konow-Lund, 2019) and citizen journalism in the city (Glaser, 2010; Paulussen & D'heer, 2013; Paulussen et al. 2007; Reese et al. 2007; Robinson & DeShano, 2011a, 2011b; Wall, 2015).

3.5 Phase 1 Research Method

3.5.1 Introducing the Phase 1 Research Method

As described above, I adopted CA as the research method for Phase 1 to answer my first sub-RQ—"what news gets covered in the Bristol local news ecosystem, by whom, and in what ways?"—and this gave an idea of the scale, and diversity, of a city-wide news ecosystem in informational terms and allowed comparisons to be made between the news selection criteria of the mainstream and nonmainstream news organisations, their choice of sources, geographical priorities, critical information needs and representation of marginalised communities.

Research materials were collected in the following manner. The *Bristol Post* was subscribed to and print copies were received by post over the two-week period. The newspaper was published Monday to Friday, with the first four days typically being 36 pages and Friday's edition, called the *Weekend Post* and datelined for three days (Friday to Sunday), being 56 pages—the Saturday edition ceased publication before research began. Also included in the analysis was the 40-page *Weekend* supplement published once a week with the *Post*, which had local stories and was produced in-house. A hard copy of the *Bristol Cable* was also received by post—only one was published during the research

period. The website homepages were visited at 2pm each day—the URL and a screen grab were collected for every story posted in the previous 24 hours, identified by date and time of posting. Analysis was restricted to the homepage, other webpages not being included. There were often news items which remained on the website for several days—news items were coded only once and if the date of their original posting fell outside the research period they were not included in the analysis. The *Bristol Live* website was the most labour intensive (daily posts in the sample period ranged from 27 to 49). *Bristol 24/7* and *Bristol World* posted daily (0 to 15 and 1 to 16 per day respectively). The *Cable*, *The Bristolian*, LVN and NBP websites were updated irregularly. The LVN publications and *The Knowledge* posted their latest issues as PDFs online or used issuu. *The Bristolian* sent a PDF of the most recent edition following an email request. The BBC *Points West* early evening broadcasts were accessed via Learning on Screen/Box of Broadcasts (BoB). From Monday to Friday the programme was 30 minutes long and on Saturdays and Sundays it was 10 minutes. Two of the programmes were shortened or moved in the broadcasting schedules because of over-running coverage of live sports events. The Sunday morning BBC local politics show, *Sunday Politics*, and lunchtime bulletins were not included, as *Points West* is the flagship regional news service, which gives a round-up of the most important news of the day and has the highest regional television audience figures.

This section discusses the use of CA as a research method in the social sciences, the design of the research and analytical methods, and the limits and difficulties encountered. It concludes with the results of the intercoder reliability test. The findings from the CA are discussed in relation to my research question and sub-research questions in Chapter 4.

3.5.2 Content Analysis

For Hall (2021c) "content analysis is at its strongest where *manifest content* is being analysed, and where the verifiability of any proposition with respect to content has to be supported by 'objective' criteria" (p. 145), as such, it is a purely descriptive method (Davies & Mosdell, 2006, p. 107). Although objectivity in CA can be, and often is, contested (see below for a discussion on the limits of CA), this method is often used as a social research tool because it quantifies content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner (Bryman, 2016, p. 285). According to Berelson content analysis concerns "what-is-said", not "why-the-content-is-like-that" and its use assumes repetition—"the pile-up of material under one of the categories"—to be the most useful indicator of significance (as cited in Hall, 2021c, p. 145). According to Deacon et al. (2021) CA was originally designed

to bring the rigour and authority of "natural" scientific inquiry to the study of human and social phenomena, although "the claim that the method provides completely value-free insights into the study of content is dubious" (p. 140), as research design, choice of sample and analytic criteria are all subject to the aims of the researcher, as well as any deductions drawn about the significance of the data collected. In line with the standard operational approach to carrying out CA, a coding manual was produced, which set out coding categories and variables, gave examples and evidence-based clarifications, to reduce ambiguities and ensure an acceptable level of consistency between multiple coders. This is Appendix A. A coding sheet (with instructions for single coded or multicoded variables) was drawn up, and this is Appendix B.

The design of this part of my research was heavily indebted to the Leeds research study carried out by Coleman et al. (2016), and their proviso about using CA was noted—"by itself, content analysis can be a limiting technique, partitioning aspects of news stories into predetermined measures and categories, in a verifiable yet fragmentary manner" (p.34). Without needing a more nuanced method of data gathering at this stage, the verifiable categories allowed me to compare news content between the various and diverse media in the city news ecosystem, where quantity of different types of news gave an indication of differing priorities and available resources. As the subject matter was complex and the category divisions were initially blurred this classifying process presented a challenge. Very detailed coding instructions were drawn up for a coding guide through an iterative and inductive approach (Bryman, 2016, p. 23), which involved carrying out a pilot on a limited number of articles (Davies & Mosdell, 2006, p. 106). This process refined category definitions and identified grey areas, an example being articles about the activities of local authorities, where it was decided to code narrowly for distinct subjects, such as "education" or "environment", rather than the less-well-defined "public sector". This process helped strengthen the reliability of the research, as discussed below.

Once coding for the Phase 1 CA was complete I entered the results into SPSS, the standard computer software system for analysis of quantitative data (Bryman, 2016; Davies & Mosdell, 2006). I gained an idea of the overall volume of news covered in Bristol, which was then broken down, platform by platform and news item by news item, to establish broad trends relating to productivity, story topic, local orientation, representation of marginalised communities, political coverage, sources and reliance on larger organisational networks. For example, I was interested in the aggregate amount of crime coverage across the city during the research period, which, in turn, I disaggregated to make comparisons between the news outlets—such as the percentage of crime stories in *Bristol Live*'s total news output

compared with BBC *Points West*'s coverage—which was further broken down by locality to find out about coverage at ward level. In the following section I discuss the criteria informing my choice of research subject.

3.5.3 News Output

The basis of the Phase 1 CA research was everything published or broadcast (when copies were available) by the news organisations in Table 3.1 over a two-week period, the analytical unit being a news item. The coding manual at Appendix A gives a detailed explanation of how news items were identified. In print and online, news items were self-contained articles, mostly identified by the presence of headlines; organising page furniture, such as rules, picture boxes and labels; and URLs. Scholars (Canter, 2018; Karlsson & Sjøvaag, 2016; Karlsson & Strömbäck, 2010 among them) have highlighted the problem faced by researchers encountering the liquidity and ephemerality of online news in contrast to the relatively stable analytical units used for legacy media. With their insights in mind, only the most recent posting was coded for continuously updated live blogs. It was necessary to draw up guidelines for broadcast news bulletins or round-ups, where format and presenter were unchanged but several different item subjects were covered (Deacon et al., 2021, p. 147)—different item subjects constituted separate news items, this was the case even if there was a thematic connection, such as a brief story on flu pressures at a local hospital, followed by another on the opening of a new children's ward somewhere else in the patch. In this example, news angle, location and possibly sources would be different.

The news items covered hard and soft news, which included reviews, what's on, sport, opinion columns and letters to the editor, whether locally produced, contributed or the product of networked content generation. Table 3.2 gives a quantitative measure of the news items produced by the various news outlets. I included those stories from the edition of the print publications published on a monthly or less regular basis, which was in circulation during the sample period.

Table 3.2: Story count—all outlets over two weeks

Outlet	Mainstream (M)/ Nonmainstream (NM)	Format	Frequency	Story count and percentage of total news ecosystem output
Bristol Post	M	Print	Daily	481 (29.2%)
Bristol Live	M	Online	Daily	530 (32.1%)
Bishopston Voice print	NM	Print	Monthly	40 (2.4%)

Fishponds Voice web	NM	Online	Daily (inf)	9 (0.5%)
Fishponds Voice print	NM	Print	Monthly	39 (2.4%)
Henleaze and Westbury Voice print	NM	Print	Monthly	40 (2.4%)
South Bristol Voice print	NM	Print	Monthly	45 (2.7%)
Bristol Cable web	NM	Online	Daily (inf)	10 (0.6%)
Bristol Cable print	NM	Print	Quarterly	22 (1.3%)
BBC Points West	M	Television	Daily	113 (6.9%)
The Bristolian web	NM	Online	Daily (inf)	5 (0.3%)
The Bristolian print	NM	Print	Monthly	9 (0.5%)
Bristol 24/7	NM	Online	Daily	104 (6.3%)
Bristol World	M	Online	Daily	140 (8.5%)
Bradley Stoke Journal	NM	Online	Daily (inf)	4 (0.2%)
Stoke Gifford Journal	NM	Online	Daily (inf)	3 (0.2%)
The Knowledge web	NM	Online	Daily (inf)	11 (0.7%)
The Knowledge print	NM	Print	Monthly	44 (2.7%)
Total				1649 (100%)

Key: Daily (inf) = website which can be updated daily, but, in practice, is updated infrequently

Deacon et al. (2021) note that media hybridity—when news organisations publish in print and online—presents new challenges in sampling coverage (p. 142). With this in mind I analysed different news formats produced by the same organisation separately—such as Reach's daily newspaper, the *Bristol Post,* and its sister online news site, *Bristol Live*, as these have distinct corporate identities as well as separate digital and print editorial departments. The news items were edited, repurposed, given different degrees of prominence, updated and headlines altered depending on format, news cycle and departmental editorial decisions, despite, in many cases, having the same journalist bylines and being overseen by the same editor-in-chief.

3.5.4 Location in Content Analysis

The refinement of mapping as a research tool in journalism studies has been noted as a response to its geographic turn (Section 2.2), with various approaches being identified (McAdam & Hess, 2022). As my research was an attempt to understand why some social groups were included, and some were excluded, from local news provision, their association with physical places—via local imaginaries, bureaucracies, and media representation—was an important indicator in their identification, as discussed in Chapter 2. With this in mind, a cartographic approach (with reference to official maps of local authority wards, areas of deprivation etc) and network mapping (in relation to information flows

defined by power) were combined, as well as elements of metaphorical mapping (ibid) which helped frame the hypothesis, evident in the concept of news deserts, that journalism's haves and have-nots are, to a large extent, spatially segregated (Abernathy, 2023; Örnebring, 2019).

An important element of the Phase 1 research was determining if news outlets met the city's (and its communities') critical information needs, a framework which excludes non-local and non-original content. Location was operationalised in the CA in two ways. Firstly, to investigate which outlets showed a greater commitment to local news (focused on the city and the region around it) as opposed to non-local news. This was an opportunity to gauge an outlet's reliance on non-original content, i.e. networked and PR-generated content which had not been "repurposed" for local audiences. As explained below this depended on drawing up detailed instructions for identifying the geographical focus in news items and justifying criteria for deciding if a news item was *non-local but relevant*, or *non-local and irrelevant* to local audiences. Secondly, the location of news items was important to discovering how often different areas of Bristol (coded at the level of sub-city districts, such as South Bristol and wards) are covered, and how coverage is framed (positively or negatively) (Moore, 2020; Redden, 2011; Wacquant, 2008). Some parts of the city, such as Clifton, are known for their affluence, and others, such as St Paul's, Easton and Knowle West—while sites of strong communities and distinct identities—are often negatively portrayed by the media. As discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2), social issues, such as poverty, are inextricably linked to place (Crossley, 2017; Moore, 2020). According to the Runnymede Trust (2017) Bristol is the most racially unequal city in the UK and the most recent indices of deprivation found that "Bristol continues to have deprivation 'hot spots' that are amongst some of the most deprived areas in the country yet are adjacent to some of the least deprived areas in the country" (Bristol City Council, 2019).

I adapted Lin and Song's (2006, p. 371) "ladder of 'localness'" to code for location in stories—specifically in relation to item subject, sources and politics. Table 3.3 shows there were four local levels, two non-local levels and a means of coding no geographical references. I also coded if the non-local stories were related or unrelated to the city, the former being stories such as "hunt for Bristol couple in aftermath of Japanese earthquake". Both the BBC and *Bristol Post/Live* have catchment areas wider than the city (the former extends to the neighbouring counties, while the latter reports on major incidents in Weston-super-Mare, a large town about 20 miles from the city, for example) and editorial policies on reporting on breaking major regional, national and international events. Their news agendas are driven by digital priorities which, according to Firmstone and Whittington (2021), employ "blander,

softer and less geographically focused content production" to appeal to a "wider, but less invested audience network" (p. 89). The amount of non-local, compared to local, content was a key indicator in the comparison between mainstream and nonmainstream news practices.

Table 3.3: Levels of location—ranked in size of area: international = largest; ward = smallest

Level of location		Examples of news items
Non-local (*relevant* and *irrelevant* to Bristol audiences)	No geographical reference	New film released; fashion news
	International	US-China tensions rise; international football competition
	National	General election called; income tax increases
Local	Regional	Murder in nearby town; damage from severe storms throughout region
	City-wide	Referendum on elected mayor; city house prices rise
	Sub-division	Investigation into MP's conduct; clean air zone introduced
	Ward	School fails Ofsted report; accident closes road

The lowest level was the smallest area considered and was based on the Bristol City Council ward system plus the surrounding Greater Bristol town and parish councils (Bristol City Council, 2021, n.d.-b, n.d.-c; Wikipedia, n.d.-b, n.d.-c). The ward system proved useful as micro-level statistics on population and poverty levels, among other indices, are available for these areas (Bristol City Council, 2019, 2022a, 2022b, 2023, n.d.-a). Landmarks, neighbourhoods within wards and inner-city areas, such as St Paul's (which is a newsworthy part of the city, but is classed as an inner suburb, not a ward), were identified before coding began and listed under the relevant ward (e.g. St Paul's was coded as Ashley ward). A not-applicable value was available if the news item did not feature this level of geographical precision. The next local level contained sub-divisions of the city, such as North West Bristol, NHS Trusts and MP constituencies (Wikipedia, n.d.-b). Also, references to cross-Bristol routes were coded here, such as the M32 and the River Avon. Again, a not-applicable value was employed if the news item did not mention sub-divisions. The next local level was the city, which included mentions of Bristol; the city council; emergency services, such as Avon and Somerset Police; well-known institutions, such as Aardman Animations and Bristol Zoo; and cultural and historical events and figures, such as the slave trade, Brunel and Bristol Balloon Fiesta. A not-applicable value was also available. The final local level was regional, which included references to nearby towns and cities, such as Weston-super-Mare; geographical areas, such as the Mendips and the Bristol Channel; and regional descriptions, such as "The

West Country" and "The South West". There was also a not-applicable value. The next two levels were non-local, this included national references, such as UK Government activities, and international ones, such as NATO and the EU. If news items were non-local but related to Bristol, this was noted, such as stories about national ambulance response times or university league tables which mentioned the local NHS trusts or universities. If national and international news items did not specify a local reference, these were coded as unrelated. This value was useful for discovering how much a news outlet relied on news items which had no connection with the local area, which Franklin noted as a concerning trend (2006b, 2006c) and has been discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2). There was a further value for no geographical references. Following Lin and Song (2006), in stories which referenced more than one level only the lowest was coded to avoid double coding, so if Westbury-on-Trym was mentioned, the ward was coded and not North Bristol or Bristol. Multiple locations (at different levels) could be coded, such as stories which included the difference in house prices in Clifton and Easton and how these compared to average property values in the North of England.

3.5.5 Sample Period

Traditionally, mid-summer is "the silly season" for news, as the political cycle takes its annual break and reliable sources go on holiday, but events carry on regardless and, from the evidence of my sample (collected from July 8 to 21, 2022), the seasonal news slow-down appears to be either a thing of the past or the exaggerated product of myth. Perennial local news topics in my sample covered both public interest and community news, and included: housing issues; development plans; community campaigns to save local pubs; long-running industrial action; transport infrastructure problems; initiatives to tackle anti-social behaviour and modern slavery; crime; road traffic accidents and human-interest stories; as well as reviews of events, restaurants and pubs; and sport. There was also heavy coverage of several breaking stories and the follow-ups, such as the long-awaited and controversial introduction of a clean air zone; Bristol City Council's surveillance of SEND parents; the fate of strip clubs in the centre of the city; Ofsted's criticism of a prestigious school; the fall-out from a press boycott of the Mayor's regular press conferences; work on the new governance model for the city in the wake of a referendum which abolished the elected mayoral system in favour of a committee-led council; a long heatwave; Bristol LGBT Pride; the Harbour Festival; countdown to the closure of Bristol Zoo at its historic site in Clifton; the cost-of-living crisis; local reaction to the resignation of the Prime Minister and the subsequent Tory leadership race, as well as Government plans for sending asylum seekers to Rwanda; and the run-up to the Women's Euros and the league football season.

3.5.6 Coding Frame

The Phase 1 Coding Manual set out the detailed coding criteria for the variables used in the CA, and is Appendix A. The Phase 1 Coding Sheet is Appendix B. The coding frame was designed to address the RQ: "to what extent, and in what ways, does coverage of community and public interest news in the Bristol news ecosystem differ between local mainstream and local nonmainstream journalists and news organisations?" and the first sub-RQ: "what news gets covered in the Bristol local news ecosystem, by whom, and in what ways?".

In the first instance I noted date of publication, publisher/broadcaster, URL, page number and headline to identify each news item. The media power lens approach (Hess and Waller, 2017) calls for a combination of political economy and cultural studies to examine the power of the local media in setting a news agenda and constructing identities. With this in mind, the two themes of public interest news — with its relations to the normative journalistic functions of holding power to account and informing the public sphere — and coverage of communities — where representation is the focus, are employed in the discussion of the variables used. Here I consider public interest news in a broad sense to include hard and soft news, such as reviews, what's on, sport, opinion columns and letters to the editor. This involved coding for author/contributor; item subject (individual news subjects; hard/soft news; locality); sources (individual sources; elite/nonelite; locality); functions of secondary sources; politics (locality); source of non-original content; digital connectivity and interactivity; representations of other media; and critical information needs, to give an indication of the overall news output as well as allowing comparisons to be made based on mainstream/nonmainstream ownership; individual outlet; frequency of broadcast/publication; and format. Coding for community news involved variables relating to representation of marginalised communities and (positive, negative or neutral) framing.

Most of the coding sheet variables were influenced by Howells's (2015) Port Talbot research — these were author/contributor, item subject, and sources; similar work on hyperlocals (Williams, n.d) — functions of secondary sources and politics location; and Coleman et al.'s (2016) Leeds study — good news/bad news. A variable on critical information needs (CINs) came from Napoli et al. (2017). The prompt for a variable on non-original content came from non-academic research by *Press Gazette* (PG) (Ponsford & Davis, 2022) building on the work carried out by Davies (2009) into churnalism — while PG admitted the study lacked academic rigour, some of the categories they employed proved informative for my research. The variable on representation of marginalised communities was added to give a fuller

understanding of the coverage of deprived areas, and under-represented and often-stigmatised identities (Moore, 2020), in relation to the differences between mainstream and nonmainstream news work.

3.5.6.1 Author/Contributor

The bylined author(s) or contributor(s) of the news item were coded (along with job titles if stated, e.g. Crown Court Reporter) with a view to discovering how much content was generated by professional journalists—in-house, network shared and news agencies—compared to non-professional contributors, such as members of the public, political representatives and community groups—something also indicated by item type. Given the cutbacks in newsroom resources discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.4) this would give an idea of the amount of user-generated content (Williams, Wardle & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011), public relations press releases (Davis, 2003; Harrison, 2006) and syndicated content (Davies, 2009) the news outlets relied on. This variable also gave an indication of the reliance on non-local journalists and national networks, as *Bristol Live* regularly publishes articles originally posted on other Reach-owned websites, e.g *Mirror.co.uk*, *Cornwall Live*, with the bylines of the original authors. Anonymous and generic bylines were also coded, e.g. Cable Team, Bristol Rovers Reporter, with a not applicable code for instances where there was no byline.

3.5.6.2 Item Subject

An item subject list was adapted from Coleman et al. (2016), Howells (2015), Williams (n.d.-a) and research projects on national broadcast news and alt-left websites (Cushion, 2019, 2021a, 2021b; Cushion & Thomas, 2022). There were 39 values with subjects ranging from politics and community through to arts and sport. This was a single-code variable. I decided against a secondary subject code for a subsidiary story topic (Coleman et al., 2016, p. 44). Coleman et al. found that coding for prominent and subsidiary story topics did not greatly alter the sense of "story subject dominance or diversity" (2016, pp. 44-46). The item subject therefore was what the story was "principally about" in the headline and introductory paragraphs (Cushion, 2021a, p.7), i.e. focus and not necessarily the actor, for example, Bristol City Council green policies were coded as Environment/Energy/Nature, not Politics (Reinemann et al. 2011; 2017). To maintain a high degree of consistency for this variable, extensive guidance was given on what should be included under the different subject headings. While most subjects fell into well-defined categories—royalty; celebrity; history/nostalgia—an iterative process was necessary for stories with more than one apparent subject, and this is dealt with in detail in the Coding Manual at Appendix A. I regularly updated the coding manual and sheet and, once initial coding was complete,

some of the SPSS data was recoded—by that stage the grey-area stories had become apparent and the reasons for refining the original coding advice clearer. To simplify analysis in SPSS some categories were amalgamated—after initial coding—into additional variables and are discussed in Chapter 4, for example health/NHS; education; transport/travel; housing and emergency services (other) were combined as a public interest category. Similarly, entertainment/leisure/food; consumer; culture/arts; property; and history/nostalgia; as well as royalty and celebrity were combined as soft news/lifestyle. At the expense of a detailed record of item subjects this amalgamation gave a clearer picture of the relative amounts of hard and soft news (Boczkowski, 2009; Patterson, 2000; Reinemann et al., 2011, 2017).

3.5.6.3 Sources

Coding for sources, along with the author variable above, gave an indication of who gets to speak and define news events. This variable was also useful for making comparisons between mainstream and nonmainstream news production, as Williams et al. (2015) noted mainstream news journalism "places a high value on quotations as an indicator of transparency in sourcing, and as a way of enacting professional norms such as impartiality and objectivity" (p. 690). Sources are important indicators of social power and are often the primary definers or political elites within a community's power structure (Brown et al., 1987; Franklin et al. 2010; Hall et al. 2013; Hermans, Schaap & Bardoel, 2014; Kurpius, 2002; O'Neill & O'Connor, 2008; Phillips, 2011; Robinson, 2018; Ross, 2006, 2007; Williams et al. 2015, p. 689). They have the ability to frame the perspective of a news story and set the news agenda (McCombs, 2005). This variable gave an indication of source diversity within the news ecosystem and which sources clustered around which news outlets. Following Williams et al.'s (2015) research I coded for all single identifiable actors which were directly quoted, as well as indirect reported speech, to test if mainstream sourcing practice differed substantially from nonmainstream news journalism (p. 690). I used Phillips's (2015a) understanding of sourcing as being from personal exchange or via secondary media (p.89) as, within the sample, there were many instances where information from websites, promotional materials, digital alerts and even posters were quoted verbatim (with conventional news media punctuation, such as quote marks) without attribution to an identified person. Williams et al.'s (2015) research found official sources in government, business and the police are important for both mainstream and nonmainstream news but "a key difference is the expanded role afforded to members of the general public and to representatives of local civil society groups in [the] emergent sector" (p. 690). Coleman et al. (2016) found their analysis of sources in the Leeds-based broadcast media appeared to "challenge the traditional notion that the voices of 'unknowns' are generally absent from

news coverage" and argued "the ease of access and low cost for reporters are certainly credible factors in explaining their attraction to such sources", concluding this may indicate a 'demotic turn' giving "increased visibility for 'ordinary people', signalling a wider shift in mediated discourse" (p. 50). Indirect speech or opinion attributed to a whole group was not coded, for example "residents fear...", "political leaders in the city are adamant that...". Some news items had no sources—for example, cinema listings and restaurant reviews. In addition to the primary source (the first, or only, source quoted), I also coded for secondary sources. This gave an indication of the prevalence of single-source stories (Davies, 2009; Harrison, 2006) and added to research and concerns about the emergence of "the passive journalist" (O'Neill and O'Connor 2008). Location of sources, and if they were talking about local or non-local events, was also coded to give an idea of the number of local voices present in comparison to sources from outside the area, such as PR agencies and government bodies (Aronczyk, 2017; Davis, 2003, 2009; McNair, 2004; White & Hobsbawm, 2007). Political sources were coded according to party—Labour, Green, Lib Dem, Conservative, Knowle Community Party, Independent—even when such actors were represented in non-political roles, such as opening flower shows. Gender of sources was coded as male, female, corporate, not known and mixed. If the sources were anonymous, gender was deduced from other indicators e.g. "... we talked to an eyewitness, he said ...", "... a mother, who did not give her name, ...". Not known was coded in the absence of these indicators e.g. "an Avon and Somerset Police spokesperson", "a resident". Corporate was used for non-human sources e.g. "... according to www.gov.uk ...", "... Primark said ...". Mixed was coded if attribution was given to a couple or a group of men and women. Coding for gender was important as research indicates women are outnumbered by men as sources in general and also under-represented among the authoritative voices quoted (Ross, 2007; Ross & Carter, 2011; Ross et al., 2018). I did not code for ethnicity or religion of sources, as this would be difficult to determine for all of them, but, when it was intrinsic to the story, this was a coding indicator in the variable on marginalised communities below.

3.5.6.4 Functions of Secondary Sources

The Functions of Secondary Sources noted instances of conflict or consensus and were coded as corroboratory (agreeing with primary source); contextual (adding further information); oppositional (disagreeing with primary source) (Williams et al., 2015). This variable was designed to give an indication of balance in news stories—one of the ways in which journalists, especially mainstream ones, attempt to demonstrate impartiality (Eliasoph, 1988, 1997; Harcup, 2015, pp. 78,79; Schudson, 2001; Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2017).

3.5.6.5 Source for Non-original Content

Academic and professional concerns about churnalism (Davies, 2009; Ponsford & Davis, 2022), clickbait (Blanchett Neheli, 2018; Tandoc, 2015), native advertising (Carlson, 2015; Carlson & Locke, 2022; Ferrer-Conill, 2016) and "cannibalisation" (Phillips, 2011, 2012) were behind the variable on source for non-original content—defined as "repeating facts assembled elsewhere" (Ponsford & Davis, 2022). Due to the difficulty of identifying "lifted" content this variable coded for clearly attributed sources—for example, PA-bylined articles; Instagram posts; other Reach-owned websites, such as *Mirror.co.uk* and *Cornwall Live*, giving an indication of the parent company's national content-sharing strategy (Sharman, 2022g); National Lottery numbers; hyperlinks connecting to original (and unedited) source material; TikTok; Twitter; YouTube; Reddit; Facebook; and those labelled affiliate links, advertorial or ad feature.

3.5.6.6 Critical Information Needs

Critical information needs (CINs) were developed from US Government-commissioned research (Knight Commission, 2009; Napoli et al., 2017) and were coded as Emergencies and Public Safety; Health; Education; Transportation Systems; Environment and Planning; Economic Development; Civic Information; and Political Life. The coding manual listed the corresponding item subject and source variables coded above to make coding more reliable. Some sources such as member of the public, experts and regulators could be coded under different values depending on the item subject. Included in the civic information value were those item subjects which add to and strengthen community connection and cohesion. Sometimes referred as banal news/journalism these are the soft news stories (Harte et al., 2019, p.15; Turner, 2015) which focus on community life and the participation of citizens, such as arts, nostalgia and sport (Howells, 2015, p. 194).

3.5.6.7 Good News/Bad News

Another set of variables was necessary for examining the influence of the local media on communities. The media power lens approach gives the opportunity to study local journalism through cultural studies, with this in mind I examined the news output of the mainstream and nonmainstream media to compare their respective practices regarding reputational geographies (Harte et al., 2019)—through a variable on good news/bad news—and representation of identities (Hall, 2013a). The variable on good news/bad news was informed by research concerned with rebuilding trust in disenfranchised communities (Firmstone, Steel & Saha, 2022; Ross Arguedas et al., 2023; Wenzel, 2020a); local journalists as representatives of the voice of citizens, and community champions (McNair, 2009); and objectivity as a professional norm (Ward, 2010). In a city as racially mixed as Bristol there is always the danger that

news operations feed into discourses of negative representation, as discussed in Chapter 1. Gathering some idea of the balance between good and bad news allowed comparisons to be made between the practices of Bristol's mainstream and nonmainstream news operations and formed the basis of a key question when news practitioners were interviewed in Phase 2. The values used in this variable were based on Coleman et al.'s (2016, pp. 41-44, 230) Leeds study and address the "in what ways?" aspect of the first sub-RQ. News items were coded as Celebratory; Neither Celebratory nor Disorder; Disorder. As the risk of subjective coding was high it was necessary to stick closely to the instructions for coders used in the Leeds study. Coleman et al. used a binary definition—positive-active/negative-passive, i.e. reporting what people are *doing now* (cultural events) as opposed to the terrible things that have *happened to* people (crime and accidents) (p. 42). Paraphrasing the Leeds research, celebratory was coded as celebratory of Bristol: its character(s); heroes/achievers; scenery; reasons for local pride/products; charity achievements; cultural events; positive nostalgia; people/places overcoming obstacles/disadvantage. Neither celebratory nor disorder was the neutral value. Disorder was reserved for crime and corruption; rape; fires; accidents; bad and extreme weather; anti-social behaviour and environmental degradation.

The *Bristol Cable* carried out a year-long solutions journalism project called The Future of Cities (*Bristol Cable*, n.d.; Edwards, 2022; Granger, 2022), which sought a more constructive way of reporting on Bristol's housing, transport and resourcing problems to "empower" readers. Articles of this kind, while having community problems as their focus, were coded as celebratory as they met the "reasons for local pride" and "people/places overcoming obstacles/disadvantage" criteria. This was noted by Harte et al. (2019) in their interviews with hyperlocal practitioners:

> There seems to be a genuine desire to resist dominant myths about localities and to reshape reputational geographies. This shapes the kind of news that is covered, with the emphasis being on good news and the everyday rather than what might be seen as bad news. (p. 197)

3.5.6.8 Representation of Marginalised/Disadvantaged Communities/Identities

My research was concerned with the visibility (or invisibility) of under-represented communities which suffer a "deprivation of voice" (passive rather than deliberate marginalisation) (Moore, 2020, p.4). Most of the values for the representation of marginalised/disadvantaged communities/identities variable were based on the types of discrimination ("protected characteristics") specified in the UK Equality Act 2010 (UK Government, n.d.) and were Age (the act specifies discrimination against adults but some

stories treat children/young people as disadvantaged communities, so these were coded); Disability/Health Inequalities; Race/Ethnicity; Religion/Belief; Gender; Sexuality—Class is not a protected characteristic but was included. Fairclough argued that class relations have "a more fundamental status" than other lines of social differentiation and "set the broad parameters within which others are constrained to develop" (as cited in Deacon et al. 2021, p. 190). According to Olah (2019):

> Efforts to improve standards have ... hinged on the protected characteristics of employment law—age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation—while frequently neglecting to consider the one condition that exacerbates all nine: class. (p. 15)

While the act does not include class, this was added to take account of poverty/low income-related news (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2023), e.g. the cost of living crisis, benefits, foodbanks, unemployment/precarity, debt, education/health inequalities (Hirsch, 2007), housing (including social housing, living conditions, evictions and rent rises [Berry & Pennington, 2022]) and trade union actions (Trades Union Congress, 2023). Consideration was given to labelling this value poverty, but as it was necessary to capture coverage of rent rises and strike actions—which also affect those on middle incomes—the label class was adopted.

This variable was originally called Explicit Mention of Marginalised Communities/Identities but to avoid coding for gender every time women, or race whenever Italian restaurants, were news subjects, "explicit mention" was changed to "representation of the marginalised or disadvantaged". This captured stories about women in football; proposals to crack down on strip clubs—framed as discrimination against working class women; and raids on premises by immigration officials. Tuchman (1981) noted the "symbolic annihilation of women" by mass media "by ignoring women at work and trivializing women through banishment to hearth and home" (p. 183)—with this in mind the gender of sources was coded in the Sources variable above to gauge the relative influence of men and women in the Bristol news ecosystem. Class was coded differently than representation, as poverty and other indicators of inequality are often incidental details in news stories—a recurring example was defendants in court stories whose address was given as "no fixed abode". Although not explicitly about homelessness this was coded under class to avoid erasing this social problem from the research (Schneider, 2013). The values were not mutually exclusive so stories were often multicoded e.g. stories about SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) children were coded as Age and Disability/Health Inequalities; and

stories about discrimination faced by Asian women were coded as Race/Ethnicity and Gender. As discussion on intersectionality shows, social inequality is faced by a range of social groups with people often falling into more than one category (Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Not all stories were about discrimination—celebratory/overcoming adversity stories were coded, e.g. Pride events; exam results (girls doing better than boys); achievements despite age, e.g. return to education after raising a family; social mobility successes, e.g. "from Hartcliffe to Oxford/Hollywood/number one/CEO/BAFTAs" (i.e. where a perceived class barrier has been breached).

3.5.7 Reliability

Intercoder reliability (ICR) testing is standard methodological practice for CA (Bryman, 2016). Reliability is "the extent to which a measuring procedure yields the same results on repeated trials"; a way of ensuring a measure can be considered valid (Neuendorf, 2017, p. 165); a check against the "idiosyncratic results of one rater's subjective judgment" (Tinsley & Weiss, 1975, as cited in Neuendorf, 2017, p. 166); and helps to convince diverse audiences of the trustworthiness of the analysis (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020, p. 11).

I carried out the CA in Phase 1 as a single coder but to ensure the coding scheme categories were clear and mutually exclusive (Davies & Mosdell, 2006, p. 106), and could be replicated and yield the same results, I called upon another coder within the university department, with extensive experience of working with complex news CA coding frames, for an ICR test. The coder was given relevant training in using the coding manual and coding sheet, and 50 news items were selected at random for ICR coding. The second coder's results, and mine for the same news items, were submitted to ReCal 2, an accepted online tool designed by Dean Freelon (https://dfreelon.org/utils/recalfront/recal2/) "that computes intercoder/interrater reliability coefficients for nominal data coded by two coders", which gave results from a range of indices of reliability. According to percent agreement—"the percentage of all coding decisions made by pairs of coders on which the coders agree" (Lombard et al., 2002, p. 590)—the results showed 90% agreement or more, which according to Lombard et al. (2002, 2005) is acceptable. Although this method fails to account for agreement by chance, a second, and more robust, way of measuring the agreement between two coders (Cohen's Kappa) showed close correlation. The lowest percent agreement scores were for Non-original Content Present at 90%, (Cohen's Kappa: 0.799) and Primary Source Local/Non-

local Issue at 92%, (Cohen's Kappa: 0.863) which shows the need for rigorous instructions on coding variables such as these.

3.6 Phase 2 Research Method

3.6.1 Introducing Phase 2 Research Method

While Phase 1 of my research into the mainstream and nonmainstream media organisations in the Bristol news ecosystem concerned news output, the subjects of Phase 2 were the people involved in news production—local journalists, editors and managers—and their role conceptions, and claims to professional legitimacy, in relation to expertise (skills and knowledge necessary for carrying out watchdog roles and holding power to account), duty (social responsibility or public service, especially in relation to marginalised communities), and autonomy (working within organisational constraints) (Örnebring, 2013), which called for a synthesis of analytical methods. Below, I discuss the research method for the second phase—semi-structured interviews; the selection of the 18 news workers I interviewed; the interview design process; and the analytical methods I employed—thematic analysis (TA) was adopted to give an insight into institutional practices and the commercial imperatives of the organisations under investigation; and critical discourse analysis (CDA) was employed to gain an understanding of the news workers' conceptualisation of "cultural and social norms" in relation to their professional ideologies and the social value of their work. The chapter concludes with an overview of the ethical considerations of interviews in relation to Cardiff University's standards and guidelines, and discussion of the findings forms the basis of Chapter 5. The second sub-RQ was:

> How do news workers in Bristol see their roles and how do these role conceptions depend on professional, cultural and social norms, and the institutional practices and commercial imperatives of the organisations they work for, whether mainstream or nonmainstream?

This was concerned with the structural and ideological differences which enable or constrain news workers on either side of a professional boundary, and explored "the values and meanings in play" (Deacon et al., 2021, pp. 8, 9) in journalists' discourses concerning journalistic authority (Carlson, 2017), and the social value of their work in relation to their audiences (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2024) especially in regard to marginalised communities. As discourse varies between speakers talking about the same subject—it is constructed in different ways according to function—Wetherell and Potter (1988) suggest using the concept of "interpretative repertoires" as an analytic tool, which limits the ways speakers can talk about a subject but allows for variance (p. 172). As an illustration, they identify talk of "community"

as “a set of terms used in explanations which depend crucially on certain metaphors and tropes. The ‘community’ repertoire is a resource which the analyst can identify as a recurring pattern in the content of certain materials” (pp. 172-173) and it is one of the repertoires I found helpful in my analysis.

The gap between role conception (aspirations to be watchdog and community champion) and role enactment (manifest content) (Tandoc et al., 2013) is an important contextualising concept for this thesis, which emphasises structural influence over journalistic aspirations, but, due to the complex nature of the media systems under investigation, my research could not draw an empirical connection between the two. One of the important findings of the CA, which enabled insights to be made about the differences in production, resources and market orientation between mainstream and nonmainstream, was the significant presence of *non-local* and non-original content in the output of the former news organisations. There was therefore a methodological difficulty in empirically connecting role enactment and the role conceptions expressed by the *local* newsworkers, who were not responsible for this networked content, and attention to this disconnection between role conception and role performance was a key element in the interview analysis discussed in Chapter 5.

3.6.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews can bring sociological depth to research, qualitatively complementing the quantitative empiricism of CA (Deacon et al., 2021). Asking news ecosystem actors predefined questions is a tried and tested way of uncovering themes and discourses in their role conceptions; role enactments; occupational motivations; interpretative repertoires; professional boundaries; and organisational practices (Bryman, 2016; Davies & Mosdell, 2006; Edwards & Holland, 2013; Hansen & Machin, 2019). For Lindlof and Taylor (2019) the interview subjects—professional insiders and experts in their field—are suitable “informants” for revealing the “history, customs, and rituals; its issues, problems, and challenges; the identities, backgrounds, and actions of key players; and so forth” of the cultural, social or professional scene (p. 227).

An active, open-ended dialogue with an interviewee allows a flexibility which more structured research methods lack (Bryman, 2016, p. 469). Lindlof (1995, cited in Deacon et al. 2021) described semi-structured interviews as “conversations with a purpose” because of the resemblance to everyday conversation, albeit one where the interviewer controls the discussion by following an interview guide (pp. 80-81). Below I discuss how the guide and interview questions were drawn up, and these can be found in Appendix C. While the respondents were asked many of the same questions about journalism

(managers and reporters were asked different factual and knowledge-related questions specific to their roles) I chose semi-structured interviewing instead of surveys to give the interviewees better opportunity to express their own perspectives, especially on their attitudes, beliefs and adoption of normative standards. I had the flexibility to ask follow-up questions to direct the line of investigation (Bryman, 2016, pp. 250-251, 466; Deacon et al., 2021, pp. 90-93). However, there are limitations to semi-structured interviews. As Deacon et al. (2021) point out, asking and answering questions is rarely a straightforward matter:

> No question is asked in a social vacuum. Sometimes people give answers they think the interrogator would like to hear, that they believe are socially acceptable or that they wish were the case. Other times they tell the truth (or at least their perception of it). For all these reasons, all answers need to be appraised carefully, and occasionally taken with a pinch of salt. (p. 77)

While it was necessary to gather descriptive information about the organisational practices and the thematic differences between mainstream and nonmainstream journalism, I also wanted to examine role conception, which called for a deeper discursive analysis of the language used than just the surface-level responses to my questions. The method design was influenced by the interviews carried out by Howells (2015) and Coleman et al. (2016) in their research into local journalism in Port Talbot and Leeds, respectively. Other useful guides were interviews carried out by Williams et al. (2015; Williams, n.d.-b) of hyperlocal journalists and those conducted by Moore (2020) about poverty coverage by news workers in Wales. Reardon's (2013) discourse analysis on category entitlement among television journalists was also influential.

3.6.3 Sample

Eighteen interviews were conducted between August and November 2023 with editors/managers/proprietors and journalists, including specialist reporters, from the news outlets in Bristol identified in Phase 1 (Table 3.1), as well as freelancers and citizen journalists, some of whom work, or have worked, for the news organisations, and others who write their own blogs. Among the interviewees were journalists who had recently retired or moved on, and who could talk more freely than the others about their former jobs and employers (Usher, 2010). The interviews were carried out and recorded remotely via Zoom with a digital recording device as back up. They lasted between 40 and 75 minutes. The interviewees are listed in Table 3.4 and Appendix J contains notes on the selection process and relevant biographical details. The next section describes how I designed the interview guide.

Table 3.4: Interviewees

Mainstream	
Alex Seabrook	Local Democracy Reporter (contributes to mainstream and nonmainstream organisations). Employed by BBC and Reach
James Garrett	Chair of South West National Union of Journalists; former *HTV West* current affairs television producer; occasional contributor to *Private Eye*
Pete Simson	Senior Broadcast Journalist and political correspondent for BBC; now editor BBC *Politics West*
Assiah Hamed	Former *Bristol Live* Life Writer; *Bristol Voices* newsletter editor; Reach Trends Writer
Nonmainstream	
Alex Turner	Bristol Cable journalist
Ben Wright	*Bristol 24/7* Managing Director
Charlie Watts	*Bristol 24/7* Community Reporter; former volunteer at *The Knowledge;* now at *Bristol World*; occasional contributor to *Bristol Cable*, *Bristol Post/Live* and BBC *Politics West*
James Ward	The Bristol Activist blogger; occasional contributor to *Bristol Cable* and *Bristol 24/7*
Joanna Booth	Freelance and blogger; occasional contributor to *Bristol 24/7* and *Private Eye*
Joe Banks	Freelance; occasional contributor to *Bristol Cable*
Marcus Smith	*BCfm Radio* Development Lead/presenter; occasional contributor to *Bristol Cable* and *Bristol 24/7*
Sue Mackinnon	Former editor *The Knowledge*
"The Bristolian"	Contributor/coordinator *The Bristolian*
Mainstream and nonmainstream (cross-over journalists)	
Christopher Brown	Former senior journalist for *Western Daily Press* (Deputy Chief Sub-editor) and local BBC (Senior Broadcast Journalist); founder *Bristol 24/7*; currently course leader for master's degree in journalism at the University of the West of England, Bristol; on *Bristol Cable*'s board of directors
Martin Booth	*Bristol 24/7* Editor; former reporter for *Bristol Post/Live*
Richard Coulter	Founder of Voice network of publications; former senior local journalist (Chief Sub-editor/Assistant Editor at *Bristol Post*)
Neil Maggs	Freelance; podcaster for *Bristol Cable*; Radio 4 documentary producer; occasional contributor to *Bristol Post/Live* and *Bristol World*

Roger Griffith	Founder, former chair and presenter *Ujima Radio*; and local media race consultant/advisor; occasional contributor to *Bristol Cable*, *Bristol Post/Live* and *Bristol 24/7*

3.6.4 Interview Design

The first set of questions were put to all 18 interviewees and were designed to gather information on their current roles, the organisations they work for, and changing work practices. These covered their main duties; a description of a typical workday; professional backgrounds; personal motivations; and the role of local journalism. The responses were necessary for getting some idea of the routines at work, normative aspirations and the pressures faced in attempting to fulfil these. This follows Davies's (2009) insights into working conditions for journalists about "the assembly line in the news factory" (p. 74). There were specific questions about how the interviewees viewed their audiences and were designed to elicit their opinions about how well the news organisations meet their community (social duty) and public interest news (democratic/public sphere) aspirations. Social media and digital innovations were covered as well as obstacles and challenges faced when dealing with official and elite sources (holding power to account).

Reporters were asked another set of questions about their day-to-day routines; the number of stories they write a day; analytics and page view targets; sources; awards and informal encouragement; as well as the use of non-original content. The final set of questions addressed organisational issues and were asked of managers and editors. Some were appropriate for the commercial mainstream organisations (in relation to advertising) while others were only put to the non-commercial nonmainstream representatives (in relation to grant dependence). Lindlof and Taylor (2019) noted: "we may legitimately vary the questions we ask across different participants" (p. 353) as an overarching interpretivist assumption in qualitative research concerns the existence of "multiple, dynamic, social realities". Information was sought on the number of staff employed; the use of part-time workers, volunteers, freelancers and contributors; and home-based working. Questions on the separation of, and connections between, print and digital departments were posed to interviewees working for *Bristol Post/Live* and the BBC. Questions about diversity of the workforce and audience as well as diversity training were addressed. Interviewees were asked about how organisation performance is measured; business models; advertising; views on paywalls, subscriptions and membership models. Nonmainstream organisations were asked about revenue sources; if other income sources are necessary, such as second jobs; grants and strategies for when grant-funding ceases. Award schemes

and training completed the questions. While leading, and unfocussed, questions relating to changes in working practices were avoided, it became clear in the discourse analysis that then-and-now/"golden age" comparisons formed a theme running through many of the interview responses. The next section looks at the analytical methodology.

3.6.5 Methodological Approaches

As I adopted different theoretical approaches—political economy (PE), cultural studies (CS) and sociology of journalism (SJ), under the umbrella of the media power lens—it was necessary, in the interviews I carried out, to adapt a core set of procedures for analysing qualitative data to explore themes about organisational practices (as related to PE); discourses about role conceptions, interpretative repertoires, values, professional boundaries (as related to SJ); and ethics in relation to audiences and representation of communities (as related to CS). For the purposes of my research what the interviewees said they did (the factual, surface responses) was useful for understanding local journalism through a PE and TA perspective, and what they thought and felt, and the motivations behind their actions (discourses and subtext), was more appropriately explored through SJ, CS and CDA.

TA is a method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning ("themes") within qualitative data. As Clarke and Braun (2017) noted, one of the hallmarks of TA which makes it useful for the analysis of qualitative data is its flexibility: "TA can be used to identify patterns within and *across* data in relation to participants' lived experience, views and perspectives, and behaviour and practices" (p. 297, emphasis in original). They also noted, unlike other qualitative analytic approaches, TA offers a method rather than a theoretically informed methodology (ibid). This is discussed in the next section. CDA is an approach to language which seeks to reveal a fuller picture of the social world the interviewees inhabit (Bryman, 2016, p. 531) and this is discussed in detail below.

For the analysis it was important to combine more than one philosophical approach. A positivist standpoint treats the interviews as a data-gathering exercise and the content as being "deductive, objective and value free" (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 15). My understanding of the business practices of the various organisations was informed through this approach, but I also needed to understand how the news workers situated themselves within a wider social world, their professional boundaries and the structures that govern their actions and beliefs, through a critical realist approach (p. 22). According to Edwards and Holland the critical realist approach "also recognises that researchers' values are inherent in all phases of the research process" (p. 22). This method also contained elements of an interpretive

approach in that semi-structured interviews allow follow-up questions, which can alter the direction of the investigation in a reflexive way, so that the process can be seen as "co-production" between the interviewer and the interviewee (pp. 16, 17). Edwards and Holland noted that qualitative interviewing is occasionally criticised within the social sciences as being subjective but concluded this is "an irrelevant concern when subjectivity is often the focus and the vehicle for research using qualitative interviewing" (p. 92).

3.6.6 Coding for Themes

I used a matrix-based method for ordering data and constructing an index of central themes and subthemes within the interview responses (Bryman, 2016, pp. 585, 587). The interviews were transcribed and proofread, and any identifying or confidential information redacted, if requested by the interviewee. I then transferred the transcripts to NVivo, a commonly used software for qualitative data analysis. It allows the analyst to go through a set of data, marking sequences of text in terms of codes (coding); and, for each code, collect together all sequences of text coded in a particular way (retrieving) (p. 602). The transcripts were read through several times to identify recurring themes which related to the core thesis, my RQ, sub-RQs and literature review. The information which did not relate to my research aims was set aside.

My RQ explicitly referred to public interest news and news about the community as two different aspects of local journalism. Although there is no tried and tested definition of both, I felt it necessary to use these as guides for understanding how local journalists report on the powerful, such as local politicians, and the powerless, such as marginalised communities, because it is my contention that the journalistic role of holding power to account draws on different interpretative repertoires (and different attitudes toward objectivity, impartiality and balance) and understanding of social capital than the other prized role of community representation. Given this, my initial overarching codes were: 1. public interest news (relating to politics and public institutions), and 2. community news (relating to specific geographically located and identity-based communities). There were other aspects I wanted to identify which were not specifically related to these two initial codes, such as organisational issues and resource constraints, but which manifest in ways that took these codes into account—examples being access to local authorities, and having the time to establish and maintain community contacts, which might be constrained by the same root cause, such as under-staffing. There was another set of codes to identify these cross-themes—these were personal motivations for working in journalism; role conceptions; organisational issues; and professional boundaries.

3.6.7 Coding for Discourses

This thesis is concerned with how mainstream journalists position themselves—using discourse—as having more authority (Carlson, 2017) than nonmainstream and citizen journalists by (explicitly and implicitly) expressing ideologies which function to promote and coordinate the interests of a group (Philo, 2007, p. 107). To do this I operationalised, as codes, Örnebring's (2013) three areas where claims to professional legitimacy and distinction from amateurs are identified: expertise (the skills and knowledge necessary for carrying out watchdog roles and holding power to account); duty (social responsibility or public service, especially in relation to marginalised communities); and autonomy (working within organisational constraints) (p. 35).

Wetherell and Potter (1988) pointed out "discourse can be said to 'construct' our lived reality" and that "repertoires can be seen as the building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena" (p. 172). The word "discourse" is used in varying ways and is the subject of many different theoretical approaches. As such, I followed the definition formulated by Fiske, that discourse is "a language or system of representation that has developed socially in order to make and circulate a coherent set of meanings, which serve the interests of a section of society" (cited in Philo, 2007, p. 104). Watt and Jacobs (2000) remind us that Foucault, one of the principal theorists of discourse theory, argued "the significance of discourse is strategic; it is the means by which social groups exercise power; hence his view that the relationship between discourse and power is unidirectional" (pp. 14, 15), and Hall (2013a) connects power to knowledge by asserting that "discourse is about the production of knowledge through language" (as cited in Atkinson and Tallon, 2023, p. 436).

Journalists' discourses about objectivity and impartiality are open to critical questioning when news content shows the reproduction of "assumptions of the powerful about what [is] necessary and possible in our society" (Philo, 2007, p. 105). According to Philo, language and definitions are "at one level the battleground for competing groups" which necessitates an examination of the social relations underpinning the generation of descriptions of the world (op. cit., p. 107). Wetherell and Potter (1988) add to this by warning that the assumption, adopted by many in the social sciences, that "language acts as a neutral, transparent medium between the social actor and the world" is implausible when the "action orientation" of discourse is real and apparent. They note "discourse has become seen as a social practice in itself, as opposed to a neutral transmitter, with its own characteristic features and practical consequences" (p. 168, emphasis in original).

It was important for this research to take a critical stance and acknowledge the consequences of language use in its ideological forms, which for Philo (2007) is "its effect in developing or reproducing social relations of power and exploitation" (p. 132). CDA is an approach to language analysis which shows relationships between language and other elements of social events and practices — it "originates within linguistics but is more socially oriented and interdisciplinary than most linguistics" (Fairclough, 2011). According to van Dijk (1999) discourse is one of the ways in which social inequality is reproduced and, compared to other approaches such as conversation analysis, CDA may be used to discuss "more loosely, but also more freely, the many ways power, dominance and inequality are expressed, enacted and reproduced in discourse, both in its structure and its contents" (p. 460).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Research "carries multiple responsibilities, to those who take part in our studies, to colleagues and professional peers, and to the wider society" (Deacon et al. 2021, p. 15). As such, Cardiff University has a rigorous research ethics procedure and, as my research involved the participation of interview subjects, an application for ethical review to JOMEC Research Ethics Committee was made and approved (Appendices E and I).

On agreeing to be interviewed participants were sent an information sheet about the project (Appendix G) which set out the rights of the interviewees in compliance with data protection laws; requests for anonymity; Cardiff University's ethical policies; and procedures for withdrawing consent and storage and use of information. I followed the university's standard operating procedure for recording interviews which gives guidance notes on dealing with topics of a sensitive or confidential nature. Although participants were not asked questions explicitly about work-related stress and anxiety, or difficulties in their working relationships, these subjects were addressed in the answers given. According to Borchardt (2019) burnout and anxiety in newsrooms are significant, under-researched, issues that come up "when the doors are closed and confidentiality is assured" (p. 63).

Having agreed to take part, interviewees were sent a participant information sheet and asked to sign a consent/anonymity form (Appendix F), with three options: 1 anonymised; 2 named; 3 named but with specific sections anonymised. The "off the record" responses were agreed on during the interview. Those taking part were told they could withdraw consent within 30 days of the interview taking place, and/or decide not to answer any questions asked, without giving a reason.

The two following chapters present the results of the Phase 1 content analysis and the Phase 2 thematic and critical discourse analyses.

Chapter 4: Mainstream and Nonmainstream Journalism in a News Oasis 1: News Content—Public Interest News and Community Representation

4.1 Introduction

This thesis asks: to what extent, and in what ways, does coverage of community and public interest news in the Bristol news ecosystem/news oasis differ between local mainstream and local nonmainstream journalists and news organisations? The first step in answering this question is addressed by the first sub-RQ: what news gets covered in the Bristol local news ecosystem, by whom, and in what ways? This chapter discusses the results of a content analysis (CA) of the news produced by the major news outlets in Bristol over a two-week period (8-21 July, 2022), the academic arguments behind the efficiency of this method and its design is the subject of the methodology chapter, Chapter 3. This chapter gives a quantitative assessment of different kinds of news produced in the city news ecosystem, starting with an overview of the total news output over two weeks, then a closer look at public interest news, sources, critical information needs (CINs), local/non-local focus, non-original content, and representation of disadvantaged communities. In Section 1.2.4 I discussed the construction of categories with the nine media organisations being grouped by *ownership* (nationally owned legacy mainstream; and locally owned, independent, emerging nonmainstream); *format* (print; online; and broadcast); and *frequency* (daily; and monthly or less frequent). Their *geographic focus* was also a factor (city-wide/regional; place-based community/ward-level).

Hess and Waller's (2017) media power lens approach has been followed throughout this thesis as a way of integrating the political economy, cultural studies and sociological aspects of a study of both mainstream and nonmainstream local media during a time of conjunctural crisis (Hall, 2015), with its collapse of sustainable business models, deteriorating relations with audiences, and deepening challenges faced by journalists as professionals (Blumler, 2010; Nielsen, 2016b). A comparison of the news output—the manifest content (Hall, 2021c)—of mainstream and nonmainstream media in the Bristol news ecosystem goes someway to discovering the positions mainstream and nonmainstream media occupy in Bourdieu's (1995) journalistic field—whether at the autonomous pole, with a desire to maintain their cultural position and influence (Deuze, 2005; McAllister, & Proffitt, 2020; Singer, 2007; Sjøvaag, 2013); or at the heteronomous pole, driven by commercial goals (Phillips, 2010). The conclusion of this chapter is a reflective discussion of the findings in relation to debates about the normative role of local journalism in a so-called news oasis regarding its democratic importance towards a public sphere, and its community sustaining aspirations.

4.2 Overview of News Output in the Bristol News Ecosystem

4.2.1 Introduction

Bristol is home to many journalists. The National Union of Journalists has 350 members registered with its Bristol branch—not all of whom work for local media and there are many journalists who are not union members. My research uncovered 355 different bylines, although some were generic, e.g. Staff Reporter, and several were from national press agencies and news hubs. This can only be a rough guide to the number of people working as journalists in the city. The byline figure does not account for those on leave or working in a rota system; neither does it account for all production staff, e.g. television copy writers could not be identified but named television presenters were. The named journalists with the most bylines were the LDRS reporters, whose copy was published in both the mainstream and nonmainstream outlets.

I found a sizable quantity of news over the two weeks (1,649 stories overall from 18 news outlets—broken down into 1,264 mainstream stories, 76.7%, and 385 nonmainstream stories, 23.3%—giving an average of 118 stories a day). This includes shared and duplicated copy. The Voice network reproduces some stories throughout its publications. The same is true of *Bristol Live* and the *Bristol Post* and the copy written by the LDRS reporters is published by most of the local news outlets. How shared and duplicated copy is accounted for in my research is discussed further in this chapter. The number of stories were also broken down into format and frequency—for format there were 720 (43.7%) stories for print; 816 (49.5%) for online; and 113 (6.9%) for television. For frequency the figures were: 1,410 (85.5%) stories for daily; and 239 (14.5%) for monthly plus (there were no weekly outlets).

While CA can give a picture of the overall quantity of content assessing its quality and its effectiveness in meeting the democratic needs of the city proved challenging (Fischer et al., 2021). My findings point to the need to question the recurring assumptions in both policy and academic discourse that the health of a city's news ecosystem can be measured by quantity and variety of news outlets and their output, or shown to be correlated with levels of deprivation—that deprived areas are more likely to be news deserts (Armstrong, 2017; Bisiani & Mitchell, 2024; DCMS, 2019; Mitchell et al., 2023; Ramsay et al., 2017; Ramsay & Moore, 2016). I examine these contentions in depth below, as one of my key findings—when looking at geographical focus and representation—is that, even in a news oasis such as Bristol, (place-based and/or socially, culturally and ethnically aligned) communities in the city are marginalised by the local news organisations, either through lack of coverage/erasure, or stigmatisation

(Jones, 2020; Moore, 2020; Redden, 2011; Robinson, 2018; Wenzel, 2020a). In addition, the increased reliance on non-local and centrally produced news by the mainstream outlets has an alienating effect on strong local identities, which can contribute to reduced trust in the media, diminished social capital and an erosion of democratic participation (Whittington, 2020).

While I found clear differences between the output of mainstream and nonmainstream news organisations in the city, my analysis revealed a more complex picture than the binary assumption underlying my research question and reflected larger trends in the way local journalism is changing. I took business models, management structure, ownership, limits on resources, and ideological orientation to be the defining factors separating the two groups, but I found similarities between, and differences within, both, when considering timeliness, digital strategies, commercial focus, geographic focus, bonding (within) and bridging (between) community strengths, format, frequency of publication/broadcast, and relationship with larger networks (Gant & Dimmick, 2000).

Story topics are looked at in detail below but next I give an indication of the volume of news produced (both public interest news and community-focused) and make comparisons between news outlets.

4.2.2 The Amount of News in Bristol

As well as making an inventory of news produced, the sample was intended to give an indication of the plurality (Barnett, 2009; Barnett & Townend, 2015; Moore, 2014, 2015; Raeijmaekers & Maeseele, 2015) of Bristol's news outlets and the strength of the news ecosystem in supporting the democratic and social needs of communicatively integrated communities (Friedland, 2001; Napoli et al., 2017). The stories were coded as they appeared in each outlet, as I wanted to gauge the volume of news produced by each outlet as well as the cumulative output of the news ecosystem—it is unlikely anyone would read all the print publications, as the smaller ones are not distributed throughout the city. *Bristol Post* and *Bristol Live* duplicate many stories, which are edited, updated and given headlines which fit the distinctive editorial focus of each format. The LDRS reporters also have their copy published by most of the city's print and web publishers, which is often edited by the publications to suit their editorial styles. As the LDRS copy is duplicated, note should be made of its volume and the way this amplifies coverage of politics and representation of (male) authority figures within the sample. Similarly, the Voice network duplicates columns by local politicians. These multi-use stories were coded each time they appeared in

an outlet to give an indication of the extent of the plurality of the city's news ecosystem. I discuss this duplication more fully, below, when it is considered necessary for understanding my statistical analysis.

When looking at the amount of individual news items produced over the two weeks Reach's *Bristol Post* and *Bristol Live* were the most productive, with a combined total of 61.3% of the stories published (see Table 3.2, p. 131). The *Post* is the "Goldilocks" (Usher, 2021, p.132) daily newspaper, which has been a vital and influential part of the city's public sphere for 90 years, and *Live* is its online counterpart, which in its current branding, was established in 2018. These two "legacy news" (Firmstone, 2024, p.13) outlets benefit from being part of the national Reach network of local and regional outlets and major news publishers, such as the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Star* and the *Daily Mirror*, and, along with the BBC, employ the largest number of journalists in the city. Some of the bylines in the *Post*/*Live* output were not from local journalists, which indicated a reliance on Reach's national news network and press agencies. Some of the bylines were generic, in-house ones, which disguised non-local and non-original content.

The next most productive outlet (8.5%) was the relatively new *Bristol World*, a two-person website run by National World (owned by Media Concierge/Iconic Media since May 2025), which also published stories produced from its wider national network. This was followed by BBC *Points West* at 6.9%. This is the daily early evening regional news television programme, which is also an agenda setter, and has been broadcast for more than 50 years. Its staff numbers are comparable to the *Post/Live* operation. These three organisations represent the mainstream media in the city, and they dominate local news production, with 76.7% of stories.

While the productivity of the nonmainstream outlets was statistically small, the focus and subjects covered, looked at in the following sections, revealed valuable points of comparison. Of the nonmainstream media, *Bristol 24/7* was the most productive at 6.3%. The website has a staff of three plus freelancers and LDRS contributions, and works a rota system to cover weekends, which limits productivity.

The other nonmainstream media publish monthly/quarterly and update their websites infrequently. All, bar the *Bristol Cable*, are one man/woman operations, with occasional contributions from local politicians, members of the public, and local businesses. The *Cable* has a full-time staff of four, frequently employs freelancers and has contributions from the LDRS reporters. It concentrates on

long-form journalism, rather than volume, which accounts for its relatively small output (1.3% of the sample in print; 0.6% online).

4.2.3 Story Topics

Harte et al. (2019) contend that "we might see the role of hyperlocal news operations as a set of practices that extend beyond 'news'" (p. 15) and, with this in mind, it was necessary for my research to measure and compare the topics covered by the different media (mainstream and nonmainstream) in the Bristol news ecosystem, to give a fuller picture of the balance between democratically important public interest news (about politics and public institutions) *and* news more focused on the bonding and bridging aspects of community life (Friedland, 2001). There were 39 item subject categories which were grouped into broad topics for an initial comparative analysis. These followed the familiar categories employed by news organisations—news; features; sport; letters to the editor; opinion; and advertorial.

While there were differences between the percentage of news and features published in mainstream and nonmainstream the contrast was not as striking as in other categories—news accounted for 60.4% of mainstream output compared to 65.7% for nonmainstream; and features accounted for 16.1% for mainstream and 18.7% for nonmainstream. This latter was due to *Bristol 24/7*'s focus on reviews and what's on content. My analysis showed sports was covered by 15.3% of the sample. Breaking the figure down further shows a stark contrast between the traditional and newer media in Bristol, with mainstream output for sport at 19.4% of its total coverage; and 2.1% for nonmainstream. This is not surprising given the role, built up over decades, of the *Bristol Post* and, more recently, *Bristol Live*, in reporting on the national league football teams, Bristol Rovers and Bristol City, and the well-established resources these outlets have, which enable them to act as a near monopoly for this subject in the city. There were 12 different sport bylines for *Post*/*Live*, plus 24 PA-authored (i.e. non-local and non-original) sport stories on Wimbledon, international golf, rugby and cricket in my sample. This byline figure does not include sport-related stories in the news pages. The comparison of sports coverage between the different outlets illustrates Gant and Dimmick's (2000) observation about resource constraints affecting news selection (p. 630). *Bristol World*, *Points West* and *Bristol 24/7* cover sport but do not have the number of dedicated journalists the Reach organisation employs. The monthly news outlets do not cover sport in the same way due to timeliness, although sporting personalities are occasionally featured, especially as an illustration of minority or diversity issues—the *Bristol Cable* hosted a podcast interview with the captain of Bristol City Women's Team, for example.

The *Bristol Post* was the only outlet to feature letters to the editor—this is a time-honoured forum for public debate and a key element in demonstrating the strength of the public sphere (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2001). This feature did not appear in the other print publications, the Voice network, *The Knowledge* and the *Bristol Cable*. Mainstream had a significantly lower amount of opinion (1.1%) than nonmainstream (8.6%). The higher figure for the latter is mainly due to the Voice network featuring regular columns by local councillors, MPs and the city and metro mayors, which are duplicated throughout its publications. Columns by local politicians, such as these, were once a feature of local newspapers but the city's mainstream media no longer publish them.

There was a higher incidence of advertorials in nonmainstream (4.9%) than mainstream (2.3%)—only those articles which were clearly labelled as advertorial were included in this category. This indicates that advertorials are a valuable revenue source for the former news operations and confirms observations made by hyperlocal scholars (Harte et al., 2019). The Voice network and *The Knowledge* featured several columns, sponsored by local private health care providers and a firm of solicitors, with accompanying adverts, the target audience being people with specific health and/or financial needs (Costera Meijer, 2019, 2020). Other local private enterprises, and organisations such as schools, the local authority, the fire service, a business support service, and local minibus service were also featured—an enticement being lower advertising rates for local businesses.

Looking more closely at the subjects which made up the news over the two-week period Table 4.1 shows the composition of the total output of the Bristol news ecosystem including a breakdown of mainstream and nonmainstream coverage to allow comparisons to be made—item subjects, and the criteria for categorising them, are listed in the coding manual in Appendix A.

Table 4.1: Item Subject by Mainstream/Nonmainstream: Ranked Highest to Lowest

	Item Subject	M	NM	Total
1	Sport	250 (19.8%)	9 (2.3%)	259 (15.7%)
2	Entertainment/leisure/food	179 (14.2%)	51 (13.2%)	230 (13.9%)
3	Disasters/accidents	98 (7.8%)	5 (1.3%)	103 (6.2%)
4	Health/NHS	56 (4.4%)	24 (6.2%)	80 (4.9%)
5	Transport/travel	65 (5.1%)	9 (2.3%)	74 (4.5%)
6	Community/charity	20 (1.6%)	49 (12.7%)	69 (4.2%)
7	Police incidents	59 (4.7%)	8 (2.1%)	67 (4.1%)
8	Weather	58 (4.6%)	4 (1%)	62 (3.8%)
9	Planning	33 (2.6%)	28 (7.3%)	61 (3.7%)

10	Education	29 (2.3%)	28 (7.3%)	57 (3.5%)
11	Consumer	50 (4%)	2 (0.5%)	52 (3.2%)
=12	Environment/energy/nature	25 (2%)	22 (5.7%)	47 (2.9%)
=12	Cost of living/welfare/benefits/poverty	31 (2.5%)	16 (4.2%)	47 (2.9%)
14	Legal/judiciary	41 (3.2%)	2 (0.5%)	43 (2.6%)
15	Culture/arts	15 (1.2%)	26 (6.8%)	41 (2.5%)
16	Politics (professional)	31 (2.5%)	9 (2.3%)	40 (2.4%)
17	Business/industry	24 (1.9%)	10 (2.6%)	34 (2.1%)
18	Animals	25 (2%)	3 (0.8%)	28 (1.7%)
19	Media/social media	11 (0.9%)	15 (3.9%)	26 (1.6%)
=20	History/nostalgia	17 (1.3%)	7 (1.8%)	24 (1.5%)
=20	Politics (voluntary)/third sector	20 (1.6%)	4 (1%)	24 (1.5%)
22	Politics (institutional)	7 (0.6%)	15 (3.9%)	22 (1.3%)
=23	Housing	14 (1.1%)	5 (1.3%)	19 (1.2%)
=23	Youth/young people	12 (0.9%)	7 (1.8%)	19 (1.2%)
25	Crime (general)	10 (0.8%)	8 (2.1%)	18 (1.1%)
=26	Immigration/diversity	11 (0.9%)	4 (1%)	15 (0.9%)
=26	Property	12 (0.9%)	3 (0.8%)	15 (0.9%)
=26	Royalty	14 (1.1%)	1 (0.3%)	15 (0.9%)
=29	Employment/jobs/industrial relations	11 (0.9%)	3 (0.8%)	14 (0.8%)
=29	Multiple	10 (0.8%)	3 (0.8%)	13 (0.8%)
=29	Celebrity	10 (0.8%)	3 (0.8%)	13 (0.8%)
=32	Other	7 (0.6%)	-	7 (0.4%)
=32	Science/technology	7 (0.6%)	-	7 (0.4%)
=34	Religion	-	2 (0.5%)	2 (0.1%)
=34	Economy	1 (0.1%)	-	1 (0.1%)
=34	Emergency services (other)	1 (0.1%)	-	1 (0.1%)
	Total	1264 (100%)	385 (100%)	1649 (100%)

The biggest category after sport was entertainment/leisure/food covering restaurant and gig reviews, recipes, travel articles (including “best places to live in/visit”), fashion and lifestyle (13.9% overall; 14.2% mainstream; 13.2% nonmainstream). The closeness of the mainstream and nonmainstream percentage can be accounted for by *Bristol 24/7*’s editorial policy, USP and advertising strategy of focusing on restaurants, pubs and entertainment venues, bringing it into direct competition with Reach (Sharman, 2023o). Linked to this category was culture/arts—in this case nonmainstream showed the higher percentage: 2.5% overall; 1.2% mainstream; 6.8% nonmainstream, due to *Bristol 24/7* coverage and shared stories by the Voice network. I combined these categories with property; consumer; history/nostalgia; royalty; and celebrity which gave a total of 390 stories (23.7%), giving an

indication that audiences with money to spend on going out and consumer lifestyles are highly sought after and well served. This fits with Bristol's demographics—a sizable proportion of the city's population are affluent—and the image of the city as having a vibrant cultural life. This is also an indication of the Reach and National World digital strategies (see Section 1.2.5) to increase (non-geographically specific) audiences through featuring non-local and non-original consumer-orientated content. Howells (2015), whose focus was on a poorer area, found 7.5% for entertainment and celebrity, and Williams et al. found 5% for entertainment/leisure; 4% for arts(high); 3% monarchy: 2% history/nostalgia; and 1% for consumer, among hyperlocals throughout the UK, so Bristol seems to be more arts and entertainment focused, with less interest in royalty.

