



UNIVERSITY OF  
LIVERPOOL

# **British Battered Corporation. How is the BBC portrayed in UK national newspapers?**

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## **Abstract**

### *British Battered Corporation. How is the BBC portrayed in UK national newspapers?*

Catrin Jessica Owen

This study uses mixed methods research to examine how the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC's) method of funding is represented in UK national newspapers.

The licence fee (paid for by everyone who watches television) provides the BBC with a guaranteed funding stream, in contrast with a struggling press facing declining print newspaper sales and subsequently declining profits. Owners of prominent newspapers have publicly condemned the notion of licence fee-funding and accused the BBC of 'dumping free, state-sponsored news on the market' (Murdoch 2009). However, so far, there has been little systematic analysis of how UK national newspapers report on the BBC and no specific literature on newspaper reporting of the licence fee. This study therefore provides unique analysis of how the licence fee is represented in newspaper reporting, focussing on print coverage of four critical periods within the recent history of the Corporation's funding model. Its results are drawn from a quantitative analysis of 646 UK newspaper articles, followed by a detailed qualitative analysis of the language in a selection of these articles, using Critical Discourse Analysis.

The quantitative analysis revealed the presence of conflicting groups within the newspaper coverage of the licence fee (e.g. the BBC, the government, the licence fee payer). Qualitative analysis was then employed to investigate how these conflicts manifested themselves in themes and discourses. Analysis found two contradictory discourses were operationalised by newspapers. The first discourse, 'tyranny of the minority' suggested the BBC was elitist and in opposition to a majority of licence fee payers. The second, 'competition is king' advocated that the BBC, fuelled by the licence fee, was an aggressive imposition on commercial media companies. These discourses were invoked flexibly and contradictorily across the articles to ideologically criticise the BBC. Overall the study found that the self-interest of newspapers as businesses superseded publications' political leanings and the licence fee was blamed for hindering the commercial ambitions of newspapers, building upon the work of authors who have considered newspaper reporting of the BBC (Thomas and Hindman 2011; Petley 2015; Freedman 2015; Rusbridger 2018). This research, therefore, contributes to broader debates about the nature of the UK national press, competing methods of media funding and attitudes towards public service media at a time when the BBC is the subject of intense scrutiny in Britain.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

*'Some prophets are foretelling a colossal struggle between the powerful Press interests and ourselves. I do not believe there need be any such thing'*  
(Reith, quoted in Higgins 2015: 165).

In her 2015 book Charlotte Higgins references the BBC's first Director General, John Reith in *Broadcast Over Britain*, published 91 years earlier. Reflecting on the BBC's history Higgins suggests that Reith 'got it wrong' stating that, 'there was a colossal struggle' between the *Daily Mail* newspaper and the BBC 'and, arguably the *Mail* lost' (Higgins 2015: 165). Higgins' assertion raises many questions – what was the struggle between the *Mail* and the BBC? Why was it colossal? Who won? Why did the *Mail* lose? Were other sections of the 'powerful Press' involved? These questions connect the BBC with the press and continue into the present day, as they both 'struggle' in a fast-paced and changing media landscape. This research, therefore, seeks to answer some of these questions through an examination of how one form of media (newspapers) reports on another (the BBC) and whether press coverage perpetuates a 'struggle' against the BBC. The study specifically assesses newspaper reporting of the licence fee, which funds the BBC, to consider whether the BBC's receipt of a guaranteed income is portrayed as a site of struggle between the Corporation and newspapers.

This introduction explains why the BBC licence fee is the focus of analysis, relating this to the wider contexts of the UK media landscape and debates about the role of public service media across democracies globally. It then discusses how this research builds on the existing literature. The introduction also explains how mixed methods, quantitative content analysis followed by qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis, is the most appropriate methodology for the research. Following this, the

decision to focus on selected events in print editions is discussed. The chapter concludes with an outline of how the research is set out across the thesis.

## **Licence fee focus**

The largest public service broadcaster in the UK, the BBC, is primarily funded by the licence fee (or TV licence), which is a compulsory flat rate fee, charged per household (£154.50 per year from April 2019). The licence fee is universal, costing the same for each household which watches live or on-demand BBC programming, regardless of income or consumption of BBC services (Broadcasting Research Unit 1985: 14). The BBC therefore receives the same income from the licence fee, around £3.8 billion in 2018 (Parliament, House of Commons 2019: 3), regardless of how many people consume its output. The government sets the level of the licence fee to allow the BBC to plan with 'certainty of income' (Tait 2015: 91). Universality through the licence fee, it is argued, ensures good quality programming as, because everyone pays the same, broadcasters are in competition for audiences rather than profits (O'Malley 2009: 45). The licence fee has funded the BBC since the Corporation's establishment in the 1920s. Although, throughout its history, there have been various challenges to the licence fee - e.g. the Peacock Committee in the 1980s set up to introduce commercialism to the BBC (Goodwin 1998: 81) - successive governments have ensured the continuation of the funding model. The number of households with a TV licence has decreased slightly between the year 2000/01 and 2017/18 (Parliament, House of Commons 2019: 5), but the BBC has retained a significant guaranteed income from the licence fee.

In contrast to the publicly funded BBC, newspapers in the UK are privately owned and have no guaranteed income stream. Unlike the Corporation, newspapers have no fixed income and are dependent on profits from sales, advertising revenues and subscriptions. The consumption of the print editions of newspapers is consistently declining, while online news is growing in popularity. 64% of people in the UK now

use the internet to consume news, in contrast with just 40% of people obtaining news from print newspapers (Ofcom 2018a: 2). Declining print circulations have impacted upon the profits of newspaper companies as 81% of news media organisations' profit continues to come from print readership, with just 12% from digital (Deloitte 2016: 8).

The BBC has established a formidable online presence and the BBC News website has become the most popular website for online news (Ofcom 2018a: 64). In contrast, newspapers are struggling to adapt to a digital age, through the introduction of paywalls, for example (Preston 2015a: 137). The declining fortunes of commercial newspapers and the growth of online news has increased scrutiny of the scale and scope of the BBC, with calls for it to reduce its digital activities and allow commercial media to compete. While the scope of the BBC has been scrutinised historically by successive governments, particularly in the 1980s (Goodwin 1998), the changing media landscape with the ascendancy of online news means the remit of the BBC has been increasingly questioned during the past decade. The BBC has been accused of 'mission creep' in providing content using public funding which could be provided by commercial companies for profit (Le Jaune 2016: 4). The Corporation's critics argue that the BBC's provision of such a wide range of services<sup>1</sup> using public money means that it is a hindrance to competition within the commercial media market. The BBC's licence fee has often been cited as the reason for the BBC supposedly 'creeping' into areas which could be provided by the commercial market. In one such attack, the right-leaning think tank Centre for Policy Studies stated:

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<sup>1</sup> The BBC provides nine national TV channels, regional TV programmes, an internet TV service - BBC Three - 10 national radio stations, 40 local radio stations and an extensive website (BBC 2019a).

[T]he scope of the BBC and the licence fee are intertwined. Restrict the BBC's expansion and the licence fee becomes less defensible; take away the licence fee and the requirement for the BBC to offer something for everyone on every platform is ended (Le Jaune 2016: 3).

Given the growth of BBC's online news services, the BBC and newspapers are now providing competing services on the same platform. This, according to the Chief Press Officer at the BBC, Ben Wiseman means 'there's inevitably going to be tension' between the BBC and newspapers (interview with Wiseman, 18<sup>th</sup> April 2018). This study investigates whether this 'tension' between newspapers and the BBC manifests itself in UK national newspaper coverage of the BBC television licence. It will consider whether the licence fee is held up as fuelling the BBC's ability to compete with newspapers, both online and within the wider media landscape.

This thesis contends that the idea of tension, struggle or competition between the BBC and newspapers is ideologically motivated. The BBC is licence fee funded and a non-commercial public service broadcaster.<sup>2</sup> Therefore it does not compete commercially with newspapers for advertising revenue (Freedman 2018: 207). However, prominent newspaper owners have criticised the BBC as a hindrance to their ability to make a profit. News UK, owned by Rupert Murdoch, is one of three companies which controls a significant portion of the British newspaper market (*Times*, *Sunday Times* and *Sun*). The Murdoch family have, for decades; publicly bemoaned the BBC's privileged position in the British media market (Murdoch 1989; Murdoch 2009). In his MacTaggart lecture of 2009, James Murdoch described the BBC as being allowed to 'throttle the news market and then get bigger to

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<sup>2</sup> UK commercial public service broadcasters such as Channel 4 and ITV have public service obligations (see Ramsey 2017) but are funded through advertising.

compensate' (Murdoch 2009: 16), as well as 'dumping state sponsored news on the market' (Murdoch 2009: 19). News UK therefore considers the BBC as a competitor in news provision. It has been suggested that this resentment towards the BBC is made clear in Murdoch owned newspapers (Petley 2015). However, to date, no study has comprehensively analysed the suspected antipathy of the Murdochs towards the Corporation as there has been no systematic analysis of the way in which national newspapers report on the BBC. This thesis, therefore, examines how newspapers report on the BBC licence fee, to measure the extent of hostility towards the public service broadcaster's guaranteed funding stream. The study will investigate the extent of criticism towards the system of publicly funding the BBC from privately owned sections of the media and show how this criticism manifests itself. It will not simply focus on one section of the press owned by one company but consider all UK national newspapers. According to McNair, journalism, in an ideal form, should perform a 'watchdog' role, which means it should scrutinise the actions of powerful institutions (e.g. government and corporations) and hold them to account (McNair 2011: 20). However, according to John Richardson journalism 'stops being journalism' when it emphasises...a need for profit' (Richardson 2007: 8). This research will, therefore, examine discourses present in newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee which consistently promote the interests of newspaper owners' profit over those of the public who consume BBC services.

This study answers the following research questions:

1. What is the character of the discourses and themes present in newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee?
2. To what extent does the language present within newspapers normalise the benefits of a commercially focused system of broadcasting at the expense of the BBC as a public service broadcaster?

3. Within newspaper coverage, to what extent is the BBC and its licence fee criticised for changes in the UK media landscape which have affected newspapers?

While this study is focussed on the British media landscape (the BBC and UK newspapers), it has the potential to build upon international debates about the relationship between public service media and commercial media, as light-touch government regulation of the media becomes favoured globally.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, conflicts have been reported between commercially-owned newspapers and publicly-owned media in Australia where the most widely-circulated newspaper, the *Australian*, (McNair *et al.* 2017) is owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp.<sup>4</sup> According to McNair (2015), this Murdoch-controlled newspaper "maintains a steady flow of anti-public service media reportage." This research, which examines how privately owned newspapers report on public service broadcasting, is therefore situated within global debates about the challenges public service media faces from the commercial market.

## Methodology

This study takes a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative analysis with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The approach taken is similar to the mixed methods studies by Richardson who investigated British newspaper representations of Muslims and Islam (2004; 2009). Like Richardson, the CDA used in this research is influenced by Norman Fairclough (1995) because it considers the linguistic features of the newspaper articles, intertextuality and the outside contexts which could influence texts. It examines how language use can be determined by ideological assumptions (Fairclough 1995: 54). The research is also influenced by

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<sup>3</sup> In France, President Macron is critical of public service media (Kuhn 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Rupert Murdoch is Australian, and News Corp was established by his father, Keith (McNair *et al.* 2017: np).

Teun Van Dijk, considering whether in-groups and out-groups or 'us' and 'them' are ideologically constructed within the discourses present in newspaper coverage (Van Dijk 2018: 31). The use of CDA allows this research to investigate how discourses are evoked within newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee and the way in which these discourses are re-created and naturalised to create an ideological representation of the BBC licence fee.

Using either a qualitative or quantitative methodology, rather than mixed methods would risk leaving gaps in the research. A solely qualitative focus on a small number of articles about the licence fee would risk supporting a preconceived hypothesis about how newspapers report upon the licence fee at the expense of gaining a wider perspective. Therefore, both quantitative and qualitative methods are used in this study to draw conclusions about the portrayal of the BBC licence fee in UK national newspapers.

### **Selection of events for analysis**

Preliminary research for this study, examining newspaper articles which mentioned 'BBC' and 'licence fee' over a ten-year period (2005 to 2015), found that there were notable points when newspaper coverage of the licence fee became more prominent. These 'spikes' in coverage of the licence fee correlated with notable events in the BBC's recent history, such as the Jimmy Savile scandal.<sup>5</sup> However, further investigation revealed that these spikes in coverage merely arose from the press performing its watchdog role and acting as a check on powerful interests (in the case of Savile scrutinising the actions of the BBC as the UK's largest broadcaster). Overall, using one very specific case study where the BBC could be

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<sup>5</sup> In October 2012, the BBC was implicated in the Savile scandal when it was revealed that the BBC's *Newsnight* had dropped a television programme investigating Savile as an abuser of children and the vulnerable (Barrow 2013: 31).



legitimately criticised would make it difficult to analyse and draw robust conclusions about the discourses evoked within newspapers around the BBC and its licence fee. Michael Grade, former Chairperson of the BBC said, 'it is so easy to criticise the BBC and too often the Corporation makes it far too easy...they provide a regular supply of ammunition to their enemies' (Grade 2015: 6). It is within newspapers' remit to report on the BBC and broadcasting policy (Tunstall 1996: 409), and scandals around the BBC will inevitably result in criticism from newspapers. This study therefore examined several events initiated by the government which could less easily generate legitimate criticism of the BBC. They were also all focused on the licence fee rather than the BBC more widely, to provide a clear economic link between newspapers and the BBC. In order to analyse discourses present within newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee, it was therefore appropriate to select events which relate directly to the funding model rather than a wider contextual agenda. The events examined within this study therefore consisted of the following:

1. **The 2010 licence fee settlement:** The 2010 licence fee settlement took place against a backdrop of the first Conservative-led coalition government for 13 years, following the General Election in May 2010, when the Conservative Party governed with the Liberal Democrats (Kavanagh and Cowley 2010: 330). In October 2010 the Work and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, attempted to pass on funding responsibilities for free television licence fees for the over 75s<sup>6</sup> from the Department for Work and Pensions to the BBC, as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review.<sup>7</sup> The

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<sup>6</sup> Free television licences for people aged 75 and over were introduced as a benefit for the over-75s by Chancellor Gordon Brown in 2001 (Snoddy 2015: 19). This meant that any household with someone aged over-75 living there did not have to pay a TV licence.

<sup>7</sup> The 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review set out the government's spending plans for the next four years. It set out 'huge reductions in public expenditure' to 'manage austerity' (Ferry and Eckersley 2011: 17).

BBC managed to avoid this move due to the response of the BBC Trust<sup>8</sup> and the Conservatives' Coalition partner, the Liberal Democrats. However, as a 'trade off,' the BBC accepted a licence fee freeze until the end of the Charter period (December 2016) which amounted to a real-terms cut in funding of around 16 per cent (Snoddy 2015: 23). The BBC also had to take on extra funding responsibilities including the funding of S4C (Welsh Channel 4), BBC Monitoring and the BBC World Service which was previously funded by the Foreign Office. This event was particularly salient to analyse because it was directly focused on the BBC licence fee and had the potential to encompass a range of wider contextual issues. For example, given the backdrop of the BBC being included within the Comprehensive Spending Review, along with other public sector bodies, this had the potential to raise wider questions about the extent to which the BBC was independent from government. Although this event occurred almost five years before the other three events selected for analysis, it was necessary to include because it marked the beginning of an ongoing tussle between the government and the BBC about the licence fee, which drew media attention.

2. **Over 75s licence fee settlement, June/July 2015:** Between the 2010 and 2015 licence fee settlements there was a change of government. In May 2015 the Conservative Party won a majority in parliament and so could govern alone without their former Coalition partners, the Liberal Democrats. Following this, John Whittingdale<sup>9</sup> became Culture Secretary. Whittingdale had previously been critical of the licence fee, pointing out its 'false logic' and

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<sup>8</sup> The BBC Trust was the governing body of the BBC (2007-2017) and most of its responsibilities were transferred to Ofcom when the 2017 Royal Charter was enacted.

<sup>9</sup> Whittingdale was the former Chair of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee. Under Whittingdale's Chairmanship, the Committee published a report that recommended the abolition of the licence fee (House of Commons 2015).

regressive nature (Higgins 2014). On 29<sup>th</sup> June 2015, the Director General and Chair of the BBC Trust were told by government that they must shoulder the cost of free licence fees for the over-75s with the possibility of recouping the money as part of the upcoming Charter Review process. This made it difficult for the Trust to threaten resignation, as they had done in 2010, as the Trust could be abolished as part of Charter Review<sup>10</sup> (Snoddy 2015: 20). The over-75s licence fee settlement of 2015 followed on from the 2010 settlement, involving a reassessment of the BBC's funding responsibilities. This research analyses licence fee settlements to see if there were similarities in the discourses present in newspaper coverage of the two settlements. In addition, it examines how the actions of government were perceived by sections of the press and whether government actions were considered aggressive.

- 3. Publication of the Green Paper on Charter Renewal July 2015:** The Green Paper on the future of the BBC set the parameters for the consultation on the contents of the BBC's next Royal Charter.<sup>11</sup> The foreword to the Green Paper suggested that the BBC needed to evolve in order to 'thrive' and said it set out 'the issues and some of the options for how that might happen' (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2015a: 2). Several key questions within the Green Paper were directly related to the BBC's funding model including 'how should we pay for the BBC and how should the licence fee be modernised?' (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2015a: 11), while funding was one of the 'four areas of possible change' that the Charter

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<sup>10</sup> The 2016 White Paper subsequently recommend the creation of a 'unitary board,' with the BBC appointing half of the members to replace the BBC Trust (DCMS 2016: 6).

<sup>11</sup> In a UK policy context, Green Papers are consultation documents produced by the government 'to allow people both inside and outside Parliament to give the department feedback on its policy or legislative proposals' (UK Parliament 2019a). The Royal Charter is the constitutional basis for the BBC (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2015: 3).

Review set out to explore (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2015a: 12). Following the publication of the Green Paper, there was commentary about the nature of newspaper coverage of the consultation. For example, according to Petley (2015), Murdoch newspapers such as the *Times* negatively reported on the licence fee following the Green Paper. This study conducts a thorough investigation of newspaper coverage in the lead up to and following the publication of the Green Paper to investigate whether patterns in reporting observed by authors such as Petley are borne out over a wider sample of newspaper articles.

Upon publication of the Green Paper many commentators expressed concern about the market orientation of the government's consultation and the influence of the BBC's competitors. According to Steven Barnett:

The notion of a smaller BBC runs through the green paper like letters through a stick of Blackpool rock. It is hard to see this emphasis on reduction as anything other than a sop to the BBC's increasingly vocal competitors who fear both subscription (which would potentially compromise the revenues of Sky, Virgin and BT) and advertising (equally opposed by ITV, Channel 5 and other advertising-funded channels (Barnett 2015: 76).

While this study does not specifically analyse the language used in the Green Paper, it conducts a robust examination of the discourses present around the licence fee in a selection of newspaper articles about the Green Paper.

#### 4. The publication of the White Paper on Charter Renewal May 2016: The

White Paper<sup>12</sup> outlined the key recommendations to be included in the BBC's next Royal Charter. Before its publication, newspapers such as the *Mirror* suggested that the government's recommendations would be overly punitive towards the Corporation. Some newspapers even speculated that the White Paper would recommend the BBC should be banned from showing the popular *Strictly Come Dancing*<sup>13</sup> in a prime-time slot (Sambrook 2016). The eventual recommendations, however, were considered relatively supportive towards the BBC as 'the worst fears of the Corporation's supporters had not come to pass' (Sambrook 2016), particularly in terms of funding, as the government recommended that the licence fee rise with inflation for five years from 2017/18 (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2016: 6). Therefore, this research examines how newspapers responded to the government's proposals, and the effects of newspapers support for or criticism of the government.

#### Focus on print editions of newspapers

Many newspapers have invested heavily in their online editions which are an increasingly popular source of news in the UK (Ofcom 2018a: 9). However, this study solely analyses the print editions of newspapers. This does not seek to imply that the online editions are unimportant, nor does it seek to further the arguments of authors who have advocated the continuing importance of print newspapers in the UK (Snoddy 2016; Greenslade 2016). Print editions are considered worthy of close analysis because:

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<sup>12</sup> In a UK policy context, a White Paper is a policy document produced by the government setting out their proposals for future legislation (UK Parliament 2019b).

<sup>13</sup> *Strictly Come Dancing*, sometimes referred to as *Strictly*, is a dance competition where celebrities partner with professional dancers and compete against each other each week 'to impress a panel of judges and the viewing public in order to survive potential elimination' (Enli 2009: 485). In the UK It has been shown on BBC One in a prime-time slot since 2004 for sixteen series. *Strictly* is a BBC-originated programme format which has been sold as a global franchise, *Dancing With the Stars* (Enli 2009: 485).

The quasi-hierarchical structure of a print newspaper, together with traditional layout conventions and the restricted space available, still makes the print edition a revealing object of analysis – a one-off daily snapshot of the newspaper's output, with selection and presentation features providing a useful guide to the importance placed upon different aspects of reporting (Goddard 2017b: np).

National newspapers such as the *Guardian* and *Observer*, have evolved from a daily print newspaper available in the UK, to an online brand with a worldwide reach, publishing different versions of the newspaper in different time zones across the globe (Cordrey 2013). Two thirds of the online audience for the *Guardian* are non-British and former editor, Alan Rusbridger has discussed the newspaper serving 'a global audience that was now coming to the *Guardian* multiple times a day' (Rusbridger 2018a: 343). The focus of this research is the UK editions of news articles, because only people who consume BBC services in the UK are required to pay the TV licence. Therefore, this study considers how issues around the licence fee are presented to people who are likely to be licence fee payers. Printed newspapers examined can be reasonably assumed to be the editions of the articles written for and largely consumed by a UK TV licence paying audience. Furthermore, studies of other events, such as the 2017 UK General Election found that 'online outlets reflect a very similar set of priorities to their broadcast and print rivals and partners' (Harmer and Southern 2018: 100). Raymond Snoddy has described it as a 'fallacy' 'to see newspapers and their online versions as separate entities,' suggesting that newspapers should be considered 'newsbrands' which incorporate print, mobile and online editions (Snoddy 2016: 10). This study therefore analyses one aspect of the newsbrand (the print editions), in order to provide a snapshot of newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee.