Lifestyle journalism was followed by the combined crime coverage (7.8% overall; 8.7% mainstream; 4.7% nonmainstream). There was the risk of overlap with this category and the next most reported story topic, disasters/accidents (6.2% overall; 7.8% mainstream; 1.3% nonmainstream) where the source was likely to be the local police press office. With both of these topics, especially the latter, mainstream coverage dominated due to the sudden appearance and short-lived nature of many of these incidents; and are therefore unlikely to be covered by the monthly publications—Gant and Dimmick (2000) point to the importance of timeliness as a news selection criteria (p. 630). The separate crime categories showed that mainstream was more likely to cover breaking incidents and court cases, often framed in a sensationalist way. Nonmainstream relies more on covering long-running campaigns, such as initiatives to tackle anti-social behaviour, often with more in-depth coverage on structural problems and solutions. The few police incidents covered by hyperlocals were appeals to the public, one headlined "Man Sought by Police" (*Fishponds Voice*, July 2022) and another "Appeal for Dashcam Footage after Off-road Motorcycles Ridden Dangerously" (*Bradley Stoke Journal*, 13 July 2022). When I interviewed reporters from the *Bristol Cable,* they emphasised their editorial policy of running stories on long-running issues, one example being "'Drill Music Can be Used for Positive Change'" (*Bristol Cable*, Summer 2022) about a charity working with current and former prisoners to launch careers in music. In-depth stories were also part of *Bristol 24/7*'s coverage, such as "The Pioneering Bristol Initiative Tackling Modern Slavery" (19 July 2022) and "Red Tangent Records: The Record Label putting Former Prisoners at the Forefront of their Work" (12 July 2022). This type of story highlights positive ways of tackling society's problems and is an example of solutions journalism, which has already been discussed. The prominence of crime and disasters/accidents corresponds with the findings of Howells (2015), Coleman et al. (2016) in their study of news in Leeds, and O'Neill and O'Connor (2008) when researching local

newspapers in the north of England. My data point to a lower amount of coverage though, with Howells citing 11.6% for crime (her study included court reports) and Coleman et al. citing 9.9% for the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, while I observed 7.8% in Bristol. One potential cause is cutbacks in specialist court reporters (Aldridge, 2003; Chamberlain et al. 2021; Davies, 1999; Glover, 1998; O'Neill and O'Connor, 2008; Pilling, 1998; Smith, 2018). In my sample there was one journalist who could be identified as a court reporter—Geoffrey Bennett, with 20 bylines on *Bristol Live* and in the *Bristol Post*, and probably responsible for more, non-bylined stories in the print publication. Seventeen of the bylines were for Crown Court Reporter on the *Bristol Live* website (the other three were just Court Reporter in the *Bristol Post*) and this shows magistrates' courts in Bristol are barely being covered. *Bristol Live* does publish a round-up of verdicts supplied by the magistrates' court service, but only infrequently and the source is typically a press release, which gives only minimal details. There were only two stories about magistrates' courts proceedings—both on *Bristol Live*—one about a landlord pleading guilty to unlawful eviction ("Rogue Landlord Fined After Nailing Tenant's Door Shut in Unlawful Eviction", 9 July 2022), the other about fly-tippers being fined ("Men Fined Over £1,500 for Waste-Related Offences", 20 July 2022), with the likely sources being press releases from Bristol City Council for the first one and South Gloucestershire Council for the second, as both these local authorities were mentioned as sources. The sentencing of the Kill the Bill protestors was covered in four court reports on *Bristol Live* and in the *Bristol Post*, an opinion piece on *Bristol 24/7*, and one other outlet, *Bristol World*. At the time this story received extensive national attention for the length of jail terms handed down (Ball, 2024; Booth, 2022a; Colwill, 2021; Deeney, 2024a; Wall, 2022, 2024).

4.2.4 Critical Information Needs

For Napoli et al. (2015, 2017, 2018) the ability of local journalism to meet Critical Information Needs (CINs) determines the information health of communities, both socially and politically. These indicators are defined as:

> Those forms of information that are *necessary* for citizens and community members to live safe and healthy lives; have full access to educational, employment, and business opportunities; and to fully participate in the civic and democratic lives of their communities should they choose. (Friedland et al., 2012, p. v, emphasis in original)

Napoli et al. (2018) compared the robustness of journalism in different communities in the US, arguing that "while we know that local journalism is suffering, we know relatively little about whether all

communities are being affected in the same way" (p. 3). As mentioned in Chapter 1 socio-political knowledge is "unequally distributed in the population mainly along socioeconomic lines" (Örnebring, 2019) and there are concerns that the knowledge gap between journalism-haves—mostly residents in affluent areas—and journalism-have-nots—those living in economically struggling communities—is growing (Abernathy, 2023). This concern is addressed throughout this thesis, that even in a news oasis, such as Bristol, there are place- and identity-based communities within the city which are underserved or marginalised by the local news outlets. The indicators used in the Napoli study were Emergencies and Public Safety; Health; Education; Transportation Systems; Environment and Planning; Economic Development; Civic Information; and Political Life (adopted from Friedland et al. 2012) and only locally relevant information and original content (i.e. produced by the local media being researched) was considered. For Napoli et al. (2017) these criteria are:

> Clearly rough and superficial indicators of the complex notion of the 'quality' of the journalism being produced within communities ... however these criteria provide a relatively simple, economical, straightforward, and replicable set of indicators of journalistic performance ... which accommodate a range of normative perspectives and priorities in relation to the important characteristics of local journalism. (p. 382)

For Napoli et al. CINs are concerned with democratically important public interest news, and, as my research question also looked at journalism which works to strengthen community bonds, this had to be addressed. For Napoli et al. public interest news was hard news, and they relegated sports reports etc to a soft news category, which was not investigated further. I included sport and community activities, such as entertainment, in an additional category as civic information because of their importance to communities, so the following analysis gauges both hard and soft news topics. Instead of analysing the data for *each CIN* I looked at those stories where *any CIN* was present, as *presence* of this type of information is fundamental to this measure rather than variety, type or quality, which are addressed by other variables. This follows Napoli et al. who collapsed the categories to create a dichotomous variable to ascertain if a story did or did not address a critical information need.

Table 4.2 shows two thirds (66.3%) of the stories in the sample had CINs present. It is difficult to gauge how healthy this is without comparative research into similar news ecosystems in the UK, which, to my knowledge, is yet to be carried out. I made comparisons of the CINs present in coverage of wards to give an indication of those parts of the city where information needs are being met, and those areas

which are underserved, and this is looked at below in the discussion on geographical relevance (Section 4.5).

Table 4.2: CINs present in stories by outlet; M/NM; format; frequency

	CINs present	No CINs	Total
Outlet			
Bristol Post	257 (53.4%)	224 (46.6%)	481 (100%)
Bristol Live	340 (64.2%)	190 (35.8%)	530 (100%)
Bishopston Voice print	33 (82.5%)	7 (17.5%)	40 (100%)
Fishponds Voice web	7 (77.8%)	2 (22.2%)	9 (100%)
Fishponds Voice print	32 (82.1%)	7 (17.9%)	39 (100%)
Henleaze and Westbury Voice print	36 (90%)	4 (10%)	40 (100%)
South Bristol Voice print	35 (77.8%)	10 (22.2%)	45 (100%)
Bristol Cable web	10 (100%)	-	10 (100%)
Bristol Cable print	20 (90.9%)	2 (9.1%)	22 (100%)
Points West	93 (82.3%)	20 (17.7%)	113 (100%)
The Bristolian web	5 (100%)	-	5 (100%)
The Bristolian print	9 (100%)	-	9 (100%)
Bristol 24/7	61 (58.7%)	43 (41.3%)	104 (100%)
Bristol World	97 (69.3%)	43 (30.7%)	140 (100%)
Bradley Stoke Journal	4 (100%)	-	4 (100%)
Stoke Gifford Journal	2 (66.7%)	1 (33.3%)	3 (100%)
The Knowledge web	9 (81.8%)	2 (18.2)	11 (100%)
The Knowledge print	44 (100%)	-	44 (100%)
Mainstream/Nonmainstream			
Mainstream	787 (62.3%)	477 (37.7%)	1264 (100%)
Nonmainstream	307 (79.7%)	78 (20.3%)	385 (100%)
Format			
Print	466 (64.7%)	254 (35.3%)	720 (100%)
Online	535 (65.6%)	281 (34.4%)	816 (100%)
Television	93 (82.3%)	20 (17.7%)	113 (100%)
Frequency			
Daily	885 (62.8%)	525 (37.2%)	1410 (100%)
Monthly plus	209 (87.4%)	30 (12.6%)	239 (100%)

Total	1094 (66.3%)	555 (33.7%)	1649 (100%)

Table 4.2 shows there are fewer stories with CINs in the mainstream media (62.3%) than nonmainstream (79.7%). This is broken down by looking closely at the formats and the local focus of the outlets. Television, which in the sample was represented by the BBC's regional *Points West*, showed a higher percentage of stories, with CINs at 82.3%, than print and online, which were closely aligned at 64.7% and 65.6% respectively. *Points West* is a locally produced programme and does not broadcast the kind of networked, non-local stories which appear in print and online in the other daily, mainstream outlets. While Reach's print publication, *Bristol Post*, and its sister website, *Bristol Live*, share some editorial content, the former recorded fewer stories with CINs (at 53.4% compared to 64.2% for the latter) due to print-only, non-local and non-original (CIN-free) lifestyle features such as fashion spreads and games reviews. Among the nonmainstream outlets, *Bristol 24/7* had the fewest stories with CINs (58.7%) due to its lifestyle focus. All the stories published by *The Knowledge*, based in Knowle West, contained CINs, which indicates small-scale, ward-level publications and websites such as this, and the Voice series, perform best for indicators showing how well an area's critical information needs are met.

4.3 Sources in the Bristol News Ecosystem

4.3.1 Introduction

Sources in news articles are key indicators of civic and political value (Williams et al., 2015, p. 689), and the choices journalists and editors make in choosing who will be invited to speak and who will be left out are "driven by *ideology*, shaped by preconceptions and limited by structural factors both economic and political" (Douglas & Phillips, 2023, p. 119, emphasis in original). A comparison of the status of sources present, the reliance on single or multiple sources, and their contextualising relevance in mainstream and nonmainstream output can help the investigation of the ideological and structural factors behind the dichotomous, or more complex, nature of the local journalism being researched. As O'Neill and O'Connor (2008) noted:

> Research into sources can shed light on the quality of information, the diversity of perspectives and the interpretative frameworks on offer to the news consumer. Which sources are favoured and how they are used goes to the heart of the debate about power relationships in society, since sources given news access have an opportunity to set the news agenda, define the parameters of debate, and shape ideology. (p. 488)

Despite a media boycott of the mayor's press conferences, limited resources for coverage of public interest news, and the sample period taking place during the traditional summer "silly season", political sources were heavily represented (see Section 4.3.3 Source Status below). The replication of LDRS copy and contributed columns in the Voice network was a significant factor in inflating or amplifying the presence of politics as a subject, and political representatives as sources, in the news ecosystem overall. In my sample, this duplication resulted in a higher statistical presence for (male) authority figures and stories with multiple sources—as council meetings, by their very nature, are multi-voiced fora. The LDRS reporters also have a ready-made pool of status-driven and highly quotable contacts to draw from—as Firmstone (2024) noted: "most journalists favour sources who offer reliable, regular information that makes for a good news story" (p. 189), and they "index" their choice of sources within prevailing elite discourse, as "journalists turn to government and industry leaders because they have the most influence over possible outcomes" (Watts & Maddison, 2014, p. 108). Reporters who do not cover politics often have to work harder in finding people to interview (Phillips, 2015a, p. 52). The figure for experts and emergency services was probably also inflated because of the persistent heatwave and the Reach outlet's reuse of topical stories based on this event in print and online (Jenkins, 2001; Robinson, 2011; Singer, 2004).

4.3.2 Single Source vs. Multiple Sources

Almost three quarters of the *articles* (1,649 stories) in my sample had (directly and indirectly) quoted sources present—1,193 (72.4%); and 456 (27.6%) had no sources—see Table 4.3. Breaking this down, just over a third of the stories had a single source: 577 (35% of 1,649); and 616 (37.4%) had more than one source, a slightly higher figure. The number of *sources* was 2,457 in 1,193 stories. This broke down to 1,193 primary sources, i.e. every story coded as having a source had one primary source; and 1,264 secondary sources (in 616 stories).

Table 4.3: Stories with single/multiple/no sources—mainstream/nonmainstream; format; and frequency; plus source numbers

	Single source	Multiple sources	(Sources present)	No sources	Total
M/NM					
Mainstream	457 (36.2%)	501 (39.6%)	[958 (75.8%)]	306 (24.2%)	1264 (100%)
Nonmainstream	120 (31.2%)	115 (29.9%)	[235 (61.1%)]	150 (38.9%)	385 (100%)

Format					
Print	248 (34.4%)	200 (27.8%)	[448 (62.2%)]	272 (37.8%)	720 (100%)
Online	295 (36.2%)	357 (43.8%)	[652 (80%)]	164 (20.1%)	816 (100%)
Television	34 (30.1%)	59 (52.2%)	[93 (82.3%)]	20 (17.7%)	113 (100%)
Frequency					
Daily	505 (35.8%)	556 (39.4%)	[1061 (75.2%)]	349 (24.8%)	1410 (100%)
Monthly plus	72 (30.1%)	60 (25.1%)	[132 (55.2%)]	107 (44.8%)	239 (100%)
Story total	577 (35%)	616 (37.4%)	[1193 (72.4%)]	456 (27.6%)	1649 (100%)
Source total	Primary sources: 1193		2457	-	2457
		Secondary sources: 1264			

My figure for sources present—72.4%—is higher than Howells (2015) found, and this can be broken down to reveal differences in format: print, 62.2%; online, 80%; television, 82.3%, with the latter relying heavily on vox pops as a low-cost way of filling airtime. The mainstream news organisations in my sample had more stories with sources present (75.8%)—with 39.6% quoting multiple sources—compared to nonmainstream (61.1%)—with 29.9% quoting multiple sources. These figures point to a correlation with observations by Williams et al. (2015) of news sources cited in hyperlocal stories (56.3%)—with 21.7% quoting more than one source (p. 691). Williams et al. found a variety of different views among hyperlocal news workers regarding journalistic balance. They argued:

> Not all local news *demands* the use of multiple, or even single, sources. A key role that many (perhaps even most) hyperlocal sites play is the provision of often quite uncontroversial information about everyday life and activity in their communities ... where a post was not contentious the use of multiple sources, whether to introduce corroboration, contextualisation or opposition, is unlikely to be needed ... this seeming "under-sourcing" of individual posts represents a (sometimes unconscious) rejection, or a critique in praxis, of some elements of mainstream journalistic sourcing strategies. (pp. 691, 692, emphasis in original)

O'Neill and O'Connor (2008) found 76% of articles cited only a single source so my lower figure of 35% points to the rise and ease of online sourcing since their study (see also, Davies, 2009; Harrison, 2006). They were concerned about the "passive journalist", over-reliant on "single sources, excluding certain views and issues relevant to the readership, and allowing routine sources to dominate the news agenda and frame subsequent stories" (2006, p. 498) as mentioned in Chapter 2. Journalists working

online, or relying on news agency copy, may be more active at copying and pasting rather than sourcing original quotes, which accounts for the higher figure for multiple sources present in my sample. The *Bristol Post* story in Figure 4.4, about ambulance services on heatwave alert, is an illustration of this. The two local sources—with information relevant to Bristol—were the South Western Ambulance Service and the Met Office. The other sources were non-local and non-original, and could easily have been cut—or condensed and summarised—as they were repetitive and not locally relevant, giving the impression they were only used to fill space, despite this being the lead story on page three, the second most important newspaper news page after the front splash. The quotes were from the *Sunday Times* health editor writing on Twitter; a health executive in the Midlands quoted by the *Health Service Journal*; and similar general quotes about emergency preparedness from the West Midlands, South Central and North West Ambulance Services; the shadow health secretary; and the Managing Director of the Association of Ambulance Chief Executives, these last were credited to the PA news agency. This story was about official response in an emergency, so non-elite sources were absent.

In my sample local journalists favoured directly quoting sources—I found 83.7% of 2,457 sources were directly quoted. Williams et al. (2015) observed 93.8% of citations by hyperlocals employed direct quotation, and, when breaking down my figures, I found 87.9% for nonmainstream and 82.7% for mainstream (p. 690). One of the reasons for the number of direct quotes in my sample was a 'bulking out' through indiscriminate copying and pasting of Twitter storms and quotes from other online media which can be accessed in "less time than it takes to walk to the lift" (Phillips, 2010, p. 98)—this is a time-saving strategy in under-resourced news operations (Davies, 2009; Jackson & Moloney, 2016; Johnston & Forde, 2017; Ponsford & Davis, 2022). Firmstone (2024) has pointed out: "research suggests that simply integrating Twitter into news gathering as an additional source has not overcome the issue of the dominance of elite sources and the limited ways in which the voices of 'ordinary people' feature in news" (p. 204), while, according to Wallsten (2015) non-elite Twitter sources are rarely cited in coverage. Hyperlinked and SEO-friendly sources are also likely to result in more clicks and higher search engine rankings (Ball, 2022; Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2012; Carnegie UK Trust, 2015; Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015; Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2018; Lee et al. 2014; Schaudt & Carpenter, 2009; Tandoc, 2015). Spilsbury (2018) found a 90% increase in the use of social media for developing content over the five years prior to 2018 (p. 35) which gives some indication of how entrenched this has become in modern newsroom practices, although there is some indication that the role of Twitter is declining (Majid, 2023e).

4.3.3 Source Status

I followed Howells (2015) again in consolidating source categories into groupings according to status (pp. 213-215). These were categorised as; low status—sources with no influence and no authority; medium status—sources with influence but no authority; high status—sources with influence and authority (Table 3 in the coding manual, Appendix A). In line with Howells's findings, authority figures dominated the source rankings for the sample period (see also Berry, 2016; Harrison, 2006; Sigal, 1986; Soloski, 1989b; Wahl-Jorgensen, et al., 2013; among others). Despite the media boycott of Mayor Rees's press conferences after he refused to talk to the LDRS reporters, he still had a high profile in the news—commenting on the city's Eurovision bid; funding risks for a mass transit plan; a council tax reduction scheme; the launching of a clean air zone; and explaining (to the media) why he was not talking to the media, among other subjects. This lends credence to the claim by Firmstone and Coleman (2014) that "local news organisations still have a quality of relationship with citizens that local authorities hope to exploit" (p. 597). Other represented politicians were regional and national Tory MPs commenting on the fallout from Boris Johnson's resignation as Prime Minister and subsequent party leadership race. Experts and national civil servants (the Met Office) were also heavily quoted due to the heatwave. Authority figures showed a bigger presence in nonmainstream (48.3%) than mainstream (42.7%), and in print (45.6%) than online (43%) and television (41.8%). BBC *Points West* did not use LDRS copy, but the Voice network of print publications did, along with contributed (and duplicated) columns from local politicians, which goes some way in accounting for this difference and why it does not agree with Watts and Maddison's (2014) finding that print news uses more source diversity than broadcast. The category for "other—celebrity, arts, sports figures" showed 20.5% for mainstream and 15.2% for nonmainstream, which was down to the large amount of sport coverage, and networked lifestyle news quotes from celebrities in mainstream media. The figure for member of the public showed mainstream and nonmainstream were closely aligned, with 19.4% and 20.1% respectively, but there was significant variation in format, with 15.7% for print; 21% online; and 23.8% for television, this was because of the increased influence of social media for online journalism, and vox pops for broadcasting. In all cases members of the public featured more as secondary sources than primary.

4.3.4 Secondary Sources

The BBC has impartiality rules governing coverage of politics which mean that secondary sources are used for balancing pieces as a matter of course (Harcup, 2015, pp. 78, 79; Harte, 2021; Mills, 2020).

While this balancing is carried out as a strategic ritual of objectivity (Tuchman, 1972, 1978a), the television broadcasts I sampled tended to fill their airtime with vox pops—short comments from members of the public. Cross (2010) found in her study of Canadian television news during a provincial election, that the public acted as 'fillers' in an already constructed news story. She said: "we can safely presume that unaffiliated individuals are used by the news media as signifiers of the voting public—mere story fillers—rather than as active agents in the political process" (p. 427). According to Coleman et al. (2016): "an essential requirement of a city's media on the part of its audiences is that they represent them as they are". They found, when talking to the mainstream providers of local news in Leeds, a strong desire to favour the man, or woman, in the street over 'men in suits', and contended: "they suggest the preferred voice is that of the 'real' or 'normal' or 'ordinary' person and that officialdom is less welcome" (pp. 122-124). The Leeds study found broadcast media appeared to challenge the traditional notion that the voices of 'unknowns' are generally absent from news coverage, in line with my observations of BBC *Points West*. They argue "the ease of access and low cost for reporters are certainly credible factors in explaining their attraction to such sources", concluding this may indicate a 'demotic turn' giving "increased visibility for 'ordinary people', signalling a wider shift in mediated discourse" (p. 50). While, on the one hand, vox pops are cheap and easy-to-make television segments, putting the focus on people not normally seen in the media (regional accents were a common feature of the vox pops, although identified minority groups were rare unless they were the story subject, a story about Ukrainian refugees was one example—see the section on representation of marginalised communities below), on the other hand, the comments tended to be shallow opinions rather than challenging counterviews (Firmstone, 2024, p. 204). As Lewis et al. (2004) found:

> The *image of citizens substantively engaged in politics is notable by its absence on TV news*. While public opinion is present on a variety of issues, it is rarely the focus of a news story. The form it takes favours vague, second-hand accounts rather than more explicit expressions (like opinion polls or demonstrations) and it is routinely apolitical. (p. 162, emphasis in original)

A closer look at the sources represented in my sample shows Lewis et al.'s observation remains substantially true—that the public which appear in television news are passive. During the sample period local politics in Bristol was Labour-dominated—but is now under Green Party control—both in the local council and its members of parliament, but its hinterland, which the BBC and the Reach outlet also report on, is a Tory stronghold, so there were a variety of political hues to choose from as sources. BBC *Points West* featured the Tory Party leadership campaign five nights running but always

acknowledged that only party members and MPs were eligible to vote. This story was covered because it was a significant national event, but it did not generate a great deal of locally-focused news angles—vox pops in Conservative clubs across the region featured strongly but none rose above the level of judging the candidates' personalities. This was backed up by a study of coverage by national BBC outlets of the previous Conservative leadership election which, compared to other news channels "did not always uncover the claims and counter-claims of the candidates' competing policy positions" (Cushion, 2019, pp. 11, 12). The passive image of the public on television news contrasts with Williams et al.'s (2015) research which found high status sources are important for both mainstream and nonmainstream news but "a key difference is the expanded role afforded to members of the general public and to representatives of local civil society groups in [the] emergent sector" (p. 690).

Table 4.4: Functions of secondary source intervention—mainstream/nonmainstream; format; and frequency

	Corroboration	Contextualisation	Oppositional	Unrelated	Total
M/NM					
Mainstream	397 (41%)	449 (46.4%)	112 (11.6%)	10 (1%)	968 (100%)
Nonmainstream	85 (41.1%)	99 (47.8%)	20 (9.7%)	3 (1.4%)	207 (100%)
Format					
Print	153 (40.3%)	187 (49.2%)	36 (9.5%)	4 (1.1%)	380 (100%)
Online	274 (40.5%)	305 (45.1%)	88 (13%)	9 (1.3%)	676 (100%)
Television	55 (46.2%)	56 (47.1%)	8 (6.7%)	-	119 (100%)
Frequency					
Daily	433 (40.8%)	494 (46.6%)	123 (11.6%)	11 (1%)	1061 (100%)
Monthly plus	49 (43%)	54 (47.4%)	9 (7.9%)	2 (1.8%)	114 (100%)
Total	482 (41%)	548 (46.6%)	132 (11.2%)	13 (1.1%)	1175 (100%)

(Note: Where multiple sources were quoted for the same intervention, I coded first instance only; and some sources were coded for more than one intervention)

I coded the different functions of secondary source intervention in line with Williams et al's. (2015) research. Table 4.4 shows broad agreement with their findings in that quoted sources demonstrate a high level of consensus in the Bristol news ecosystem. The higher figure for television for corroboration (46.2%) is likely to be down to the use of vox pops and the lower figure, again for

television, for oppositional is probably due to LDRS copy (with its reliance on contesting opinions) being only used in print and online. As addressed above, the generally uncritical nature of nonmainstream news is due to the apparent uncontroversial focus on community activities.

4.3.5 Gender of Sources

Gender of sources helped give an insight into the relations between local journalists and power structures in the city, as women are (still) significantly underrepresented among elite sources (Table 4.5). In the Bristol news ecosystem women quoted by the local media were outnumbered by men two to one—21.8% of sources quoted were women, compared to 43.7% for men. This is a similar finding to research by the University of London, which found the number of male experts being quoted by the UK's major broadcast news programmes is almost double that of women (Tobitt, 2024o). Allan (1998) noted that for some feminist researchers, a "principal point of contention concerns the gendering of the dominant discourses of truth being mobilised by journalists, that is, the extent to which a 'gender bias' is discernible in the ritualised practices of 'objective' news reporting" (p.114).Tuchman (1979, 1981) warned that both the television industry and newspapers "engage in the symbolic annihilation of women by ignoring women at work and trivialising women through banishment to hearth and home" (1979, p. 183). The low number of women as sources in my sample shows, worryingly, that Tuchman's concerns are still valid. As well as revealing a gender-biased conception of society this low visibility of women in the news can directly affect news consumption, at a time when (mainstream and nonmainstream) news organisations are under pressure to expand their audiences. According to Toff and Palmer (2019) women are significantly more likely than men to say they avoid news (p. 1563) and this lack of representation may be a factor.

Table 4.5: Gender of source—mainstream/nonmainstream; format; and frequency

	Male	Female	Corporate*	Not Known**	Mixed (couple or group)	Total
M/NM						
Mainstream	860 (42.9%)	415 (20.7%)	477 (23.8%)	240 (12%)	12 (0.6%)	2004 (100%)
Nonmainstream	213 (47%)	121 (26.7%)	57 (12.6%)	61 (13.5%)	1 (0.2%)	453 (100%)
Format						

Print	419 (51.4%)	207 (25.4%)	116 (14.2%)	69 (8.5%)	4 (0.5%)	815 (100%)
Online	524 (37.3%)	254 (18.1%)	390 (27.8%)	231 (16.5%)	4 (0.3%)	1403 (100%)
Television	130 (54.4%)	75 (31.4%)	28 (11.7%)	1 (0.4%)	5 (2.1%)	239 (100%)
Frequency						
Daily	966 (43.5%)	460 (20.7%)	514 (23.2%)	268 (12.1%)	12 (0.5%)	2220 (100%)
Monthly plus	107 (45.1%)	76 (32.1%)	20 (8.4%)	33 (13.9%)	1 (0.4%)	237 (100%)
Total	1073 (43.7%)	536 (21.8%)	534 (21.7%)	301 (12.3%)	13 (0.5%)	2457 (100%)

(Corporate was coded for quotes attributed to corporate entities, such as "police said", "according to the council", "posting on the website the retailer said"*

*** Not Known was coded for individuals without gender-specific descriptions, such as "spokesperson", "customer", or "resident")*

Women make up more than half the population and are a significant part of the workforce, including within newsrooms and on television screens (Ross et al., 2018), but, as Ross and Carter (2011) noted:

> Despite women's presence in the labour market across all professions and occupations, and their recruitment to senior positions in significant numbers in both the public and private sectors, their expertise and contribution to social and economic life continues to be marginalised as journalists still privilege men's voices as the authoritative expert, business person or politician. (p. 1161)

Ross (2007) noted that questions of gender bias reveal the conceit that journalists are independent and authoritative commentators "while actually peddling a particular viewpoint by the choice of speaker and the choice of quote", through framing and agenda setting (p. 450).

While I found a higher percentage of female sources in nonmainstream (26.7%) than mainstream (20.7%) the figure was still very low. One factor may be the multiple use of LDRS copy by both sectors, which would result in an exaggeration of occurrences of (mainly male) authority figures. Marked differences can be seen between formats: television, 31.4%; print, 25.4%; online, 18.1%. This differs from Tiffen et al. (2014) who looked at national media in the UK and found a greater percentage

for female sources in web-based articles: television, 37%; print, 25%; online, 30%. Non-gendered corporate entities, such as "the police", "Primark" or "Met Office", were often credited in the research sample as the source of verbatim quotes and these occur more frequently in mainstream (23.8% compared to nonmainstream: 12.6%) and online (27.8% compared to print: 14.2%; and television: 11.7%) which is an indication of copying and pasting of promotional materials (Davies, 2009; Jackson & Moloney, 2016; Johnston & Forde, 2011), rather than direct contact with sources.

4.4 Community News Coverage in the Bristol News Ecosystem

4.4.1 Introduction

During the CA sample period there was a heatwave, with higher than usual temperatures causing disruption to travel and vital services, health warnings, opportunities for quirky stories and ongoing discussion from meteorologists about when it would end. The figures for weather (3.8%), health/NHS (4.9%) and transport (4.5%) are therefore likely to be higher than usually seen. Weather featured more heavily in mainstream because there were daily developments during the heatwave, such as official advice, transport problems, school closures and expert predictions. Health/NHS coverage by nonmainstream was higher (6.2%) than mainstream coverage (4.4%)—this was likely due to community health news in *The Knowledge;* information about defibrillator installations; and pilates, chronic pain management, suicide prevention, eyesight and chiropractor advice/advertorials/contributed content in the Voice series. Contributed content from local health providers is vital for non(or low)-profit news organisations with a small staff, and helps strengthen professional and third sector support networks within the community—its importance to hyperlocals such as *The Knowledge* has already been discussed. The category for animals (28, 1.7%) heavily featured clickbait and might also have been inflated by the opportunity to exploit the heatwave. The only newsworthy local stories were about a bee garden being removed from a bus stop; beaver sightings; and dead fish in a pond, as well as three stories about animals at Bristol Zoo being given ice lollies to cope with the heat. The rest were along the lines of what to do if you see a dog in a hot car; how to keep your pets cool in the heat; weather warning for snake owners; the importance of sunscreen for dogs; and "when is flying ant day?".

There were similar reasons for the marked difference in the amount of coverage for community/charity (4.2% overall; 1.6% mainstream; 12.7% nonmainstream). The *Bristol Post* and *Bristol Live* ran seven stories about, and related to, Bristol Pride, which was also covered by *BBC Points West*,

Bristol Cable and *Bristol 24/7* due to it being a large city occasion and good photo opportunity. The *Cable* and *24/7* also cover LGBTQ issues regularly.

There was a greater variety of place-based community stories in the ward-based publications. *The Knowledge* printed 23 (out of 55) stories on allotments; community gardens; local winners of the Bristol Young Heroes Award; a community and social club celebrating 60 years in existence; women's gardening for wellbeing and cookery classes and others of a similar ilk. Charity bike rides, a midnight walk, a fundraising swim and success in saving a local pool were among the Voice stories. These are important for strengthening community bonds (Harte, et al., 2019) and highlighting positive achievements (Williams et al., 2015a) in the areas they cover. Discussion of this type of subject matter, the campaigning role assumed by hyperlocals and bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000) formed an important part of the interviews in Chapter 5.

Linked to stories about community and (volunteer) charity activities were those which covered protests and the work of professional charities—and represented 1.5% of the total output (24 stories) with a near match between mainstream and nonmainstream coverage at 1.6% and 1% respectively. This is probably accounted for because of the headline-grabbing, short-term nature of local campaigning and activism. There were six stories about victory in a fight against a plan for a phone mast in a park, this was a big—though ward-level—development in a long-running dispute and the main one picked up by nonmainstream (*Bristol 24/7* and *The Knowledge* online). The mainstream outlets *Bristol Live*, *Bristol Post* and *Bristol World* published two stories on a campaign to ban meat products from City Hall; three about SUVs targeted by climate activists; two about Bristol-based charity Women's Aid complaining about misogynistic behaviour on ITV's popular *Love Island*; two about a petition organised by a community group calling on the council to fix potholes; two about fuel protesters blocking roads; two about a protest planned against the Kill the Bill sentences; one about a day of memory for victims of honour-based abuse; and the *Bristol Cable* published one about community efforts to save a pub; while *Points West* had a story about tree protesters. For a city which likes to cultivate an activist image, this appears to be most evident in mainstream coverage and maybe linked to their SEO strategies. According to my interviewees, controversial subjects such as the Colston statue and the Merchant Venturers have a strong following beyond the city and have pushed up website hits for *Bristol Live*.

The other categories closely linked to community involvement and charities were immigration and diversity and others which covered the cost of living, welfare, benefits and poverty. In the first

category there were 15 stories overall (0.9% overall; mainstream, 11, 0.9%; nonmainstream, 4, 1%), and in the second category there were 47 stories overall (2.9% overall; mainstream, 31, 2.5%; nonmainstream, 16, 4.2%). One of the on-going news items during my sample period was rising inflation and the resultant increase in prices for food and fuel. Mainstream devoted most of the cost-of-living coverage to reproducing national reports targeted at hard-hit individuals, some from the Department for Work and Pensions about benefits, and others about the negative effects of the economic climate on families, shopping habits and business confidence; while nonmainstream concentrated on local stories more focused on mutual aid, such as food clubs, food banks and food action groups. This is central to the idea of community-centred journalism, as Wenzel (2020a) noted:

> Journalism has the potential to be a more constructive actor contributing to the health of communities—something that is particularly critical in communities that have been marginalised or divided. (p. 125)

I combined stories about business, industry, employment, jobs, industrial relations, and the economy and this gave a low figure of 3.1% overall compared to Howells's (2015) 2013 figure of 8.5% (p. 193). The Port Talbot study was weighted in favour of industrial news because of the presence of the large steel works. Many businesses in Bristol specialise in the leisure sector, so my coding would have favoured that category. Also, the *Bristol Post* runs a business section periodically, so news specific to this sector is concentrated in short bursts. Reach announced massive redundancies in late 2023 and one of the specialist reporting beats to be hit was business coverage (Linford, 2023i) so this subject is likely to have an even lower profile in future.

4.4.2 Coverage of Marginalised Communities

In the interviews discussed in Chapter 5, several of the mainstream and nonmainstream news workers I talked to expressed the importance of journalists' lived experience and embeddedness (Robinson, 2023; Vos & Hanusch, 2023; Wenzel, 2023b) in helping their organisations strengthen community bonds. Some talked about attachment in emotional ways, such as caring "passionately" about their community links (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019b, 2023, 2024). Assiah Hamed is a Muslim woman who worked for Reach, and Charlie Watts was a *Bristol 24/7* community reporter from Knowle West—a Bristol ward which suffers reputational damage locally—and both were concerned about the media representation of the communities they identify with. The interviews revealed discourses about authenticity, journalistic authority, social capital and trust, especially regarding the communities which have suffered erasure and

stigmatisation in the local media, as mentioned in Chapter 1. The value of local media can be seen in the bridging role of city-wide outlets, which can traverse barriers between disparate communities; and the bonding role of those at ward-level, which focus on raising the self-esteem of isolated communities. For local media the coverage of marginalised communities, while highly praised for its social value, is restricted by limited resources, which is a practical ideology (Reardon, 2013) often expressed by local journalists. According to Martin Booth, editor of *Bristol 24/7*:

> We've got a reporter who lives and breathes Knowle West, and so our coverage of Knowle West is absolutely, extraordinarily good, because we have that very news-hungry reporter based out there. That, in some ways, is to the detriment of other areas that don't get that coverage but, resource-wise, we just can't.

Coverage of race, poverty, sexuality and gender issues, as well as age, health and religious discrimination, has been the subject of a growing amount of research within journalism studies in an attempt to address the need to build trust and tackle misrepresentation and under-representation of marginalised communities, whether place- or identity-based (Brown et al., 1987; Douglas & Phillips, 2023; Hall, 1982, 1986, 2013, 2019a, 2021a, 2021g, 2021h; Hall et al., 2013; Norris, 2023; Moore, 2020; Ofcom, 2022a; Robinson, 2015a, 2018, 2023; Robinson & Culver, 2019; Ross, 1998; Ross Arguedas et al., 2023; Seaton, 2018; Voakes et al., 1996; Wenzel, 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2023a, 2023b; Wenzel et al., 2018). These are also high-profile topics within the Bristol news media, with the journalists I interviewed all keen to show their commitment to diversity, equality and inclusion—they also form part of the corporate social responsibility aims of the BBC, Reach, *Bristol 24/7* and the *Bristol Cable*. Voakes et al. (1996) make it clear that defining news diversity has long been a contested exercise for scholars and they delineate the problems of the different approaches. In Chapter 3 I set out the criteria for identifying representation of marginalised communities in stories and explained how I based them on the protected characteristics set out in the UK Equality Act 2010 (UK Government, n.d.). A CA, such as this, can only give an indication of the volume of stories addressing the representation of marginalised communities and, as Voakes et al. (ibid.) stress, this is not adequate for assessing the quality of the coverage—"it captures diversity at a superficial level" (p. 583)—which would be better addressed through a framing analysis (Moore, 2020), and which should be considered in any future research.

Table 4.6: Representation of marginalised communities—mainstream/nonmainstream; format; frequency

	Marginalised communities represented	No marginalised communities	Total
M/NM			
Mainstream	217 (17.2%)	1047 (82.8%)	1264 (100%)
Nonmainstream	145 (37.7%)	240 (62.3%)	385 (100%)
Format			
Print	150 (20.8%)	570 (79.2%)	720 (100%)
Online	182 (22.3%)	634 (77.7%)	816 (100%)
Television	30 (26.5%)	83 (73.5%)	113 (100%)
Frequency			
Daily	274 (19.4%)	1136 (80.6%)	1410 (100%)
Monthly plus	88 (36.8%)	151 (63.2%)	239 (100%)
Good news/bad news			
Celebratory	197 (24.5%)	607 (75.5%)	804 (100%)
Neither celebratory nor disorder	28 (10.8%)	232 (89.2%)	260 (100%)
Disorder	137 (23.4%)	448 (76.6%)	585 (100%)
Total	362 (22%)	1287 (78%)	1649 (100%)

In the Bristol news ecosystem nonmainstream outlets published proportionately more diversity stories than mainstream—37.7% to 17.2%—but there is not great variation in format—print: 20.8%; online: 22.3%; television: 26.5%. There is near parity in the number of stories about marginalised communities coded as celebratory (24.5%) compared to disorder (23.4%) (Table 4.6).

While I identified differences between mainstream and nonmainstream media, format and frequency, it was also necessary to consider individual outlets. It should also be remembered that the Voice network, the Journals and *The Knowledge* are ward-level publications with a focus on one place-based community; while the others are city-wide/regional and hence cover all the place-based communities within Bristol. The biggest variation in coverage of marginalised communities can be seen when the data are broken down into outlets, as shown in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Representation of marginalised communities—outlet

Outlet	Reach: City (C) or	Marginalised communities represented	No marginalised communities	Total

	Ward (W)			
Bristol Post	C	62 (12.9%)	419 (87.1%)	481 (100%)
Bristol Live	C	107 (20.2%)	423 (79.8%)	530 (100%)
Bishopston Voice print	W	10 (25%)	30 (75%)	40 (100%)
Fishponds Voice web	W	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)	9 (100%)
Fishponds Voice print	W	8 (20.5%)	31 (79.5%)	39 (100%)
Henleaze and Westbury Voice print	W	8 (20%)	32 (80%)	40 (100%)
South Bristol Voice print	W	18 (40%)	27 (60%)	45 (100%)
Bristol Cable web	C	9 (90%)	1 (10%)	10 (100%)
Bristol Cable print	C	14 (63.6%)	8 (36.4%)	22 (100%)
BBC Points West	C	30 (26.5%)	83 (73.5%)	113 (100%)
The Bristolian web	C	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	5 (100%)
The Bristolian print	C	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)	9 (100%)
Bristol 24/7	C	36 (34.6%)	68 (65.4%)	104 (100%)
Bristol World	C	18 (12.9%)	122 (87.1%)	140 (100%)
Bradley Stoke Journal	W	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	4 (100%)
Stoke Gifford Journal	W	-	3 (100%)	3 (100%)
The Knowledge web	W	4 (36.4%)	7 (63.6%)	11 (100%)
The Knowledge print	W	27 (61.4%)	17 (38.6%)	44 (100%)
Total		362 (22%)	1287 (78%)	1649 (100%)

At one end of the scale were the *Bristol Post* and *Bristol World*, both mainstream outlets, with 12.9%, each, of their total output being stories featuring marginalised communities. The other Reach outlet, the *Post*'s sister website, *Bristol Live*, showed a slightly higher percentage at 20.2% whereas the less-commercially focussed *Bristol Cable* online (90%), *The Bristolian* online (80%), and *The Knowledge* (61.4%) showed, among other outlets, some of the highest rankings.

The difference between *Bristol Post* and *Bristol Live* was probably due to several online stories of national origin about changes to DWP benefits, national charities and celebrity stories which focused

on discrimination, meaning that much coverage on the website which featured marginalised voices and experiences was not local in its orientation. Table 4.8 presents a selection of the headlines.

Table 4.8: Bristol Live Headlines for Non-local Stories Featuring Discrimination

Date	Headline
12 July 2022	Mo Farah Reveals he was Brought to UK Illegally under Someone Else's Name
12 July 2022	National Lottery-funded UK Charities Unite to Mark Day of Memory for Victims of Honour-based Abuse
12 July 2022	DWP Issues Warning to Those on Universal Credit with Social Media Accounts
18 July 2022	'Mum said Girls Didn't Play Football' — Footie-Mad Marty Proves Doubters Wrong
18 July 2022	Siânnise Fudge Talks About Weight Gain Journey and Says 'the Struggle is Real'
20 July 2022	Pride of Britain Life Changing Stories Podcast Hears Peter Andre Open Up on Racist Childhood Bullying

There were, however, other *Bristol Live* stories on marginalised communities which featured local people, one about a mother and son bringing Balkan cuisine to Bristol, and another about a hairdresser avoiding deportation proceedings (Table 4.9). Both of these gave some background to difficult life stories, the first being about fleeing war and ethnic cleansing, and the second about the threat of deportation, but each concentrated on the experiences of individuals. In contrast the *Bristol Cable* runs stories about more systemic problems which affect a significant proportion of the local population. The first in this sample was about Bristol landlords cashing in on short-term lets and the second about children being failed by a "broken education system".

Table 4.9: Bristol Live and Bristol Cable Headlines for Local Stories Featuring Discrimination

Outlet	Date	Headline
Bristol Live	8 July 2022	Meet the Mother-and-Son Team Bringing Balkan Food to Bristol with Five-Course Supper Club
Bristol Live	18 July 2022	Bristol Hairdresser Anthonell Peccoo 'Sense of Relief' as Home Office Ends Deportation Proceedings
Bristol Cable	Summer 2022	Bristol Landlords are Cashing in on Lucrative Short-Term Lets
Bristol Cable	Summer 2022	Lost Learning: My Grandson's Being Failed by a Broken Education System

These different approaches illustrate the problematic framing of social issues, prevalent in much episodic mainstream (daily) news, and a more complex approach seen in thematic nonmainstream (periodic) media. Gavin (2021) drew attention to an important distinction between the two:

> ["Thematic"] is characterised by in-depth coverage of issues, and which heavily contextualises them, giving detailed, rounded explanation, and interpretative analysis, involving causes, effects, and exploration of implications. In contrast, "episodic" reporting describes concrete, isolated events, individual illustrations or specific instances, and cases around an issue. (p. 720)

Gavin pointed out that the "episodic" structure of commentary is prevalent in much mainstream coverage because of the media's preference for hard news, but also the need to include a great number of—often brief and self-contained—news stories in a limited format. Patterson (1998) noted Iyengar's research on television news audiences which shows the two frames differ in more ways than just their focus and frequency:

> In controlled experiments, Iyengar found that viewers exposed to episodic frames tend to concentrate on the individuals involved, make few connections to larger forces in society ("the big picture"), and deny accountability to anyone but the individuals in the story (p. 62).

The general effect of this is that potentially public and enduring stories become essentially private and momentary ones. Thematic framing, on the other hand:

> Encourages viewers to confront larger questions of cause and effect, to consider how public policy and social conditions might be related, and to take a longer view of policy problems and solutions (pp. 62-63).

In discussing power and the news media van Dijk (1996) stated that a lack of education may seriously limit news understanding (p. 13). The normative function of local journalism (or all news journalism for that matter) is to simplify complex information, highlight the relevant parts and explain why these are important. By putting news events into context, thematic reporting makes up for a possible educational deficit, or lack of knowledge of structural causes. According to van Dijk, "powerlessness may involve limited (passive) access to mass-mediated discourse due to a failure (fully) to understand news texts themselves or the events such texts are about" (p. 14). Slater (2021) relates this to agnotology—the study of the intentional production of ignorance—to understand how, and why, the powerful withhold knowledge from the powerless (pp. 19-21). He quoted Paul Gilroy:

> We need a better understanding of the relationship between information and power that arises from the command of not knowing, from the management of forms of ignorance that have been strategically created and deployed, and institutionally amplified. (p. 20)

I now go on to consider the data I gathered on geographic focus in the Bristol news ecosystem.

4.5 Geographic Focus

4.5.1 Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter 3 mapping has become an increasingly significant method within journalism studies as a way of understanding the effects of (local) media on its intended audience(s) (McAdam & Hess, 2022). For Schmitz Weiss (2015, 2018, 2020), spatial journalism is a way of exposing the issues and faults of a journalism practice that aims to serve a democratic function by highlighting social, economic and cultural issues tied to race, class and place, and identifying the "holes, gaps, and lack of attention given to communities that are underrepresented or not represented at all" (2015, p. 127).

As discussed in Chapter 3, item subjects and sources were classed as local or non-local based on a system set out in the coding manual (Appendix A). Local item subjects and sources were those associated with specific buildings, landmarks and roads; neighbourhoods; wards; areas or subdivisions (such as South Bristol); Bristol itself; and the catchment area surrounding the city (coded as regional). While non-local item subjects and sources were those which were national, international and non-geographically specific (such as motoring reviews or entertainment news).

I argue that when local news organisations report news which has no local relevancy, this severely curbs their ability to cover local news in the public interest, stretches limited resources and destroys the trust with local audiences, built up by social capital, which local journalism has always depended upon. While churnalism, the cutting and pasting of non-original content, has been adopted due to the time pressures faced by journalists in today's newsrooms, it involves labour which could be directed to original, local news reporting (Davies, 2009). Locally based and focussed media have privileged access to local primary sources and, in relation to social capital and trust, can claim to have more reliable local knowledge than outsiders. News which has no relevance to the place-based communities where people live, or the communities-of-interest they identify with, can have an alienating effect on previously loyal local audiences. The dilution of relevant local news, risks the loss of readers, erodes trust and damages communities (Franklin, 2006b; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2023, 2024;

Whittington, 2020). The psychological and emotional effect is similar to the alienation, or un-homing, noted in gentrification studies, where the familiar lived environment is displaced by the unfamiliar. Marcuse (1986) identified direct and indirect displacement as processes of urban change—the former involves forced removal from homes through demolition or evictions; the latter occurs when residents, despite not leaving an area, no longer feel at home there due to the changing feel of the neighbourhood, physically, but also in media representation (see also Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020; Madden & Marcuse, 2016; Marcuse, 1989, 2010; Rose, 2024).

Non-original content—"repeating facts assembled elsewhere" (Ponsford & Davis, 2022)—made up the bulk of the network news and non-local items. In these stories the sources were clearly indicated as being from social media, television, PR or other local and non-local media. I found that for mainstream, almost a third of stories (32.8%) featured non-original content, whereas this was true for just over a fifth of nonmainstream stories (21.8%)—these are both substantial percentages and show the importance of social media to news-gathering techniques. I also found that online, by far, contained the most non-original content—almost half the stories (46.4%)—with print on 16%, and television on only 3.5%.

I begin this section with a look at the level of locality of story subjects and sources, dividing them between local and non-local. I then go on to discuss my findings from a ward-level analysis which gives a more fine-grained picture of the way separate place-based communities in the city are portrayed and the attempts of small-scale nonmainstream media to cover these areas.

4.5.2 Location of Item

I adopted a coding system to accommodate multiple locations within each story. Where these were purely local, they were coded as such, but some stories, such as away fixtures for the local football teams, had both local and non-local elements. For the purposes of this analysis I considered this combined category as being local.

Table 4.10: Location of item—local/non-local by mainstream/nonmainstream; format; and frequency

	Local	Local/non-local	(Local plus local/non-local)	Non-local	Total
Mainstream/nonmainstream					
M	621 (49.1%)	303 (24%)	[924 (73.1%)]	340 (26.9%)	1264 (100%)
NM	300 (77.9%)	70 (18.2%)	[370 (96.1%)]	15 (3.9%)	385 (100%)

Format					
Print	400 (55.6%)	137 (19%)	[537 (74.6%)]	183 (25.4%)	720 (100%)
Online	432 (52.9%)	217 (26.6%)	[649 (79.5%)]	167 (20.5%)	816 (100%)
TV	89 (78.8%)	19 (16.8%)	[108 (95.6%)]	5 (4.4%)	113 (100%)
Frequency					
Daily	727 (51.6%)	338 (24%)	[1065 (75.5%)]	345 (24.5%)	1410 (100%)
Monthly plus	194 (81.2%)	35 (14.6%)	[229 (95.8%)]	10 (4.2%)	239 (100%)
Total	921 (55.9%)	373 (22.6%)	[1294 (78.5%)]	355 (21.5%)	1649 (100%)

Napoli et al. (2018) argue that the number of news stories which are "truly local" to a community is a measure of the robustness of the local journalism that a community receives. Their study analysed 16,000 news stories, gathered over seven days, across 100 randomly sampled U.S. communities, and found that only about 17% of the news stories provided to a community were truly local. I found 78.5% of *stories overall* which contained local elements (Table 4.10). So, while Bristol as a whole, seems healthier regarding the localness of news than that found by Napoli et al., there is a marked difference when the output of mainstream and nonmainstream is compared. The percentage of mainstream news stories with local elements was 73.1%, compared to 96.1% of nonmainstream news stories (Table 4.10). The figure hides an even lower percentage for the commercial Reach (*Bristol Post*, 64%; *Bristol Live*, 74.7%) and National World (*Bristol World*, 80%) outlets, as the television-based, non-commercial, mainstream media, BBC's *Points West*, showed 95.6% of local news. The lowest percentage for the 14 nonmainstream outlets was 81.8% for *The Knowledge* website—whereas *The Knowledge* print publication registered 100% along with seven others. The fact there is a difference between mainstream and nonmainstream is not surprising given the nature of hyperlocal news (Williams et al., 2015a) but the size of the gap is striking. This points to a reliance on networked copy for the mainstream outlets, especially the commercial ones. In the following section I provide examples of non-local and networked stories published by the Bristol news organisations.

4.5.3 Networked Copy Sharing

A closer look at the bylined stories and online biographies of the writers reveals heavy use by the commercial (Reach and National World) websites of copy from SEO and Trends writers based throughout their national editorial networks. One of the *Bristol Live* bylines belonged to Neil Shaw, Network Content Editor, Live and Trends, who, according to his online biography, is responsible for

"curating and creating content for the Reach network of sites and Head of News for *The Plymouth Herald"*. Among the stories he was credited with during the sample period were: "Seven Signs a Dog Could be About to Bite as Charities Issue Urgent Warning" (20 July 2022); "Gull Shoplifts 18 Bags of Crisps and a Flapjack from Heron Food" (21 July 2022); "UK Faces Hummus Shortage as World Supply of Chickpeas Drops 20%" (9 July 2022); and "People Don't Know Who Invented Algorithms, Fridges and Wi-Fi for Terrible Reason" (21 July 2022), each of which can be assumed to be clickbait and none have a distinctly local connection. Other Reach websites throughout the UK published these stories on the same day as *Bristol Live.* Instead of a hyperlink from the home page to a single webpage, each one featured local branding—this indicates that, instead of uploading being centralised, this task was duplicated throughout the network. Usher (2016) questions the received wisdom that clickbait offers a financial lifeline for news organisations hit badly by the journalism crisis. She said: "the logic goes that with more visitors, there will be more clicks—and more views—of advertising, and sites can hopefully make a case to charge more. Just whether this logic works is unclear" (p. 183).

One story on *Bristol Live* was a product of the Reach network but had no local content and was almost two weeks old. It was headlined "British Boy, Four, Drowns on Holiday with Family in Mauritius". The boy came from Cumbernauld, north Lanarkshire, and the event happened on 28 June 2022, with the funeral on 1 July, and yet the story was datelined 8 July. One of the bylines for this story was for Phil Norris, Editor, *Gloucestershire Live*, and the other was for a trainee reporter at the *Scottish Daily Express*, another Reach news organisation, with a credit and hyperlink for the Scottish news outlet. What would be a big story for north Lanarkshire (or Mauritius) a week or so previously is unlikely to attract clicks in Bristol as, as already discussed, proximity and timeliness are important to local news. According to Buttle (2024b) the economic value of online journalism is high at the time of publication and then erodes quickly: "Typically traffic to an article peaks within 24 hours of its publication (and the relationship between monetisation and traffic is reasonably direct). Archival content represents a low-single-digital percentage of overall engagement with news." Usher (2016) also warns about the rehashing of "dime-a-dozen" stories:

> The cultural response to the technological phenomenon of constant, visible competition has been simply to create news that everyone else has for concerns deeply rooted in the journalistic ego. These old standards that compel news creation are proving damaging as commodity news becomes wasted, redundant effort, dime-a-dozen stories available anywhere online. (p. 187)

My research uncovered credited PR-generated news stories, but I also found uncredited, and disguised, recycling of material, or plagiarism, with stories given bylines of journalists who were not their authors. On closer inspection, some, if not all, of these bylines were for fictional reporters. Lewis et al. (2008) observed this in their study of the quality and independence of British journalism in 2008 (see also Franklin et al. 2010). Firmstone (2024) also noted: "this [practice] raises questions about transparency and trust because audiences are misled that content has been produced through a journalistic process" (p. 206). Harte et al. (2019) interviewed a hyperlocal publisher who stressed their policy of crediting the author was an "open and honest way" of dealing with press releases in contrast to the more common method of lightly adapting them and giving a byline for the journalist (p. 163). Lewis et al. (2008b) found that journalists' reliance on public relations materials and news agency copy was extensive—60% of press articles and 34% of broadcast stories come wholly or mainly from 'pre-packaged' sources—but, as their study was restricted to only those verifiable instances of news stories based on PR material, it is likely that this is just the tip of an iceberg of uncredited PR influence (see also Johnston & Forde, 2011, 2017).

Lewis et al.'s influential study into news sources and public relations quoted working journalists as blaming the pressures of reduced staff numbers and increased pagination for the reliance on, and minimal editorial input, of these PR subsidies but my research indicates there are now job roles where this recycling is carried out almost routinely. Sophie Wills, who described her job as "SEO and Trends Writer for National World ... creat[ing] content for a variety of sites across the UK including *Yorkshire Evening Post*, the *Sheffield Star* and *Bristol World*", had her name attached to a *Bristol World* story about a Japanese garden behind an unremarkable house in the Brislington part of Bristol (Wills, 2022b). The story was also printed with minor differences in a rival publication, the *Bristol Post*, a couple of days later with Charlotte Penketh-King as the byline (Penketh-King, 2022)—see Figures 4.1 and 4.2. Penketh-King is the name of a reporter who worked nationally for Reach and a news agency, although the *Post* byline gives her a generic *Bristol Post* email address which goes some way to disguising this (the inhouse journalists at the *Bristol Post* have personalised, not generic, email addresses).

The Japanese garden gets frequent coverage locally and nationally, mainly because it is a feature of an annual national open gardens scheme. An internet search revealed 13 web stories over the past 18 months (not counting the two referenced here) on websites as diverse as *Global Herald*, *The Mirror*, *The Metro*, *Mail Online, Wales Online*, the BBC and ITV, although none of the others reproduced the story word-for-word. More than 20 years ago Boczkowski and de Santos (2007) found a growing trend of

content homogeneity across print newspapers and their online stablemates, as well as with their rivals, and this example shows how this is happening in the Bristol news ecosystem. Years ago, journalists trained by the National Council for the Training of Journalists were told not to copy press releases because of the risk of duplication with competitor publications, but given examples like the Japanese garden story, it is apparent the pressures of the modern newsroom mean this advice appears to have been forgotten. Richard Coulter, of the Voice network, explained why his publications sometimes reproduce press releases without editing them: "We sometimes do. But that's the thing of resources more than anything else. Sometimes we will rewrite a press release. They're not always awful, but we'll try and check that it's okay. But we're trying to produce as much original content as we can ... But, if a school sends us a press release that they've opened a new library, we're not gonna spend days checking the honesty of it and doing an investigation. We will take that as read that that school did open a new library".

Figure 4.1: *Bristol World* story about a Japanese garden published 16 July 2022



News

Bristol dad spends 13 years transforming his barren backyard into incredible Japanese garden

It's hard to believe it's in Brislington, not Tokyo

By Sophie Wills
Published 15th Jul 2022, 16:31 BST
Updated 16th Jul 2022, 11:02 BST

A dad has spent 13 years transforming his barren backyard at his terraced **Bristol** home into an incredible Japanese garden.

Martin Fitton, 54, fell in love with Japanese gardens after first visiting one on holiday in **Dorset** back in 2009 and immediately set about creating his own at home.

Figure 4.2: *Bristol Post* story about a Japanese garden published 19 July 2022 with a different byline



The back garden that's big in Japan

Charlotte PENKETH-KING
bp@reachplc.com

A BRISTOL dad has spent 13 years transforming his barren backyard at his terraced city home into an incredible Japanese garden.

Martin Fitton, 54, fell in love with Japanese gardens after visiting one

One of the unexpected findings of my CA was a series of advertorials in the *Bristol Post* on the Pride of Scotland Awards 2022. There were several full-page interviews with Scottish celebrities and patrons of Scottish charities praising Scotland's unsung heroes, run over a week, building up to an eight-page centre pull-out on the ceremony—there were only 13 pages of Bristol news in the same 36-page issue—which was billed as being shown on STV (the ITV Scottish television channel, not broadcast in Bristol). The logo for the *Daily Record*, Reach's large circulation Scottish newspaper was also prominent. This in-company advertorial campaign was presumably spread throughout the Reach network in the UK, despite only being relevant to the Scottish part of it.

The practice of trawling other media for stories and quotes runs the risk of duplication, as I discovered in my news sample. A prominent SEO topic during the sample period was the popular ITV programme *Love Island* and stories about this show featured regularly on *Bristol Live* with different angles. The local Life Writer was responsible for "Love Island Reportedly Planning Spin-off Featuring 'Middle-Aged Parents Looking for Romance'" on 20 July 2022, while the Network Content Editor (Live and Trends) was bylined for "New Love Island for Middle-Aged People with Normal Bodies" two days later. The former credited (and hyperlinked) *Mirror Online* and *Metro Online* for quotes; while the latter

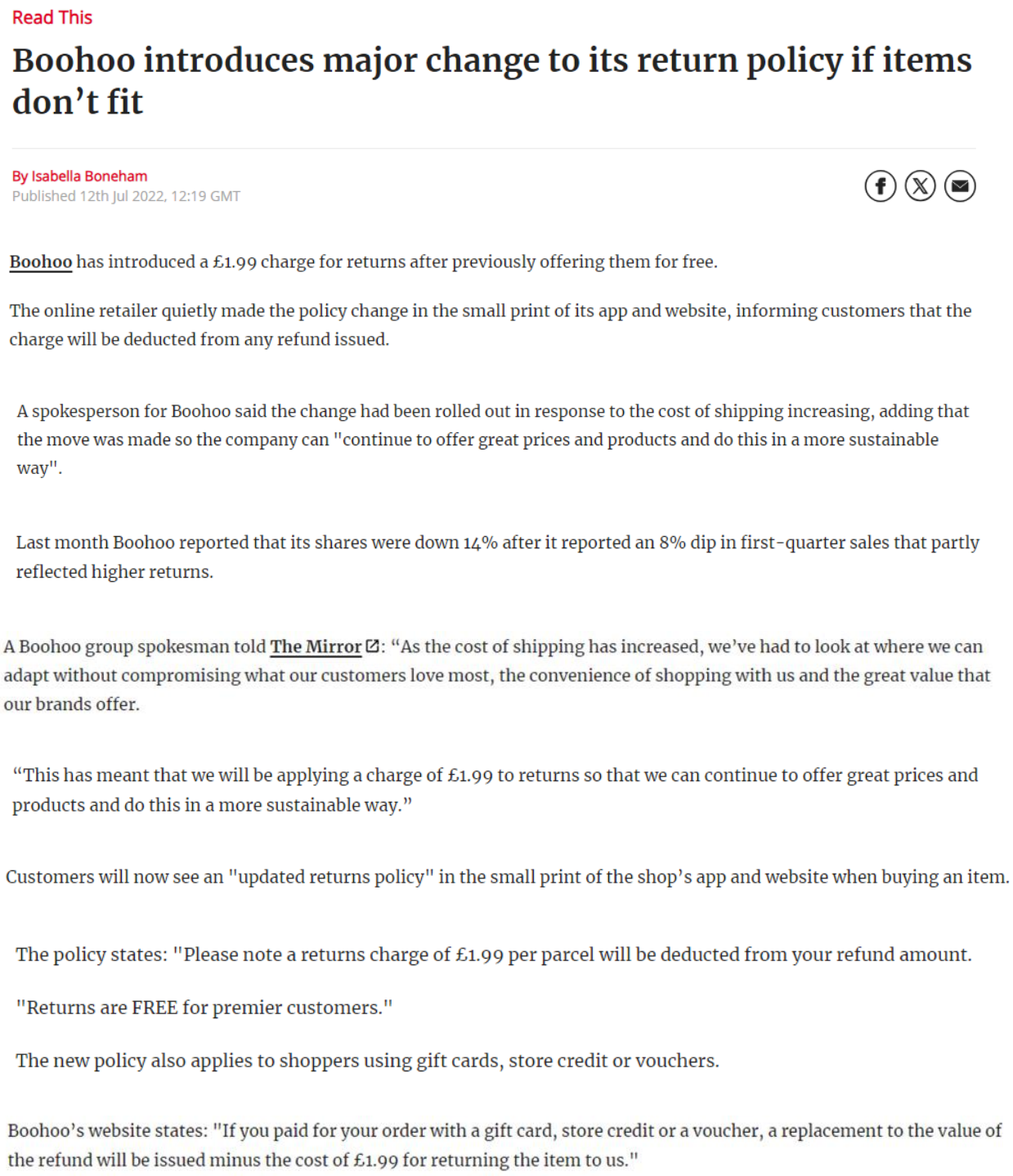
took quotes from *OK!* magazine, and both used the same quote from *The Sun*. Also, the 20 July story mentions that the charity Women's Aid had been in talks with *Love Island* producers over 'misogyny and controlling behaviour' on the programme. It does not mention that the charity is Bristol-based, and there is no link to the previous day's *Bristol Live* story ("Bristol Charity Women's Aid in Talks with *Love Island* Bosses Regarding 'Misogyny and Controlling Behaviour in Villa'") written by the Senior Audience Writer, who, in this instance, credits *MailOnline*. Both the 19 July and the 20 July stories use the same quote from Women's Aid, the first credits a statement from the charity, the second *Metro Online*. While the Women's Aid press release was the source of quotes for both stories, neither journalist followed up with a call to the charity for fresh quotes even though it is locally based. The problem of news harvesting from national online sites is that any local references have been removed—a subeditor should have spotted the local connection. This points to news operations being siloed without communication or coordination between writers and editorial production staff. These stories have been cobbled together from others which have already been published, sometimes days, or even months previously, from websites with much higher audience figures, some of which are competitors. The commercial logic behind networked, non-local, non-original content is illustrated by this story published by *Private Eye* (2024e):

> Reach plc's gormless 'chief digital publisher' David Higgerson [in his] regular all-staff missive ... had great news for the future of journalism. [He wrote] 'In Birmingham, creative angles and consistently newsy and well-written copy generated £13,630 in affiliate revenue for *BirminghamLive* in March so far, including this luggage article that's our top-performing affiliates article in Reach.' The article in question, taken from what had been—since 1870—known as the *Birmingham Mail*, carried the shock revelation that a 'gorgeous' overnight bag 'comes in five different colours and two, blush pink and mineral blue/green, are now heavily reduced from £140 to £84' in an onlne sale.

An example of networked, non-original content was a *Bristol World* story headlined "Boohoo Introduces Major Change to its Return Policy if Items Don't Fit". Figure 4.3 is a screen grab for this story, showing quotes taken from *The Mirror*; social media users; and the Boohoo website. The story was an example of "a basic rewrite of easy-to-obtain information which appears to involve little journalistic work" (Ponsford & Davis, 2022) and was published principally to appear in internet searches. While there is nothing to indicate this is an example of native advertising—paid-for content passed off as

editorial—it still acts as promotion for the online retailer (Aronczyk et al., 2017; Carlson, 2015b; Carlson & Locke, 2022; Ferrer-Conill, 2016).

Figure 4.3: *Bristol World* story—non-original content



Read This

Boohoo introduces major change to its return policy if items don't fit

By Isabella Boneham
Published 12th Jul 2022, 12:19 GMT

Boohoo has introduced a £1.99 charge for returns after previously offering them for free.

The online retailer quietly made the policy change in the small print of its app and website, informing customers that the charge will be deducted from any refund issued.

A spokesperson for Boohoo said the change had been rolled out in response to the cost of shipping increasing, adding that the move was made so the company can "continue to offer great prices and products and do this in a more sustainable way".

Last month Boohoo reported that its shares were down 14% after it reported an 8% dip in first-quarter sales that partly reflected higher returns.

A Boohoo group spokesman told The Mirror: "As the cost of shipping has increased, we've had to look at where we can adapt without compromising what our customers love most, the convenience of shopping with us and the great value that our brands offer.

"This has meant that we will be applying a charge of £1.99 to returns so that we can continue to offer great prices and products and do this in a more sustainable way."

Customers will now see an "updated returns policy" in the small print of the shop's app and website when buying an item.

The policy states: "Please note a returns charge of £1.99 per parcel will be deducted from your refund amount.

"Returns are FREE for premier customers."

The new policy also applies to shoppers using gift cards, store credit or vouchers.

Boohoo's website states: "If you paid for your order with a gift card, store credit or a voucher, a replacement to the value of the refund will be issued minus the cost of £1.99 for returning the item to us."

The retailer has extended its returns policy to 28 days, so a typical refund may take longer than usual.

Customers will be issued a refund within 14 days of the retailer receiving the returned items, or within 14 days of the consumer providing it with proof of return via one of its carriers if the items are not returned.

Unhappy shoppers took to social media to complain about the change in policy, as many customers order multiple sizes of an item to get the correct fit, before returning the ones they don't need, meaning they will be left out of pocket.

One user wrote: ""I always have to buy in two sizes as sometimes the cut is skimpy and the next time it drowns you. Think I'm sticking to Primark from now on, at least you can actually see what you are buying."

"@boohoo @boohoo_cshelp since when do you charge for returns???", said another.

A third wrote: "Well, that settles it. No more shopping from @boohoo now they've started charging £1.99 for refunds."

Another added: "@boohoo_cshelp Hi, please can you tell me why you now charge for Isle of Man residents to return?? Just had to pay 9.19 for three dresses? Then apparently you then take £1.99 from refund!!"

Which other retailers charge for returns?

The move from Boohoo comes after Zara shoppers have started being charged £1.95 to send items back, with the fee deducted from their refund.

Zara had said the move was to encourage people back into its stores, where there is no fee for returns.

However, fellow online only retailer Asos' chief executive Jose Antonio Ramos Calamonte said his company currently does not charge for returns and isn't thinking of charging "right now".

Asos chief operating officer Mat Dunn said free returns was a "no regret" decision taken to optimise its customer proposition.