In addition to focussing on printed editions of newspapers, this research uses textual analysis to investigate newspaper reporting of the licence fee. This has been criticised by scholars such as Greg Philo (2007) who stresses that ‘production and reception processes’ must be analysed alongside the texts as a text-based analysis cannot account for ‘professional ideologies’ or what the texts mean to different audiences (Philo 2007: 117). Textual analysis

[C]annot make safe assertions about the intentions of a text’s producer, nor can it validly infer the impact of the text on readers, viewers or listeners. All such analysis can do is offer provocative and productive hypotheses about these processes (Deacon *et al.* 2010: 189).

In response to criticisms of textual analysis, Fursich (2009) argues that only ‘independent textual analysis’ can draw out the ideological underpinnings of media content (Fursich 2009: 239). Fursich considers the methodological limitations of textual analysis mixed with audience research. For example, selective use of audience reactions can be used to support a partial reading from a researcher as a dominant reading (Fursich 2009: 243). Furthermore, Fursich argues that reliance on study of production processes can narrow the reading of a researcher to ‘the hegemonic view supported by media workers’ (Fursich 2009: 244). Reliance on interviews with media professionals or readers of newspaper articles about the BBC licence fee would provide an insight into how newspaper articles were constructed or responded to. However, it would not provide a full assessment of which discourses were present within the texts.<sup>14</sup> CDA allows for a full analysis of the extent to which hegemonic positions are present in the texts and whether and how

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<sup>14</sup> When it was decided that the main method used in this research was discourse analysis, it was not planned for interviews to form part of this study. However, given that access to a high-profile individual working within the BBC was possible, data from this interview was used in order to complement the findings from the qualitative analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis. Information from just one interview did not form the cornerstone of this research but was used where possible to provide additional context around the findings within this

language is used to sustain or challenge these positions. This study employs mixed methods research and so a quantitative content analysis provides guidance for which articles are then examined in more detail using discourse analysis to avoid the application of pre-conceived bias to the study.

## **Study outline**

Chapter two explains the context of this thesis, relating the research to existing literature on the UK press, public service broadcasting and the BBC licence fee. It relates the study to literature in key areas relevant to the research (UK newspapers, public service media and the BBC) and then examines the literature in relation to the BBC and the licence fee (e.g. how this relates to the scope of the Corporation). Finally, the chapter engages in detail with the existing literature around how the BBC is reported in UK newspapers, to provide important context for the methods and findings in this research.

The next chapter discusses how Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used as the theoretical underpinning for this study. It explains how discourse is understood within this study and relates this to ideology, to investigate how ideology is normalised within newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee. It outlines the different versions of CDA and explains how the approach taken within this study was influenced by CDA practitioners Fairclough and Richardson. Finally, this chapter refutes criticisms of using CDA to analyse newspaper articles.

Following the explanation of CDA, chapter four examines the methodological detail of the study, outlining the decision to focus on UK national newspapers at the time of each event. It discusses how both quantitative and qualitative analysis were conducted, explaining the detail of the development of a coding manual as an aide to quantitative analysis and the mechanics of employing mixed methods research. The chapter further explains how discourses and themes were identified in this



study and how CDA was used in qualitative analysis to examine the linguistic and contextual features of the newspaper articles.

Chapters five and six outline the results of the analysis of newspaper articles.

Chapter five details the results from the quantitative analysis. It states the key quantitative findings: 1) that there was distinct positivity towards the BBC from some sections of the press; 2) that certain newspapers were particularly critical of government actions towards the BBC; 3) that praise towards the licence fee as a system of funding was rare; 4) newspapers argued that the BBC was a hindrance to commercial media; and 5) that while BBC programming was praised by newspapers, the conduct of the BBC was often criticised. The chapter then discusses how these quantitative results influenced the qualitative analysis. Overall, quantitative analysis indicated the presence of conflicting groups within newspaper coverage (e.g. between the BBC and the government). Qualitative analysis was therefore then needed to investigate how conflict manifested itself in the language used by newspapers and subsequently how this was present in themes and discourses.

Chapter six, the qualitative analysis, is split into four substantive sections. The first, 'anti-government, pro Beeb' outlines how certain left-leaning newspapers were supportive of the BBC, as a method of criticising the government, using two case studies – David Cameron's 'delicious' comments, and the 'Luvvies letter.'

Newspaper coverage of the 'Luvvies letter,' was also evocative of two discourses present throughout the newspaper coverage. Section two explains the first of two discourses identified, 'tyranny of the minority,' which focussed on classing the BBC as an elitist 'them' against the licence fee payer, or 'us.' Section three explains how the 'competition is king' discourse was identified. This suggests BBC licence fee fuels the BBC's size and enables the Corporation to show aggression towards commercial media. Section four uses the case study of BBC recipes to show how

the two discourses are operationalised flexibly to further the ideological interests of newspapers. The discourses use the licence fee differently – ‘tyranny of the minority’ criticises the BBC for failing to appeal to a constructed conservative majority of licence fee payers, while ‘competition is king’ directly attacks the licence fee for enabling the BBC to hinder commercial rivals. However, both discourses enable criticism of the BBC to further the commercial interests of newspapers. The final chapter outlines how the presence of contradictory BBC-critical discourses within newspaper coverage impacts on debates around the future of the BBC, the licence fee and public service media.

## **Chapter Two - Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the existing literature on the relationship between BBC and UK newspapers and reviews the political, economic and technological developments which have posed a threat to public service broadcasting more widely. The chapter situates this research, not only within the British media landscape, but within wider debates about media systems, ownership and public service media which span other Western and European democracies (see Polonska and Beckett 2019 for example). The review of the literature is grouped into six sections. Firstly, the UK national newspaper landscape and their funding system. Secondly, the history and structure of BBC which includes substantial discussion of the BBC's role as a public service broadcaster and scrutiny of this. Thirdly, the licence fee, including alternative systems of funding. This is followed by an analysis of the literature on the scope of the BBC, assessing the ways in which the Corporation is considered in relation to the commercial media market. Then the changing media landscape and how it impacts on both newspapers and the BBC is considered. Finally, the chapter will discuss the existing literature on newspaper reporting of the BBC. Overall, this chapter brings together literature from widely researched areas (UK newspapers, public service broadcasting, the BBC licence fee) to provide context for analysis of how UK national newspapers portray the BBC licence fee. While there is existing literature on newspaper reporting of the BBC's output, and suggestions that certain sections of the press are hostile towards the BBC licence fee, this study provides unique, systematic analysis of how the licence fee is constructed in newspapers.

## **Section One: The UK press – politically influential**

In Britain, the national press, particularly daily newspapers, have played a prominent role in society since the 1800s (News Media Association 2018a). James Curran and Jean Seaton (2010) provide a detailed historical account of the UK press in Part One of their seminal work *Power Without Responsibility*, including the development of the 'commercial' and the 'radical' press in the 1800s to the present day impact of the internet on journalism (Curran and Seaton 2010: 95). There are currently many national and local newspapers in the UK (the exact number of all newspapers fluctuates, with local newspapers frequently closing, merging and re-launching)<sup>15</sup> and most now have a significant online presence as well as print editions.

Newspaper journalism is said to serve an important 'fourth estate watchdog' role through uncovering elite wrongdoing. For example, the *Daily Telegraph* revealing the Members of Parliament (MP's) expenses scandal in 2009.<sup>16</sup> According to the trade association for UK Newsbrands, the News Media Association, newspapers also play an important role acting as a 'feeder of knowledge and literacy,' through 'educating the population on issues ranging from public health to climate change' (Deloitte 2016: 18). Former *Guardian* editor, Alan Rusbridger, stated:

Readers, on some level, want their newspapers to be brave, serious, campaigning and dogged. They like corruption to be exposed, overweening power to be challenged, and serious scandals to be unearthed. It reminds them what journalism is for. They admire it. They are even willing to pay for it (Rusbridger 2018a: 161).

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<sup>15</sup> In 2017, around 40 local newspapers closed (Kakar 2018).

<sup>16</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* bought a leaked disk containing four years' worth of MPs parliamentary expenses (Rawnsley 2010: 645). The *Telegraph* published details of the claims daily, showing that public money had been used by MPs to fund lavish home improvements, costly repairs and extravagant accessories, with one MP even attempting to claim £1,600 for a floating duck island (Kavanagh and Cowley 2010: 27).

National newspapers in the UK are described as ‘unusually dominant and unusually competitive’ (Tunstall 1996: 3) and for Nicholas Jones, former BBC political and industrial correspondent, ‘if there is one characteristic which marks out our newspapers from their counterparts around the world it is their prowess in setting the agenda’ (Jones 2008: 179). There is a body of research relating to agenda setting studies which ‘seeks to establish empirically whether the media influenced public opinion over time on issues such as climate change, immigration or during election campaigns’ (Cushion *et al.* 2018: 164). This study does not seek to pass judgement on the extent to which newspapers set the agenda around the BBC licence fee. Previous studies have demonstrated the agenda-setting influence of newspapers. For example, Cushion *et al.*’s (2018) empirical study found that the morning newspapers shared a similar agenda to evening television news bulletins during the 2015 General Election campaign (Cushion *et al.* 2018: 178). Given that newspapers ‘can set the agenda for public thought and discussion’ (McCombs 2004: 3), this study analyses UK print newspapers to investigate their contribution to the licence fee debate.

As UK newspapers have an agenda setting role, there are numerous studies of how British newspapers habitually report negatively on issues such as immigration (e.g. Gabrielatos and Baker 2008; KhosraviNik 2009), and how newspapers’ reporting is used to shape public discourse on these particular issues. Following political events such as General Elections in the UK, there is always analysis surrounding the extent to which newspapers reported on and influenced the tone and quality of debate (for example see Temple 2017 and Firmstone 2017). This research is a study of newspaper coverage, but rather than focus on political issues such as elections, it provides analysis of how UK national newspapers evoke discourses surrounding the BBC licence fee.

## How are UK newspapers funded?

Newspapers in the UK are largely commercially-owned, run as businesses and funded by advertising, subscriptions or donations. According to Sparks, 'Newspapers in the UK are first and foremost businesses. They do not exist to act...as watchdogs for the public...They exist to make money as any other business does' (Sparks 1996 quoted in Cole and Harcup 2010: 16). The newspaper market in the UK is very concentrated. In 2019, three companies dominate 83 per cent of the national newspaper market, up from 71 per cent in 2015 (Media Reform Coalition 2019: 7). These companies are Rupert Murdoch's News Corp<sup>17</sup> (publishing the *Times*, the *Sunday Times* and the *Sun*), Lord Rothermere's *Daily Mail* Group (publishing the *Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday*) and Trinity Mirror (publishing the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Express*), which changed its name to Reach PLC in 2018. Newspapers in Britain are also well-known for their political opinions. They generally declare their preferred result at General Elections (Trelford 1999: v), with a majority of newspapers supporting the Conservative Party (Deacon *et al.* 2017: 6). The extent to which newspaper endorsements help political parties in elections was questioned following the 2017 General Election<sup>18</sup> (Waterson 2017), but endorsements of higher circulation newspapers have long been considered key to a party's victory in the UK. Although this study considers some newspaper articles which were written several months after the 2010 and 2015 General Elections, it does not directly focus on the extent to which UK newspapers influence elections. Nevertheless, as it is convention for newspapers generally to endorse political

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<sup>17</sup> Concentrated newspaper ownership is also prevalent in Australia where News Corp Australia's national daily titles control 58 per cent of the circulation (McNair *et al.* 2017: np).

<sup>18</sup> During the 2017 election campaign, the UK press was particularly hostile towards the Labour party leader Jeremy Corbyn with the headlines in the *Sun* newspaper such as 'Don't Chuck Britain in the Cor-Bin' (8 June). However, despite this hostility, the Labour Party still gained 40 per cent share of the vote and the election resulted in a hung parliament (Waterson 2017).

parties, this study investigates whether newspapers' party political affiliations (see table 2.1) influence the language they use when reporting the BBC licence fee.

**Party political affiliation of newspapers during UK General Elections 2010-2017**

<b><u>National Newspaper</u></b>	<b><u>2010 General Election endorsement<sup>19</sup></u></b>	<b><u>2015 General Election endorsement<sup>20</sup></u></b>	<b><u>2017 General Election endorsement<sup>21</sup></u></b>
Guardian	Liberal Democrat	Labour	Labour/Tactical vote against the Conservatives
Observer	Liberal Democrat	Labour	Labour/Tactical vote against the Conservatives
Times	Conservative	Liberal Democrat-Conservative Coalition	Conservative
Sunday Times	Conservative	Conservative	Conservative
Daily Telegraph	Conservative	Conservative	Conservative
Sunday Telegraph	Conservative	Conservative	Conservative
Financial Times	Conservative	Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition	Conservative
Daily Mail	Conservative	Conservative	Conservative
Mail on Sunday	Conservative	Conservative	Conservative
Daily Express	Conservative	United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)	Conservative
Sunday Express	Conservative	UKIP	Conservative
Independent	Liberal Democrat	Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition	n/a
i	n/a	Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition	No declaration
Independent on Sunday	No declaration	No declaration	n/a
Sun	Conservative	Conservative	Conservative
Sun on Sunday	N/A	Conservative	Conservative
News of the World	Conservative	N/A	N/A
Daily Mirror	Labour	Labour	Labour
Sunday Mirror	Labour	Labour	Labour
Daily Star	No declaration	No declaration	No declaration
Daily Star Sunday	No declaration	No declaration	No declaration
Sunday People	Not Conservative	Labour	Anti-Conservative

*Table 2.1: A list of UK national daily and Sunday newspapers' (n=22) party-political affiliation at the past three general elections.*

<sup>19</sup> Endorsement information from Scammell and Beckett (2010).

<sup>20</sup> Endorsement information from Deacon and Wring (2016).

<sup>21</sup> Endorsement information from Wring and Deacon (2019).

Generally, gaining the endorsement of newspapers controlled by Rupert Murdoch's News UK is considered essential to a political party achieving a General Election victory<sup>22</sup> (McNair 2004: 331). Murdoch is a prominent figure in the UK media landscape as his business interests included not just newspapers but a large portion of the UK pay-tv market. The subscription TV platform, Sky, was in 2015 (when some of the events analysed for this study took place) the biggest UK broadcaster in terms of revenue. Murdoch owned 39 per cent of Sky through his company 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fox (Media Reform Coalition 2015: 11) and attempted to take full ownership.<sup>23</sup> Murdoch has therefore, historically maintained a significant stake within the UK commercial TV market. However, although Sky has been the biggest UK broadcaster in terms of revenue, the reach of Sky as a news service is significantly lower than BBC channels, with 62 per cent of adults using BBC One for news, compared with 24 per cent for Sky News (Ofcom 2018a: 21). Members of the Murdoch family have been vocal in their criticism of the BBC's size, its funding and its imposition on commercial interests. For example, James Murdoch suggested that the licence fee provides the BBC with an unfair advantage compared with commercial companies (Murdoch 2009: 19). Furthermore, in an interview as early as 2000, James Murdoch described the licence fee as an 'evil taxation scheme' (Davies 2014: 225).

Many studies have focused on Murdoch, his family media empire and its impact upon both media and politics. For example, Murdoch's role in the phone hacking

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<sup>22</sup> Tony Blair sought to form a positive relationship with Murdoch when he became leader of the Labour Party in 1994 (McNair 2004: 331). Blair met with Murdoch in Australia in 1995 and, following this meeting, the *Sun* announced its support for the Labour Party in the 1997 general election. While it is unlikely that the support of this newspaper alone won the 1997 election for the Labour Party, 'it dominated the political news for days and got the Labour campaign off to a flying start' (McNair 2004: 331).

<sup>23</sup>In 2011, Murdoch launched a bid to take control of BskyB, the company which provides Sky services. This bid was blocked by Parliament following Murdoch-controlled newspapers involvement in the phone hacking scandal (Davies 2014: 251). Sky was bought by Comcast in 2018 (Media Reform Coalition 2019: 2)



scandal<sup>24</sup> was documented by former *Guardian* journalist Nick Davies (2014), while others have focussed upon the link between Murdoch's business interests and his political interests, both in the UK and across the world (McKnight 2003). McNair *et al.* (2017) have considered the role of Murdoch-controlled publications in Australia, discussing how News Corp Australia's titles dominate the media landscape and are critical of the public service broadcaster, Australia Broadcasting Company. This study is not concerned with an examination of Murdoch as an individual, or the motivations for his business interests. However, it is important to consider Murdoch's previous comments on the BBC and public service broadcasting more widely, as context which impacts public debates around the BBC's funding model.

This research considers, how one form of media (newspapers) reports on another, (the BBC), focussing specifically on newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee. Now that the wider context of UK newspapers has been explained this chapter discusses the literature on the BBC to provide background to the debates which could inform newspaper coverage of the events analysed.

## **Section Two: The BBC**

The British Broadcasting Company was formed in November 1922 (Crisell 2002: 18). On the recommendation of the Crawford Committee,<sup>25</sup> in 1927 the BBC became the British Broadcasting Corporation, a publicly-funded and quasi-autonomous organisation, established by a Royal Charter<sup>26</sup> (Crisell 2002: 28). Since the BBC's

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<sup>24</sup> The 2011 phone-hacking scandal revealed that journalists working for Murdoch-controlled News International (now News UK) had hacked the phones of numerous individuals in pursuit of stories, including that of murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler and relatives of deceased British soldiers (Mair 2013: 17).

<sup>25</sup> The Crawford Committee (1926) rejected the idea of the BBC being established as a state-run institution and established the BBC as a public service broadcaster (Barnett 2011: 23).

<sup>26</sup> It was in response to allegations of biased coverage of the 1926 General Strike that the British Broadcasting Company dissolved, and the British Broadcasting Corporation established, enshrining the principle of 'due impartiality' within its Royal Charter (Thomas and Hindman 2011: 573).

inception it has expanded its services as technology has developed. At the time of writing, within the UK,<sup>27</sup> the BBC has eight television channels, an online television channel (BBC Three), ten national radio stations, national TV and radio stations for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, 40 local radio stations and BBC Online.<sup>28</sup> These BBC services are used by 97% of adults weekly, who, on average consume BBC services for 18 hours per week (MTM 2015: 2). Statistics from the communications regulator, Ofcom, show that BBC as a news source currently has the highest audience reach amongst adults of all UK news sources at 81 per cent (Ofcom 2018a: 8). Furthermore, the television channel BBC One is the most popular news source across all platforms (Ofcom 2018a: 21). Levels of trust in the BBC as a source of news remain high, particularly in comparison with other sources, including newspapers. Ofcom statistics show that 73 per cent of people say BBC TV is 'trustworthy' (Ofcom 2018a: 90), compared with 53 per cent of people who trust the *Sun* and *Sun on Sunday* newspapers (Ofcom 2018a: 94).<sup>29</sup> As well as being trusted as a news source the BBC is generally respected as an institution. Despite numerous scandals which have dogged the BBC such as *Sachsgate*<sup>30</sup> (2007) and ongoing recent issues such as the gender pay gap,<sup>31</sup> the BBC still maintains a prominent position in British public life. The Corporation is described as 'the most important cultural institution in Britain' (Aitken 2013: x), 'the most powerful British institution of

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<sup>27</sup> Outside of the UK, BBC output includes the BBC World Service and commercial ventures such as BBC Worldwide and BBC World News (BBC 2018).

<sup>28</sup> BBC's flagship online services include BBC News, Sport, Weather, CBBC and CBeebies, iPlayer, BBC Sounds, and BBC Red Button (BBC 2019a).

<sup>29</sup> The example of the *Sun* is used here, given that it has, outside of the time period for analysis in this thesis, been used by the BBC to defend itself from criticism within the *Sun*. On November 2017 the *Sun*'s front page featured pictures of BBC staff on night shifts who appeared to be asleep at their desks with the headline 'Here is the Snooze.' The BBC Press Office @bbcpress posted a bar chart on Twitter showing how the BBC compared favourably with the *Sun* on trustworthiness. The bar chart was captioned "Even with our eyes closed, it's good to know the public trusts BBC News more than the Sun" (Ling 2017).

<sup>30</sup> In 2008, presenter Jonathan Ross and comedian Russell Brand, were heard on BBC Radio 2 leaving inappropriate voicemail messages for the actor Andrew Sachs (Higgins 2015: 168).

<sup>31</sup> A row over BBC pay was highlighted in 2018 when the BBC's China Editor, Carrie Gracie, stepped down from her job following a dispute over the disparity between her pay and that of male foreign editors employed by the Corporation (Chakelian 2019).

them all' (Higgins 2015: 1) and even part of the UK's 'national mythology' (Tunstall 2010: 145).

Given the reach and influence of the BBC, it is unsurprising that there is a wealth of literature on how it functions as an institution. This includes detailed academic histories of the BBC, charting its development (for example, Seaton 2015), ethnographic accounts of life inside the Corporation (Born 2005) and accounts based on numerous interviews from inside the BBC (Higgins 2015). There are many 'insider' accounts from various former Director Generals of the BBC (for example, Dyke 2005) and those who have worked for the Corporation in managerial capacities (e.g. Mosey 2015). Scholars have produced detailed revisions of the BBC's rich, fascinating and (at times) troubled history (e.g. Mills 2016). While this study does not attempt to provide an account of the BBC as an organisation, such historical accounts provide context for the analysis of newspaper articles. For example, Higgins identifies 'outspoken critiques' in the recent history of the BBC (Higgins 2015: 159) and this research identifies how these 'critiques' manifest themselves in newspaper coverage.

### **Public service broadcasting and commercial broadcasting**

There are many ways in which broadcasting is structured. These have been examined by authors such as Hallin and Mancini (2004). The main models of broadcasting discussed in this research are public service broadcasting (PSB) and commercial broadcasting because of their different funding streams. PSB can be funded in several ways: by a licence fee (like the BBC), directly through a government grant, general taxation, subscription by listeners/viewers and/or controlled by limited advertising (Rudin 2011:8). PSB is independent from the state and commercial interests, aiming to serve the public and assist with 'the smooth running of democracy' (Hendy 2013: 27). A commercial model of broadcasting aims to make a profit and is funded by advertising, sponsorship or a combination of the

two (Rudin 2011: 9). PSB lacks the profit motive of commercial media. Therefore, this study is concerned with how a PSB system is discussed within newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee and whether it is criticised as inferior to a commercial system. More broadly, the research considers political economy<sup>32</sup> (Thomas 2019) and how this theory influences newspaper reporting of the public service broadcaster.

PSB<sup>33</sup> exists in a number of 'developed democracies' (Nielsen and Linnebank 2010: 4), in many different forms. The UK has a public service broadcasting system, rather than one single public service broadcaster, with commercial public service broadcasters ITV, Channel 5 and Channel 4<sup>34</sup> existing alongside the BBC (Ramsey 2017: 140). Authors such as Ramsey (2017) have examined the business models of commercial PSBs. While commercial PSBs do not form a key focus of this research, this thesis builds on wider debates about media funding through an examination of whether the commercial considerations of newspapers as business manifest themselves in press reporting of the BBC licence fee.

This study considers how language used within newspapers constructs the BBC as a public service broadcaster, specifically in relation to the licence fee. Therefore, rather than provide a concrete definition of PSB and examine whether newspapers

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<sup>32</sup> The theory of political economy is used to refer to the influence of ownership and economic pressures on the content of news (Thomas 2019: 587). This research does not solely focus on ownership (it considers all UK national newspapers not just those which are controlled by a particular proprietor). However, the study examines whether newspapers' interests as businesses in a changing media landscape affects their coverage of the licence fee.

<sup>33</sup> PSB is increasingly referred to within the literature as 'public service media' (PSM) to account for public service broadcasters increasing their online offering (Jakubowicz 2010: 10). This thesis refers to the BBC as a public service broadcaster and public service broadcasting, because later analysis showed that the newspaper articles for analysis referred to PSB rather than PSM.

<sup>34</sup> Channel 4 is publicly owned but funded by advertising and sponsorship and does not receive money from the licence fee (although it partly owns Welsh channel S4C, which also receives some licence fee funding) (Ramsey 2017: 644).

include specific attributes within articles about the BBC, this research will consider how discourse is used around the BBC as a public service broadcaster. This thesis investigates whether and how newspapers evoke the different media models within their reporting of the licence fee and whether a commercial media model is naturalised at the expense of PSB. It is outside the scope of this research to build on the work of Freedman (2018), who evaluates the democratic value of public service broadcasting, or Cushion who assesses 'the relative merits of news media operating under different media systems' (Cushion 2012: 13). How language is used around PSB within reporting is the focus of this research, not assessing which system of broadcasting is superior.

### **The 'ideological challenge' to public service broadcasting**

Michael Tracey (2002) juxtaposes PSB with commercial systems, emphasising that 'In a public system, TV producers acquire money to make programmes. In a commercial system, they make programmes to acquire money' (Tracey 2002: 18). Tracey also states that commercial television poses an 'ideological challenge' to the BBC (Tracey 2002: 66). This 'ideological challenge' can be defined as a wider challenge to the values which have underpinned PSB since its inception in the 1920s. The ethic behind the creation of the BBC as a public service broadcaster was one of collectivism. This relates to an idea of public service which suggests treating people as 'individual citizens, not just as consumers to be aggregated and then targeted' (Hendy 2013: 129). Policies of increased state intervention in areas such as health and housing had arisen in the aftermath of the First and Second World Wars (O'Malley 2009: 13) and the idea of the BBC as a public service developed against this backdrop. Before the 1980s, successive reports since the founding of the BBC (including Sykes, Crawford, Beveridge, Pilkington and Annan) had developed the idea of broadcasting as a public service to inform, educate and

entertain in varying degrees (Curran and Seaton 2010: 343) and upheld the licence fee as a mechanism for funding PSB in the UK (Ramsey and Herzog 2018: 433).

The collectivist approach to PSB was questioned by neoliberalism, a school of thought which emphasises individual liberty, rather than the wider community and advocates a limited role for government. There are many contradictions within neoliberalism, and it has been described as an 'ideological parasite' which draws energy from various bodies and phenomena but cannot exist without a host (generally the state or government) which allows it to thrive (Peck 2013: 144). The meaning of neoliberalism has therefore changed over time, from a more 'laissez faire' economic doctrine, to advocating a strong government which intervenes to actively promote a free market economy. Under a neoliberal system, allowing the market to operate freely, without restriction from the state is considered paramount (Klein 2007: 51).

Neo-liberals view the market to be a much more effective than the state at responding to people's preferences, offering more opportunities for choice. In the UK, these neoliberal ideals pervaded in every area of policy including health and transport during the 1980s and, some scholars have argued, still endure within public discourse today (Fairclough 1995; 2000b). Neoliberal ideas alone did not influence a change in approach to the BBC, but the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 brought these ideas in from the margins to the centre (O'Malley 2009: 64). Her government was committed to 'rolling back' the state, allowing the market to have free reign in 'allocating economic, social and welfare goods' (Franklin 1997: 17). In the 1980s, the Conservative government repeatedly compared PSB unfavourably with consumer choice in a deregulated commercial system where the public would have programmes that responded to their desires due to commercial pressures

(Curran and Seaton 2010: 352). The Peacock Committee<sup>35</sup> was expected to abolish the licence fee. However, the final report, published in July 1986, rejected abolition of the licence fee and introducing funding by advertising but suggested that broadcasting in the UK should ‘move towards a system of consumer sovereignty’ (Mills 2016: 148).

O’Malley suggests that the ‘economic terminology’ from the 1980s influenced discussions of the BBC’s Charter Review in 2015, with a House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee report (published in February 2015) describing the licence fee as “a *public intervention* of close to £4bn” (O’Malley 2015: 295, emphasis added). This study builds on this identification of economically-charged language by O’Malley, through examining whether such terminology is present within newspaper reporting of the recent history of the BBC licence fee. The BBC is a public service organisation and this study therefore examines whether discourses within newspaper reporting suggest that the BBC should be judged by the values and structures of the market, rather than as a public service broadcaster.

While assessing Tracey’s conclusion that there is an ‘ideological challenge’ to public service broadcasting from commercial companies, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to make a judgement on whether Tracey is correct. However, it is important to consider whether newspapers, as commercial companies, use the BBC’s receipt of a compulsory licence fee as a way in which to undermine the public service broadcaster. Cushion has noted that there has been an ‘aggressive ideological attack’ on the funding of public service broadcasters (Cushion 2019a: 71) and specifically referenced how ‘commercial competitors, in particular right-wing

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<sup>35</sup> Alan Peacock, who chaired the committee was a neoliberal economist and a trustee of the right-wing think tank the Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA).

newspapers' launched a 'sustained attack' on the BBC's reporting of Brexit<sup>36</sup> (Cushion 2019a: 70). This study investigates how UK national newspapers perpetuate an 'ideological attack' on the BBC's funding system within their reporting, through an analysis of the discourses and themes present. The ways in which terms such as 'discourse' and 'ideology' are used are explained in more detail in chapter three.

This chapter has so far considered the BBC's role as a public service broadcaster, to provide context for the potential discursive constructions which may exist around the BBC within newspapers. Next, this chapter will discuss several key aspects of the BBC which are relevant to this study: the licence fee, universality and the impact of changes in technology.

### **Section Three: BBC Funding**

The BBC is partly funded by commercial activity through BBC Studios,<sup>37</sup> which generates income of around £1.2bn (BBC 2018a: 69). However, primarily the BBC is funded by a compulsory licence fee which, at the time of writing, stands at £154.50<sup>38</sup> per year and provides the BBC with around £3.8bn in revenue. The licence fee has funded the BBC since the 1920s when the Sykes Committee (1923) and the Crawford Committee (1926) allowed the BBC to become 'a public corporation funded by a licence fee levied on wireless owners' (Barnett and Curry 1994: 6). When the licence fee was established, it was not a foregone conclusion that this would be the method of funding the BBC. The Sykes Committee considered advertising but rejected this as it would disadvantage smaller firms who did not have

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<sup>36</sup> In June 2016, the UK held a referendum on its membership of the EU. 52 per cent voted for the UK to leave the European Union. At the time of writing (March 2020), negotiations about the terms under which the UK will leave (and debates about whether the UK should leave) are still ongoing.

<sup>37</sup> In November 2017, BBC Worldwide, the BBC's former commercial arm, merged with BBC Studios.

<sup>38</sup> Under the last Royal Charter, the licence fee is set to rise with inflation until at least 2022 (DCMS 2016: 6).



the means to buy excessive airtime (Barnett and Curry 1994: 6) and also because of fears that advertising would lower standards in programming (Crisell 2002: 22).

When the Crawford Committee outlined its recommendations for the existence of the British Broadcasting Corporation, 'organised on the basis of a monopolistic, non-profit system' the universal licence fee was 'at the heart of the structure' (Tracey 2002: 100). Whether and the extent to which newspapers report positive and negative arguments around the licence fee is examined in this thesis. These arguments are detailed in the next section of the chapter.

### **Arguments in favour of the licence fee**

The licence fee, or television licence, costs the same for all,<sup>39</sup> regardless of income or location, so that 'everyone, whether poor or rich is entitled to as much television as he wants without any special or extra payment' (Broadcasting Research Unit 1985: 14). In principle, the licence fee ensures good broadcasting, free from commercial intervention, is available for the whole nation without exception, essentially democratising access to broadcasting (Broadcasting Research Unit 1985: 12). The principle of universality, it is argued, ensures good quality programming because, as everyone pays the same, broadcasters are in competition for audiences, rather than in competition for profits (O'Malley 2009: 45). Director General of the BBC, Tony Hall, said:

Because the BBC is funded by the licence fee, its mission is universal.

Because everybody pays, it is cheaper for everyone. Because it is funded directly by the public, they hold us to high standards. Because the BBC's funding is independent that gives us creative freedom (BBC 2015: 5).

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<sup>39</sup> This does not include everyone aged 75 and over who are entitled to receive a free TV licence until 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020 and those who are severely sight impaired who receive a 50 per cent concession (TV licencing 2019).

Funding through the licence fee, for Curran and Seaton, means that the BBC 'does not discriminate on the grounds of low income or profitability' (Curran and Seaton 2010: 318). The licence fee means that the BBC serves the whole population equally because a means-tested fee where wealthier viewers contributed more might encourage the BBC to focus more on their needs and tastes (Broadcasting Research Unit 1985: 3). Guaranteed licence fee funding means that the BBC is free to produce programmes which could not be made or shown profitably by a commercial broadcaster. BBC programmes can therefore serve niche interests and communities which would not necessarily be considered profitable by advertisers (Broadcasting Research Unit 1985: 5).

Not relying on profit or other outside funding means that the BBC can experiment with innovative programmes and TV formats which may not attract high numbers of viewers initially but gather momentum. For example, reality show the *Great British Bake Off* took five years to be commissioned by the BBC and when it eventually aired in 2010, received mixed reviews. It went on to achieve record ratings and the BBC was eventually outbid by Channel 4 for broadcast rights to the programme (Chalaby 2016). *Bake Off* may not have achieved such success if it was initially aired on a commercial channel because 'In the cut-throat competition that is the private sector, risk taking is hard to find... Their advertisers and shareholders correctly expect immediate results. The BBC has none of these inhibitors' (Grade 2015: 9). Former Chairperson of the BBC, Rona Fairhead, wrote in 2015 that 'the existence of the BBC gives its competitors an incentive to compete on quality rather purely commercial criteria. This produces higher quality across the whole of the UK ecology' (Fairhead 2015: 12).

The licence fee, in theory, ensures that the BBC is independent both from commercial interests and from government. It is described as a 'resilient and sufficiently predictable' source of revenue for public service broadcasting (Barnett

and Curry 1994: 255). The government sets the level of the licence fee, which, according to Tait, allows the BBC to plan with 'certainty of income' (Tait 2015: 91). The licence fee does not make the BBC as vulnerable to political interference as a system of direct taxation (Barnett and Curry 1994: 255). Furthermore, the licence fee creates a relationship between the BBC and the public who pay it (Tait 2015: 91), rather than a relationship between the broadcaster and advertisers who wish to make a profit. However, Seaton argues:

The licence fee...made the BBC responsible to the *whole* British public, not just the bit of it with commercial clout that advertisers liked; not just the bits that were usually in power, or were the right age, or in the right place or with the views that everybody chased...This direct relationship with the public came at a cost: people did not like to pay more for it (Seaton 2015: 27).

As the licence fee creates a 'direct' relationship between the Corporation and the public, the BBC is criticised when it is perceived not to adequately represent the people who pay for it, with its broad appeal increasing the likelihood of this happening. The link that the licence fee creates between the BBC and the public who pay for it is arguably a burden for the BBC; as everybody pays, it must serve and adequately represent all licence fee payers. How language is used to create conflict between the BBC and the licence fee payers and the evocation of discourses around this within newspapers is assessed within this thesis.

### **The case against the licence fee**

The longevity of the BBC's licence fee has led to it being criticised as 'an accident of the 1920s which has survived too long' (Le Jaune 2016: 10). It was questioned by Thatcher's government as a 'regressive tax' (Higgins 2015: 166) as she argued that its universality and compulsory nature were the antithesis of choice (Deans 2014). Criticism of the licence fee from Conservative politicians continued with the former

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, John Whittingdale, comparing the licence fee to a 'poll tax' (Higgins 2015: 180). The licence fee is arguably unfair as 'it is not correlated to use – someone who uses the BBC very little pays as much as someone who uses it a lot' (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2015a: 49). The licence fee is also criticised as a 'hypothecated tax.' This means that the money is paid directly to the BBC (Barnett and Curry 1994: 255). However, a licence fee has to be bought to receive television signals, even if one does not intend to consume BBC channels and only watches commercial channels (Booth and Davies 2016: 3). Therefore 'there is no choice for those who want to opt-out of BBC services' (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2015a: 49).

It is a criminal offence in the UK to watch television without paying a TV licence. In 1991, the BBC assumed responsibility for the collection and enforcement of the licence fee from the Home Office (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2015a: 49). Martin Le Jaune, a former Director of Public Affairs at Sky argues that criminalising non-payment of the licence fee impacts upon the poorest in society because it is an 'injustice' that people who own a television face 'fines or prison' for not paying it, even if they never watch BBC TV (Le Jaune 2016: 2). In their report on the BBC in 2015, the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee supported decriminalisation of the licence fee. Yet, failure to pay for a TV licence when watching live television does not automatically result in a prison sentence. One can only be imprisoned for non-payment of fines related to the licence fee and the maximum penalty is a fine of no more than £1,000 (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2015b: 19). In 2015, an independent review of TV licence fee enforcement conducted under Lord Perry found that non-payment of the licence fee should remain a criminal offence under the present system of licence fee collection. It stated 'The current regime represents a broadly fair and proportionate response to the problem of licence fee evasion and provides good value for money

(both for licence fee payers and taxpayers)' but recommended considering a simpler system for licence fee collection in the Charter Review (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2015b: 6). This study considers how the rules surrounding licence fee enforcement are described in newspapers and whether the possibility of a prison sentence for non-payment is used to discredit the licence fee within newspaper reporting.

The guaranteed income from the licence fee is described by the Corporation's critics as providing the BBC with 'an enormous financial advantage over its media competitors (commercial television and radio, newspapers and magazines, and digital outlets)' (Le Jaune 2016: 3). It is further argued that the principle of the licence fee actually drives down the quality of BBC services as other organisations 'have to compete with one another and fight hard for every consumer penny' (Le Jaune 2016: 5) whereas 'the BBC lacks this incentive to improvement and innovation. Its BBC war-chest is deep and its replenishment guaranteed' (Le Jaune 2016: 6). The right-wing think tank, the Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA) argue that the licence fee has actually constrained the BBC's revenues, highlighting statistics which show that 'TV advertising spend is now about the same size as the total money collected by the licence fee' and 'both the total advertising spend and the licence fee money have been surpassed by Sky's subscription revenue' (Congdon 2016: 122). They argue that 'private sector businesses, led by Sky and ITV...have carved out strong market positions. But they have done so only after taking great commercial risks and defying the blatant government subsidy given to the original state-owned industry leader' (Congdon 2016: 124).

Within these commercially-inspired arguments against the licence fee, the BBC is judged by the standards of the market, considering the Corporation as another competitor rather than a public service broadcaster. The IEA's arguments have been refuted by Barwise and Picard whose research showed that 'cutting the BBC licence

fee would reduce consumer choice and value for money, as well as greatly damaging UK programme producers' (Barwise and Picard 2014). They found that, without the £1.6 billion portion of the BBC licence fee revenue allocated to television content, total UK TV industry revenue would be dramatically reduced because 'the BBC probably forces commercial channels to spend more on programmes in order to attract viewers' (Barwise and Picard 2014). Overall, the BBC undermines commercial profitability by ensuring that its competitors must invest in quality in order to compete. Commercial companies could most effectively make a profit by maximising audiences while minimising content spend, but the BBC model prevents this. Therefore, this research investigates how market-centric arguments against the licence fee are employed in newspapers to provide an analysis of the discursive nature of newspaper reporting.

### **Alternatives to the licence fee**

Several options for replacing the licence fee as a system of funding the BBC have been suggested in recent policy papers, by think tanks and academics. Alternatives to the licence fee were also considered in the Green Paper consultation on the future of the BBC. They include:

- **General taxation:** The BBC would be funded from tax, like other British public services such as the National Health Service (NHS). This was considered an inappropriate option for the BBC in the 2015 Charter Review Green Paper as it would reduce the BBC's independence from government and 'would have an impact on the government's overall objective of deficit reduction' (Department for Culture Media and Sport 2015a: 50).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> In other Western democracies, such as America, increasing government funding for public service media has also been criticised because it "inexorably leads to less critical journalism" (Powers 2018: 174).

- **Universal public funding model such as a household levy:** This was recommended as the best system for funding the BBC by the Culture Media and Sport Select Committee in their report *Future of the BBC*, published before the 2015 licence fee settlement and Charter Review (Ramsey and Herzog 2018: 433). In their article, Ramsey and Herzog outline the pros and cons of the implementation of the household levy to UK households. They conclude that, for the next charter period, 'it is quite likely that the UK will follow after some of the other European examples [such as Germany] in arriving at post-television licence fee arrangements that allow for substantial funding of PSM [Public Service Media]' (Ramsey and Herzog 2018: 439).
- **Advertising** – The IEA think tank suggest that part-funding the BBC through advertising would be desirable (Congdon 2016: 133). A move to funding by advertising was dismissed in the Green Paper on the future of the BBC as 'undesirable' as 'audiences may...be negatively affected by such a change, as advert-free content is a popular aspect of the BBC' (Department for Culture Media and Sport 2015a: 50). Advertising is also the least popular method of funding the BBC, according to polls (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2016: 110).
- **Subscription** – The Green Paper stated that there was potential for the BBC to move to a subscription-based funding model in the long term (Department for Culture Media and Sport 2015a: 50) while the White Paper considered whether 'elements of subscription' have a role within any future funding settlement (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2016: 7). The

broadcaster David Elstein<sup>41</sup> has been a particularly strong supporter of a BBC funded by subscription since the 1980s (Higgins 2015: 170). Elstein suggests that the quality of BBC services mean that the Corporation would easily be able to 'persuade' viewers to pay directly (Elstein 2015a: 99). However, there are difficulties with subscription as it 'challenges the idea of public service programming as a universal service as a matter of principle' (Gibbons 2017: 42). A subscription-based BBC would mean that there would be 'large welfare losses' as people would not necessarily subscribe to programmes or channels containing a wealth of information or entertainment (Davies 2004: 18), which could 'undermine the BBC as an institution' (Gibbons 2017: 44).

This research examines how these alternatives to the licence fee were mentioned within newspapers, showing how newspapers promote commercially-funded alternatives to the licence fee. Alternative proposals for funding the BBC consider that technological developments have reduced the rationale for the licence fee. It is, therefore, important to consider the impact of new technology on the principle of the licence fee in the next section of this chapter.

### **The licence fee and technology**

A key challenge facing public service broadcasting systems has been labelled 'rapid technological change' (Iosifidis 2010: 1). State intervention in broadcasting was necessary until the 1970s as scarcity of suitable wavelengths meant that the state needed to regulate their allocation and use (Scannell 1990: 20). However, the emergence of cable and satellite TV (Weddell and Luckham 2001: 12) and wider access to encryption technology paved the way for a variety of channels which could be bought and sold in the commercial marketplace (Davies 2004: 10). Rather than

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<sup>41</sup> David Elstein was head of programmes for Sky Television and Chief Executive of Channel 5 (Born 2005: 24).



the need for channels to be universally available, new technology meant that consumers could pay only for the channels which they wanted to watch, creating a market in broadcasting. Choice was made possible by technology and advocates of the free market saw this as an 'antidote to interventionist politics' (Weddell and Luckham 2001: 13). The proliferation of subscription and pay per view channels called the principles behind the licence fee into question. Crisell concluded 'if enough viewers resent paying the licence fee for channels they seldom watch because they are already having to pay for channels they do watch, it could mean the end of the BBC as a genuine public service broadcaster' (Crisell 2002: 292).