One example which illustrates the reliance on non-local and non-original content was a lead story on page three (traditionally the most important news page, after the front page) of the *Bristol Post* during the heatwave, headlined "Heatwave Pressures: Ambulance Services at Highest Level of Alert" (Houseman, 2022)—see Figure 4.4. While the article was topical it also appears to be a lightly edited news agency story given a local byline—John Houseman, with a generic email address. This name also appears on other reworked PA copy in the *Bristol Post*, and is likely to be a generic byline as it is not listed on the *Bristol Live* contacts page. An internet search found the same story on national *BBC*, *ITV*, *Metro*, *The Standard* and several other media outlets (all with different bylines). What is problematic about the story, as it was published in the *Bristol Post*, is that only three, out of 27, paragraphs referred to the South Western Ambulance Service and one referred to an extreme heat warning for Bristol (marked in red in Figure 4.4), the other paragraphs recounted the situation for ambulance services in

the midlands, the home counties and the north west, all of which confirmed they were on high alert. One of the quoted sources was the *Sunday Times* health editor writing on Twitter, another was the *Health Service Journal* and another was the PA news agency, which gives the impression of minimal coverage of an important local news story being fleshed out with repetitive and geographically irrelevant information (Firmstone & Whittington, 2021, p. 85). What is also perplexing about this story is that the accompanying photograph featured ambulances and emergency vehicles at an incident in Bristol the previous day, with a short caption which said one person was taken to hospital—there could be an interesting local story here which may or may not be linked to the heatwave and high alert status but this was not followed up in print. Further investigation revealed two online *Bristol Live* stories from the previous day which were rehashed for the *Bristol Post* article but did not include the UK-wide references (see Figure 4.5). Both had different bylines, were more geographically relevant and had more on the emergency incident, which had additional details about an air ambulance attending the scene and bus services being redirected (Elliott-Gibbs & Donoghue, 2022; Streeting & Bourne, 2022). In this case the online versions had more relevant information, were more geographically focused and less likely to be prone to accusations of churnalism (Davies, 2009; Harcup, 2015; Ponsford & Davis, 2022). This shows the difficulties inherent in filling news pages when newspaper production resources are being redirected to online news operations (Linford, 2023c). Other research has indicated the trend has been in the opposite direction in recent years, that online news is more prone to copying and pasting than print publications (Whittington, 2020).

Figure 4.4: *Bristol Post* 13 July 2022, page 3—local references marked in red



Heatwave pressures Ambulance services at highest level of alert

John HOUSEMAN

THE ambulance service is currently at its highest level of alert in Bristol and across the South West, amid reports that the current heatwave is putting intense pressure on the health service all across the country.

The South Western Ambulance Service (SWAST) has confirmed to the Post that it is at REAP Level Four, otherwise known as black alert – the highest alert level.

All other ambulance services in the UK are also on that level, according to the *Sunday Times*.

Their health editor Shaun Lintern wrote on Twitter that this was due to "heatwave pressures and massive delays outside hospitals".

Patients are reportedly being seen stuck outside A&Es in ambulances because warm weather has encouraged 'respiratory illnesses'.

And a health executive in the Midlands reportedly told the *Health Service Journal* that the worst is yet to come.

An extreme amber heat warning has been issued by the Met Office for Bristol this coming weekend – a rare occurrence amid warnings that there could be 'danger to life'.

Yesterday's weather was slightly cooler than Monday's but temperatures are expected to climb again by the weekend to highs of 28°C on Saturday – and even higher at the start of next week.

According to official NHS documents, moving to REAP Level Four means that pressure is so high that the local health and care system is "unable to deliver comprehensive care".

This means that there is increased potential for the care and safety of patients to be "compromised".

It also means that "decisive action" must be taken locally to ensure patient safety, and that if the local health services have taken all possible action to solve the problem, then "extensive support" is required.

And if multiple health systems across the country are stuck on level four for "sustained periods of time" and there is an impact "across local and regional boundaries", then "national action" may be taken.

SWAST did not respond when asked to explain what being at level four means for the local health service.

A combination of Covid absences among staff, difficulty caused by the hot weather and ongoing delays in handing over patients to A&E has left ambulance trusts struggling to cope.

All 10 ambulance services confirmed to the PA news agency they were on the highest level of alert after the *Health Service Journal* first reported they were.

West Midlands Ambulance Service said it had been on the highest level of alert – known as REAP 4 – for a few months, while South Central Ambulance Service said it was also at REAP 4, which means trusts are under "extreme pressure".

South Central added that it had also declared a critical incident "due to current pressures on our services".

It said in a statement: "We continue to prioritise our response to those patients with life-threatening and serious emergencies but, due to the current levels of pressure we are seeing, there will be delays in responding to other patients with less urgent needs who are assessed as requiring an ambulance response.

"We are experiencing an increasing number of 999 calls into our service, combined with patients calling back if there is a delay in our response to them. As a result, our capacity to take calls is being severely challenged.

"This is combined with the challenges of handing patients over to busy hospitals across our region and a rise in Covid infections, as well as other respiratory illnesses, among both staff and in our communities.

"This week we are also faced with high temperatures across our region which we know will lead to an increase in demand on our service. All of these issues combined are impacting on our ability to respond to patients."

A North West Ambulance Service spokesman told PA: "As a result of the recent warm weather and increased demand, we have decided to step up to Level 4 of Resource Escalation Action Plan (REAP).

"We urge the public to reserve the 999 service for emergencies only and consider if their GP, pharmacist or 111.nhs.uk could provide them with the medical help they need."

Shadow health secretary Wes Streeting said: "Twelve years of Conservative mismanagement has left our ambulance service in crisis. Patients are left for far longer [illegible] is safe and lives are being lost result."

Martin Flaherty, managing d[irec]tor of the Association of An[bu]lance Chief Executives, said: "[The] NHS ambulance sector is u[nder] intense pressure, with all an[bu]lance services operating at [the] highest level of four within [the] local resource escalation a[nd] plans, normally only ever rese[rved] for major incidents or short-[term] periods of unusual demand.

"Severe delays in ambul[ance] crews being able to hand over [the] patients at many hospital e[mer]gency departments are havi[ng a] very significant impact on [the] ambulance sector's ability [to] respond to patients as quickl[y as] we would like to, because our c[rews] and vehicles are stuck ou[t in] those hospitals.

"Added to this, we have a nu[mber] of staff absences due to a ri[se in] Covid cases as well as additi[onal] pressure caused by the curren[t] weather, which is making th[ings] even tougher for our staff ar[e] course the patients they are c[are] for."

He urged people not to cal[l] back to ask about an estim[ated] arrival time unless the pati[ent's] condition has changed.

Ambulances and emergency vehicles in Sandy Park Road in Brislington yesterday. One person was taken to hosp[ital] after emergency services attended an incident.

Figure 4.5: *Bristol Live* 12 July 2022—local references marked in red

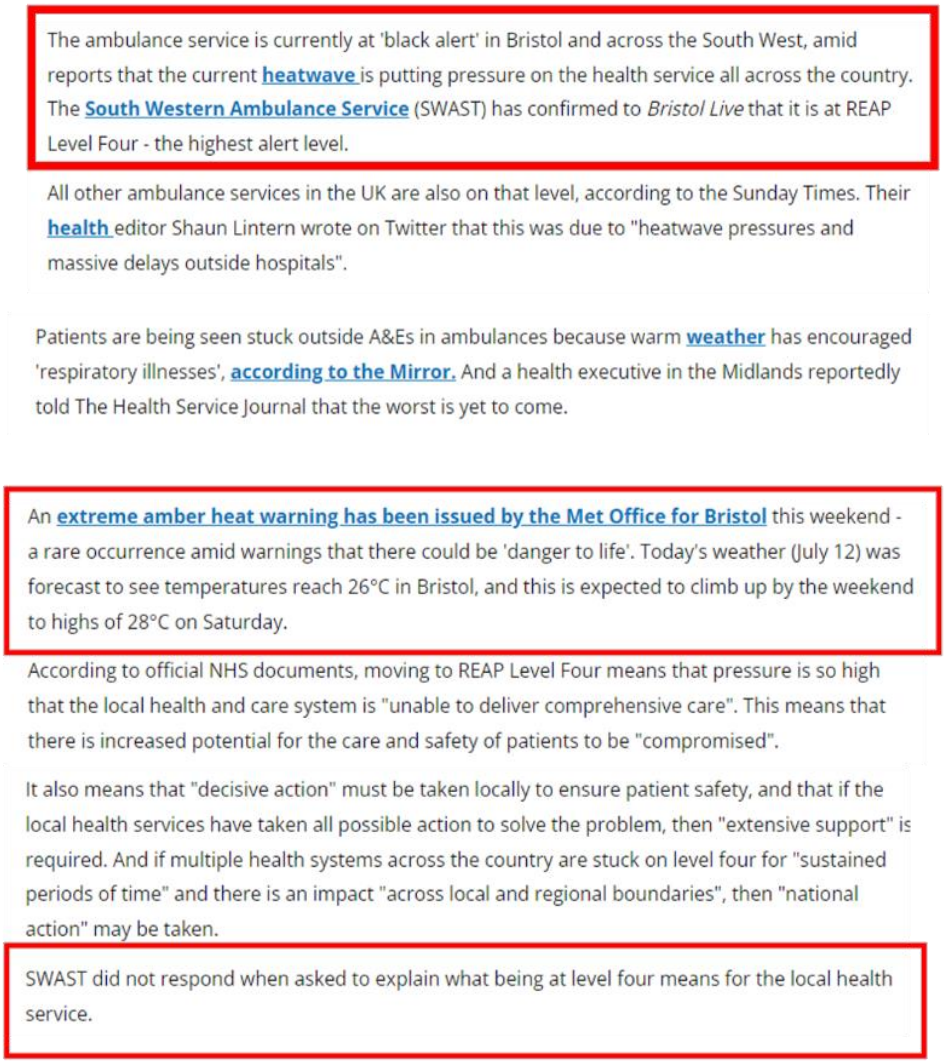
Ambulance service at 'black alert' in Bristol as 'heatwave pressures' blamed

All ambulance services across the UK have reached their highest alert level

NEWS By Sam Elliott-Gibbs & JJ Donoghue

15:45, 12 JUL 2022 | UPDATED 15:48, 12 JUL 2022

Bookmark Comments 6



The ambulance service is currently at 'black alert' in Bristol and across the South West, amid reports that the current **heatwave** is putting pressure on the health service all across the country. The **South Western Ambulance Service** (SWAST) has confirmed to *Bristol Live* that it is at REAP Level Four - the highest alert level.

All other ambulance services in the UK are also on that level, according to the Sunday Times. Their **health** editor Shaun Lintern wrote on Twitter that this was due to "heatwave pressures and massive delays outside hospitals".

Patients are being seen stuck outside A&Es in ambulances because warm **weather** has encouraged 'respiratory illnesses', **according to the Mirror.** And a health executive in the Midlands reportedly told The Health Service Journal that the worst is yet to come.

An **extreme amber heat warning has been issued by the Met Office for Bristol** this weekend - a rare occurrence amid warnings that there could be 'danger to life'. Today's weather (July 12) was forecast to see temperatures reach 26°C in Bristol, and this is expected to climb up by the weekend to highs of 28°C on Saturday.

According to official NHS documents, moving to REAP Level Four means that pressure is so high that the local health and care system is "unable to deliver comprehensive care". This means that there is increased potential for the care and safety of patients to be "compromised".

It also means that "decisive action" must be taken locally to ensure patient safety, and that if the local health services have taken all possible action to solve the problem, then "extensive support" is required. And if multiple health systems across the country are stuck on level four for "sustained periods of time" and there is an impact "across local and regional boundaries", then "national action" may be taken.

SWAST did not respond when asked to explain what being at level four means for the local health service.

Findings such as this add to fears that journalists employed by the big, national publishers are being favoured for their news aggregation (or content curation) and digital trend spotting skills over the more traditional ones (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2018; Lee et al., 2014; Phillips, 2011; Tandoc, 2014, 2015; Whittington, 2020) but as Anderson (2013b) pointed out "aggregation is a radically hybrid form of newswork that promiscuously crosses occupational boundaries" (p. 1020). He argued (2013a) that aggregation, as a passive form of newsgathering, is a form of second order news work (much like editing, design and layout) whereas news reporting should hold primary position in a news organisation. According to Firmstone (2024):

> Debates about the consequences of the widespread proliferation of digitally aggregated and curated news are therefore a continuation of deep-rooted critiques of newsgathering practices

that are reliant on second-hand information and are seen as a threat to independent journalism and, by extension, the democratic qualities of news. (p. 73)

The satirical publication *Private Eye* (2024c) noted the practice employed by Reach of "recycling the material from its own back catalogues" by republishing articles by former staff and not paying them despite using their bylines "they had, however, gained a number of glaring mistakes during re-editing—the latter done possibly by AI, given that Reach titles don't consistently label the increasing number of stories produced (or reproduced) with the help of their in-house tool Gutenbot".

While it is apparent there is demand for SEO material my research shows there is a great deal of clumsiness, repetition, duplicated effort, plagiarising and inappropriate (for local media) focusing on non-local events.

4.5.4 Locality and Sources

I also looked at sources quoted, in relation to locality, (Table 4.11) as one of the key indicators which would reveal differences between mainstream and nonmainstream news organisations, as addressed in my research question.

Table 4.11: Local/non-local issue—mainstream/nonmainstream; format; and frequency

	Local issue	Non-local issue	Total
M/NM			
Mainstream	1308 (65.3%)	696 (34.7%)	2004 (100%)
Nonmainstream	406 (89.6%)	47 (10.4%)	453 (100%)
Format			
Print	609 (74.7%)	206 (25.3%)	815 (100%)
Online	895 (63.8%)	508 (36.2%)	1403 (100%)
Television	210 (87.9%)	29 (12.1%)	239 (100%)
Frequency			
Daily	1481 (66.7%)	739 (33.3%)	2220 (100%)
Monthly plus	233 (98.3%)	4 (1.7%)	237 (100%)
Total	1714 (69.8%)	743 (30.2%)	2457 (100%)

With this variable I was concerned with the local relevance of quoted sources and the results further consolidated the pattern which emerged in my analysis of item subject locality. Nonmainstream outlets, by their very nature, register a higher incidence of sources talking about local issues (89.6%)

than mainstream (65.3%) but, also, television (87.9%) and print (74.7%) are more locally focussed than online (63.8%). This indicates that search engine optimisation is a big factor in deteriorating local content and that BBC *Points West* favours conscripting local people to fill its airtime, as noted in the discussion on vox pops above.

4.5.5 Reputational Geography

In Chapter 5 I discuss how the Bristol media address marginalised communities in the city through the interviews I carried out with local news workers. The local media has historically had a difficult relationship with these communities, but this has changed with the introduction of community radio in the past 15 years or so, and, more recently, the Black Lives Matter protest and the pulling down of the statue of Colston, which local mainstream reporter Hamed said caused "an epiphany" within Reach, "nationally and locally". Reach launched a series of "passion-based" email newsletters in 2022 to focus on communities of interest and diversify its brand marketing. This was run by a 12-strong team (the Email Innovation Lab), with financial and technical backing from the Google Digital News Initiative (Kersley, 2022m; Maher & Ponsford, 2024; Sharman, 2021d). According to Reach Chief Audience Officer David Higgerson: "The launch of these bulletins will be the first of many as we supercharge our email offering to amplify our local journalism, and provide audiences with the content that matters the most to them" (Tobitt, 2023e).

In Bristol, as anywhere else, the maintenance of chronic social divisions through stratification and isolation (or social immobility) is linked to place (Crossley, 2017; Slater, 2013); and the alienating effects of absent voices and derogatory stereotypes in the media often boil down to representation of race or class, or a combination of the two, which are associated with certain parts of the city (Jones, 2020; Slater, 2018, 2021; Slater & Anderson, 2011; van Dijk, 1989; Wacquant, 2007, 2008, 2014; Wacquant, et al. 2014). For people living in the poorest areas of the city, such as St Paul's and Knowle West, their social ranking is deeply, psychologically embedded (Potter & Reicher, 1987; Slater & Anderson, 2011). One of the hidden injuries of class (and, likewise, race) stigma is the demoralising effect of the lived experience (Sennett & Cobb, 2023). I argue this is reinforced by the media, either through erasure, i.e. not covering communities, or stigmatisation (Wacquant, 2007, 2008, 2014; Wacquant et al. 2014), the conscious or unconscious labelling of "the Other" (Hall, 2013a, 2013b) or framing issues such as poverty as failures of individuals rather than applying a more systemic analysis (Moore, 2020). The following section looks at the coverage of local authority wards (and

neighbourhoods within wards, especially those associated with race and class—Clifton, St Paul's, Easton, Hartcliffe and Knowle West) within the city, noting the differences in under-reporting and stigmatising perceptions in both the mainstream and nonmainstream local media.

I was interested in coverage of individual wards, which is discussed next—firstly the amount of mentions of each ward during the sample period and then I look more closely at what this means for the poorer wards in terms of meeting critical information needs; under-representation, and negative representation.

4.5.6 Coverage at Ward Level

Breaking down a city's news to ward level is important when cultural differences and inequalities are defined by these areas. For my CA I took local authority wards to be the geographically smallest and lowest level of the local category (neighbourhoods were coded for the wards they are in). I only considered ward-level mentions in this part of the analysis, the three other local levels—sub-divisions (South Bristol; Central Bristol etc), the city as a whole, and regional—and the three non-local levels—national; international; no geographical reference—are looked at in detail below. I coded for 34 Bristol City Council (BCC) wards and the 11 surrounding town and parish councils which together make up Greater Bristol, 45 in total—these are listed in the coding manual in Appendix A. Ward-level coverage was based on mentions of locations, not story count, as several locations were often mentioned in a single story—for example, local media often compare house prices in different parts of the city.

The ward which received the most mentions was Central (64 overall; mainstream = 40 mentions; nonmainstream = 24). This was to be expected as this ward has the highest density of retail, leisure, business and tourist attractions, and has the highest employment, and crime rates in the city. Most of the news outlets I researched are also based in this ward. As mentioned in the previous chapter the Central ward is the location for major events and cultural venues—these were generally coded at the city level except for stories specifically related to physical locations, for example the Bristol Harbour Festival attracted thousands of people to the city over a weekend during the sample period, this was coded as Bristol, but related stories about a licencing application for a pop-up quayside bar and overflowing harbourside litter bins were coded at ward level. Four of the 45 Greater Bristol wards (St George Troopers Hill; St George West; Frampton Cotterell; and Pill and Easton-in-Gordano) received no mentions in the sample period. Filwood ward received the second highest number of mentions (59 overall; mainstream = 5 mentions; nonmainstream = 54) with the greater number of mentions being

from nonmainstream outlets, this is because Knowle West—one of the poorest parts of Bristol—is in this ward, and is covered by *The Knowledge*, which is produced by the Knowle West Media Centre on a quarterly basis. The editorial focus for this publication is dealt with in detail in the interview with the former editor in the next chapter. Filwood registered the second lowest turnout in the 2024 local council elections at 21.49% (only neighbouring Hartcliffe and Withywood, another poor ward, registered lower at 14.23%). The finding that Filwood is relatively well reported on, questions assumptions about correlations between news coverage and levels of deprivation and political disengagement (Hayes & Lawless, 2018, 2021), which is discussed in detail in the next section. Only some of the nonmainstream outlets cover the city as a whole and Table 4.12 compares their ward coverage with mainstream.

Table 4.12: Mentions of location of item at selected ward level among city-wide outlets (mainstream and selected nonmainstream)

Selected wards	Mentions of location (percentage within selected city-wide outlets)*							
	Mainstream outlets				Nonmainstream outlets			
	Bristol Post	Bristol Live	Bristol World	BBC Points West	Bristol Cable web	Bristol Cable print	The Bristolian	Bristol 24/7
Ashley	6 (6.5%)	14 (8%)	5 (7.7%)	1 (10%)	3 (14.3%)	1 (5.9%)	-	10 (12.7%)
B'minster	3 (3.3%)	9 (5.2%)	3 (4.6%)	-	1 (4.8%)	-	-	3 (3.8%)
B'ston and Ashley Down	1 (1.1%)	3 (1.7%)	-	-	-	-	-	3 (3.8%)
Brisl'ton East	2 (2.2%)	8 (4.6%)	1 (1.5%)	-	-	-	-	-
Brisl'ton West	4 (4.3%)	6 (3.4%)	4 (6.2%)	-	-	-	-	-
Central	10 (10.9%)	25 (14.4%)	5 (7.7%)	-	2 (9.5%)	-	2 (50%)	19 (24.1%)
Clifton	7 (7.6%)	10 (5.7%)	4 (6.2%)	-	1 (4.8%)	1 (5.9%)	1 (25%)	7 (8.9%)
Easton	2 (2.2%)	8 (4.6%)	2 (3.1%)	-	-	4 (23.5%)	-	3 (3.8%)
Eastville	2 (2.2%)	4 (2.3%)	3 (4.6%)	-	1 (4.8%)	1 (5.9%)	-	-
Filwood	2 (2.2%)	2 (1.1%)	1 (1.5%)	-	1 (4.8%)	4 (23.5%)	-	1 (1.3%)
Frome Vale	1 (1.1%)	3 (1.7%)	-	1 (10%)	-	-	-	-
Hartcliffe and W'wood	6 (6.5%)	6 (3.4%)	4 (6.2%)	3 (30%)	2 (9.5%)	-	-	2 (2.5%)

Hengrove and W'church Park	3 (3.3%)	3 (1.7%)	4 (6.2%)	1 (10%)	1 (4.8%)	-	-	-
Horfield	2 (2.2%)	4 (2.3%)	3 (4.6%)	2 (20%)	1 (4.8%)	-	-	-
Hotwells and H'side	13 (14.1%)	18 (10.3%)	7 (10.8%)	-	2 (9.5%)	1 (5.9%)	1 (25%)	9 (11.4%)
Knowle	7 (7.6%)	9 (5.2%)	5 (7.7%)	-	1 (4.8%)	-	-	2 (2.5%)
Lawrence Hill	5 (5.4%)	5 (2.9%)	2 (3.1%)	-	2 (9.5%)	4 (23.5%)	-	3 (3.8%)
S'ville	2 (2.2%)	7 (4%)	3 (4.6%)	-	1 (4.8%)	-	-	3 (3.8%)
W'bury-on-Trym and Henleaze	1 (1.1%)	4 (2.3%)	2 (3.1%)	-	-	1 (5.9%)	-	1 (1.3%)
Windmill Hill	2 (2.2%)	5 (2.9%)	1 (1.5%)	-	-	-	-	6 (7.6%)

** Note: Percentage of total does not add up to 100% as the 23 wards with fewer than ten mentions have been removed*

Key: B'minster = Bedminster; B'ston = Bishopston; Brisl'ton = Brislington; W'wood = Withywood; Whitchurch; H'side = Harbourside; S'ville = Southville; W'bury-on-Trym = Westbury-on-Trym

For *Bristol 24/7* Central received the greatest number of mentions, almost a quarter of this outlet's output—19 of 79 (24.1%); for this outlet the contiguous wards Hotwells and Harbourside (9, 11.4%) and Ashley (10, 12.7%) were also covered well. The former ward is the site of the Western Harbour redevelopment plan which got a lot of coverage during the sample period; and the latter featured in what's on round-ups and stories such as "How the Cost of Living is Affecting People in Bristol". It seems that Central and the neighbouring ward Hotwells and Harbourside receive the most mentions in most of the mainstream outlets for similar reasons. Clifton and Ashley are not far behind; the former is the most affluent part of the city, while the latter contains the poor area of St Paul's—coverage of positive and negative news at the ward level is discussed below. Ward-level coverage for the BBC is low, as *Points West* has a remit for covering a whole region in a half-hour daily slot, not just Bristol.

4.5.7 Ward Coverage—Critical Information Needs

I selected those stories relevant to the 34 Bristol City Council wards for their Critical Information Needs content. Table 4.13 shows those ward mentions where CINs were present. The number of ward references was greater than the number of stories because some stories featured more than one ward.

Table 4.13: CINs present for Bristol City Council wards by location mention

Bristol City Council wards mentioned		Critical Information Needs present	No Critical Information Needs	Total number of mentions
1	Ashley	39 (86.7%)	6 (13.3%)	45
2	Avonmouth and Lawrence Weston	4 (66.7%)	2 (33.3%)	6
3	Bedminster	18 (72%)	7 (28%)	25
4	Bishopston and Ashley Down	14 (70%)	6 (30%)	20
5	Bishopsworth	2 (100%)	-	2
6	Brislington East	6 (54.5%)	5 (45.5%)	11
7	Brislington West	13 (86.7%)	2 (13.3%)	15
8	Central	47 (73.4%)	17 (26.6%)	64
9	Clifton Down	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	5
10	Clifton	24 (72.7%)	9 (27.3%)	33
11	Cotham	2 (66.7%)	1 (33.3%)	3
12	Easton	19 (100%)	-	19
13	Eastville	16 (88.9%)	2 (11.1%)	18
14	Filwood	56 (94.9%)	3 (5.1%)	59
15	Frome Vale	24 (77.4%)	7 (22.6%)	31
16	Hartcliffe and Withywood	23 (95.8%)	1 (4.2%)	24
17	Henbury and Brentry	6 (66.7%)	3 (33.3%)	9
18	Hengrove and Whitchurch Park	12 (85.7%)	2 (14.3%)	14
19	Hillfields	2 (66.7%)	1 (33.1%)	3
20	Horfield	12 (92.3%)	1 (7.7%)	13
21	Hotwells and Harbourside	43 (84.3%)	8 (15.7%)	51
22	Knowle	33 (97.1%)	1 (2.9%)	34
23	Lawrence Hill	22 (84.6%)	4 (15.4%)	26
24	Lockleaze	5 (71.4%)	2 (28.6%)	7
25	Redland	4 (66.7%)	2 (33.3%)	6
26	Southmead	9(100%)	-	9
27	Southville	16 (84.2%)	3 (15.8%)	19
28	St George Central	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	4
29	St George Troopers Hill	-	-	-
30	St George West	-	-	-

31	Stockwood	2 (100%)	-	2
32	Stoke Bishop	-	2 (100%)	2
33	Westbury-on-Trym and Henleaze	22 (81.5%)	5 (18.5%)	27
34	Windmill Hill	14 (93.3%)	1 (6.7%)	15
Total		384 (82.9%)	79 (17.1%)	463

For all wards, bar one (Stoke Bishop, which was mentioned twice, and there were no CINs present), more than 50% of the mentions had CINs present, the average being 82.9%. The poorer wards I have highlighted all had high numbers of CINs—for Ashley (where St Paul's is located) 86.7% CINs were present in mentions; Easton, 100%; Filwood (where Knowle West is located, and is covered by *The Knowledge*), 94.9%; Hartcliffe and Withywood, 95.8%.

This shows these areas, when they are covered, are well served in the type of information necessary for citizens and community members to participate in the civic and democratic lives of where they make their homes (Friedland, 2012; Napoli, et al., 2017, 2018), but it should be remembered that CINs do not discriminate between positive and negative news, which is covered in the next section on celebratory or disorder content.

4.5.8 Ward Coverage—Celebratory or Disorder

Chapter 3 discussed in detail the coding for a good news/bad news variable adapted from the Leeds study (Coleman et al., 2016) which had three, single-code, options—celebratory; neither celebratory nor disorder; disorder. It was informed by that study's binary definition—positive-active/negative-passive, i.e. reporting what people are *doing now* (such as cultural events) as opposed to the terrible things that have *happened to* people (such as crime and accidents) (p. 42, emphasis in original).

Table 4.14: Celebratory or disorder by mainstream/nonmainstream; format; and frequency

	Celebratory	Neither celebratory nor disorder	Disorder	Total number of mentions
Mainstream/nonmainstream				
M	550 (43.5%)	206 (16.3%)	508 (40.2%)	1264 (100%)
NM	254 (66%)	54 (14%)	77 (20%)	385 (100%)
Format				
Print	394 (54.7%)	132 (18.3%)	194 (26.9%)	720 (100%)
Online	361 (44.2%)	119 (14.6%)	336 (41.2%)	816 (100%)

Television	49 (43.4%)	9 (8%)	55 (48.7%)	113 (100%)
Frequency				
Daily	649 (46%)	217 (15.4%)	544 (38.6%)	1410 (100%)
Monthly plus	155 (64.9%)	43 (18%)	41 (17.2%)	239 (100%)
Total	804 (48.8%)	260 (15.8%)	585 (35.5%)	1649 (100%)

I found celebratory news in nonmainstream was higher (66%) than mainstream (43.5%) (Table 4.14) —also, television showed the lowest figure for neither celebratory nor disorder (8%), which may be an indication of the particular news values associated with *Points West*, and the delivery of its presenters in linking segments (along the lines of "I'm sure you'll join with us here in wishing **** a speedy recovery. And now for happier news, which is guaranteed to bring a smile to your face!"). The higher nonmainstream celebratory figure is likely to be a confirmation of the observation made by Williams et al. (2015) that hyperlocal sites frequently publish "quite uncontroversial information about everyday life and activity in their communities" (pp. 691). When I spoke to the former editor of the Knowle West-based *The Knowledge* she stressed the publication's role in giving positive help and advice to people living in the poor community and the need to boost the image of the area. The solutions journalism stories favoured by the *Cable*, and others by *Bristol 24/7*, were also coded for their positive orientation, despite their subject matter—such as a scheme to help prison inmates launch a record label.

Print and the monthly plus outlets also featured celebratory news more highly at 54.7% and 64.9%. Nonmainstream media had a lower percentage of news with a disorder focus at 20% compared to 40.2% for mainstream. How this was broken down into outlets can be seen in Table 4.15.

Table 4.15: Celebratory or disorder by outlet

Outlet	Celebratory	Neither celebratory nor disorder	Disorder	Total
Bristol Post	239 (49.7%)	89 (18.5%)	153 (31.8%)	481 (100%)
Bristol Live	210 (39.6%)	64 (12.1%)	256 (48.3%)	530 (100%)
Bishopston Voice print	25 (62.5%)	10 (25%)	5 (12.5%)	40 (100%)
Fishponds Voice web	6 (66.7%)	-	3 (33.3%)	9 (100%)
Fishponds Voice print	25 (64.1%)	5 (12.8%)	9 (23.1%)	39 (100%)

Henleaze and Westbury Voice print	26 (65%)	9 (22.5%)	5 (12.5%)	40 (100%)
South Bristol Voice print	26 (57.8%)	14 (31.1%)	5 (11.1%)	45 (100%)
Bristol Cable web	4 (40%)	2 (20%)	4 (40%)	10 (100%)
Bristol Cable print	11 (50%)	4 (18.2%)	7 (31.8%)	22 (100%)
BBC Points West	49 (43.4%)	9 (8%)	55 (48.7%)	113 (100%)
The Bristolian web	1 (20%)	-	4 (80%)	5 (100%)
The Bristolian print	-	-	9 (100%)	9 (100%)
Bristol 24/7	79 (76%)	8 (7.7%)	17 (16.3%)	104 (100%)
Bristol World	52 (37.1%)	44 (31.4%)	44 (31.4%)	140 (100%)
Bradley Stoke Journal	2 (50%)	-	2 (50%)	4 (100%)
Stoke Gifford Journal	2 (66.7%)	-	1 (33.3%)	3 (100%)
The Knowledge web	5 (45.5%)	1 (9.1%)	5 (45.5%)	11 (100%)
The Knowledge print	42 (95.5%)	1 (2.3%)	1 (2.3%)	44 (100%)
Total	804 (48.8%)	260 (15.8%)	585 (35.5%)	1649 (100%)

When the amount of celebratory and disorder news per outlet was compared, in Table 4.15, *The Bristolian* stands out as being, almost, wholly critical. This is no surprise given its satirical focus. The online outlets *Bristol Live* and *Bristol World* have the next lowest scores for celebratory content (39.6% and 37.1% respectively)—this is due to both responding quickly to breaking news about accidents; having regular updates on the ongoing heatwave; and online strategies which favour clicks from negative stories. In contrast *Bristol 24/7*'s celebratory stories make up 76% of its output, due to its reliance on what's on articles and related advertising. The ward-level Voice series and *The Knowledge* have the highest percentage of celebratory stories because of their community focus—the supportive community roles of both these outlets is discussed in detail in the interviews in the next chapter.

Table 4.16: Celebratory or disorder for selected wards by location mention

Selected ward	Celebratory	Neither celebratory nor disorder	Disorder	Total number of mentions
Ashley	18 (40%)	-	27 (60%)	45
Central	36 (56.3%)	8 (12.5%)	20 (31.3%)	64

Clifton	17 (51.5%)	3 (9.1%)	13 (39.4%)	33
Easton	8 (42.1%)	2 (10.5%)	9 (47.4%)	19
Filwood	48 (81.4%)	4 (6.8%)	7 (11.9%)	59
Hartcliffe and Withywood	8 (33.3%)	1 (4.2%)	15 (62.5%)	24
Hotwells and Harbourside	17 (33.3%)	7 (13.7%)	27 (52.9%)	51
Knowle	10 (29.4%)	2 (5.9%)	22 (64.7%)	34
Lawrence Hill	9 (34.6%)	10 (38.5%)	7 (26.9%)	26
Westbury-on-Trym and Henleaze	22 (81.5%)	2 (7.4%)	3 (11.1%)	27

Table 4.16 shows the ward with the highest number of celebratory mentions was Filwood with 81.4%—this was due to *The Knowledge*'s coverage of Knowle West. The wards with the most disorder mentions were Ashley (60%); Easton (47.4%); Hartcliffe and Withywood (62.5%); Hotwells and Harbourside (52.9%); and Knowle (64.7%)—accidents, crime, planning, housing and education failings feature highly in these areas. Among the Ashley disorder stories were a café closing due to drunken behaviour on waste ground nearby; a funding threat to an 'inadequate' school; and a community bee garden removed from a bus stop. For Easton, these included a community group claiming a pothole-filled street is dangerous; and landlords cashing in on short-term lets. In Hartcliffe and Withywood there were vandals at a special school; Hotwells and Harbourside news was dominated by criticism of the Western Harbour redevelopment plans; and Knowle had several stories of a man dying after being hit by a car on his way to work.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter and the one following it are snapshots of the profound changes faced by local journalism. This chapter presented a CA of the news produced by nine mainstream and nonmainstream news organisations in Bristol over a two-week period, while the next chapter explores normative role conceptions of Bristol's news workers, their aspirations towards holding power to account and providing social value, and challenges to their autonomy. It is the contention of this thesis that the differences between the various forms of local journalism depend more on structurally determined organisational demands and hierarchy of influences, than the agency of frontline journalists. It is worth remembering that the three mainstream news organisations featured in this research (Reach, National World and the BBC) have seen strikes by staff, letters of no confidence in executive leadership, and criticism from the National Union of Journalists over job cuts, reductions in locally produced content, management-

imposed changes in editorial direction, and the introduction of a commercially focused target scheme (with rewards and penalties). These issues are representative of the challenges to journalistic values and sense of autonomy within mainstream (hybrid—local *and* national) media and show the power of national business decision making over local outlets. They also show that frontline staff are willing to demonstrate resistance and solidarity in the face of these plans. The hierarchy of influence within these organisations is an illustration of the empirical difficulty of drawing connections between the role conceptions of local news workers and the content published by the news outlets they work for, nevertheless a CA does reveal different organisational priorities within the news ecosystem.

While there are perennial challenges in meeting normative critical information needs, and in maintaining community trust and social capital, in a city suffering from high levels of inequality, the mainstream media are increasingly relying on their national networks to cut costs, consolidate production and increase (non-geographically specific) audiences. But despite the fragility of the so-called news oasis there are reasons to be optimistic about the future of news in Bristol—the LDRS reporters have proved vital in sustaining public interest news in the city and, among both mainstream and nonmainstream media workers, there is a tenacity and determination to carry on providing news which supports community needs. While local journalism throughout the country is in an increasingly precarious position, the variety of business models in the Bristol news ecosystem shows innovation and capacity to provide both bridging (strengthening reputation *between* socially, culturally and economically diverse communities) and bonding (enhancing self-esteem *within* marginalised, stigmatised and stereotyped communities) social capital, which is valued by local audiences.

To some degree the CA also shows the necessity for a more nuanced approach to categorising local media, rather than the binary in my main research question—the difficulties of applying categories to the myriad varieties of local journalism has already been introduced in Section 1.2 and is explored more fully in Chapter 6. The analysis in this chapter provided a large-scale quantitative overview of content and showed differences in production values and use of limited resources between mainstream and nonmainstream; print, online and broadcast; daily and less frequent media, as well as city-wide/regional and ward-level community outlets. I found clear differences between mainstream and nonmainstream practices, but my analysis also revealed a more complex picture, where format, frequency and geographic reach also played a part.

The organisational differences can be seen most clearly in relation to productivity—the volume of news output—while community representation; episodic (negative, shallow) and thematic (in-depth, solutions-orientated) news; and geographic focus are strongly linked to format, frequency and reach. This chapter confirms the dominance of mainstream (nationally owned) media—in Bristol's case, the Reach-owned newspaper and website; National World website; and the public broadcaster, the BBC—in local journalism in the UK, both in amount (three quarters of the total news ecosystem content) and variety of output, and resources—including specialised reporters, such as courts and sport, and network-generated content. Local media such as these are agenda setters, have an historically important presence in the local news ecosystem, and draw the biggest audiences, but are also increasingly dependent on non-local content—only two thirds of the *Bristol Post*'s content is local, for example. While the combined content of the independent, locally owned media is small in comparison, both sectors show commitment to the normative (democratic and social) values of local journalism. Public interest news in the city is in a, relatively, healthy position not only due to the LDRS reporters, whose work is published in both mainstream and nonmainstream news organisations, but also because all the outlets employ dedicated and experienced hard news reporters, many of whom are cross-over journalists (ex-mainstream journalists working in nonmainstream media and retaining the news values of their former employers). This highlights one of the limitations of CA, in that a quantitative analysis can only tell part of the story—in the interviews I carried out in Phase 2, and discussed in the next chapter, several interviewees talked about the tendency for media in the city to leave the systems of power unchallenged; resource limitations to community coverage; the strained relationship with the local authority and local journalists, especially the LDRS reporters; and the homogenisation of the local news in the public interest (Boczkowski & de Santos, 2007) through the duplication of copy by multiple platforms.

I found, in line with other scholarship on source selection, that high status individuals dominated local news coverage (McCombs, 2005; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This was the case for both mainstream and nonmainstream, despite a media boycott of the mayor's press conferences. A factor in the high profile of the city's most powerful individuals, when compared to the visibility of the less powerful, was the work of the LDRS reporters and the duplication of their articles in both mainstream and nonmainstream media, as well as the retention of mainstream sourcing values by nonmainstream cross-over journalists. Also, some of the nonmainstream outlets cover several local authorities in the Greater Bristol area, so a higher number of councillors were quoted.

Previous research (Davies, 2009; Harrison, 2006; O'Neill & O'Connor, 2008) has highlighted concerns over the "passive journalist", over-reliant on single sources, which dominate the news agenda. My analysis showed a higher percentage of stories with multiple sources than these earlier studies, especially the online outlets. One of the factors for this may be the ease of copy and pasting from social media (Phillips, 2010; Spilsbury, 2018). Quoting multiple sources, while going someways to addressing visibility of diversity, does not necessarily enhance the democratic quality of the news content. Television coverage relied on (relatively low cost) vox pops with members of the public, but the subjects gave passive opinions rather than well-thought-out counter arguments, as other research has found (Cross, 2010; Lewis, 2004). In line with historical research into gender bias in news sourcing, I also found representation of women to be very low in both mainstream and nonmainstream media in Bristol, which probably reflects the gender makeup of the city's elite rather than selection values.

Networked copy by mainstream Reach and National World SEO and Trends Writers was the largest source of non-local, non-original, stale, duplicated or plagiarised, aggregated and news-agency-generated articles. This form of journalism relies heavily on copying and pasting quotes from commercial retailers, tabloid media, sister publications, and social media, with no, or minimal, local references added. Local BBC television shares a highly local focus with the nonmainstream media, but BBC local radio is increasingly being cutback, in terms of staff and airtime, and replaced by regionally and nationally produced content. It is the contention of this thesis that information subsidy such as networked production—which is not available to nonmainstream media—has become a more prominent feature of local news ecosystems through commercial pressures and economies of scale, and is a factor in alienating local audiences.

Advertorial is a significant revenue source for both mainstream and nonmainstream, and, for the latter, whose advertising partners tend to be non-profit rather than commercial enterprises—such as health centres, debt advisors, legal help, organisers of community activities—it also helps strengthen community support networks (Harte et al., 2019; Matthews & Hodgson, 2024). One of the benefits of *The Knowledge*, which local advertisers find valuable, is that it is delivered to all the households in the area, and, according to its former editor, whom I interviewed, advertorials also make the publication look "like a proper magazine".

A more nuanced approach to measuring the value and relevance of public interest news, especially in relation to different communities, can be found by utilising a critical information needs

framework (local, original, democratically and socially vital news) and mapping techniques which measure coverage at a ward level. CINs accommodate a range of normative perspectives and priorities (Napoli at al., 2017) and include those forms of information which are necessary to live safe and healthy lives; which provide access to educational, employment and business opportunities; and enable participation in civic and democratic community life (Friedland et al., 2012). The more commercially orientated mainstream (Reach and National World) and nonmainstream (*Bristol 24/7*) media had less content, as a percentage of overall output, which met CIN criteria, than the public broadcaster and non-commercial nonmainstream outlets. Also, the nonmainstream, ward-level media (*The Knowledge* and the Voice network) were best placed for CIN content due to their (geographically) hyperlocal focus.

Coverage at ward level showed central Bristol featured highly for those city-wide outlets with a what's on focus. Coverage of other, poorer wards depended on dedicated ward-level media and the (positive or negative) nature of the stories. When the news at ward-level was considered for its celebratory or disorder focus, nonmainstream media had a higher percentage of celebratory news — two thirds compared to less than half for mainstream. Nonmainstream media had a lower percentage of news with a disorder focus — half that found in mainstream. This is a reflection of a deliberate editorial focus in areas which suffer from territorial stigmatisation (Harte et al., 2019), but also most of the nonmainstream media were published on a monthly, or less frequent, basis and featured fewer stories about sudden, quickly resolved and disruptive events.

A quantitative CA can only go so far in painting a picture of the current state of local journalism in Bristol, so the next chapter attempts, qualitatively, to answer my second sub-RQ on differences in role conceptions relating to normative journalistic aspirations between mainstream and nonmainstream news workers, including cross-over and former journalists, through discourse and thematic analysis of interviews. It addresses professional boundaries and views on expertise (professional skills, especially in relation to holding power to account), duty (social value and responsibility to marginalised communities) and autonomy (working within constraining influences).

Chapter 5: Mainstream and Nonmainstream Journalism in a News Oasis 2: Themes and Discourses around News Worker Boundaries

5.1 Introduction

This chapter draws on semi-structured interviews which covered the practices, motivations and normative role conceptions of, and the challenges faced by, past and present mainstream, nonmainstream, cross-over and LDRS journalists in Bristol in reporting news in the public interest and covering the city's diverse communities. The chapter adds a qualitative dimension to this thesis and examines themes and discourses relating to holding power to account (democracy), social responsibility (community) and organisational constraints (hierarchy of influences) in a news ecosystem lauded for its variety, diversity and plurality. The industry is contending with a series of conjunctural upheavals — economically (failing business models), conceptually (competing definitions of journalism, its status and its democratic and social purpose) and professionally (changing newsroom practices). According to Örnebring (2013), these changes, over a very short period of time have "so thoroughly undermined the traditional institutional basis of journalism that the collective, organised and institutional character of newswork *cannot but* come to the fore and be made explicit" (p. 49, emphasis in original). The collectivity found by Örnebring is a form of occupational closure (p. 49), and an expression of an underlying and shared professional ethos as seen in claims to professional legitimacy and distinction from amateurs relating to *expertise*, *duty* and *autonomy* (p. 35).

These three aspects relate to the purpose and ethics of local journalism, and professional boundaries, and are used to organise the discourse analysis below, however, the word "amateur" is used in a broader sense than Örnebring's, to encompass "outsiders" to local newsrooms. These outsiders include parachute/tourist journalists — who are not local, do not possess "lived experience" or affective attachment, and are not embedded — and management/owners of mainstream media — who influence newsroom practices but are not locally based, and frequently lack professional journalistic expertise, experience and attachment to the normative democratic and social role conceptions of local journalism.

An understanding of a shared professional ethos among local journalists adds to the contention of this thesis that the boundaries between mainstream and nonmainstream media can be, to a large extent, better understood by examining business goals and management hierarchies (structure), rather than frontline journalistic values and practices (agency). My research has been informed by a need to

investigate local journalism as a "necessarily normative phenomena" (what journalism *ought to be*) with an acknowledgment that it is conducted by real people in real world situations (what journalism *is*) (Nielsen, 2017, p. 1252). Coleman et al. (2016), in their Leeds research, recognised their interviewees' statements, when compared with the content analysis they carried out, "might not correspond in all respects with the kinds of news the services actually produce" (p. 118). Identifying a "consensual occupational ideology" (Deuze, 2005) can shed light on the gap between journalists' role conceptions (discourses around professional identity and goals) and role enactment (manifest content), although, as already noted, there was a methodological and empirical difficulty in exploring a connection between the two, due to a reliance on non-local and non-original networked content by the mainstream outlets.

I interviewed one of the people behind *The Bristolian* who voiced an anti-professionalism critique, which, Örnebring contends (2013), is often behind a crusading and independent image and a championing of innate, rather than taught, journalistic skills such as intuition, cunning and tenacity (p. 37). In *The Bristolian*'s case, though, the interviewee thought most journalists "are pretty conservative, and just want a quiet life", adding that they create a professional mystique around a job where "all you have to do is find out stuff and write it down. That's it, isn't it? That's the fundamentals of journalism". While *The Bristolian*'s comments contain an element of truth, I argue that local journalists, while voicing normative aspirations about the democratic and social value of journalism, especially in the examples I uncovered in the Bristol news ecosystem, are hampered less by an inherent conservatism and more by internal organisational structures (Sjøvaag, 2013), the external difficulties of holding power to account and gaining the trust of marginalised communities.

While mainstream is often characterised as being profit-orientated, and nonmainstream as having higher ethical and social goals (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2023), it is the contention of this thesis that social value is now prized by journalists working in both sectors, at least discursively. This might not have always been the case. Harcup (2005) quoted veteran Fleet Street journalist, Roy Greenslade, whose experience of being a trainee, local reporter in the 1960s was not motivated by an aspiration "to do good works" or "to right wrongs" but that "most of us were seeking personal fame and fortune" (p. 362). This is less likely to be the case with local mainstream journalists now as precarity, low wages and churnalism (Davies, 2009) are a large part of young reporters' working lives (Spilsbury, 2021, 2022, 2023). In white-collar jobs, such as these, social value has become an important motivating factor in the face of relative wage deflation and attenuated career paths (Graeber, 2019).

For Sjøvaag (2013) there is a chimeric or fluid nature to the notion of journalistic autonomy (p. 155). While this is highly valued as a signifier of independence and indicator of high ethical standards, and hence trustworthiness and authority (Singer, 2007), it is difficult to achieve in practice. According to Sjøvaag (op. cit.) autonomy "is restricted at the political, economic and organisational levels of news production, negotiated at the editorial level, and exercised at the level of practice" (p. 155). Singer (op. cit.) noted the hierarchical nature of a news work environment means decisions about final news content are often made by editors rather than individual journalists, and concluded that "while the profession itself seeks to exercise autonomy from outside control, individual professionals actually give up personal autonomy to a significant degree" (p. 81). Tandoc et al. (2013) found routine influence, "the effects of news deadlines, supervisors in the organisation and even colleagues in the organisation" (p. 551), to have the strongest effect on the news produced, rather than much-vaunted autonomy—the incentive being passive compliance and a favourable reaction from other group members.

The first section of this chapter establishes the research aims in relation to the thesis RQ and sub-RQs, and explains the analytical method behind identifying interpretative repertoires around expertise, duty and autonomy at work in the Bristol news ecosystem—TA and DA (as described in Chapter 3: Section 3.6). The following section goes over the theoretical context of the analyses for regarding journalism as a profession, and its boundary challenges. The rest of the chapter is devoted to a discussion of the discourses and themes in a changing journalistic landscape.

5.2 Aims, Analytical Method and Theoretical Context

5.2.1 Research Aims and Analytical Method

This thesis is an investigation into the ideological and organisational differences between local mainstream and nonmainstream journalists and news organisations in the Bristol new ecosystem, and this formed the basis of my RQ:

> RQ: To what extent, and in what ways, does coverage of community and public interest news in the Bristol news ecosystem differ between local mainstream and local nonmainstream journalists and news organisations?

Two sub-RQs were addressed in turn by quantitative data gathered from a CA of news produced over two weeks (discussed in Chapter 4); and a qualitative TA and DA of semi-structured interviews with 18

mainstream and nonmainstream media practitioners, past and present (as listed in Table 3.4 in Chapter 3), which is the subject of this chapter. The second sub-RQ was:

> Sub-RQ2. How do news workers in Bristol see their roles and how do these role conceptions depend on professional, cultural and social norms, and the institutional practices and commercial imperatives of the organisations they work for, whether mainstream or nonmainstream?

The two findings chapters (Chapters 4 and 5) act in a complementary way because, as mentioned in Section 3.2, CA gives an overall picture of news output, while DA allows the researcher "to uncover the unnoticed, perhaps unconscious, social framework of reference which shaped the manifest content" (Hall, 2021c, p. 146).

In Section 3.2 I discussed the theoretical underpinning of what I hoped to achieve through TA and CDA and Section 3.6 detailed the methods used—the identification of themes and discourses in interview transcripts around public interest news (democratic role conceptions), community news (social responsibility role conceptions) and constraints (hierarchy of influences) using the three factors Örnebring identified as professional boundary markers, expertise, duty and autonomy. Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language, but also the means by which social groups exercise power (Atkinson & Tallon, 2023; Deacon et al., 2021; Hall, 2013a; Watt & Jacobs, 2000; Wetherell & Potter, 1988). Discourse is more than just the expression of ideology, it is a strategy employed to create different kinds of effect (Bryman, 2016, p. 532) and a way of accomplishing acts, "such as attributing blame, presenting oneself in a particular way, or getting an argument across" (Gill, 2000, as cited in Bryman, 2016, p. 534), as such DA is used here to explore the conceptual boundaries, and their strategic importance, between past and present mainstream, nonmainstream, cross-over and LDRS journalists.

Following Firmstone (2016), my research was underpinned by four normative functions "commonly attributed to news in liberal democratic theory as a measure of democratic value"—informational (informing and educating citizens about local issues); representative (representing the voice of citizens); watchdog (holding governing bodies and organisations to account on behalf of citizens); and campaigning (proactively campaigning on matters of public interest) (p. 929). These are not discrete categories, there is often overlap between them and some of these functions have social, as well as democratic value—according to Friedland (2001), a communicatively integrated community

depends on both a functioning democracy *and* strong communities. The theoretical context for identifying the discourses which express these normative values is the subject of the next section.

5.2.2 Theoretical Context: Distinction from Amateurs

The main theoretical context for this chapter was Örnebring's (2013) "*three core elements* of the professional project", the claims to professional legitimacy and distinction from amateurs (p. 38, emphasis in original): *expertise* (specialist knowledge, editorial judgement, objective watchdog role, holding power to account); *duty* (community champion and engagement, trust, reciprocity, social value, ethical codes and professional principles); and *autonomy* (in relation to internal and external constraints).

Debate over the status of journalism as a profession, craft or occupation has occupied academics and practitioners for more than 100 years, and, according to Tumber and Prentoulis (2005) "as we enter the 21st century, it seems that public criticism, alongside the self-doubts within the 'profession' continues to leave journalism in an uncertain position regarding its status and definition" (p. 72). While an objective definition is elusive, "professionalism" as a sociological construct, is linked to representation of special power and prestige (Singer, 2007, p. 81), which, Singer (ibid.) claims, "most journalists consider themselves professionals in the important sense that they feel loyalty to the ideals of a profession and a particular assortment of shared norms". This includes an overarching commitment to public service and social value, which is "a foundational ethic for all professions" (p. 81).

It is important to realise that, during a time of financial instability, job losses and technological challenges in the industry, professional identity is a resource to cope with change (Grubenmann & Meckel, 2017; Meyen & Riesmeyer, 2012; Ryfe, 2009a, 2009b; Witschge & Nygren, 2009). This was apparent as I researched a news ecosystem in flux, where the permeability of professional boundaries showed a pragmatic reaction to emerging opportunities and blocked avenues, most evident when experienced mainstream journalists were made redundant and, subsequently, launched nonmainstream ventures (the Voice network and *Bristol 24/7* in my sample). These cross-over journalists (Harcup, 2005), who see their age, experience and expertise (Nikunen, 2014) as invaluable assets in carrying out their jobs, present an interesting variation, in that they continue to express high professional (traditional mainstream) standards in their subsequent roles while calling into question the changing journalistic goals, and practices, of a new generation of mainstream journalists and managers.

There are competing discursive constructions around seeing journalism as a profession (Reardon, 2016, p. 942). For Deuze (2005) the ideal-typical values which give legitimacy and credibility to journalists are: providing a public service, as watchdogs and disseminators of information; displaying objectivity; being autonomous and independent; having a sense of immediacy; and acting ethically (pp. 446-447), while McNair (2009) also notes the normative expectations of journalism in a democracy as being the primary source of news about where people live and acting with critical scrutiny; and adds representative of the voice of citizens; and trusted community champions (p. 240). Whereas Mellado (2015) lists six overlapping, but not mutually exclusive, empirical dimensions of journalistic role performance: intervention, watchdog, loyal, service, 'infotainment' and civic. According to Heider et al. (2005), the public also expects local media to be a good neighbour, unbiased and accurate, and fast (p. 961). Speed in relation to local journalism needs to be qualified, as Phillips (2012) notes, the value of some information, especially that relating to financial investments, is judged by its immediacy but pre-digital media, with early evening, weekly, monthly or quarterly publication/broadcast times and working in a monopolistic environment could afford to break news in a timely, rather than urgent or hasty, fashion. For contemporary digital media, though, looking for clicks, and competing with news aggregators (Anderson, 2013b), speed has become a significant factor in business strategies and a valued skill during a time of changing news practices (Nikunen, 2014). This need reduces the time journalists can spend on researching and writing stories (Phillips, 2012; Usher, 2016) and is a factor in the ("golden age") discourses expressed by the news workers I interviewed in relation to constraints on autonomy and the differences between mainstream and nonmainstream goals, as discussed below.

Throughout this thesis I have argued that local journalism should be regarded as a specialised form of journalism, that journalistic authority on a local or hyperlocal level depends on trust (Firmstone et al., 2022; Hamer, 2006; Robinson, 2023; Ross Arguedas et al., 2023) and bonding and bridging social capital (Friedland, 2012; Putnam, 2000) in relation to race, class and/or lived experience; which is gained through authenticity, reciprocity (Borger et al., 2016; Harte et al., 2017, 2019), and a respect for, and informed knowledge of, the affective attachments of place- and identity-based communities (Massey 1992, 1995; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2023, 2024). As Radcliffe (2023) found in writing about a community-centred approach for local media, being a "good neighbour" is as highly valued an attribute as being a watchdog, or as a "carrier of official knowledge" (Cottle, 2003, p. 11). For Heider et al. (2005) being a good neighbour includes "caring about your community, highlighting interesting people and groups in the community, understanding the local community, and offering solutions to community problems" (p.

963). Radcliffe (op. cit.) contends this can be demonstrated not just by the type of stories covered, but also *how* stories are covered, which requires a reconceptualisation of the idea of neutral professionalism (Robinson, 2023).

Unlike a detached national news media—which, according to Deuze (2006), regard their audience as invisible (p. 267)—local journalists are often more aware of their immediate ethical and social responsibilities (Borden, 2010; Singer, 2007) and the consequences of their actions, as they often inhabit the same social worlds as local contacts and audiences (Frost, 2006). That is not to say national journalists blithely ignore these, but local journalists pay more attention to nuance, subtlety, local systems of power and historical context, because trust is fragile and there is the danger that years of gradually building this up can be wiped out with an ill-judged headline (Kakar, 2018) or clumsy stereotyping (*Bristolian*, 2019; Cork, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c).

5.3 Discourses Within a Changing Journalistic Landscape

5.3.1 Normative Role Conceptions of Local Journalists

Here I discuss examples which indicate a common interpretative repertoire shared by mainstream and nonmainstream news workers regarding overall normative roles for local journalism—the subsequent sections look more closely at the differences I found regarding expertise, duty and autonomy. Martin Booth has been the editor of the nonmainstream *Bristol 24/7* for several years, after having worked for the mainstream *Bristol Post*, and his views on the role of local journalism show the need to consider it in relation to democracy *and* the community (Friedland, 2001), including viewing it as an information resource, representative, watchdog, and source of entertainment (McNair, 2009). When asked about the importance of local journalism, he said:

> I think to inform, first of all. To be a central part of the community. To ask questions. To entertain. I like *Bristol 24/7* to be a bit quirky, so I want people to be able to enjoy reading our articles. We can have fun with that. I think that people like to know what's going on in their city. What's going on down their street. So, we've got an extremely important job to tell people what's going on, and that's everything from, you know, a little independent small theatre company performing in a local park to a murder trial. It's just about lifting the lid on what's happening within communities and celebrating the good as well as questioning the bad.

Among the rhetorical tools Booth uses are phrases which relate directly to his intended audience (through the use of "their") and where they live, such as "central part of the community", "what's going on in their city ... down their street" and the reference to a local park help in the construction of a particular interpretative repertoire that is related to an affective attachment to place-based community (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2023). Discourses around the roles of information resource and watchdog are also present in the phrases "to inform", "to ask questions", "people like to know", "we've got an extremely important job to tell people what's going on" and "lifting the lid". Quantification rhetoric is also present in the use of adjectives relating to size and relative position: "*central part* of the community", "*extremely* important job", and "a *little* independent *small* theatre company" (Bryman, 2016, p. 537). There is also an acknowledgement of the necessity of balancing within a professional ethos "celebrating the good as well as questioning the bad", without qualifying what is "good" and what is "bad". Why this is sometimes problematic for local media is illustrated by a *24/7* article on the benefits of gentrifying one of Bristol's "run-down" neighbourhoods (Emanuel, 2015), and the critical response to this from the *Bristol Cable* (Turner, 2015).

Two other interviewees, one from local mainstream media and the other representing nonmainstream, employed similar discourses about the value of local journalism to local audiences. For Alex Seabrook, LDRS reporter: "It's got to be interesting, entertaining, and tell you something important that you didn't already know. Yeah, that's it, really," but added "and you've got to want to read it. It's got to not be a drag." It is interesting to note the emphasis on entertaining audiences, which is also evident in Booth's list of news values (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). Seabrook also includes geographically relevant democracy "it's gotta inform you about what local politics is doing in your area" (Armstrong, 2017; Barclay et al., 2022; Chakelian, 2019; Davies, 2023; Gao, et al., 2020; Heese, et al., 2022; Howells, 2015; Nielsen 2015b; Postans, 2022a, 2022b; Ramsey & Moore, 2016; Starr, 2009; Stewart & Murray, 2023; Whittingdale, 2019).

Alex Turner, of *The Bristol Cable*, also expressed similar normative values but added that it is helpful for local journalism to "involve people ... who ... care about it", the need for "a strong local angle" and "the kind of characters that bring it to life" which shows an understanding of a closer, reciprocal (Harte et al., 2017), relationship with audiences. The use of the words "involve", "care" and "bring to life" show the importance of an emotive discourse and affective attachment (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019b), which nonmainstream media can capitalise on through embeddedness and in

engaging, and building trust, with marginalised communities (Robinson, 2023; Vos & Hanusch, 2023; Wenzel, 2023b). Turner also added: "challenging things that people have problems with in their local area … we've done some good campaigns at the *Cable*", which demonstrates the community champion role identified by McNair (2009) and others as being important for local democracy.

As mentioned, in some ways it is unhelpful to see mainstream and nonmainstream local journalism as opposed poles firmly separated by a professional boundary. This is equally true of audiences—one audience is not solely interested in local politics, while another is not solely interested in community activities. The dichotomy rests within the various needs of audiences, and, as journalists tailor their roles to these, they move along a spectrum of objectivity. Underlying the discourses therefore is a conception of the particular audiences (and, in the case of local journalism, their place-based affiliations), and their CINs (Napoli et. al., 2015, 2017, 2018), which journalists seek to address. It should be remembered that CINs, as conceived by Napoli and colleagues, need to be locally relevant in the first instance. For both mainstream and nonmainstream news workers interviewed, construction of the audience informed editorial decisions in two ways: what the audience *wants* to read about, and what the audience *ought* to read about, which combines commercial considerations and normative notions of public service (Reardon, 2013, p. 180). According to Reardon the audience is therefore a practical ideology for justifying news practice and news values and is fundamental in bolstering category entitlement as it serves "to endorse the speaker's professionalism and faithfulness to the ethics of journalism" (p. 180). One of the main findings of the CA discussed in Chapter 4 related to the geographic relevance of the content analysed, and, as discussed below, it is the contention of this thesis that city/regional-level (mainstream and nonmainstream) media have a fundamentally different audience orientation and social role to ward-level (nonmainstream) media, the former helping bridging (important for reputational geographies) between diverse communities (as well as helping bonding within) within the city, whereas the latter is concerned solely with bonding (important for community self-esteem) and limited geographic focus. This helps see the smaller initiatives as being in a better position to capitalise on social capital, trust and reciprocity.

High-status elites and low-status masses are two groups with fundamentally distinct, and often opposed, goals and access to power, whose experiences of being in the public eye often have radically different consequences (Liu, et al., 2018; Wenzel et al., 2018), and, as Ross (2007) notes, in the eyes of the media, "citizens are simply not as equal as government spokespeople" (p. 454). The elite have high status due to influence and authority (Douglas & Phillips, 2023; O'Neill & O'Connor, 2008; Phillips,

2015a; Williams et al., 2015)—they are primary definers (Hall et al., 2013), "official" voices and opinion leaders (Katz, 1957; Lazarsfeld, et al., 1948). Whereas ordinary citizens, even dissenting voices among them, lack the influence and authority necessary to change the status quo, except under exceptional circumstances. Mellado (2015) noted "role performance can be seen as an outcome of dynamic negotiations" (p. 597), and so for local journalists source selection requires learning and deploying different strategies, building up different types of social capital and a reflexivity regarding impartiality, balance and objectivity (Robinson & Culver, 2019; Ward, 2010).

"Expertise", discussed next, is the area in which news workers express discourses about the skills and knowledge necessary for conducting their watchdog roles and dealing with powerful figures within the city, where objectivity, consideration of the democratic importance of local journalism and expectations of normative/professional requirements, judgements and goals are themes. Affective attachment to place-based community and geography (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2023) was a recurring theme in the interviews, and distinguishes local journalism from the national variety—this is looked at more closely through the public service discourses considered under "duty" below. Cohen (1963, as cited in Hellmueller & Mellado, 2015) identified two roles as defining journalism: the "neutral reporter" and the "reporter as participant", and this dichotomy illustrates the contradictions inherent in role conception, especially concerning objectivity and autonomy. How freely journalists move between neutrality and participation depends not only on the nature of the news item but also organisational practices and routines, which may in turn be adapted pragmatically. With "autonomy", the final area to be investigated, news workers talked about internal and external influences (Gallagher, 1982; Reese, 2001, 2016) on their ability to carry out their normative roles, which revealed discourses about the gap between role conception and role enactment (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017).

5.3.2 Discourses of Professional Legitimacy and Distinction from Amateurs 1: Expertise

The job of reporting public interest news, and the normative role of holding power to account (watchdog), could be thought of as a public service and examined under "duty" below, but the examples here have been chosen to illustrate discourses around "expertise", knowledge or skills as indicators of legitimacy and distinction from amateurs. As these examples show, local media, both mainstream and nonmainstream, must show expertise in balancing the democratic need to question power and the practical desire to maintain trusted, reciprocal relationships (independence is looked at more explicitly under "autonomy" below). While mainstream media are often considered "agenda setters" (Firmstone,

2024) and are heavily relied on by local authorities when it comes to public engagement (Coleman et al., 2016), the diversity of the Bristol news ecosystem illustrates how social capital through place- and minority-based community affiliations—which nonmainstream media can capitalise on—can influence relations with those in power, and help consolidate claims to being trusted information disseminators.

The relationship between Marvin Rees, the Mayor of Bristol from 2016 to 2024—and of a mixed race and poor background—and the local media was complex and fraught, and provides a vantage point for a discussion about discourses around expertise in balancing journalistic professionalism (holding power to account) and social capital (trust). Early in his career Rees worked as a journalist with the BBC but left, citing lack of career-advancement opportunities for minorities, and has since continued to be critical of lack of diversity in the local media (Al-Kaisy, 2023; Cherubini & Sharma, 2023; Eddy et al. 2023a, 2023b; Olusoga, 2020). He has also been vocal in his criticisms of click-focused reporting. He refused to be interviewed on an one-to-one basis by *Bristol Post/Live* for a large part of his tenure (Booth, J., 2021b) and, as described in Chapter 1, banned LDRS reporters from his regular press conferences, leading to a joint boycott by local media.

Despite this, Rees often took part in discussions on the community (nonmainstream) radio stations, *Ujima Radio* and *BCfm*. Marcus Smith, development lead and presenter at the community radio station *BCfm*, commented: "We've ... got a really strong relationship with the Bristol Mayor, Marvin Rees, who regularly calls in and we call him, you know, it's quite a close relationship" and, according to the freelance journalist I interviewed, Neil Maggs: "he has a loyal base with *BCfm* and *Ujima*, see, that's where it's been quite interesting ... they have a good, really good relationship with minority communities in the city. Brilliantly so. Yeah? Marvin was sort of involved in that stuff a little bit before". Of course, having a "really strong ... close relationship" and a "loyal base" calls into question the impartiality which is fundamental to carrying out a watchdog role successfully (Allan, 1998; Anderson & Schudson, 2019; Carlson, 2017; Cottle, 2000; Schudson, 2001; Soloski, 1989a; Tuchman, 1972). As Maggs commented:

> At times, some of their coverage of the mayor has been softballing, and it has been not really holding him to any account, and not doing the journalism, and I think he always goes to them when he wants to reputation-mend a bit, or something bad has happened, in his mind, with the other media. I was like, come on, I know he's your boy, from where you're from, and he's from where I'm from. But I'm still, you still need to ask those questions and perhaps do it in a robust

> way that it should be. And I don't think that's happened. And I think it's lost its impact because of that. I do think that what was great about it was they both held power to account in Bristol. And then the problem is that who was in power changed a bit, and then I don't think it was done in the same way. So, they're almost being just as bad as the people that they were opposed to before, when it was cosy. It's become a different type of cosiness with different people.

Maggs could be thought of as a cross-over journalist—he hosts a podcast for *The Bristol Cabl*e in which he regularly interviews a range of local people from politicians to community leaders (Maggs, 2021b, 2022; Maggs et al., 2021, 2022, 2023) and makes documentaries for BBC Radio 4 (Maggs, 2019c, 2021a), as well as freelancing for local mainstream media—so his comments are examples of category entitlement, and can be seen as attempts to set him apart, professionally, from some of the more compromised/less autonomous aspects of nonmainstream journalism (he was also critical of mainstream journalism, particularly the pressures front-line reporters face in relation to management-set goals—this is discussed under "autonomy" below). He claims to have adopted an approach which is both robust and respectful—"hopefully, I'm fair, but I would think, tough as well"—and has occasionally resulted in scoops:

> My style is more Louis Theroux than Andrew Neil, although I can, when I want to, sort of, push a bit more. Without sounding, you know, conceited, I've managed to get them to say things on that show that they probably wouldn't in other places, which then, ironically, then gets picked up by the *Bristol Post*, or *24/7*, or whatever. A lot of the politicians in the city can be quite defensive, and there's a bit of a negative, there's quite a tricky relationship between the politicians and journalists. And one of the reasons I think is that, obviously, politicians always want to, kind of, keep anyone off the scent.

Maggs also thought "a lot of the politicians will push back against journalists" because the latter are often not from Bristol. He said "some of them [journalists] are embedded in the city and born here, and then they've got someone who's been here for five minutes asking them questions about, you know, poverty in the inner city or whatever. I'm a bit harder to push back against on that. And I've worked and known some of these people in my various different guises before [community work], so probably come with a degree of respect that they would agree to the interview". His reference to "respect" shows an acknowledgement of the importance of social capital, trust and reciprocity, which can be conveyed

through geographical ("embedded") and temporal ("born here") affiliations and acquaintances ("known some of these people ... before").

While he is unequivocally critical of a particular aspect of the community radio stations — their apparently acquiescent relations with powerful figures — using phrases such as "not really holding him to account", "not doing the journalism" and "you still need to ask those questions and perhaps do it in a robust way", he praised them for when they did hold power to account in the past. This reveals Reardon's (2013) distinction between two types of interpretative repertoire — an "empiricist repertoire" where Maggs justifies his own conception of journalistic roles and the normative expectations of public interest journalism as rational and obvious, and in doing so lays claim to expertise in this regard; and a "contingency repertoire" by casting opposing ideas as based on a subjective approach, through more emotive, and picturesque, terms such as "softballing" and "cosy". Underlying this strategic ritual he reveals a discourse that this is an area in which nonmainstream media could, and should, improve, but also shows a frustration with the uncooperative nature of Mayor Rees's relations with the media. As I contend throughout this thesis, consideration should be given to the influence of external pressures on news practices, and this is evident in Magg's observation that "the problem is that who was in power changed a bit".

Maggs also highlighted another aspect of the expansion of alternative media in the city and its influence on a conservative mainstream which illustrates Anderson's (2010, 2013a) observations about the reflexivity and interconnectedness of news ecosystems. In this example, he utilises rhetorical qualification ("maybe") and elicits reassurance ("yeah?") to modify his observations above.