However, during the Twentieth and beginning of the Twenty First Century, technological developments in television did not mark the end of the licence fee. With government encouragement and support, the BBC took a leading role in driving the take up of digital television services<sup>42</sup> (Smith and Steemers 2007: 40). Greg Dyke, Director General of the BBC between 2000 and 2004 firmly established the BBC's digital television services in a way which did not assume that 'pay television and niche viewing were the future' (Born 2005: 486). Dyke believed that the BBC's role as a public service broadcaster was more important in the digital era because 'commercial media face increasing market fragmentation and audience segmentation' and so are less able to provide services (Born 2005: 489). Under Dyke, the BBC launched the Freeview platform in partnership with BskyB. This meant that viewers could pay a one-off charge to receive digital channels, without having to pay for subscription services (Born 2005: 488). Freeview provides, in digital form, the five analogue channels – BBC One, BBC Two, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 – in addition to their 'families of newer channels' (Harvey 2015: 300).

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<sup>42</sup> The switchover from analogue television (the original way television was received) to digital was completed in the UK in Autumn 2012, 'augmenting satellite and cable television provision in the United Kingdom' (Ramsey 2018: 154).

According to Dyke, Freeview meant that it would be difficult for any government to try and make the BBC a pay-television service as most of the Freeview boxes could not be adapted for pay-tv (Smith and Steemers 2007: 44). Overall, Freeview was a way for the BBC to preserve 'itself against neo-liberal inspired calls for [it] to be funded by subscription' (Smith and Steemers 2007: 44).

It has been almost two decades since the introduction of Freeview and the licence fee is still used to fund the BBC. However, technology has continued to offer more choice and challenges to the compulsory licence fee. Internet delivered subscription services, or streaming services, such as Netflix have become significant features in UK broadcasting (Harvey 2015: 300). Accessing television through the internet, on a device such as a smartphone or tablet, rather than on a traditional TV set is increasingly common. Nearly 88 per cent of UK adults are now online, and this is almost universal among those under 55 (96% of 45-54s, increasing to 98% of 16-24s) (Ofcom 2018b: 2). Television viewing habits have changed as 'Audiences, especially young people, are watching less scheduled television' which 'appears to be a permanent structural trend' (Ofcom 2018c: 7). Changing viewing habits arguably pose a threat to the licence fee model based on each household paying a licence for owning a television (Higgins 2015: xiv).

In 2007, the BBC created its own on-demand viewing service, BBC iPlayer, a platform to watch BBC programmes online. All BBC channels are available to watch on iPlayer, nearly all BBC programmes are available to watch on demand shortly after broadcast for up to 30 days, while some programmes are made exclusively for the BBC Online (BBC 2018c). iPlayer is described as 'hugely successful' (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2015a: 26) and an example of 'highly valued technological change' (Fairhead 2015: 15). By 2014, iPlayer had become the most used on-demand service provided by the major broadcasters and platforms in the UK (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2016: 10). However, until

September 2016, the 'iPlayer loophole' meant that people were able to watch BBC television through iPlayer, as long as it was not streamed live, without paying for a TV licence. On recommendation of the Perry Review and the White Paper, this was modernised so that those streaming BBC programmes through any device also had to pay the licence fee (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2016: 17).

Some commentators believe that BBC iPlayer is stifling competition. For Le Jaune, closing the iPlayer loophole meant that this placed the BBC in direct competition with other online streaming services such as Amazon Prime Video (Le Jaune 2016: 3). As a licence fee costs more per month than a subscription to other streaming services, he argued that this made iPlayer uncompetitive. Ramsey disagrees with the assertion that BBC iPlayer should be considered in terms of its competitiveness. Ramsey argues that 'the primary competition is between those companies offering subscription services, with the non-subscription but rather licence fee funded BBC iPlayer falling outside of this' (Ramsey 2018: 162). The Institute of Economic Affairs argue that because now, people can watch television on a tablet or smartphone without having to buy a television receiver, this 'drastically weakens' the argument for the licence fee, as it is 'impossible' to enforce (Booth and Davies 2016: 6). Furthermore, they argue that because organisations such as Netflix are moving towards 'the production side of the business' this will result in less original content being produced by the BBC, removing the argument that a licence fee is necessary to produce popular programming (Booth and Davies 2016: 8). Paul Dacre in his latest Society of Editors speech, also suggested that the future for the BBC licence fee was bleak because of streaming organisations, stating 'the BBC subsidariat will diminish in power as the streaming giants undermine the licence fee' (Dacre 2018). However, not all recent arguments around new technology are focussed on the removal of the licence fee. In August 2018, the Labour Party leader, Jeremy Corbyn, unveiled his party's plans for a 'digital licence fee' 'collected from tech giants and

Internet Service Providers' as a 'fairer and more effective way to fund the BBC' (Corbyn 2018).

The past 30 years has ushered in many technological developments in broadcasting. The BBC has so far managed to retain its licence fee until a mid-term review in 2021/22 (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2016: 16). However, a review of the literature has suggested that new technological developments often bring calls for the licence fee to be abolished. Therefore, this research analyses the debates around technology and examines how critics use these to push pre-determined ideological arguments about the licence fee.

### **The licence fee and independence**

Throughout its history, the BBC licence fee has been threatened by both Conservative and Labour governments.<sup>43</sup> The funding system has been criticised for failing to protect the BBC's independence from government. Though the BBC is supposedly independent, under its Royal Charter, its relationship is with government, not parliament. This means that if it requires more funding, the BBC must 'go cap in hand to whatever Secretary of State or Prime Minister is currently in office, and lives in fear of being saddled with a cabinet master who opposes its very existence' (Barnett and Curry 1994: 260). The precedent of the BBC needing to go to the government to increase its income was set in the 1970s (Seaton 2015:44) when the broadcaster no longer had a way to raise revenue. Until then, 'the BBC had been able to keep up with costs through growth in the total number of licences, first radio, then radio and black and white television, then black and white and colour licences' (Tracey 2002: 102). By the 1970s, however, the number of licences

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<sup>43</sup> Although examples given in this chapter are mostly drawn from Conservative governments, Labour governments have also criticised the licence fee. In the 1970s Prime Minister Harold Wilson saw the licence fee as a 'regressive tax' (Seaton 2015: 32) and Wilson's Labour government planned to 'abolish the licence fee by bringing the Corporation within general government expenditure' (Seaton 2015: 5).

required began to 'level off' as 'many who wanted a colour TV had bought one making future increases in the licence fee inevitable' (Seaton 2015:33). This, together with the rise in inflation following the 1973 oil crisis, meant that 'between 1976 and 1985 there were as many licence fee raises as in the entire previous history of the Corporation' (Seaton 2015: 33). It is therefore argued that the independence that the licence fee affords from government is exaggerated. The government in power sets the level of the licence fee and so this increases government influence over the BBC (Mills 2016: 25). There is a risk of the BBC becoming 'directly susceptible to political pressure' because of its 'reliance on the government of the day to sanction, tamper with and reduce their funding' (Lewis 2015a: 184). The BBC needs to ensure that the government of the day is willing to adequately fund it, which could impact on the way in which the BBC approaches relations with government. For Hughes, the licence fee has failed to protect the BBC's independence as 'even a cursory look at the history of the BBC reveals governments repeatedly and unashamedly prepared to wield control of the licence fee as a threat to secure their own objectives' (Hughes 2015: 130).

Mills argues that the BBC's autonomy from government is reduced during times of austerity, where the level of the licence fee is co-opted into government spending. This is relevant to the events analysed within this thesis (see chapter one). For example, the government's 2015 decision to pass their responsibility of funding free licence fees for over-75s to the Corporation was seen as 'drawing the BBC into [the government's] politics of austerity' (Mills 2016: 26). How newspapers use language when discussing government actions towards the BBC is assessed in this thesis, to consider the way in which government is criticised for its actions and how the BBC's independence is framed.

## **The licence fee and impartiality**

The first Director General of the BBC, John Reith, said that the best way to serve the public was to offer ‘a thoroughly non-partisan approach to reporting the world’ (Hendy 2013: 28). This is linked to the central idea of ‘impartiality.’ The BBC’s editorial guidelines specify that the broadcaster should ensure that ‘controversial subjects’ are handled ‘with due accuracy and impartiality’ (BBC 2019b: 190).

However, impartiality is a ‘tricky concept’ and is associated with terms such as bias, truth, objectivity and fairness (Hendy 2013: 28). All public service broadcasters in the UK are regulated by Ofcom for accuracy and impartiality. However, it is argued that the BBC receives more public scrutiny over its impartiality as, because of the licence fee, it is ‘highly politically exposed and subjected to far more scrutiny – particularly with respect to any perceived political bias – than commercial media organisations’ (Wahl-Jorgensen *et al.* 2016: 13).

The extent to which the BBC achieves impartiality in its news broadcasting is the subject of intense debate. This is particularly salient at the time of writing when commentators have strongly criticised the BBC’s reporting of the result of the 2016 referendum on the UK’s membership of the European Union and subsequent Brexit negotiations.<sup>44</sup> Gaber (2018), discusses the difficulty for broadcasters in predicting ‘the truth’ in an era of ‘extreme spin’ focusing on the EU referendum, the 2017 General Election and allegations of antisemitism in the Labour Party (Gaber 2018: 3).

Paradoxically, voices from the left and right of the political spectrum use impartiality to criticise the BBC (Rudin 2011: 108). Former employees of the BBC, in their memoirs, have lamented the BBC’s left-wing bias. For example, former head of

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<sup>44</sup> The journalist, Nick Cohen, accused the BBC of ‘journalistic cowardice’ around its reporting of Brexit, particularly on Radio 4’s *Today* programme. He asked ‘What is the point of the BBC if it cannot tackle issues of national importance? What is the point of a news organization that is frightened of journalism?’ (Cohen 2018).

television news, Roger Mosey, said that although BBC journalists are not biased in a party-political sense, there can be a default to a liberal 'groupthink' at the Corporation (Mosey 2015: 160). It has been argued that the general background of those who work for the BBC – Oxbridge-educated and London centric – leads to a mind-set that certain positions are 'good', and others are dangerous. For example, 2004 research by Minotaur Media Tracking showed that there was a consistent balance in favour of a 'Europhile perspective' (Rudin 2011: 110). Minotaur was set up by Lord Pearson, a Conservative who defected to UKIP and provided research for Eurosceptic think tanks such as Centre for Policy Studies (Mills 2016: 122).

Academic research has indicated that the Corporation is biased towards reporting 'elite' perspectives and 'establishment' values (Mills 2016:106). There is a great deal of quantitative and qualitative analysis in this area by the Glasgow and the Cardiff Media Schools (Philo *et al.* 2013; Lewis 2015b; Wahl-Jorgensen *et al.* 2013; Berry 2016; Lewis and Cushion 2019a). For example, Wahl-Jorgensen *et al.* found that 'elite, party-political voices' dominated 'flagship programming' on the BBC (Wahl-Jorgensen *et al.* 2016: 15). Overall, 'every reputable scholarly study suggests that the BBC's output has overwhelmingly reflected the interests and perspectives of powerful groups' (Mills 2016: 106). There are multiple ways in which the BBC is criticised for failing in its impartiality which fall beyond a simple left/right divide.<sup>45</sup> This research considers how the BBC's impartiality is discussed in newspapers in relation to the licence fee. It shows that the discussion of impartiality becomes embedded in a discourse which evokes conflict between an 'elitist' BBC and a 'hardworking' taxpayer.

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<sup>45</sup> Other Western democracies with public service media systems, such as France, have seen both the "radical left and the radical right" criticise political coverage within the mainstream media (or MSM) (Kuhn 2019: 78). The BBC has similarly been criticised as embedded within the mainstream media from both right-wing and left-wing alternative news sites (Robinson 2017).

## **The licence fee paradox**

According to Born (2005) many commentators have noted that there is a paradox surrounding the BBC licence fee. As the BBC is funded by everyone it has to demonstrate its popularity. One method of doing this is through a demonstration of high ratings and a diverse range of programming, some of which appeals to mass audiences. However, it is also within the BBC's remit to serve a wide audience, including minorities, and take risks (Born 2005: 54). The Corporation is essentially in a situation where it's 'damned if you do, damned if you don't' as it needs to justify the licence fee but when it does through popular programming, the BBC is accused of behaving in the manner of a commercial broadcaster. This is despite the fact that the BBC's earnings are not for profit but 'ploughed back into its public operations for audience benefit' (Born 2005: 55). The licence fee is often, therefore, used as a basis upon which to criticise the BBC. For Elstein, the licence fee offers 'perverse incentives to produce unoriginal programmes in the search of ratings to justify a universal levy' (Tait 2015: 91). Elstein argues that the principle of providing something for everyone with everyone paying the same is a "false goal...a 'fraudulent piece of rhetoric that existed in order to justify the licence fee'" (Elstein quoted in Higgins 2015: 171). Le Jaune also frames the BBC's possession of the licence fee negatively in relation to the licence fee paradox:

[T]he scope of the BBC and the licence fee are intertwined. Restrict the BBC's expansion and the licence fee becomes less defensible; take away the licence fee and the requirement for the BBC to offer something for everyone on every platform is ended (Le Jaune 2016: 3).

Overall, the licence fee paradox creates a line of vulnerability through which critics of the BBC can condemn it either for being too popular or not popular enough. How licence fee paradox is evoked in UK national newspapers is examined here. As,



within the literature, the licence fee is linked with the scope of the BBC, the next section of this chapter discusses scope in more detail.

#### **Section Four: The BBC's universality of appeal**

The BBC is a universal broadcaster, seeking 'to provide quality programmes for its audiences across all genres' (Goddard 2017a: 1091). The BBC aims to provide 'quality across the whole range of its programming, making 'popular programmes good' and 'good programmes popular' (Broadcasting Research Unit 1985: 3). Lord Reith's vision<sup>46</sup> at the inception of the BBC was put into practice by turning on 'different senses of universality' (Born 2005: 28) including the idea that the BBC should produce 'mixed programming' including entertainment, to 'attract a mass audience and be truly popular' (Born 2005: 29). Exactly who public service broadcasting should appeal to, and who the BBC should serve, has evolved throughout the Corporation's history. Reith believed in a 'high culture,' paternalist version of public service broadcasting which advocated that broadcasting should have a 'high moral tone,' high standards and educate, rather than simply entertain the public (Scannell 1990: 13). Reith's beliefs were in contrast to the attitude of Director General Ian Jacobs, who wanted to BBC to improve engagement with audiences in the 1950s, following the creation of the duopoly with ITV.<sup>47</sup> For Jacobs, public service broadcasting should provide the best possible programming 'in every field' which included 'light entertainment alongside the serious and informative' (Jacobs quoted in Tracey 2002: 75). Under Jacobs the launch of BBC 2 in 1964 gave viewers a choice within BBC television services (Crisell 2002: 118).

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<sup>46</sup> Reith's vision was for broadcasting to bring different sections of the population together, regardless of class or region (Born 2005: 28).

<sup>47</sup> 1955 saw the creation of commercial television in the UK with the ITV channel, although ITV still operated 'within a public service framework' (Goodwin 1998: 13). Commercial PSBs in the UK are regulated through the Communications Act 2003 to ensure they conform to public service principles such as 'the provision of a range of high-quality and diverse programming' (Ramsey 2017: 644).

The BBC continued to develop new services for UK audiences,<sup>48</sup> the development of which increased in pace with the advent of online services. A White Paper in 1994 'required the Corporation to expand into new media and to become more commercial' (Born 2005: 497). New BBC channels were developed such as BBC News 24 (now BBC News) and BBC3, aimed at 16 to 34-year olds (Ramsey 2018: 152), which now broadcasts online. The development of BBC Online services, existing across a range of websites and mobile apps further widened out the choices available to audiences from the BBC (Ramsey 2013: 870). Research has shown that a well-resourced BBC providing a wealth of services has led to a "race to the top" in standards of news and impartiality. For example, in the UK, the Sky News channel is American style in its format but has not become highly partisan like Fox News (Cushion 2019b: 29). Furthermore, Curran *et. al's* 2009 study of media systems has shown that people in countries with strong public service media systems (e.g. Finland and the UK) have better knowledge of public affairs than in countries without (e.g. America) (Cushion 2019b: 34). However, the BBC providing audiences with so many different services has led to criticism from commercial media providers who state that the BBC is 'abusing its privileged position and distorting the market in which it operates' (Born 2005: 497). How universality has manifested itself within the BBC today has therefore drawn criticism from companies which see the Corporation as a commercial competitor. This study investigates how suggestions that the BBC is a hindrance to the commercial market are reported in the UK national press. It shows that, through discourse, the interests of the commercial market are prioritised in newspaper coverage (research question two). The BBC's relationship with the commercial sector is examined in the section below.

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<sup>48</sup> While the BBC also provides services overseas (e.g. BBC World Service), the focus of this thesis is how UK services, consumed by the licence fee payer, are perceived by commercially-run UK national newspapers.

## **The BBC as a positive influence on the commercial market**

The BBC's role, at least in theory, is as a universal broadcaster which should 'serve us equally as both majorities and minorities' (Broadcasting Research Unit 1985: 3). According to Reith, the BBC should use 'the privilege brought by the income from the licence fee...to serve the thinly scattered few as well as the many' (Higgins 2015: 212). The BBC therefore aims to 'cater for all interests and tastes' (Broadcasting Research Unit 1985: 5), including minority groups. This is an example of public service broadcasting addressing 'market failure.' There is no guarantee that commercial broadcasters would provide representation for all audiences as they are driven by profit rather than public service principles. Whilst the market may be a viable method for measuring company profits, 'if an individual feels better off, better informed or educated this will never be captured in free market prices' (Davies 2004: 21). Seaton has shown that when BBC services are reduced, these are not always replaced by commercial media companies. Barnett and Seaton use the examples of BBC Jam,<sup>49</sup> 'a popular and widely used education service for youngsters', which was removed after complaints from educational publishers; and BBC Local, a £68m web-based local video service cut following objections from newspaper publishing groups (Barnett and Seaton 2010: 332). These services were cut in response to objections from commercial media providers, but commercial alternatives were not introduced.

Introducing the principles of the market into broadcasting creates monopolies because, in the broadcasting industry, there are high fixed costs and low variable costs. This means that companies investing in the broadcasting market are likely to be large, producing a monopoly which hinders competition because few companies are large enough to enter the market (Davies 2004: 22). Small independent

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<sup>49</sup> The closure BBC Jam, also known as BBC Digital Curriculum was analysed in detail by Michalis (2012).

production companies are often bought out by their larger counterparts which results in several large companies dominating programme making (Franklin 1997: 207). Monopolies also tend to over-charge for products, reducing value for money (Davies 2004: 22). For example, subscribers to Sky TV pay several hundred pounds per year when the BBC licence fee costs £154.50 each year. However, until early 2014, the BBC was paying nearly five million pounds to Sky for appearing on its platform, a deal struck by Mrs Thatcher with Rupert Murdoch (Toynbee 2012). This was not in the interests of audiences who were paying for public channels twice, once when they purchased a Sky package and again when paying for the licence fee.

Curran and Seaton argue that commercial competition in broadcasting does not respond to the desires of the audiences. If programmes are funded by advertising, then it is likely the wishes of the advertiser will be paramount in programme choice. Even the Peacock Committee, established by Mrs Thatcher to implement a commercial television market in the UK, concluded that a broadcasting system based on advertising finance was one in which 'channel owners do not sell programmes to audiences but audiences to advertisers' (Goodwin 1998: 81). Under a commercial system, a small number of corporate owners are concerned with profit, rather than innovation in programming (Curran and Seaton 2010: 353). Competing channels all want a share of the most lucrative audiences to sell to advertisers. This means that they are likely to show more of the same or similar programmes as, in a commercially driven system, broadcasters are not required to operate in the interests of minority groups (Curran and Seaton 2010: 352). Therefore, this study examines how newspaper reporting considers the failures of commercial systems in providing UK broadcasting. It shows that the failings of a market driven system are rarely highlighted in newspaper coverage and criticism instead focuses on the publicly funded BBC.

## **The BBC as secondary to the commercial market**

Before the publication of the 2015 Green Paper, Rona Fairhead, former Chair of the BBC Trust, wrote:

[T]here remains the enduring question of whether it [the BBC] should be a universal service. Some argue that the BBC should address only areas of market failure with a schedule consisting of news and current affairs, children's, science, the arts, religion...a BBC limited to areas of market failure would benefit principally the commercial interests of its competitors, so it is hardly surprising that some of them find this prospect attractive (Fairhead 2015: 14).

The 'market failure' discussed by Fairhead has negative connotations. When Davis discusses how 'the BBC is the best way in addressing market failure' (Davis 2004: 29), this suggests that the Corporation takes a proactive role in ensuring that there is a wide provision of programming. This is a more positive conception of the BBC's role, suggesting that there are natural gaps for the BBC to fill which would not be provided by the commercial market, rather than placing limitations on the BBC's provision. In contrast, Fairhead's description of a BBC 'limited to areas of market failure' suggests that the BBC plays second fiddle to the demands of the commercial market, relegated to areas which companies deem unprofitable. The belief that the BBC should be 'limited' to market failure suggests a deregulated commercial system should be promoted over a collectivist PSB orientated system.

Even though the BBC does not compete for profits in the same way as commercial companies, the Corporation has been criticised for its dominance in the UK media landscape.<sup>50</sup> Commercially owned media companies 'understandably resent' the

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<sup>50</sup> Similarly, the Italian public broadcaster, RAI, is often portrayed as a 'mammoth organisation' which is 'ultimately failing to fulfil its public service remit in key areas such as

BBC receiving public money through the licence fee (Barnett and Seaton 2010: 332) and are concerned that the BBC uses this public money to make programmes which could be commercially profitable. If the public chooses to watch a programme on the BBC rather than a similar programme on a commercial channel, this removes the channel's viewers and, subsequently, the ability to attract advertisers, which is likely to impact on the commercial channel's profits. This is not the case with the BBC, as the amount of money the Corporation receives from the licence fee is not dependent on viewing figures. The BBC therefore has been criticised for making programmes which would be profitable for commercial channels. A former Director of Public Affairs at Sky wrote, 'The BBC is a persistent me-too broadcaster with a serial record of imitation...too often a parasite on others' ideas' (Le Jaune quoted in Higgins 2015: 161). Le Jaune also accuses the BBC of 'mission creep' on to the commercial market and 'always looking for areas into which to expand' (Le Jaune 2016: 4). This presumes that the role of the BBC is not to 'tread on the toes' of commercial media and disregards its role as a universal broadcaster, assuming that the concerns of commercial media should be paramount in broadcasting. This study shows how such presumptions about the commercial market are naturalised in newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee.

### **The Green Paper, White Paper and the market**

According to Michalis, 'PSM [Public Service Media] are fundamentally defined with reference to their market impact' (Michalis 2012: 955). The language used in the 2015 Green Paper supported this view, suggesting that 'commercial competition' and 'the market' need to be of primary consideration for the future of the BBC. The

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the provision of distinctive and innovative TV programmes' (D'Arma 2019: 112). The Italian method of collecting the licence fee differs from the UK (in Italy it is connected to the electricity bill) (D'Arma 2019: 114). However, it is notable that criticising the publicly funded broadcaster for its size is present across both the UK and Italian media systems. Therefore, this thesis will examine whether newspapers portray the BBC as a 'mammoth' within reporting of the licence fee.

following questions in the Green Paper suggested that the commercial market was paramount:

**Question 4:** Is the expansion of the BBC's services justified in the context of increased choice for audiences? Is the BBC crowding out commercial competition and, if so, is this justified?

**Question 5:** Where does the evidence suggest the BBC has a positive or negative wider impact on the market? (Department for Culture Media and Sport 2015a: 11).

Furthermore, the idea of 'distinctiveness' of the BBC's output was a key theme of the Green Paper. For example, Question Nine read 'Is the BBC's content sufficiently high quality and distinctive from that of other broadcasters? What reforms could improve it?' (Department for Culture Media and Sport 2015a: 11). Furthermore, the Green Paper asked whether the BBC 'uses its broad purposes to act in too commercial a manner, chasing ratings rather than delivering distinctive, quality programming that other providers would not' (Department for Culture Media and Sport 2015a: 2). The government focus on 'distinctiveness' was carried forward to the 2016 White Paper which recommended that the BBC should incentivise 'more distinctive output that informs, educates and entertains' (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2016: 6). Distinctiveness at the BBC could suggest that the Corporation should only make programmes which commercial providers would not (Goddard 2017a: 1093). Distinctiveness is the antithesis of the BBC as a universal broadcaster and positions the BBC as limited to addressing market failure. This focus on distinctiveness in both the Green Paper and the White Paper was viewed as problematic by Goddard who argued that distinctiveness was a 'concealed threat to the notion of the BBC as a universal broadcaster' (Goddard 2017a: 1091) which could be used by the BBC's critics 'as a tool for condemning and limiting the BBC,

especially when it develops programming which gains mass audience approval' (Goddard 2017a: 1097). Distinctiveness was an underlying theme of the Green Paper and White Paper, but the suggestion that the BBC should not provide popular programmes produced by commercial broadcasters was not new. According to Born, David Elstein, who had 'masterminded BSkyB's aggressive strategy of buying up football rights' suggested that the BBC should 'stop resisting the inevitable: it should give up its futile attempts to maintain a presence of popular, national sports on free-to-air-television' (Born 2005: 25). For Born, this was someone closely associated with Sky suggesting that 'the BBC should roll over and die as a popular broadcaster' because 'It can simply no longer compete with pay television' (Born 2005: 25).

Commentators have argued that the concept of distinctiveness has been 'weaponised' by commercial programme providers to criticise popular BBC programming. According to Braman, the focus on distinctiveness in the White Paper was:

[L]ikely to expose the BBC to a dangerous and ironic double-bind where, increasingly, the need to promote its value to the public while sustaining the breadth of public service that legitimises the universality of its financing will become harder to sustain (Braman 2016).

Academics have suggested that the debates about the scale and scope of the BBC within the Green Paper and White Paper focused upon the idea that the BBC should consider its impact on the commercial media landscape in the UK. This commercial focus was questioned by academics such as Des Freedman who asked:

Why should we measure the BBC simply in terms of its wider impact on the marketplace? Do we judge the NHS on the basis of whether it makes life



difficult for Bupa<sup>51</sup> or do we welcome its status as an institution that treats everyone irrespective of background or income? (Freedman 2015).

Comparing the BBC and the free at the point of use National Health Service (NHS) in the UK, underlines how the BBC can be perceived as a public service rather than complementary to commercial providers. This comparison has been made by Alan Rusbridger, former editor of the *Guardian*, who wrote ‘In the UK, we treasure a public health service – but not to the point of financing it sufficiently. We trust a public service broadcaster above all private news providers – but regularly revile it’ (Rusbridger 2018b). This study is concerned with how newspaper discourses frame the licence fee and how they seek to prioritise the commercial market in which the BBC competes. It examines how the BBC is compared with other publicly funded services, such as the NHS, within newspaper coverage and how this invokes wider discourses surrounding the licence fee. Many of the same arguments around whether the BBC should be a universal broadcaster or should seek to address ‘market failure’ in broadcasting are also applied to the BBC’s online services, which will be focussed upon in the next section of this chapter.

### **Section Five: The changing media landscape**

Debates surrounding the impact of the BBC on commercial media need to be considered within the context of substantial technological changes over several decades. Advances in technology have affected the way in which newspapers are consumed and funded. These changes have led to traditional newspaper business models being threatened, while the publicly funded BBC has retained a level of income from the licence fee. These changes to the media landscape are not solely a

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<sup>51</sup> Bupa is an international private healthcare provider which was founded in the UK.

UK phenomenon. Commenting on public support for the media in five countries across Europe and the United States of America, Nielsen and Linnebank said:

Both newspapers and free to air broadcasters, the two industries that have historically employed most journalists and generated and disseminated the most news, have seen their revenues and sometimes their reach tumble even as new entrants around have grown around powerful search engines and expensive social networking sites that were scarcely imaginable ten years ago (Nielsen and Linnebank 2011: 6).

Overall, this research focuses on whether UK national newspapers criticise the BBC for its receipt of a compulsory licence fee, in the context of how media consumption has changed. Therefore, it is beyond the scope of this study to investigate the extent to which 'powerful search engines and expensive social networking sites' have impacted upon media worldwide. Nor is there scope to examine whether technological changes have had an equal effect on public service broadcasters and newspapers. For the purposes of this study, it is assumed that the BBC's receipt of a compulsory licence fee, coupled with the growth and popularity of BBC online, has meant that the UK public service broadcaster has been able respond to technological changes more effectively than newspapers. The next section of this chapter firstly discusses the decline in newspaper revenue within the last decade. Then it investigates the BBC's online presence, including the extent to which this has impacted on newspapers will then be discussed.

### **UK newspapers: scrambling to adapt to a digital revolution?**

Over the past 20 years, the way in which news is consumed has changed dramatically. Research by the UK communications regulator, Ofcom, stated, 'Gone are the days when the majority of people bought a paper in the morning, watched the TV news in the evening, and had little or no exposure to news in between'

(Ofcom 2018d: 3). Although television is still the most used source for news 'nowadays,' this is followed by the internet (Ofcom 2018a: 2). Jim Waterson, the former Political Editor of *Buzzfeed* and now Media Editor at the *Guardian*, described the internet as a 'uniquely destructive force' to traditional news cycles because:

Ten years ago, sites such as the *Guardian* would often just put the daily newspaper online, if people checked the news online they'd be doing so at a desktop computer on a lunch break. Really, people didn't engage...Now, Westminster is people checking their smartphones, a story will last about three hours if you're lucky (Speakers Lecture, House of Commons, Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2017).

Over the past decade, there has been much discussion about whether the internet means print newspapers will cease to exist, or whether they can adapt to the 'exciting' opportunities offered by technology (Cole and Harcup 2010: 9). The explosion in the use of the internet has meant that, to remain viable businesses, newspapers have needed to develop and maintain a significant online presence to adapt to the 'digital age' and produce 'content' rather than just 'news and information' (Cole and Harcup 2010: 6). The rise of news available through the internet and social media has challenged the traditional business models of newspapers. Newspaper owners have had to find new ways of profiting from news online. The BBC, by contrast, is able to provide its BBC News website and app to people for free because it is not reliant on profits for its funding stream. This research therefore investigates how newspapers cover the BBC licence fee and newspapers' response to the freely-available, licence fee funded, BBC News website (and other online services). It outlines how newspapers present the licence fee as a threat to their own online presence.

Digital audiences of newspapers are now larger than the print audiences. 64% of people in the UK now use the internet to consume news, in contrast with just 40% of people obtaining news from newspapers (Ofcom 2018a: 2). As shown in Figure 2.1, across the events analysed within this study, newspaper print circulations declined significantly between October 2010 (the first licence fee settlement under the Coalition government) and July 2015 (the second licence fee settlement and the Green Paper). On average, across the newspapers analysed, circulation declined by 32 per cent between 2010 and 2015 (Audit Bureau of Circulation 2010; 2015). Declining print circulations have impacted upon the profits of newspaper companies as 81% of news media organisations' profit continues to come from print readership, with just 12% from digital (Deloitte 2016: 8). The News Media Association states that the total news media industry's revenue in 2015 was approximately half its 2003/04 level because of 'the shift of revenue to online media, the decrease in print circulation and the emergence of online competitors' (Deloitte 2016: 8).

## Decrease in UK national newspaper circulation between 2010 and 2015<sup>52</sup>

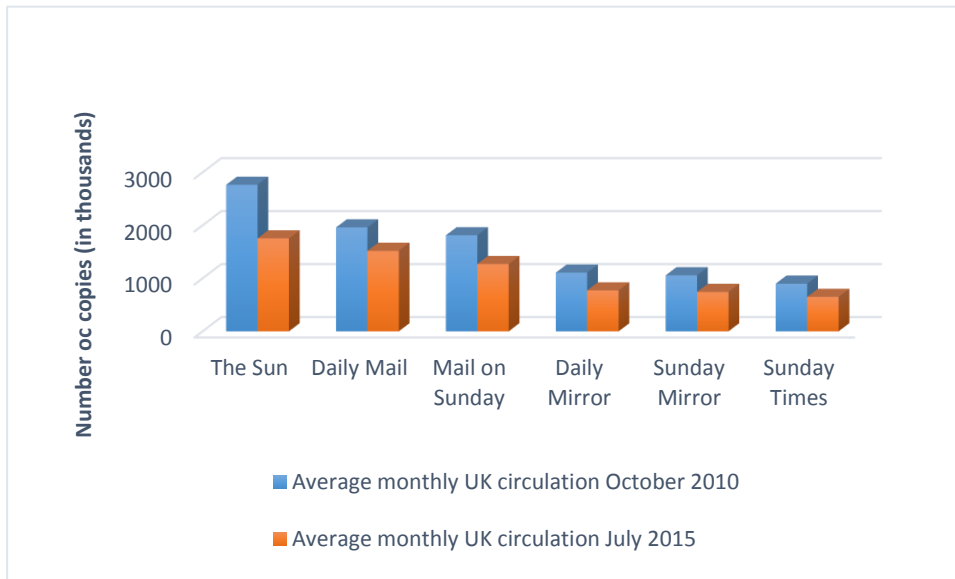


Figure 2.1: UK national newspapers with the greatest decrease in print circulation between 2010 and 2015 (n=6). These were the Sun (decrease in circulation = 1,011,027), the Daily Mail (442,229), the Mail on Sunday (541,547), the Daily Mirror (334,786), the Sunday Mirror (313,013) and the Sunday Times (249,446). Total decrease in circulation across the newspapers between 2010 and 2015 = 2,892,448 copies.

The emergence of online internet ‘giants’ has revolutionised the way in which people currently consume news. Nowadays, for people who access news online, their primary platform for access is social media through largely unregulated providers such as Facebook (Ofcom 2018b: 3). However, the internet and social media have not just revolutionised the way in which people consume news, but how newspapers are financed. Traditionally, newspapers were primarily funded by advertising (including through ‘classified’ adverts) and cover price (Cole and Harcup 2010: 90). However, the emergence of companies such as Facebook (opened up to general users in 2006) and Google (2002) caused the steady decline of traditional newspaper advertising. According to Rusbridger, Facebook and Google offered advertisers ‘the means to pitch to potential customers on an unprecedented scale and with unprecedented precision’ which ‘all but destroyed newspapers growing

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<sup>52</sup> Figures taken from Audit Bureau of Circulation 2010; 2015).

revenue from online advertising' (Wilby 2018). This has been echoed by *Guardian* Editor, Katherine Viner, who wrote in 2017:

The transition from print to digital did not initially change the basic business model for many news organisations – that is, selling advertisements to fund the journalism delivered to readers. For a time, it seemed that the potentially vast scale of an online audience might compensate for the decline in print readers and advertisers. But this business model is currently collapsing, as Facebook and Google swallow digital advertising. (Viner 2017).

Nevertheless, although print newspapers in the UK are experiencing reduced readership and revenue, this is not as bleak as earlier prognoses of newspapers' fortunes. In 2008, Enders Analysis<sup>53</sup> predicted that seven national newspapers would close by 2014 (Rusbridger 2018a: 166). In actuality, only the print editions of the *Independent* and *Independent on Sunday* have discontinued (Martinson 2016a). Despite facing commercial and technological challenges, newspapers 'struggle on' using funding models such as paywalls (Wilby 2018). This research considers how, within coverage of the BBC licence fee, newspapers emphasise their struggles in a digital age while the BBC has remained in receipt of a compulsory licence fee which has allowed it to expand online.

### **BBC Online – treading on the toes of newspapers?**

In the mid-1990s the then BBC Director General, John Birt, spoke of creating the 'third great arm' of the BBC – online provision of public service broadcasting (Brevini 2013: 118). BBC Online began in November 1997 with the launch of the BBC News website, which built upon the BBC's online coverage of the May 1997 General Election. The BBC's general website launched soon after (Oliver & Ohlbaum

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<sup>53</sup> Enders Analysis describes itself as a 'subscription research service covering the media, entertainment, mobile and fixed telecommunications industries in Europe' (Enders Analysis 2018).

Associates 2016: 149). In the late 1990s, Birt lobbied for an increased licence fee to fund digital expansion of the BBC (Born 2005: 468). Only a fraction of the licence fee is spent on BBC Online. In 2017/18 just 91 pence of the £12.25 per month licence fee for each household was spent on online services (BBC 2018a: 69).

As the numbers using the BBC's online services grew in the late 1990s (Brevini 2013: 119), commentators frequently discussed the so-called 'market impact' of BBC Online. Many commercial media operators 'claimed that BBC Online was expanding too much and that its activities comprised the production of services that had not been foreseen at the time of its launch and approval' (Brevini 2013: 120). The Graf report (2004), ahead of the 2006 Charter Review considered the market impact of BBC Online (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2004: 3). It concluded that the BBC should 'redefine the remit and objectives for its online service...increase distinctiveness; and introduce a deliberate, precautionary approach to investment' (House of Commons 2011: 32). The House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee report on the BBC licence fee settlement in 2010, said that the BBC's online presence was 'an area where the BBC has allowed itself, for too long, to depart quite substantially from its public mission' (House of Commons 2011: 32). Following the 2010 licence fee settlement (see chapter one for more information), the Chair of the BBC Trust, Michael Lyons, wrote a letter to the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, aiming to address concerns about the 'scale and scope' of the BBC. These included a proposal to reduce the budget of BBC Online by 25 per cent (House of Commons 2011: 11). Concerns have therefore been raised in parliament and later, in the 2015 Green Paper, by government about the impact of the BBC's online activity. This study considers how these concerns manifest themselves in newspaper reporting.

Assessing the 'market impact' of the BBC's online presence is now a regular occurrence around the renewal of the Royal Charter. The 2015 Green Paper consultation, under a section entitled 'market impacts' stated:

The BBC has a variety of impacts on online markets. For example, the popularity of BBC News in the UK (BBC News website had an average 27 million UK weekly browsers in early 2015, and more than 65 million worldwide) has led to suggestions that the scale of BBC's online offer is *impeding the ability of other UK news outlets to develop profitable business models*, such as paywalls and subscriptions, in existing and new markets (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2015a: 25, emphasis added).

Here, the government highlights suggestions that BBC online is 'impeding' the ability of commercial news outlets to make a profit. Spending on online services was also detailed in the Green Paper which stated that 'BBC Online accounts for about 5 per cent of the BBC's overall content budget, amounting to £125 million on a variety of online services' (Department for Culture Media and Sport 2015a: 36). The discussion of how the impact of BBC Online on 'other UK news outlets' is interpreted by newspapers is focussed on within this thesis. Analysis shows how BBC online is criticised within newspaper coverage for impeding the commercial sector.

The popularity of the BBC website is increasingly evident amongst those who consume news online. Ofcom analysis of news consumption in the UK found more than two fifths (44%) of adults claim to consume news via social media, and the BBC was the most commonly followed news organisation across all social media platforms in 2018 (Ofcom 2018a: 46). Two thirds of people (63%), claim to use the BBC website or app for news. This is many more people than the 17% who claim to use the most popular online platforms from newspapers, the *Guardian* and the *Daily*



*Mail* websites or apps (Ofcom 2018a: 64).<sup>54</sup> The BBC's online popularity has resulted in commentators questioning whether the Corporation's website is a specific hindrance to the functioning of newspapers online. The News Media Association claims:

This expansion of online news content increasingly brings the BBC into direct competition with what would traditionally have been considered the 'print' media sector, now largely online – an expanding editorial scope is eroding traditional points of differentiation between the commercial news sector and the BBC's output (Oliver & Ohlbaum Associates 2015: 5).

Even BBC broadcasters have highlighted the BBC's online presence as an issue, with Jeremy Paxman stating:

'There's no argument that the BBC distorts the marketplace in online [news]. Hugely distorts the marketplace. And one understands, of course, that the *Mail* and the Murdoch Empire dislike a commercial rival which they are obliged to compete with on unfair terms' (Paxman quoted in Higgins 2015: 160).

Ben Wiseman, Chief Press Officer at the BBC, has challenged the idea that the BBC website specifically seeks to overlap the content of other media providers:

For the BBC, obviously the website is a really important part of what we do and there are restrictions on what we do. We don't offer the same kind of content in terms of comment pieces and that kind of thing that people often go to newspapers for. There's lots of news online, especially something like

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<sup>54</sup> Ofcom statistics covering the time in which most events for analysis took place also showed that a significant proportion of online news users (56 per cent) said they used the BBC website or app (Ofcom 2016: 34). This is many more than those who used the *Guardian* (9 per cent) and the *Daily Mail* (10 per cent) websites (Ofcom 2016: 38).

specialist news that the BBC doesn't offer, so maybe you're interested in trains or whatever, it may be there's a train publication online that can serve you far better than the BBC can. Equally, publications like *Vice* and people like that who do really interesting journalism, but in a very different style to the BBC (interview with Wiseman, Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2018).

The BBC website has been particularly criticised is for its impact on local newspapers in the UK. For example, the 2015 Green Paper stated that 'the BBC draws on content' sourced by local news organisations 'without giving appropriate credit' (Department for Culture Media and Sport 2015a: 42). Between 2005 and 2018 more than 200 local papers had closed, and the number of regional journalists halved to around 6,500 (Hutton 2018). The 2016 White Paper on the BBC's Royal Charter cited the internet as the main cause of newspaper decline, stating 'while many local news providers are making great strides in transitioning their audiences online, the monetisation of this move remains challenging' (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2016: 73). The News Media Association specifically criticised the BBC's website for damaging the local press sector:

The BBC News website has had a profound impact on the digital strategies of UK news media publishers who are forced to compete with a state-funded provider of news and information which is free to consumers at the point of delivery. At a local level, BBC local websites have all too often piggybacked on the work of independent news providers without properly attributing their source (News Media Association 2018b).

Responding to this criticism of unfair competition, as suggested in the White Paper (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2016: 15) the BBC invested eight million pounds to fund 150 new journalism jobs through the Local Democracy Reporting

Service,<sup>55</sup> together with ‘a facility allowing local news providers access to local BBC material’ (News Media Association 2018b). Commenting on the scheme, however, former Culture Secretary, John Whittingdale said:

[T]his money from the BBC is not going to save the local press... Even though local media were critical of the BBC I never believed that the difficulties faced by the local media were created by the BBC. The BBC didn’t help, but it was never really the cause (Speakers’ Lecture, House of Commons, Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2017).

Whittingdale, who was called a particularly vocal critic of the BBC by Higgins (2015: 180), does not consider the BBC solely responsible for the decline of local newspapers. Whittingdale described how changes in technology and companies such as Facebook and Google exacerbated ‘the economic changes that are facing traditional media.’ The reduction in local newspapers in the UK can be largely attributed to the decline in print advertising revenues (Deloitte 2016: 8). Using Johnston Press as a case study, former editor of the *Leicester Mercury* and *Derby Telegraph*, Keith Perch, described how ‘reliance on advertising... was to prove catastrophic for local newspapers when the internet really took off in the early 2000s’ (Ponsford 2017). Almost half of advertising revenues for Johnston Press came from classified advertising.<sup>56</sup> However, ‘as use of the internet grew, it became obvious classified advertising worked better online where it was fully searchable, always available and, relatively, cheap or free.’ This resulted in huge falls in revenue

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<sup>55</sup> In 2018 the Cairncross Review into the newspaper industry was launched by the Prime Minister. It warned ‘the closure of hundreds of regional papers is fuelling fake news and is ‘dangerous for democracy’’ (Hutton 2018). The review recommended the extension of the BBC’s Local Democracy Reporting Service (DCMS 2019: 11).

<sup>56</sup> This included property advertising, which was swallowed up by websites such as RightMove from 2008 onwards (Ponsford 2017).

for local newspapers, which led to cost cutting exercises and eventual reduction in the number of newspaper titles (Ponsford 2017).