> When you had the *Cable* ... and the community radios and *24/7* coming in, they were people from outside the city that were suddenly rocking the boat on issues that people sat on, a little bit ... things like the Merchant Venturers or things like Colston, or, that were fringe things, that a little bit compromised, I would say, some of the media outlets a bit with establishment in the city. They shook that up. So maybe it needed that a little bit as well. But it's just about getting that balance right. Yeah?

Pete Simson, political journalist with the local BBC, also expressed the same discourse about objectivity and impartiality which he stressed the corporation had strict guidelines and rules about, but was more nuanced through acknowledging the need to consider news format (radio or television), rather than the boundary between mainstream and nonmainstream local journalism. This is an example

of Reardon's (2013) practical ideology, an understanding that relations with contacts are not always predictable, and are contingent on external factors which can affect normative role outcomes. This displays another level of expertise, this time gained through experience and worldliness. There is also evidence of Reardon's (ibid.) category entitlement in the way Simson differentiates being a BBC political journalist from being a BBC radio producer, with "separation" (signifying objectivity, balance, autonomy) being contrasted with the necessity of "a certain level of ... personal relationship" (signifying pragmatic objectivity, trust, reciprocity) and is an illustration of the uneasy balance which needs to be maintained between being a watchdog and a trusted information disseminator which local journalists, both mainstream and nonmainstream, face:

> He (Rees) will come on occasionally on *Radio Bristol*, doesn't like (early evening regional television news show) *Points West* ... the relationship is not perfect but then I don't think it's good to have a matey relationship necessarily with your local authority, even if you do require them to come to the TV and radio and give a statement several times a week. You want that separation, don't you? So, you can properly scrutinise what they are doing. We get the (regional local authority) leaders to come in (to *Radio Bristol*) every month ... So, you have to have a certain level of that personal relationship. I think that goes without saying. So yeah, I think if I was a radio producer, I would probably have a different answer there.

According to Davis (2000, 2002, 2007) politicians rely on a battery of strategies and practices in the mediation of power as they attempt to control, manipulate or stifle the media. For a politician like Rees, radio and podcasts provide space to control the conversation, especially in light of his public criticism of local media over editing his comments and apparent reliance on provocative quotes from his critics (Behind Local News, 2024; *Bristol Cable*, 2022; *Bristol Live* Comment, 2019; Booth, 2023a; Farell Roig, 2024a; Maggs, 2021b; Matiluko, 2024; Seabrook, 2024c, 2024d; Sharman, 2019c, 2019d, 2023e).

Rees recorded an interview for Bristol Unpacked, Magg's *Bristol Cable* podcast, in the run-up to his (successful) re-election bid for the mayoralty in 2021[7] and was warned against filibustering the

7 During the same campaign *Bristol 24/7* published Rees's answers to questions posed by readers in which he claimed: "I'm comfortably the most scrutinised and transparent person in Bristol, compared to any other politician, MPs, councillors, the police commissioner, the metro mayor and the leaders of any of our other major institutions" (Booth, 2023a). This came after a review of Bristol City Council's "collective leadership failure" in a budget shortfall of £29million, concluded the mayor had too much power and there was "not enough transparency" (Ashcroft, 2018a).

interview through repeatedly steering the conversation towards discussion of race and class, and his mixed-race, working-class background, and away from answering questions about his record as mayor (Maggs, 2021b). Maggs mentioned the long-form nature of his podcast meant politicians are given "more space to state their case" but he added that after he interviewed Rees for the podcast, Rees did not speak to him for a year, so the line between being robust and "softballing" is a difficult one to tread. Maggs used the colloquial expression "there are many ways to skin a cat" where the goal is explicit but there is equivocation about the method to be used. Irrespective of journalistic skills, experience and judgement influenced by professional role conceptions, evidenced in Maggs's discourse, the success, or otherwise, quite often depends on the personalities of people, and the social capital and goals of the organisations involved.

If the political field is only seen as a combative theatre, there is the danger that the news which is in the public interest gets buried (McCombs, 2005; McCombs & Shaw, 1972), that the media not only tell us "what to think about" but also "what to think" (Weaver, 2007, p. 145). In my examination of the Bristol news ecosystem, I found examples of, both a fascination with the gladiatorial nature of local politics—Usher's "palace intrigue" (2021)—and injunctions around the need for the local media to investigate deeper, often voiced by the same journalist.

The next section looks at a different type of power relationship through discourses around "duty", especially around the community bonding and bridging roles and social capital (Friedland, 2001, 2012; Putnam, 2000) which local journalists, both mainstream and nonmainstream, regard as normative standards of public service.

5.3.3 Discourses of Professional Legitimacy and Distinction from Amateurs 2: Duty

One of the main contentions underpinning this thesis is that local journalism is a specialised form of journalism (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2023), with a pragmatic approach to objectivity (Ward, 2020), and a need to engage and empathise with marginalised communities (Robinson, 2023; Robinson & Culver, 2019; Wenzel, 2020a, 2023b). Trust-building and authenticity are legitimising strategies for journalists and discourses around these aspects add substance to claims of social value and public "duty". For Harte et al. (2019) one of the ways in which authenticity is expressed for hyperlocals is through newsgathering practices that rely on reciprocal exchanges with audiences: "this desire for a deeper participation, through reciprocity, acts as an interpretative repertoire whereby such exchanges are couched as unproblematic and equal in terms of power relationships" (p. 134). Although both mainstream and

nonmainstream news workers at a local level, as the interviews confirmed, recognise the importance of social value as part of a professional ethos, a practical ideology discourse — "we would do this, but ..." — around aspirations rather than concrete achievement, is not uncommon. As argued in Chapter 1, *city-wide* mainstream and nonmainstream media have an important role to play in *bridging* (Putnam, 2000) between diverse and fragmented communities, suffering from reputational damage, negative stereotypes (Jones, 2020; Moore, 2020) and territorial stigmatisation (Slater, 2018; Slater & Anderson, 2011; Wacquant, 2007, 2008, 2014; Wacquant et al., 2014). Whereas community-focused, *ward-level* (nonmainstream) media have more of an emphasis on *bonding*, which gives the community a stronger, positive sense of itself (Hatcher, 2012), improves the community's sense of self-esteem (Friedland, 2001, 2012; Maslow, 1943), and where embeddedness (Vos & Hanusch, 2024) is important. This contrasts with "parachute/tourist journalism" — superficial reporting by outsider journalists, physically (and socially and culturally) distanced from the community (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2024, p. 58) — which (typically nonmainstream) journalists feel is damaging from the point of view of community trust, but also demonstrates a professional discourse around "not being one of us" (i.e., not a competent journalist) (Ryfe, 2009).

Local freelance journalist Maggs gave an informative overview of how the media and social landscapes of the city misalign, with both positive and negative observations of mainstream and nonmainstream media, which indicated interpretative repertoires on journalistic authority, the importance of "lived experience" ("you don't need to be from, or need to be born here, but be embedded, and, I think you cannot talk, or write, or speak with authority on something, in my opinion, unless you have that ... I think you need to hear the accent, which we don't hear enough") and the reflexivity of media organisations when a changing media and social landscape becomes apparent ("a sudden surge of ... alternative ... or new media"). He mentioned lack of diversity ("the media landscape's been very white in Bristol until recent times"), few journalists with "local" roots ("in my personal opinion, there isn't and hasn't been and continues to be, not enough local journalists from Bristol that know the city ... any aspiring young journalists in the city would ... get ... frustrated ... have to leave") and an increased number coming in via nationally networked media ("where they don't have a feel or a sense"), entrenched conservatism and silo mentality ("media bubble") through old-guard journalists not moving on ("a few people ... should have moved on ... long time ago"), and a lack of engagement with marginalised communities, either ignoring them or only highlighting negative problems ("I don't think,

traditionally, black and Asian minority communities were particularly written about, unless there was an issue, or challenge, or problem").

While Maggs used the (nonmainstream) community radio stations as examples to illustrate his contention that the strategic ritual of normative public interest journalism should endeavour to hold power to account, as mentioned above under "expertise", here he acknowledges their role in steering (mainstream) local media (*Radio Bristol* and *Bristol Post*) towards covering minority communities ("taken that challenge a lot more ... massively improved"), and highlights a discourse around the importance of diversity, which conveys notions of authenticity, informed social and cultural local knowledge, authority and trust. He also criticises the two most high-profile city-wide, nonmainstream media outlets (*The Bristol Cable* and *Bristol 24/7*). He commented:

> I think it's changed (coverage of communities) over the years ... I think the community radio stations like *BCfm* and *Ujima* have pushed the Overton window, and the mainstream has reacted to that, and have been, I wouldn't say taken there kicking and screaming, but, kind of, reluctantly accepted that they weren't doing enough, and have taken that challenge on a lot more. Most definitely. Certainly, *Radio Bristol* have and *Bristol Post*. So that coverage has massively improved. There are one or two individual journalists that are good at engaging with the estates in the north of the city, and the south [Knowle West and Hartcliffe] ... I think the vast majority don't engage with those communities as well as they could and should ... in the inner-city area [St Paul's and Easton], it wasn't so great either. There weren't many journalists from there, stories from there were generally about crime and nothing else, until the last few years. *BCfm* and *Ujima*, were, kind of, set up as radio stations in that area ...and ... have an incredibly diverse range of presenters. So those stories were being told. There isn't that equivalent in north Bristol or south Bristol. They haven't got that representation. So, it's still kind of missing. So even within the alternative media, I wouldn't say the *Cable* are good at engaging there, either. I wouldn't say *Bristol 24/7* are.

What Maggs does not mention is that the radio stations' "incredibly diverse range of presenters" are unpaid volunteers—citizen journalists working within a professional environment. *BCfm*'s Smith valued these as being able to show a diversity of opinions and views, and voices. Smith commented "quite regularly, we'll have a bunch of people in the studio that are, you know, a really mixed demographic, all come in with our own perspective and points of view, so that diversity of thought is really important for us. And also hearing news in different accents is really important for us as well, whether it's localised or

whether it's someone with an accent that's not from the UK. That's important". From Smith's perspective the social value of *BCfm* comes from providing a platform for diversity and giving people, who are often overlooked by mainstream media, an opportunity to bridge social and cultural divisions. *BCfm* has also run a podcast series focusing on different local communities, called 12 Communities: One Bristol, which has won national awards, and the *Bristol Cable*, as part of its community outreach programme has held community events in different parts of the city.

The *Bristol Cable* is a city-wide publication, based centrally and with a small staff—four full-time reporters and a limited number of freelancers, so covering communities can present a challenge, which is evident in discourses around practical ideologies (Reardon, 2013). In talking about the difficulties in covering communities Alex Turner of *The Cable* utilised an interpretative repertoire around duty and public service in this comment: "we made a conscious effort to try to serve" but limited distribution, a small team and narrow readership are among the reasons given for failing to meet the publication's aspirations. He commented:

> (the *Cable* readership is) definitely concentrated among the inner zone of the city, where it gets a better distribution. Where it's been picked up, probably by more of a broadsheet, middle-class kind of audience. And I think the *Cable* has not reached as well as it could some outlying areas of Bristol. It's partly because our distribution, because it relies on a small team of people, it's been a bit haphazard across the city. They may not see the print editions so much, and we have struggled, I think, because as a team, there's only ten people in the organisation, four journalists. We have struggled to spread ourselves around the city as well as we'd like.

Both *The Knowledge* (based in Knowle West) and the Voice network (based in Bishopston, Fishponds, Henleaze and Westbury, and South Bristol, in my sample) are ward-level print publications with smaller, more focused, distribution areas and are, geographically, socially and culturally embedded. These publications are delivered to every household in their areas (6,500 for *The Knowledge* and 6,500 to 11,500 for the Voice publications) and left in local public spaces, such as shops, health centres and libraries, so everyone living in the community can read them. Richard Coulter, who co-founded and runs the Voice network, also expressed a practical ideology in his comment: "we still see ourselves as print first ... so, we've got to make sure we get it to all the households. So that that can be a headache". He mentioned the people who distribute the magazine, "that's dozens and dozens. But that's mainly retired people, or a dad and his son and they're just looking for pocket money ... they're doing it once a month

... and we pay them, obviously". Getting people to work for these nonmainstream outlets, either as volunteer presenters, as in the case of *BCfm*, or as low-paid distributors, with the Voice publications, depends on social capital and being able to encourage a feeling of common purpose, or bonding.

Because their geographical distribution is limited, bridging social capital, with its ability to mend reputations across distances and between communities, is less relevant to the ward-level publications, unlike the city-wide local media, and so their social value lies in bonding social capital, and improving self-esteem (Friedland, 2001, 2012; Maslow, 1943) within the community, as well as providing vital welfare information and combating isolation. The former editor of *The Knowledge*, Sue Mackinnon, revealed an empiricist repertoire (Reardon, 2013) by explaining how its contents relate to specific social and health problems in the area such as obesity, illiteracy, domestic violence, isolation, mental health and the cost-of-living crisis, and the need to publicise the local support networks including food banks, food clubs, clothes and uniform swaps, a free pet clinic, a monthly market, coffee mornings and "where you can get free stuff", in addition to its value in fulfilling Knowle West's wider CINs around education, crime and planning news (Napoli et. al., 2015, 2017, 2018). She commented: "I would say one massive remit of *The Knowledge* is the signposting", bringing together useful information in one place. Also, among the interpretive repertoires she expressed was to contrast the way the *Bristol Post* (mainstream) and *The Bristol Cable* (nonmainstream) focus on negative stories from Knowle West, implying their outsider status and short-lived interest ("it's come straight in"), whereas with *The Knowledge* she commented: "the whole point of us is to try and bring the area up", which she illustrated with examples of local people and their achievements. Elements of a contingency repertoire (Reardon, 2013) can be seen in the way Mackinnon uses the terms "love" and "hoodlums" which imply a more subjective motivation for covering negative news from the *Post*.

> Image of Knowle West? I've seen that in other papers. Even the *Cable*, about it being a deprived area. It's come straight in, and it's not that people in Knowle West don't know they are. Also, the *Post* used to at one point love all the things about hoodlums. They didn't have many positive stories, but I think it is changing a lot because suddenly you could see all the good things happening. And we're not trying to say it's only good things happening, be cause if there's a bad story, like we did the arson, that has to be reported. If there has been some sort of crime or something. The police used to write a column.

In investigating hyperlocal community news, Williams et al. (2015) found there is a "very common tendency among hyperlocals to want to portray the place they live in in a positive light". They stress this is not "evidence of toothless local news producers who are unlikely to fulfil the critical watchdog function of accountability news" but that "this tendency is in many cases more accurately interpretated as a reaction to the perceived practice of journalists in the local and regional newspaper industry" (pp. 697-698), as confirmed by Mackinnon's comments.

As well as local knowledge, an understanding of the particular needs of the community and having a rapport with the people living there, the media engage in an advocacy or campaigning role — *Bristol Post/Live* has campaigned for a pause in paying council rent for the occupants of a block of flats which was evacuated over safety concerns (Cork, 2023b; Reeder, 2023c); and most of the Bristol media have been involved in a joint campaign against knife crime in the city (Driscoll, 2024; Linford, 2024c; Morrison, 2024a). Richard Coulter, founder and editor-in-chief of the Voice network, explained why certain topics were important for his publications:

> We've campaigned for a few things, and we've had a bit of success. We've managed to keep a kind of facility that was ... for new mums where they could go and ... get nursing help in the first few months after the baby's born, and it was going to close down and move five miles away. Mums who didn't have a car said this was going to be a problem. So, we campaigned, and the facility's still open. I'm not saying it was all down to us, but I think we played a part. So, we campaign for these small-scale things that matter to local people. Our big thing, at the moment, is houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs) ... particularly with a lot of students here. The local people say it's wrecking the neighbourhood. So that's been a big issue. A three-bedroom house suddenly turned into a ten-bedroom house and all the issues that go along with that. So that's been a campaign that we've been running.

Coulter stressed that the campaigns the Voice network have been involved in are about subjects which "matter to local people" and are — drawing on an emotive idiom — "wrecking the neighbourhood". The references to "bit of success" and "I think we played a part" also show an emotional engagement. He also acknowledges that there are often two sides to the story, and both get published. Coulter was a senior mainstream journalist for many years before starting the Voice network, and one of Harcup's cross-over journalists, and so the discourses relating to public service and social value can be seen as belonging to a shared professional ethos. Publications such as his can concentrate on the small number

of social problems in their areas and regularly report on them, whereas the city-wide media, due to practical limitations, have to be more selective.

Charlie Watts comes from Knowle West. When I interviewed him, he was about to start work for the mainstream *Bristol World*, after several years working as a community reporter for *Bristol 24/7* and doing work experience at *The Knowledge*. He explained the importance of (city-wide/nonmainstream) *24/7*'s community reporter scheme to himself as both a resident and as a trainee journalist, and to community life as a whole, which displayed an authenticity discourse and sense of vocation. This was combined in his conception of the role as being a "community ambassador" and "giving communities a voice/platform" for "communities that traditionally might be perceived to be forgotten" (all of which relate to bridging and addressing reputations); being embedded, "building trust" and the need to be "passionate" about the area (which displays bonding through affective affiliations), as well as:

> building trust with people, giving them a voice and a platform to get their stories told ... there is a big emphasis on the sort of positive stories there ... the role is really about giving an alternative to the existing platforms that we've got in the city. And that sort of self-representation, in a way, because we're not people from outside the area coming in to report on the area. We're people who grew up there. So, we have an understanding of the culture and the needs and the values of local people. So yeah, a big part of it just is about giving communities a voice. And yeah, as well as being a community reporter I saw it also as sort of a community ambassador for that area.

So far, I have discussed local journalism in relation to Bristol's place-based communities, here I look at the ways other marginalised groups are considered by the local media, in this case, mainstream. Assiah Hamed, is a Muslim woman with an interest in reporting on minority subjects, and her discourse around authenticity involved shared life experience. Hamed did a master's degree in investigative journalism and began work for *Bristol Live* as a Life Writer (the term Reach uses for lifestyle journalist) during the covid lockdown, during which time she was based in her home in Leicester, 117 miles away from Bristol. She was then seconded to work as a Trends Writer on national stories in the Reach network and has now moved on to national media. During her time working for *Bristol Live*, she was involved in setting up the Bristol Voices newsletter, which reflected her interests in giving voice to marginalised communities—it was described as "a safe space to celebrate minority communities and explore Bristol's diversity". As these were weekly bulletins sent directly to subscribers, it should be borne in mind that this is a relatively obscure new news format and only available to people who are digitally connected.

According to Hamed, the Black Lives Matter protests in summer 2020 and the toppling of the statue of Colston in Bristol prompted an interest ("an epiphany") in a newsletter aimed at minority communities. Hamed said:

> I think that's the reason why they were, you know, pushing for a lot more diverse content, as I think, because they had an epiphany. Not just nationally, but also locally. Those voices are extremely pivotal. So, I think there was definitely, and, hopefully now, there's still a high level of enthusiasm to tell those stories ... Reach really wanted to, I want to say, quote, unquote, revolutionise, how newsletters were made, and pump out a lot of content and see what we could do even within a local level. So those discussions were being had ... how can we do better and really amplifying diverse stories, which for me, based on my background, what I've always been passionate about, I was very onboard with doing work based on that. And covering stories that were really crucial. As, you know, Bristol is indeed a diverse city, and had a lot to tell. So, I ended up being really, really excited and involved in that. There would be in-depth, human-interest-based stories. So, there wasn't really a particular strategy. It was just making sure that we were really telling those stories as best as we can and using our connections, using our experiences, obviously getting tapped into what's happening in Bristol as well, which we obviously were doing anyway, in our day-to-day work as reporters.

It is clear that emotion (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019b), connection, and a need to improve coverage (both to increase audience numbers and trust) are important in taking the work Hamed did for the newsletter beyond routine day-to-day editorial work, which displays her commitment to the social value of her job and the normative boundary marker of duty. She uses the words and phrases "enthusiasm", "how we can do better", "passionate", "really crucial", and "really, really excited". She also made clear that care was taken with representation of communities, avoiding stereotypes and tokenisation and expressed discourses about category entitlement (Reardon, 2016) through drawing attention to her claims of authenticity and (cultural and social) embeddedness through being a "Muslim woman of colour":

> I kind of emphasized when I first started, being a Muslim, being a Muslim woman of colour, wanted to see more nuanced stories about Muslim communities more and more, and, more broadly, stories about, religious minorities that doesn't stereotype us and put us in a box. Just see those stories in a nuanced and amazing way.

One of the underlying discourses which can be identified in Hamed's comments is the way her passion and enthusiasm were driving forces for the newsletter (like Watts's comments about *Bristol 24/7*'s community reporter scheme; and Mackinnon's about *The Knowledge*). Hamed made no reference to commercial goals or editorial directives, beyond their encouragement and willingness to experiment with new forms of audience engagement, which displays a level of autonomy from management influences (Gallagher, 1982; Reese, 2001, 2016), the subject of the next section.

5.3.4 Discourses of Professional Legitimacy and Distinction from Amateurs 3: Autonomy

The news ecosystem in Bristol is a microcosm of a changing journalistic landscape, seen throughout the Western world. In response to crises of viability, and civic adequacy over the relationship with their audience(s) (Blumler, 2010), news organisations have been forced to adopt new technology and adapt newsroom practices, precipitating a professional crisis over purpose (Nielsen, 2016b) and journalistic boundaries—digital/print (Bélair-Gagnon & Holton, 2018; Blanchett Neheli, 2018; Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016; Engel, 2009; Tandoc, 2014, 2015; Tandoc & Thomas, 2015; Tandoc & Vos, 2016; Whittington, 2020); hard news/soft news (Boczkowski, 2009; Patterson, 2000; Reinemann, et al., 2011, 2017); and mainstream/nonmainstream. For Ryfe (2009b) this means "displacing the structure of daily news gathering" (p. 678) which, he contends, threatens the values and identities—functional and symbolic needs embedded in a culture of professionalism (Ryfe, 2009a)—upon which experienced journalists have built up careers over many years (Nikunen, 2014). In this section I explore the discourses around autonomy and agency as an area in which a perceived loss of control over journalistic content; fears over job precarity (Phillips, 2015a); fewer opportunities for career development (Cherubini & Sharma, 2023); organisational reputation; hierarchical status (Harcup, 2005); professional legitimacy and distinction from amateurs—or rather a new generation of news workers—is expressed by older journalists. This is a category entitlement discourse over who has journalistic authority (by demonstrating "expertise") and who is closest to upholding normative journalistic social responsibility values ("duty"), but is used here to illustrate "autonomy" (Örnebring, 2013). For Bourdieu (1995), as cited by Nikunen (op. cit.), "differentiation and sense of professional pride connected with journalistic autonomy is a crucial counterweight against commercial and political powers" (p. 884).

While autonomy has been addressed to a certain extent in this chapter with discussion of the influence of local politicians over endeavours by local journalists to hold power to account, here a focus on critiques by cross-over (former mainstream/currently nonmainstream) (Harcup, 2005) and retired

news workers is used to illustrate the contention that the changing nature of mainstream, local journalism, specifically the introduction of digital journalism, clickbait (Ball, 2022; Bélair-Gagnon & Holton, 2018; Blanchett Neheli, 2018; Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2012b; Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016; Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015; Davies, 2009; Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2018; Lee et al., 2014; Schaudt & Carpenter, 2009; Tandoc, 2014, 2015; Tandoc & Thomas, 2015; Tandoc & Vos, 2016), "hamster-wheel" work routines (Usher, 2016) and targets, centralised production, cutbacks and job losses ("restructuring"), has reduced autonomy for front-line reporters and made them subservient to commercial pressures and management directives (Gallagher, 1982; Reese, 2001, 2016). A "golden age"-informed discourse (comparisons between "then" and "now") — "when things were better in the past, worse in the present and likely to be terrible in the future" (Reardon, 2013, p. 168) — portrays a new generation of mainstream managers, and their imposition of new priorities and routines, as being responsible for the rise of churnalism (Davies, 2009; Ponsford & Davis, 2022) and diminished resources for holding power to account. Reach's plan for page view targets is a recent example of management introduced change which has met resistance from within the newsroom — it introduces an element of individual competitiveness and perceived loss of autonomy (as priority would be given to click-friendly stories), which conflicts with professional values. Seabrook, the LDRS reporter managed by *Bristol Post*/*Live*, mentioned the fears from colleagues, backed by reference to the leading journalist trade union, over "driv(ing) down *standards* and the *quality* of the articles". He commented: "there was a lot of pushback from the National Union of Journalists about (the plans) ... I know from my colleagues who aren't LDRs, there is a lot of concern, that it would drive down the standards and the quality of the articles that they were producing".

James Garrett, one of the thesis interviewees, is chair of the local branch of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and was involved in two recent industrial actions. One was about pay and redundancies at *Bristol Post*/*Live*, and the other over cutbacks to local programming and job losses at BBC West. Garrett's mainstream news credentials involve producing current affairs programmes for HTV West (regional commercial television) and breaking a key example of investigative journalism in the UK, the Bristol Royal Infirmary (BRI) Heart Scandal story: "the standout film, will always be, certainly for me, and I suspect, for my colleagues as well, will be one that we broadcast in March 96. It was the result of a lengthy investigation into medical negligence at the Bristol Royal Infirmary. Dozens of babies were, either died, or left brain damaged, as a consequence of poor surgery on their hearts". This is an example of local journalism performing a watchdog role, using time-consuming and costly investigative methods

(gaining the trust of a whistleblower within the BRI, and interviewing dozens of bereaved parents over many months and a wide geographical area), and being of national importance. The revelations led to one of the most wide-ranging inquiries into NHS negligence this country has seen. Garrett refers to the story as a source of professional pride but it also strengthens his observations about structural changes in local news over intervening decades. These are informed by a category entitlement repertoire and framed in "golden age"-type comparisons, which utilise rhetorical emphasis ("real risk", "serious faults", "so much better", "real honour", "fantastic", "great") and emotional reaction ("standout ... for me", "it saddens me, frankly") to convey a sense of loss of autonomy (managers at HTV West were praised for giving Garrett a "decent amount of time" for researching and "great at giving me my head"). The frequent use of personal and possessive pronouns (I, me and mine) indicate a strong sense of personal agency, and there are also references to colleagues and positive relations with editors which indicate the importance of teamwork where everyone shared a common goal and values. This is a way of strengthening his argument that diminishing resources (cuts in staff numbers and time), for public interest journalism, relates to wider social and democratic damage and erosion of duty to the public ("there is a real risk that serious faults are being ignored, corporate faults are being ignored in, frankly all areas of the region, the economy, and the rest of it, because *there aren't the people* to keep an eye on what's going on and take the *time* to explore how bad things are or might be ... anybody in a position of power has the opportunity to abuse it"), as well as laying the blame on a hierarchy of influences within news organisations ("it saddens me frankly, but because it's not just television where I, sort of, worked last that's cut its staffing and programming. It's all news, the newspapers or news sites ... are equally under-resourced, and, as a consequence, unable to investigate important matters in the public interest"). Part of the "then-and-now" discourse which Garrett mentions is the loss of mainstream competition ("the public was so much better served back then ... different world ... remarkable how quickly we've lost all that really"), reduced time for investigations (on working for a regional political programme "which was fantastic. It meant I only had to produce one story a week, and I could spend some decent amount of time researching it, and the editor ... was great at giving me my head and letting me investigate some, sometimes, tricky stories") and less autonomy for today's journalists in following up their own stories ("I don't know how it happens anymore. If you're working in a newsroom you're so focused on getting tonight's programme out and maybe tomorrow night's programme lined up, that working on longer-term stuff is actually quite difficult to do, and, of course, newsrooms are not as well staffed these days as they were 20 or 30 years ago, anyway"). He also stresses an emotional involvement and a sense of pride ("it was a real honour to be able to tell the story of the consultant

anaesthetist [whistleblower] ... I thought, bloody hell, this is what I came into journalism to do" — he also acknowledged the film "All the President's Men", about the *Washington Post* investigation of the Watergate scandal, as an early inspiration), which, although he does not say is lacking in current journalistic endeavours, he does indicate is probably dampened.

Garrett's views about autonomy in today's local journalism also display category entitlement in relation to the value of experienced journalists, and the way in which this is overlooked and not respected by their employers. He commented:

> I've written the odd article in *Private Eye* about the nonsense of asking people with 30 years' experience on *Radio Bristol*, for instance, having to reapply for their own jobs and to send in a voice reel. I mean, what the fuck? Frankly. If the person selecting the new presenters doesn't know, doesn't recognise the field sufficiently well to be able to choose. Not that I'm suggesting they should be in a position, should be having to choose, anyway. But, frankly, if you don't know that Steve Yabsley is a bloody good broadcaster, and that the BBC's been lucky to have him for these decades. Extraordinary, I mean, we're really concerned about that. It's one of our biggest concerns, frankly, is the way that local radio is becoming regional radio as a consequence of these local radio cuts. And the next thing we fear is that the BBC will start making compulsory redundancies amongst those for whom there are no, there remain no jobs, now that the music's stopped and they haven't found themselves in a new chair. That's one big issue.

Pete Simson, of the BBC, was also critical of the management-imposed cutbacks to local radio airtime and mentioned that he had taken part in industrial action, saying, "I'm not defending what's happened. I just went on strike about it". Strikes are performative demonstrations of solidarity and resistance by frontline workers against the actions of management.

Garrett also noted similar labour versus management disputes over the changing nature of Reach, the publisher of *Bristol Post/Live*, praising the journalists and criticising the managers.

> Reach. Shockingly run company. Truly. We supported them (journalists) when they were striking for better pay last year, and then this year, there's a pay dispute all over again, and in between the two pay disputes, there's a pretty heavy round of redundancies. And meanwhile Jim Mullen, the chief executive, trousers four million quid a year. They do a brilliant job, the journalists on the *Post* slash *Bristol Live*, and their equivalents elsewhere. And they deserve to be managed so, so much better than they are.

For Christopher Brown, former senior journalist with *Western Daily Press* and the local BBC, founder of *Bristol 24/7*, and now course leader in the journalism department at the University of the West of England, category entitlement was also evident in his comments about new digital priorities, and the way "user experience" and journalists, on the one hand, and "bosses" and their revenue plans, on the other, conflict: "the business model for the traditional newspapers has collapsed and I think it's stabilised now. But it's stabilised on the back of a digital business model that doesn't make for a great user experience. And I think the journalists ... will admit that as well, but it's what the bosses of Reach and National World, believe they have to do to bring in the revenue at the moment". The underlying discourse is that both audiences and journalists are suffering because of the way profits come before public good (Pickard, 2020). According to Nikunen (2014), newsrooms, like other organisations, "are, in general, resilient and resistant to change", and, among journalists "there is also a sense of powerlessness and even fear when faced with a transition", which shapes the ways they see their profession and its future (pp. 883-884). The freelance cross-over journalist Maggs held up the rise of digital journalism, with its deskbound nature, speed and reliance on social media, as being behind his move away from mainstream news organisations. He utilises a "then" and "now" justification, "that's always what I *did*" in his comments, and, like Garrett, Brown, Simson and Seabrook does not blame "new journalists" for the current problems, but indicates through using the phrase "not *given* the time" the fault, and constraints on autonomy, belong to their employers:

> The speed of stories that are expected, they're not given the time to leave their desk. So, these new journalists, it's not their fault, they don't get to know the city because they're just banging stuff out, from reacting to what's happening on social media. They're not out and about looking at things. And that's partly why I left there, because I just felt that I like to see the whites of people's eyes and be out and about, and that's always what I did. And media now, I just didn't realise how deskbound it was.

Richard Coulter, is also a cross-over journalist, having worked in senior editorial positions in local mainstream newsrooms (Chief Sub-editor and Assistant Editor at the *Bristol Post*) for many years before founding the Voice network of hyperlocal newspapers. He took redundancy because "at that period of time it was just a series of redundancies after redundancies. And I thought my time was probably going to come eventually. So, I took the money and ran" but, like Brown, above, only after forming plans for his own hyperlocal project in partnership with an experienced mainstream advertising executive who had also been made redundant. His comments can be seen as being critical of both having to work in an

environment where major job losses were becoming the norm, but also the *changing nature* of mainstream news journalism, over *time* (through using "era", "predated", "coming into"), and its professional values, priorities, goals and practices, which indicates a strong sense of category entitlement and a "golden age" perspective. An "era of *just trying to get* clicks" is referred to where the word "clicks" is used in a derogatory way, implying lack of substance, ephemerality, sole focus, a lack of autonomy and expertise over news selection:

> Well, I was there before the era of clicks. Where I mean, it's not to say we didn't have digital. We did. We did have digital. But that era of just trying to get clicks. I predated that. I think the main thing for me is that we've [the Voice] gone back into the communities, and we're covering things that I think the mainstream media used to think was a little bit beneath them. I go to Filton Town Council Meetings. I'm the only person in the audience ... But if I wasn't there, nobody would do it. Nobody would know. I think we bring a lot of relevant stuff into the households of local people. I like to think we do, anyway ... More and more, I saw the mainstream media, and particularly the kind of people who were coming into the mainstream media quite dismissive of hyperlocal stuff. They had a very metropolitan attitude to everything, everything was centralised city centre, all that kind of stuff. They weren't interested in potholes, and when the bins get collected, and in communities. I mean, some of them didn't know where some of the communities were, if I'm honest.

Like other local news entrepreneurs, and as seen in broader social enterprise generally, Coulter has had to combine innovation with a "commitment to social change aligned to personal goals" and an affective attachment to communities (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2023)—and physical presence, through going to town council meetings. "The kind of people who were coming into mainstream media ... being dismissive of hyperlocal stuff", having "a very metropolitan attitude to everything" and not knowing "where some of the communities were" are singled out to represent changing news values and lack of a sense of social value, duty, expertise, lived experience, place-based knowledge and understanding of the value of trust and reciprocity. "Golden age", and "local" discourses can also be seen in phrases such as "we've *gone back*" to bringing "a lot of relevant stuff into the *households of local people*", which indicates nonmainstream is a rediscovery or continuation of traditional (pre-digital) local journalism, although in a slightly modified form (with different financial goals, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2), rather than a novel, idealistic new entrant.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the ways past and present, mainstream, nonmainstream, cross-over and LDRS news workers within the Bristol "news oasis" express professional legitimacy and distinction over contested boundaries, through their discourses relating to expertise (professional skills, knowledge), duty (social value) and autonomy (independence) (Örnebring, 2013) in the face of a journalism crisis, which has, at least, three aspects—economic viability; civic adequacy (Blumler, 2010); and changing professional roles and routines (Nielsen, 2016b). At an organisational and economic level, the crisis manifests itself through constrained resources and precarious employment, as audiences and advertising revenues fall, competition increases, and technological developments force change. Mainstream journalists are having to contend with digital transition, faster turnover, cutbacks and increasing competition from the peripheries in an attempt to carry out the normative roles which local media has valued for decades—being a democratic watchdog, source of information, community champion and providing a platform for the voice of the people (McNair, 2009). Some news workers, either through redundancy, or an explicit commitment to personal goals around social change, are making the most of opportunities to carry out these normative roles through nonmainstream entrepreneurial innovations which, while financially precarious, do not face the commercial pressures which mainstream local journalism does, to maximise profits (Granovetter, 1985; McAllister & Proffitt, 2020; Singer, 2017) or help sustain national organisations in the face of competition from digital platforms and the need to "restructure". This means they are free from the influence of higher management and can pay greater attention to journalistic ethics and relations with marginalised communities (Anderson, 1990; Borden, 2010; Borden & Bowers, 2020; Coddington & Lewis, 2024; Fidalgo, 2009; Firmstone et al., 2022; Frost, 2006; Nechushtai & David, 2025; Steel et al., 2025) which suffer from territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant, 2007, 2008, 2014; Wacquant et al., 2014) and negative geographic reputations (Harte et al., 2019), through bridging between communities (for city-wide media) and bonding within communities (for ward-level media) (Hatcher, 2012; Putnam, 2000).

In this chapter I discussed the discourses in the semi-structured interviews I conducted with 18 news workers around expertise, duty and autonomy. The first of which was illustrated with a discussion of relations between the media (mainstream and nonmainstream) with Bristol's mayor; the second focused on initiatives, and the social capital necessary, to cover communities; and the third examined the influence of internal organisational hierarchies. Throughout there is an acknowledgement of the dichotomy between structure and agency, and the way practical ideologies are utilised to show the

existence, and understanding, of professional and normative role aspirations, such as meeting CINs, but framed by a discourse which allocates the failure to meet these aspirations to structural limitations, i.e. lack of resources (Reardon, 2016).

I began the discussion of expertise discourses with a look at the power relations between politicians and journalists around public interest news in the Bristol news ecosystem. The background was the way Marvin Rees, the mayor at the time, avoided dealing directly with the local media (both mainstream and nonmainstream) in its watchdog role, but capitalised on social capital, through being mixed race and from a poor background, to reveal a more human side (on mainstream and community radio). The discourses revealed a nuanced understanding of practical ideologies, in that Rees was powerful enough to pick and choose which media to engage with, and the media could only capitalise on this by not presenting a threat. According to the BBC's political reporter, for instance, "I don't think it's good to have a matey relationship", while for BCfm "we've got a really strong relationship with the mayor"—both of these acknowledge the importance of public interest news coverage, therefore, they have a common professional ethos, but they differ in the way they approach it. Category entitlement was also present, especially in the injunction made by one of the cross-over journalists that politicians, such as the mayor, should be held to account "you still need to ask those questions and perhaps do it in a robust way that it should be".

This was followed by a look at discourses around duty—the need to engage and empathise with marginalised communities. Trust-building and authenticity are legitimising strategies which sustain claims of social value and public duty and the local media approach this in two distinct ways: bridging (for city-wide mainstream and nonmainstream) and bonding (for ward-level nonmainstream). There were two predominant themes in the discourses around community coverage, both relating to local knowledge and affective attachment. One was about the need for journalists to have lived experience, either embeddedness, through common values ("what matters to local people", according to one cross-over journalist), or an awareness of importance of trust; the other, related, theme was negative stereotyping by the city-wide media. On the latter point, one nonmainstream journalist with experience of both ward-level and city-level media employed a bridging discourse to strengthen his claims to social value and public duty—"community ambassador" and "giving communities a voice/platform"; while another, more concerned with the bonding, self-esteem boosting nature of her ward-level publication said: "the whole point of us is to try to bring the area up" while not avoiding negative news.

Finally, I discussed discourses around autonomy where concerns were voiced about the ways management-directed change constrains the work of journalists. In this case it was important for those interviewed to show a collective professional ethos which, discursively, underlined a desire to be seen to be independent from commercial and business pressures. The discourses voiced by local journalists, especially those who "predate the era of clicks" couched the changes as a threat to the functional and symbolic values and identities embedded in a culture of professionalism (Ryfe, 2009a, 2009b) — "driving down standards and quality", "it saddens me frankly ... under-resourced, and, as a consequence, unable to investigate important matters in the public interest", "the kind of people who were coming into the mainstream media quite dismissive of hyperlocal stuff" — in which a "golden age" discourse was evident.

The next chapter brings together the various strands of this thesis to give a fuller picture of mainstream and nonmainstream local media in a news oasis.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

> It is up to the community journalism scholar to parse out the intricate connections between communities and journalism. The key is to be sceptical of generalisation and rather focus on variation. There is variation in community on scales of size, complexity, and endless cultural nuances. There is variation in journalism based on readership, community climate, and modes of delivery. And between these two concepts, there is a dynamic and fascinating two-way relationship that is never fixed and rarely predictable.
>
> (Hatcher, 2012, p. 146)

6.1 Analysing the Strengths and Weaknesses of the Variety, Diversity and Plurality of a News Oasis

My research asked, "to what extent, and in what ways, does coverage of community and public interest news in the Bristol news ecosystem differ between local mainstream and local nonmainstream journalists and news organisations?" In answering this question this thesis sought to contribute to current debates by academics, policymakers and industry figures about the ability of local mainstream and nonmainstream journalists and news organisations to meet their normative, democratic and social journalistic aspirations—watchdog; disseminator of information; voice of the citizens; and community champion (McNair, 2009) at a city-wide and (place- and identity-based) community level, by looking at their role conceptions, and role enactment (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017; Hellmueller & Mellado, 2015; Mellado & van Dalen, 2014; Mellado et al., 2020; Tandoc et al., 2013). My research has not sought to claim that one form of local journalism can replace another, but it has sought to highlight—through a multi-platform analysis in a bounded geographic area—the inherent strengths and weaknesses of the various permutations to learn more about their respective roles in an uneven and complex social world.

Local mainstream media production—this research looked at the for-profit conglomerates, Reach and National World, and the publicly funded regional BBC—is increasingly hybrid and semi-autonomous, i.e., it depends on both local and national (non-local) content, production, organisational infrastructure and decision-making (Franklin, 2006b), audience orientation and revenue streams. This thesis was also concerned with more community-focused and embedded alternatives, referred to as nonmainstream media, and comprised of locally owned, independent, for-profit—(local) advertising-dependent—and not-for-profit—grant- and membership-dependent—media, and included hyperlocals, community radio stations, community-centred initiatives, activist publications and citizen journalists. The study also examined the potential of the nonmainstream media to fill the gaps not addressed by

traditional, legacy forms of media, around meeting local critical information needs (CINs) (Friedland, 2001, 2012; Napoli et al., 2015, 2017, 2018) and addressing democratic deficits and the rise of socially damaging mis/disinformation through their contributions to community bridging and bonding (Putnam, 2000; Radcliffe, 2023b; Radcliffe et al., 2023; Robinson, 2023; Robinson & Johnson, 2024; Wenzel, 2020a, 2023b; Wenzel & Crittenden, 2020).

The thesis also explored the argument that the role conceptions of both mainstream and nonmainstream frontline journalists show a common professional ethos around democratic (expertise—holding power to account) and social responsibility (duty—ethical treatment of communities), and concerns about the constraints they face in carrying out these responsibilities (autonomy) (Örnebring, 2013). The contention of this thesis is that the hierarchy of (management-level) influences (Breed, 1997; Gallagher, 1982; Reese, 2001, 2016; Wang & Polillo, 2016) within news organisations is the main factor in determining role enactment, which can be seen in the manifest content produced by the outlets. This adds weight to the view that structure determines agency, and that frontline journalists have limited autonomy in fulfilling their role conceptions. The discourses of cross-over journalists (Harcup, 2005)—those with experience of both sectors—and former journalists—and their views on media production then and now—also helped illuminate this contention, which is considered in this chapter's concluding remarks.

Current debates about the state of journalism, generally and at a local level, are often couched in a rhetorically powerful narrative of (near-terminal) decline for the media industry as audiences and revenue plummet. Most commentators acknowledge there is no one-size-fits-all solution and agree that journalism is facing a multifaceted crisis (Blumler, 2010), which was discussed in Chapter 2. They recognise that news organisations are, on the one hand, businesses, and, on the other, are vital to a fully functioning public sphere and the symbolic (Cottle, 2003) and ethical (Frost, 2006) representation of (place- and interest-based) community identities (Hall, 2013a), while also employing professionals keen to preserve their authoritative status (Carlson, 2017), maintain boundaries which exclude amateurs (Örnebring, 2013), and demonstrate their autonomy from both organisationally internal hierarchies of influence or control and external political and commercial pressures. These concerns are, therefore, financial (profitability and long-term sustainability, and the need to increase audience reach/advertising spread), cultural/social (loss of audience trust, damage to community representation and social capital, erasure of the marginalised, erosion of local links and focus), and professional (boundary challenges, and changing work practices which test claims to autonomy and pit role conceptions around normative

democratic and civic expectations of frontline journalists against management-imposed market orientation, business goals and values)—and the broader repercussions to society, as seen in democratic deficits, loss of journalistic authority (Carlson, 2017) and the rise of news deserts (Howells, 2015).

In contrast, this thesis has been informed by a narrative of reinvention, as discussed in Chapter 1. The news ecosystem in Bristol has been labelled a news oasis because of the diversity, variety, plurality (Picard & Pickard, 2017) and innovation among the local news organisations, which includes a substantial contribution to public interest news provision by two Local Democracy Reporter Scheme (LDRS) reporters. The news organisations display variation in format (print, broadcast and digital); frequency (daily and less frequent); geographic reach (city-wide and ward/community-level); audience orientation (non-geographically specific general audiences, and local and niche audiences); ownership (mainstream and nonmainstream); and funding (for-profit and not-for-profit). This variation is discussed below in the consideration of categories and the relative strengths and functional limitations of the different forms of local media regarding social capital, fulfilling normative role conceptions, and in meeting the critical-information and community-bonding-and-bridging needs of a diverse social landscape. While the image of a news oasis places great, and probably unrealistic, expectations on emerging alternatives to declining traditional local media, it is a source of optimism.

Barnett and Townend (2015) asked if hyperlocals can fill the gap when traditional local media declines and concluded that they have "the potential to fulfil a vital democratic and civic role" (p. 323) and that "a broader view of both the current activities and aspirations of most hyperlocal sites suggests a potentially major role in compensating for the decline of traditional local media and making a genuine contribution to local plurality" (p. 344). On the other hand, Metzgar et al. (2011) noted that hyperlocals are "not purposeful in developing a news organisation that might provide complete coverage of community issues" (p. 779). In the introduction (Chapter 1) I argued that mainstream and nonmainstream local media fulfil the different news and information needs of diverse communities in fragmented and specialised ways, and a more fine-grained and nuanced investigation can yield insights into the different approaches. It is this attention to specialised roles, and the intrinsic limitations of the formats, within a news oasis, and their effectiveness in addressing local journalism's diverse information and social functions which is explored in this thesis's discussions around categories, introduced in Chapter 1 (Section 1.2.4), empirically tested, quantitively and qualitatively, in the content analysis in Chapter 4, and the discourses of media workers around expertise, duty and autonomy in Chapter 5, and discussed further in this chapter.

This chapter presents a summary of the main arguments of this research, the key findings and observations from the content, thematic and critical discourse analyses, and the contribution made to broader academic, policy and industry understandings of local journalism at its current uncomfortable conjuncture of decline and reinvention. It continues with a brief reminder of the research approach; followed by a look at journalism's haves and haves-nots in relation to Bristol and its communities; public interest news coverage in the city; community, and geographically relevant, representation; then the strengths and weaknesses of categories—and the need for a workable typology—are considered. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research.

6.2 Research Approach

This thesis was informed by the assertion that, as traditional media retreat from covering public interest and community news in response to the crisis in journalism and the need to maintain high profit margins, non-traditional forms of journalism, such as hyperlocals, community-centred journalism, not-for-profits, bloggers and citizen journalists, can address the democratic and social gaps by helping citizens re-engage with local political life and strengthen their feelings of belonging to the communities in which they live (Alexander, 2016; Fenton, 2010a; Harte et al., 2016, 2019; Konieczna, 2018; Konieczna & Robinson 2014; Konow-Lund, 2024; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2023; Wenzel, 2020a). Democracy and community involvement are integral to Friedland's (2001, 2012) communicatively integrated communities, and ideas around critical information needs, which allow *all* citizens to participate in the public sphere (Napoli et al., 2015, 2017, 2018). The news oasis of Bristol was chosen as the focus of my research because it was felt that the diverse news ecosystem, with both mainstream and innovative nonmainstream players, would provide an ideal subject to test this assertion. This led to my research question and sub-research questions:

> RQ. To what extent, and in what ways, does coverage of community and public interest news in the Bristol news ecosystem differ between local mainstream and local nonmainstream journalists and news organisations?
>
> Sub-RQ1. What news gets covered in the Bristol local news ecosystem, by whom, and in what ways?
>
> Sub-RQ2. How do news workers in Bristol see their roles and how do these role conceptions depend on professional, cultural and social norms, and the institutional practices and commercial imperatives of the organisations they work for, whether mainstream or nonmainstream?

The theoretical approach adopted to answer these questions was based on Hess and Waller's (2017) media power lens which combines insights from political economy, cultural studies and sociology, to examine news organisations, their relations to systems of power and hierarchy of influences (Gallagher, 1982; Reese, 2001, 2016); audience conceptions and social/cultural impact; and professional discourses voiced by journalists, especially when faced by a testing of boundaries and occupational ideologies (Carlson, 2015a; Carlson & Lewis, 2019; Konow-Lund, 2019; Maares & Hanusch, 2023; Schapals et al., 2019), and the gap between role conception and role enactment (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017; Hellmueller & Mellado, 2015; Mellado et al., 2020; Mellado & van Dalen, 2014; Tandoc et al., 2013). This approach is useful for understanding how news organisations operate within a journalistic field—where "people jostle for status and control vis-a-vis the economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital at stake in the particular field" (Slater, 2021, p. 5).

An in-depth analysis of local journalism in a bounded geographic area (as opposed to national or international surveys) is a rarity in the field of journalism studies, but can provide valuable insight into the necessity of tailoring limited journalistic resources to specific civic and democratic needs as well as the dynamics of, and competition within, a news ecosystem (Anderson, 2010, 2013a, 2016a; Local News Lab, n.d.). My research has been informed by two of the few UK studies carried out so far: the first focussed on Leeds, a post-industrial city in the north of England (Coleman et al., 2016; see also Anderson et al., 2015; Firmstone, 2016); and the second was a longitudinal examination into a "news black hole", Port Talbot, an economically struggling town in South Wales (Harte et al., 2019; Howells, 2015). The links between civic and democratic disengagement as local media declines have been delineated by Hayes and Lawless (2018, 2021), this has also been a useful guide for my research as well as work by other scholars, notably Wenzel (2020a) and Harte et al. (2019), on community-centred and hyperlocal journalism, and other studies focusing on marginalised communities (Konieczna, 2018; Konieczna, & Robinson, 2014; Konow-Lund, 2019, 2024; Robinson, 2014a; Robinson & Johnson, 2024; Robinson et al., 2025).

The research methods used in answering the research question and sub-research questions were a content analysis of all the news (1,649 stories) produced by nine news organisations over two weeks in July 2022, which gave a quantitative picture of their public interest and community news coverage, especially their local focus, ability to meet CINs, and balance of negative and positive news about marginalised communities. The findings were presented and discussed in Chapter 4. This was complemented by discourse analysis of qualitatively rich interviews with 18 mainstream and

nonmainstream news workers (including cross-over, Local Democracy Reporter Scheme and former journalists), which gave insights into how the media interacts with systems of power in the city (expertise), their aspirations, and resource constraints, in covering the marginalised (duty), and hierarchies of influence (autonomy). This was the subject of Chapter 5. The next section summarises the key findings from both chapters.

6.3 Summary of Key Arguments from Findings and Discussion Chapters

6.3.1 Research Context: Journalism Haves and Have-nots in Bristol

Bristol is a city in the UK with a population of more than 470,000, its economy is growing (Baker, 2024) and it has a reputation as a "cool place to live" (Booth, 2017; *Bristol 24/7*, 2016; Cork, 2024a; Kendall, 2024a, 2024b; Murray, 2018; Prideaux, 2017). This positive image is countered by the knowledge that while the city is booming for many, it is also struggling with some of the deepest race-, class- and place-based inequalities in the UK (Runnymede Trust, 2017)—according to recent indices of deprivation the most deprived area in Bristol is ranked 91 out of 32,844 in England, whereas the least deprived is ranked at 31,994 (Bristol City Council, 2019). Local communities—St Paul's, Easton, Hartcliffe and Knowle West, among them—have historically suffered discrimination, stigmatisation and erasure, often reinforced by questionable ethical practices among a small number of local journalists who lack embeddedness and affective attachment (see Appendix K). The toppling of the Colston statue (Statue Wars: One Summer in Bristol, 2021) brought to the fore long-simmering debates about race in the city, community representation, the power of business elites in local democracy, and the role of the local media. Bristol was also one of the UK cities to experience far-right rioting and threats of attacks on hostels housing asylum seekers during the summers of 2024 and 2025 (Cork, 2024b; Morrison, 2024b; Raval & Morrison, 2024), which have been cited in contemporary debates about the need for local media to have a role in countering the mis/disinformation of racist hate campaigns. Voter engagement in the 2024 local authority elections also highlighted the city's uneven democratic landscape, with turnout in Bristol's most affluent ward at 51.67% (down from 60.56% in 2016) and, for a ward at the other end of the city council's relative income table, turnout was at 14.23% (down from 27.31% in 2016) (Bristol City Council, 2019, n.d.-b).

The decline in public interest and community news does not affect all citizens equally. Örnebring's (2019) warnings are pertinent here, that journalism's failings contribute to uneven knowledge gaps in society—"socio-political knowledge being unequally distributed in the population

mainly along socioeconomic lines" (p. 227), but there are, and have always been, limits to what local journalism can achieve, democratically and socially. As Örnebring (2019) noted about journalism studies scholars:

> we tend to think that if there are problems with journalism, then it is within journalism's power to address them ... but I have a hard time seeing that any amount of fact-checking or temporarily dropping paywalls would in any way affect social inequality and increasing urbanisation—and make no mistake, these are the underlying root causes of the most important challenges facing journalism today. (pp. 227-228)

Such an observation underlines the importance of identifying the journalistic practices which are best placed to address society's specialised needs. The next section looks at the thesis findings in relation to public interest news, and this is followed by a section on community news coverage.

6.3.2 Public Interest News Coverage in a News Oasis

I found the daily mainstream news outlets—Reach-owned *Bristol Post* (print) and *Bristol Live* (digital); National World-owned *Bristol World* (digital); and the BBC's *Points West* (television)—were the most productive in the Bristol news ecosystem. This was to be expected, as they are agenda setters, and the *Post* and *Points West* have a reach which takes in the city and the surrounding area as well as long historical associations with the region, and the digital outlets have a geographically unlimited audience/market orientation. Reach and the BBC also employ the greatest number of journalists locally, while Reach, National World and the BBC's local radio operation (*Radio Bristol*, not part of the content analysis but relevant to the discussion throughout this thesis about local cutbacks and networked content) rely heavily on non-local and non-original copy from centralised and specialised reporters. For example, a 36-page copy of the *Bristol Post* typically contains 13 pages of local news, and locally produced content for *Radio Bristol* has been reduced to 40 hours a week. This networked content is a low-cost information subsidy for these large organisations and is not a production resource which is available to local nonmainstream outlets, nor is it utilised by the BBC's *Points West* television bulletin. This reliance is the result of consolidation of resources within national networks and market orientation (for the online *Bristol Live* and *Bristol World*) towards larger audiences (and advertising spread) than can be generated and sustained locally. It also replaces locally produced content lost through cutbacks, principally redundancies and the loss of specialised reporter roles. The consequences of this—especially the presence of bland, commercially oriented, and algorithmically and search engine-optimised,

content—in relation to audience trust, critical information needs and diminishing local relevance are discussed in the following section on community focus.

When local and original content is considered, Reach and the BBC demonstrate an important contribution to local public interest news (and sports) coverage through (relatively) well-staffed—though shrinking—newsrooms, specialised reporters and access to influential (elite, mostly male) sources. An important supplement to the in-house editorial teams has been two (BBC-funded) Local Democracy Reporter Scheme journalists, who cover local authorities and other public bodies in and around the city, and are assigned to Reach, with their copy published by most of the city's mainstream and nonmainstream outlets. They have won national awards for their scoops—successfully challenging a police misconduct anonymity decision and revealing a secret report on the £18bn cost of a Bristol underground (Linford, 2023d). They have had a difficult relationship with those in power in the city—Bristol's mayor took offence at a question (an online spat which went viral) from one of the LDRS reporters during one of his regular press conferences and refused to let them attend in future, saying "they're not banned, they're just not invited". This led to a boycott of the conferences by all the Bristol media, and subsequent cancellation of the meetings by the mayor, and questions about transparency, accountability and holding power to account (Bristol Cable, 2022; Bristolian, 2022c; Hookham, 2023; Kersley, 2022h, 2022j; Seabrook, 2022a, 2022b, 2024d; Sharman, 2022h, 2022i, 2022j, 2022k, 2022l, 2022m, 2022n, 2022o). The mayor also openly criticised the reporters, accusing them of "minute-taking" and being "an embarrassment to the profession", in full council meetings, where they were present but could not reply (Gavan, 2023a; Sharman, 2019d, 2023e; Tobitt, 2019b).

The LDRS service was launched nationally in 2017 (and is due to be reviewed along with the current BBC Charter in 2027). It is funded by the BBC licence fee (£8m p.a. or £88m in total) but the BBC is not involved directly on an editorial level. The reporters (165 spread throughout the UK) cover the activities of local authorities in their localities, report to contract holders (generally large commercial local media organisations—Reach has an executive editor to oversee the work of 80 LDRS reporters [Linford, 2025i]) and make their copy available to qualifying partners, including hyperlocals (BBC, n.d.-a). In 2025 the scheme marked the publication of 500,000 stories since its inception (Linford, 2025a). This is an interesting use of public media subsidies for public interest news and is under-researched. It has generated mixed feelings because, while it provides valuable and welcome public interest news coverage for news organisations with limited resources (the nonmainstream outlets in Bristol were full of praise for the scheme), reservations have been voiced that it subsidises making staff journalists

redundant by commercial enterprises; reporters are allocated to mainstream organisations to the detriment of smaller publishers; the pay is low and does not follow the salary rises of non-LDRS staff; questions have been raised over fee retention; and reporters have also been asked to cover non-LDRS subjects (Barnett & Greenslade, 2020; Heawood, 2016; Kersley, 2022a; Linford, 2017, 2023f, 2024e, 2024i, 2024q, 2025b, 2025c; Lock, 2021; Maher, 2023d, 2024f; Mayhew, 2019b; National Union of Journalists, 2024; Private Eye, 2024f; Sharman, 2023h, 2023i; Tobitt, 2019a, 2020a). The prolific amount of copy they produce (the LDRS reporters had the largest number of bylines in the sample) and its duplication throughout several local outlets, while welcome, also has the effect of amplifying and homogenising news about the most powerful in the city to the detriment of coverage of the marginalised.

Vox pops on *Points West* go some way to redressing the imbalance between representation of the powerful and the public ("the voice of the man/woman in the street") in the mainstream output, however they seldom feature well-thought-out arguments. Representation of women was also low in both mainstream and nonmainstream content and probably reflects cross-sector journalistic attachment to a hard news agenda focusing on local politics, as well as the gender balance of local power structures and the elite sources within them.

The discourse analysis of the interviews in Chapter 5 addressed three aspects by which news workers voiced their role conceptions in relation to normative journalistic values, and policed professional boundaries. These were expertise (holding power to account), duty (social value in respect of community coverage), and autonomy (organisational constraints on fulfilling their journalistic aspirations and goals). The discourses around both expertise and duty were often framed in terms of social capital and embeddedness, which is looked at in the following section on community representation, but the views of the (mainstream, past and present, and cross-over) news workers on autonomy revealed an explicit criticism of organisational (structure) changes over time (a "golden ageism") which have had a damaging effect on their ability (agency) to hold power to account and cover public interest news. The cross-over and former journalists continued to show allegiance to *traditional* mainstream hard news values and practices (holding power to account; elite sourcing; "lived experience"; reliance on advertising; and publishing print products, among them), while also criticising *contemporary* mainstream commercial orientation, the pressure to produce in large quantities shallow, "fast-turnaround" copy—Davies's (2009) churnalism—and its non-local focus. This was conveyed by references to "not given enough time" for the kind of investigative journalism which involves gaining the

trust of unwilling or cautious sources, whistle-blowers and bereaved parents for example; the desk-bound nature of modern news work ("they're just banging stuff out, reacting to what's happening on social media ... not out and about"); the lack of local knowledge by a new generation of managers ("they had a very kind of metropolitan attitude to everything, everything was centralised, city centre, all that kind of stuff. They weren't interested in potholes, and when the bins get collected, and in communities. I mean, some of them didn't know where some of the communities were, if I'm honest"); and under-staffing. A critical stance by frontline news workers towards diminished autonomy brought about by management-imposed changes and targets can also be seen in recent industrial action (over job cuts, reduced local coverage, productivity targets and political editorial direction) at the three mainstream news organisations examined in this thesis. Both mainstream and nonmainstream news workers also voiced practical ideologies which combined aspirations and an acknowledgment of present-day resource constraints, saying "we would do this, but we don't have the staff/resources/time/access".

6.3.3 Community Representation and Journalists' Social Value in a News Oasis

In the observations made by the news workers interviewed in Chapter 5, the expertise needed to hold power to account, and aspirations around social duty (embeddedness/"lived experience"), were also linked to (race- and class-based) social capital. The key example which illustrated this was the way the city's mayor—Marvin Rees—took advantage of his mixed-race and working-class background and affiliations (and media format—the unedited nature of live radio and podcast interviews was exploited) in forming relationships with a select few local outlets (the community radio stations, *BCfm* and *Ujima*) but refused to deal directly with the other news organisations. After his second (and final) term of office he also accused most of them of racially biased personal attacks and was critical of the "point-scoring" nature of local media coverage. In a podcast interview which he carried out with the *Bristol Cable* (in the run-up to his re-election at the end of his first term) he was asked not to filibuster by steering the focus away from his record and towards his observations of race and class in the city (Maggs, 2021b). Those outlets which had a "cosy" relationship with the mayor were also criticised by a cross-over journalist—in an example of category entitlement—for not meeting professional journalistic standards regarding holding power to account through their "soft-balling", showing that, for local news organisations the line between gaining trust, and making impartial and objective challenges in a watchdog role, is a difficult one to tread. The community radio stations were however praised for the way they held power to account with Rees's mayoral predecessor, who was white and middle class ("I do think that what was great about it was they both [*BCfm* and *Ujima*] held power to account in Bristol. And then the problem

is, that who was in power changed a bit, and then I don't think it was done in the same way. So, they're almost being just as bad as the people that they were opposed to before, when it was cosy. It's become a different type of cosiness with different people").

When the interviewees approached the subject of social duty—their aspirations towards ethical coverage of the city's marginalised, and territorially stigmatised, communities—they discussed the need to engage and empathise through such legitimising strategies as trust-building, embeddedness, local knowledge, affective attachment, "lived experience" and authenticity, and voiced their opposition to "parachute journalism" as a demonstration of category entitlement—although objective detachment, and an outsider perspective, was also seen as an advantage in disrupting historically complacent relations between the local media and the powers-that-be. These aspirations can be approached by local media in two distinct ways, and which are related to the geographical reach of the respective formats: *bridging between* communities (reputation enhancing by city-wide mainstream and nonmainstream) and *bonding within* communities (self-esteem boosting by ward-level nonmainstream). There was an awareness that the city-wide media (mainstream and nonmainstream) have, occasionally, emphasised and added to negative stereotyping of place-based communities and this has given impetuous to reputation-enhancing community reporter initiatives ("a sort of community ambassador for that area", said a *Bristol 24/7* reporter) and the self-esteem boosting focus of the smaller publications ("the whole point of us is to try and bring the area up", said the former editor of the Knowle West-based *The Knowledge*).

While the city, as a whole, benefits from coverage of public interest news by a highly productive news workforce, across both sectors, the coverage of place-based communities within the city revealed a patchy distribution of content which met critical information needs. CINs are informed by normative perspectives and priorities (Napoli at al., 2017) and seek to identify local, original, democratically and socially vital news. This is the type of information necessary to live safe and healthy lives; which provides access to educational, employment and business opportunities; and enables participation in civic and democratic community life (Friedland et al., 2012). The analysis combined a CIN framework with a mapping exercise, to look more closely at ward-level coverage. The balance of positive and negative news was also investigated.

The daily for-profit mainstream (Reach and National World) and nonmainstream (*Bristol 24/7*) media had less content, as a percentage of overall output, which met CIN criteria, than BBC television

and the not-for-profit, periodically produced, nonmainstream outlets, mainly due to the reliance by Reach and National World on non-local and non-original content, and the lifestyle-oriented nature of *Bristol 24/7* (listings, restaurant reviews, arts and culture focus, etc). These also devoted more coverage to central Bristol than the poorer, outlying, wards. The (geographically) hyperlocal focus of the nonmainstream, ward-level media (*The Knowledge* and the Voice network) meant their CIN content, as a percentage of overall output, was high.

Daily media focus, to a large extent, on "episodic" reporting of events which are, generally, sudden, quickly resolved and disruptive, and are predominately negative. This type of reporting depends on timeliness for impact, which is not something which can be exploited by the monthly, or less frequently produced, media. These have more time for a "thematic" analysis of wider issues of social structure and longer-term processes of change (Gavin, 2021)—such as solutions journalism—which can have a positive aspect. When the news at ward-level was considered for its celebratory or disorder focus, (the monthly and less frequent) nonmainstream media had a higher percentage of celebratory news and a lower amount of news with a disorder focus, than mainstream. This finding indicates the community self-esteem-boosting value of ward-level nonmainstream media can be due to its intrinsically limited geographic reach and periodicity, as well as editorial focus and news values.

6.3.4 Categorising Local News Organisations—Strengths and Weaknesses in a News Oasis

Mainstream and nonmainstream media are often seen as ideologically and commercially opposed (Eldridge, 2014, 2016, 2019; Hanusch & Löhmann, 2023) and at opposite ends of Bourdieu's journalistic field (Benson, 2006; Benson & Neveu, 1995; Bourdieu, 1989, 1995; Phillips, 2010) with the former tending towards the heteronomous (commercially focused/profit-maximising and politically conservative/status quo reinforcing) pole, and the latter tending towards the autonomous (independent/not-for-profit and oriented towards the public good) pole. But my research into the differences in content production between both sectors, and the similarities in the role conceptions of local news workers relating to expertise, duty and autonomy, in a changing local news environment marked by diverse critical information needs, has shown that a more fine-grained approach to categories of local journalism is needed than a simplified dichotomy based on ideology and commercial goals.

A more forensic analysis considers ownership (mainstream—part of national news organisations/nonmainstream—independent and local) but also the inherent limitations and specialised

affordances of the variations in format (print/digital/broadcast); frequency (daily/periodic); and (local) geographic reach (city-wide/ward- or community-level).

The mainstream media are local outlets of national organisations (for-profit Reach, National World and the publicly funded BBC) and can be considered local/national hybrids with limited autonomy. These organisations are grouped together because content, market orientation, targets, production systems, staff levels and specialised roles, increasing reliance on networked content, and business goals and decisions at a local level are determined by national hierarchies of influence in ways which are absent from their nonmainstream counterparts.

Format, however, shows a more nuanced reading is necessary as this affects audience reach and market orientation in ways which do not conform to the mainstream/nonmainstream dichotomy. Digital audiences are *potentially global and unlimited*, and this is commercially exploited by the local outlets (*Bristol Live* and *Bristol World*) of mainstream (for-profit) national news networks through non-local and non-original, algorithmically orientated copy. Geographically non-local market orientation and content are not present in digital nonmainstream local media (*Bristol 24/7*) despite utilising the same format.

In contrast to this digital potential, the audience (and advertising) reach for print and broadcast media is *limited geographically*, and this is a factor for both mainstream and nonmainstream. Despite this, networked content in the (for-profit) *Bristol Post* and (not-for-profit) *Radio Bristol* fills (hard copy and airtime) gaps caused by organisational cutbacks and exploits the production capabilities of national networks but does not have the same (audience-maximising) commercial focus as seen in digital.

There are inter-sector commonalities, and intra-sector differences, according to frequency and range—daily (mainstream and nonmainstream) outlets are orientated to episodic reporting (potentially negative), whereas monthly and less frequent media (nonmainstream) can host more thematic material (potentially positive). The city-wide media (mainstream and nonmainstream) have the potential to enhance community reputations through bridging social capital. Daily mainstream has the advantage of (relatively) high productivity of public interest news and (relatively) large audiences—but has, in the past, occasionally been prone to territorial stigmatisation and erasure of communities which has badly affected audience trust in these areas. Whereas the city-wide (both daily and monthly and less frequent) nonmainstream media cater to niche audiences—socially and politically concerned and interested in identity-based communities. While the embeddedness of local journalists, content focus and

distribution (every household in a geographically restricted area) of ward-level media (nonmainstream) help boost the self-esteem of marginalised communities through bonding social capital.

Cross-over journalists (and LDRS reporters) also show how some (mainly traditional and normative) mainstream values and production methods have been incorporated into nonmainstream production, in a blurring of sector and professional boundaries. This can also be seen as a critique of *current* mainstream direction. A comment by the editor of *Bristol 24/7* illustrates how some nonmainstream organisations share a similar reliance on advertising with their mainstream counterparts. He said: "Primarily, income comes from *old-fashioned* advertising ... we can say that we are this kind of young, hip, digital upstart but actually the income is *extremely traditional* in terms of paid-for advertising" (emphasis added). What is not addressed is that Reach and National World use their local outlets to host national advertising to maximise profits, and that nonmainstream makes more modest returns from local classified and display advertising. The editor of the Live network also made it clear that his products were based on *traditional* mainstream formats. He said "so we're a print-first thing, we always have been".