Therefore, while the BBC's online services have impacted on local newspapers' provision, the Corporation cannot be solely blamed for their decline. The focus of this study is national, rather than local newspapers. However, the extent to which national newspapers criticise the BBC for the decline of local newspapers is of interest. The closure of so many local newspapers, and the associated impact on local democracy, because of a slump in advertising funding arguably highlights the flaws of an advertising funding model in comparison to public funding models such as the licence fee. Overall, this study assesses how newspaper reporting advocates that the BBC's online provision is overlapping with newspapers. Specifically, the thesis focusses on the extent to which newspapers perceive the licence fee as responsible for the BBC's expansion into online areas.

This chapter has so far examined debates within the existing literature which are relevant to either the current UK newspaper landscape or the BBC. The remainder of the chapter discusses the literature which specifically considers how newspapers report on the BBC and outlines how this study builds upon current research.

### **Section Six: How the BBC is reported in newspapers**

Academic studies about journalism from the BBC or newspapers are generally focussed on either newspaper or BBC reporting practices, rather than considering how one form of media (newspapers) reports on another (the BBC). There are some studies of the way in which newspapers have covered the BBC, focussing on specific examples of the broadcaster's reporting. For example, Tumber (2012: 14) found evidence of hostile news coverage towards the BBC in the *Daily Mail* because of the Corporation's coverage of the Leveson Inquiry. Thomas and Hindman (2011) discussed newspaper reaction to the BBC's decision not to air a 2009 appeal by the

Disasters Emergency Committee to raise money for refugees in the Gaza region.<sup>57</sup>

The authors found six prominent themes within newspaper discourse about the Gaza issue (e.g. suggesting that the Corporation's decision violated the principles of public service broadcasting). The themes present allowed the authors to conclude that 'the newspaper discourse surrounding this decision constructs an image of an organization that is woefully inadequate at performing its public service mission' and indicates the 'fragility of the Corporation's role in British society' (Thomas and Hindman 2011: 583). Although their study was not directly focused upon the licence fee, within their conclusions, Thomas and Hindman situate their findings against a backdrop of critical comments towards the BBC and its licence fee from James Murdoch (see introduction). They conclude that:

[T]he perspective that the 'Beeb' has an unfair advantage over its competitors due to its public funding continues to gain traction, with newspapers and commentators using the opportunities afforded them by ethical lapses in the BBC's decision-making to weaken the public broadcasting model and advocate a move toward a free-market system...our findings indicate that the wolves of the free market are at the BBC's door and are howling louder than ever (Thomas and Hindman 2011: 584).

Like Thomas and Hindman, this study uncovers themes within the newspaper coverage of the BBC and draws conclusions about the extent to which these themes promote a market orientated broadcasting system. However, rather than focus upon one particular action or so-called 'ethical lapse' by the BBC (such as the decision not to broadcast a particular programme), this study considers newspaper reporting on four government-initiated events in the recent history of the BBC licence fee (see

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<sup>57</sup> This decision by the BBC is discussed by Engelbert and McCurdy (2011) in relation to the Corporation's commitments to impartiality.

chapter one). Given that a wider corpus of articles is analysed than by Thomas and Hindman, this study identifies particular discourses which are commonly evoked within newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee, in addition to themes within and surrounding these discourses.

During events analysed for this study, particularly the Green Paper and the White Paper on the future of the BBC, there were timely comment pieces written by academics about the themes within the newspaper coverage of these events. Commentators suggested that the Murdochs consider the BBC 'a semi-socialist entity that affronted their view of how the free market was best placed to deliver what they regarded as independent news' (Rusbridger 2018a: 21). For example, before the publication of the 2015 Green Paper, according to Jewell, press coverage of the BBC was hostile as the Murdoch press had 'sharpened its claws' towards the BBC. For Jewell, this was indicative of how 'the cosy relationship between the Conservatives and the Murdoch press is gradually returning to normal' (Jewell 2015). Jewell cited an example of hostile press coverage in the *Sunday Times*, but his article did not include systematic analysis of newspaper coverage, as is conducted within this study, spanning across all newspapers for several weeks surrounding the Charter Review period. Similarly, Petley (2015), cited the *Times* editorial the day after the publication of the Green Paper, as an example of Murdoch waging a 'continuous war on public service broadcasters, and on the BBC in particular' (Petley 2015). Both examples of Murdoch newspaper coverage cited by Jewell and Petley are examined in this study in detail. Furthermore, following the publication of the Green Paper on the BBC, McNair (2015) commented that anti-public service media coverage was present, not just in the Murdoch-controlled *Times* and *Sunday Times* in the UK, but within News Corp's most widely-read newspaper in Australia, the *Australian*. While this research focuses solely on UK

newspapers, it is situated within the broader, international debates how privately owned media such as newspapers report on public service broadcasters.

Journalists have described how newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* excessively criticise the BBC. When describing his time as Editor of the *Guardian*, Alan Rusbridger said that ‘Scarcely a week passed without a withering attack from the Mail on the BBC’s editorial ethos or standards’ (Rusbridger 2018b). Paul Dacre the former editor of the *Daily Mail* has also criticised the BBC in speeches in 2007 for its “monopolistic nature” and “cultural Marxism” (Dacre quoted in Higgins 2015: 164). In 2018 Dacre suggested that the BBC was part of the “subsidiariat”: that section of the media which seems to take great pride in being economically unviable’ (Dacre 2018). However, although authors have alluded to *Daily Mail* hostility towards the BBC, systematic analysis of the language used in *Mail* newspaper articles about the Corporation has not yet been conducted specifically in relation to the licence fee. Such unique analysis is provided within this thesis.

Although particular UK national newspapers (*Daily Mail*) and newspaper owners (Rupert Murdoch) have been associated with hostility towards the BBC, the purpose of this study is not simply to identify where criticism from prominent newspaper owners and editors is mirrored in newspaper coverage. As this study is focussed on newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee, it examines all UK newspapers, rather than only focusing on those which are reputedly critical of the BBC, to consider the extent to which commercially funded newspapers use language to evoke discourse around a publicly funded broadcaster. Focusing on all UK national newspapers also provides the opportunity to draw conclusions about the differences and similarities between newspapers in their reporting of the BBC licence fee.

Overall, this chapter has provided an analysis of the relevant literature surrounding the BBC, its licence fee and UK newspapers. It has shown that though there has

been much research and debate into issues surrounding the BBC and newspapers, no other scholars have provided specific systematic analysis of how UK national newspapers report on the BBC licence fee. The next chapter will focus on the literature surrounding the theoretical underpinning for this research: Critical Discourse Analysis.



## **Chapter Three: Critical Discourse Analysis – Why use Critical Discourse Analysis within mixed methods research?**

### **Introduction**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) underpins this thesis. This research uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse UK national newspapers and how they represent the BBC licence fee. This is broadly similar to the mixed methods studies by Richardson who investigated British newspaper representations of Muslims and Islam (2004; 2009), blending CDA, with quantitative analysis. This chapter will outline what is understood by the term 'discourse' within this study, the relationship between discourse analysis and CDA, and how this is informed by ideology. The version of CDA which has provided the main methodological inspiration for this analysis of newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee will be explained.

### **Discourse analysis**

The term 'discourse' is extremely disparate (Jaworski and Coupland 1999: 14), used across multiple different disciplines in a variety of ways. As a catch-all term, discourse analysis can be considered as 'describing texts and the way they work' (Johnstone 2008: 27). Discourse can be described as 'language above a sentence,' focused both on the way in which linguistic units (e.g. morphemes, syllables) form words, which combine to form sentences and how different sentences work together cohesively to form a text (Cameron and Panovic 2014: 4). This linguistically focussed definition is criticised by some scholars who take a critical perspective, more associated with Critical Discourse Analysis. Richardson, for example, criticises the 'language above a sentence' definition as too formalist and not accounting for how discourse is shaped by 'social knowledge' of wider contexts surrounding texts (Richardson 2007: 24). When reading a text, the reader does not only consider the 'situational context' in which the text is read, but also the 'abstract cultural context' of

'what they know to be conventional' (Widdowson 2007: 5). 'Language in use' is therefore a broader, more social definition of discourse (Cameron and Panovic 2014: 6), linking discourse to wider contexts (Richardson 2007: 25). Furthermore, discourse as 'language in use' is described as a social practice, which considers language as a part of society, as 'whenever people speak or listen or write or read, they do so in ways which are determined socially and have social effects' (Fairclough 2001: 19). This research considers discourse in a broader sense, to mean 'language in use' and associates this with ideology to conduct a Critical Discourse Analysis of newspaper articles.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis and ideology**

The use of the term 'ideology' within media research has been widely debated (see Corner 2016; Downey and Toynbee 2016; 2014). For the purposes of this study, discourse can be linked with ideology within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is described as 'critical' because it relates to how language use is bound by ideological assumptions, of which the reader might not be aware, particularly within the exercise of power (Fairclough 1995: 54). CDA as an analytical tool is often described as chameleon-like in its qualities, rather than as a specific methodological framework for analysis of texts. For example, Baker *et al.* state:

[CDA is] 'an academic movement, a way of doing discourse analysis from a critical perspective, which often focuses on theoretical concepts such as power, ideology and domination. We do not view CDA as being a method nor are specific methods solely associated with it. Instead, it adopts any method that is adequate to realize the aims of specific CDA-inspired research (Baker *et al.* 2008: 273).

CDA is not a concrete 'school of thought' or 'method' but is a way of viewing the world. CDA is inspired by a wide range of disciplines including linguistics,

ethnography, anthropology and sociology (Bloor and Bloor 2007: 2). The evolution of CDA has encompassed many different strands including, more recently, Positive Discourse Analysis (Bartlett 2018) and the Discourse Mythological Approach (Kelsey 2018). Critical Discourse Analysis is also increasingly referred to as Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), which places greater emphasis on how discourse affects social structures and vice versa (Flowerdew and Richardson 2018: 2). There is not the scope within this research to effectively explore all these different strands of CDA or reflect on their development, differences or similarities. However, the analytical approach taken will be referred to as Critical Discourse Analysis, or CDA. The inspiration for this and the approaches which influence it will be explained in the remainder of the chapter.

There is a strong association between CDA and the Systemic Functional Linguistics developed by Michael Halliday (Cameron and Panovic 2014: 68). This is a model of grammar which 'stresses the importance of social context...in the production and development of language (Bloor and Bloor 2007: 2). Context is therefore key in CDA as critical discourse analysts are interested in the way in which language and discourse are used to bring about social change. CDA 'does not simply describe and evaluate existing realities but seeks to explain them' (Fairclough 2013: 178). CDA is more than a mere description of language but it 'exposes social inequalities as expressed by language use' (Wodak 2001: 2), aiming to reveal the ways in which discourse can contribute to the reproduction of, or resistance to, social inequalities. This study uses CDA to investigate whether and the extent to which inequalities exist between the representation of commercial media and the representation of the BBC (as a public service broadcaster) in UK national newspapers. Research question two is concerned with extent to which a commercial model of broadcasting is normalised and whether the BBC as a public service broadcaster is presented as anomalous or damaging within UK national newspapers. CDA is used to identify the

ways in which these different broadcasting systems are presented within the newspaper articles, focusing specifically on the BBC licence fee.

Within this study, 'ideology' refers to the extent to which discourses are normalised within texts. Ideologies are powerful common-sense assumptions which are implicit in the conventions of linguistic interaction (Fairclough 2001: 2). Social theorist Michel Foucault linked discourses to ideology and power by describing them as 'conventional ways of talking that both create and are created by conventional ways of thinking. These linked ways of talking and thinking constitute ideologies and serve to circulate power in society' (Johnstone 2008: 3). An ideology can be defined simply as 'a set of beliefs or attitudes shared by members of a particular social group' (Bloor and Bloor 2007: 10). However, the beliefs of a social group which amount to an ideology may not always be consciously held – they can be so deeply ingrained they are believed to be 'self-evident' (Bloor and Bloor 2007: 10).

'Common-sense' assumptions can therefore interact with ideology as repetition of 'descriptive statements on what we take for granted' can assist in the reproduction of ideology (Richardson 2004: 53). For Foucault, discourse can help to persuade citizens to accept the exercise of power. This means that 'discourse is the favoured vehicle of ideology and therefore control by consent' (Fairclough 2001: 30).

Discourse is linked to the Gramscian concept of hegemony, whereby elites persuade all others to accept their rule by consent (Richardson 2007: 35). Discourse is a powerful tool because:

Each time a world is created in discourse, it becomes easier again to create that world in subsequent discourse. Particular choices come to stand for whole ways of seeing things, whole ways of being, and those ways of seeing things can come to seem natural, unchallengeable and right (Johnstone 2008: 46).

This study investigates the discourses evoked within newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee, and how these discourses are re-created and naturalised to set the terms of the debate and create a partial representation of the BBC licence fee (Fairclough 2018: 21).

According to Fairclough, it cannot be assumed that ideology always influences the selection of discourses evoked within a text. However, the articulation of various discourses is likely to be the result of ideologically significant decisions made by the text's author. For example, constructing relations between the 'West' and a 'Third World' country as though they were relations between a teacher and a child evokes imperialist and racist ideologies (Fairclough 1995: 102). Ideologies are generally embedded within the implicit meaning of the text rather than made explicit (Fairclough 1995: 14). This analysis of newspaper articles is not approached from an ideological standpoint (for example inspired by a Marxist or Feminist view of the world) and so ideologies which could influence the selection of discourses in the texts are not pre-empted. This study investigates the discourses present within the newspaper texts and uses this investigation of discourse to consider the extent to which ideologies are operationalised and made to appear as 'common sense' (Deacon *et al.* 2010: 158).

In conceiving of discourses as vehicles to make ideology appear as common sense within texts, this can imply that ideologies are essentially 'deceptive intent,' hiding within texts to stupefy readers (Downey and Toynbee 2016: 1265). However, 'there is no necessarily straightforward relay between linguistic mediations of ideology and an uncritical acquiescence in them by the readers...of media texts' (Deacon *et al.* 2010: 188). The identification of discourses within this study is much subtler than a simplified idea that the presence of discourses to evoke ideology is the 'elites' attempt to pull the wool over the eyes of unsuspecting 'ordinary' readers. While the assumption that discourse can be influential is implicit within CDA, this research

does not intend to make any direct claims about the influence of news coverage on readers. This study uses the analysis of discourse to deconstruct the myriad contexts and linguistic features which exist in newspaper articles on the BBC licence fee, to expand upon speculation about the nature of newspaper coverage of the BBC's funding system.

### **Which version of Critical Discourse Analysis has influenced this research?**

Within this thesis, discourse is understood as 'language in use', considering the wider context in which the newspaper articles were written. However, although context is important, this study also considers the lexical choices made by the authors of newspaper articles as lexical choice can be ideological (Richardson 2004: 55). This study does not use Linguistics as a discipline to wholly interpret the newspaper articles but discusses how lexical choices are operationalised to evoke discourses and relates these to context. Differences in linguistic detail can construct the same event differently across different genres, or even across different newspapers, and therefore linguistic detail will be focused upon within this study, to consider how the same events can be reported differently across different UK national newspapers (Fairclough 1995: 118). Given that linguistic choices are important within this analysis, earlier work from Norman Fairclough<sup>58</sup> (1995) is highly influential for this project. For Fairclough, discourse analysis is an attempt to show 'systematic links between texts, discourse practices and sociocultural practices/contexts' (Fairclough 1995: 17) and therefore, critical discourse analysis takes place on three levels, textual, discursive and social. Fairclough uses a process of intertextual analysis which incorporates these three levels. Although linguistic analysis at the level of the text is important to provide evidence for intertextual

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<sup>58</sup> The period of Fairclough's work which is most influential for this study is the period in the 1990s and 1980s which has been described as responding to wider discursive shift towards neoliberalism in the 1970s (Fairclough 2018: 14).

analysis, it also requires wider understanding of sociocultural practices 'or a wider frame of the society and of the culture in which the text is situated' (Fairclough 1995: 61). Intertextual analysis, from Fairclough's perspective, is influenced by discourse, as sociocultural practices help form texts by shaping the discourse practices.

Fairclough's more recent work on discourse analysis includes critical policy studies (2013), incorporating argumentation theory through 'dialectical reasoning' (Fairclough 2018: 13), which is not directly considered within this analysis of newspaper reporting of the BBC's licence fee. The so-called 'argumentative turn' (Fairclough 2018: 19) within Fairclough's work is premised on the idea that 'dialectical reasoning can provide a way of arguing which can pave the way to changing the existing terms of debate and changing existing reality' (Fairclough 2018: 24). It is beyond the scope of this study to provide recommendations to change 'existing reality' and attempt to influence decision making around the BBC licence fee. The purpose of this study is to identify the range of discourses and themes present within newspaper articles about the licence fee in order to draw some unique, systematic conclusions on the nature of newspaper reporting of the BBC's funding system.

Fairclough's 'three levels' approach to CDA has also influenced the work of John Richardson (e.g. Richardson 2007). Richardson describes Fairclough's method as providing 'a more accessible method of *doing* CDA than alternative theoretical approaches' (Richardson 2007: 36, emphasis added). For Richardson, within CDA, discourse is a circular process whereby social practices influence texts, shape their contexts and the way in which they are produced, while in turn texts influence society by shaping the viewpoints of those who consume them. Richardson advocates the level of text as the best starting point for analysis (Richardson 2007: 37). He then moves to analysis of the discursive practices of texts, considering 'the processes which journalists use to construct texts' (Richardson 2007: 111). Finally,

he considers social practices, or 'the outside influences which permeate journalism (Richardson 2007: 114). This study takes a similar approach to that of Richardson (influenced by Fairclough), by considering the linguistic features of the text, intertextuality and the outside contexts which could influence texts. For example, print newspaper circulations have sharply declined over the past decade due to increased online news (Ofcom 2018), while the BBC has retained a set income from the licence fee (although this was frozen between 2010 and 2017, the BBC could still be certain they were going to receive income from it). The decline in print circulations of newspapers has resulted in reduced income for the businesses which own them (Deloitte 2016: 8) while they struggle to monetise the changing online media environment. This is an important contextual factor when considering how newspapers report on the BBC licence fee. Research Question Three for this study considers whether the BBC (and specifically the BBC licence fee) was held responsible for such changes in the UK media landscape within newspaper coverage.

Richardson approaches newspaper discourse from a materialist, Marxist, class-conscious perspective (Richardson 2007: 148), where he is critical of the idealism from scholars who take a more linguistically orientated approach to CDA (Richardson 2007: 29). Richardson writes from the explicit perspective that 'Newspaper discourse reproduces capitalist exploitation and inequality' (Richardson 2007: 14). Although CDA techniques adopted by Richardson (mainly from the 'Faircloughian' tradition of CDA), are used within this study, this research is grounded more dispassionately than Richardson's work. This thesis is influenced by the lack of current systematic analysis of newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee and a curiosity over how a publicly funded broadcaster is portrayed in commercially funded newspapers.



Richardson's CDA has evolved to incorporate a more Discourse Historical Approach (DHA). For example, Richardson's study of fascist discourse analysed speeches from the BNP leader, Nick Griffin<sup>59</sup> and identified common rhetorical threads in fascist discourse (Richardson 2018: 455). DHA does have similarities to a 'traditional' CDA approach in that it considers wider immediate social contexts. For example, Stoenger and Wodak's (2016) study of the discursive construction of the then Leader of the Opposition's father, Ralph Miliband, as a dangerous 'other' considered previous *Daily Mail* coverage which was hostile towards Ed Miliband's leadership (Stoenger and Wodak 2016: 195). However, unlike CDA, the Discourse Historical Approach places 'more weight on historical anchoring and echoing specific discourses' and more emphasis on rhetoric within texts than the CDA practiced by Fairclough (Reisigl 2018: 49). It is relevant background for this study to consider how the BBC licence fee has been utilised by previous governments (see chapter two, section three). Whilst this study does not undertake a discourse-historical analysis of press coverage of the BBC licence fee, it investigates whether incidents in the history of the BBC are evoked and examines how this contributes to newspaper discourse surrounding the BBC licence fee.

Within his Critical Discourse Analysis, Richardson also alludes to the CDA developed by Teun Van Dijk. This is a more socio-cognitive approach to CDA, recently entitled Sociocognitive Discourse Studies, which 'relates discourse structures to social structures via a complex socio-cognitive interface' and considers the 'ongoing communicative common ground' or shared social knowledge and ideologies of language users (Van Dijk 2018: 28). Van Dijk considers concepts such

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<sup>59</sup> The British National Party (BNP) is an extreme-right and anti-immigrant, Islamophobic party in the UK which broadened its electoral base under leader Nick Griffin. It reached its high point of success in the 2009 elections to the European Parliament where they polled 6.2 per cent of the vote and gained two Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in the North West and Yorkshire and Humber (Kavanagh and Cowley 2010: 119). The party no longer has any representation at any level of UK government (Pidd 2018).

as how short term and long term memory relate to discourse production and comprehension and references 'mental models' within discourse (Van Dijk 2018: 30). For Van Dijk, people understand discourse not just as individuals but as members of linguistic and discursive communities where people share the same norms, values and ideologies. This leads to defined social groups, which results in the polarisation of 'us and them' (Van Dijk 2018: 31). This is a key aspect of Van Dijk's 'ideological square' which suggests that the 'positive presentation of self and the negative presentation of other' is paramount in ideologically constructed texts (Van Dijk 1997: 36).

Richardson uses Van Dijk's ideological square within his analysis of UK newspaper representation of Islam and Muslims. He shows how broadsheet newspapers use language to represent Muslims/Islam negatively as 'them,' by, for example, portraying Islam as the antithesis to modernity (Richardson 2007: 74). This research does not follow Van Dijk's sociocognitive approach to CDA by considering the 'mental models' of the journalist writing the newspaper articles, for example (Van Dijk 2018: 39). For Van Dijk, 'no direct link should be made between discourse studies and social structures because these are mediated by the interface of personal and social cognition' (Machin and Mayr 2012: 213), whereas this research links discourses and the context surrounding the BBC licence fee. This study takes some influence from Van Dijk as it considers whether 'us' and 'them' are constructed within the discourses present within the newspaper articles about the BBC licence fee. Philo criticises the ideological square because 'the four points of a square can easily become four boxes into which language is fitted' (Philo 2007: 122). However, Philo's work still alludes to the ideological square as he uses it to show how polarisation between 'us' and 'them' is used, to scapegoat asylum seekers in British political discourse (Philo *et al.* 2013: 165). This study considers the ideological

square within analysis to investigate how 'us versus them' is used within British newspaper reporting of the licence fee.