Table 6.1: Categories of Local Journalism and their Relative Public Interest News and Community-Focused Strengths and Weaknesses

M/Nm	Revenue	Format and Outlet	Frequency	CINs (proportion of overall output relative to other outlets)	Non-original and Non-local Content (Networked)	Potential for Local Focus	
						City-level Bridging	Ward/ Community-level Bonding (Embeddedness)
M	For-profit (national/ local advertising)	Print (Bristol Post-Reach)	Daily	Low	Present	High	Low
		Digital (Bristol Live-Reach/ Bristol World-National World)	Daily	Low	Present	High	Low
	Not-for-profit (licence fee)	Television (BBC Points West)	Daily	High	NA	High	Low
		Radio (BBC Radio Bristol)	Daily	Limited (reduced)	Present	High	Low

Nm	For-profit (primarily local ads)	Digital (Bristol 24/7)	Daily	Limited (soft news)	NA	High	Limited (community reporter scheme)
		Print (Voice network/ North Bristol Press)	Monthly plus	High	NA	NA (ward-level only)	High
	Not-for-profit (mixed – ads and grants)	Radio (BCfm/ Ujima Radio)	Daily	High	NA	High	High
		Print (Bristol Cable/The Bristolian)	Monthly plus	High	NA	High	Limited (solutions journalism)
		Print (The Knowledge)	Monthly plus	High	NA	NA (ward-level only)	High

Key: M = Mainstream; Nm = Nonmainstream; NA = Not Applicable

(note: Ward-level includes place- and interest-based communities)

Considering that the quantity of mainstream output is much greater than nonmainstream, Table 6.1 is an attempt to compare the *relative* strengths and weaknesses in meeting critical information needs (local and original public interest news) and potential and ability to bridge between, and bond within, marginalised communities (social responsibility), of the variety, diversity and plurality of the various news organisations in the Bristol news ecosystem. The commercial success of the various organisations and judgemental comparisons about their long-term sustainability were beyond the scope of this thesis, instead it has adopted a critical information needs framework as a way of assessing the efficacy of local news organisations in meeting their normative democratic and social obligations through the presence of original and local public interest news. According to this framework non-local and non-original content is seen as being detrimental to local audience information needs (by taking up news space and production resources which should be focused on local news), as well as trust and social capital, despite its commercial, and space-filling, value to mainstream media. Local journalists also see non-local content as a threat to their professional values and jobs, as seen in the strike by BBC workers. The community radio stations in this analysis use brief PA news bulletins, but these are only a small part of their output, are not the result of cutbacks, and are not seen as adversely affecting the local focus of these outlets.

Table 6.1 shows that, compared to the other outlets *Bristol Post*, *Bristol Live*, *Bristol World* and *BBC Radio Bristol* have a lower percentage of CINs present, as a proportion of overall output due to the presence of non-local and non-original networked content. These four outlets, plus *BBC Points West*, have high bridging, but low bonding, *potential* between and within the city's communities. The relatively high numbers of reporters, their productivity and the regional spread of these organisations mean there is a potential for high profile coverage of communities, but the desk-bound nature of the news work, territorial bias and city-centre-based production make embeddedness difficult for these organisations (*BBC Points West* does have roving reporters but these are thinly spread over a large region).

Of the nonmainstream organisations, the for-profit B*ristol 24/7* is the only one with limited content fulfilling CIN criteria, due to a higher percentage of commercially orientated soft news. The other outlets have a high proportion of CINs relative to overall output because of their local and original public interest news content. The city-wide nonmainstream media, *Bristol 24/7*, *Bristol Cable* and *The Bristolian* have high potential to bridge between communities, but only limited potential to bond within because of small staff numbers, and, for the print *Cable* and *The Bristolian*, limited means of distribution. The community radio stations (*BCfm* and *Ujima Radio*) have good bridging and bonding potential because they broadcast over a wide area and are focussed on interest-based communities, meaning they can use social capital and embeddedness to their advantage in attempts to gain authenticity and audience trust. This can also be capitalised by the Voice network and *The Knowledge*, although, as these are restricted to ward-level distribution areas (place-based communities), their bridging potential is nil but bonding potential is high. These findings add to the contention of this thesis that there is no single organisational model which is capable of fulfilling all the normative democratic and social aspirations expected of local journalism but, in a news oasis such as Bristol, where there is variety, diversity and plurality, then the complementary nature of the news ecosystem is a strength in itself.

I conclude this chapter with recommendations for future research directions.

6.4 Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

I started my research in 2018, prompted by widely held concerns about the reduction in public interest news and the withdrawal from community life of local journalism. Howells's (2015) study of the news black hole in Port Talbot in South Wales was an influence on the research—it has also had an impact in wider the academic and policy-making worlds—in understanding how communities depend on local

journalism and the depth of loss when this disappears. Since then, as I carried out research on this thesis, the situation for mainstream local journalism in general has worsened—job cuts, title closures, digital challenges, falling profits and audience share are frequently, almost routinely, reported—with the pandemic of 2020 accelerating the decline.

In the face of a bleak view of the current, and future, health of local journalism, I sought to make an original and unique contribution to knowledge by examining the robustness of a news oasis lauded for the innovations of its nonmainstream alternatives and valued for the strengths of its legacy media. Throughout this thesis I have provided insight into the diverse and varied news ecosystem in Bristol and efforts by an army of dedicated, hard-working and talented journalists who care about the ongoing relevance of the profession to the public sphere, and the way it can have a positive effect on the lives of local people.

Much local journalism research is concerned with finding a way to make provision of public interest and community strengthening news financially sustainable. The Bristol news ecosystem is an ideal test case for studying the variety of business models available to news organisations, which depend on advertising, philanthropic donations, paid-for print, licence fees, and membership contributions, among them. It should be noted that several of the organisations have seen the value of diversifying their revenue streams and all are open to considering new income sources. It was beyond the scope of my thesis to gauge the success of these various models beyond noting the relative longevity of the news organisations. All of them have survived and shown resilience over the past decade, in the face of the journalism crisis—some, if not all of them, were badly affected by the pandemic in 2020 but have since seen their fortunes improve. To gain a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of these models over time would require a second visit to the Bristol news ecosystem in, say, five years.

In researching the Bristol news ecosystem, I had the advantage of interviewing a wide range of very experienced journalists, some of whom began their professional lives 40 years ago. All of them, but especially the cross-over journalists—those who have worked for mainstream and nonmainstream media—were able to give first-hand accounts of the various journalism crises, from cutbacks; job losses; reduced recruitment; withdrawal from "local", i.e. community, news; and how to make the most of opportunities within the nonmainstream sphere. There was a strong "golden age" discourse in most of the interviews, not in a comforting, nostalgic sense, but a very real critique of changes which threaten a normative conception of journalistic professionalism—watchdog; disseminator of information; voice of

the citizens; and community champion (McNair, 2009). The journalists I talked to represent the past, and present, of the profession, but what of the future? News that training courses are closing due to a steady decline in interest (Stewart, 2024a, 2024b), is concerning, but for those establishments, universities and colleges, which continue delivering the next generation of reporters, editors, and broadcasters thought should be given to more focused training on careers within nonmainstream (Spilsbury, 2024), particularly as redundancies and reduced job opportunities within mainstream media are becoming the norm. Training should include, not just business skills (Baines & Kennedy, 2010), but also an understanding of embeddedness, social capital, trust, bonding, bridging and the problems and ethics of engaging with marginalised communities (Al-Kaisy, 2023; Firmstone, et al., 2022; Frost, 2006; Robinson, 2023; Robinson & Culver, 2019).

The government-backed Cairncross Review (DCMS, 2019) focused on the same concerns around democratic deficits raised by Howells. The report provided the most coherent official overview of the condition of local journalism and paths to securing its future in recent years and there is a need for policy makers to revisit the recommendations which were made more than seven years ago, among them an institute for public interest news, an innovation fund and tax relief—MPs have also, subsequently, called for a public interest local news fund. None of these initiatives have seen any progress (Mayhew, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 2020a; Tobitt, 2023a). There is also a need to look again at the rules around government advertising and public notices, especially as this is a revenue source which currently excludes hyperlocals (Abbott, 2020; Linford, 2024m; Heawood, 2021).

As I have found, the Local Democracy Reporters Scheme has made an invaluable contribution to reporting on news in the public interest in Bristol. A long view would be necessary for gauging its effectiveness. The BBC—which is having to make massive cutbacks—has not guaranteed funding beyond the next few years, so if (or when) funding is withdrawn the gap left by the LDRS reporters is likely to be a difficult one to fill.

Similarly, there are other areas of reporting on public interest news which are seeing profound changes, and the effects of which are only likely to become clear over the course of the next few years. These are the reduction in local news broadcast by BBC *Radio Bristol*, in line with the corporation's other local radio stations throughout the UK (Tobitt, 2024ae). In contrast, the BBC's investment in increasing local coverage online, and its effects on its commercial rivals, is worthy of further study.

Perhaps the most troubling development is the move away from geographically relevant news by Reach, National World and the BBC local radio service. This is the result of both concentrating content production in national networks and instructing locally based journalists to prioritise volume over quality with "quick turnaround" copy. Management strategies are based on high volume page views to monetise content, as well as using AI, although threats of page-view targets appear to have been shelved. There is a pressing need to carry out further in-depth research into the repercussions of this for working journalists and local audiences.

The critical information needs and community bonds in the city vary from a ward-to-ward, even a street-to-street, basis, which can be seen in deprivation statistics and voter turnout. The relationship between local news provision and these metrics—if indeed one exists—requires a longitudinal study. One cannot gauge the value of a quarterly ward-based publication such as *The Knowledge* in Knowle West by reference to measurable socio-economic factors, but anecdotal evidence, and community action to save it from folding, point to how highly it is regarded by readers, local advertisers and service providers—showing the strength of creating a relationship of authenticity with the community (Harte, et al., 2019) and the importance of bonding social capital.

There is a danger in looking upon nonmainstream journalists as saviours of local journalism, when their motivations are often more prosaic. The picture which emerges from the journalists working for the nonmainstream outlets in the Bristol media landscape is one where there is less naïve idealism or challenge to the prevailing order, but a hardheaded pragmatism about the desire or necessity of continuing to work in journalism outside a work environment where they no longer feel valued, or at home. The commercial direction of mainstream journalism and the imperative of a capitalist, market-based economy to maximise profits by increasing productivity, while reducing costs, such as staff numbers—which not even the non-commercial BBC escapes—not only alienates audiences but also compromises the reasons why many became journalists (Nikunen, 2014).

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Appendix A Coding Manual Phase 1

Content Analysis Coding Manual

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Introduction

This coding manual covers Phase 1 research—a content analysis of news produced by Bristol's news outlets over a two-week period (8-21 July, 2022).

The Bristol News Ecosystem

Table 1 lists the news outlets in the Bristol news ecosystem as well as the frequency and source of sample and if they are mainstream or non-mainstream.

Table 1

Media included in the content analysis

Outlet	Print	Website	TV	Radio	Frequency and source	Mainstream (M) or Non-mainstream (N)
Bristol Post (Reach)	X				Daily (hard copy)	M
Bristol Live (Reach)		X			Daily (2pm screenshot)	M
Bishopston Voice (Local Voice Network) (web)		X			Daily (2pm screenshot)	N
Bishopston Voice (print)	X				Monthly (issuu)	N

Filton Voice (LVN) (web)		X			Daily (2pm screenshot)	N
Filton Voice (print)	X				Monthly (issuu)	N
Fishponds Voice (LVN) (web)		X			Daily (2pm screenshot)	N
Fishponds Voice (print)	X				Monthly (issuu)	N
Henleaze and Westbury Voice (LVN) (web)		X			Daily (2pm screenshot)	N
Henleaze and Westbury Voice (print)	X				Monthly (issuu)	N
Horfield and Lockleaze Voice (LVN) (web)		X			Daily (2pm screenshot)	N
South Bristol Voice (LVN) (web)		X			Daily (2pm screenshot)	N
South Bristol Voice (print)	X				Monthly (issuu)	N
St George and Redfield Voice (LVN) (web)		X			Daily (2pm screenshot)	N
Bristol Cable (web)		X			Daily (2pm screenshot)	N
Bristol Cable (print)	X				Quarterly (hard copy)	N
Points West (BBC)			X		Daily (BoB—evening broadcast)	M

BBC News (web)		X			Daily (2pm screenshot)	M
Radio Bristol (BBC)				X	Daily (BoB—morning show)	M
Ujima Radio		X (no online news)		X	Daily (website—playback)	N
BCfm (Bristol Community Radio) (web)		X			Daily (2pm screenshot)	N
BCfm (broadcast)				X	Daily (website—playback)	N
ITV West news			X		Daily (BoB—evening broadcast)	M
The Bristolian (web)		X			Daily (2pm screenshot)	N
The Bristolian (print)	X				Monthly (PDF)	N
Bristol 24/7		X			Daily (2pm screenshot)	N
Bristol World (JPI Media)		X			Daily (2pm screenshot)	M
Bradley Stoke Journal (North Bristol Press)		X			Daily (2pm screenshot)	N
Filton Journal (NBP) (web)		X			Daily (2pm screenshot)	N
Patchway Journal (NBP) (web)		X			Daily (2pm screenshot)	N

Stoke Gifford Journal (NBP) (web)		X			Daily (2pm screenshot)	N
The Knowledge (web)		X			Daily (2pm screenshot)	N
The Knowledge (print)	X				Monthly (issuu)	N

Sample Gathering Process

The unit of analysis is every news item produced over a two-week period by the Bristol news outlets (8-21 July, 2022), gathered from hard copy newspapers, online PDFs/issuu, website home pages, broadcasts via Learning on Screen/Box of Broadcasts (BoB) and online playback feature for radio broadcasts not on BoB.

The code sheets for each news item are filed in folders and subfolders on OneDrive following the labelling convention: **outlet>week>date>numbered code sheets** (see Sample Number below for a fuller explanation).

For websites, save a screenshot of the homepage at 2pm each day and copy and paste URLs for each live (posted in the previous 24 hours) news item in a numbered list to correspond to numbered code sheets. The screenshot and list of URLs should be saved in the corresponding **outlet>week>date>** folder. This can be referred to when coding commences.

Coding Schedule

Table 2 is an excerpt of the schedule to keep track of coding progress.

Table 2

Excerpt of coding schedule

(X – materials gathered, N – no new items uploaded, C – coding complete)

Outlet	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3

	F 24	S 25	S 26	M 27	T 28	W 29	T 30	F 01	S 02	S 03	M 04	T 05	W 06	T 07	F 08	S 09	S 10	M 11	T 12	W 13	T 14
Bristol Post	X			X	X																
Bristol Live	X	X	X	X	X	X	X														
https://www.bristolpost.co.uk																					
Bishopston Voice (web)																					
https://www.bishopstonvoice.co.uk																					
Bishopston Voice (print)																					
Filton Voice (web)	N	N	N	N	N	N	N														
https://www.filtonvoice.co.uk																					
Filton Voice (print)																					
Fishponds Voice (web)	N	N	N	N	X	N	N														

In this example the Bristol Post folders are labelled: Bristol Post>week 1>Fri 24/06. Bishopston Voice (print copy) and Filton Voice (print copy) are monthly (or not as frequent). We are only interested in coding the current issue in the sample period. The Bristol Post is not published on Saturday and Sunday, but Bristol Live is updated daily. It is important to note when no new items have been uploaded as is frequently the case with the smaller news outlets and will give some idea of how active they are.

Code Sheet Guidance

Outlet

These are listed in Table 1 above. For outlets which are printed and have an online presence it is important to identify which one is being coded, e.g. Filton Voice (print) or Filton Voice (web).

Date

This is the date of broadcast, website or cover date. Do not code items on websites which are more than 24 hours old. This information will be used to identify the news item — note down month and year if this is all that is given, e.g. Figure 1, or day, month, year and time, e.g. Figure 2. When online

stories are updated the update time is usually posted—we need to find the correct version, so it is important to note the time.

Figure 1

Cover date on Bishopston Voice



Figure 2

Date and time on Bristol Live website



Item Number

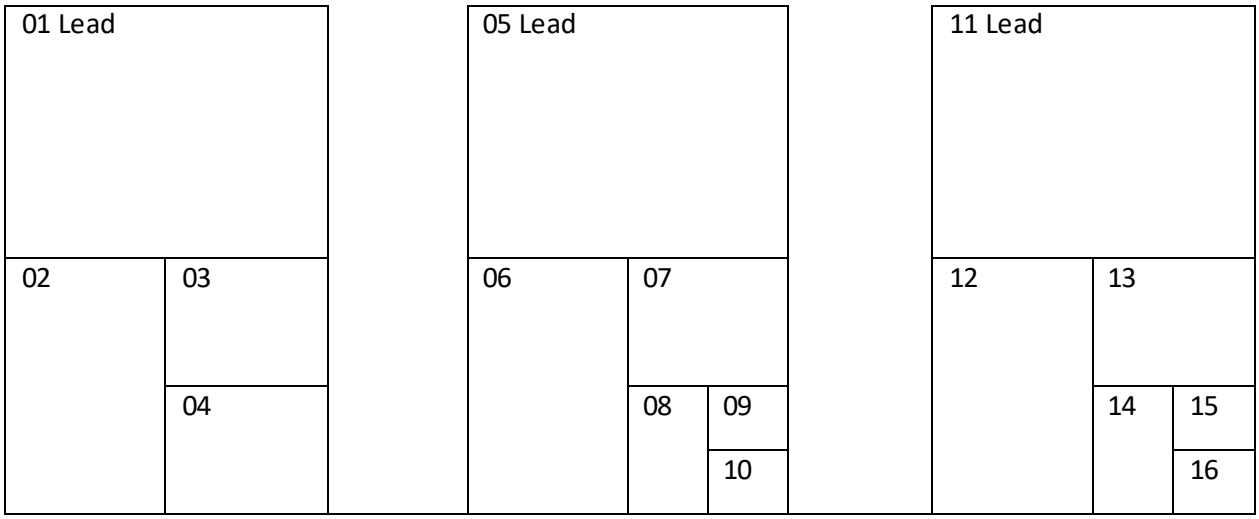
Numbers are allocated to <u>separate news items</u> (e.g. each new Item Subject, see below; <u>do not</u> code sidebars/info boxes separately; <u>ignore</u> front/back-page teasers, which are usually a headline and/or photograph and a blurb saying "see p. X for full story") on a **website**, in **print** or **broadcast** on a

particular day. The first in-sample item will be 01. Complete the code sheet for that item, save in this format—**outlet>week>date>item 01**—in the appropriate folder then start a new code sheet for item 02.

- For **websites** use the numbering system corresponding to the list compiled at 2pm each day.
- For a **print** layout use the numbering system in Figure 3—the order is, page lead, downpage/non-lead stories, news in briefs/NIBs (see Item Length below). Mark up the hard copy news item with the corresponding Item Number.

Figure 3

Numbering system for print news items



- For **broadcasts** items are coded consecutively. Note: do not include initial anchor introduction, previews, adverts and trailers. For broadcasts a new news item will depend on changes in Item Subject not Item Type or Journalist/Contributor. Anchors often do round-ups of short items and each one should be coded separately with a new code sheet for each new Item Subject, e.g. King's visit; tensions rise with Russia; skateboarding dog would be coded as:

  (Item Number) 01 <— changed

  (Item Type) News Item <— unchanged

  (Item Length) Short <— unchanged

  (Author/Contributor) Inhouse Anchor <— unchanged

(Item Subject) Royalty; <— changed

(Item Number) 02 <— changed

(Item Type) News Item <— unchanged

(Item Length) Short <— unchanged

(Author/Contributor) Inhouse Anchor <— unchanged

(Item Subject) Foreign Affairs; <— changed

(Item Number) 03 <— changed

(Item Type) News Item <— unchanged

(Item Length) Short <— unchanged

(Author/Contributor) Inhouse Anchor <— unchanged

(Item Subject) Other <— changed

There are times when broadcasters change format (Item Type) and Author/Broadcast Journalist/Contributor when reporting on a single Item Subject, e.g. a report on the covid pandemic might begin with a straight-to-camera piece by a studio-based anchor, followed by an interview with a health expert and concluded by outside broadcast vox pops by a different journalist. To avoid Item Subject being coded multiple times in a single broadcast when broadcast format/convention changes, code as one item and code Item Type and Author/Broadcast Journalist/Contributor as multiple, specifying the different formats and journalists, e.g.:

(Item Number) 01 <— unchanged

(Item Type) Multiple <— specify as News Item + Interview + Opinion Piece (Member of the Public)

(Item Length) In-depth <— unchanged

(Author/Broadcast Journalist/Contributor) Multiple <— specify as Inhouse Anchor + Inhouse Reporter

(Item Subject) Health/NHS <— unchanged

Also beware of segues, e.g. where an anchor presents a segment on lack of NHS beds then says "...in other health-related news.." and goes to a segment on a breakthrough in kidney dialysis—these are two separate Health/NHS stories, so two separate code sheets.

There are also occasions when the broadcast returns to a previous news item after an interruption, e.g. "...and finally just to recap on our main news tonight..." —in this case code this segment as a continuation of the first, if Item Subject remains unchanged. This means two, or more, start-finish times (see next variable) will need to be noted, e.g. 01.25-7.45 and 27.39-28.40.

Item URL/Page Number/Broadcast Item Start-Finish Times

This information is needed to retrieve the news item.

- **Websites**. Copy and paste the item **URL** into this box. This can be cross-referenced with the sample number on list compiled at 2pm.
- **Print**. **Page numbers** in hard copy publications are generally at the top of the page. If a story is split over two or more pages, e.g. "...continued on page 3..." then include all page numbers.
- **Broadcast**. Note minutes and seconds of segment's **start and finish times**, e.g. 12.45-16.34. Include additional start-finish times if Item Subject is returned to later in the broadcast.

Headline/Broadcast Description

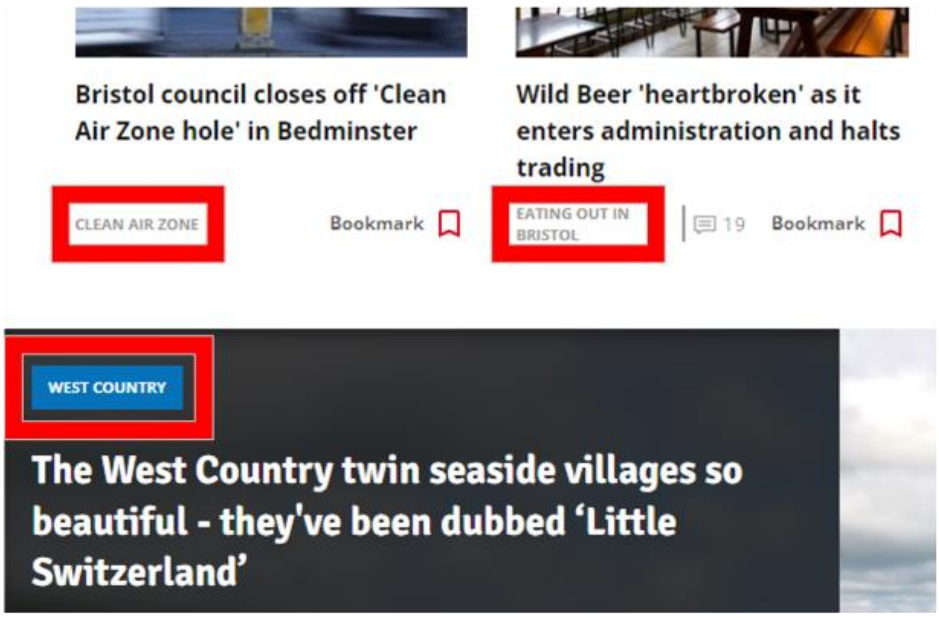
Write the print/website headline or a short description of the broadcast story, e.g. City Leaders in Council Tax Rise Warning.

Item Label (multicode possible)

Specify any labels assigned to articles—in Figure 4 Bristol Live has used the labels Clean Air Zone, Eating Out in Bristol and West Country. Highly unlikely there will be more than one label but it is possible. Also mark Not Applicable for stories with no labels.

Figure 4

Item labels on Bristol Live



Item Length (single code)

Item length has been simplified to short (news in briefs in print, broadcast headline round-ups), lead/non-lead (bulk of the stories) and in-depth (extended coverage) to avoid the difficulties of making comparisons across multiple platforms.

- **Short:** Newspaper NIBs—usually one or two paragraphs with a small font headline and placed in the outer column on a page; broadcast pieces—short anchor round-up where Item Type and Author/Broadcast Journalist/Contributor are unchanged but Item Subject changes. In this instance use new code sheet and code new Item Length.

Figure 5

St George and Redfield Voice NIBs



- **Lead:** The main story, usually with the biggest headline (in bold type) on a newspaper page, at the top of a website or first story after the headlines in broadcasts. There will always be <u>one</u>, but not more than one, lead per page, website, broadcast. For newspaper pages, such as Figure 8, where it is not clear which is the lead, there are no hard and fast rules, so pick <u>one</u> story to code as the lead. For websites, such as Figure 7, where stories are uploaded one after the other but there are no clear design/layout pointers to lead status, code the most recent/top story as lead.

Figure 6

St George and Redfield Voice lead story



Figure 7

Bristol 24/7 website lead story

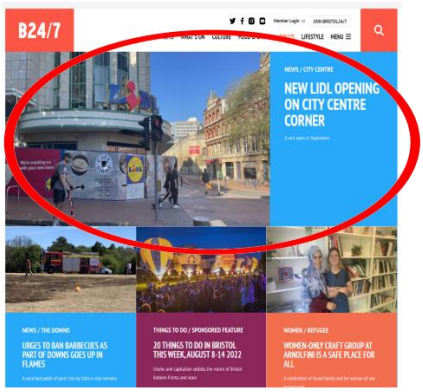


Figure 8

Print example of ambiguity over lead status in Fishponds Voice



July, 2022 Fishponds Voice 19

NEWS

Award for special school

A SPECIAL school based in Hillfields has become the first to be awarded the Healthy Schools Mental Health and Wellbeing Specialist Award.

Briarwood School, which has its primary and pastoral departments in Briar Way, has pupils aged from three to 19 with severe and profound learning difficulties, complex needs, autism and sensory impairment.

The school signed up for the Healthy Schools programme, a national drive to protect and improve health and well-being.

The award scheme encourages taking a "whole school approach" to improving the mental health and well-being of all pupils and staff, supporting those most at risk.

Briarwood began by completing the Healthy Schools essential award, which covers areas including healthy eating, dental hygiene, staying active and mental health.

Staff reevaluated the curriculum to "embed" opportunities to learn about and improve healthy living.

The award judges highlighted the school's good practice in areas including anti-bullying, staff well-being, hearing pupils' views and respecting rights.

Briarwood then moved on to complete the specialist award, with key members of staff given mental health first aid training, and regular support and supervision available to all pupils and staff.

Assistant head teacher Tina Gram said: "The award recognises the work Briarwood is doing in supporting the mental health and well-being of all of its community.

"School experiences has an important influence over a young person's mental health. Schools are in a good position to support children and young people to understand how they can look after their own mental health and well-being. School staff are also in a good position to identify pupils who need more support."

Children from St Joseph's at their exhibition

Pupils' talent on show

A FISHPONDS school opened for an exhibition of work produced by its pupils during a poetry and art week.

Children at St Joseph's Catholic Primary School in Chatsworth Road performed, read and wrote their own poetry, and used sculpture, pastels, watercolours and paint to create their own artwork. The work, on the theme of light, was exhibited around the school and parents invited in to see the different projects produced by each class.

Head teacher Jessilyn Baker said: "Their work was amazing. It was great to have parents once again in school to see all the children's art and poems.

"It was very special to hear the children proudly showing off what they had done."

Teacher Helen Grainger said: "I loved helping the children set up for the exhibition.

"It was an amazing week of writing and performing poetry, and the children have shown they are true artists and poets."

Briarwood School ENJOY ENGAGE LEARN

Are you a passionate, empathetic, hardworking person, who likes to make a difference in children's lives, if so, we have exciting opportunities to work at our rapidly expanding Special School in a variety of roles.

Briarwood is a **Bristol Special School**, based in **Fishponds** and **Barton Hill**, committed to providing a high quality of education, care and life skills for children and young people with severe learning difficulties and complex needs including autism and sensory impairment from 3-19 years.

Please visit our careers page on www.eteach.com/schools/briarwood-school-25106 or contact us via email on HR.briarwoodsp@bristol-schools.uk

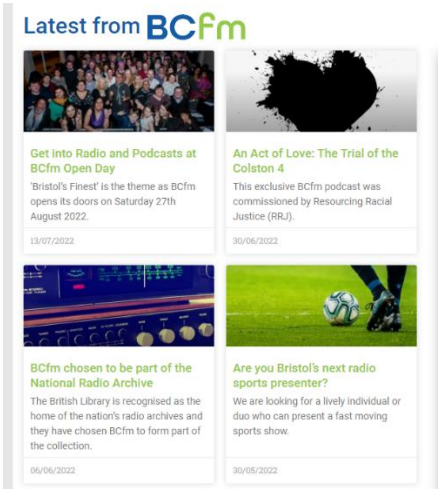
Are you looking for a way to get involved with your local community? Have you considered being a School Governor? If you are interested please contact **Deborah Smith** for more information chairbriarwoodsp@bristol-schools.uk

Briarwood School, Briar Way, Fishponds, Bristol BS16 4EA www.briarwood.bristol.sch.uk

To advertise, contact Shaun Tel 07540 383 870 Email: sales@fishpondsvoice.co.uk Got News? Call Ken On 07715 770377

Figure 9

BCfm website example of ambiguity over lead status



- **Downpage/Non-lead:** The majority of stories will be downpage/non-leads. In print, typically (but not always) the headline will be a smaller font size than the lead and light, i.e. not bold. Some downpage/non-leads are picture stories with prominent photographs, picture boxes (frames) and bold text as in Figure 10. There can be several downpage/non-lead stories to a page.

Figure 10

St George and Redfield Voice downpage/non-lead story



- **In-depth/multiple:** An extended story, often spread over two or more pages or dominating a bulletin with multiple Item Types and Author/Broadcast Journalist/Contributors. If there is coverage of a major incident and Item Subject is constant, e.g. a plane crashes on a school and there are component items such as introductory overview, an interview with the headteacher, expert analysis by air traffic control etc, then use one code sheet to avoid coding Item Subject more than once:

(Item Number) 01

(Item Type) Multiple <— specify as News Item + Interview/Profile + Analysis

(Item Length) In-depth/multiple

(Author/Broadcast Journalist/Contributor) Multiple <— specify as Inhouse Anchor + Inhouse Reporter + Contributed Content – Public Sector

(Item Subject) Disaster/Accidents

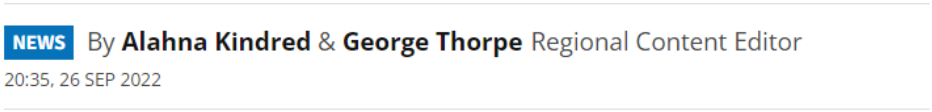
Author/Broadcast Journalist/Contributor (multicode possible)

Code for broadcast anchors, print/broadcast/online reporters/editors and contributions by non-journalists. Specify when names and specialisms/job titles are given. Also specify for gender—**M** = male, **F** = female, **NK** = not known, **C** = corporate, **Mx** = mixed (more than one name, different genders).

Multicode if there is more than one byline for a single Item Type, as in Figure 11. In this case code Inhouse Byline/Reporter/Anchor (Name Only) and Byline/Reporter/Anchor (Name + Specialism) and specify names, specialism and genders.

Figure 11

Bristol Live post with two bylines



When there is more than one Item Type for a single Item Subject, e.g. when broadcasts use different formats with different journalists for each segment, then code Author/Broadcast Journalist/Contributor as Multiple. See guidance in Item Type, Item Number and Item Length above.

There is also the possibility of coding collaborations—only code when the collaboration is between an inhouse journalist and an outside contributor. Specify name and title if given.

- **Inhouse (Generic):** If byline is Staff Reporter, The Newsroom, Correspondent (but no name)—specify.
- **Inhouse (Specialism Only):** If byline is a specialism, e.g. Business Editor, Sports Correspondent (but no name)—specify.
- **Inhouse Byline/Reporter/Anchor (Name Only):** Named byline but no job title—specify name and list if more than one byline.
- **Inhouse Byline/Reporter/Anchor (Name + Specialism):** Named byline and job title, e.g. John Simpson, Foreign Affairs Editor—specify both name and specialism and list if more than one byline.
- **Syndicated Content:** If byline is PA News, aggregated content, e.g. not original to news outlet—specify. If there is also an Inhouse Byline do not code as Collaboration.
- **Contributed Content—Political Representative:** e.g. MP/mayor column—specify.

- **Contributed Content—Members of the Public:** e.g. Letters to the editor, opinion piece—specify.
- **Contributed Content—Community Group:** e.g. WI reports, local sports, community correspondent—specify.
- **Contributed Content—Private Sector:** e.g. Business representative—specify.
- **Contributed Content—Celebrity:** Specify.
- **Contributed Content—Public Sector:** Specify.
- **Contributed Content—Expert:** Specify. Including contributions by academics.
- **Collaboration:** Between outlet and contributor—specify. Sponsored Features (see Figure 13) are sometimes collaborations but code only if there is byline attribution.
- **Other**: Specify.
- **Multiple:** Only code when broadcasts change formats and broadcast journalists but Item Subject is unchanged. Specify.
- **No Attribution:** No explicit name/title given.

N.B. members of the public in vox pops should be regarded as Sources (see below) not contributors.

Item Type (single code)

This variable codes for the format of the item and not, specifically, the content, which is coded in Item Subject below. The coding of item type enables comparisons to be made between the type of news produced by mainstream and non-mainstream news outlets within the city news ecosystem. Ignore front/back-page teasers, which are usually a headline and/or photograph and a blurb saying "see p. X for full story".

- **News Item:** Hard news—crime, politics etc; live feeds on websites; a recent event; also soft news—missing pet, charity fundraising. Normally dependent on recency (O'Neill & Harcup, 2019, p. 218)
- **Survey (Social Media Invitation):** Mainly found on mainstream websites, obvious invitation to share opinions online, often includes the phrase "what do you think?"
- **Report (In-Depth Feature/Investigation):** Broader discussion and not necessarily time-specific.
- **Editorial/Opinion (Professional journalist):** An article which expresses a strong personal opinion by an editor, journalist, columnist.
- **Opinion Piece/Letter/Contributed Content (Non-journalist):** Letters to the Editor and vox pops as well as an invited contribution. An article which expresses a strong personal opinion or organisational campaigning stance by a non-journalist or regular diary piece, e.g. MP, mayor, councillor, religious leader, Third Sector representative, member of the public, WI write-ups.
- **Advertorial/Sponsored Feature/Affiliate Links:** Only when clearly labelled as advertorial/sponsored feature or when affiliate links are mentioned.

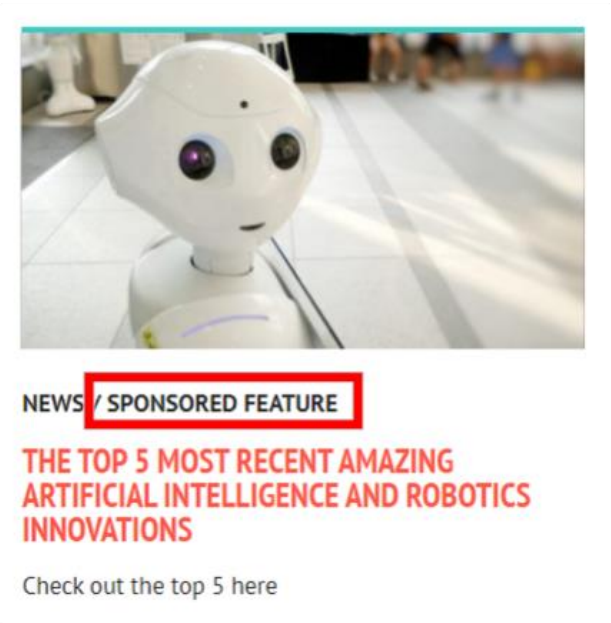
Figure 12

Bristol Live use of a mirror.co.uk advertorial



Figure 13

Bristol 24/7 sponsored feature



- **Preview/Review/Consumer/What's On Lists:** These cover arts, events, leisure, property, retail.
- **Interview/Profile:** Include experts being interviewed as well as profiles.
- **Photo Story:** A photo spread where the photos dominate the text, e.g. flower shows, charity fashion shows, "recently-unearthed treasure trove of old photographs show how docks have changed over the decades".

- **Aggregated Articles:** Stories collected from different media outlets. See Source for Non-original Content variable below.
- **Podcast:** Online only. Only stand-alone podcasts. Do not code podcast as a separate item if it is embedded in a news item.

Figure 14

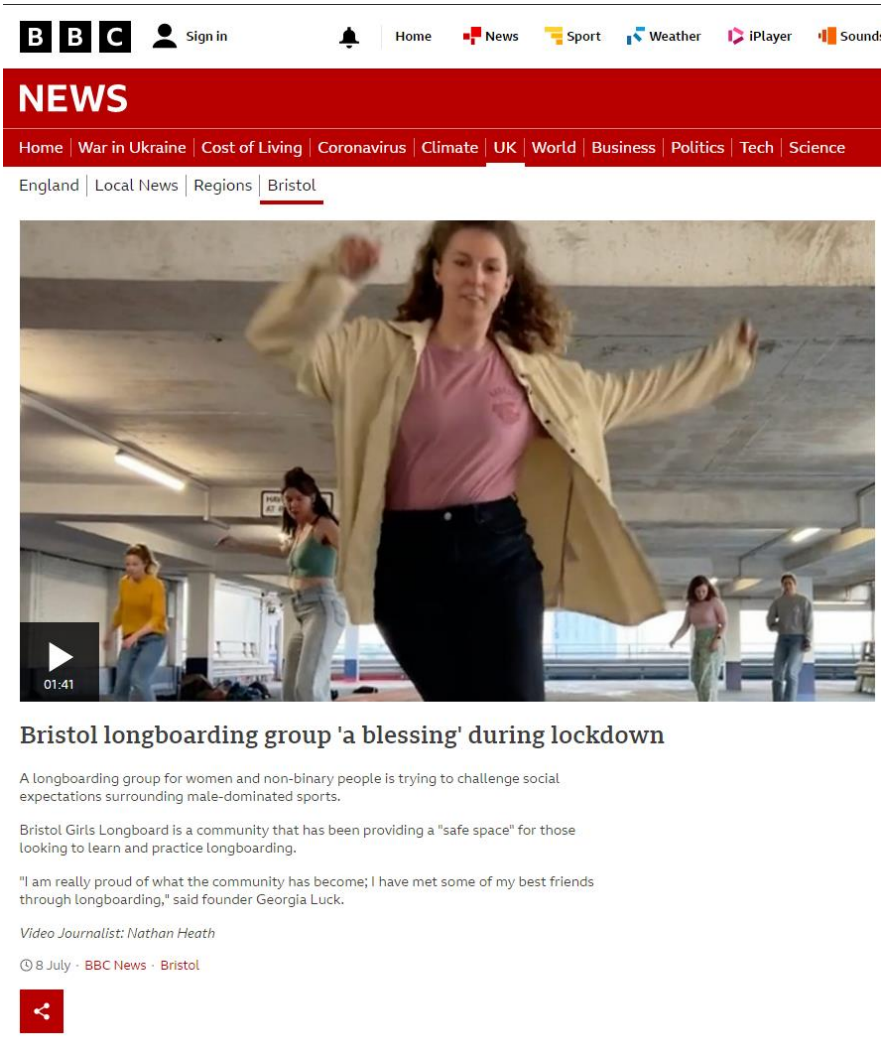
Bristol Cable stand-alone podcast



- **Video**: Online only. Only stand-alone videos. Do not code video as a separate item if it is embedded in long news item. In Figure 15 the text is an introduction to/summary of the video and has a Video Journalist byline—regard similar items as stand-alone videos.

Figure 15

BBC web news stand-alone video



- **Live Blog:** Online only. Continually updated with time stamps/bylines—usually explicitly referred to as Live Blog. Only code for introductory paragraphs—not new posts.
- **Multiple**: Code this when format changes—usually in broadcasts (see Item Number above)—and specify. Also if main (print) story is accompanied by sidebars/info boxes.
- **Other:** Specify.

Item Subject (single code)

Code the most prominent story subject in headline and introductory paragraphs. Code for focus and not necessarily the actor, i.e. Bristol City Council green policies should be coded as Environment/Energy/Nature, not Politics (Reinemann, et al. 2011, p. 226; 2017).

- **Politics (Institutional):** Local councils, UK Government, policies, services, council tax. Council responsibilities cover many areas so only code this value for those subjects which relate to the

running of the public body, such as the introduction of a new committee system or diversity of council staff; for SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) stories involving the council, code under Education; environmental, such as the Clean Air Zone, and planning stories, likewise, have their own values.

- **Politics (Professional):** MPs, councillors, political parties, elected mayors, civil servants, e.g. chief executives.
- **Politics (Voluntary)/Third Sector:** Protests, petitions, campaigns on political issues, advocacy and pressure groups. Include organised protests against cut backs in bus services/plans for housing developments/climate change/saving a local market from gentrification/BLM. Organised charities, e.g. Women's Aid.
- **Business/Industry:** Firms, shop/restaurant closures/trading difficulties (not shop openings/retail—code as Consumer), CBI, trade bodies, chambers of commerce, Federation of Small Businesses, Business West, BID (Business Improvement District). Response to new regulations and economic performance. Business rates. Awards and innovations. Trading standards. Not industrial relations.
- **Economy:** Interest rates, the Budget.
- **Environment/Energy/Nature:** Energy provision, e.g. nuclear power stations, windfarms, solar power, fracking, National Grid. Not energy bills. Pollution levels. Not environmental protest. Include local authority green plans here (instead of Politics). Code Clean Air Zone plans here, not Transport/Travel.
- **Health/NHS:** Ambulance services—e.g. South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SWASFT), A&E, waiting lists, health statistics, cancelled operations, vaccinations, GPs and dentists. Include health advice and warnings, e.g. diets, obesity, cancer check-ups, alcohol/drugs dependency and clinics etc. Air ambulance service.
- **Education:** Attainment, qualification tables, university news, include nurseries/early years childcare as this is regulated by Ofsted. Not free school meals, which should be Cost of Living/Welfare/Benefits/Poverty.
- **Employment/Jobs/Industrial Relations:** Union actions, employment statistics, redundancies, vacancies, wage discrimination (irrespective of employer), expanding workforce (where not Business/Industry), apprenticeship courses, tribunals.
- **Finance Sector:** Banking, Stock Exchange.
- **Science/Technology:** Academic research and local technological developments, e.g. a Bristol firm has made a breakthrough in microchip technology which is likely to have world-wide impact, do not code as Business/Industry in this case. (Not gadget/tech reviews—code as Consumer).
- **Religion:** Where there is a specific religious function, e.g. marking dates/festivals in religious calendar, religious leaders commenting on events from a religious perspective, not church fetes, events in church halls, which would be Community. Solstice celebrations.
- **UK Defence/Military/Terrorism:** War, conflict, terrorism, include stories about local defence contractors. British Legion. Ex-service personnel.
- **Immigration/Diversity:** Refugees, deportation proceedings, race, but code educational attainment, health disparities, housing, protests under relevant values.

- **Cost of Living/Welfare/Benefits/Poverty:** Social care, pensions, free school meals, foodbanks, cost of living, rising energy bills, budgeting tips for fuel/food, poverty statistics. Not homelessness, which comes under Housing.
- **Foreign News:** Foreign trade, aid, foreign conflicts, disasters, coups—no local impact. For a local person on trial in a foreign country, code as Legal/Judiciary. If stranded by holiday flight cancellations, code as Transport/Travel.
- **Transport/Travel:** Public transport, transport infrastructure (National Highways, Network Rail), transport plans also traffic hold-ups, airport queues if not caused by Disasters/Accidents, protests or strikes which should be coded as Politics (Voluntary) or Employment/Jobs/Industrial Relations. Car test drives/reviews should be coded as Consumer. Code Clean Air Zone plans as Environment/Energy/Nature. Include parking/speeding fines stories. Code First Bus and GWR here (but as Private Sector in Sources).
- **Celebrity:** A well-known person, their family, private life, e.g. gossip prompted by Love Island but not a review of the show itself.
- **Entertainment/Leisure/Food:** Only soft news, e.g. restaurant and gig reviews, recipes, travel articles, tourism and tourist attractions (including "best places to live in/visit in the UK"-type articles), fashion, lifestyle, garden and house makeovers (not shops/retail—code as Consumer). Food allergies should be coded as Health/NHS, closure of a well-loved music venue should be coded under Business/Industry.
- **Royalty:** Royal duties, visits, media relations, finances, etc.
- **Disaster/Accidents:** Fires, severe injuries, road traffic accidents; travel disruption if due to accidents, damage caused by severe weather.
- **Weather:** Climate extremes but not damage caused by severe weather, code instances as Disaster/Accidents, and hospitalisations due to heatwave as Health/NHS.
- **Media/Social Media:** Newspapers/websites, television, radio, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, influencers, Only Fans, media policy, media owners, BBC. Not references to outlets' own campaigns, e.g. "We've done it! Target reached in our homelessness campaign", which in this instance should be coded under Housing.
- **Culture/Arts:** Professional cultural events, not amateur dramatics, community arts projects, which should be coded under Community.
- **History/Nostalgia:** Down Memory Lane pieces, marking anniversaries, photo stories, such as "Remembering Bristol's 80's Nightlife in Pictures".
- **Sport:** Fans, match reports, team/league news, sports bodies (FA, ECB), fundraising for youth team kit/clubhouse, playing fields under threat.
- **Property:** Houses for sale, house prices. Not rental market, long-term housing provision, housing developments or home and garden DIY/lifestyle/consumer pieces. Demand for office space goes under Business/Industry.
- **Planning:** Long-term housing provision, housing/leisure/retail/industrial developments, regeneration/gentrification (but not protests), licensing, not transport related.
- **Community/Charity:** Local non-political civil society groups, e.g. WIs, amateur dramatics, community groups, religious groups, societies, not sport related. Non-professional community events, e.g. flower shows, dog shows, fetes, street parties, Remembrance Day services. Twin town groups. Sealed Knot. Pride parade. (Non-political) fundraising activities. Also code under

this for charitable donations/prizes/honours from private sector firms to community groups/good causes/community champions/heroic acts (Community/Pride/Bravery Awards).

- **Consumer:** Items for sale, shops/retail (openings/new lines/trading hours/refurb/relaunch/branding not shop/restaurant closures/trading difficulties—code as Business/Industry), gadget/tech reviews, sales/discounts/returns policies/product recall/compensation, financial investment advice, car test drives/reviews (not Transport/Travel).
- **Emergency Services (other):** Fire service, RNLI, cave rescue, mountain rescue, RSPCA, coastguard, AA, RAC.
- **Police Incidents:** Incidents of individual and organised criminal activity including vandalism, hate crime, riot, drug spot checks and modern slavery. People jailed for attacks on police come under Legal/Judiciary. Include police activity which is not necessarily crime related, i.e. appeals for information about missing persons, police good deeds.
- **Crime (General):** Crime statistics, policing in general including claims of institutional racism, crime prevention campaigns/initiatives, advice on avoiding scammers/online fraud etc. Gun licences. Include internal police misconduct/disciplinary hearings but not court cases, which are coded as Legal/Judiciary. For fines code under relevant subject—speeding/parking under Transport/Travel; water company pollution under Environment/Energy/Nature; trading standards fines under Consumer or Business/Industry.
- **Legal/Judiciary:** Court cases—Crown, magistrates, family, small claims, bankruptcy, inquests. Code inquiries/tribunals under own subject, e.g. Planning, Disaster/Accidents (for Grenfell, Hillsborough), Media (for phone hacking) or Employment/Jobs/Industrial Relations. Not deportation and asylum legal proceedings, which are coded as Immigration/Diversity.
- **Animals:** Code for pets, animals in distress, animal sanctuaries, rare and unusual sightings, rewilding, new/introduced/threatened species, zoos and zoo breeding successes, animal testing/experiments—policies, procedures and developments but protests should be coded as Politics (Voluntary).
- **Housing:** Code for waiting lists, social housing, housing conditions, renting, evictions, Acorn (rent reform), private landlords, housing associations, homelessness. Not housing developments/local plans or houses for sale—see Planning and Property above.
- **Youth/Young People:** Youth groups, not cutbacks in provision of youth services, which should be coded as Politics (Institutional).
- **Multiple (Editorial, Contents):** Code this for editorials giving a round-up of the current issue's contents, e.g. Bristol Cable online has a weekly digest of news called This Week in Bristol.
- **Other:** Specify. Multiple urban social problems (housing, crime, education etc)—i.e. stories about "sink estates"—can be coded here.

Sources (multicode possible)

Use numbers for sequential quotes.

Write **D** for **identifiable actors** whose words are used verbatim (**direct [or quoted] speech**—"Mayor Rees said: 'The city is facing a turning point...'", i.e. with colon and quote marks or a broadcast clip, also if broadcast reporter says "and I quote..." and reads out the quote).

Write **I** for **identifiable actors** cited (**indirect [or reported] speech**—"Mayor Rees said the city is facing a turning point...", "the mayor believes...", "the mayor acknowledged today..." i.e. journalistic paraphrasing, without punctuation).

Code both named and unnamed individuals—e.g. "Mayor Rees said: '...'"; a witness, who did not want to give their name, said: '...'"—and quotes attributed to corporate bodies—e.g. "According to the developer's website: 'The plans include...'" (basically cut-and-pasted from a non-original source—see variable below). Attribution is important here so do not code instances of indirect speech or opinion attributed to a **whole group** (e.g. "residents fear...", "political leaders in the city are adamant that…").

Write **PS** for primary source (there will be only one) and **SS** for secondary source (there might not be a secondary source) and specify. The number of stories using single sources compared to those with more than one source will be an important research finding—O'Neill and O'Connor (2008) in their research into the "passive journalist" found 76 per cent of a sample of 3,000 local news articles cited only a single source.

If a source talks about a local issue write **L**, and a non-local (national/international) issue write **N**. For national/international items with a local angle, code **L** e.g. national government changes to planning laws which would have repercussions for local developments. (See Location variable below for guidance on coding Local/Non-local).

Code **M** for male (if not named, code for gender identifiers, e.g. father, member of boy's football team, "we talked to a local resident, he said: '...'", spokesman); **F** for female; **C** for corporate (e.g. a spokesperson for Avon and Somerset Police; the Met Office); **NK** for not known (e.g. a local resident, with no gender identifiers); and **Mx** for mixed (more than one name, different genders, e.g. "Steve and Jenny said: '...'").

- **Local Politician (Labour):** Councillors, Metro Mayor Dan Norris, election candidates.
- **Local Political Affiliate (Labour):** Unelected local party representatives working for both local councillors and MPs, e.g. party organisers, agents, canvassers, fundraisers, members, volunteers, ex-councillors.

- **Local Politician (Green):** Councillors, election candidates. Note, Cllr Carla Denyer (Clifton Down) also is co-leader of the national Green Party so only code as Local Politician if she is speaking in her role as a local councillor.
- **Local Political Affiliate (Green):** Unelected local party representatives working for both local councillors and MPs, e.g. party organisers, agents, canvassers, fundraisers, members, volunteers, ex-councillors.
- **Local Politician (Lib Dem):** Councillors, election candidates.
- **Local Political Affiliate (Lib Dem):** Unelected local party representatives working for both local councillors and MPs, e.g. party organisers, agents, canvassers, fundraisers, members, volunteers, ex-councillors.
- **Local Politician (Conservative):** Councillors, election candidates.
- **Local Political Affiliate (Conservative):** Unelected local party representatives working for both local councillors and MPs, e.g. party organisers, agents, canvassers, fundraisers, members, volunteers, ex-councillors.
- **Local Politician (Knowle Community Party):** Councillors, election candidates.
- **Local Political Affiliate (Knowle Community Party):** Unelected local party representatives working for both local councillors and MPs, e.g. party organisers, agents, canvassers, fundraisers, members, volunteers, ex-councillors.
- **Local Politician (Independent):** Councillors, election candidates.
- **Local Politician (Ceremonial):** Lord Mayor Cllr Paula O'Rourke, honorary aldermen/women (when not already holding another post, e.g. MP).
- **Local Civil Servant:** BCC Chief Executive Mike Jackson, planning officers, department heads, quotes from unattributed surveys, consultations, policy documents, official advice/instructions, rules and regulations. Code this when the source is attributed to 'Bristol City Council' (i.e. 'spokesperson' not mentioned).
- **Mayoral Office:** Mayor Marvin Rees (Labour), Deputy Mayor Craig Cheney (Labour, Hillfields), mayor's official staff.
- **Local Council Spokesperson (Other):** Local government spokesperson, press officers. Code this when source is attributed to 'Bristol City Council spokesperson/man'. Not spokesperson for mayor. Specify.
- **National Politician (Labour):** MPs, election candidates, members of House of Lords.
- **National Politician (Conservative):** MPs, election candidates, members of House of Lords.
- **National Politician (Lib Dem):** MPs, election candidates, members of House of Lords.
- **National Politician (Green):** MPs, election candidates, members of House of Lords. Also party co-leaders Carla Denyer and Adrian Ramsay. Denyer is also a BCC councillor so only code as National Politician if she is speaking as party co-leader.
- **National Politician (Other):** MPs, election candidates, members of House of Lords. Include SNP, UKIP, DUP, Plaid Cymru. Specify.
- **National Civil Servant:** e.g. Chief Medical Officer for England Sir Chris Whitty; UK Government's Chief Scientific Adviser Sir Patrick Vallance, Met Office, DVLA.
- **International Politician:** Politicians and spokespeople for EU and individual countries, also UN, NATO, UNHCR, ECRE, WTO.
- **Police:** Police officers, PCSOs, police spokesperson, former police officers.

- **Law (Courts, Lawyers):** Judges, clerks of court, lawyers, solicitors, barristers, Crown Prosecution Service.
- **Witness/Protagonist/Victim:** Members of the public who have seen something happen, has had something happen to them or have direct knowledge of event.
- **Member of the Public:** Usually being asked for opinion, e.g. vox pops. Not a witness.
- **Education:** Teachers, lecturers, institutional heads, nursery workers and academics. Not council/government representatives speaking about education.
- **Health/NHS:** WHO, doctors, nurses, NHS managers, hospital workers (not ambulance drivers/service which is coded as Other Emergency Services). Not council/government representatives speaking about health.
- **Private Sector:** Business/commercial spokesperson. Business West. BID.
- **Activist/Protestor/Campaigner:** Spokesperson for grassroots campaigning group or aligned with one, protesting about a specific issue (not formally constituted Third Sector organisations, code those under Charity/NGO), e.g. Alexander Smith, leader We 3 Rhubarb Tavern group (an informal campaigning group, c.f. Community Representative definition). Acorn (rent campaign), Bristol Defend Asylum Seekers Campaign (BDASC), Residents Against the Mast campaign, Bristol Sex Workers Collective, Tyre Extinguishers. Likely to be a source when Item Subject is Politics (Voluntary).
- **Culture/Arts:** Spokesperson for arts, music, exhibitions.
- **Fire Service:** Spokesperson for fire service.
- **Community Representative:** Community organiser/helpers e.g. organised litter pickers, scouts, guides, neighbourhood watch, WIs, sewing circles, community gardens, neighbourhood forums, medical support groups, steam railway enthusiasts.
- **Charity/NGO:** Spokesperson for Round Table, Rotary Club, Third Sector organisations (local and national)—not-for-profits, social enterprises, community interest companies, co-operatives, community-owned pubs, fan-run sports teams, e.g. Charlie Watts, communications coordinator for Filwood Community Centre (a formally constituted organisation but not a charity). Fundraisers, e.g. sponsored bike rides for cancer research (but the work of World Cancer Research Fund International etc is coded as Health/NHS). Bristol Pride. Food banks. Shelter. Women's Aid. RSPCA. Avon Wildlife Trust. Trussell Trust.
- **Regulators:** Spokesperson for OFGEN, OFCOM etc.
- **Unions:** Trades unionists.
- **Celebrity:** Someone known for being famous.
- **Armed Forces:** Representatives of armed services, head of armed services, include ex-service personnel and charity workers helping ex-service personnel etc.
- **Public Sector (Other):** Spokesperson for publicly funded body. Housing associations. Not involved in health, education, academia, regulation or emergency services.
- **Sportsperson:** Including amateur sportspeople.
- **Expert:** Academic, think tank, reports.
- **Religion:** Leaders of all religions as well as worshippers, including druids/pagans, and people representing churches/mosques.
- **Emergency Services (Other):** Spokesperson for RNLI, cave rescue, mountain rescue, ambulance service. Not fire or police.

- **Media/Social Media:** Editors/journalists/presenters, including outlet's own staff—only when name and title is given (i.e. not an office vox pop). Also social media influencers.
- **Royalty:** A member of the Royal Family.
- **Unidentified Source:** Where the source is not identified, e.g. "a witness, who declined to give their name, said..."
- **Other:** Specify.
- **Not Applicable:** For stories where there are no sources.

Source Status (single code)

Sources are further consolidated into three status catagories; low status—sources with no influence and no authority; medium status—sources with influence but no authority; high status—sources with influence and authority.

Table 3

Source categories by status groups

Source	Status group	Status
Politician (local and national)	Authority figure	High
Public servant (civil servant)		
Public sector (education, NHS)		
Emergency services (police, fire service)		
Legal representative (judges, lawyers)		
Regulators		
Armed forces		
Religious figure		
Royalty		
Expert		
Private sector (business)	Business and charity	
Charity/NGO		
Culture/arts	Other	Medium
Celebrity		
Media/social media		
Sport		
Member of the public	Member of the public	Low
Trade union		
Witness/protagonist/victim		
Activist/protestor/campaigner		
Community representative		

Functions of Secondary Sources (multicode possible)

This is an important variable which will determine the function of any sources quoted after the primary source. It will provide some measure of **balance** and **impartiality** by noting instances of **conflict** or **consensus**. Code for **first instance** of any of these values and multicoding is possible. Note, secondary sources may make contributions which fall into more than one category, e.g. primary source — "firm failed due to Brexit", secondary source — "firm failed but it wasn't Brexit" would be coded as Corroboration and Oppositional. Be aware this variable is prone to ambiguity.

- **Corroboration:** Corroborates or agrees with primary source.
- **Contextualisation:** Further, but related, information.
- **Oppositional:** Disagrees, to some extent, with primary source.
- **Unrelated:** No apparent link to contribution of primary source.
- **Other:** When a secondary source is used and their contribution does not fall into any of the categories above. Specify.
- **Not Applicable:** For stories where there is only one source, or none, quoted.

Location—Source and Item Subject (multicode possible)

A key part of this study is an attempt to discover how often, and in what context, the deprived areas of Bristol get covered. It is important to note every instance these and more affluent neighbourhoods are named, to enable comparisons of the type of coverage to be made.

This variable is used to list locations of both **Sources** and **Item Subject**. Mark **PS** for primary source, **SS** for secondary source and **I** for item subject locations.

It is also important for this research for a comparison to be made between the number of local stories and non-local ones. There are seven levels of location, which are set out in Table 4. Four levels are considered as **local**—Level 1: ward (Table 5); Level 2: sub-division (Table 6); Level 3: the city as a whole (Table 7); Level 4: regional (Table 8). Two levels of location are considered as **non-local**—Level 5: national (Table 9); Level 6: international (Table 10). Level 7 codes for no geographical reference (Table 11). Code the lowest level mentioned and mark Not Applicable for the other levels, e.g. if Westbury-on-Trym (Level 1: ward) is mentioned, code that and mark NA for Levels 2-7, and if South Bristol (Level 2: sub-division) is mentioned, code that and NA for Levels 1, 3-7.

Table 4

Levels of location—ranked in size: international, largest; ward, smallest

Level of location			Examples of news items
Non-local	Level 7	No geographical reference	New film released; fashion news
	Level 6	International	US-China tensions rise; international football competition
	Level 5	National	General election called; income tax increases
Local	Level 4	Region	Murder in nearby town; damage from severe storms throughout region
	Level 3	City	Referendum on elected mayor; city house prices rise
	Level 2	Sub-division	Investigation into MP's conduct; Clean Air Zone introduced
	Level 1	Ward	School fails Ofsted report; accident closes road; neighbourhood police teams

The most granular level is Level 1 and follows the **ward/parish and town council boundaries of Bristol City Council (BCC) and Greater Bristol** as listed in Table 5. The local authorities have data on these wards covering population levels, deprivation statistics, education and health, among other subjects. This allows objective comparison between areas. Some well-known areas, such as St Paul's, fall within a ward, in this case the ward is Ashley. These **smaller parishes and neighbourhoods** are listed in the table—code for the ward name, so for references to St Paul's mark Ashley. For consistency, code **councillors** for the ward they represent, even if they are speaking as cabinet members (council leaders should be coded at council level). Some **landmarks and prominent buildings** are listed in Table 5—code for the ward they are in when these are mentioned in news reports. Other, more famous, landmarks/buildings are coded as Bristol and these are listed in Table 7 (Level 3: city). If a place is mentioned but is not listed in the table use Bristol City Council ward profile data https://www.bristol.gov.uk/council-and-mayor/statistics-census-information/ward-profile-data, https://maps.bristol.gov.uk/pinpoint/ or Google Maps to find its location. Tick at least one box—if no ward, neighbourhood, parish etc is mentioned tick Not Applicable, this will be useful in finding out the number of stories which are not targeted at this level. There are occasionally stories which identify many wards, e.g. the results for each ward in city council elections—so where there are eight or more wards mentioned, code the Eight-plus Ward Level Locations and specify, and when all wards are mentioned, code as All Ward Level Locations, there is no need to specify in this instance.

Code police neighbourhood teams under relevant ward (Level 1: ward), otherwise code Avon and Somerset Police source (and other emergency services) as Bristol (Level 3: city).

Table 5

Level 1: Bristol City Council wards and Greater Bristol parish and town councils

BCC ward/town council/parish council (code as the item/source location)	Neighbourhoods, parishes, suburbs, inner city areas, landmarks etc (for information)
Bristol City Council	
Ashley	Baptist Mills, Montpelier, Montpelier Railway Station, St Andrew's, St Paul's, St Werburgh's, Picton Street, Stokes Croft
Avonmouth and Lawrence Weston	Shirehampton, Coombe Dingle – Cllr Don Alexander
Bedminster	Ashton Vale, Bedminster Railway Station, acta Community Theatre, Victoria Park
Bishopston and Ashley Down	Bristol County Ground, St Andrew's Park – Cllr Emma Edwards
Bishopsworth	Bedminster Down
Brislington East	Broom Hill, St Anne's, St Anne's Park – Cllr Tim Rippington
Brislington West	Arno's Vale Cemetery, Brislington Park and Ride, Bath Road
Central	City Centre, Cabots Circus, Broadmead, Castle Park, Old Market, Christmas Steps, King Street, Welsh Back, the Bearpit, BRI, Trinity Centre, Lewins Mead
Clifton Down	Clifton Down Railway Station, Bristol Lido
Clifton	Clifton Downs, Clifton Suspension Bridge, Clifton Cathedral, Clifton College, Avon Gorge, Whiteladies Road, Clifton Triangle
Cotham	Kingsdown, St Michael's Hill
Easton	Stapleton Road Railway Station, Greenbank Cemetery, Whitehall, Redfield, St Mark's Road – Cllr Jenny Bartle, Cllr Barry Parsons
Eastville	Crofts End, Fishponds
Filwood	Filwood Park, Lower Knowle, Inns Court, Knowle West – Cllr Gary Hopkins, Cllr Zoe Goodman

Frome Vale	Broom Hill, Fishponds
Hartcliffe and Withywood	Cllr Helen Holland
Henbury and Brentry	Blaise Castle, Cribbs Causeway
Hengrove and Whitchurch Park	Hengrove Park, Hengrove Leisure Park, South Bristol Community Hospital – Cllr Tim Kent, Cllr Andrew Brown
Hillfields	
Horfield	Southmead Hospital, Memorial Stadium (but do not code Bristol Rovers here, see below) - Cllr Tom Renhard
Hotwells and Harbourside	College Green, Bristol City Hall, Brandon Hill, Cabot Tower, Cumberland Basin, Create Centre, Park Street, Floating Harbour, the Matthew, Millenium Square, Western Harbour, Wapping Wharf
Knowle	Redcatch Park
Lawrence Hill	Barton Hill, St Philips Marsh, Temple Meads (area and station), Lawrence Hill Railway Station, St Judes, Redcliffe
Lockleaze	Purdown BT Tower
Redland	Redland Railway Station, Redland May Fair
Southmead	(note Southmead Hospital is in Horfield ward) - Cllr Kye Dudd
Southville	Tobacco Factory theatre, Ashton Gate Stadium (do not code Bristol City, Bristol Bears here, see below), Ashton Court, Bower Ashton – Cllr Tony Dyer, Cllr Christine Townsend
St George Central	
St George Troopers Hill	Cllr Fabian Breckels
St George West	
Stockwood	
Stoke Bishop	
Westbury-on-Trym and Henleaze	Canford Park, Cllr Geoff Gollop, Cllr Steve Smith
Windmill Hill	Totterdown, Windmill Hill City Farm – Cllr Ed Plowden
Greater Bristol	

South Gloucestershire Council	
Almondsbury	Easter Compton, The Wave Bristol
Bradley Stoke	
Filton	MoD Abbey Wood
Frampton Cotterell	
Kingswood	Warmley, Oldland Common, Hanham, Longwell Green
Mangotsfield	Staple Hill
Patchway	Aztec West – Cllr Toby Savage
Stoke Gifford	Bristol Parkway Station, Little Stoke
Winterbourne	Hambrook, Frenchay
North Somerset Council	
Pill and Easton-in-Gordano Parish Council	
Bath and North East Somerset Council (BNES)	
Whitchurch Town Council	
Eight-plus Ward Level Locations	
All Ward Level Locations	
Not Applicable	

Some news subjects cover a greater area than a ward but smaller than the city as a whole. Table 6 lists these **city sub-divisions** (Level 2)—only code these if wards or parish/town councils are not mentioned. Examples include the football clubs Bristol City/Ashton Gate (South Bristol) and Bristol Rovers/Memorial Stadium (North Bristol); MP constituencies (Bristol East; Bristol North West; Bristol South; Bristol West; Filton and Bradley Stoke; Thornbury and Yate; Kingswood)—do not code here if MPs are quoted in relation to events at specific locations within their constituencies, code at Level 1 in such cases; BCC's clean air zones, economic development initiatives, transport plans, local plans (these

are usually named after the area—specify if necessary); art trails, festivals and other cultural events; routes traversing or surrounding Bristol, such as the M32, M4, M5, Portway, A38 Gloucester/Cheltenham Road, A4 Bath Road, A4174 (Avon/Bristol Ring Road), River Avon, Bristol and Bath Railway Path; North Bristol NHS Trust; University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust (Central and South Bristol); North Bristol Foodbank; Bristol City Centre BID (Business Improvement District). If postcodes are mentioned then refer to https:// en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BS_postcode_area which lists the wards in each postcode. Tick at least one box—if no sub-division is mentioned tick Not Applicable, this will be useful in finding out the number of stories which are not targeted at this level.

Table 6

Level 2: Sub-divisions of Bristol (greater than wards)

Sub-division (code as the item/source location)	Parts of sub-division (for information)
South Bristol	General description—non-specific Bristol City/Bristol Bears/Ashton Gate (BS3) University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust (and Central) South and East Bristol Foodbank (and East) Cultural events (specify) e.g. arts trails, festivals Local authority initiatives (specify) e.g. clean air zones, transport plans, development areas, local plans (mainly BCC, the Greater Bristol local authorities are likely to be self-contained and coded above, but be aware there might be joint initiatives)
North Bristol	General description—non-specific Bristol Rovers/Memorial Stadium North Bristol NHS Trust North Bristol and South Glos Foodbank Cultural events (specify) Local authority initiatives (specify)
East Bristol	General description—non-specific

	South and East Bristol Foodbank (and South) Cultural events (specify) Local authority initiatives (specify)
West Bristol	General description—non-specific Cultural events (specify) Local authority initiatives (specify)
North West Bristol	General description—non-specific Bristol North West Foodbank Cultural events (specify) Local authority initiatives (specify)
North East Bristol	General description—non-specific Cultural events (specify) Local authority initiatives (specify)
South West Bristol	General description—non-specific Cultural events (specify) Local authority initiatives (specify)
South East Bristol	General description—non-specific Cultural events (specify) Local authority initiatives (specify)
Central Bristol	General description, bigger than Central ward BS1 postcode University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust (and South) Cultural events (specify) Local authority initiatives (specify) Bristol City Centre BID (Business Improvement District)
Bristol South parliamentary constituency Karin Smyth MP	Code only when article is specifically about MP/constituency BCC wards—Bedminster, Bishopsworth, Filwood, Hartcliffe and Withywood, Hengrove and

	Whitchurch Park, Knowle, Southville, Stockwood, Windmill Hill; (Greater Bristol/BNES) Whitchurch
Bristol East parliamentary constituency Kerry McCarthy MP	Code only when article is specifically about MP/constituency BCC wards— Brislington East, Brislington West, Eastville, Frome Vale, Hillfields, St George Central, St George Troopers Hill, St George West
Bristol West parliamentary constituency Thangum Debbonaire MP	Code only when article is specifically about MP/constituency BCC wards—Ashley, Bishopston and Ashley Down, Central, Clifton, Clifton Down, Cotham, Easton, Hotwells and Harbourside, Lawrence Hill, Redland
Bristol North West parliamentary constituency Darren Jones MP	Code only when article is specifically about MP/constituency BCC wards—Avonmouth and Lawrence Weston, Henbury and Brentry, Horfield, Lockleaze, Southmead, Stoke Bishop, Westbury-on-Trym, Henleaze
Filton and Bradley Stoke parliamentary constituency Jack Lopresti MP	Code only when article is specifically about MP/constituency South Gloucestershire wards—Almondsbury, Bradley Stoke Central & Stoke Lodge, Bradley Stoke North, Bradley Stoke South, Downend, Filton, Frenchay & Stoke Park, Patchway, Pilning and Severn Beach, Staple Hill, Stoke Gifford, Winterbourne
Thornbury and Yate parliamentary constituency Luke Hall MP	Code only when article is specifically about MP/constituency South Gloucestershire ward—Frampton Cotterell

Kingswood parliamentary constituency Chris Skidmore MP	Code only when article is specifically about MP/constituency South Gloucestershire ward—Kingswood
Cross-Bristol route (specify)	e.g. M32, River Avon, M4, M5, Portway, A38 Gloucester/Cheltenham Road, A4 Bath Road, A4174 (Avon/Bristol Ring Road), Bristol and Bath Railway Path
Other (specify)	
Not applicable	

Table 7 lists the criteria for **coding Bristol as the location** (Level 3)—only code this if wards, parish/town councils or sub-divisions are not mentioned. For a story about travel disruption at Bristol Airport, code as Bristol, the exact location is not relevant as the story is of interest to people from a wider area; Link House provides support for women experiencing mental health problems, its location is not publicised so code as Bristol. Tick at least one box—if the city or city-wide news subjects are not mentioned tick Not Applicable, this will be useful in finding out the number of stories which are not targeted at this level.

Table 7

Level 3: The city of Bristol

The city (code as the item/source location)	News subjects (for information)
Bristol	City as a whole Bristol City Council (BCC); Mayor Marvin Rees; city-wide services/initiatives, e.g. bin collections, social services, clean air zones, public transport; council tax (different for Greater Bristol town/parish councils) City-wide competitions/events/festivals, e.g. art/sculpture trails, business awards, local hero competitions (but specify locations for

	individuals—if the story is Cotham Girl is Community Champion of the Year, specify Cotham, but if it's Winner Found in Hunt for Bristol's Community Champion, specify Bristol, despite it being the same competition), apprenticeship scheme awards, Bristol Harbour Festival, Bristol Balloon Fiesta Well-known people, businesses, institutions, e.g. Banksy, Aardman Animations, Bristol music scene, Soil Association, Bristol Friends of the Earth, Extinction Rebellion Bristol, Merchant Venturers, St Monica Trust, Don Cameron (hot air balloonist), Bristol Radical History Group, Bristol University, University of the West of England, Business West, Link House, Acorn (rent reform campaign group)—but if story is about specific eviction/tenancy then code location at ward level, Black South West Network Famous buildings/landmarks, e.g. HMP Bristol (Horfield Prison), ITV West Country Studios, M Shed, Hippodrome, Bristol Old Vic, Bristol Beacon (formerly Colston Hall), Bristol Crown Court, Bristol Zoo, Royal West of England Academy, Broadcasting House (BBC), Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Bristol Cathedral, SS Great Britain, Spike Island, Watershed, Arnolfini, Lakota nightclub References to historical figures/events associated with Bristol, e.g. Cabot, Colston, Brunel, GWR, Alfred the gorilla, slave trade, the blitz, Cary Grant, Wills Tobacco, Ashton Court Festival

	Bristol Airport, Avon and Somerset Police and other emergency services can be considered as Bristol Stories with national/international impact, regardless of location within the city, e.g. Colston statue, Kill the Bill protests
Not applicable	

For consistency in **court cases** code:

- item subject location as where the alleged offence took place (or where its effects were felt), e.g. if a Bristol man is accused of hacking the Pentagon, then code as international, not the defendant's location or where the case was being heard. Some stories have a national and international impact, e.g. pulling down the Colston statue and the violent Kill the Bill protests. In cases such as these code as Bristol and not the location within the city, except where the location is considered important, e.g. the St Paul's riots, Hartcliffe riots. Only code location of Bristol Crown Court if, say, a protest is happening outside it, not as the item subject location for the legal proceedings. There have been several cases of modern slavery prosecutions in Bristol, in this case it is important to code the location of the offence, not the offenders, who might not live in the same area.
- source location, e.g. judges, solicitors, defendants and witnesses, code as Bristol (or other relevant court).

Table 8 lists commonly used **regional references** in news reports (Level 4). This is the widest geographical area to be considered as local. Tick at least one box—for stories with no regional references tick Not Applicable, this will be useful in finding out the number of stories which are not targeted at this level.

Table 8

Level 4: Regional references

Regional references (code as the item/source location)	News subjects (for information)
Regional	Mentions of South West, West Country, The West, West of England

	West of England Combined Authority (WECA), Metro Mayor Dan Norris Surrounding local authorities—(for the Greater Bristol sub-divisions code as above) Bath and North East Somerset Council, South Gloucestershire Council, North Somerset Council Surrounding towns, cities, villages—Weston-super-Mare, Wells, Cheddar, Bath, Keynsham, Emersons Green, Yate, Nailsea, Backwell, Clevedon, Thornbury, Chipping Sodbury, Severn Beach, Chew Magna, Saltford, Congresbury, Downend, Long Ashton, Winscombe Geographical features—Bristol Channel, Mendips, Cotswolds, Somerset Levels
Not applicable	

Tables 9 and 10 list commonly used **national and international terms** (Levels 5 and 6). These stories are considered as non-local, however, if a report specifically mentions a Bristol location code **R** for **related**, e.g. non-local competitions/league tables with Bristol-based entrants such as police/ambulance response times, university league tables; a report on housing in England which prompts a follow-up on the problems facing first-time buyers in Bristol; a national investigation into child heart surgery deaths throughout NHS England, which would have implications for the BRI; EU funding to tackle poverty in Hartcliffe lost following Brexit; members of Kingswood Church report from Mali as they tour Africa; Bristol band in American charts. If there is no mention of a specific Bristol location code **U** for **unrelated**. Tick at least one box—for stories with no national/international references tick Not Applicable, this will be useful in finding out the number of stories which are not targeted at this level.

For example:

- code Home Secretary Priti Patel saying: "...we will introduce new laws to prevent future protests similar to the ones we have seen in Bristol..." as National (related to Bristol)

- and Home Secretary Priti Patel saying: "...our government is determined to crackdown on illegal migrants..." when the quote (without a local reference) has been added to a story about a local anti-deportation protest as National (unrelated to Bristol).

Table 9

Level 5: National

National references (code as the item/source location)	News subjects (for information)
National	Mentions of England, Southern England, Wales, Scotland, North Ireland, the UK, United Kingdom, the Nation, Britain, Great Britain, UK Government, Bank of England National news stories Code R for related to Bristol, U for unrelated to Bristol
Not applicable	

Table 10

Level 6: International references

International references (code as the item/source location)	News subjects (for information)
International	Mentions of EU, NATO, UN, UNHCR, WTO, IMF etc, individual countries, continents, trading blocks International news stories Code R for related to Bristol, U for unrelated to Bristol
Not applicable	

Table 11 shows examples of stories with **no geographical references**. Tick no geographical reference for stories with no location, generally soft news/entertainment/lifestyle, e.g. box-office takings for latest blockbuster film, launch of new fashion range, Christmas gift ideas, television shows, National Lottery numbers but also copyright lawsuits, news about influencers.

Table 11

Level 7: No geographical references

No geographical references	News subjects (for information)
No geographical reference	Television shows Film/book reviews Fashion Social media/influencers Gift ideas Recipes Lifestyle Fitness/diet/health advice
Not applicable	

Politics Location (multicode possible)

Code all mention of formal local government/national/UK parliamentary/transnational politics. Code for references to policies, formal political processes, institutions (councils, committees, assemblies, parliaments, EU bodies) and political representatives (councillors, MPs, mayors). This variable codes for instances of formal politics as well as non-party political involvement with the community, such as the local MP opening a flower show. Multicode possible, tick for first instance only.

- **Local Politics:** Levels 1-4. Wards, parish councils, Bristol City Council, Greater Bristol authorities (see above in Item Location), West of England Combined Authority (but not MP constituencies). Local branches of national political parties.
- **National Politics (Local):** Level 5. MPs, implications of a national law/policy at local level. Home Secretary's statement on Bristol rioters.
- **National Politics (Non-local):** Level 5. Without an explicit local angle. Home Secretary's statement on Government policy on refugees—this might be included in a story about local immigration protests but Bristol is not mentioned by them.
- **International Politics (Local):** Level 6. Implications of an EU or other international law/directive/policy at local level, e.g. BCC environment policy complies with UN climate change goals.
- **International Politics (Non-local):** Level 6. Without an explicit local angle.
- **Unclear:** Use sparingly.
- **Not Applicable:** No political item subject/source in story.

News Trigger for Original Content (single code)

This variable seeks to capture the main generative cause or apparent reason the news story appeared—e.g. diary event, final inquiry report, court case, council meeting or digging by the news outlets, using Freedom of Information requests, contacts or other investigative methods. This variable codes for original content—those stories which appear to involve some journalistic endeavour (for non-original, see next variable). Only code if trigger is obvious and explicit, otherwise code as Unclear.

- **Unclear:** Do not make assumptions if trigger or origin of story is not mentioned, use this code.
- **Government Meeting:** Local and national government. Scheduled council/committee meetings. Inquiries. Council-arranged press conferences.
- **Press Conference/Media Event/Launch/Photo Op:** Event arranged explicitly for the media e.g. shop openings, product launches, press previews. Likely to be soft news.
- **Scheduled Event/Preview/Review:** Sports match, play, art exhibition. Include restaurant/bar/tourist attraction reviews despite being unscheduled, e.g. "A new crazy golf attraction has just opened – we were among the first to try it out". (Note, review round-ups such as fashion, motors, tech, holidays, books should be coded as Not Applicable for this variable and coded as Affiliate Links/Advertorial/Ad Feature under the non-original variable below). Public events not arranged with the media in mind. Information, e.g. dates and times for new over-50s fitness clubs at leisure centre; list of half marathon road closures. Code non-local clickbait in the non-original content variable below, e.g. "When is the World Cup final taking place?".
- **Civic Information:** Useful information, e.g. Public health campaigns, changes to waste collection dates, new hospital car-parking charges, taxi fare increases.
- **Human Interest:** Stories with a human angle, e.g. profiles.
- **Announcement/Statement/Consultation:** Official statements by politicians or political organisations. Launch/reminder/results of consultation. News trigger, not a reaction to an event.
- **Disasters/Accidents:** News stories about accidents and weather alerts such as heatwaves, flooding, fog, 'big freezes'.
- **Crime/Courts:** Stories about a crime, court cases, civil actions, inquests. Include non-criminal penalties, e.g. parking fines. Not appeals for witnesses, these are coded below.
- **Public Meeting:** Meetings open to the public by campaigning groups, community groups and not arranged by council etc.
- **History/Nostalgia:** Reminiscences, down memory lane, photos from the archives but not if they are prompted by a local history book, if so, code as Launch.
- **Trade Union Action:** Ballots, meetings, strikes, statements.
- **Law Change:** Changes to law from law-making bodies.
- **Exclusive Interview:** Only if labelled exclusive.

- **Interview:** Interviews not labelled as exclusive. Other news triggers are likely to trump this value e.g. launch, protest or opinion.
- **Investigative Journalism:** Only if explicitly about an investigation carried out by journalists, includes results of Freedom of Information requests.
- **Whistleblower/Leak:** Only if leak, whisteblower or anonymous tip-off is mentioned, including any stories initiated by direct contact with member of the public.
- **Apology/Retraction/Clarification:** Only explicitly labelled as such.
- **News Already Broken:** If a local angle emerges from a regional, national or international story, but other triggers might be more relevant.
- **Appeal:** Only stories which use the word "appeal", including appeals for witnesses.
- **Member of the Public Contributed Content:** Opinion/comment column by members of the public, 'have your say' feature, vox pops, explicitly labelled letter or reader content, e.g. letters to the editor. Also if a letter is mentioned as news trigger in article.
- **Community Report:** Explicitly labelled community reports, e.g. WI reports.
- **Expert Contributed Content:** Regular column by professionals considered to be leading figures or experts in their field, e.g. personal finance, business, walks, film reviews, farming, gardening, local religious leaders.
- **Political Contributed Content:** Regular columns/diaries by mayors, councillors, MPs.
- **Protest:** Stories about protests and campaigns for change, note, this is different from information campaigns which come under Civic Information. Include petitions here.
- **Success:** Stories about competition winners or business successes. Include stories about award nominations.
- **Closure/Disruption:** Closure of service, facility or business and short-term disruption, e.g. "Twitter down". Include lack of success, e.g. "Bristol is NOT a potential Eurovision location, say EurovisionWorld". Code cancellation of flights, train services due to Government security alerts related to destinations or industrial action as Accident/Incident or Trade Union Action. News trigger may be announcement or protest.
- **Complaint:** Explicitly labelled as complaints.
- **Fundraising Event/Praise:** Explicitly mention fundraising event. Recognition for fundraising efforts.
- **Celebration/Tribute:** Celebrating birthdays, anniversaries, or tributes following a death. Lifelong achievement award.
- **Report:** Publication of report or official figures. Include (marketing) surveys.
- **Speech:** Stories which mention a speech being made.
- **Academic/Trade Conference:** Any conferences.
- **Donation:** Donations of money/equipment/building use, though Fundraising Event might trump this.
- **Meta:** Media organisation's coverage of itself.
- **Pre-meeting:** Meetings which set the scene for upcoming political meeting.
- **Other:** Use sparingly—specify.
- **Not Applicable:** Use for non-original content, including features/reviews—see next variable.

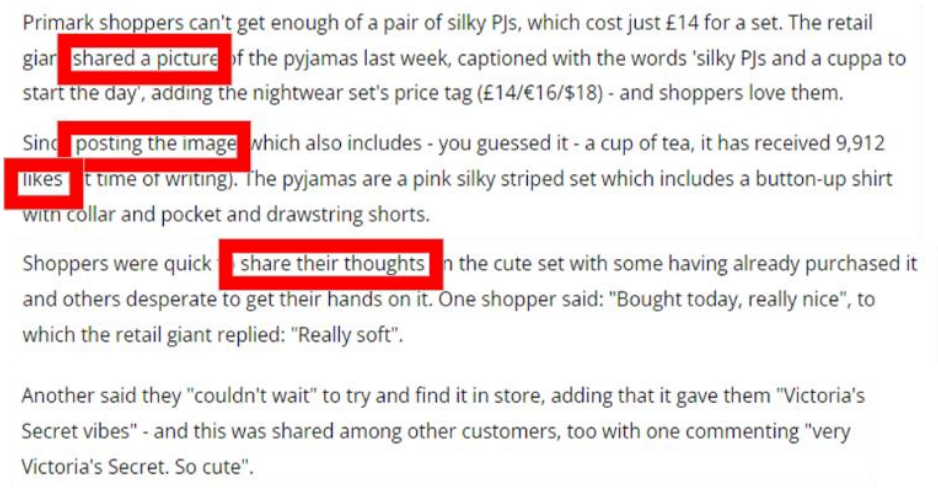
Source for Non-original Content (multicode possible)

This variable is designed to find out the prevalence of some forms of churnalism (Davies, 2009; Ponsford & Davis, 2022), clickbait (Blanchett Neheli, 2018; Tandoc, 2015), native advertising (Carlson, 2015; Carlson & Locke, 2022; Ferrer-Conill, 2016) and "cannibalisation" (Phillips, 2011, 2012) in the Bristol news ecosystem. It seeks to find to what extent the news organisations rely on repeating facts assembled elsewhere. Due to the difficulty of identifying "lifted" content this variable codes for clearly attributed sources. Multicode is possible, e.g. Figure 17 should be coded as Instagram and SEO, note that this story appears to be native advertising as it is not labelled as advertorial. Code for direct quotes, e.g. when a colon and quote marks are used. In some instances a story might quote from a non-original source once but others might use multiple quotes, so specify the number of non-original quotes, including embedded posts/tweets etc, e.g. for the story in Figure 17 the number would be eight—one caption (as referred to in the main text), six direct quotes and an embedded post (n.b. do not code for separate quotes within an embedded post—count the post as one instance).

- **Unspecified social media:** Code if story mentions "sharing" or "posting" but does not specify platform.

Figure 16

Unspecified social media in a Bristol Live web story


Primark shoppers can't get enough of a pair of silky PJs, which cost just £14 for a set. The retail giant shared a picture of the pyjamas last week, captioned with the words 'silky PJs and a cuppa to start the day', adding the nightwear set's price tag (£14/€16/$18) - and shoppers love them.

Since posting the image which also includes - you guessed it - a cup of tea, it has received 9,912 likes (at time of writing). The pyjamas are a pink silky striped set which includes a button-up shirt with collar and pocket and drawstring shorts.

Shoppers were quick to share their thoughts on the cute set with some having already purchased it and others desperate to get their hands on it. One shopper said: "Bought today, really nice", to which the retail giant replied: "Really soft".

Another said they "couldn't wait" to try and find it in store, adding that it gave them "Victoria's Secret vibes" - and this was shared among other customers, too with one commenting "very Victoria's Secret. So cute".

- **Instagram:** Code if story includes Instagram posts.

Figure 17

Example of native advertising and use of Instagram posts in a Bristol Live web story

What's On › Shopping › B&M

B&M's 'brilliant' pet stairs for £14 that are both pooch and pet owner approved

"Much safer than these small dogs hurting their spines jumping. Great idea B&M"

WHAT'S ON By Assiah Hamed Life Writer
19:47, 8 AUG 2022 | UPDATED 19:50, 8 AUG 2022

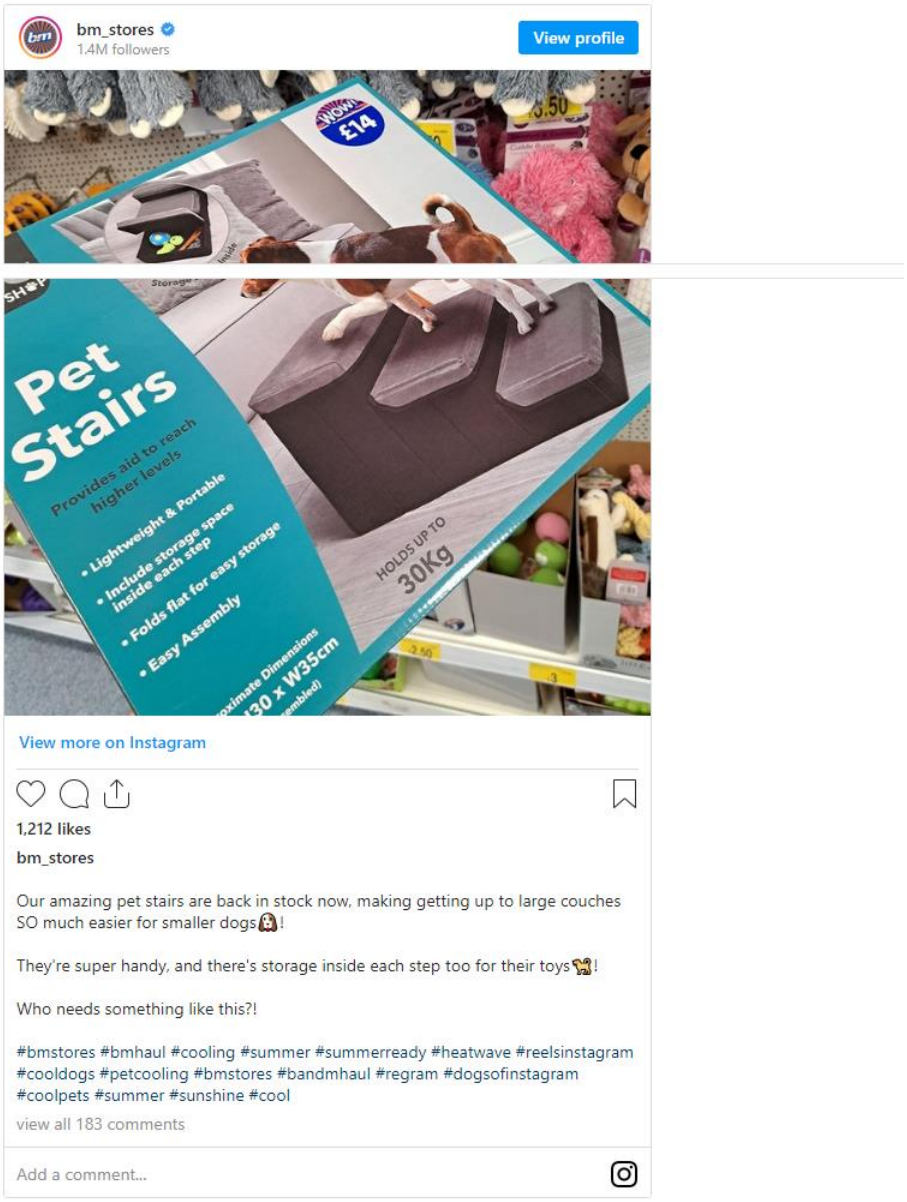
Bookmark Comments

Supermarket chain B&M have brought back a highly requested item that's been deemed a certified hit for pets and their pet owner. On Instagram, the retailer showcased the Pet Stairs in a recent post.

The post had the following caption: "Our amazing pet stairs are back in stock now, making getting up to large couches SO much easier for smaller dogs! They're super handy, and there's storage inside each step too for their toys! Who needs something like this?!"

Priced at £14, the stairs are aimed to help your pet dog walk up onto a couch or inside a car- particularly for those who are weaker or ageing. Another addition of the stairs is that each step contains storage and holds up to 30 kg.

On Instagram, users shared their own opinions of the pet stairs as they flocked to the comments section.





- **TikTok:** Code if story includes TikTok posts.
- **Twitter:** Code if story includes quotes from tweets and embedded tweets.

Figure 18

Embedded tweet on Bristol 24/7

He promised he would develop a solution and six years on, the project has finally come to fruition and is set to fulfil an order of 3,000 machines to refugee camps in Iraq, India, Lebanon and more. Some are also set to go to low-income families in the UK.

But first, Navjot has enlisted the help of the eight fourth-year engineering design students, who are looking at how to make the washing machine as efficient and intuitive as possible, from improving the manufacturing process to making its materials more sustainable.

The work will culminate into a group design project in their fifth and final years.



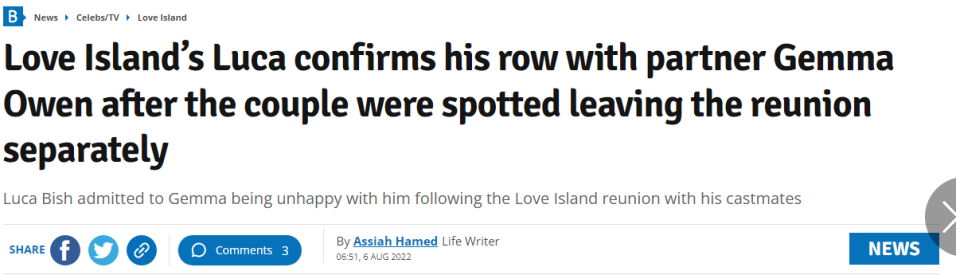
Student Henry Morgan is working on refining the hand crank, and how a small motor can be joined onto solar panels to make washing better for those without access to electricity.

"Engineering for good is what I've always wanted to do, so to do something hands-on with a humanitarian benefit is amazing," says Henry.

- **YouTube:** Code if story includes quotes and links to YouTube videos.
- **Reddit:** Code if story includes Reddit posts.
- **Facebook:** Code if story includes Facebook posts.
- **TV:** Code for television show-related clickbait where focus is on a specific programme, <u>not</u> channel, otherwise code for Local/Non-local Media below. See Figure 19.

Figure 19

Bristol Live use of television clickbait



- **Affiliate Links/Advertorial/Ad Feature:** Code for consumer/retail/lifestyle articles e.g. where retailers/travel companies/books/games/motors/services get a plug—see Figures 20 and 21. Code where affiliate links are mentioned or labelled Advertorial or Ad Feature—see Figure 22.

Figure 20

Bristol Post fashion feature with retailers and prices



Figure 21

Bristol Post technology review with named products



FRIDAY, JULY 8, 2022 BRISTOL POST 35

TECH

Gaming on the go

PLAY ON: The Razer Kishi is just one of the controllers that make phone gaming more satisfying

Turn your phone into a handheld gaming machine by investing in these great bits of hardware

JUSTIN CONNOLLY
Technology Editor

WE often talk about how our phones have replaced more than one gadget in our lives – they are our cameras as well as our communications machines now.

There's another category, too –

They essentially bring a Nintendo Switch-type control system to your mobile screen, once your device is snapped into place.

As your phone gets more powerful, so will the games you can play on it. A controller for games is the next logical step towards turning your phone into a play-anywhere games machine. And they're a lot cheaper than splashing the cash on one of the latest consoles.

to the Maxes (although the 13 Pro does require a free adapter).

It brings the usual double joystick and D-pad options, as well as shoulder triggers. It can hold your phone in place securely, and attachment is via the Lightning port for zero latency.

Perhaps the best feature though is the addition of a headphone jack that the phone itself lacks – and wired headphones means no

We say: Razer is a big name in gaming machines, and its phone controller matches its reputation as being one of the best, too.

There are versions available for iPhones and Android devices, and the system can accept almost any size of phone, including the most popular Android devices.

Given the power-hungry, battery-sapping nature of mobile gaming, it's good to know the Kishi offers

TECH THAT

THE LATEST IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

CANCEL CULTURE: Instagram is changing

Instagram adds phone cancellation

I don't know about you, but I am deeply suspicious of any online service that makes it more difficult for you to cancel than it is to sign up.

Instagram has been guilty of allowing users to get on board with the service on their iPhones, but not allowing them to jump off on the same platform – you had to log in to Instagram on a computer to cancel.

But not so any more. There's now an option within the Instagram settings to suspend and cancel your account within the iPhone app.

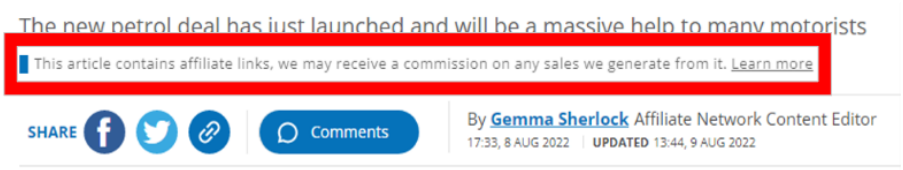
It's not a rare show of magnanimity on Instagram's part, though. Apple recently changed the App Store rules so that ANY app that offers sign-ups for a service, must also offer the ability to cancel within the app. So we look forward to other apps and services following suit.

Sign up for Snapchat+

Snapchat has launched its premium plus service that allows users to experience extra features for a fee.

Figure 22

Bristol Live mention of "affiliate links"



- **Local Media:** e.g. BBC West, Bristol Post, Bristol Cable, include The Knowledge, The Bristolian, not references to own outlet—specify.
- **Non-local Media:** News media (not television shows, code for TV above in such cases) e.g. BBC (not BBC West), The Guardian, HuffPost, Guido Fawkes, Skwawkbox—specify.
- **SEO:** Basic rewrites of easy-to-obtain information which appear to involve little journalistic work. As a guide, Blanchett Neheli (2018) uses Shapiro's (2014) elements that define journalistic activity, specifically "current or recent events as subject matter" and "involves original work (as opposed to mere linking or replication)". Figures 23 and 24 show content which is neither recent nor original and this can be verified by following the hyperlinks. Neither of the articles feature local news—they have both been labelled by the outlet UK & World News, which is probably

where the majority of SEO articles will be found. Figure 25 is a less clear-cut example, as there is no hyperlink or reference to a specific source, but the bulk of the article is made up of a list of official figures which are not likely to be released exclusively to a local outlet.

Figure 23

Bristol Live's 2022 use of a 2021 POLITICO story/press release and the hyperlinked original



News › UK & World News

What will happen when the Queen dies?

Leaked documents outline meticulous protocols already put in place for when the Queen dies.

SHARE Comments 7 By Robbie Purves 17:00, 7 AUG 2022 | UPDATED 17:09, 7 AUG 2022 NEWS

In documents obtained by POLITICO, protocols for when Queen Elizabeth II dies have been revealed.

Called 'Operation London Bridge', the hugely detailed plan has everything in place from the very moment the Queen passes away.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Britain's plan for when Queen Elizabeth II dies

POLITICO has obtained documents laying out Operation LONDON BRIDGE in granular detail.

BY ALEX WICKHAM

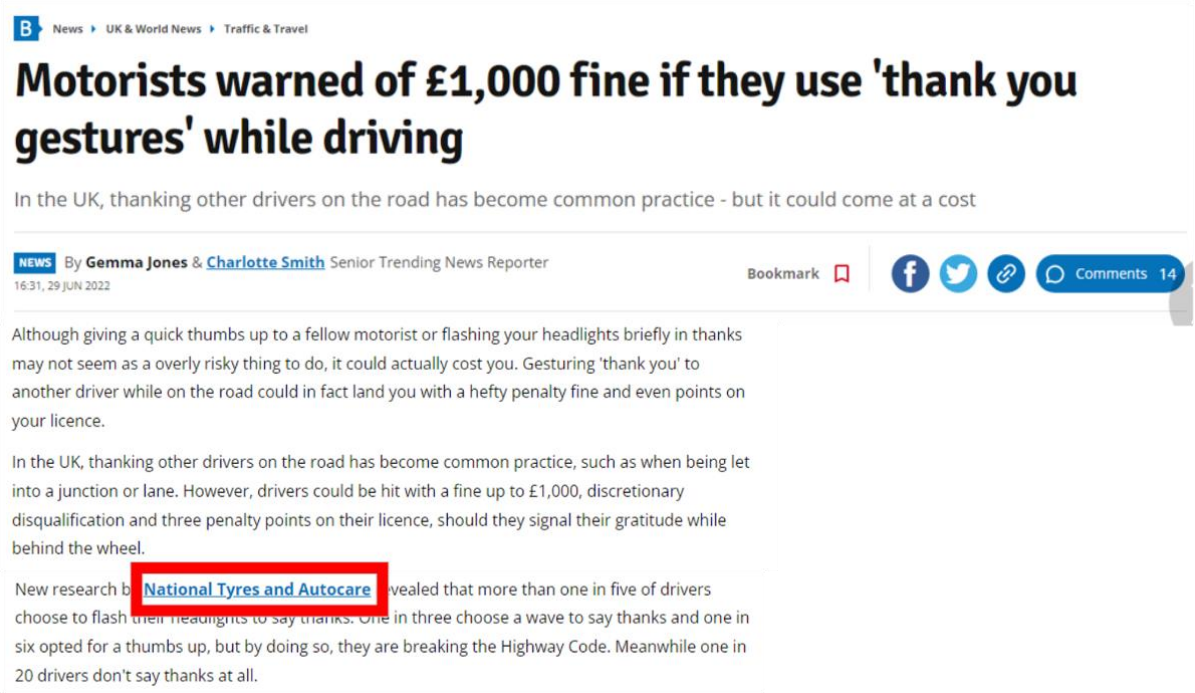
SEPTEMBER 3, 2021 | 4:00 AM

This article was originally published in September 2021.

LONDON — The U.K. government's plan for what will happen in the days after the death of Queen Elizabeth II — codenamed Operation LONDON BRIDGE and long shrouded in secrecy — can now be revealed.

Figure 24

Bristol Live's use of a hyperlinked National Tyres and Autocare survey (dated 29 June 2022) and the original webpage (dated 7 June 2022)



B News ▸ UK & World News ▸ Traffic & Travel

Motorists warned of £1,000 fine if they use 'thank you gestures' while driving

In the UK, thanking other drivers on the road has become common practice - but it could come at a cost

NEWS By **Gemma Jones** & Charlotte Smith Senior Trending News Reporter
16:31, 29 JUN 2022

Bookmark

Comments 14

Although giving a quick thumbs up to a fellow motorist or flashing your headlights briefly in thanks may not seem as a overly risky thing to do, it could actually cost you. Gesturing 'thank you' to another driver while on the road could in fact land you with a hefty penalty fine and even points on your licence.

In the UK, thanking other drivers on the road has become common practice, such as when being let into a junction or lane. However, drivers could be hit with a fine up to £1,000, discretionary disqualification and three penalty points on their licence, should they signal their gratitude while behind the wheel.

New research b National Tyres and Autocare vealed that more than one in five of drivers choose to flash their headlights to say thanks. One in three choose a wave to say thanks and one in six opted for a thumbs up, but by doing so, they are breaking the Highway Code. Meanwhile one in 20 drivers don't say thanks at all.

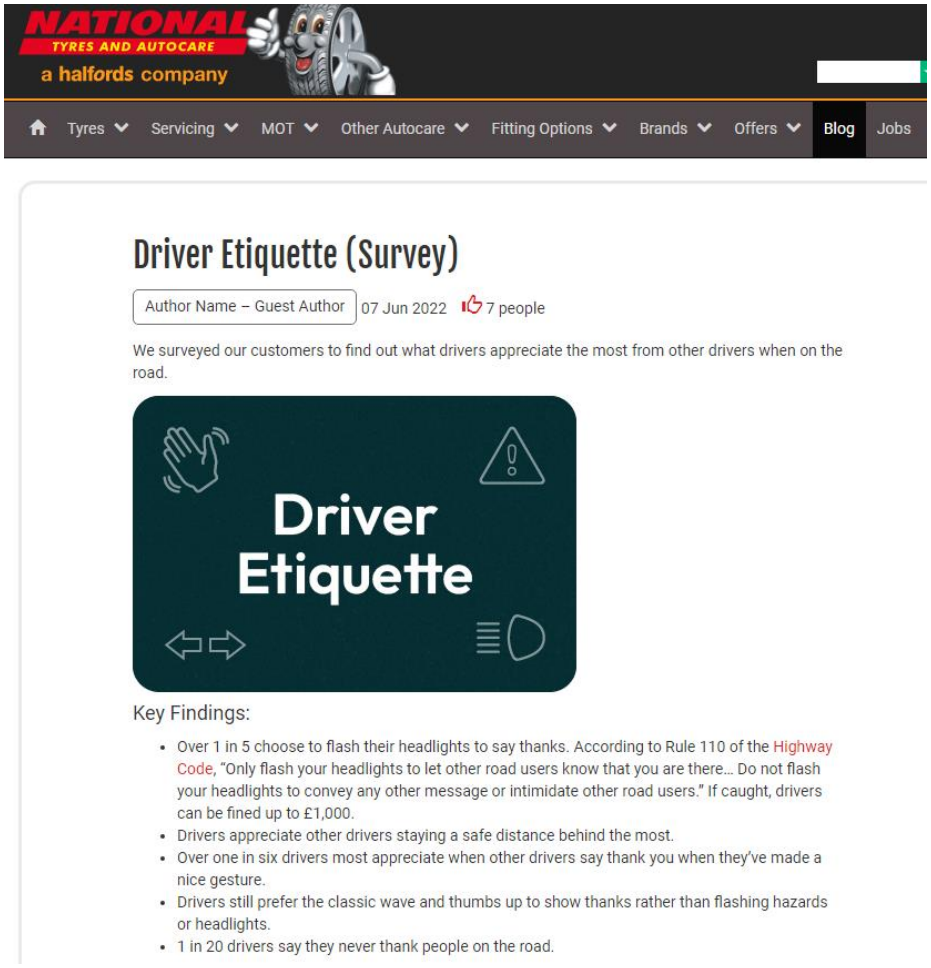
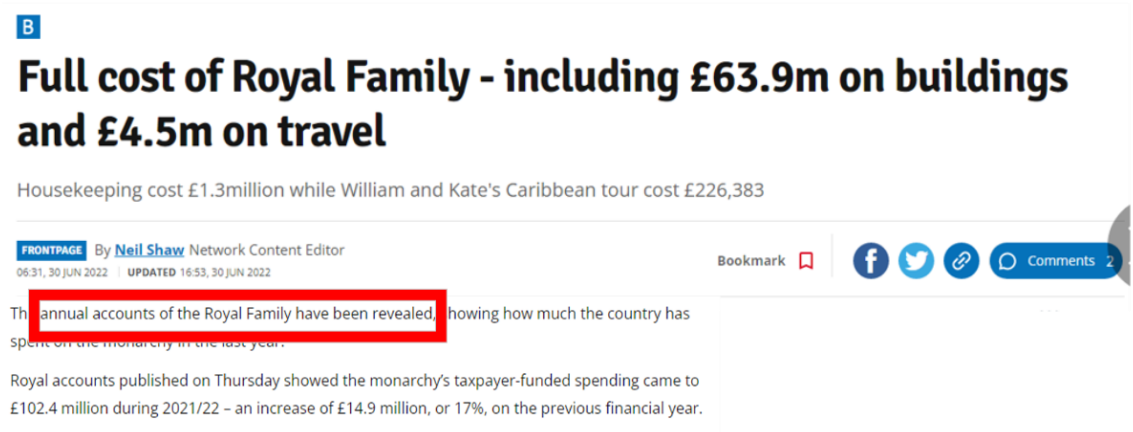


Figure 25

Bristol Live's use of officially released figures



- **News Agency Quotes:** Copy attributed to a specific news agency, such as Associated Press (AP) or Press Association (PA). Code when agency is bylined or there is a mention/attribution in article text.

Figure 26

Bristol Live example of a PA byline



- **Other In-company Websites:** e.g. Cornwall Live, Somerset Live, www.national.world.com, www.mirror.co.uk—specify. This will give an indication of Reach's and National World's nationwide content-sharing strategies and the extent of Bristol Live's and Bristol World's commitment to regional coverage. With articles such as Figure 27 multicode for both this value and reference to Twitter.

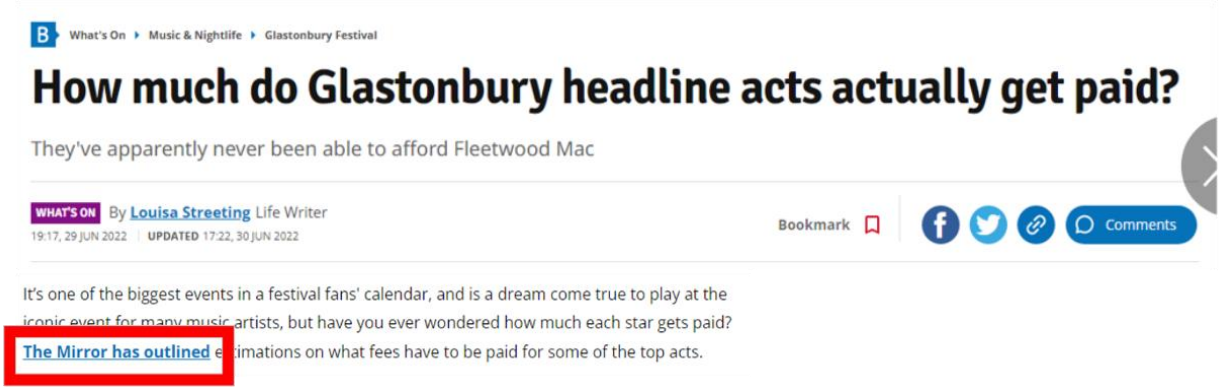
Figure 27

Bristol Live reuse of a Cornwall Live story



Figure 28

Bristol Live's hyperlink to a Mirror article



- **Lottery Numbers:** Code one non-original quote for articles listing lottery numbers.

Figure 29

A Bristol Live lottery numbers article



- **Other:** Use sparingly—specify.
- **Not Applicable:** Use for original content—see previous variable.

Digital Connectivity and Interactivity (multicode possible)

This variable measures a news organisation's digital connectivity and interactivity.

- **Internal Hyperlinks:** Code if hyperlink takes readers to other stories on outlet's own website. Also, invitations to outlet's own services, e.g. "click here to sign up for email alerts/to become a member/make a donation". There is no need to specify for this value.

Figure 30

Fishponds Voice use of an internal hyperlinks

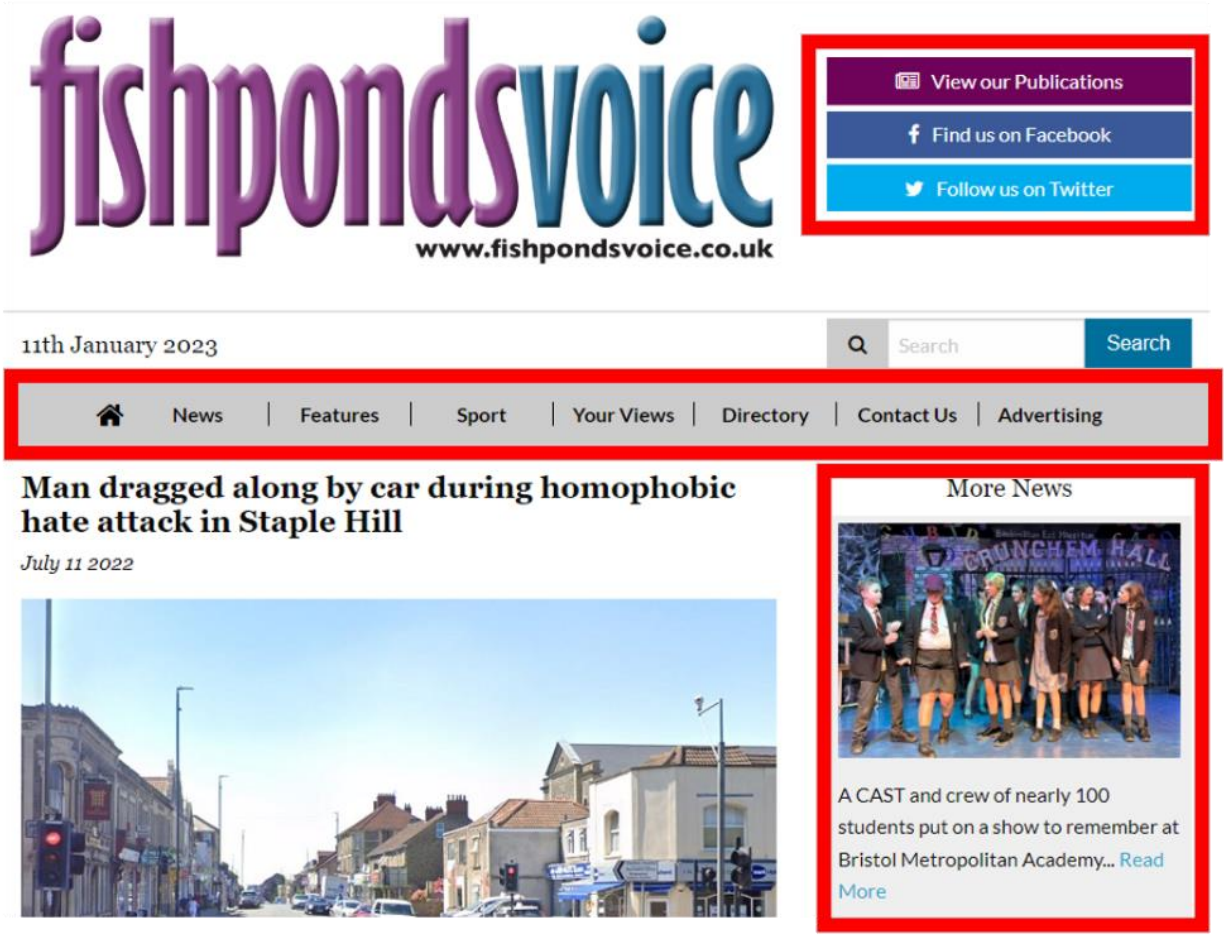
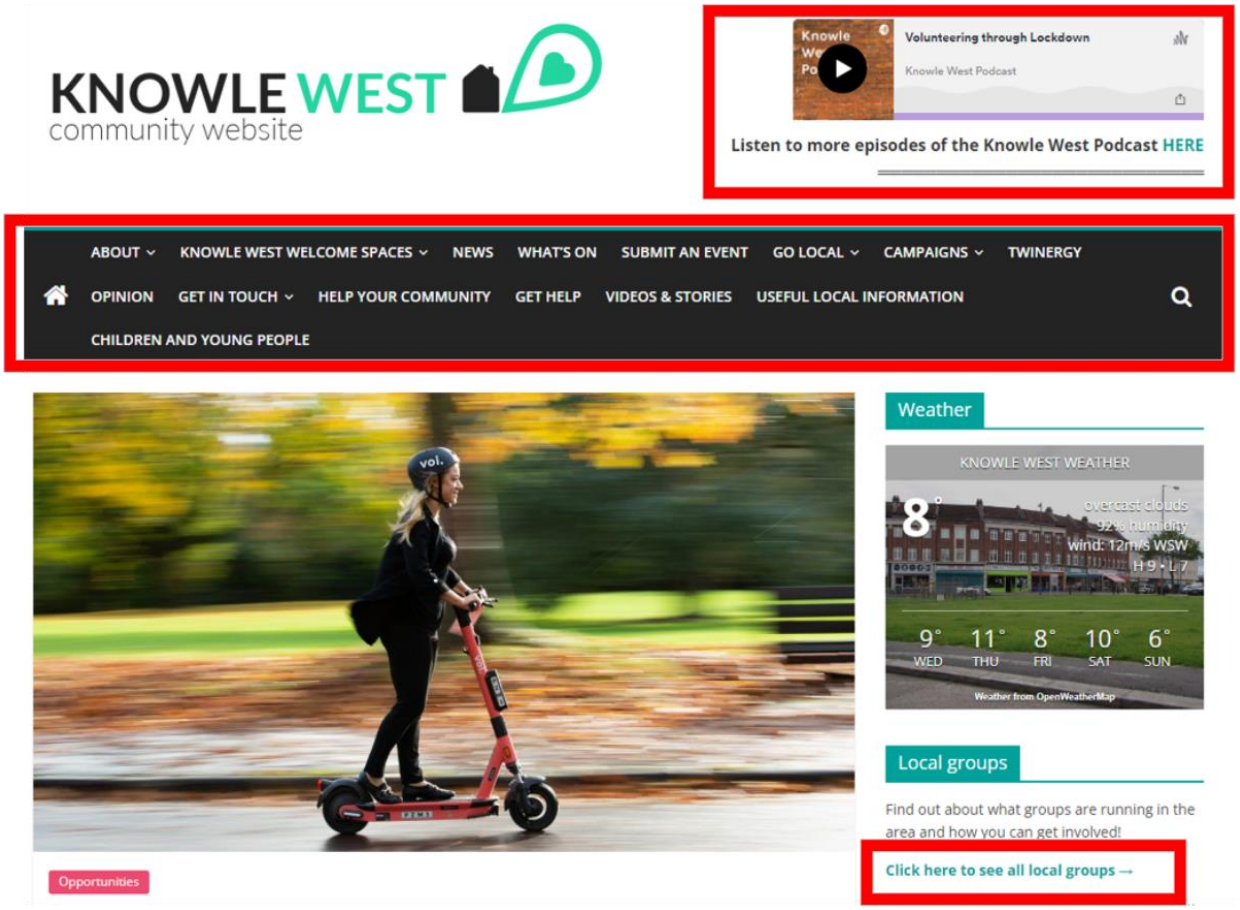


Figure 31

The Knowledge's use of internal hyperlinks



- **External Hyperlinks:** Code if hyperlink takes readers to other organisations' websites. Specify—note, not embedded tweets. In Figure 32 specify Bristol City Council.

Figure 32

Bristol 24/7 use of an external hyperlink—the words "to host a summit" click through to a BCC webpage

> This is despite the council teaming up with the Bristol Fair Renting Campaign (supported by Shelter) and ACORN earlier this year to host a summit focusing on ways to tackle the rental crisis. The commission was formed in the wake of this event.

- **Comments:** Code if readers can post comments.
- **Embedded email link:** Code if readers can click on link to send an external email.
- **Print – website/email address/QR code/text/Whatsapp numbers:** Code if this information is given in print articles.
- **Other**: Specify.
- **Not Applicable**: No hyperlinks or comments.

Representations of Other Media (multicode possible)

Code when there is an explicit reference to other media (local, non-local and social), whether it is positive or critical and when credit is given for breaking the story. There may be rare occasions when a reference is both positive and critical e.g. commenting on a rival's story which reveals information in the public interest but criticising the way it was obtained. Also, code for hyperlinks to other media, even though credit is not explicit, as in Figure 33.

- **Positive:** Explicit praise.

Figure 33

The Bristolian including a hyperlink to a Bristol Cable webpage

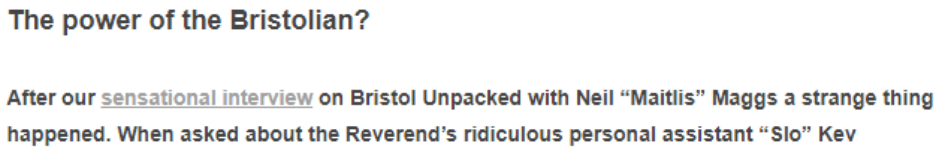
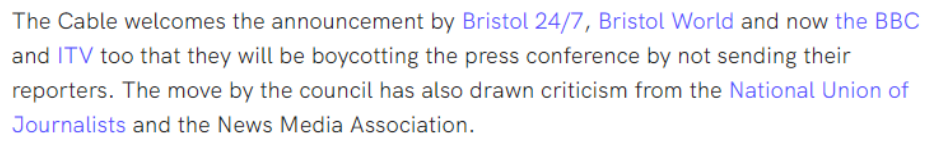


Figure 34

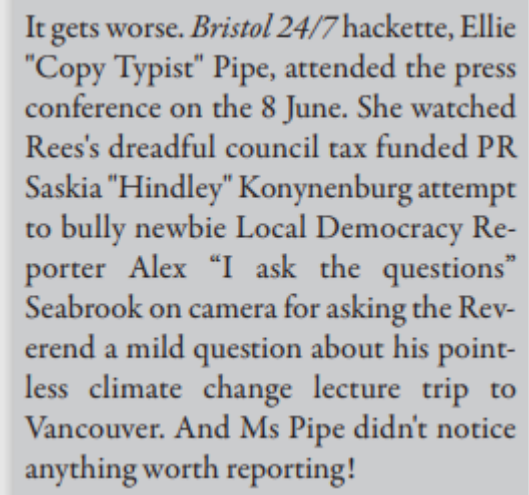
The Bristol Cable praising other local media



- **Critical:** Explicitly negative.

Figure 35

The Bristolian being critical of a Bristol 24/7 journalist



It gets worse. *Bristol 24/7* hackette, Ellie "Copy Typist" Pipe, attended the press conference on the 8 June. She watched Rees's dreadful council tax funded PR Saskia "Hindley" Konynenburg attempt to bully newbie Local Democracy Reporter Alex "I ask the questions" Seabrook on camera for asking the Reverend a mild question about his pointless climate change lecture trip to Vancouver. And Ms Pipe didn't notice anything worth reporting!

- **Credit:** Acknowledging scoop by other source. Code this when the outlet is following up on a story already broken by another and has more to add—a "copy and paste job" should be coded as neutral.
- **Neutral:** Where a reference is made which is not positive, critical or gives credit and has no positive or negative adjectives e.g. "as reported in the Bristol Post". Bristol Live often "repurposes" stories already published by The Mirror and other Reach-owned titles such as Lancs Live, and they usually include an attribution (and hyperlink) "...as reported by Cornwall Live"—code as neutral.
- **Other:** Specify.
- **Not Applicable:** Where there is no explicit mention of other media.

Good News/Bad News (single code)

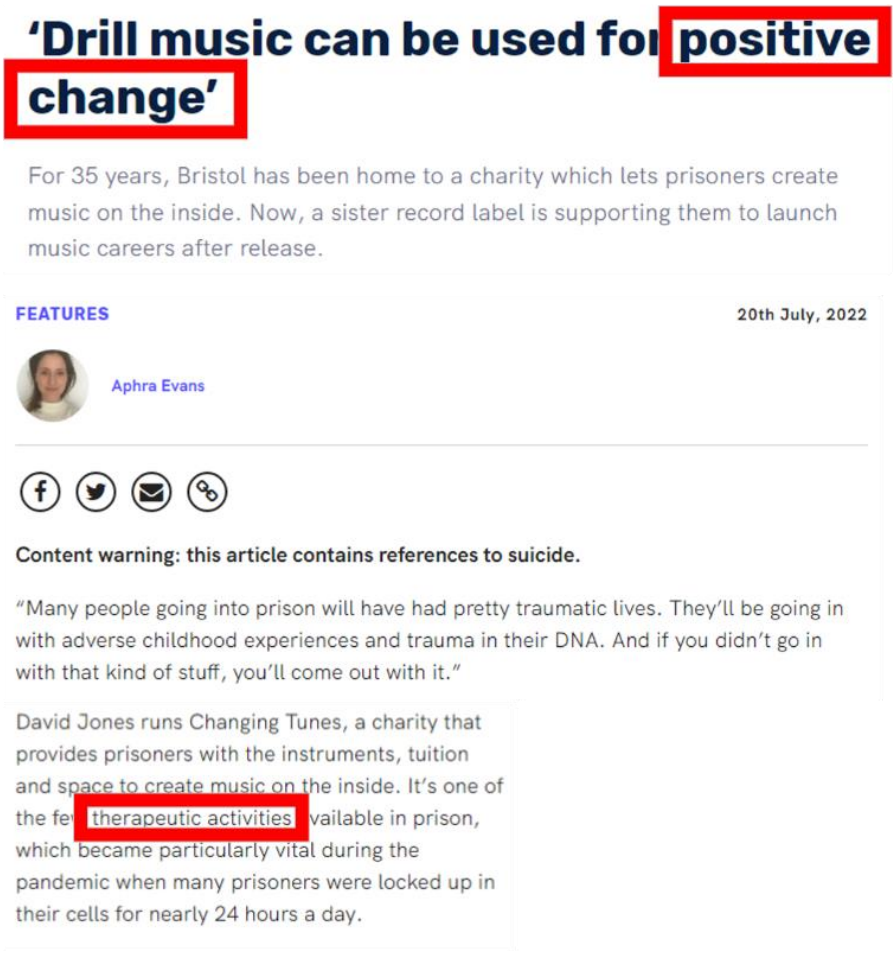
Code for explicit celebratory/neither celebratory nor disorder/disorder angles. This variable is based on Coleman et al.'s (2016) Leeds research, which used a binary definition—postive-active/negative-passive, i.e. reporting what people are *doing now* (cultural events) as opposed to the terrible things that have *happened to* people (crime and accidents) (p. 42). The variable seeks to find instances which promote civic engagement and community trust in the face of negative stereotypes (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001; Harte et al., 2018; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006; Konieczna & Robinson, 2014; Kohring & Matthes, 2007; Robinson & Culver, 2019; Wenzel, 2020). Very subjective how this is coded, so be careful, especially when coding solutions journalism articles which are often found in The Bristol Cable. According to Wenzel et al. (2016, p. 8) "the strongest solutions journalism stories use the rigor of investigative reporting to explore systemic, underlying reasons for social ills, and then critically examine

efforts to address them"—these should be coded as celebratory, despite references to social ills, as they are about overcoming obstacles/disadvantage.

- **Celebratory:** Celebratory of community/Bristol/West Country: characters, heroes/achievers, landmarks/scenery, reasons for local pride/products, charity achievements, cultural events, positive nostalgia, people/places overcoming obstacles/disadvantage. Not simply "good news" but celebratory in nature. See Figure 36 for an example of a story about overcoming obstacles—despite the bleak context it uses phrases such as "positive change" and "therapeutic activities".
- **Neither Celebratory nor Disorder:** Code this if the story is neither explicitly celebratory nor focusing on disorder issues—this will be the majority of stories.
- **Disorder:** Crime and corruption, rape, fires, accidents, bad weather, drunkenness and disorder, environmental degradation.

Figure 36

A Bristol Cable article which should be coded as celebratory



'Drill music can be used for positive change'

For 35 years, Bristol has been home to a charity which lets prisoners create music on the inside. Now, a sister record label is supporting them to launch music careers after release.

FEATURES 20th July, 2022

Aphra Evans

Content warning: this article contains references to suicide.

"Many people going into prison will have had pretty traumatic lives. They'll be going in with adverse childhood experiences and trauma in their DNA. And if you didn't go in with that kind of stuff, you'll come out with it."

David Jones runs Changing Tunes, a charity that provides prisoners with the instruments, tuition and space to create music on the inside. It's one of the few therapeutic activities available in prison, which became particularly vital during the pandemic when many prisoners were locked up in their cells for nearly 24 hours a day.

Representation of Marginalised/Disadvantaged Communities/Identities (multicode possible)

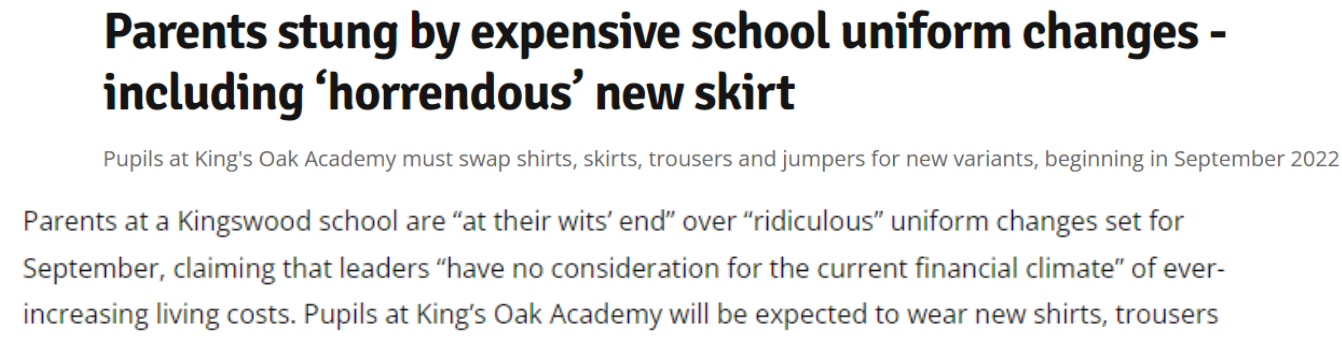
This variable is important for finding out more about the coverage of marginalised/disadvantaged communities/identities (see Ross Arguedas et al., 2023, for how misrepresentation and underrepresentation of disadvantaged communities undermine their trust in news). Most of the values are based on the types of discrimination ("protected characteristics") listed in the UK Government's Equality Act 2010—these are age (the act specifies discrimination against adults but some stories treat children/young people as disadvantaged communities so we code for those—see coding examples below); disability; race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation. Class has been added to take account of poverty/low income-related news, e.g. the cost-of-living crisis, housing, DWP payments, threats to jobs and trade union actions. This accords with Marx's "class in itself" (i.e. class as a social group—a category of people having a common relation to the means of production) rather than "class for itself" (i.e. class as composed of people who are class conscious) (Savage, 2015, p. 3). The values are not unitary, mutually exclusive entities so stories will often need to be multicoded—e.g. stories about SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) children should be coded as Age and Disability/Health Inequalities and stories about discrimination faced by Asian women will be coded as Race/Ethnicity and Gender—especially, as discussion on intersectionality shows, social inequality is faced by a range of social groups with people often falling into more than one category (Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Not all stories are about discrimination—code for celebratory/overcoming adversity stories here, e.g. Pride events; exam results (girls doing better than boys); gaining recognition in women's football (but not routine match reports and coverage of sports usually associated with women, e.g. synchronised swimming); achievements despite age, e.g. return to education after raising a family; social mobility successes, e.g. "from Hartcliffe to Oxford/Hollywood/number one/CEO/BAFTAs" (i.e. where a perceived class barrier has been breached). Do not code stories where the marginalised characteristics are incidental, e.g. grandmothers' swimming clubs; hygiene standards in Chinese takeaways; women's fashions. An exception has to be made for class. It is not a "protected characteristic" but this research is concerned about the visibility or invisibility (rather than just discrimination) of under-represented communities ("deprivation of voice" according to Moore, 2020, p.4) so code stories which mention people living on estates/in high rises, as well as court reports where the defendant is described as having no fixed address, as Class.

- **Age:** Cuts to after-school clubs, youth services, children in care, unaccompanied refugee children, SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) children, free school meals, student debt, care homes (plus Disability/Health Inequalities below), fuel poverty relating specifically to

the elderly, loneliness, meals-on-wheels, age discrimination, e.g. lack of middle-aged people on television. (Do not code for Golden Weddings, 100th birthdays, running a marathon at 80 or bowling club's oldest member retires as they are achievements of individuals/couples and not examples of overcoming social, political, ideological and institutional barriers faced by whole sections of the community).

Figure 37

Bristol Live articles about age discrimination/representation



Parents stung by expensive school uniform changes - including 'horrendous' new skirt

Pupils at King's Oak Academy must swap shirts, skirts, trousers and jumpers for new variants, beginning in September 2022

Parents at a Kingswood school are "at their wits' end" over "ridiculous" uniform changes set for September, claiming that leaders "have no consideration for the current financial climate" of ever-increasing living costs. Pupils at King's Oak Academy will be expected to wear new shirts, trousers



SEND parents 'traumatised' after being blamed for their child's condition says community worker

Bristol SEND parent therapy groups are popping up throughout the city and now their concerns are being taken to Bristol City Council



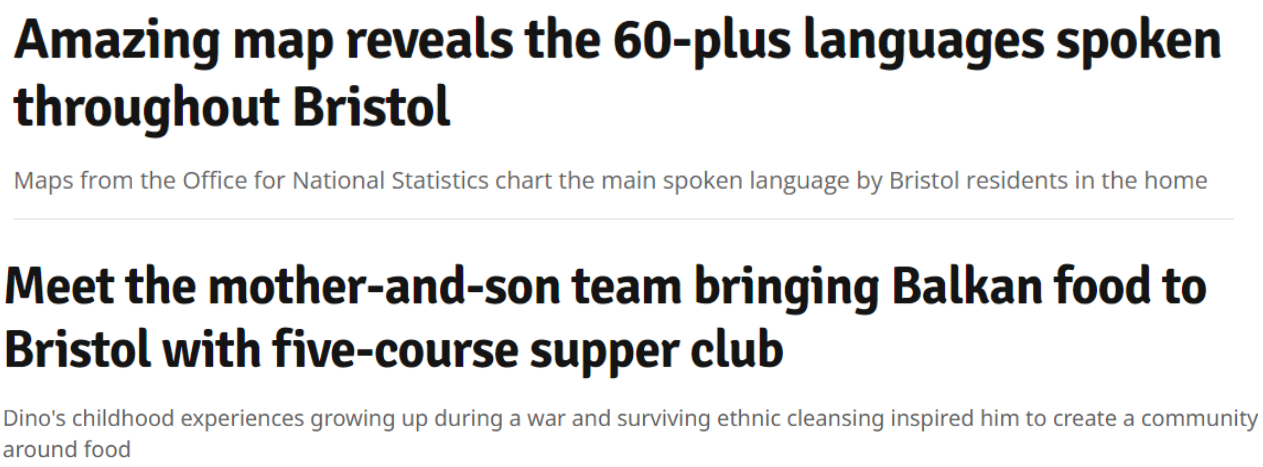
New Love Island for middle-aged people with normal bodies

The show could reportedly be on air next summer

- **Disability/Health Inequalities:** Stories about disabled access, mobility, specialist health and care (e.g. sickle cell support services, addiction support services, cancer survivors support services, bereavement support services, mental health, SEND).
- **Race/Ethnicity:** There are many organisations/campaigns/initiatives in Bristol which help refugees and asylum seekers—code for those here even if specific races/ethnicities/countries are not mentioned. Include travellers/Roma here. BLM. Include stories on diversity of languages/cultures/ethnicities in the city.

Figure 38

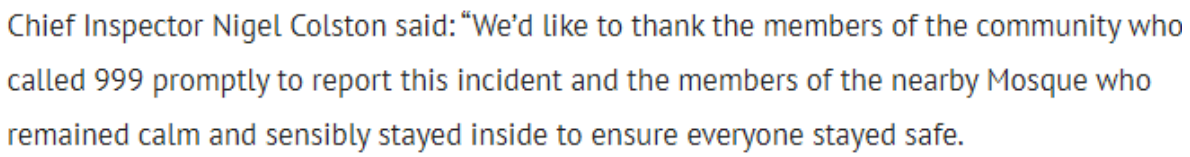
Bristol Live articles about race representation



- **Religion/Belief:** Code only if a specific religion is mentioned in relation to religious worship/occasions/organisations. If someone is described as Jewish but there is no mention of Judaism then code that instance as Race/Ethnicity rather than Religion, similarly a Palestinian Arab is not necessarily Muslim so be careful not to make assumptions.

Figure 39

Bristol 24/7 article which mentions religion



- **Gender:** Code if the story is specifically about equality issues/comparisons between women and men—some of these examples can also be coded under Class, e.g. pay (gender pay gaps), jobs (council threats to remove strip club licences), maternity leave/paternity leave, child care responsibilities, health (eating disorders associated with young women, menopause). Bristol Women's Aid. Stories about misogyny/representation of women in the media. No need to code the gender of item subjects/sources here. Note domestic violence stories are sometimes about violence against men. Trans stories can be coded as Gender and Sexuality.

Figure 40

Bristol 24/7 article featuring gender and class representation with quotes from opposing points of view

Bristol Women's Commission argue that SEVs cause harm and promote and profit from gender inequality and a sexist culture that leads to male violence.

The group Tweeted: "The licensing committee meeting reports pack confirms just how strong the global sex industry lobby is and Bristol has a clear decision to make. Are we a city happy to confine women and girls to being sex objects, or a city that says no to venues and practices that reinforce this?"

"We want Bristol to be a fair/equal city for women & girls: where 'sex work' is not the answer to the cost of living crisis, where men do not feel entitled to women's bodies, where women are seen as equal to men. Strip clubs stand in the way of this. That is why we need a nil-cap."

Meanwhile, Bristol Sex Workers Collective said a ban on strip clubs would constitute indirect gender discrimination – and plans to lodge legal action if the proposal goes ahead.

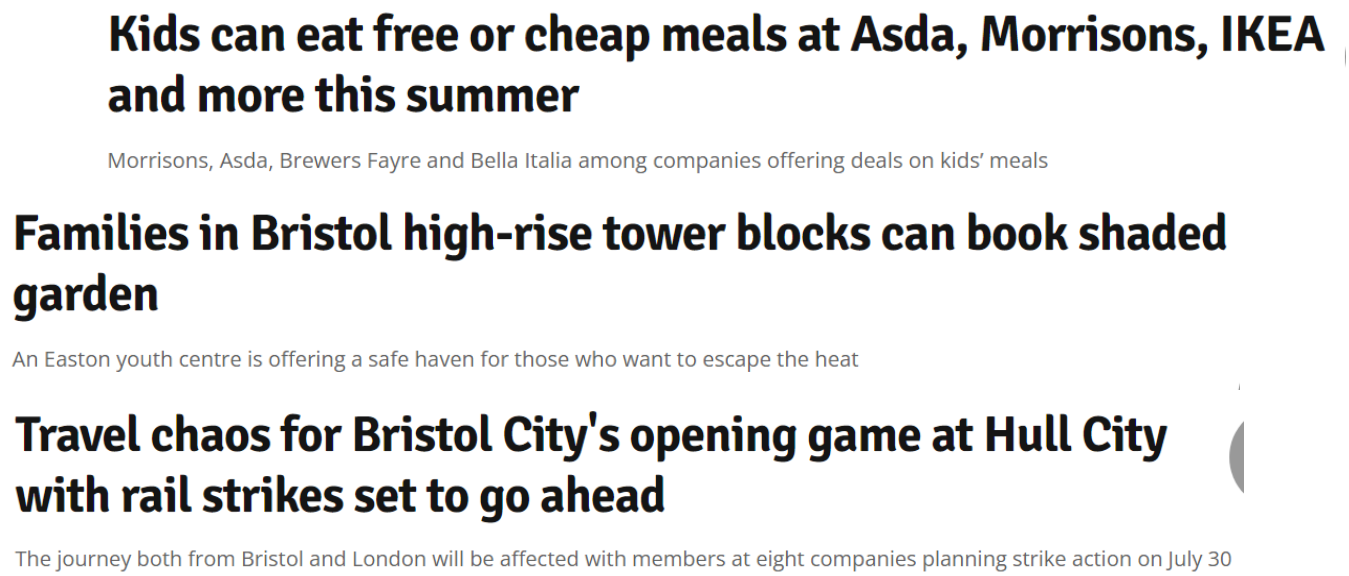
United Sex Workers, a national union, reacted to the consultation's results on social media, writing: "We are SO PROUD of every single one of our members, including the incredible Bristol Sex Workers Collective, who mobilised such a huge response to this consultation.

"The people of Bristol don't want a nil-cap, the workers do not want a nil-cap, let's hope Bristol City Council listens."

- **Sexuality:** Code LGBTQ, including Trans rights. Pride events.
- **Class:** As a generalisation this is the property-less group in society, as opposed to propertied. Code if there are mentions of organisations or statistics involving poverty, homelessness, debt, single parents, "working class", social housing, estates/tower blocks, canal boat dwellers, squats, rent, evictions (e.g. Bristol ACORN), low wages/gender pay gaps, unemployment, benefits, welfare, public transport, free school meals (plus Age above), state pensions (plus Age above), food banks, prisoners' rights, sex workers' rights, support services for ex-service personnel, trade unions and TU protests/strikes.