The methodological approach used here is similar to Richardson's mixed method's approach in two of his projects analysing newspaper representation of Islam (2004) and Muslims (2009) during several British general elections. Many authors have used CDA to focus on the study of how the British media, and particularly newspapers, construct discourses around racism, asylum seekers, immigration and Islam (e.g. Baker *et al.* 2013; Gabrielatos *et al.* 2008; Bates 2017). Richardson uses CDA to show that if racism is reproduced through discourse, then racism will be evident in all levels of communication (Richardson 2004: 33). This research takes inspiration from Richardson's (2009) study as it uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to identify discourse patterns both 'between and within' newspaper articles (Richardson 2004: xvii).

Although this study's wide focus on both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers is also similar to Richardson's (2009) qualitative analysis, it does not mimic Richardson's quantitative focus on lexical collocation, where collocations are defined as 'patterns or consistencies in language use that create an expectancy that a word or phrase will be accompanied by other specific words' (Richardson 2009: 360). This is associated with a discourse analysis approach involving Corpus Linguistics, whereby computer software is used 'to identify linguistic patterns that occur across large sets of text' (Subtirelu and Baker 2018: 106). Critical Discourse researchers are increasingly turning towards Corpus Linguistics as it is considered a way to ensure that critical analysis is 'more rigorous' (Cameron and Panovic 2014: 79). As well as identifying collocations, software can be used to identify frequencies and key words in context (Cameron and Panovic 2014: 81). However, although corpus-based approaches can give precise results about the frequencies of specific textual features, the textual features which are deemed worthy of quantification can depend

on the ideological commitments of the author (Subtirelu and Baker 2018: 109). This research does not use the identification of collocates as the starting point for quantitative analysis. It uses a coding manual to categorise the texts, using open coding and then axial coding to develop the coding manual. This was felt more appropriate for a project of this size than collocation analysis, which is more often associated with larger scale data analysis than this research (Baker *et al.* 2013: 25).

### **Criticism of Fairclough and CDA**

The inspiration for this study, Fairclough's CDA, has been criticised on a number of levels by Brian Poole (2010). Poole argues that Fairclough's arguments are linguistically flawed (Poole 2010: 139) and that Fairclough provides haphazard definitions of 'discourse' (p.141). Poole further suggests that Fairclough's 'socialist' political perspective drives his textual interpretation rather than any concrete analysis (p.146) and states Fairclough's analysis is unable to address the problem that 'all readers interpret a given text in different ways' (Poole 2010: 152). According to Poole, Fairclough's CDA is flawed because he simply seeks to validate his own opinion while 'True criticality would involve...searching for the hidden attitudes and assumptions behind *all* arguments' (Poole 2010: 152). This study is not influenced by an ideological perspective and does not simply search for discourses which fit a pre-existing theoretical slant within the newspaper articles. It examines which discourses are present and how the presentation of these contributes to the representation of the BBC licence fee. A range of newspapers in the UK with widely differing partisan affiliations are considered and contrasted so that criticism is not confined to newspapers of one political persuasion. Furthermore, the aim of CDA is not to merely validate an authors' opinion, but to uncover assumptions in the text which have been naturalised. Although Poole says that different readers would interpret different texts differently, this ignores the fact that Fairclough specifically states that his analysis (at least in his earlier work) does not specifically cover

reception studies as this 'sometimes leads to a disregard for text itself' (Fairclough 1995: 16).

More generally and not specific to Fairclough, Michael Toolan (1997) questions the ability of CDA to change attitudes. He states that:

It is not self-evident that a CDA analysis of a John Major speech, or a racist discourse, will necessarily more directly lead to a change in the world than, say, a traditional literary critic's commentary on *The Merchant of Venice* (Toolan 1997: 88).

However, textual analysis deploying CDA methods is not designed in and of itself to promote revolution or direct policy reform. CDA does not purport to change the world but show that 'Another world is possible. It is the point of CDA to show how discourse conceals this from us, normalising inequalities and closing down the possibility of change' (Richardson 2007: 45). This study does not claim that its observations on newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee will bring about a change in the way in future debates on the licence fee are reported. Rather, it aims to observe the discourses present to consider whether and the extent to which language is used in newspapers to normalise market-centric and anti-public service broadcasting discourses. In doing so, it aims to provide evidence to support or refute existing assumptions about newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee (e.g. Petley 2015).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an explanation for why Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) used within this study. It has set out how CDA allows for the investigation into whether and the extent to which newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee is ideologically driven. The chapter also discussed the myriad versions of CDA which have been applied to analysis of texts and how Fairclough's focus on wider contexts

or socio-cultural practices is necessary for analysis within this study of newspaper coverage surrounding the BBC licence fee.

Now that the context surrounding CDA has been explained, the next chapter will focus on how the CDA used within this thesis was operationalised within analysis. It also explains the quantitative methodology, which is also used within this mixed methods research, alongside CDA.

## **Chapter Four: How did analysis take place?**

### **Introduction**

While the previous chapter discussed the theoretical underpinning of this thesis how the analysis for the research was conducted in practice will now be explained. As discussed in the introduction, this study focuses on print newspaper articles published within four specific time periods surrounding key events in the recent history of the BBC licence fee for analysis. These are:

1. The 2010 licence fee settlement (October 2010)
2. Over 75s licence fee settlement (July 2015)
3. Publication of the Green Paper on charter renewal (July 2015)
4. Publication of the 2016 White Paper on charter renewal (May 2016)

This chapter discusses, in detail, how the sample of newspaper articles around these events was selected for analysis. The chapter then explains the process of quantitative analysis, including the design of the coding manual and the intercoder reliability test conducted. Following this, how the qualitative approach from Critical Discourse Analysis was applied to the text is explained.

### **Rationale for newspaper sample**

The newspapers included for analysis were selected if they met the following criterion:

- All UK national daily newspapers in print circulation at the time of each event (for example, not *The Independent* for the 2016 White Paper because the print edition of the *Independent* was discontinued before the White Paper's publication).

- All UK national Sunday newspapers in print circulation at the time of each event (for example, including *News of The World*<sup>60</sup> for the 2010 licence fee settlement).

All newspaper titles were selected regardless of format (see table 4.1 for information on newspaper formats). The decision was taken to focus solely on national rather than local newspapers because the events analysed for this study were concerning national events, rather than analysing the impact of the BBC at a local level. Given that this study focuses on the BBC licence fee, a UK-wide system of funding the public service broadcaster, it was salient to focus upon national newspaper publications.

### Formats of UK newspapers

<u>Format and explanation of meaning</u>	<u>Newspaper</u>
<p><b>Quality</b><sup>61</sup> – also known as ‘broadsheet’, referring to the publications’ larger physical size. They have also been referred to as ‘upmarket’ newspapers (Tunstall 1996: 46). The focus of quality newspapers is a “serious’ approach, reflecting a readership that is more engaged by ‘heavier’ news topics and a weightier reporting style.’ Quality newspapers tend to appeal to more affluent or educated readers (Robinson <i>et al.</i> 2010: 68).</p>	<p><i>Guardian</i>  <i>Times</i>  <i>Telegraph</i>  <i>Independent</i>  <i>i</i>  <i>Financial Times</i>  <i>Independent on Sunday</i>  <i>Observer</i>  <i>Sunday Times</i>  <i>Sunday Telegraph</i></p>
<p><b>Mid-market</b> – also known as ‘black-tops,’ generally containing hard news as well as lengthy features and interviews. They appeal to the same social classes as popular newspapers (Robinson <i>et al.</i> 2010: 69).</p>	<p><i>Daily Mail</i>  <i>Mail on Sunday</i>  <i>Daily Express</i>  <i>Sunday Express</i></p>

<sup>60</sup> The 2011 phone-hacking scandal resulted in the closure of the *News of the World* (Mair 2013: 17).

<sup>61</sup> For the purposes of this study, newspapers were assigned to a format based on Audit Bureau of Circulation categories at the time for each of the events analysed (Audit Bureau of Circulation 2015). Initially, quality newspapers were categorised as ‘broadsheet’ and the popular were categorised as ‘tabloid’. However, these labels are ‘no longer that useful’ (Reeves and Keeble 2015: 21), given that many broadsheet papers have changed their physical size to tabloid. For example, the *Guardian* was traditionally considered broadsheet, but changed to tabloid, or compact size, in 2018, due to the decline of classified advertising in print (Rusbridger 2018a: 96).



<p><b>Popular</b> – also known as ‘tabloid’ or referring to their smaller physical size, or ‘red top,’ referring to the colour of their masthead. Popular newspapers are mass circulation with stories often less than 400 words which are designed to be read quickly. Popular newspapers are designed to appeal to occupational classes C2, D and E<sup>62</sup> (Robinson 2010: 68). They have also been referred to as ‘downmarket’ newspapers (Tunstall 196: 40).</p>	<p><i>Daily Mirror</i>  <i>Sun</i>  <i>Daily Star</i>  <i>People</i>  <i>Daily Star Sunday</i>  <i>Sun on Sunday</i>  <i>News of The World (NOTW)</i><sup>63</sup></p>
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Table 4.1: UK newspapers, including both Daily and Sunday national newspapers (n=22), by format.

The licence-fee focussed nature of this project meant that the *Financial Times* (F.T.) was analysed. Although the F.T. is set apart from other titles in the UK press in terms of the way in which it structures its headlines (Rafferty 2008: 232), due to its focus on financial issues (Tunstall 1996: 356) it was included in this study, as it was considered likely to include articles on BBC financing.

The newspapers which stayed constant for all four events analysed were:

- *Guardian*
- *Times*
- *Telegraph*
- *Daily Mail*
- *Express*
- *Sun*
- *Daily Mirror*
- *Daily Star*
- *People*
- *Financial Times*

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<sup>62</sup> These classes refer to skilled manual workers, semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers and state pensioners, lowest grade workers and those in receipt of state benefits (National Readership Survey 2016).

<sup>63</sup> No articles from the NOTW appeared in the searches which formulated the sample. In October 2010, the newspaper had the second highest average monthly circulation, beaten only by *The Sun* (ABC 2010). The lack of articles in the corpus from NOTW could be attributed to the BBC licence fee not quite fitting the NOTW’s ‘traditional focus of Sunday sex, sensation and sport’ (Tunstall 196:39). Within the sample articles from other Murdoch-controlled newspapers were plentiful, representing almost a quarter (24 per cent) of the total number of articles. Arguably, the licence fee was considered a more salient topic for discussion in Murdoch’s other UK newspapers which were more ‘upmarket’ (Tunstall 1996: 16) such as the *Times* and *Sunday Times*. However, it is important to note the limitations of the sample around the 2010 licence fee settlement in relation to the NOTW– the period around which it was analysed (14<sup>th</sup> October 2010 to 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2010) contained only three Sundays for which the NOTW would be in print.

- *Observer*
- *Sunday Times*
- *Sunday Telegraph*
- *Mail on Sunday*
- *Sunday Star*
- *Sunday Express*

Others included depending on the timing of the event:

- *Sun on Sunday*
- *News of The World*
- *Independent*
- *i*
- *Independent on Sunday*

Although the *Metro* newspaper is a popular tabloid (within the top 20 most popular newspapers in the UK in 2018),<sup>64</sup> this newspaper was not included within the sample for analysis. The *Metro* is owned by *Daily Mail* Group (DMG), the same company which owns the *Daily Mail* and the *Mail on Sunday* newspapers. However, unlike the *Mail* and *Mail on Sunday*, the *Metro* is a free newspaper, distributed in the UK on public transport and by vendors. If the *Metro* was included in the sample, as a free newspaper, then this would arguably mean other free UK newspapers had to be analysed. Limiting the project to an analysis of paid, national media was a way to reduce the sample of articles which was possible to be effectively analysed within a PhD study. Furthermore, the *Metro* is currently said to offer 'little original reporting' from the content already in DMG owned publications (Rusbridger 2018a: 92) and therefore, the *Metro* was not included in this analysis.

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<sup>64</sup> By June 2017, the *Metro* had overtaken the *Sun* in terms of average weekday circulation (Rusbridger 2018a: 400)

## How articles were selected

From the four events selected for analysis, articles were chosen from one week before and two weeks after each event in order to gain perspective on any speculation before the event and the full aftermath and analysis in reporting.

The date ranges examined within Lexis Nexis<sup>65</sup> for each event were therefore as follows:

1. **The 2010 licence fee settlement:** Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt wrote a letter to Chair of the BBC Trust, Michael Lyons on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2010 to confirm the licence fee freeze, so newspaper articles from 14<sup>th</sup> October to 3<sup>rd</sup> November were analysed.
2. **Over 75s licence fee settlement:** The Chancellor and the Culture Secretary wrote a letter to Director General Lord Hall about the settlement on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2015 and so newspaper articles between 26<sup>th</sup> June and 17<sup>th</sup> July were analysed.
3. **Publication of the 2015 Green Paper on charter renewal:** This was published on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2015 and so newspaper coverage was analysed between 9<sup>th</sup> July 2015 and 30<sup>th</sup> July.
4. **Publication of the 2016 White Paper on charter renewal:** This was published on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2016 and so coverage between 9<sup>th</sup> May and 26<sup>th</sup> May 2016 was analysed.

As there was overlap between the over 75s licence fee settlement and the Green Paper, the articles for these events were selected by conducting one search

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<sup>65</sup> Lexis Nexis is an American based online system, originally set up for law firms and financial sources. 'It has now become the media archive of choice for many academic and political sources across North America and Europe' (Deacon 2007: 5).

encompassing 26<sup>th</sup> June to 30<sup>th</sup> July. Across the four events in the sample, the 2010 licence fee settlement contained 106 articles, the 2016 White Paper contained 155 articles and the 2015 licence fee settlement and Green Paper, taken together, contained 385 articles. There was an overlap of 9 days and 143 articles between the 2015 licence fee settlement and Green Paper (between 9<sup>th</sup> July 2015 and 17<sup>th</sup> July 2015). Analysis for this study was not structured so the 2015 licence fee settlement and Green Paper were examined in isolation, as there were themes and discourses observed in the reporting across the events.

Within Lexis Nexis, for all date ranges the following search terms 'anywhere in the text' were entered in order to try and encompass the full range of newspaper reporting around the licence fee:

- BBC AND licence fee
- Beeb AND licence fee (initial research for the study found that 'Beeb' was a more popular term in red top or tabloid newspapers)
- BBC AND licence payers (for articles not directly mentioning licence fee and to capture the relationship between viewers and the BBC)
- BBC AND TV licence (to capture relevant articles which mentioned the system of licence fee funding but not the licence fee directly)

These terms were searched 'anywhere in the text' rather than in 'major mentions' (in the headline, lead paragraph or indexing), 'in the headline,' 'at the start' or 'three or more mentions.' This was decided because, during initial research, it was found that there were few articles mentioning the licence fee in major mentions.

There are flaws in using the Lexis Nexis database to identify a corpus of newspaper articles. For example, the different national newspaper titles deliver articles to Lexis

Nexis in different ways. Deacon has identified that duplicated items in article lists produced by Lexis Nexis searches are common and information about how duplicate items appear 'is not consistently provided' (Deacon 2007: 21). In the initial searches for this study, there were some duplicate articles, some newspapers which did not differentiate between website and print articles, and the different sections of the newspaper were all classified differently between different newspapers. For example, what the *Times* described as a 'feature' was not the same as a feature in the *Daily Telegraph*. Therefore, once the initial Lexis searches were conducted, the researcher read through the articles, make judgements on the appropriate category<sup>66</sup> of article, and ensure there were no duplicates.

From 2015 onwards, it was difficult to differentiate between the articles in the *Guardian* and *Observer* which appeared on their website and which were included in print. For the 2010 articles this was much easier as they included, for the print articles, a page number, whereas the online articles did not include this and contained a distinctive web address. This was not the case for the 2015 and 2016 samples. Therefore, *Guardian* and *Observer* articles were cross checked with the News Bank database,<sup>67</sup> which solely delivers the print editions of recent newspaper articles, to ensure that only the print articles of every newspaper were examined to avoid a skewed sample. Each article in the corpus was considered one unit of analysis and, for the purposes of coding, assigned a number.

Lexis Nexis software was used to gather the corpus for analysis because this was the quickest way to find which newspaper articles contained the appropriate search terms for analysis (Deacon *et al.* 2010: 133). However, using Lexis does not provide any context about where a newspaper article appears on the page, or an indication

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<sup>66</sup> See appendix for information on how particular categories were chosen

<sup>67</sup> Newsbank is a database which gives access to articles from UK and Ireland newspapers from 1982 to present.

of whether it has any relationships with other articles within the newspaper (Deacon 2007: 12). For example, within this study a *Sun* editorial (Halls 2016), which mentioned the terms 'BBC' and 'licence fee,' referred to a news article which was highly relevant to this thesis because it discussed how the newspaper considers BBC's role as a public service broadcaster. However, because the news article did not mention the words 'BBC' and 'licence fee', it did not meet the criterion for analysis. In this instance, from the reference in the editorial, the article outside the sample could be identified. However, this may not have always been the case within analysis and therefore articles which would have been of interest to the study may have been missed. Although Deacon's warnings about the methodological implications of using Lexis Nexis are noted, they do not overshadow the practical usefulness of the database for providing relevant articles for the study from a broad range of publications. The major problems in using Lexis lie when taking the delivery of data at face value (Deacon 2007: 30) and, within this study, every effort was made to review the raw Lexis data to ensure the limitations of using the software were taken into consideration.

### **Quantitative analysis**

This section of the chapter explains the process of quantitative analysis for this research. It sets out the development of the coding manual and provides an outline of the key terms used within this. It then provides an outline of the inter-coder reliability process used within the content analysis and details how this linked with qualitative analysis.

#### **Development of coding manual**

*[To view the coding manual and coding sheet in full, see appendix]*

Scholars who have researched newspaper reporting of the BBC said that they 'used open coding to allow themes to emerge inductively rather than using a

predetermined schema' and then used axial coding to bring together the categories (Thomas and Hindman 2011: 577). A similar approach was used within this project because following too rigid a schema could run the risk of placing pre-determined ideas upon the themes present within the text instead of systematically analysing the data (Philo 2007: 102; Priest 2009: 162). As a starting point, several major coding categories surrounding the range of debate on the BBC were generated based on previous knowledge, research and study of the literature. These categories were:

- Funding
- Broadcasting ecology
- Conduct
- Bias
- Governance

Following an initial examination of the returned articles, other categories emerged which were based on themes recurring in the data rather than the authors' preconception of what would be present in the articles (Creswell 2014: 196). During this initial analysis of articles, notes were made on the range of opinions expressed around each event analysed, and the speculation that preceded each event, in order to ensure that the coding manual would encapsulate all areas of the debate. During this process, more categories were developed, and some were merged with others. The following categories were decided as adequate for representing the range of issues which could arise:

1. Funding
2. Market impact
3. Conduct
4. Bias
5. Governance
6. Government relations
7. Technology
8. Programming
9. Reputation

While new categories in were the process of being created, in addition to the nine listed above, there were also categories for ‘austerity’ and ‘future.’ However, it was decided these categories should be collapsed into categories such as ‘funding’ ‘technology’ and ‘government relations’. For example, the rationale for initially creating the ‘austerity’ category was to investigate how arguments that the licence fee should be frozen in line with other public services to contribute towards eliminating the budget deficit were mentioned. However, it was found during an initial pilot study<sup>68</sup> that although austerity was mentioned, it did not occur frequently enough to require a category of its own. Furthermore, including an austerity category could risk suggesting a preconceived assumption that newspapers would automatically focus upon the government’s austerity policies in relation to the BBC. Themes surrounding austerity were reflected in subjects within ‘government relations’ and ‘funding’ such as ‘government cuts to the BBC in line with other public services: effective.’

The nine major categories identified, although useful to separate out the different areas, were extremely broad. This meant more detail was required to meaningfully code the articles. Therefore, under each of the major categories, different subjects were created. For example, under ‘Funding’ there appeared the following sample subjects,<sup>69</sup> which were each given a number for ease of recording in an Excel spreadsheet:

1. Too much funding given to the BBC

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<sup>68</sup> The pilot study for this research involved analysis of 20 articles, which were taken from different newspapers and were of varying time periods and lengths. The pilot coding influenced decisions taken in the final quantitative coding process. For example, the decision to code the extent to which articles were considered BBC-relevant was deemed necessary during piloting (see table 4.2 for explanation of BBC relevance). Furthermore, the initial overview of the articles found that there were 558 articles for analysis across the four events, which increased to 646 articles when as, during the pilot, it was decided that each letter on the letters pages should be coded as a separate article, rather than several letters appearing under one heading appearing as one article.

<sup>69</sup> See appendix for full list of subjects which appeared under ‘funding’ as a major coding area.



2. Not enough funding given to the BBC
3. Licence fee increases: positive
4. Licence fee increases: negative
5. Licence fee freeze: justified due to austerity
6. Licence fee freeze: unjustified
7. Call for the licence fee to be abolished
8. Call for the licence fee to remain

These detailed list of subjects within the major coding areas were included to provide a full range of the debate around the BBC and the licence fee. There were 369<sup>70</sup> subjects in total, many of which alluded to different opinions on the BBC and licence fee, (e.g. under 'government relations' was the subject 'government forcing the BBC to make cuts'). Some of the subjects were more descriptive such as 'description of potential reforms to the BBC.' These descriptive subjects were considered necessary as, after an initial reading of the articles, many of the news articles contained an element of describing government actions, quoting a section of the Culture Secretary's or Prime Minister's comments on the licence fee, for example. Although these descriptive subjects may not necessarily contribute to identifying discourses when considered alone, examining their frequency helped to build up an accurate portrayal of the character of newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee (Research Question One).