Figure 41

Bristol Live articles about class representation



Kids can eat free or cheap meals at Asda, Morrisons, IKEA and more this summer

Morrisons, Asda, Brewers Fayre and Bella Italia among companies offering deals on kids' meals

Families in Bristol high-rise tower blocks can book shaded garden

An Easton youth centre is offering a safe haven for those who want to escape the heat

Travel chaos for Bristol City's opening game at Hull City with rail strikes set to go ahead

The journey both from Bristol and London will be affected with members at eight companies planning strike action on July 30

- **No Mention:** Tick if none of the above apply.

Critical Information Needs (multicode possible)

The state of local journalism can be assessed by utilising Critical Information Needs (CINs) —a methodological approach that can be realistically scaled to large numbers of communities (Napoli et al. 2017). It is based on US Government-commissioned research which identifies CINs as "those forms of information that are *necessary* for citizens and community members to live safe and healthy lives" (Friedland et al., 2012). Item subjects and sources already coded are listed in Table 12 under the relevant CIN value. Note: some sources, e.g. member of the public, experts, regulators, could be coded under any of these values depending on the item subject. Note: only LOCALLY RELEVANT subjects/sources and ORIGINAL content (i.e. produced by outlet) to be coded as CINs. Note: analysis of this variable is as CINs present/absent (and ward-level geographical relevance) rather than individual CIN categories.

Table 12

Critical Information Needs

Critical Information Needs	Already coded item subjects and sources (for information)

Emergencies and Public Safety	• Item subjects—police incidents; crime (general); UK defence/military/terrorism; disaster/accidents; emergency services (other); legal/judiciary; science/technology (may come under other CINs, dependent on story); weather • Sources—police; fire service; armed forces; other emergency services; law (courts, lawyers); witness/protagonist/victim
Health	• Item subjects—health/NHS • Sources—health
Education	• Item subjects—education; youth/young people • Sources—education
Transportation Systems	• Item subjects—transport/travel
Environment and Planning	• Item subjects—planning; environment/energy/nature
Economic Development	• Item subjects—business/industry; economy; property; employment/jobs/industrial relations; finance sector; cost of living/welfare/benefits; housing • Sources—private sector
Civic Information	• Item subjects—public sector/third sector (general); community; religion; entertainment/leisure/food; media/social media; arts; history/nostalgia; sport; immigration/diversity; consumer • Sources—public sector (other) (dependent on item subject); culture/arts; community representative (dependent on item subject); charity/NGO (dependent on item subject); sportsperson; religion
Political Life	• Item subjects—politics • Sources—politician; political affiliate; civil servant; activist/protestor/campaigner (dependent on item subject); unions (dependent on item subject)
Not Applicable	• Item subjects—foreign news; celebrity; royalty • Sources—celebrity; unidentified source

Further Comments

Please post further comments in this box. Please post with no paragraph breaks to enable easy copy and pasting into SPSS.

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Appendix B Coding Sheet Phase 1

SPSS input date	

OUTLET	

DATE	
DATE OF BROADCAST, WEBSITE (INCLUDE TIME OF POSTING/UPDATE), COVER DATE	

ITEM NUMBER	

ITEM URL/PAGE NUMBER/BROADCAST ITEM START-FINISH TIMES	

HEADLINE/BROADCAST DESCRIPTION	

ITEM LABEL		
MULTICODE POSSIBLE SPECIFY	LABEL/LABELS	NOT APPLICABLE

ITEM LENGTH				
SINGLE CODE	SHORT	LEAD	DOWNPAGE/ NON-LEAD	IN-DEPTH/MULTIPLE

AUTHOR/BROADCAST JOURNALIST/CONTRIBUTOR

MULTICODE POSSIBLE SPECIFY NAME SPECIFY SPECIALISM/ JOB TITLE WHERE GIVEN SPECIFY M = MALE F = FEMALE C = CORPORATE NK = NOT KNOWN Mx = MIXED (MORE THAN ONE, DIFFERENT GENDERS)	INHOUSE (GENERIC)	INHOUSE (SPECIALISM ONLY)	INHOUSE BYLINE/ REPORTER/ ANCHOR (NAME ONLY)	INHOUSE BYLINE/ REPORTER/ ANCHOR (NAME PLUS SPECIALISM)
	SYNDICATED CONTENT			
	CONTRIBUTED CONTENT – POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVE	CONTRIBUTED CONTENT – MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC	CONTRIBUTED CONTENT – COMMUNITY GROUP	
	CONTRIBUTED CONTENT – PRIVATE SECTOR	CONTRIBUTED CONTENT – CELEBRITY	CONTRIBUTED CONTENT – PUBLIC SECTOR	CONTRIBUTED CONTENT – EXPERT
	COLLABORATION	OTHER (SPECIFY)	MULTIPLE	NO ATTRIBUTION

ITEM TYPE				
SINGLE CODE	NEWS ITEM	SURVEY (SOCIAL MEDIA INVITATION)	REPORT (IN-DEPTH FEATURE/ INVESTIGATION)	EDITORIAL/ OPINION (PROFESSIONAL JOURNALIST)
	OPINION PIECE/ LETTER/CONTRIBUTED CONTENT (NON-JOURNALIST)	ADVERTORIAL/ SPONSORED FEATURE/ AFFILIATE LINKS	PREVIEW/REVIEW/CONSUMER/ WHAT'S ON LISTS (ARTS/LEISURE/PROPERTY/RETAIL)	
	INTERVIEW/ PROFILE	PHOTO STORY	AGGREGATED ARTICLES	PODCAST
	VIDEO	LIVE BLOG	MULTIPLE (SPECIFY)	OTHER (SPECIFY)

ITEM SUBJECT					
SINGLE CODE	POLITICS (INSTITUTIONAL)	POLITICS (PROFESSIONAL)	POLITICS (VOLUNTARY)/ THIRD SECTOR	BUSINESS/ INDUSTRY	
	ECONOMY	ENVIRONMENT/ ENERGY NATURE	HEALTH/NHS	EDUCATION	
	EMPLOYMENT/ JOBS/ INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS	FINANCE SECTOR	SCIENCE/ TECHNOLOGY	RELIGION	
	UK DEFENCE/ MILITARY/ TERRORISM	IMMIGRATION/ DIVERSITY	COST OF LIVING/WELFARE/BENEFITS/ POVERTY		
	FOREIGN NEWS (NO LOCAL IMPACT)	TRANSPORT/ TRAVEL	CELEBRITY	ENTERTAINMENT/ LEISURE/ FOOD	
	ROYALTY	DISASTERS/ ACCIDENTS	WEATHER	MEDIA/SOCIAL MEDIA	
	CULTURE/ARTS	HISTORY/ NOSTALGIA	SPORT	PROPERTY	
	PLANNING	COMMUNITY/ CHARITY	CONSUMER	EMERGENCY SERVICES (OTHER)	
	POLICE INCIDENTS	CRIME (GENERAL)	LEGAL/ JUDICIARY	ANIMALS	HOUSING
	YOUTH/YOUNG PEOPLE		MULTIPLE (EDITORIAL – CONTENTS)	OTHER (SPECIFY)	

SOURCES			
MULTICODE POSSIBLE SPECIFY NAME/ DESIGNATION/ AFFLIATION USE NUMBERS FOR SEQUENTIAL QUOTES PS = PRIMARY SOURCE (ONLY ONE) SS = SECONDARY SOURCE D = DIRECT SPEECH I = INDIRECT SPEECH L = LOCAL ISSUE N = NON-LOCAL ISSUE M = MALE F = FEMALE C = CORPORATE NK = NOT KNOWN Mx = MIXED (MORE THAN ONE, DIFFERENT GENDERS)	LOCAL POLITICIAN (LABOUR)	LOCAL POLITICAL AFFILIATE (LABOUR)	LOCAL POLITICIAN (GREEN)
	LOCAL POLITICAL AFFILIATE (GREEN)	LOCAL POLITICIAN (LIB DEM)	LOCAL POLITICAL AFFILIATE (LIB DEM)
	LOCAL POLITICIAN (CONSERVATIVE)	LOCAL POLITICAL AFFILIATE (CONSERVATIVE)	LOCAL POLITICIAN (KNOWLE COMMUNITY PARTY)
	LOCAL POLITICAL AFFILIATE (KNOWLE COMMUNITY PARTY)		LOCAL POLITICIAN (INDEPENDENT)
	LOCAL POLITICIAN (CEREMONIAL)	LOCAL CIVIL SERVANT	
	MAYORAL OFFICE	LOCAL COUNCIL SPOKESPERSON (OTHER)	NATIONAL POLITICIAN (LABOUR)
	NATIONAL POLITICIAN (CONSERVATIVE)	NATIONAL POLITICIAN (LIB DEM)	NATIONAL POLITICIAN (GREEN)
	NATIONAL POLITICIAN (OTHER)	NATIONAL CIVIL SERVANT	INTERNATIONAL POLITICIAN
	POLICE	LAW (COURTS, LAWYERS)	WITNESS/ PROTAGONIST/ VICTIM
	MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC	EDUCATION	HEALTH/NHS
	PRIVATE SECTOR	ACTIVIST/PROTESTOR/ CAMPAIGNER	CULTURE/ARTS
	FIRE SERVICE	COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE	CHARITY/NGO

	REGULATORS		UNIONS	CELEBRITY
	ARMED FORCES		PUBLIC SECTOR (OTHER)	SPORTSPERSON
	EXPERT	RELIGION	EMERGENCY SERVICES (OTHER)	MEDIA/ SOCIAL MEDIA
	ROYALTY	OTHER (SPECIFY)	UNIDENTIFIED SOURCE	NOT APPLICABLE (NO SOURCES)

FUNCTIONS OF SECONDARY SOURCES			
MULTICODE POSSIBLE, FIRST INSTANCE ONLY	CORROBORATION (CONFIRMATION)	CONTEXTUALISATION (FURTHER INFO)	OPPOSITIONAL (DISAGREEMENT)
	UNRELATED (NO APPARENT LINK)	OTHER (SPECIFY)	NOT APPLICABLE (NO SECONDARY SOURCES)

LOCATION OF SOURCE AND ITEM SUBJECT					
MULTICODE POSSIBLE MARK LOCATIONS FOR PS = PRIMARY SOURCE, SS = SECONDARY SOURCE, I = ITEM SUBJECT	LOCAL	LEVEL 1			
		ASHLEY	AVONMOUTH AND LAWRENCE WESTON	BEDMINSTER	BISHOPSTON AND ASHLEY DOWN
		BISHOPSWORTH	BRISLINGTON EAST	BRISLINGTON WEST	CENTRAL
		CLIFTON DOWN	CLIFTON	COTHAM	EASTON
		EASTVILLE	FILWOOD	FROME VALE	HARTCLIFFE AND WITHYWOOD
		HENBURY AND BRENTRY	HENGROVE AND WHITCHURCH PARK	HILLFIELDS	HORFIELD

CODE LEVELS 1-7 AND TICK NOT APPLICABLE IF NEEDED					
		HOTWELLS AND HARBOURSIDE	KNOWLE	LAWRENCE HILL	LOCKLEAZE
		REDLAND	SOUTHMEAD	SOUTHVILLE	ST GEORGE CENTRAL
		ST GEORGE TROOPERS HILL	ST GEORGE WEST	STOCKWOOD	STOKE BISHOP
		WESTBURY-ON-TRYM AND HENLEAZE	WINDMILL HILL	ALMONDSBURY	BRADLEY STOKE
		FILTON	FRAMPTON COTTERELL	KINGSWOOD	MANGOTSFIELD
		PATCHWAY	STOKE GIFFORD	WINTERBOURNE	
		PILL AND EASTON-IN-GORDANO PARISH COUNCIL		WHITCHURCH TOWN COUNCIL	EIGHT-PLUS WARD LEVEL LOCATIONS (SPECIFY)
		ALL WARD LEVEL LOCATIONS		NOT APPLICABLE	
		LEVEL 2			
		SOUTH BRISTOL	NORTH BRISTOL	EAST BRISTOL	WEST BRISTOL
		NORTHWEST BRISTOL	NORTHEAST BRISTOL	SOUTHWEST BRISTOL	SOUTHEAST BRISTOL
		CENTRAL BRISTOL	BRISTOL SOUTH PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY	BRISTOL EAST PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY	BRISTOL WEST PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY
		BRISTOL NORTH WEST PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY	FILTON AND BRADLEY STOKE PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY	THORNBURY AND YATE PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY	

		KINGSWOOD PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY	CROSS-BRISTOL ROUTE (SPECIFY)	OTHER (SPECIFY)	NOT APPLICABLE
		LEVEL 3			
		BRISTOL		NOT APPLICABLE	
		LEVEL 4			
		REGIONAL		NOT APPLICABLE	
	NON-LOCAL	LEVEL 5 NATIONAL			
		RELATED TO BRISTOL	UNRELATED TO BRISTOL	NOT APPLICABLE	
		LEVEL 6 INTERNATIONAL			
		RELATED TO BRISTOL	UNRELATED TO BRISTOL	NOT APPLICABLE	
		LEVEL 7			
		NO GEOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE		NOT APPLICABLE	

POLITICS LOCATION				
MULTICODE POSSIBLE, FIRST INSTANCE ONLY	LOCAL (LEVELS 1-4)	NON-LOCAL (LEVEL 5)		
	LOCAL POLITICS	NATIONAL POLITICS (RELATED)	NATIONAL POLITICS (UNRELATED)	
	NON-LOCAL (LEVEL 6)		UNCLEAR	

	INTERNATIONAL POLITICS (RELATED)	INTERNATIONAL POLITICS (UNRELATED)		NOT APPLICABLE

NEWS TRIGGER FOR ORIGINAL CONTENT				
SINGLE CODE	UNCLEAR	GOVERNMENT MEETING		PRESS CONFERENCE/MEDIA EVENT/LAUNCH/PHOTO OP
	SCHEDULED EVENT	CIVIC INFORMATION	HUMAN INTEREST	ANNOUCEMENT/ STATEMENT/ CONSULTATION
	DISASTERS/ ACCIDENTS	CRIME/COURTS		PUBLIC MEETING
	HISTORY/NOSTALGIA	TRADE UNION ACTION		LAW CHANGE
	EXCULSIVE INTERVIEW	INTERVIEW		INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM
	WHISTLEBLOWER/ LEAK	APOLOGY/ RETRACTION/ CLARIFICATION		NEWS ALREADY BROKEN
	APPEAL	MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC CONTRIBUTED CONTENT		COMMUNITY REPORT
	EXPERT CONTRIBUTED CONTENT		POLITICAL CONTRIBUTED CONTENT	
	PRE-MEETING	PROTEST		SUCCESS
	CLOSURE/ DISRUPTION	COMPLAINT		FUNDRAISING EVENT/PRAISE

	CELEBRATION/ TRIBUTE	REPORT	SPEECH
	ACADEMIC/TRADE CONFERENCE	DONATION	META
	OTHER (SPECIFY)	NOT APPLICABLE	

SOURCE OF NON-ORIGINAL CONTENT				
MULTICODE POSSIBLE SPECIFY NUMBER OF INSTAGRAM QUOTES/ TWEETS ETC	UNSPECIFIED SOCIAL MEDIA		INSTAGRAM	TIKTOK
	TWITTER		YOUTUBE	REDDIT
	FACEBOOK	TV	AFFILIATE LINKS/ADVERTORIAL/ AD FEATURE	LOCAL MEDIA (SPECIFY)
	NON-LOCAL MEDIA (SPECIFY)		SEO	NEWS AGENCY QUOTES
	OTHER IN-COMPANY WEBSITES		LOTTERY NUMBERS / OTHER (SPECIFY)	NOT APPLICABLE

DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY AND INTERACTIVITY				
MULTICODE POSSIBLE SPECIFY EXTERNAL HYPERLINKS AND OTHER	INTERNAL HYPERLINKS		EXTERNAL HYPERLINKS (SPECIFY)	COMMENTS
	EMBEDDED EMAIL LINK	PRINT – WEBSITE/EMAIL ADDRESS/QR CODE/TEXT/ WHATS-APP NUMBERS	OTHER (SPECIFY)	NOT APPLICABLE

REPRESENTATIONS OF OTHER MEDIA			
MULTICODE POSSIBLE	POSITIVE	CRITICAL	CREDIT
	NEUTRAL	OTHER (SPECIFY)	NOT APPLICABLE

GOOD NEWS/BAD NEWS			
SINGLE CODE	CELEBRATORY	NEITHER CELEBRATORY NOR DISORDER	DISORDER

REPRESENTATION OF MARGINALISED/DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES/IDENTITIES			
MULTICODE POSSIBLE	AGE	DISABILITY/ HEALTH INEQUALITIES	RACE/ETHNICITY
	RELIGION/BELIEF	GENDER	SEXUALITY
	CLASS	NO MENTION	

CRITICAL INFORMATION NEEDS				
MULTICODE POSSIBLE	EMERGENCIES AND PUBLIC SAFETY	HEALTH	EDUCATION	TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS
	ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING	ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	CIVIC INFORMATION	
	POLITICAL LIFE			NOT APPLICABLE

FURTHER COMMENTS	
DO NOT INCLUDE PARAGRAPH BREAKS	



Appendix C Interview Questions

Name...

Age...

Job title...

Organisation...

Time/date/place of interview…

Background/current role **(for both reporters and management/editors)**

- Can you tell me a little about your **journalistic background** – when did you start working in journalism and **what drew you to working** in journalism?
- How long have you been in your current role? (follow up: how are you **currently involved** in journalism and why work as a journalist in **Bristol**?)
- What do you think makes a **good story**?
- Can you tell me what stories you're most **proud of working on**, and why?
- Conversely, are there stories you are **less proud of**, and why?

Day-to-day work

- What are the **main duties** of your current role and can you describe a typical day? (prompt: if the answer is "there is no such thing as a typical day" then ask them "can you take me through what you did yesterday?")
- How has this **changed** since you started working in journalism? (follow-up: what do you attribute this to?)

- How many **hours** do you work in a typical day? (follow-up: do you need to be flexible over your working hours. Why would this be the case?) (follow-up for Bristol 24/7 and Bristol World: how is your seven-days-a-week operation covered?)

Role

- What do you think is the **role** of local journalism? (prompts: is it reporting news in the public interest? Strengthening community bonds? If the answer is 'quality journalism', ask them to explain what this means)

Obstacles/challenges

- You have talked about what you see as the role of local journalism but can you give me examples of instances where you have been stopped, or forced to compromise, when working as a journalist – either by external bodies (such as the council or police force) or internally (such as an editorial decision)? If so, how do you deal with it? (prompts: Mayor's LDR restrictions and subsequent press conference boycott; withholding names of disciplined police officers) (follow-up: do you often make Freedom of Information requests? Have there been times when these have been refused?)

Audiences

- Bristol is a city of many **communities**. Which ones do you think are well served by your coverage, and which ones not so well, and in what ways?
- What is your **target audience** and do you think you reach it? (follow up: if not, why not?)
- How do you track **audience engagement**? (prompts: what kind of methods do you use – audience research, market research, direct appeals, corporate strategy, focus groups,

membership meetings, online comments, social media, analytics?) (follow up: how to you quantify the "success" of a story? Can you provide any examples?)

- While you use various methods to get at what the public is interested in, there is also a separate question of the "**public interest**". In what ways, and how well, does your organisation serve the "public interest"? (follow up: can you provide any examples?)

Social media and digital innovations

- In what ways is **social media** important to your job? Do you, or someone else in your organisation, **monitor** social media posts about your news articles?
- Besides social media are there any **other digital innovations** you've adopted? (prompts: do you employ videos, podcasts, e-newsletters, email alerts/round-ups?) (follow up: How successful have these been? Do you plan to continue using them?)

The next set of questions are for reporters

Day-to-day practice

- **How many stories** do you typically produce in a day? (prompts: what's the smallest number? What's the highest number? What's the average?)
- Do you feel you have enough **time** to do your job well? (follow up: have you seen your workload **increase**? Why do you think this is?)
- What **choice** do you have about which stories you cover? (follow up: **where** do you get most of your stories from?)
- What subjects would you **avoid writing about**, and why?

Sources

- Are there some **sources** you quote from more than others? (follow-up: why is this?)

- What sort of stories do you feel that a **single source** is adequate?
- What sort of stories prompt you to seek quotes from **second sources**?
- Can you give an idea of how many stories you would produce, on a weekly basis, which rely on content from press agencies or already published information, in other words, **non-original content**?

Performance monitoring

- How is your **day-to-day performance** in your current role measured by your managers?
- In what ways do **analytics and page-view targets** affect the choice of stories you write and how they are written? Can you give me some examples?

The next set of questions are for management/editors

News output (ignore for reporter-editors as this should have been covered above)

- Can you give an idea of how many stories you would produce, on a weekly basis, which rely on content from press agencies or already published information, in other words, **non-original content**?

Staffing levels

- **How many staff** do you employ?
- How many are **part-time** compared to full-time?
- What would you say is the **average age** of your workforce?
- Do any of your staff **work from home**? (follow-up: if so, how many?)

Print/digital divide (for Bristol Post/Live, BBC)

- How are the **print/broadcast and digital departments** organised and how do they work together? (follow up: are print/broadcast journalists offered opportunities for retraining/reskilling as digital journalists?)

Diversity

- How **diverse would you say your staff** are, in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, educational background, disability?
- Why do you think it is **necessary to have a diverse staff**?
- How do you feel your staff reflect the **diversity of your target audience**?
- What steps have you taken to **recruit staff or create entry routes** into journalism for people from more diverse backgrounds?
- What sort of training do you offer your staff on **diversity issues**?

Part-time, volunteers, freelance

- When would you use **community correspondents** and **freelancers**?
- If community correspondents and/or freelancers are used, how are they **recruited** and what's the retention rate? (follow-up – are they paid? Are they stringers/contacts or do they submit finished copy?)
- What type of **training** do they get (prompts: legal, news writing, basic grammar, diversity)?

Contributors and other sources

- What is the **importance of your news audience** to your news organisation?
- What sort of content do you ask **readers** to send in?
- What value do you put on **letters to the editor**?

Performance

- How do you measure the **performance** of your news organisation? (prompt: print circulation; viewer/listener numbers; digital engagement; ad revenue figures?)
- What kind of **company targets** do you have?
- How are **performance figures** made available to staff?
- What formal ways are available to non-managerial staff to **communicate their opinions** to managers – both innovative and dissenting views?
- What workplace **appraisal systems** are in place?

Economics

- (for the non-mainstream news organisations) Do you aim to **make money** from your media operation?
- What is your **business model**?
- (not BBC) What kinds of **advertising** do you have in your publication/on your website? (prompts: local ads, national ads? How do you find them? Do you sell your own ad space? Does someone do it for you? How does that work?)
- What is your view on **paywalls** or **subscription/membership models**?
- (for non-mainstream) Could you give me an indication of how much **money** you make from your media operation? (prompts: is this enough to generate wages for anyone? Full-time wages? Part time?)
- (for non-mainstream) What kinds of extra work do you do to **supplement** the work you do for the operation? (e.g. day job – what kind? Freelance work? Consultancy? Training? etc)

- (for non-mainstream) What staff posts are funded by **grants**? (prompts: are these full-time, part-time and for how long?) (follow-up: What a strategy do you have in place for when the grants come to an end?)
- What value is **advertorial/sponsored content** to your news operation? (follow-up: what percentage of your total news output does this make up?)

Awards

- What kind of **awards** has your news organisation won?
- What kind of an **internal award scheme** is there?

Training

- In what ways is professional journalism **training** – i.e. NCTJ – important? Do staff need to have these qualifications before recruitment, or can they work for these after starting work?
- What **other training** do you offer staff?

Appendix D Bristol Media

D.1 Media Types

Table D.1 lists some of the broad differences in defining the terms mainstream, nonmainstream and independent as these are used in very particular ways throughout my research.

Table D.1

Differences between mainstream, nonmainstream and independent media players

Media player	Definition
Mainstream organisation	
Commercial, nationally owned	National publishers, with local news operations, dependent on advertising and print sales, some autonomy over editorial direction but business matters are overseen nationally (Harcup, 2015). In Bristol the publishers are Reach (*Bristol Post/Live*) and National World (*Bristol World*).
Public sector	BBC (*Points West* and *Radio Bristol*). Publicly owned, dependent on the licence fee and governed by rules of impartiality (Harcup, 2015, pp. 28, 77; Mills, 2020).
Nonmainstream organisation	
Hyperlocal grant-dependent, member-owned advertising/print sales-dependent, independent franchise	"Hyperlocal media operations are geographically based, community-oriented, original-news-reporting organisations ... intended to fill perceived gaps in coverage of an issue or region and to promote civic engagement" (Metzgar et al., 2011, p. 774). This is the Voice network, North Bristol Press, *The Knowledge*, *Bristol 24/7*, *Bristol Cable*.
Alternative/critical media	"Outsider journalism that can alert you to stories, sources or perspectives that might be overlooked by most mainstream media" (Harcup, 2015, p. 62; see also Atton, 1999, 2002, 2003, 2009, 2010, 2015). *The Bristolian*.
Community radio	Small-scale, reliant on a mix of funds, holder of community radio licence. Often reliant on volunteers (Harte et al., 2019, p. 148). *Ujima Radio* and *BCfm*.
Independent	
Freelance	Casual workers, on short-term or rolling contracts. Sometimes they are "community reporters, often unpaid or paid a few pounds for a report, who ... 'cover every spit and cough' of the local scene" (Phillips, 2015a, p. 61).
Citizen journalist/blogger	"Citizen journalism tends to be seen as part of the more general blurring of boundaries between journalist and audience—sender and receiver—that has been facilitated by digital technology" (Harcup, 2015, p. 223).

Tables D.2 and D.3 set out the mainstream and nonmainstream organisations I selected for research, and, to re-iterate, mainstream is used here for the large commercial organisations and the BBC

and nonmainstream is employed as a catch-all term for “hyperlocal”, “alternative” or “community” news providers. I refer to freelancers, bloggers and citizen journalists as independents. Chapter 3 discusses the selection of these media (Wikipedia, n.d.-a).

D.2 Mainstream Media in Bristol

Table D.2

Mainstream media in Bristol—commercial; nationally-owned; public-sector broadcasting; more than 20 employees

Outlet	Media type	Reach	Ownership	Frequency
Bristol Post	Newspaper	Regional	Reach	Daily (Monday-Friday)
Bristol Live	Sister website to *Bristol Post*	Regional	Reach	Daily
Points West	Public-sector television news	Regional	BBC	Daily
Radio Bristol	Public-sector radio news	Regional	BBC	Daily
ITV News West Country	Commercial television news	Regional	ITV West Country	Daily
Bristol World	News website	City-wide	National World	Daily

The mainstream news outlets in the city are *Bristol Post/Live*, *Bristol World*, the BBC and ITV. The *Post* has been the main daily newspaper for almost 90 years—it is now published Monday to Friday, having dropped the Saturday edition, and it has a sister website *Bristol Live*. It is published by Reach, one of the UK’s biggest newspaper groups. In 1962 the newspaper had a daily circulation of 160,000; in 2017, this had fallen to 17,381; and the most recent figures for Jan-Jun 2024 were 3,372, a –27.34 year-on-year change from the same period in 2023, when the number recorded was 4,294 (Linford, 2024bc, Wikipedia, nd.-j).

Bristol Live is one of the best performing regional dailies in the UK for digital engagement, at a time when most websites are recording dramatic falls (Sharman, 2023ad). According to market research firm Ipsos, the website almost doubled its readership and increased its page views (97.5% change in Unique Users; 43.5% change in Page Views) between August 2022 (1,774,000 Unique Users; 7,000,000 Page Views) and August 2023 (3,504,000 Unique Users; 10,000,000 Page Views). Pete Gavan, the editor, credited this with “a decision to refocus the site’s what’s on content to include the latest restaurant openings and other events across the city”—so, upsetting received wisdom, this upsurge was down to local coverage. This upward turn in *Bristol Live*’s audience numbers is not typical of the majority of Reach regional websites—most of the 13 which closed in November 2023 recorded double digit falls

(Sharman, 2023g, 2023j). According to Ipsos data released in October 2024 Bristol Live saw a year-on-year fall—the overall audience (unique users) dropped from 3,503,953 in August 2023 to 2,651,781 in August 2024, a YoY change of –24.32; in the same period page views dropped from 17,142,881 to 13,758,979, a YoY change of –19.74 (Linford, 2024bg; Press Gazette, 2024b).

Revenues for Reach's UK operation continued to fall in 2024 despite an upturn in digital takings. Overall group revenues fell 4.3% for the first nine months of the year, while there was a 2.5% increase in digital revenues over the same period. In a quarterly update for the period July to September, the company registered a 5% volume decline in page views year-on-year. Print advertising revenue was down 9.1% during the quarter, while circulation revenue was down 1.9%, leading to a 3.9% decline in print revenues overall (Linford, 2024bi).

Research carried out by trade news website *Press Gazette* in 2022 found that most local news websites across the UK derive a significant amount of their traffic from outside their local region—in February 2022 *Bristol Live* had a total UK audience of 3.1m and an audience share in its main local region of only 14%, almost the lowest (48) of 49 websites (Majid, 2022c).

Bristol Post/Live was the only nationally-owned newspaper/website in the city until National World—a national multimedia company owned by media entrepreneur David Montgomery—launched *Bristol World* website in 2021 (Sharman, 2021c; 2021c).

The BBC broadcasts an early evening news programme from its Bristol-based regional headquarters, *Points West*, which covers news from a large area of southwest England, in which Bristol is the major city. The BBC's *Radio Bristol* has regular news bulletins throughout the day. ITV West also broadcasts an early evening news programme.

D.3 Nonmainstream Media in Bristol

Table D.3

Nonmainstream media in Bristol—hyperlocals; alternative media; non-commercial; grant-dependent; community media; fewer than 20 employees

Outlet	Media type	Reach	Ownership	Frequency	Founded
Bishopston Voice	Website and print publication – hyperlocal	Ward-level	Local Voice Network (franchise)	Daily/ Monthly	(Voice network launched 2011)

Filton Voice	Website and print publication – hyperlocal	Ward-level	Local Voice Network	Daily/ Monthly	
Fishponds Voice	Website and print publication – hyperlocal	Ward-level	Local Voice Network	Daily/ Monthly	
Henleaze and Westbury Voice	Website and print publication – hyperlocal	Ward-level	Local Voice Network	Daily/ Monthly	
South Bristol Voice	Website and print publication – hyperlocal	District-level	Local Voice Network	Daily/ Monthly	
Bristol Cable	Website and print publication – hyperlocal	City-wide	Member-owned, grant-dependent	Daily/ Quarterly	2014
Ujima Radio	Community radio station	City-wide	Grant-dependent, owned by Ujima Radio CIC (Community Interest Company)	Daily	2008
BCfm (Bristol Community Radio)	Website and community radio station	City-wide	Grant-dependent, owned by Bristol Community Fm Ltd	Daily	2007
The Bristolian	Alternative/ critical website and print publication	City-wide	The Committee for Public Safety	Daily/ten times a year	2001/relaunched 2013
Bristol 24/7	Listings and news website and print publication – hyperlocal	City-wide	Bristol 24/7 CIC	Daily	2009
Bradley Stoke Journal	News website – hyperlocal	Ward-level	North Bristol Press	Daily	2008
Stoke Gifford Journal	News website – hyperlocal	Ward-level	North Bristol Press	Daily	2008
The Knowledge	News community website and print publication	Ward-level	Grant-dependent, run by Knowle West Media Centre	Daily/ Monthly	2009

The nonmainstream media are split into those published/broadcast on a city-wide basis (*The Bristol Cable*, *Ujima Radio*, *BCfm*, *The Bristolian*, *Bristol 24/7*) and those targeted at smaller neighbourhoods or wards within the city and surrounding local authorities (Local Voice Network [LVN], North Bristol Press [NBP], *The Knowledge*). The ward-based outlets are predominantly print-based (there are associated websites which are updated only occasionally) and editions are delivered to every household in their

distribution areas, so they have a clear idea of their boundaries and make-up of the communities they serve. The city-wide news outlets come closer, to a greater or lesser extent, to being critical media (Fuchs, 2010) and feature coverage of Bristol's marginalised communities, whereas the LVN and NBP are franchises dependent on advertising revenue (Williams et al., 2015, p. 698).

BCfm and *Ujima Radio* are community radio stations, set up with the remit of giving a voice to the city's minority communities. Marcus Smith (2023), *BCfm*'s development lead and presenter, said:

> *BCfm* was formed in 2007. Since then, we're at the point now where we have roughly 30,000 weekly listeners. That's actually decreased over time. As people's listening habits have changed, more to podcasts on demand, etc, and more competition. But at the moment it's around 30,000. We've got about 20,000 followers on our social media channels across the platforms Twitter and Facebook, Instagram, Linkedin and we broadcast from Easton Community Centre, which is one of the most, you know, mixed demographics in the city, but at the same time, sort of, one of the most deprived areas as well. But it's also, but it's really important for us. Our location, our base is, is in that sort of setting. Our motto is to try and to improve community cohesion and wellbeing by providing like a challenging audio experience. And that's on radio and increasingly podcasts with a mix of talk and music and we've got 60 weekly shows, broadcasting 24 hours a day with content in different languages, including Polish and Somali, which are the two most spoken languages after English in Bristol, also Arabic and Spanish as well. In terms of our podcasts is sort of something that we've been doing more so just as habits have changed and technology has changed. So far, our podcasts have been downloaded over 20,000 times since we've been making them over the last four, five years or so altogether. So that's *BCfm* ... We're sort of a very left-leaning, whatever that means, radio station and that's who we are, that's what we do. But we always try and give the opposite opinion as well. We always try and play the devil's advocate. But yeah, political bias has been something that's come up. But we're a community radio station. We're not the BBC, so we can sort of do what we want, really. But it doesn't stop people complaining (to Ofcom)". (Smith, 2023)

He went into some details about the financial sustainability of the radio station, and how it is a combination of project funding and advertising:

> We've never really had much core funding, to be honest. I'd say quite a lot of our funding is project-based, to be honest. Where we do get core funding and support is advertising. So, you

know, within the past year we've had Bristol Zoo, Bristol Dental School, Open University, Tyrrells Crisps, NHS that have advertised on *BCfm*, on air. Also, sometimes we'll do stuff on social media. And I would say that sort of covers the, you could say, the bread and butter of running *BCfm*. So, the rent and the licences and the subscriptions and then, when it comes to the project-based funding. Yeah, we sort of, we will use that for a lot of the projects that we're doing, but then we will also use that for some of the operations of *BCfm*, as well. Sort of use it, as well, in between as and when, because some of it is related to the project, but then also it helps *BCfm* as well.

Smith also explained that he is optimistic about the future of community radio:

The future of community radio, *BCfm*, *Ujima* and many others is looking really, really bright, actually. Good at the moment because local BBC radio output is decreasing and shrinking. Also, commercial local output has decreased anyway. And it's becoming all centralised and corporate. And I think to fill that void, moving forwards, for local audio, local radio, local podcast content is going to be community radio. I think it's a great opportunity for us to do moving forwards, and we are, and I think we will increasingly do so, moving forwards. But there's questions around, how do you make that sustainable financially for us and for everyone. I may not necessarily agree with these ideas, but some of the ideas that I've heard is, maybe the BBC could give some money to some community radio stations around the country. Ofcom could maybe be better with their funding, because Ofcom do provide some funding, but it's often competitive, and it's often like small pots. So maybe there could be a better system or mechanism, or just more money there. In terms of what we've been doing. We've become quite sustainable by getting project-based funding and then that helps to sort of pay me and pay some other people in the management team and pay for some of the costs of operating a station. Also, I think, as a result of becoming more of the local audio voice, I think there will be an increase in advertising and sponsorship that will come to us over time. Some people have talked about having like sort of a membership system where I know listeners and volunteers can pay like a monthly thing. We have the option of that, but we don't ask, or we don't make it mandatory. But you can donate on our website if you want to, one off or monthly, but we'd never push it. But that's an option.

Both *Bristol 24/7* and LVN were set up (in 2009 and 2011, respectively) by senior journalists who had taken voluntary redundancy from the local mainstream media, and have continued to employ other former mainstream journalists.

Richard Coulter (2023), who co-founded and runs the Voice network, was interviewed for this research. He told me he took redundancy as assistant editor at *Bristol Post* when he felt the SEO evangelists in senior positions were pushing the news product in the wrong direction. He said:

> For the record, I took redundancy, because, I mean obviously there were, at that period of time it was just a series of redundancies after redundancies. And I thought my time was probably going to come eventually. So, I took the money and ran. And I'd been having conversations with a few people about this, because, at that time, so this was about 2011. At that time there were lots and lots of advertising booklets in the Bristol area that were coming through people's letterboxes, and they seemed to be thriving. They seemed to be absolutely chockerblock with adverts. So, they seemed to be good propositions commercially, but what most of them didn't do, was they didn't have much of a news element to them. Yeah, you know, they might have a little bit of stuff, but not very much so I wondered whether there was a gap in the market. Because I was seeing the *Bristol Post* declining. So, the circulation was getting smaller and smaller. Despite what everybody in the media echo chamber says, I wasn't convinced that digital was completely replacing things. And I thought that there was still a market for hyperlocal news delivered to every letterbox for everybody in the community with news that's relevant for that community. More and more I saw the mainstream media, and particularly the kind of people who were coming into the mainstream media quite, kind of, dismissive of hyperlocal stuff, you know. They had a very kind of metropolitan attitude to everything, you know, everything was, you know, centralised city centre, all that kind of stuff. They weren't interested in potholes, and when the bins get collected, and in communities. I mean, some of them didn't know where some of the communities were, if I'm honest, and I thought there was probably a pretty sizeable gap in the market.

He also gave some indication of the size of the operation:

> We endeavor to deliver to every household in our area. So, we've used maps, and over time, you kind of gradually refine these things, and the deliverers start to tell you things that oh, we need, for this street I need 20 more, and for that street you've given me too many. So over time you start to learn how many copies are needed. Obviously, every magazine has a slightly different circulation, because it depends on how many people. I think we range from about 6,500 to about 11,500. And the total circulation is about 150,000. So that's across all 18 magazines. So, I mean, we are way by far the biggest print operation in Bristol ... there are practical problems with

> distribution. You know if we could guarantee advertising revenue, you know, hefty advertising revenue. It's, you know, it's an open goal, really. But in the current climate, advertising is challenging. Paper prices have gone up. So, we're still making money, but not maybe as much as we were. But we're still doing okay, and, you know, we're looking to develop the digital side of it. And we've made some inroads in that. But we're still, we still see ourselves as print first ... so, we've got to make sure we get it to all the households so that that can be a headache. But I mean, the biggest thing is keeping on top of the commercial side of it. And I mean, I've said this many times at conferences and things like that, that I think there is a future for hyperlocal news but only if the journalistic people come to the realisation that you've got to have a commercial approach. I think there's too many people out there who just think that because they're doing something incredibly worthy they should be, you know, paid royally for it. And life's just not like that. I don't think.

According to its About Us webpage *Bristol 24/7* is "Bristol's biggest and best independent magazine and website, and your first port of call to find out what's happening across Bristol with news, features, what's on listings and everything in between" (*Bristol 24/7* n.d.). Martin Booth (2023), the editor of *Bristol 24/7*, told me: "Primarily, income comes from old-fashioned advertising ... We can say that we are this kind of young, hip, digital upstart but actually the income is extremely traditional in terms of paid-for advertising". He added:

> Now, I don't like giving journalism away for free. I think that that model is completely broken. So paywalls definitely have their place. Now, we've never even spoken about having a paywall at *Bristol 24/7* but we do now want to remind people who read our stories that journalism isn't free. So, we have, kind of, it's pop-ups for want of a better word. Interrupters, I think is their official name, just to just to tell people, look the journalism that you're reading isn't free. If you can afford £5 a month, do you think of becoming a member of *Bristol 24/7*. But we wouldn't ever stop people reading our content. But I think we need to do a better job of just reminding people that, that what they're reading is the work of professionals, and deserves to, and needs to be, recompensed, reimbursed, whatever, if a very small, lean organisation like *Bristol 24/7* is to continue.

Ben Wright (2023), the managing director, told me about the business model and how the covid pandemic affected revenues:

Traditionally, almost all of our revenue came from advertising. And then, I suppose, two things happened. One was, I was quite instrumental, I suppose, in leading it, for the, sort of, social enterprise element of the business, the sort of social and environmental impact side of what we do to become more central to what we do. And I had an initial idea, which was that we could, sort of, form a membership strategy which essentially would kind of pay for that side of what we do. Because we couldn't really, we didn't have enough money to invest into it without that. So we launched a public and a business membership back in 2019 and that, and then obviously, Covid happened. And then overnight almost all of our advertising revenue just disappeared, overnight. We, you know, almost predominantly taking advertising from local businesses. A lot of those are sort of culture, you know, days out, food-and-drink businesses, and obviously pretty much all of those were shutting down. So almost all of our revenue disappeared. And then there was, we relied on, you know, obviously the furlough scheme, but also grant funding which I hadn't really got any experience of before but I ended up writing a lot of grant-funding applications. And then, you know, did a bit of thinking around how actually, membership could provide a more significant part of the pie, I suppose. So that, you know, with a greater contribution from membership, we wouldn't be quite so reliant on the advertising side of things, and then, you know, would be more resilient to future economic shocks, I suppose. And so we invested more into the membership, as we've kind of come out of Covid, and we've had some funding. We've put more into that side of things, and it has grown. We now have over a thousand public members, we have about 50 business members, and we have six key partners. And they're like the big universities here, and a couple of other, sort of, larger businesses, and they give us varying amounts of money. And so it's now a bit more of an even split, but particularly in the last 12 months we've seen advertising revenues really start to recover. When Covid happened, we had to stop publishing all of our print publications. So, as well as being online, we also have, we used to publish a monthly print magazine and then a whole range of annual publications and then a bit of contract work. So we do the programmes for the Harbour Festival and the Balloon Fiesta programme. But all that went. And then slowly, we kind of brought back some of the annual publications. And then this year, we brought back a magazine, but we're now doing it quarterly rather than monthly. And that's been actually very successful. And we've managed to maintain the online revenues that we built up when we didn't have the print publications. But now the print publications are coming back and we're actually in a much stronger position now than we have been for some time.

The Bristol Cable was the subject of academic research by Konow-Lund (2019) which highlighted the ways the organisation differed from mainstream journalism—it is a non-hierarchical, non-profit co-operative with 2,500 paying members who have a say over the direction of the operation. It is run without a CEO or an editor-in-chief, and organised along the lines of a Quaker-influenced sociocracy where decisions are made, by consent, in fortnightly team meetings (Bristol Cable, n.d.-b.; Crosse, 2023; Edwards, 2024). There are currently four editorial and six administrative staff members, plus several freelancers.

During the research period the *Cable* launched a year-long fundraising drive to raise £100,000, which included a £40,000 grant from the Chicago-based Logan Foundation (Maher, 2024j; Stewart, 2024c). Membership grew through the offer of a new newsletter, greater event discounts and WhatsApp alerts. The organisation is diversifying its income streams with events, consultancy work and crowdfunding. Recent events have included talks by campaigning journalists such as Gary Younge, Owen Jones and Grace Blakeley (Stewart, 2024e). Strategy lead Eliz Mizon, said:

> We're committed to doing journalism differently at the local level rather than just going 'well click-bait will get us some ad revenue so we'll have to do that because it would work'. It's about trust and it's always at the forefront of our minds to gain that confidence, maintain it and build it. Trust is crucial.

Alex Turner (2023a), a reporter at the *Cable*, talked about the organisation's membership strategy:

> It's just sustainability of the organisation. I mean ... *The Cable*'s been very lucky to receive grant funding from various organisations, and to have its model of journalism supported. But ultimately, it's not sustainable to rely on that funding which may just, which could just run out at some point. And so, we want to grow that I mean, I think there's been, *The Cable* has been successful in gaining reach throughout, across certain parts of the city, certain demographics. But there's always room to expand that. And I think that's yeah, you know, that's what we'll be seeking to do.

Konow-Lund wrote about the way the outlet is organised, unusually for a journalistic endeavour it does not have an editor (Edwards, 2024):

> The goal of *Bristol Cable* was to demonstrate that holding power to account does not require a hierarchical journalistic organisational structure; instead, shared values and goals alone might

sustain an organisation that could accommodate the input of the people themselves in the work to be done. (p. 105)

This builds on studies of journalism without profit by Konieczna (2018), reciprocal journalism by Lewis, Holton and Coddington (2013), civic engagement by Kim and Ball-Rokeach (2006) and Wenzel (2019), community participation by Paek et al. (2005), solutions journalism by Wenzel (2019, 2020); Wenzel et al. (2016); and Wenzel & Crittenden (2020) and rebuilding community trust by Konieczna and Robinson (2013). The publication carried out a year-long solutions journalism project—funded by a €130,000 grant from the European Journalism Centre's Solutions Journalism Accelerator, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Called The Future of Cities (Granger, 2022; *The Bristol Cable*, 2023, n.d.) the project reported on the city's housing, transport and resourcing problems in a positive way—"the end goal is more quality local journalism that leaves us feeling empowered as readers, instead of doomscrolling or switching off altogether" (Edwards, 2022). Turner (2023) told me about the funded solutions journalism project:

> Basically, from some of our evaluations of it the story seems to have been well received. They seem to have generated good conversation among people at a local level. We've enjoyed focusing on the some of the more positives because occasionally the *Cable* gets criticism for being too uniformly bleak in terms of covering problems all the time. I think, compared with when we set out, we hoped to do a more varied range of content, because a lot of the stories have ended up being long reads, with a fairly similar format to them. But I think it's been, within the team, doing this kind of journalism and meeting with some of the kind of parameters which was set in the original funding package, and also finding, trying to find solutions to some things which are like some of the most intractable things in British society has been quite tough at times. It's definitely been a bit of a learning curve for everybody in the team to do so, because some of them. A lot of them are problems which ultimately cities can't do too much about without the inputs of national government. The reporting has been challenging sometimes. We've tried really hard to, I think, with solutions journalism, we developed a, again, this was just before I started. But my colleagues developed a kind of checklists, or like a map of, like the things that we, the elements which we needed to be including in most of the stories, which are things like reporting on things which were either directly pertaining to or driven by communities and having strong characters to show how problems were tackled, and how they, how the solutions might impact on, for want of a better word, everyday lives of normal people. So, a tricky thing, because a lot, because it's, I think,

> because a lot of these things were quite. We're looking at in quite big picture ways, at problems that affect Bristol and other cities. It was finding good characters who could kind of anchor the stories and discuss things in a way which brought these kind of like, these things which can be quite dry and policy centred to life. So those have been difficult. And also just, yeah, I think keeping in terms of the reporting, I think. Just get tucking into some of these very big and complex issues. Trying to keep the length of the articles down, even though they haven't been short by any means, it has been hard. So it's definitely been, I would say, all elements to it have been a learning curve recently, really, yeah.

The *Cable*'s investigative work has also gained national recognition with reporter Sean Morrison being shortlisted for the 2023 Orwell Prize for Journalism for his After the Fall series, examining issues of domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour in a notorious tower block in Bristol. It was the only local publication to be nominated alongside the BBC, *The Economist* and *Tortoise* (*The Bristol Cable*, 2023; Sharman, 2023l). The news team also won the 2019 British Journalism Award for Local Journalism for its five-year investigation into modern day slavery—The Ice Cream Slavery case (Cantwell-Corn & Aviram, 2019; Mayhew, 2019).

The Knowledge is a quarterly newspaper delivered to every household (6,500) on the Knowle West estate on the southern edge of Bristol and is produced by a long-established local arts organisation and charity, the Knowle West Media Centre [n.d.], to help "people find out what's going on in their community and offers a platform for local voices to be heard more widely". This ward-level news operation, along with the LVN and NBP franchises, gave an opportunity to examine how smaller audiences "can still play a significant role through collaboration, distribution and impact" (Posetti et al., 2019, p. 9).

The former editor of *The Knowledge*, Mackinnon (2023), explained the importance of journalism at a hyperlocal level:

> I was a journalist on local papers, and then regional, and I did some national stuff. And then I discovered local journalism, and I was just hooked, then. I just thought the stuff here is, you know, they're like stories that even *The Sun*, everyone, would want. And they, you know, those stories were taken by, you know the *(Bristol) Post*, by nationals and things ... I think it's great being on the ground because you're there, actually in the area, knowing everything that's going on, and there's so much exciting stuff. I think regeneration areas, just a hotchpotch of amazing stuff. I

think we've helped bring the image up. But I think people that are working on this care more because you're, it's very different. It's not like you're just after the story, the quick story, you know. You're not. You're there because you've got a vested interest in the area to see it grow, but you also want to be truthful, you know, if you lie and said everything's brilliant, that's not going to, you know. So, you cover everything. But you also bring up the positive stories that maybe other media think it's not worth their while. Because it's hyperlocal, someone can be a local celebrity, but they're not important enough, maybe, to be somewhere else, you know ... But, you know, those people are heroes in the area, aren't they? So, I think, yeah, that's what's so important, really.

The Bristolian is well-established but is unlike the other news organisations in that its contributors belong to an anonymous collective called The Committee for Public Safety. According to its About Us webpage it is "a scandal sheet covering all sorts of shenanigans in the fine British city of Bristol" and is known as the "smiter of the high and mighty" (*Bristolian*, n.d.; Maggs, 2022). It was launched in 2001 but has its ideological roots in a "muck-raking popular radical paper" of the same name published in the 1820s and 30s and has been runner-up in the Paul Foot Award for Investigative Journalism. During my research it scooped the other news organisations with revelations about Bristol City Council spying on SEND parents, in a manner which showed the power connections between the different elements of the local news ecosystem discussed by Anderson (2010, 2013a). I interviewed one of the coordinators of the publication, who only wanted to be known as *The Bristolian* (2023). He talked about their scoop:

> It's one of the main purposes we serve, is we mainly go for these kind of marginal stories that the press aren't really picking up on. Cause I think that story was kind of going around, cause it was Chopsy who posted it. She's a regular poster on Twitter and so she's out there. All the journalists follow her. But there's only The Bristolian who'll go "hang on a minute. This is, you know, there, there's legal issues with this". You just can't. You can't basically follow people around Twitter and their social media, and, you know, get print outs and pass them round City Hall. This is not, you know. I doubt this is legal and it's us that picked up and said "hang on, there's a problem here". And then I think the other media then stopped and thought "yeah, actually, they're right. This is not just quite straightforward as it seems". And, you know, the public shouldn't be stalked by council officers and they do have, you know, I know they've denied it, but they do have rules and regulations around how they should be surveilling people, and they haven't followed them. And yeah, I think. Yeah, that happens, every now and then. We will get a story that the media's maybe ignored, and then, because we've done it, they've then, sort of, they will come in and take it up as well, which we always consider that a success really. If we can get stuck into mainstream press, then, you know, that's yeah, it's a small victory. But we don't get many victories. And that story is still ongoing, actually, because there's two of the victims are taking legal action. My understanding is that there will be legal papers going in towards September, October. So, there's a lot more to go on that story, because obviously the council has done its own investigation, said, oh, nothing to see here. They voted to have an independent investigation, but Marvin Rees won't actually do it, because he knows that an independent investigation is not going to come down on their side.

> So, it looks like there's going to be some legal action around that which would ignite the whole thing, again. Which it should be ignited because it's a serious issue. And I suspect other local authorities are at it as well, and it's just like cowboy country, everyone's just doing what the hell they like out there with people's social media. You know. Well, we can just access it, you know, print it off, record it, pass it around. I mean, I mean. You know, it's all subject to GDPR if nothing else, you know. Who's given permission for the council to hold this data on you? This personal data. And I think they've got this wafer-thin defence that "oh, it's in the public domain". But once it once it comes into the council, and it's stored on their system it's data like anything else. And it's personal data. So, they probably, you know, councils across the country probably need to think about this a bit more. If they wanna spy on us they've got, you know, they've got rules, regulations and laws in place to do that, and they should follow those. The idea we can just sort of go, you know, go onto social media and do what we like is just a disgrace.

Also included in Phase 2 were freelancers and citizen journalists—some had been members of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), and some were former mainstream journalists with national, and international, experience and National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) qualifications, while others were concerned citizens making Freedom of Information (FoI) requests and blogging or using social media. While, in terms of amount of output, these are peripheral actors in the Bristol news ecosystem their influence can be felt in social media, sometimes scooping the 'professionals', such as the initial revelations about Bristol City Council's surveillance of SEND parents. I interviewed Joanna Booth (2023) for this study—a citizen journalist who works as a freelance and who monitors local council spending. She gave her views on why local scrutiny of power elites is important and personal, but also why she could be considered a maverick in the local news landscape and how she has not got the kind of safety net non-freelance journalists can rely on:

> I have a kind of an anarcho-Buddhist approach to this. I live in Bristol. My body is in Bristol. My council tax goes to Bristol finances. My money goes to these schools, and my circle of influence is the greatest in my local area and even more in my hyperlocal area. So my circle of influence is the greatest in my personal domain. It extends slightly in my community, and it extends a bit more in local. And there's a billion journalists covering everything else in terms of national. So, I have no interest in that, because it's already been covered. My purpose is to talk about the things other people aren't talking about and that's mainly within my small sphere of influence … I think there's a real big difference between … local and national papers and local capitalism. One thing councils

> have is a lot of power over planning and land, that's their kind of their USP, and also access to public service millions and billions. The local journalists are very much affected by these forces, these local forces of incredible power over planning and open checks towards public services and the distribution of assets ... I publish what's safe to publish and I tend to avoid what's not safe. But that's my very kind of personal judgment. It's different as a freelancer. You don't have a lawyer, and you haven't got an editor saying, you know, I'll go to bat for you if something goes wrong. There isn't anyone you know, and most of the media here probably wouldn't support me.

D.4 Other Local Media Not Included in Research

The *Western Daily Press* is a major, long-established newspaper published in Bristol but was excluded from the CA as its remit is to cover news from a wide region of south west England and is not primarily focused on the city.

Up Our Street is a magazine published by the Eastside Community Trust, with 14,000 copies being delivered to community hubs and households in Easton and Lawrence Hill—unfortunately this was not included in the CA as I was not aware of its existence at the time (Eastside Community Trust, n.d.).

Regional media group SoPublishing also launched SoBristol—a "local news brand with a lifestyle and business angle"—as research was concluding (Aberneithie, 2024).

In recent years several of Bristol's small-scale independent radio stations, including *Noods* Radio, online *1020* and youth-led *SWU.fm*, have been hit by the cost-of-living crisis, rising energy bills, landlord ultimatums and falling ad revenue, with some closing and others having to launch crowd-funding campaigns (Limbu, 2024).

Appendix E Application for Ethical Review of Academic Research



JOMEC RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH PROJECTS

For Office Use Only	
SREC Reference: [x]	Meeting/Review Date: [x]

SECTION 1. GENERAL INFORMATION	
Application Type:	☐ Staff X PGR student ☐ PGT/Masters Student ☐ Undergraduate
Name of Taught Degree Course if applicable	
Research Project Title:	News Ecosystems Under the Microscope—Comparing the Work of Journalists in the Established Press and Emergent Hyperlocal Alternatives in a Bounded Geographic Area
Short Title (where applicable):	
For Staff Projects	
Name of Chief/Principal Investigator:	
Contact details:	
Other members of research team:	
For Student Projects	

Name of Student & student number:	Andrew Nelmes c1853135
Contact details:	Nelmesaj@cardiff.ac.uk
Name of Supervisor(s):	Dr Andy Williams; Dr Mike Berry (second supervisor)
Contact details:	williamsa28@cardiff.ac.uk; BerryM1@cardiff.ac.uk
Other members of research team:	

SECTION 2. SCREENING QUESTIONS

		es	**o**
2.1	Is the research project categorised as 'Research' (as defined in the Cardiff University Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research on Human Participants, Human Materials and Human Data (The Ethics Policy)? ***If no, you do not need to continue with this application form, but you must contact the School's Ethics Officer, Damian Carney (CarneyD@cardiff.ac.uk) with a summary of the research methods you intend to use to confirm this.*** *If he confirms this the case* ***you do not need to continue with this application.*** If you are unsure whether ethical review is required, please seek advice from the School's Ethics Officer, Dr Damian Carney (CarneyD@cardiff.ac.uk)		
2.2	Does the research project involve human participants, human material or human data as defined in The Ethics Policy in 2.1. above?		

	If no, you do not need to continue with this research, but you must contact Schools' Ethics Officer, Damian Carney (CarneyD@cardiff.ac.uk) with a summary of the research methods you intend to use to confirm this. *If he conforms this the case* ***<u>you do not need</u> to continue with this application.***		
2.3	Does the research project require review by an external ethics committee (refer to Appendix 1 of the Ethics Policy in 2.1. above)? Please note that this includes all research projects involving participants who lack the capacity to consent. *If* ***yes****, the research project should be submitted to the relevant external ethics committee for review and does not fall within the remit of this Committee. Please contact the <u>Research Governance Team</u> for further advice.* ***Please do not continue with this application.***		
2.4	Has the research project been ethically reviewed by another university or research institution (for example, where the Chief/Principal Investigator for the research project is based at another institution)? *If* ***yes,*** *please provide evidence of the review conducted (such as an outcome letter or communication) and the ethical review policy of the relevant institution or committee. This should be sent to the Chair of the Ethics Committee,* ***Damian Carney (CarneyD@cardiff.ac.uk). Please do <u>not</u> continue with this application.***		
2.5	Is the research project exempt from ethical review under the University's framework for the 'Ethical Review of Research using Secondary Data and/or Publicly Available information only' (which relates to public documents), or involves only: textual analysis, content or discourse analysis, or examinations of theories, or theorists.		

	Note: This framework allows certain research projects using only secondary data and/or publicly available information to proceed without ethical review by a SREC provided certain conditions are met. *If **yes**, you are not required to submit the research proposal to this Committee.* ***Please do not continue with this application. but you must contact School's Ethics Officer, Damian Carney (CarneyD@cardiff.ac.uk) with a summary of the research methods you intend to use to confirm this.***		
2.6	Does the research project fall within the scope of the UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care Research? This Framework broadly applies to research taking place within, or involving, the health and social care systems. *If **yes**, you will need to apply to the Research Governance Team for Sponsorship using the Advanced Project Information Proforma (APIP) (available on the Cardiff University intranet). The Research Governance Team will advise you on the approvals that are required for the research project after it has conducted a review of the APIP and supporting documentation.* ***Please do not continue with this application until you have sought advice from the Research Governance Team.***		
2.7	Does the research project involve the collection or use of Human Tissue (including, but not limited to, blood, saliva and bodily waste fluids)? *If **yes**, the research project should be submitted to the Human Tissue Act Compliance Team (HTACT) prior to submission to an ethics committee.* ***Please do not continue with this application until you have sought advice from HTACT.***		
2.8	Does the research project fall within the scope of the University's Security-sensitive Research Policy? This Policy broadly applies to research		

	involving terrorism, extremism or radicalisation (or access to materials of such a nature). *If **yes**, you must register the research in accordance with the Policy and comply with the IT and security arrangements contained in the Policy. Please attach a copy of the security-sensitive research registration form (Appendix 1 of the policy) to this application.*		
2.9	Has the research project received scientific review? (For student research projects, review by the research project supervisor is an acceptable form of scientific review) *If **no**, please obtain appropriate scientific review before submitting the application to this Committee.*		
2.10	If a student on a taught course, have you attended the relevant sessions on research methods?		
	If a member of staff/postgraduate research student have you completed the relevant training on:		
	Research Integrity (this is mandatory for all staff seeking approval)		
	Information Security (this is required if the research will involve the storage of special category data or sensitive information of the type identified in 4.4. below)		
	Prevent (this is required if fieldwork involves interaction with those holding extreme or violent views)		
If the research project involves the use of animals, please contact the Cardiff University Biological Standards Office bso@cardiff.ac.uk to seek further advice.			

	SECTION 3. PROJECT SUMMARY
3.1	Summarise the research project (including the purpose and its methodology) using language that would be understood by a lay person.
I am researching the provision of local news in the public interest in Bristol by established print, online and broadcast news publishers (mainstream), and newer hyperlocal/alternative/community news outlets (non-mainstream). The work will benefit marginalised communities within the city which suffer from negative coverage or under-reporting and will have a positive impact outside academia. There are three phases to the research – the first two involve content and discourse analyses of published journalism and the third involves interviews with news workers in the city.	
3.2	Describe the research question(s).
RQ. To what extent, and in what ways, does coverage of community and public interest news in the Bristol news ecosystem differ between local mainstream and local non-mainstream journalists and news organisations? **Sub-RQ1.** What news gets covered in the Bristol local news ecosystem, by whom, and in what ways? **Sub-RQ2.** How do news workers in Bristol see their roles and how do the differences between role conception and role enactment depend on cultural and social norms, and the institutional practices and commercial imperatives of the organisations they work for, whether mainstream or non-mainstream?	
3.3	Estimated start date.
01 October 2018 (PhD start) March 2023 (interviews start)	
3.4	Estimated end date (usually the end of data collection).
May 2023 (interviews finish)	

	19 January 2024 (submission of thesis)
3.5	Is the research project funded? *If **yes**, please name the funding body.*
	No
3.6	Are there any potential conflicts of interest? *If **yes**, please confirm the action you propose to take to address such conflicts.*
	No

SECTION 4. FULL REVIEW CRITERIA

Your answers to the questions in this Section 4 will help the Committee determine whether your project requires full or proportionate review.

If all 'No' boxes apply, your project may be considered for proportionate review.

If a 'Yes' box applies, your project will proceed to full review unless the School has approved a Standard Operating Procedure or Ethics Protocol for that particular criterion. Where a Standard Operating Procedure Ethics Protocol applies, this is confirmed below (The box will be left blank rather than coloured grey). If you have complied with the Standard Operating Procedure or Ethics Protocol, your project may be considered for proportionate review.

Please check with the JOMEC Research Ethics Application Forms and Related Documents Team site, or the Research Ethics folder in your Research/Dissertation Module in Learning Central, or the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee as to whether standard operating procedures have been adopted.

Note: SOP means Standard Operating Procedure previously approved by the SREC. For each response given as 'Yes-SOP', please provide details of the SOP in the text box below.		**es**	**es-OP**	**o**
4.1	Will the research project be performed without the participants' prior consent?			
4.2	Does the research design include an element of deception, including covert research?			
4.3	Will the research project involve children under the age of 18 or 'at risk' (vulnerable) adults or groups? *The Cardiff University Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk: Policy and Guidance sets out examples of 'at risk' or 'vulnerable' adults.*			
4.4	Does the research project include topics which may be considered highly sensitive for participants? *This includes sexual behaviour; illegal activities; political, religious or spiritual beliefs; race or ethnicity; gender identity; personal financial information; experience of violence, abuse or exploitation; and mental health issues.*			
4.5	Does the research project require access to records of a sensitive or confidential nature, including Special Category Data, for the purposes of the General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018?			
4.6	Is permission of a gatekeeper required for initial or continued access to participants? *This includes participants in custody and care settings, or research in communities where access to research participants is*			

	not possible without the permission of another adult, such as another family member or a community leader.			
4.7	Does the research project involve intrusive or invasive procedures? *This includes the administration of substances, vigorous physical exercise, procedures involving pain or more than mild discomfort to participants (including the risk of psychological distress, discomfort or anxiety to participants).*			
4.8	Does the research project involve visual or audio recordings where participants may be identified?			
4.9	Does the research project involve the collection or use of human tissue?			
4.10	Does the research project involve more than a minimal risk of harm to the safety and wellbeing of participants and/or the researchers?			
4.11	Does the research involve the use of personal data without the explicit consent of the individual concerned from social media or similar platforms and does not fall within the exceptions recognised in 8.4.3. of the JOMEC RESEARCH ETHICS PROCEDURES which can be found in the Research Ethics folder on Learning Central? See Further Guidance on Research Using Data on Social Media Platforms. For students this document can be found in the Ethical Applications folder in their dissertation/project module on Learning Central; for staff in the JOMEC Research Ethics and Associated Documents Teams Site).			
For each response given as 'Yes-SOP', please provide details of the SOP that has been approved by the SREC.				

PROCEDURE TO FOLLOW, BASED ON RESPONSES IN SECTION 4:

- If any 'Yes' box applies, the research project should follow a full ethics review.
- If all 'No' boxes apply, the research project may be considered for proportionate review.
- If a combination of only 'No' and 'Yes-SOP' boxes applies, the research project may be considered for proportionate review.

SECTION 5. RECRUITMENT

5.1	How will you recruit participants to the research project? *If appropriate, please include sampling criteria.*

Current and former employees of 11 news organisations in Bristol will be sent letters/emails asking for their participation in interviews. Names and contact information for the current employees will be gathered from their respective publication/website contact details. Former employees will be tracked down through Linked In.

5.2	How many participants are you aiming to recruit? *If applicable, please include a breakdown of participants by type and number.*

I currently have contact details for 20 potential participants. These include editors/managers/proprietors, news editors and reporters (specialist and Local Democracy Reporters), permanent and freelance.

5.3	What is the inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants?

Only current and former employees of the identified news organisations will be contacted.

Participants will be asked two sets of questions – one set for all the participants and another depending on their role (as employer or employee) and journalistic specialism, as not all the participants would have the relevant knowledge to answer these questions fully.

5.4	How will the research project address recruitment of participants who are not fluent in the English/Welsh language?
All the news organisations publish/broadcast in English	
5.5	Will the research project involve participants that are Cardiff University staff or students or people who are likely to become students or clients of the University or the place in which you may otherwise work? *If applicable, please provide details.*
No	
SECTION 6. CONSENT PROCEDURES	
6.1	How will informed consent be obtained? *Please include who will be taking consent, how consent will be recorded, when participants will be provided with information about the research project, and how long potential participants will be given to decide whether to take part.*
Consent forms and participant information sheets (based on Cardiff University templates) will be sent to potential participants with the request that they take no longer than two weeks to respond.	
6.2	Will participants be offered any incentives to take part in the research project?
No	
6.3	If a questionnaire is to be used, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not wish to answer?
No questionnaire will be used	
6.4	Will participants be informed that their participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw at any time and for any reason?
Yes	

SECTION 7. POSSIBLE HARM TO PARTICIPANTS/RESEARCHERS	
7.1	Is there is a risk of the <u>participants</u> experiencing physical, emotional or psychological harm or distress*? If yes, please provide details of how ethical issues will be handled and how any risks will be minimised. Please consider whether the research project includes topics which could be considered as highly sensitive for participants.*
Although participants will not be asked questions explicitly about work-related stress and anxiety it is possible these subjects will be addressed in the answers given. Participants will be assured their responses will be treated confidentially and sufficiently anonymised to avoid repercussions from employers following any critical comments they might make. Participants will be able to withdraw consent within 30 days of the interview taking place, and/or decide not to answer any questions asked, without giving a reason. After 30 days the responses will be in the process of being analysed.	
7.2	Is there a risk of the <u>Researcher</u>(s) experiencing physical, emotional or psychological harm or distress? *If yes, please provide details of how ethical issues will be handled and how any risks will be minimised.*
No	
SECTION 8. DATA MANAGEMENT, CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA PROTECTION	
8.1	How, and by whom, will data be collected?
Interviews will be recorded by the research student via Zoom	
8.2	Will you be accessing or collecting Personal Data (identifiable personal information) as part of the research project? If yes, please confirm what data will be accessed and/or collected (including details of the information participants are asked to provide on a written consent form) and by who.

	Note: If your project involves Personal Data, you are advised to review the University's GDPR Guidance for Researchers and to check whether your project requires, or would benefit from, the completion of a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA). It is not the role of the SREC to review or advise on DPIA's, but if you have completed one, please confirm this below. For further advice, please refer to the 'DPIA' intranet page or contact complianceandrisk@cardiff.ac.uk.
I will be collecting name; age; gender; race; job title; name of employer; area of residence and length of time they have worked as journalists and been employed by their current organisation.	
8.3	How long will you retain the Personal Data collected in connection with the research project? Please also explain any data deletion arrangements. Note: Research records and data must be retained for the period specified in Section 2.9 ('Research Project Conduct') of the University's Research Records Retention Schedule. If identifiable information is being collected, researchers must ensure that this is limited to the information necessary to achieve the relevant purpose (data minimisation). The University expects raw data containing identifiable information (questionnaires and audio tapes for example) to be retained for the full retention period unless: (1) the identifiable information is not required to support the research or to demonstrate good research conduct; and (2) stringent measures have been taken to verify and ensure the integrity of any anonymised or pseudonymised records/data produced from the raw data. Where (1) and (2) apply, the researcher must take the necessary steps to remove the personal data. Consent Forms must be retained for the full retention period ***Note for UG/PGT projects****: the retention period specified in the University's Research Records Retention Schedule does not apply to UG projects unless the data is to be published. If there is no intention to publish, records and data should be retained until the*

	end of the appeals process (students usually have 28 days from the date of their transcript/results to make an appeal).
In accordance with Section 2.9 of the University's Research Records Retention Schedule, the personal data collected will be retained for five years after the end of the project or after publication of any findings based upon the data (whichever is later).	
8.4	What efforts will be made to anonymise the data collected (where possible)?
Participants will be assured their participation will be treated confidentially. The consent form gives three options: 1 anonymised; 2 named; 3 named but with specific sections anonymised. The 'off the record' responses will be agreed on during the interview. Where anonymised participants may be identified through age, gender, race, job title and organisation they work for this will be changed and a disclaimer attached, i.e. "job title has been changed to prevent identification".	
8.5	Are you proposing to utilise 'public task' as the lawful basis for processing Personal Data for the purposes of the research project (as recommended in the University's GDPR Guidance for Researchers)? *If no, please explain why and what alternative lawful basis you propose to use.*
Yes	
8.6	Have you utilised/incorporated into the Participant Information Sheet the template GDPR privacy information for research participants? *If no, please explain why this has not been used.*
Yes	
8.7	For how long will the collected anonymised data be retained?

	Note for Staff/PGR/PGT projects: Anonymised research data should be retained for the period specified in Section 2.9 ('Research Project Conduct') of the University's Research Records Retention Schedule. Note for UG projects: Unless there is an intention to publish (in which case the above retention period applies), anonymised research data should be retained until the end of the appeals process (students usually have 28 days from the date of their transcript/results to make an appeal).
In accordance with Section 2.9 of the University's Research Records Retention Schedule, the personal data collected will be retained for five years after the end of the project or after publication of any findings based upon the data (whichever is later).	
8.8	Who will have access to the data?
Myself, and potentially my supervisory team Dr Andy Williams and Dr Mike Berry	
8.9	Will the data be shared in any way, for example through deposit in a data repository, with third parties, or a transcription service?
No	
.10	How will the information be stored?
OneDrive	
SECTION 9. OTHER ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	

Please outline any other ethical considerations raised by the research project and how you intend to address these. You are obliged to bring to the attention of the SREC any ethical issues not covered in this Ethics Review Application Proforma.

SECTION 10. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

I have attached the documents, as indicated in the table below, in support of this application.

Please note that the documents listed below **MUST BE** provided where relevant to the research project, alongside any other documents relevant to recruitment, consent and participation.

		es	**o**	**Version no.** (where applicable)
1	Research Project Protocol/Proposal (This is only a mandatory requirement for medical research)			
2	Recruitment Adverts/Invitation Letters			
3	Participant Information Sheet			
4	Consent Form			
5	Data Collection Tools (e.g. questionnaires) [or a detailed description of the proposed tool which provides the SREC with clear information about the parameters of the tool i.e. what themes/areas will be covered and what will be excluded].			
6	Other participant communications (e.g. debrief sheets)			
7	Protocol(s) or Standard Operating Procedure(s) of documented and ethically approved common methodology(ies) being used for the research project			
8	Evidence of training completion (staff and PhD students only)			

9	Security sensitive registration form			
10	Other documentation (specify)			

SECTION 11. SIGNATURES AND DECLARATIONS

General declaration

I confirm that:

a. The information in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it.
b. I have the necessary skills, training and or/expertise to conduct the research project as proposed.
c. I am familiar with the University's health and safety requirements and policies and that all relevant health and safety measures have been taken into account for the research project.
d. I am familiar with, and will comply with, the University's Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research involving Human Participants, Human Material or Human Data and the University's Research Integrity and Governance Code of Practice.
e. The relevant equality and diversity considerations have been taken into account when designing the research project.
f. If the research project is approved, I undertake to adhere to the research project protocol, the terms of the full application as approved and any conditions set out by the Committee and any other body required to review and/or approve the research project.
g. I will notify the Committee and all other review bodies of substantial amendments to the protocol or the terms of the approved application, and to seek a favourable opinion from the Committee before implementing the amendment.

FOR STAFF PROJECTS

Signed:

Chief/Principal Investigator

Print name:

Date:

FOR STUDENT PROJECTS (Supervisor's recommendations as to conditions attached to approval of ethics permission, or that it goes to full review or is refused permission)

Signed: Student	Signed: Supervisor
Print name: Andrew Nelmes	Print name: Andy Williams
Date: 06/01/2023	Date: 20 Jan 2023

Please submit the completed application and supporting documents to JOMECEthicsForms@cardiff.ac.uk

Your electronic submission should contain wet-ink or electronic signatures of all relevant parties. Please note that if any information is missing, the application may be returned to you.

Approved by (supervisor if applicant student on taught course, otherwise the Chair or other delegated member of the research ethics committee)

……

….

and

……

…..

(member of research ethics committee, or authorised delegate)

Appendix F Consent Form



CONSENT FORM

Title of research project: News Ecosystems Under the Microscope—Comparing the Work of Journalists in the Established Press and Emergent Hyperlocal Alternatives in a Bounded Geographic Area

SREC reference and committee: 22/23PGR001 JOMEC Research Ethics Committee

Name of Chief/Principal Investigator: Andrew Nelmes

	Please initial box
I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated 06/01/2023 version 1 for the above research project.	
I confirm that I have understood the information sheet dated 06/01/2023 version 1 for the above research project and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and that these have been answered satisfactorily.	

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without any adverse consequences (e.g. to medical care or legal rights, if relevant). I understand that if I withdraw, information about me that has already been obtained may be kept by Cardiff University.	
I understand that data collected during the research project may be looked at by individuals from Cardiff University or from regulatory authorities, where it is relevant to my taking part in the research project. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my data.	
I consent to the processing of my personal information [name; age; race; gender; job title; employer; area of residence; length of time employed by current employer; length of time working as a journalist; email address] for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be held in accordance with all applicable data protection legislation and in strict confidence, unless disclosure is required by law or professional obligation.	
I understand who will have access to personal information provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the research project.	
I give my permission for this information to be used (tick one of the following): 1. **Anonymised** (n.b. it is possible that my comments may be identifiable to others even when my name is not used – e.g. due to familiarity with my work or professional role and/or the relatively small pool of potential participants involved in the research and limited geographical area from which they are drawn) 2. **Named** (the information I provide will be identifiable to me) 3. **Named, but with specific sections anonymised** (n.b. if, during the interview, I decide I would like to keep something I say anonymous/"off the record" this will be noted and sufficient wording to protect anonymity will be agreed)	1 2 3
I understand that after the research project, anonymised data may be made publicly available via a data repository and may be used for purposes not related to this research project. I understand that it will not be possible to identify me from this data that is seen and used by other researchers, for ethically approved research projects, on the understanding that confidentiality will be maintained.	
I consent to being audio recorded/video recorded (Zoom) for the purposes of the research project and I understand how it will be used in the research.	
I understand that anonymised excerpts and/or verbatim quotes from my interview may be used as part of the research publication.	
I understand how the findings and results of the research project will be written up and published.	

I agree to take part in this research project.	

Name of participant (print) Date Signature

Name of person taking consent (print) Date Signature

Role of person taking consent

(print)

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN OUR RESEARCH

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM TO KEEP

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

06/01/2023 version 1

News Ecosystems Under the Microscope—Comparing the Work of Journalists in the Established Press and Emergent Hyperlocal Alternatives in a Bounded Geographic Area

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being undertaken and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others, if you wish.

Thank you for reading this.

1. What is the purpose of this research project?

My name is Andrew Nelmes and I am a PhD researcher in the School of Journalism, Media and Culture (JOMEC) at Cardiff University, investigating the provision of local news in the public interest in Bristol by established print, online and broadcast news publishers (mainstream), and newer hyperlocal/alternative/community news outlets (non-mainstream).

2. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited because you currently (or have recently) work(ed) for one of the news organisations in Bristol which are the subject of this research.

3. Do I have to take part?

No, your participation in this research project is entirely voluntary and it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part, we will discuss the research project with you and ask you to sign a consent form. If you decide not to take part, you do not have to explain your reasons and it will not affect your legal rights.

You are free to withdraw your consent to participate in the research project at any time, without giving a reason, even after signing the consent form.

4. What will taking part involve?

Participants will be interviewed at a time and place convenient to them. The interviews should take no longer than an hour and, in most cases, will be conducted (and recorded) via Zoom. The researcher may need to contact the participant for additional information/clarification following the interview, but this will only be in exceptional circumstances.

5. Will I be paid for taking part?

No. You should understand that any data you give will be as a gift and you will not benefit financially in the future should this research project lead to the development of a new method/test/assessment.

6. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There will be no direct advantages or benefits to you from taking part, but your contribution will help us understand better the functioning of journalism in a varied local news environment (and difficult economic times) and the advantages and disadvantages of, and difficulties faced by, the various types of news organisations in the city and the business models they employ in the production of news in the public interest.

7. What are the possible risks of taking part?

There are no major risks anticipated, but you may in the course of the interview be asked questions relating to your professional practice which you may deem to be confidential. If you are uncomfortable talking about your experiences working as a journalist in your place of work but would like to take part in an interview, this could be conducted at a time and place convenient for you. See below for the measures which will be taken over confidentiality, data protection and anonymising responses.

8. Will my taking part in this research project be kept confidential?

All information collected from (or about) you during the research project will be kept confidential and any personal information you provide will be managed in accordance with data protection legislation. The personal information which will be collected will include your name; age; race; gender; job title; employer; area of residence (not address); length of time employed by current employer; length of time working in journalism; email address. Please see 'What will happen to my Personal Data?' (below) for further information.

9. What will happen to my Personal Data?

Cardiff University is the Data Controller and is committed to respecting and protecting your personal data in accordance with your expectations and Data Protection legislation. Further information about Data Protection, including:

- your rights
- the legal basis under which Cardiff University processes your personal data for research
- Cardiff University's Data Protection Policy
- how to contact the Cardiff University Data Protection Officer
- how to contact the Information Commissioner's Office

may be found at https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/public-information/policies-and-procedures/data-protection.

Printed copies of the above-mentioned documentation and privacy notices are available if you do not have access to the internet.

After six weeks, the research team will anonymise all the personal data it has collected from, or about, you in connection with this research project, with the exception of your consent form. Your consent form will be retained for five years and may be accessed by members of the research team and, where necessary, by members of the University's governance and audit teams or by regulatory authorities. Anonymised information will be kept for a minimum of five years but may be published in support of the research project and/or retained indefinitely, where it is likely to have continuing value for research purposes.

All information collected will be stored in a password protected folder on my university One Drive account. Should you withdraw from the research project all your personal information and notes of your interview will be deleted and none of the information will be used in the PhD thesis.

10. What happens to the data at the end of the research project?

Any future research using the data will be limited to Journalism Studies research.

11. What will happen to the results of the research project?

It is my intention to publish the results of this research project as a PhD thesis, in academic journals/monographs, in blog posts/short articles summarising the findings, and/or present findings at academic and/or industry conferences. The PhD thesis will be publicly available in the Cardiff University data repository. Participants will not be identified in any report, publication or presentation, unless specific consent has been given to identify verbatim quotes.

12. What if there is a problem?

If you wish to complain, or have grounds for concerns about any aspect of the manner in which you have been approached or treated during the course of this research, please contact myself, Andrew Nelmes, nelmesaj@cardiff.ac.uk. If your complaint is not managed to your satisfaction, please contact the Chair of the JOMEC Research Ethics Committee, Dr Damian Carney, CarneyD@cardiff.ac.uk.

If you are harmed by taking part in this research project, there are no special compensation arrangements. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, you may have grounds for legal action, but you may have to pay for it.

13. Who is organising this research project?

The research is organised by PhD student Andrew Nelmes at JOMEC, Cardiff University.

The primary research supervisor is Dr Andrew Williams williamsa28@cardiff.ac.uk.

14. Who has reviewed this research project?

This research project has been reviewed and given a favourable opinion by the JOMEC Research Ethics Committee, Cardiff University.

15. Further information and contact details

Should you have any questions relating to this research project, you may contact me during normal working hours: Andrew Nelmes, 07949 626119, nelmesaj@cardiff.ac.uk.

Thank you for considering taking part in this research project. If you decide to participate, you will be given a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and a signed consent form to keep for your records.

Appendix H Recruitment Letter-email



Date: ...

Dear ...

I am carrying out PhD research into local journalism at the School of Journalism, Media and Culture (JOMEC) at Cardiff University, after years of working as a local journalist in the South West for both mainstream local newspapers and alternative publications.

The title of my research is News Ecosystems Under the Microscope—Comparing the Work of Journalists in the Established Press and Emergent Hyperlocal Alternatives in a Bounded Geographic Area. My research involves a comparison of the working practices, motivations, experiences, sustainability and difficulties faced by journalists and editors/proprietors working for the various news organisations (mainstream and non-mainstream) in the busy news environment of Bristol in what is a difficult time for the journalism industry.

I am interviewing people who work in all news organisations in Bristol (present and former, freelance and on-staff) and your participation in the project is invaluable. The interviews should take no longer than an hour (and are likely to be shorter) and can be conducted at a time and place at your convenience. I can come to Bristol or the interviews can be carried out remotely via Zoom. They will be recorded and if you consent to take part – by signing a consent form – you will be supplied with relevant information about the steps taken to ensure confidentiality, data protection, Cardiff University's ethical research processes, and anonymising responses prior to publication, as well as procedures relating to withdrawal of consent and complaints.

Please feel free to pass on this request to colleagues.

If you agree to take part, or would like more information, please contact me at nelmesaj@cardiff.ac.uk.

Regards

Andrew Nelmes,

PhD researcher,

JOMEC,

Cardiff University,

2 Central Square,

Cardiff

CF10 1FS

Appendix I Ethical Review Approval Letter

27 January 2023

Dear Andrew

Research project title: News Ecosystems Under the Microscope—Comparing the Work of Journalists in the Established Press and Emergent Hyperlocal Alternatives in a Bounded Geographic Area

SREC reference: 22/23PGR001

Ethical Opinion

The JOMEC Research Ethics Committee ('Committee')] via its proportionate review procedure and gave a favourable ethical opinion of the above application on the basis described in the application form, subject to the following conditions:

1) Use the participant information sheet attached and make the other changes advised in the comments there.
2) Follow the standard operating procedure for recording interviews and other research events attached.

Amendments

Any substantial amendments to documents previously reviewed by the Committee must be submitted to the Committee via CarneyD@cardiff.ac.uk for consideration and cannot be implemented until the Committee has confirmed it is satisfied with the proposed amendments.

You are permitted to implement non-substantial amendments to the documents previously reviewed by the Committee.

Monitoring requirements

The Committee must be informed of any unexpected ethical issues or unexpected adverse events that arise during the research project.

Documents reviewed by Committee.

The documents reviewed by the Committee were:

Document	Version	Date
Ethics application form		
Consent form		
Participant information sheet		
Interview questions		
Email invite		
Coding sheet		

Yours sincerely,

Dr Damian Carney

Chair of JOMEC Research Ethics Committee

Appendix J Interview Participants

J.1 Selection Process

There were several stages in the selection process: Coulter and Griffith are involved in, respectively, the wider hyperlocal sector and race issues in Bristol so their names were known to me before the process started. Seabrook, Turner, Wright, Martin Booth, Watts and "The Bristolian" were emailed (Appendix H) via the contacts information on their organisations' websites. Turner passed on my contact details to Maggs. Garrett was enlisted following an inquiry to the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) main office. Simson and Smith were leads recommended by Maggs. Ward, Joanna Booth and Banks were freelancers messaged via Twitter/X following interesting posts they had made. Brown had been quoted as a knowledgeable source in articles on Bristol media so I contacted him via UWE. Mackinnon had left her job recently and contact was made via her replacement (who was the only person I approached who refused to be interviewed, on the grounds that her predecessor would know more about the publication, given the short time she had been in post). Hamed no longer works for Reach but her byline was on several interesting stories in the content analysis sample and she was tracked down via Google and Twitter/X. Most were happy to talk on the record for the majority of their interviews, there were a couple of occasions when they asked for anonymity for specific answers. Coulter said he would not talk about financial details, while Turner and Martin Booth both said they were not involved in the financial side of their organisations so could not answer related questions. "The Bristolian" would only consent if anonymity was guaranteed, as the publication is based on anonymous tip offs from whistleblowers in Bristol City Council and other prominent local organisations.

J. 2 Interviewee Demographics

Of the 18 people I interviewed, 15 were male (83%) and three were female (17%). Smith and Griffith were black, and Hamed was Asian (17%), the rest being white (83%). While Watts, Maggs, Griffith, Brown, Wright and "The Bristolian" mentioned their Bristol or West Country roots (33%), the rest indicated they were not born and brought up locally (66%). Seabrook, Turner, Hamed, Watts, Garrett, Ward, Joanna and Martin Booth, "The Bristolian" and Coulter all mentioned having had formal journalism training either before getting their first jobs or during the trainee stage (56%). Brown and Simson indicated they learnt their journalistic skills "entirely on the job", as did Wright, when talking about business management training (17%). Of those no longer working as mainstream journalists, Brown, Coulter, Garrett, Wright and Martin Booth—before (in most cases) being made redundant—had extensive experience of working for the *Bristol Post*, *Western Daily Press*, *HTV West* (the independent

commercial television station replaced by *ITV West Country*), the now-defunct *Venue* magazine and the local BBC (28%). Watts, Maggs and Griffith have worked as freelance contributors to *Bristol Post/Live*. Smith and Griffith have contributed to *Bristol 24/7*and the *Bristol Cable*, while Watts has also written for the latter. Hamed is now working for The New Arab—an English-language news website covering the Middle East, North Africa and further afield. Watts is now working for the mainstream Bristol World. Turner, Griffith, Smith and Maggs worked in community development before becoming involved with the media (22%); and Coulter, Brown, Mackinnon, Turner, Maggs, Hamed and Garrett talked about working as journalists for national organisations (39%). "The Bristolian" became involved through activist contacts working in alternative media. Turner worked for a small music magazine before taking a journalism course.

Appendix K Historical and Social Context for Understanding Race, Class and the Media in Bristol

This appendix gives an historical and social context behind the news environment in which Bristol's media work. This brief overview shows that local journalism must contend with the fact that the people its serves have always had, and continue to have, unequal access to the necessities of life, including information. This is intrinsically related to race and/or class and how these are linked to where people live in the city—their identities—and the reputational image—their representation—of these places in the minds of those in power, in the media and in the popular imagination.

K.1 A Cosmopolitan and Divided City

This thesis considers the strengths and weaknesses of differing types of local journalism, with their associated social capital, in representing, and capitalising on the affective value of, local identities. It should be acknowledged, though, that nowhere in the Western world is completely isolated from outside influences and that we live in "plural societies" of "differentiated specificity/complex unity" (Hall, 2021l, p. 142). This is an important point when considering the distinction made by Putnam (2000) that there are two types of social capital—"bridging" and "bonding". The latter contributes to the strengthening of relationships, and self-esteem, within a community, which can be seen in ward-level/community media; and the former reaches across groups in a disparate or pluralistic community, which is evident in the city-wide media, and can repair reputational damage and challenge stereotypes.

Bristolians are proud of their city and their community affiliations but are far from homogenous and insulated. The city is not a single and coherent community—within it there are distinct social groups which are defined by race and class, as well as linked socioeconomic indicators and bureaucratic markers such as deprivation indices and ward boundaries. Affective bonds have been formed over generations through shared histories and social support networks, and identified by cultures and traditions, such as the St Paul's Carnival, stereotypical images and distinctive accents. While there are internal influences, such as the local media, which reinforce these distinctive identities, as discussed below, Robertson (1995) notes that "translocal factors" are also important in the contemporary assertion of local identity, and these depend on "global terms of identity and particularity" (p. 28, emphasis added). These can be seen in the diasporic pride shown in the Caribbean heritage of St Paul's, and the nationalist assertions of white working-class authenticity and "British ethno-national identity" (Ince, 2011, p. 7) in Knowle West and Hartcliffe (Maggs, 2019c). Friedland (2012) also makes the observation that smaller communities "are not islands, even though they often imagine that they are or wish to be. They are integral parts of the larger urban metropolitan ecology" (p. 152). Some are,

however, often ignored, stigmatised or stereotyped by local media in a way that more privileged small communities are not and this has a profound effect on trust and journalistic authority.

Being a major port on the west coast of England, and a key node of the North Atlantic, "triangular trade" route, Bristol has ridden, and vastly profited from, successive waves of historical globalisation, from voyages of discovery to the New World, trade in slaves and tobacco (Chivallon, 2001; Dresser, 2007, 2009), and post-war, post-colonial immigration, resulting in an ethnically mixed modern city (Bristol City Council, 2019, 2021, 2022a, 2023a, 2023b, n.d.-b, n.d.-c, n.d.-f; BSWN, 2022, 2023; Hackett, 2021; Slater & Anderson, 2011). According to the 2021 census and the Office of National Statistics (ONS), more than 60 different languages are spoken as a first language in Bristol (the top five, after English, being Polish, Spanish, Romanian, Arabic and Italian) (Stone, 2023), with at least 91 different languages being spoken overall (Bristol City Council, 2022b). Through the Georgian and Victorian eras to the present day, feats of engineering—railways, canals, tunnels, bridges, roads, nearby docks and an international airport—improved connections to the rest of the country and the world. The city is also host to major organisations with global affiliations, such as the aerospace and aviation industry, with an important role in the joint British/French Concorde project; telecommunications; Bristol Zoo and the BBC Wildlife Unit. The Victorian engineer Brunel, the city's maritime history and hot-air balloons—all linked to transport, travel and trade—are city icons, tourist attractions and subjects of civic celebrations. The city is also renowned for its music scene—itself an esoteric amalgam of Caribbean, Afro-American, and World music styles, which evolved from the St Paul's reggae sound systems in the 1970s, through esoteric Post-Punk agit-funk and avant-garde/free jazz experimentation in the 1980s, to safely retro-tinged trip hop in the 1990s. The music became less confrontational in the process, as local musicians, producers and record labels sought to appeal to white and middle-class audiences. The result was internationally successful and mirrored local hero Banksy's rise from street art provocateur to lucrative art market figure and popular purveyor of edgy urban-themed home decoration. The music and club scene, with its associated graffiti and hip-hop style influences, have all added to the clichéd view of the city as a cultural melting pot and centre of cutting-edge creativity.

Bristol is a site of constant change and, especially since sustaining extensive bomb damage during the Second World War, undergoing slum clearances and being exposed to successive recessions, has experienced post-industrial economic restructuring; regeneration, gentrification and urban renewal; the building of large satellite overspill estates of mainly council housing—a product of intra-city relocation of working class communities; immigration from former colonies and inward migration, such

as the London exodus—cash rich young professionals selling homes in the capital for vast profits, relocating to the now-fashionable West Country and, in the process, being blamed for, often meteoric, rises in local house prices, putting property ownership out of reach for many city-born workers (Grubb, 2021). Between 2011 and 2021 Bristol was the fastest growing of the 11 Core Cities in England and Wales due to positive net migration from other parts of the UK and from outside the country, rather than birth rates, which fell. In the 2021 census the population of Bristol stood at 472,400, making it the largest city in South West England and the eleventh most populous urban area in the United Kingdom (Bristol City Council, 2022b, p. 2). There are 34 Bristol City Council (BCC) wards and the average ward size, in numbers of people, is 13,896; the largest being Avonmouth and Lawrence Weston at 22,169; and Hotwells and Harbourside has the smallest population of 6,040 (Bristol City Council, n.d.-e).

These ward numbers can be compared to another sizable population—students. There are two universities in the city (the University of Bristol and the University of the West of England) and since 2016/17, the number of full-time students has increased by 37.6% at an average annual growth of 6.6%. There were 64,400 in 2021 (16,220 international students) and this is forecast to rise to 85,400 in 2034 (Cork, 2023c, 2023e), with immediate plans for more than 20,000 extra student beds (Cork, 2024d), leading a local councillor to claim "universities are the housing crisis" (Seabrook, 2024e). The University of Bristol is currently building a £300million "enterprise campus" in a central enterprise zone "focused on creative, high-tech and low-carbon industries" (Bristol City council, n.d.-h.; Cork, 2023b; Legal and General, 2021) and there are ambitious plans to build high-rise "co-living" and purpose-built student accommodations (PBSAs) in the city centre instead of affordable housing for local people, as retail outlets move to out-of-town shopping centres or go online (Cork, 2020d, 2023d). A more long-standing development is the conversion of residential properties into houses-of-multiple-occupation (HMOs) in other parts of the city. Chatterton (2010) noted high concentrations of "in-migrant middle-class students" create "exclusive geographies" (p. 509) and Allinson (2006) has also argued large numbers of students in cities have a profound impact, not only economically and socially, but also culturally, i.e. a reorientation of local services to accommodate their tastes and lifestyles (p. 80). To show how important this is to local news operations the editor of *Bristol Live*, Pete Gavan, credited a doubling of its readership to a new focus on events, such as restaurant openings, and what's on content (Sharman, 2023af).

The city's population shift is reflected in other demographic statistics: the biggest population growth has been seen in the 20-29 and 30-39 years age groups and Bristol has a relatively young age

profile—the median age of people living in the city is 34.3 years compared to 40.6 years in England and Wales (Bristol City Council, 2021). The city also has a higher level of transience; 17.6% compared to an average 11% in England and Wales—this figure comes from a census question about change of address in the previous 12 months (ibid). Indicators show that some parts of Bristol are booming—in 2019 there were reports that the city had become "the new cocaine capital of Europe", a drug more commonly associated with middle class affluence (Smith & Grimshaw, 2019). High rents in the city also make it the most expensive place to live outside of London (Farell Roig, 2024b).

Politically, the city's voters have moved closer to the centre. Economic stagnation and failed development projects were blamed on a succession of hung councils and gave an impetus to the successful campaign for an elected mayor, as a recognisable leadership figure, in 2012 (*Bristol Evening Post*, 2009; Hambleton, 2020; Hambleton et al., 2022; Tallon, 2007). Parts of the city have been strongly loyal to Labour while others consistently voted for the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and independents, but recent years have seen a shift away from a strongly polarised political landscape, with Labour support markedly dwindling—in the 2016 city council elections Labour had 37 seats, out of 70, and the Green Party, only 11 seats; in 2024 Labour support was reduced to 21 seats, while the Greens took 34, and, since the 2024 general election the city has a Green Member of Parliament, the former co-leader of the party, Carla Denyer (Cork, 2024a). These events have brought profound changes to the social character of many parts of the city (Cole, 1985)—some praise its image of cosmopolitan open-mindedness and tolerance, and anti-authoritarian attitude, while others condemn its stubborn parochialism (Booth, 2023d).

K.2 Reputational Geographies and Deprivation in Bristol

While Bristol in the 21st century is a globalised, multicultural city it also suffers from gross inequality—the flipside of the modern networked world (Hall, 2021e, 2021f; Held, et al., 1999) and this is a factor in the way reputational geographies (Harte et al. 2019), territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant, 2007, 2008, 2014; Wacquant et al., 2014) and poverty statistics become intertwined. As Bourdieu (1999) observes "those who are deprived of capital are either physically or symbolically held at a distance from goods that are the rarest socially; they are forced to stick with the most undesirable and the least rare persons or goods. The lack of capital intensifies the experience of finitude: it chains one to a place" (p. 127). People living in the city evince a proud local affiliation, especially to the socio-economically differentiated communities, such as the peripheral, mainly white and working-class, former council estates, Hartcliffe and Knowle West (Booth, 2024b; Cork, 2023g; 2023j, 2024f; Maggs, 2019b;

Woolerton, 2023b); and inner-city St Paul's and Easton, with their strong diasporic connections to an Afro-Caribbean heritage (Slater & Anderson, 2011). According to Slater and Anderson (2011), St Paul's is a reputational ghetto but there is also a "discernible protectionism in respect of what St Paul's stands for: collective struggle against adversity, a phoenix rising from the ashes of postwar economic malaise, and strong neighbourhood organisations (e.g. the Carnival)"(p. 540). In the popular imagination the neighbourhood known as Clifton, with its large Georgian houses and grand crescents is a byword for privilege and exclusivity (Hunt, 2020), whereas Wacquant et al. (2014) refer to the "warped collective image thrust upon the district of St Paul's in Bristol" (p. 1274), especially after the "riot" in 1980 (Reicher, 1984)—it is still called "The Jungle" by local police (Ashcroft, 2017; Norton, 2017a; Sharman, 2017a)—while Slater and Anderson (2011) also note a "strong sense of collective pride in St Paul' s in response to external defamation" (p. 542). According to one of the residents of the council estates: "there is a massive stigma living in Hartcliffe, massive. People see us as racists, degenerates, lazy, drug addicts. We're white, working-class trash" (Maggs, 2019a), and another also observed: "people's perceptions of Knowle West have followed me around like a bad smell my whole life ... and that does make you feel ashamed to come from where you do, because you don't want to be labelled your whole life" (Kelly, 2007).

It is culturally distinct enclaves such as Knowle West and St Paul's which have become the focus of much of the city's community-centred journalism, especially because of the urgent necessity to meet their critical information needs, and mend their reputations. The differences in how "local people" experience their lives (through employment opportunities; health care; education; democratic engagement; transport infrastructure; access to information; social networks; entertainment; institutional biases or blind spots; crime and cost-of-living, among others) can lead to widely differing views on what constitute Franklin's (2006b) "local concerns of consequence" which he feels should be covered by the local media and brings into question the normative view of journalism as serving a unified public sphere, when news and source selection often reinforces a us/them dichotomy. One of the institutional blind spots—exposed by the children's charity Barnardo's (Woolerton, 2023b)—was the practice of adding the acronym NFH (short for Normal For Hartcliffe) to official assessments by social workers, doctors, education and council staff as a way of informing other professionals "that issues that would be a cause for concern or prompt action if it was elsewhere, could be routinely ignored as part of a culture of low expectations and a lack of support for people from the South Bristol estate" (Cork, 2023g). Examples of othering, exclusion and stigmatisation in the Bristol media are presented below—

these are by no means indicative of the majority of the journalistic output in the city, but several of them resulted in a highly critical response from the communities identified.

The city's aggregated deprivation data shows "lower levels of deprivation relative to the other English Core Cities" (Bristol City Council, 2019). The Index of Multiple Indices of Deprivation is the official measure of relative deprivation in England (Bristol City Council, 2019) and broadly defines deprivation as encompassing a wide range of an individual's living conditions—people may be considered to be living in poverty if they lack the financial resources to meet their needs, whereas people can be regarded as deprived if they lack any kind of resources, not just income. Therefore, this is not an accurate measure of affluence, relative or otherwise, but it does give an indication of levels of inequality. The indices are based on seven facets: income, employment, education, health and disability, crime, barriers to housing and services and living environment deprivation (Gulyas, 2021, p.22). The unit of analysis for relative levels of deprivation in England is the Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA)—there are 32,844 small areas or neighbourhoods, and these are smaller than wards, each containing on average 1,500 people or 650 households (Dorling, 2023, p.169). But the city's deprivation data masks a deep social and economic divide—it "continues to have deprivation 'hot spots' that are amongst some of the most deprived areas in the country yet are adjacent to some of the least deprived areas in the country" noted a report by Bristol City Council (2019). According to Olusoga (2017) "the socioeconomic and racial zoning of Bristol is worthy of the Deep South". The highest levels of deprivation in Bristol are in the inner-city areas and satellite ex-council estates—the wards of Ashley (where St Paul's is located); Hillfields; Easton; Lockleaze; Southmead; Filwood (where Knowle West is located); Hartcliffe and Withywood; Central; and Lawrence Hill. Hartcliffe and Withywood contains six, and Filwood contains three, of the ten most-deprived LSOAs in Bristol. The most deprived being ranked 91 out of 32,844 LSOAs in England. In contrast, Westbury-on-Trym and Henleaze has seven of the ten least-deprived areas of the city, with one ranked at 31,994 out of 32,844 in England (Bristol City Council, 2019). The Government-published English Indices of Deprivation 2025 showed a widening gap in deprivation in the city (Cork, 2025). According to the Runnymede Trust (2017), ethnic minorities in the city experience greater disadvantage than in England and Wales as a whole, in both education and employment. The large housing estates, such as Hartcliffe and Knowle West on the southern edge of the city, are also marked by high levels of poverty and associated social problems, such as high crime rates and domestic violence, low educational attainment and digital connectivity, poor health, minimal public transport, and isolation for the elderly and vulnerable, as well as low investment in infrastructure and amenities (Kelly, 2007). Bristol is not

unique in suffering inequality, but it is among the most unequal cities in the country. Dorling (2023) noted: “the UK is a state in which people live parallel and very different lives ... again and again in the UK, people tend not to see inequality as the underlying problem because they have become so used to it; they take it as given“ (pp. 92, 96). Generations have been brought up in these places with little opportunity to move away, which has consolidated their homogenous and enclosed nature. In these places there are strong social bonds, inward-looking cultural and social lives, interpretative and imagined communities, and social imaginaries—the internalisation of the self-as-other (Fanon, 2021) is also apparent in the discourses which set these communities apart—united by a shared discourse, collective memories and feelings of community pride which outsiders find difficult to penetrate and engage with (Otele, 2012; Slater & Anderson, 2011). For example, Dresser (2005) recounts a debate among contributors to an oral history project in St Paul’s over changing Afro-Caribbean patois into “Queen’s English” for a booklet of transcribed interviews. There are other ethnic groups in the city—the Polish and Somali communities for example—but as they are relatively new arrivals it is difficult to pin down their areas of settlement in the popular imagination. In spite of this they are catered for by at least one of the local media outlets—the community radio station *BCfm* hosts regular programmes by volunteer broadcasters in the languages of these newcomers.

Life expectancy data for the whole of Bristol show marked inequalities with people in the richest parts of the city living for a decade longer than the poorest parts. Men in Lawrence Hill have a life expectancy of 72, and 83 in Clifton. Women live longer and the gap is slightly narrower, they have a life expectancy of 79 in Hartcliffe and Withywood, and 88 in Clifton. According to data in the 2024 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment compiled by BCC and the local NHS integrated care board both men and women in Bristol live shorter lives than the average in England—for men 77.8 years compared to 79.3 years; for women 82.7 years compared to 83.1 years—and has fallen due to the effects of the Covid pandemic, which disproportionately affected minorities. Compared to 2019, male life expectancy in Bristol in 2024 was 1.2 years shorter, and female life expectancy was 0.2 years shorter (Seabrook, 2024f).

Property prices also show a stark difference between BCC wards, with £240k the median paid in June 2022 in Lawrence Hill (where renting and flats predominate) compared to £630k in Westbury-on-Trym and Henleaze (where the most common property type is owner/occupier) (House of Commons Library, 2024).

K.3 Bristol Rising: the City as a Crucible of Protest, Resistance and Activism

The ghosts still linger of the 1963 Bristol bus boycott (Dresser, 2013) and the 1980 St Paul's riot—where the city's Afro-Caribbean community fought back against, in the case of the boycott, a colour bar at the city's bus company, which was a pivotal event in influencing changes to employment practices and racial discrimination legislation in the UK; and police intimidation, in the latter case (Byrne, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; Potter & Reicher, 1987; Reicher 1984; Slater & Anderson, 2011). Contemporary protest and resistance among the marginalised in the city have more recently been manifested in two dramatic demonstrations of anger—the toppling of the statue of Edward Colston in 2020 and the Kill-the-Bill protests the following year. Colston (1636-1721) became very rich through his involvement with the slave trade, and used his wealth to fund almshouses, hospitals, schools, workhouses, churches and other charitable foundations, many of which continue to this day, some under the auspices of a prominent group of local business leaders—the 500-year-old Society of Merchant Venturers, "after the council, the most powerful organisation in Bristol" (Bristolian, 2025)—and, until recently, claimed him as a benefactor. The statue was erected in 1895, more than 170 years his death, in an attempt to "whitewash" his reputation, celebrate his philanthropy and turn him into a civic figurehead or father figure, with a view to assert a common civic identity for Bristol at a time of growing class divisions (Bevan, 2022; Dresser, 2009, 2020). While challenges to the "cult of Colston" have gained momentum since the late 1990s, with the statue becoming a lightning rod for anti-establishment and decolonising indignation, and periodically vandalised, the Merchant Venturers have continued to staunchly defend the image of the man as a "virtuous son" of Bristol (Ball, 2018; Ball et al., 2021; Gallagher, 2014). The Countering Colston campaign was set up to find a civically sanctioned compromise but in the summer of 2020 the statue was torn down, defaced, dragged through the streets and dumped in the docks by hundreds of Black Lives Matter demonstrators (BBC Points West, 2020; Bevan, 2022; Bristol Cable, 2020b; Cork, 2020a, 2021a, 2021b, 2022; Dresser, 2020; Grimshaw, 2020; Norton, 2020a, 2020b, 2022; Sharman, 2020a; Statue Wars: One Summer in Bristol, 2021). The catalyst was the murder of a black man, George Floyd, by a police officer in the US and echoed many other demonstrations throughout the world, with the dramatic events in Bristol being reported globally. The incident prompted a furious reaction from right-wing media and politicians, and was followed by counterdemonstrations and racist vandalism in the city (Cork, 2020b, 2021d; Culver & McLeod, 2023; Grubb, 2020; Syal, 2022; Wilson & King, 2020). Four people were tried for criminal damage but were found not guilty (Bennett et al., 2022; Booth, 2024a; Bristolian, 2021; Linford, 2020; Norton, 2020b; Raval, 2022a; Scott, 2021).

The Kill-the-Bill protests the following year, saw violent standoffs with the police for several nights running (All Party Parliamentary Group on Democracy and the Constitution, 2021; Blackall & Gayle, 2021; Booth, 2022a; Colwill, 2021; Edwards, 2021a; Gayle, 2021). More than 40 people were charged with riot—the most serious, but rarely used, public-order offence on the statute books—and the length of jail terms handed down received extensive national attention (Ball, 2024; Wall, 2022). More people, and more women, were imprisoned for rioting during one day than in any other protest-related disorder since the 1980s (Deeney, 2024a; Wall, 2024). Journalists covering the protests were also stopped by police and threatened with arrest (Booth, M., 2021a). These recent events added momentum to the introduction of controversial legislation by Conservative and Labour governments to limit the right to protest and criminalise formerly legal activities (Bristol Cable, 2025).

Like other parts of the UK the city also saw a rise in race-hate crimes following Brexit (Ault & Farell Roig, 2024; Emanuel, 2016) and clashes between anti-immigration hate mobs and anti-racists during the summers of 2024 (Cork, 2024k; Raval & Morrison, 2024) and 2025 (Celerier, 2025; Kendall & Grubb, 2025). Conflicts such as these are not everyday occurrences and, while the local media put every effort into covering them, they are violent manifestations of the discontent fomented by chronic inequalities. Needless to say, the local media have been deeply implicated in the city's ongoing social and political conflicts and debates (Beauchamp-Byrd & Sobers, 2019; Bristolian, 2019; Byrne, 2019; Cork, 2019b, 2019c, 2019e; Gordon & Norton, 2019; Grierson, 2018; Norton, 2018a; Sharman, 2018a) and its role in these is critically examined throughout this thesis.

K.4 Democratic Engagement

Byrne (2022a) noted the correlation between areas of Bristol which are marked by low incomes and high unemployment, and low rates of voter turnout. He argued that in a city such as Bristol there is always the danger of a "self-selecting minority" deciding the political direction of the city. Before electoral reform in the 19th century Bristol was run by "an oligarchy of wealthy men elected by a small and largely property-owning electorate"—and, according to Byrne, "Bristol is still run by an elite; the third or so of the electorate who vote in local polls. Voters in affluent wards will turn out in numbers; those from poorer wards, not so much". Voter turnout for the three most recent Bristol City Council elections — 2016, 2021 and 2024, the only elections for the full council, the previous ones were for a third of seats — shows not only a marked and consistent difference between wards but also a decline in votes, with all but one ward, Brislington West, seeing a reduction in engagement. Overall, while the turnout fell from 44.74% in 2016 to 41.04% in 2021 to 35.36% in 2024 (Turner, 2024), it was, until the most recent

election, slightly above the range typically seen for local elections in the UK—according to the Institute for Government turnout at local elections tends to be between 30% and 40% of the electorate (Hourston, 2023). Voter turnout in Westbury-on-Trym and Henleaze in 2024 (at the top of BCC's relative income table) was at 51.67% (down from 60.56% in 2016); and 14.23% for Hartcliffe and Withywood (near the bottom and down from 27.31% in 2016) (Bristol City Council, 2019, n.d.-b).

K.5 Marginalisation and Racism

Since the financial crisis of 2008/09, austerity economics—which saw massive cuts to housing and other welfare support, as well as funding to local authorities, reducing disability, employment and youth services; the Covid pandemic; and the cost-of-living crisis have hit marginalised communities disproportionately hard (Black South West Network, 2023b; Featherstone et al., 2012; Gray and Barford, 2018). Post-war society and politics—in Bristol, nationally and internationally—have also been profoundly influenced by race and racism (Hall et al., 1978, 2013; Hebdige, 1988; Okolosie et al., 2016; Sivanandan, 1976, 2008; Solomos, 1982, p. 15; van Dijk, 1989, 1992, 2009) and, post-Brexit, the UK has seen a steep rise in race hate crimes and anti-immigrant rhetoric (Bhattacharyya et al., 2021; Goodfellow, 2020). In Bristol 61.7% of those who voted in the Brexit referendum to leave the European Union, voted remain (38.3% voted leave on a 73.1% turnout), making it the second highest remain city in England after Brighton and Hove)—the results for the UK as a whole were 48.11% remain and 51.89% leave (on a 72.21% turnout), but, following the referendum, hate crime charity SARI (Stand Against Racism and Inequality) reported a rise in hate crimes in Bristol (Emanuel, 2016; King, 2022; Morrison, 2022; Pipe, 2017, 2018). In 2022/23 SARI (2023) dealt with 493 hate crime referrals in the Bristol area: 67 disablist; six discrimination; 15 faith-based; 13 gender-based; 26 homophobic; 13 mate crime (befriending someone who is vulnerable in order to exploit them); one misogyny-based; one pregnancy/maternity-based; 362 race hate; 6 transphobic (some referrals involved more than one hate crime type). Official statistics published by the UK government recorded a 5% fall in hate crimes in England and Wales in 2022/2023, even so the majority were racially motivated, accounting for more than two-thirds of such offences (70%; 101,906 offences) (Home Office, 2023). Other figures released in 2025 showed hate crimes in England and Wales, including race and religiously motivated offences, rose for the first time in three years (Campbell & Comerford, 2025).

The Chief Constable of Avon and Somerset Police, which Bristol comes under, claimed the force was "institutionally racist" (Elliott-Cooper, 2023; Heath, 2023) following incidents of police failings over the racially aggravated murder of a disabled refugee—a subsequent inquiry also found Bristol City

Council to be institutionally racist over its treatment of the murdered man. Officers also tasered a 63-year-old former race advisor to the police (Morris, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c; see also Morris, 2022a) and the force had to pay damages to Kill-the-Bill protesters after assault claims (Morris, 2022b).

Four in five teenagers in Bristol have witnessed racism according to an international education charity (Cork, 2021a) and the editor of Bristol Post/Live has vowed to expose racism among staff working for Bristol City Council after running an investigation which "uncovered a host of complaints of racist bullying at the authority" (Sharman, 2019b). Despite this, incomplete, list of racism in the city, Bristol has been designated a City of Sanctuary: "a dedicated charity with a huge vision that every person seeking sanctuary feels welcomed and safe and that their contribution to the community is valid" (Bristol City of Sanctuary, n.d.). *The Bristol Cable* has also carried out a months-long investigation following complaints of institutional racism at a local NHS trust (Raval, 2024), and revealed that black children and adults have been strip searched 25 times more often than white peers in the Avon and Somerset police authority area (Morrison, 2024c).

K.6 Holding Power to Account

The relationship between the local media and those who hold the reins of power in the city gives an indication of the journalistic competition and the ways social capital is exploited. Marvin Rees, was the elected Mayor of Bristol from 2016 to 2024, and had a complex attitude towards the local media, being on friendlier terms with the community radio stations rather than the other outlets. He has a mixed-race and poor background and prior to his involvement with local politics he worked as a journalist with the BBC, but left citing race-related lack of career advancement opportunities—which is seen as a barrier to retention throughout the industry (Al-Kaisy, 2023; Cherubini & Sharma, 2023; Eddy et al. 2023a, 2023b; Olusoga, 2020). Throughout his tenure as directly elected mayor Rees was highly critical of mainstream reporting. In his final major speech as mayor, Marvin Rees said: "The disinvestment in newsrooms is appalling at the local level. It leaves people without the time to investigate, explore and check for the nuance of the story. If you've got to knock out four stories a day, do you have time to test the accusation given by one person to another? Or are you left in the situation where someone just says 'hey, Marvin's rubbish', and they write six paragraphs saying 'Marvin's rubbish', and then say 'Marvin, do you want to comment on what they said', and it's just quote, quote. Is that insight? We also need to recognise the pressure on outlets to generate clicks to sell advertising. The measure is not always about truth and nuance and subtlety, it's how many people clicked on your story, because we've got advertising to sell. There are legitimate questions and challenges to be taken on to support the

profession to be what I believe it can be and needs to be" (Seabrook, 2024c). Despite his motto being "ask me anything" (*Bristolian*, 2022c; Stiftung, 2022) he refused to give face-to-face media interviews in the run-up to his second mayoral campaign but spent about £31,000 on electoral advertorials with Reach (J. Booth, 2021b). During this campaign *Bristol 24/7* published Rees's answers to questions posed by readers in which he claimed: "I'm comfortably the most scrutinised and transparent person in Bristol, compared to any other politician, MPs, councillors, the police commissioner, the metro mayor and the leaders of any of our other major institutions" (Booth, 2023a). This came after an inquiry into Bristol City Council's budget shortfall of £29million concluded there was "collective leadership failure", the mayor had too much power and there was "not enough transparency" (Ashcroft, 2018a).

Rees was more accommodating, and showed more trust, towards community, and BBC, radio. The live programme format meant he was less likely to be edited, and, taking advantage of community radio's minority audiences, he could steer the interview towards his observations on race and class, and away from challenging questions, a filibustering tactic noted by other journalists. Nevertheless, the community radio stations welcomed his patronage (Behind Local News, 2024; *Bristol Cable*, 2022; *Bristol Live* Comment, 2019; Booth, 2023a; Farell Roig, 2024a; Maggs, 2021b; Matiluko, 2024; Seabrook, 2024c, 2024d; Sharman, 2019d, 2019e, 2023i).

The conflict between the mayor and the media came to head in 2022 with a ban on LDRS reporters attending his regular press conferences ("they are not banned, they are just not invited", he said) and a subsequent boycott of the meetings by the combined local news organisations in a rare outbreak of solidarity (Bristol Cable, 2022; Bristolian, 2022c; Kersley, 2022h, 2022j; Seabrook, 2022a, 2022b, 2024d; Sharman, 2022p, 2022q, 2022r, 2022s, 2022t, 2022v, 2022w, 2022x). Bristol City Council also stopped sending press releases to the local media, launching a "digital first" strategy, i.e. using its own website to disseminate information and bypassing the press, a growing trend among local authorities (Richards, 2023). The spark for the row came from a question at an online press briefing from a LDRS reporter asking why Rees had flown 9,000 miles to Vancouver to give a 15-minute TED talk on climate change (Hookham, 2023). The council's head of external communications claimed the question was off limits because the LDRS reporter was not a "journalist from a newspaper". Rees's chief of staff at the time was also seen as someone who relished a confrontational attitude with the press (Bristolian, 2022a; Cameron, 2021; Cork, 2021a). A Bristol-based citizen journalist made a copy of the exchange and posted it on social media where it was seen 325,000 times, partly through the re-tweeting efforts of Reach journalists from outside the city. The confrontation, ban and boycott received media attention

globally and led to questions about the difficulties journalists face in upholding transparency expectations in public life. Ironically, and in an attempt to repair a damaging situation, Reach asked the LDRS reporter to refuse requests for interviews with national media. Rees publicly criticised the LDRS reporters on other occasions, notably during council meetings, claiming they were just "minute takers" and "an embarrassment to the profession" (Gavan, 2023a; Sharman, 2019e, 2023i; Tobitt, 2019b).

The Bristolian (2022a, 2023c, 2025) occasionally runs articles on what they see as censorship at the *Bristol Cable*, *Bristol 24/7* and the *Bristol Post*, where investigations, at each outlet, into multi-million pound developments in the city have been stopped. This has been attributed to members of the local power elite sitting on boards of directors and having direct influence on the publications' editors.

Freedom of Information requests have also caused problems for local journalists. Public authorities are legally required to answer requests within 20 working days, but the city council only meets this target for six out of ten requests, prompting a warning from the government watchdog, the Information Commissioner's Office (Kersley, 2024; Seabrook, 2023g). Alex Turner (2023b) of the *Bristol Cable* wrote: "Over the last five years Bristol has managed to respond on average to just under 70% of requests on time, with some years well below that. This compares with nearly 90% for cities like Bradford, Leeds and Manchester—and almost 100% for Leicester. This June, only 56% of Bristol's requests were answered on time".

K.7 Media Representation of Race and Class in Bristol

The rest of this chapter gives a brief overview of representation of race and class in journalism in Bristol. This section brings together some examples of othering in both the mainstream and nonmainstream media—the first part discusses several them-and-us frames employed by local journalists; the next part highlights concern about the erasure of Afro-Caribbean history from civic celebrations and the local media's role in this; this is followed by an example of racial discrimination which had profound repercussions for the local press; and another example, in this case, class (and territorial) stigmatisation broadcast by the BBC.

The local media, mainstream and nonmainstream, occasionally publish articles that, despite local voices being featured and positive initiatives highlighted, reinforce the (symbolic) distance between the haves and have-nots in the city through (geographically based) language and frames. According to Bourdieu (1999) this is a factor in the alienation felt by marginalised communities:

> The imperceptible incorporation of structures of the social order undoubtably happens, in large part, through a prolonged and indefinitely repeated experience of the spatial distance that affirms social distance. (p. 126)

Bristol Live has published stories with headlines such as "What Life is Like in One of Bristol's Most Deprived Areas" (Donoghue, 2021); "The Fight for Hope in Bristol's Most Deprived Area" (Gogarty, 2019) and "Life in Easton: the Inner-City Neighbourhood with Two Separate Worlds" (Farell Roig, 2021). These emphasise the voyeuristic, or even vicarious, perception that readers are about to be drawn into an unfamiliar (and potentially threatening) world. The Gogarty article begins:

> On a clear day, you can see the Clifton Suspension Bridge from parts of Hartcliffe. Isambard Kingdom Brunel's masterpiece, an iconic Bristol image which draws thousands of visitors each year, is only five miles away, but it can feel a lot further.

And the Farell Roig story starts: "There is a tale of two cities in this road". While both articles are accurate in relaying geographical and social distance, this type of framing reinforces the them-and-us image many in these areas would like to see dispelled. The Donoghue one has a more inclusive take though: "Knowle West in south Bristol is one of *our city's* poorest areas" (emphasis added).

One article on the *Bristol Live* website which struggles to be objective while failing to comment on the inequalities it uncovers, is "What Life is Like in Clifton—One of the Most Expensive Places to Live in Bristol" (Kendall, 2022a) and has the subheading "Clifton is the Most Expensive Area in Bristol—but its People, History, Architecture, Landmarks and Amenities Justify it" while also referring to the "naturally well-off folk here". The irony being that Kendall did not get to speak to any of the "naturally well-off"—only two people were quoted in the story, a florist, who had to move away "purely because she had started a family", and a lettings agent on why the area is popular for people relocating "from London or Hong Kong". While the article initially follows the formula of "promotionally influenced texts" which "disseminate versions of reality that reinforce the power of particular classes, dominant groups or institutions" (Davies, 2013, p. 58) through clichéd descriptions such as "arguably the city's most iconic landscapes and landmarks", "a hub of bustling cosmopolitan city life that could have you wondering whether you have woken up in an episode of *Sex and the City*" and a list of the most expensive house sales in the area, the fluff evaporates and Kendall stumbles upon the kernel of a real hard news story. Buried deep in the article she wrote:

> During our walk around Clifton, *Bristol Live* spoke to more visitors to the area than actual residents and people working in shops, cafes and other establishments commented that this could be down to residents working outside of Bristol and earning a 'London wage', with those working in Clifton actually unable to afford to live there.

The clumsy thing about this article is that this revelation undermines the connotations of desirability introduced in the first few paragraphs—yes, Clifton represents the height of exclusivity, but this means people like you, the reader, are excluded.

The image of a city divided culturally, socially and economically, as well as geographically, is also apparent in a story in the nonmainstream, *The Bristol Cable*, about Knowle West on the southern outskirts of the city:

> "For me as a young person, you didn't step foot out of Knowle West, you stuck with what you knew," Levi [a youth worker] says. He believes the solutions to this divide could be "as simple as taking young people to the city centre, where there are all these fantastic facilities that they can see from Knowle West but have never been to". From the window of the Youth Move's centre, Cabot Tower stands proudly in the distance, but Levi says most who attend the youth club would say that they've never visited it. (Stockwell, 2022, p.12)

The othering in these examples is not deliberate, and the journalists involved approached their subjects with a sense of altruism and tact, nevertheless, framing such as this adds to the stigmatisation of the social imaginaries of marginalised communities (Haq, 2025; Poole, 2019).

Erasure in the local media has also been a subject for concern in the city. In the mid-1990s Bristol hosted a Festival of the Sea to celebrate its role in transatlantic voyages of discovery but many sections of the black community were angry that the slave trade (Fryer, 2018, 2021; Hall, 2018; Norton, 2017b; Olusoga, 2021) and subsequent colonial immigration—which has deep historical significance for a large part of the city's population—were being erased and that the local media was complicit in sustaining an ignorance about the past, specifically *their* past (Beauchamp-Byrd & Sobers, 2019; Byrne, 2019; Chivallon, 2001; Dresser, 2009; Otele, 2012; Under the Bridge, 2000; Unfinished Business, 2007). Tony Forbes, a local black artist, painted Sold Down the River which prominently shows the complicity of the local media—the BBC*, The Evening Post* (now *The Bristol Post*), and HTV (the former ITV television franchise)—in this civically sanctioned erasure (Figure K.1). He commented:

I wanted to truthfully address the problems what I went through in Bristol. And I looked at a time when I felt really angry and ashamed with the city towards the issue of race and that time came in 1995 during the Festival of the Sea. In the painting you'll see me on a raft floating down the river with Colston's statue behind me, covered with chains, chains connecting to The Matthew [the ship John Cabot sailed in from Bristol to Newfoundland in 1497], which I believe was a total waste of time and an insult to the people of Bristol as well. You realise that it was probably the boat that signalled the beginning of the genocide of American Indians and the authority spent a lot of our money towards that, which was a waste. Also, on the sails I put the logos of *HTV*, *BBC* and the *Evening Post* who helped hype the event and they were the people who should have turned round and noticed exactly the thing about the history of the slave trade. They chose to ignore it, so it was a slap in the face of the people in the city. I'm being dragged under the [Clifton] suspension bridge and you'll see a silhouette of people dancing on the bridge, and that's councillors, people in those media organisations who are basically laughing and having a party whilst I'm being dragged down into some kind of oblivion. (Under the Bridge, 2000)

Figure K.1: Sold Down the River, Tony Forbes, 1999



A few years after the Festival of the Sea, Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery staged an exhibition to mark the abolition of the slave trade, which proved to be one of its most popular, and Forbes's painting was prominently featured (Beauchamp-Byrd & Sobers, 2019; Byrne, 2019). The painting is currently on display in another city museum.

Erasure in local media is difficult to measure. In my content analysis, discussed below, I look at ward-based coverage of news, comparing different parts of the city, as well as looking at the amount of non-local news (which effectively pushes out local news) produced by mainstream and nonmainstream media. In contrast to erasure, stigmatisation of places and communities is easier to identify and comes in the form of negative framing, such as concentrating on crimes, and crossing symbolic barriers, by contrasting poor and affluent areas. This is discussed in detail in the content analysis but here are historic examples where the local media, *The Bristol Post* and BBC *Radio Bristol*, had to apologise for their coverage of disadvantaged communities.

Mike Norton, then-editor of *The Bristol Post*, apologised in 2018, for a 1996 front page, which featured photographs of a black criminal gang under the headline, Faces of Evil (Figure K.2) (Kakar, 2018; Grierson, 2018; Norton, 2018a; Sharman, 2018a; Wall, 2018). This front page, he wrote:

> Essentially destroyed what little credibility and trust the *Post* had within Bristol's African and Afro-Caribbean community ... it offended and ostracised a large section of the city's community ... they already had a suspicion that the paper wrote about black people only when they committed crime. The Faces of Evil front page, with its black faces arranged in rows like slaves held in cages, cemented that view. (Norton, 2018a)

Roger Griffith, who founded *Ujima Radio* for the city's black community in 2008, launched the Year of Change project in 2018 (Cork, 2018b)—a campaign to confront racism in Bristol's past—and persuaded Norton to run a front-page apology, more than two decades after the original front page (Figure K.3). He commented:

> It doesn't feel like 21 years ago. I remember it as clear as day. My heart sank—it fed into a negative media portrayal of black men ... ever since that front page people stopped buying it. I don't know anyone who buys it on a regular basis. (Wall, 2018)

Figure K.2: The 1996 Bristol Evening Post "Faces of Evil" front page



EVENING POST

Wednesday, April 17, 1996

NEWSDESK: BRISTOL (0117) 926 0080 WEATHER: CLOUDY LIGHTING UP: 8.11pm to 6.08am

Eighteen jailed after police target crack dealers

FACES OF EVIL

By NIGEL DANDO and ROGER BURTON

THIS gallery of shame shows the men caught in a major police operation against crack cocaine pushers in Bristol.

Tough blitz on deadly street trade: Pages 2 and 3

BUY FOUR WINDOWS GET ONE FREE BUY SEVEN WINDOWS & GET A DOOR FREE

Diamond Windows

Call Now on (0117) 977 9222 for your Free Quotation

Figure K.3: The 2018 Bristol Post apology



The following year the same editor had to apologise after being criticised by the Bristol Commission on Race Equality for publishing a front-page picture of the city's black mayor which was likened to a "criminal mug shot" (Gordon & Norton, 2019; Sharman, 2019d). In response to the criticism Mike Norton wrote:

> Our mistake is doubly frustrating because the *Post*'s participation in Roger Griffith's excellent Year of Change project has indeed brought about significant change to our editorial thinking, our content and our recruitment of staff. (Gordon & Norton, 2019)

Another incident, this time at the BBC, is an example of territorial stigmatisation related to representations of class (Kersley 2022e, 2022g). In 2019 James Hanson, a BBC *Radio Bristol* presenter—described as "private school educated" and who subsequently moved to up-market *Times Radio*—sang a self-penned song, Hartcliffe Lass, in a mock Bristolian accent live on-air. The song mocked women from Hartcliffe, a predominantly working-class part of Bristol, as incestuous and promiscuous. What was only

"a bit of fun" for Hanson was a humiliating experience for the people of Hartcliffe. There were formal complaints from local councillors and people living in the area with local residents commenting: "it is the stereotyping that is the worst—the stigma that comes from living in Hartcliffe. I'm pretty shocked it's on a BBC platform" and: "to add insult to injury, he clearly thinks it's funny" (Bristolian, 2019; Cork, 2019b, 2019c, 2019e). Graeber (2019) provides some useful clues in understanding why this stigmatisation was seen to be a transgression of the expected behaviour of the local broadcaster: "psychological studies regularly find that people of working-class background are more accurate at reading other people's feelings, and more empathetic and caring, than those of middle-class, let alone, wealthy backgrounds" (p. 237). An investigation by the BBC complaints unit found the song did not breach the broadcaster's standards for content, but ruled it was broadcast at the wrong time of day. Hanson kept his job—after temporarily being removed from being on-air—unlike another BBC *Radio Bristol* presenter a few years earlier, Sam Mason, who was sacked for making an allegedly racist comment in an *off-air* phone conversation (BBC, 2008). BBC *Radio Bristol* has also acted decisively when presenters have shown potential political bias—one had his show moved when he became engaged to the local Tory MP (Matthew, 2015) and Dr Phil Hammond was sacked from his show hours after announcing his intention to run against sitting Tory MP, Jacob Rees Mogg (Yong & Cork, 2018).

Several of the above are examples of parachute journalism and illustrate the difficulties faced by journalists in covering aspects of society with which they are unfamiliar (Robinson, 2023; Robinson & Culver, 2019; Wenzel, 2023b). In doing so they fall back on hegemonic tropes about place-based problems, that reinforce social divisions rather than ameliorating them. The consequences of which led, in these cases, to an erosion of journalistic authority and damage to community trust, but there are examples in the Bristol news ecosystem, in both mainstream and nonmainstream media, which show a positive commitment to the role of community champion. The *Bristol Cable* spent a year working on a funded solutions journalism project, which involved talking to the residents of a troubled tower block in Easton, and led to the reporter, Sean Morrison, being nominated for a prestigious Orwell Award (*Bristol Cable*, 2023). While in-depth, long-form journalism is often beyond the scope of the mainstream organisations, *Bristol Live* reporters frequently cover the city's poorer areas in an even-handed way, two very good recent examples have been stories headlined Kuumba Centre Supporters Vow to Block Council Eviction of Community 'Lifeline' (Cork, 2023c) and Filwood Fantastic—The Cynical, Forgotten Bristol Community with £14 Million to Spend (Cork, 2023d), which give space to the views of local people and community leaders while contextualising the challenges these areas face. In 2023 the

occupants of Barton House, a block of flats, were evacuated over safety concerns. *The Bristol Cable* raised £10k in 48 hours for the residents (Mizon, 2023) and *Bristol Post/Live* campaigned for a pause in their council rent payments (Cork, 2023k; Reeder, 2023c).

After fatal knife attacks in Knowle West and St Paul's most of the Bristol media formed a joint campaign—Together for Change—against knife crime in the city (Driscoll, 2024; Linford, 2024p; Morrison, 2024a) and *Bristol World* has also been involved in a campaign with the aim of helping young adults living in sub-standard rental accommodation and struggling with mental health problems (Linford, 2024z). The Voice network also regularly campaigns about the issue of houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs) which they see as altering the social fabric of local communities.

Appendix L

L.1 The Idea of Local in a Globalised World

Deuze (2007) advocates the concept of liquid journalism as a way of reflecting social philosopher Zygmunt Bauman's observations on the "rapidly changing human condition" encountered during "times of fast-paced radical change" and "under conditions of permanent revolution" (2006b, pp. 1-2). He reminds us that during the "20th century heyday of mass media" journalism emerged as the "primary sense-making practice of modernity" where it was seen by its practitioners as being "the cornerstone of modern society" and was vital to the constitution of a democratic social order (ibid.). The birth of digital journalism at the end of the 20th century was a paradigm shift, not only for media communications but also for postmodern conceptions of globally interconnected networks (Castells, 2017; Curran & Witschge, 2010; Dencik, 2013; Jenkins, 2001, 2008; Robinson, 2009, 2010, 2011a, among others). It came with claims about "time-space compression"—an updated, post-industrial elaboration of Marx's "annihilation of space by time" (Harvey, 1993a, 2002; Massey, 1993)—which speculates that "geography is dead" and posits the "death of distance" (Freeman, 2020). The position of regional media in the information age can therefore be "potentially confusing ... a newspaper can be confounding … advocating faith in [two] positions (a potentially regressive place-based fundamentalism or a misguided faith in networked globalism) with little concern for consistency", claims Hutchins (2004, p. 588).

I argue that local journalism has to contend with a neoliberal and postmodern conceptualisation of the globalising and networked world of culturally homogenous non-places (Augé 2008; Harvey 1993a, 2005; Held et al., 1999; Hutchins, 2004) or a meaningless realm (McAdam & Hess, 2022), but also the view that geography is fundamental to relations of power in society. The work of Castells on network society has been influential on theorising the transformation from industrial society to an information economy through technological innovation. According to Hutchins (2008): "Castells outlines an historical shift in social structures away from statism, concentrated bureaucracy and hierarchy organised on national lines. The structural logic of the contemporary age is based on networks, and more specifically, adaptable information and communication technology networks that criss-cross the globe, influencing social life and paying limited heed to the national and political boundaries that have governed the past two centuries" (p. 578). For Augé (2008), the place/non-place pairing "is an instrument for measuring the degree of sociality and symbolisation of a given space" (p. VIII), both essential elements in understanding reputational geographies/communities (Wacquant, 2008) and their relation to local journalism. Davis (2017) notes a "'disembedding' of elite activities from local territorial contexts, a

quasi-utopian attempt to disengage from a suffocating matrix of poverty and social violence" (p. 119) while Usher (2019) argues "postmodern placelessness is the exact opposite of a key cause of one of journalists' biggest problems: issues of audiences' trust in news" (p. 86). In contrast, Massey (1993, 1999, 2005) describes power geometry as the way in which spatiality is both shaped by, and reproduces, unequal power relations in society. But also, as Hall (1997) noted, identities, place-based or otherwise, are stable points of reference—"still points in a turning world" (p. 22)—a reassuring bulwark against the threat of precarious, unexpected, disorientating, unwanted and potentially disastrous change, which local media once sought to exploit.

Hatcher (2012) noted the seeming transformation of society through new and more accessible communication technologies has led to individuals defining themselves "not by their neighbours, but by those who see the world as they do" (pp. 136-137). This view fails to acknowledge that (physical and virtual) mobility increases when one has greater access to economic resources. It also fails to acknowledge that liberal democracy is defined by geographic-bureaucratic boundaries, such as wards, constituencies and national borders, and that participation through voting, political representation, taxation and access to public services is dependent on place of residence. Robinson (1995) argues that debates about globalisation often see homogenisation (universal) and heterogenisation (particular) trends as existing in an oppositional dialectic, but are simultaneous and "in the last instance, complementary and interpenetrative; even though they can and do collide in concrete situations"—that the current form of globalisation is best described as glocalisation (p. 37).

Friedland (2012) noted two aspects to communities which journalism has to take account of, "they are geographic places *and* they are networked collectives" (p. 151, emphasis added). Billard's (2023) observation about "placefulness" and "placelessness" is useful in clarifying two uses of the idea of community, especially in relation to local journalism and the digital realm. He argues "community" (singular) is a product of geographic rootedness, a physical presence (Potter & Reicher, 1987, p. 29) or an actual social group (Williams, 1988, p. 75), hence, it is "placeful". But "communities" (plural) are consolidated in the imagination, a social attribute or a particular quality of relationship, i.e. they are "placeless", coexisting as communities of interest. Prompted by the exponential growth in digital media, the geo-social model (Hess, 2013a; Hess & Waller 2014) plays down the importance of proximity (Jenkins & Nielsen, 2018, 2020; Kang et al., 2011; Martin, 1988; Shoemaker et al., 2007; Usher, 2019, 2021) with the claim that online news serves dispersed communities "united by participation, interest, activity or points of view" (Hess & Waller, 2014, p. 124). Hess and Waller refer to this as "shifting

constellations of global and national systems, issues and social relationships in the digital era ... [extending] ... well beyond the geographic zone" (p. 131) with the capacity to confront multiple global audiences in emerging "deliberative spaces of democratic life" (Reese, 2009, p. 362).

In contrast to this techno-utopian idealism, a "geographic turn" has taken place in journalism studies in recent years (Freeman, 2020; McAdam & Hess, 2022) through investigations of the place-making value of news and an acknowledgement of the importance of place-based knowledge. Entman (1990) recognises that "local news implicitly traces the symbolic boundaries of the community" (p. 342). Hatcher (2012) has also contended geography and journalism "share a strong familial bond" (p. 135). For Schmitz Weiss (2015, 2018, 2020), spatial journalism is a way of exposing the issues and faults of a journalism practice that aims to serve a democratic function by highlighting social, economic and cultural issues tied to race, class and place, and identifying the "holes, gaps, and lack of attention given to communities that are underrepresented or not represented at all" (2015, p. 127). Socio-political knowledge is "unequally distributed in the population mainly along socioeconomic lines" (Örnebring, 2019) and is reflected in the spatial segregation of cities (Crossley, 2017; Reardon & Bischoff, 2011). Abernathy (2023) has also expressed concern that the knowledge gap between journalism-haves—mostly residents in affluent areas—and journalism-have-nots—those living in economically struggling communities—is growing.

An optimistic view of the democratically empowering potential and reach of digital media has been influenced by journalism research being skewed towards a small set of elite news organisations at the expense of "marginal and unfashionable practices" (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2017, p. 251). It has also been tempered by the colonisation of the internet by commercial forces (Curran et al., 2012; Fenton, 2010a, 2016, 2019; Fenton & Freedman, 2017; Fenton et al., 2020; Srnicek, 2017); the realisation that "life online ... is more appealing to and stronger among the young" (Friedland, 2012, p. 151), the demographic least likely to have an interest in public interest news (Kassova, 2024); social distancing (Turkle, 2017); the proliferation of emotion-driven trivia—a "distraction from emotional reality" (Gilroy-Ware, 2017; Tandoc et al., 2018), marked by generality and telic vagueness (having no clear or obvious purpose); and being the front line in political offensives and culture wars over hate speech, fake news (Gilroy-Ware, 2020) and authoritarian crackdowns (Morozov, 2011). Despite this, mainstream local media, through their parent companies, are now in a competitive click-dependent online environment, for advertising, audience attention and engagement, and referrals, with platform giants and search engines—Facebook and Google—rather than small-scale local media. This is seen as being

disproportionately influential on news production and is leading to the trivialisation of news, as well as potentially acting against the interests of the audience (Ball, 2022; Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2018).