Several drafts of the coding manual were produced in order to ensure, where possible, repetition was eradicated but that there was still a detailed range of subjects present. During the coding, particularly in the early stages, there were subjects which appeared within the articles which were not covered within the existing coding manual. This meant that the coding manual had to be altered to cover the news subjects. All previous articles coded then needed to be revisited to check for mentions of the subject area in previous articles. This process meant that

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<sup>70</sup> Originally there were 448 subjects in total, but 79 of these were not found within any of the newspaper articles after analysis. They were subsequently removed from the coding manual.

the coding judgements were consistent and did not change as the analysis developed (Deacon *et al.* 2010: 130). The coding manual developed for this research was extremely detailed to ensure that the quantitative analysis could inform the qualitative analysis as effectively as possible, discussed in the next part of this chapter.

Each article was assessed for tone on a scale of 1 to 9, with neutral articles recorded as 5 on the tone scale. This allowed for subtle variances in tone to be established. The tone for the BBC and the licence fee were recorded separately, to allow for distinctions to be made between the two variables. The extent to which the tone towards the licence fee differed from the tone towards the BBC provided an indication of how newspaper coverage specifically considered the licence fee, rather than just the BBC as an organisation. Distinction was also made between 'detailed tone' and 'general tone' (see table 4.2). Assigning a number to each article on the BBC and the licence fee, while providing an indication of tone became a starting point for qualitative analysis to assess how BBC and the licence fee were discursively constructed. Coding the tone of each article allowed for the articles to be sorted into different categories with an indication of their contents, for further analysis of language.

In addition to tone, a binary choice for each article was recorded on whether it was fully licence-fee-relevant. This was to mitigate for the fact that the words 'licence fee' were searched for 'anywhere in the text' in Lexis and allowed for variables to be constructed which reflected that articles had differing levels of engagement with the licence fee itself.

Table 4.2 sets out the key terms used throughout the chapter, including how tone of each article was assigned by the researcher. With each term used, an explanation of how it is used is included.<sup>71</sup>

**Key terms used throughout analysis**

<b><u>Term</u></b>	<b><u>Definition</u></b>
<p>Detailed Tone (a number assigned on a scale of 1 to 9):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Extremely anti BBC/licence fee</li> <li>2. Very anti BBC/licence fee</li> <li>3. Anti BBC/licence fee</li> <li>4. Mildly anti BBC/licence fee</li> <li>5. Neutral</li> <li>6. Mildly pro BBC/licence fee</li> <li>7. Pro BBC/licence fee</li> <li>8. Very pro BBC/licence fee</li> <li>9. Extremely pro BBC/licence fee</li> </ol> <p>Each article was assigned a separate tone for the BBC and a tone for the licence fee.</p>	<p>To provide an indication of the way in which a newspaper article was orientated towards the BBC and licence fee – how positive or negative was the article?</p> <p>The use of a scale of 1 to 9 was developed during the pilot study and a detailed explanation of how tone was differentiated is provided within the appendix.</p>
<p>General tone (positive, negative or neutral)</p>	<p>After detailed tone was recorded on the coding sheet, general tone was created to provide a very general indication of the way in which newspapers were orientated towards the BBC and licence fee.</p> <p>To create the general tone categories, new variables were created in SPSS which categorised articles with the detailed tone indicators 9-6 as 'positive, 4-1 as 'negative' and kept 5 as 'neutral.' This recoding allowed for a judgement to be made on the general slant of a newspaper towards the BBC and licence fee.</p>
<p>Subject (listed within the coding manual – see appendix. There were 369 possible subjects which could be assigned to an article).</p>	<p>Subjects are the variables listed within the coding manual to show what was being discussed within the article in detail.</p> <p>The final list of subjects within the coding manual was generated through open coding. Firstly, a list of possible subjects was constructed based on consulting the literature around the topic. This was further developed from initially reading through the sample of articles and the subsequent pilot study.</p>

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<sup>71</sup> For a more detailed explanation of the guidelines for coding used by the author, see appendix

Major coding areas	The nine broad areas (e.g. funding, market impact) under which subjects were included within the coding manual.
Subject areas	<p>Subjects were assigned to each article in three different subject areas – primary secondary and peripheral. These could be differentiated as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Primary subject areas: subject(s) which would run throughout the article and would aim to provide an answer to the question ‘what is the article about’.</li> <li>➤ Secondary subject areas: subject (s) which do not run throughout the article but are mentioned several times and/or are expanded on reasonably significantly within a paragraph.</li> <li>➤ Peripheral subject areas: A subject mentioned in passing, which is not expanded upon with any quotations, opinion or otherwise, but serves to support a primary or secondary subject.</li> </ul> <p>The separation of subjects into different subject areas allowed for the prominence given to each of the subjects to be considered. This enabled an understanding of the full range of what was contained in newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee. It was particularly useful for longer news and opinion articles which delved into many aspects of the BBC licence fee.</p>
Licence-fee-relevant (articles were assigned 0 if they were licence-fee-relevant and 1 if they were not).	To determine whether the primary purpose of the article is discussion of the licence fee, or whether the words ‘licence fee’ were simply mentioned in passing.
BBC-relevant (articles were assigned 0 if they were BBC-relevant and 1 if they were not).	To determine whether the primary purpose of the article is discussion of the BBC, or whether the word ‘BBC’ was simply mentioned in passing.
Variables	<p>In addition to the variables which were initially recorded on the coding sheet, discussed above (e.g. detailed tone, licence-fee-relevance), following the coding of newspaper articles, data was recoded into different variables which involved the amalgamation of multiple subjects. This meant that new variables could then be cross-tabulated with existing variables, such as newspaper, in SPSS.</p> <p>Different variables were created based on:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Areas of further investigation deemed necessary after initial coding of the newspaper articles – e.g. if there was a pattern in tone or subject.</li> <li>➤ How frequently particular subjects occurred – if subjects appeared particularly frequently it was of interest to investigate these further within a variable.</li> </ul>
Left-leaning newspaper	The left-leaning newspapers refer to those which endorsed the Labour Party in the 2015 General Election – <i>Guardian</i> , <i>Mirror</i> , the <i>Observer</i> , <i>Sunday Mirror</i> and <i>People</i> . It would be inaccurate to refer to these as purely Labour supporting, particularly in the case of the <i>Guardian</i> , whose support for Labour has wavered in recent years, particularly towards leader Jeremy Corbyn (Firmstone 2017), while the newspaper endorsed the Liberal Democrats in the 2010 general election.
Right-leaning newspaper	The right-leaning newspapers refer to those which are generally consistently supportive of the Conservative Party in General Elections e.g. <i>Sun</i> , <i>Daily Mail Telegraph</i> , <i>Daily Express</i> (and their Sunday counterparts). It would be inaccurate to refer to these as ‘Conservative-supporting’ as, while their support for more right-wing values has stayed constant, some publications’ support for the Conservative Party has wavered. For example, the <i>Daily Express</i> endorsed the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in the 2015 general election. <sup>72</sup>

Table 4.2: key terms used throughout analysis

All variables were assigned numbers, and these were recorded in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to be later analysed using Excel and SPSS statistics software. Whilst coding was taking place, notes were made by the researcher about why particular coding decisions were taken. This meant that the researcher could use these to assess whether there was precedent for particular coding decisions during the process. These notes could also be used to explain the process to another coder during the inter-coder reliability process.

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<sup>72</sup> See table 2.1 for an explanation of the party political affiliation of each UK national newspaper in recent General Elections.

### **Intercoder reliability**

After the 646 articles were coded by the researcher, a sample of approximately 10 per cent of articles (63) was selected to be coded again by another coder. The variables included within the intercoder reliability were:

- Publication (name of newspaper)
- Page number
- Word count
- Author of article
- Section of the newspaper
- Major coding area
- Persons quoted
- Persons Present
- Licence fee tone (general)
- BBC tone (general)
- Licence fee relevance
- BBC relevance

SPSS was used to compare the original coding the sample for intercoder reliability. Overall a good level of agreement (more than 80 per cent) was recorded across all variables (see appendix for full results).

The above variables were considered within intercoder reliability because they were the subjects of quantitative content analysis. Other variables, although part of the detailed coding process, were considered to be slightly more subjective and therefore used to link the quantitative research to the qualitative analysis. These variables included:

- Subjects present (from the 369 possible listed within the coding manual)
- Subject area (whether the subjects were primary, secondary or peripheral)
- Detailed tone (on a scale of 1 to 9)

### **Variables linking quantitative and qualitative analysis**

Assigning numerous subjects on different levels (primary, secondary and peripheral) to each article allowed for a range of information to be captured on the coding sheet (see appendix) which determined the level of importance given to different issues

within the articles. This was then revisited to decide which articles would be most salient to analyse in detail during the qualitative analysis. For example, once the data was coded, one of the first tasks of the researcher was to find out the most frequently occurring primary, main and peripheral subjects across the data and within each of the newspapers. Although the peripheral subjects were not considered as salient as the primary, it was of interest to understand which subjects recurred 'in the background' of the newspaper articles as these could provide an indication of how wider themes would be constructed in the texts. If a more descriptive subject was assigned as primary subject area, it was of interest to examine the main and peripheral subject areas which appeared alongside it, to see if any of these subjects could assist in identifying the context in which the event was described. For example, an article in the *Daily Telegraph* on 16th July 2015 entitled 'Way ahead for BBC? The key proposals,' was assigned 'Description of potential reforms to the BBC' as its sole primary subject area. However, it was also assigned peripheral subject areas which suggested the BBC was biased, referred to the Savile scandal, described the ineffectiveness of the BBC Trust, and suggested the BBC website was 'crowding out' local newspapers. Therefore, delving deeper into the composition of the article indicated that it was more than mere description of the contents of the Green Paper.

Rather than limit the number of peripheral subjects which could be assigned to each article, it was decided that this should be expanded to include as many as was necessary, to capture the full range of issues around the BBC and licence fee present within the articles. Limiting peripheral subjects would mean that the full range of background subjects would not be fully recognised in the quantitative research. If one subject appeared excessively as a peripheral within a newspaper, then this could hint a theme present within the newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee or may be indicative of a newspaper's discursive disposition towards the

BBC or its licence fee. Each newspaper had a different mode peripheral subject (see table 4.5). In the *Sun*, the most frequently occurring peripheral subject was 'licence fee is poor value for money.' Although this alone was not strong enough to provide evidence alone that 'the *Sun* considers the licence fee poor value for money,' it was indicative of a potential discourse being constructed within the *Sun*, which required further qualitative investigation. The researcher could not make a judgement on discourses evoked within texts by simply counting the quantitative subjects which appeared within newspaper articles. However, patterns in the presence of these subjects provided guidance for which articles were necessary to qualitatively analyse.

Microsoft Excel was initially used to examine the frequencies of variables across the corpus of articles and analyse the composition of the entire corpus. Although frequencies can also be easily captured in SPSS statistics, the detailed nature of the coding manual meant that using formulas in Excel allowed for easier examination of these as a starting point. The initial Excel research was used to help determine the articles which would require further qualitative analysis. For example, the articles which had expressed the most extreme tone either for (9) or against (1) the BBC and the licence fee were selected as articles to analyse in more detail to assess the language which contributed to them being assigned such an extreme code for tone. After the initial Excel research, SPSS was used for more detailed analysis to recode the data into different variables, and cross-tabulation was used to cross-reference salient variables. For example, as the page number of each article was collected during the coding process, a variable was created to identify articles which appeared within the first 12 pages of the newspaper. This could be then cross-tabulated with a variety of other variables, including those considered within intercoder reliability (e.g. the type of article or the general tone towards the BBC), to identify how articles



appearing earlier in the newspaper statistically portrayed the BBC and the licence fee.

Although the quantitative analysis was important in identifying patterns in the texts to investigate further, 'coding is just the starting point in which data is organised' and more questions needed to be asked of the texts (Richardson 2007: 19). Conducting an initial content analysis acted as a starting point to draw quantitative conclusions about the range of debate around the licence fee, allowing for identification of general themes within the text (Fairclough 2003: 6). Although quantitative results provided an overall basis from which to draw more general conclusions about the nature of newspaper reporting of the licence fee, these results required further explanation (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011: 9). The final section of this chapter will identify how the qualitative analysis took place through the identification of discourse and linguistic features.

## **Qualitative analysis**

### **How discourses were identified in the newspaper articles**

As Research Question One is concerned with the identification of discourses and themes present within the newspaper articles, it is necessary to outline how a discourse is identified within the articles as opposed to a theme. There are many different 'arguments,' 'ideas' and 'narratives' present within any selection of newspaper articles and so it is salient to identify how discourses and themes are differentiated from those within this study. For this research, the use of the terminology 'theme' and a 'discourse,' while influenced by the CDA literature (e.g. Fairclough 1995), was not taken directly from other scholars' understanding of the term.

A discourse differs from a theme in that it is used to set the terms of the debate, it is naturalised and used to make an argument appear unchallengeable. When a

potential discourse was identified in this research, both quantitative and qualitative examination were used to analyse the extent to which it is challenged in the texts. If the challenges to the potential discourse were explicit and widespread within the newspaper articles, then this was considered an argument or a theme rather than a discourse. If it was difficult to find any significant challenges to the potential discourse, then this was identified as a discourse within the texts. A discourse was considered different to a simple argument (sometimes corresponding with the subject areas within the coding manual) such as 'the licence fee is poor value for money' or 'the BBC is well respected.' A discourse was considered to comprise multiple different themes which contribute to a wider-ranging discourse, which is influenced by both wider contexts and language.

Within this study, the identification of 'challenges' to a discourse was conducted on two different levels. First, once a potential discourse was identified by identifying patterns in textual and contextual features across articles within content analysis, where possible, SPSS was used to re-examine the quantitative data. This involved the recoding of existing subjects into new variables which were supportive of and challenging to the proposed discourse. The frequency of these variables was then assessed and cross-tabulated with newspapers. There was an inevitable element of subjectivity within this method as it was at the discretion of the researcher to decide which subjects should appear within the re-coded variables. However, this quantitative analysis simply provided an indication of whether it was feasible to identify a discourse. A qualitative review of texts which were considered to contain the potential discourse then took place to identify linguistic and intertextual features, together with contextual factors.

The extent to which presuppositions were challenged within texts was particularly relevant in identifying discourses present, as if these assumptions remained unchallenged within the text, this suggested evidence of discourse naturalisation. As

discussed, this study investigates the range of discourses present within the newspaper texts and uses this to examine the extent to which ideologies are operationalised, to appear as 'common sense' rather than a partial worldview. Presuppositions are important in constructing 'common sense' as 'presupposing something is tantamount to assuming that there are other texts...that are common ground for oneself and one's readers, in which what is now presupposed is explicitly present, part of the 'said'" (Fairclough 1995: 107). In order to identify presuppositions, previous knowledge of the literature<sup>73</sup> was drawn upon, in addition to considerations of the use of language. The qualitative analysis within this study included intertextual analysis, examining how texts which are key parts of the events for analysis (e.g. the Green Paper and the White Paper) were drawn upon and adapted within the newspaper articles. Analysis also considered how texts were drawn upon which were related to the events analysed, such as speeches and remarks from the Prime Minister and Culture Secretary. Whether these speeches or comments were reported directly or indirectly was taken into consideration. Furthermore, how different sections of newspapers interacted with one another was examined, for example, considering whether and the extent to which opinion pieces, features and letters to the editor were drawn upon within news articles. This study to examined whether and how the use of other texts could relate to the 'ideological motivations of the text producer' (Cameron and Panovic 2014: 72).

### **Linguistic features identified**

The use of pronouns such as 'our' and 'we' was considered in analysis to identify how 'collective identities' were constructed in the texts (Fairclough 2000: 35).

Identification of pronoun use allowed for investigation of whether and the extent to

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<sup>73</sup> This included the BBC related literature which was the focus of the newspaper articles for analysis such as the Green Paper and White Paper, in addition to any of the previous studies which have mentioned the BBC licence fee (see chapter two, section three).

which categories of 'us' and 'them' were created within the texts. The referential strategies used to refer to actors within the newspaper articles were considered because journalists writing for a newspaper make a choice when deciding to name people (Richardson 2007: 48). It was of particular interest to consider why journalists chose to use one name instead of another when referring to the BBC (for example, whether the Corporation was referred to as 'Auntie.' According to Richardson, Van Dijk suggests the 'ideological square' determines choices between referential strategies, referencing 'them' negatively and 'us' positively (Richardson 2007: 205). It was therefore of interest to consider how positive and negative naming strategies were used by newspapers when discussing the licence fee payer and the BBC. Furthermore, this study analysed the use of hyperbole, or excessive exaggeration in the texts, and the effect that this had in portrayal of the BBC licence fee. According to Van Dijk's ideological square, hyperbole can be used to present opposite sides as the enemy (Machin and Mayr 2012: 170). Although this study did not try to simply transpose the ideological square on to the data, pronoun usage, hyperbole and referential strategies were all analysed to assess whether an 'us' and 'them' were evoked within the newspaper discourse.

The use of rhetorical tropes, such as hyperbole, can help drive the understanding of events or arguments because they can make the event seem much more emotive or simplistic than describing an event factually. However, this study did not just identify rhetorical tropes within the texts but related them to the wider discourses which the rhetorical tropes help to communicate (Machin and Mayr 2012: 178). Metaphor, or portraying one concept in terms of another, such as the 'housing market bubble' (Machin and Mayr 2012: 167), was examined. The analysis of metaphor could identify whether there were common concepts which were used to identify the BBC across the newspaper articles, or whether there were common metaphors across newspapers. This was considered important in analysis as 'when metaphors

become accepted, they can have implications for how we understand the world' (Machin and Mayr 2012: 164). Further to this, metonymy (Fairclough 2007: 68) was also identified within the texts to assess whether part of the BBC was consistently referred to across newspapers. Metonymy is a more direct form of association than metaphor and it was of interest to investigate whether either (or both) were present within the newspaper articles and whether there were any patterns in the usage of these rhetorical tropes. In addition, the extent to which puns were used and whether these were more common in the tabloid newspapers across the corpus was examined (Richardson 2007: 69).

## **Conclusion**

Overall, this study uses mixed methods research (quantitative content analysis using a coding sheet together with Critical Discourse Analysis) to conduct a robust analysis of newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee. Articles were selected for analysis using the Lexis Nexis database and scrutinised by the researcher to mitigate the methodological shortcomings of using Lexis (Deacon 2007). Newspaper articles were based around four events in the recent history of the licence fee, and the articles from these events were chosen based on the national newspapers in print at the time of each event. Once the sample of articles was chosen the quantitative aspect of this research used coding through a detailed coding manual, influenced by open coding, a pilot study and intercoder reliability. Coding decisions (e.g. around tone and subject area) were used to influence the selection of articles for qualitative analysis (explained in more detail in chapter five). Qualitative analysis identified the themes and discourses present using presuppositions, while also drawing upon linguistic aspects of the text for analysis. The following chapters will discuss the results which were derived from putting this methodology into practice.

## **Chapter Five: Quantitative findings on newspaper reporting of the BBC and the licence fee**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a breakdown of the findings from the quantitative content analysis undertaken prior to the Critical Discourse Analysis for this study. The chapter details the results from a content analysis of a sample of 646 newspaper articles using a coding manual (see appendix). The difficulties of content analysis of newspaper articles have been well-documented. For example, Deacon *et al.* discuss how researcher bias can mean interesting features of the data are missed as 'content analysis is not an exploratory method. It only gives answers to the questions you ask. So, you must make sure you ask the right questions' (Deacon *et al.* 2010: 123). However, as discussed in chapter four, using open coding for this study allowed for themes to emerge for inclusion in the coding manual, rather than applying a predetermined schema to the newspaper texts. The process of designing the coding manual was as open as possible and included a pilot study to ensure that its content was not solely constructed around the pre-determined bias of the researcher. Content analysis was conducted, and verified through intercoder reliability, to provide a broad overview of newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee. The key findings from this overview could then be investigated in more detail through qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis.

### **Summary of quantitative findings**

1. Certain sections of the press, notably the *Daily Mirror*, were, overall, distinctly pro-BBC. However, higher circulation newspapers such as the *Sun* and the *Daily Mail* displayed a predominantly anti-BBC tone.

2. The party-political stance of newspapers affected their tone towards the BBC, with left-leaning newspapers (see table 4.2 for definition) particularly critical of the government's actions towards the BBC.
3. A reasonably large portion of articles (44 per cent) were not licence-fee-relevant,<sup>74</sup> showing that although the articles mentioned the words 'licence fee' the BBC's system of funding was not the principal discussion point within the article.
4. The articles were rarely positive towards the licence fee, indicating a general lack of support of the licence fee across UK national newspaper articles.
5. Recurring subjects present within the newspaper articles suggested that the BBC was too big and hindered commercial media.
6. Newspapers were notably positive about the BBC's programming or output but, in contrast, were critical of profligacy at the BBC, and were particularly critical of celebrity pay.

The findings within this chapter were derived from analysis of the following main variables of each article, recorded during the coding process (see table 4.3):

- Tone towards the BBC
- Tone towards the licence fee
- Subjects present within the article
- Licence fee relevance of the article
- BBC relevance of the article

Before explaining the findings of the quantitative analysis in detail, the next section of the chapter provides quantitative background to the sample of newspaper articles, indicating the impact of print newspaper circulation on the sample.

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<sup>74</sup> For guidance for the researcher on how to differentiate between a licence-fee-relevant and a non-licence-fee relevant article, see appendix.

## Prominence of the articles

The largest number of articles appeared in the *Guardian* newspaper, with the fewest appearing in two Sunday newspapers, the *Sunday Star* and the *Sun on Sunday* (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2). Most articles (over 90 per cent) in the sample were from daily newspapers, while less than ten per cent were from the Sundays. This was unsurprising given that each of the events were examined over a three-week period and so there were only usually three Sundays analysed during the time each event could be considered current, compared with 18 days of Daily newspapers within each event.

### Composition of Daily newspaper articles in the corpus

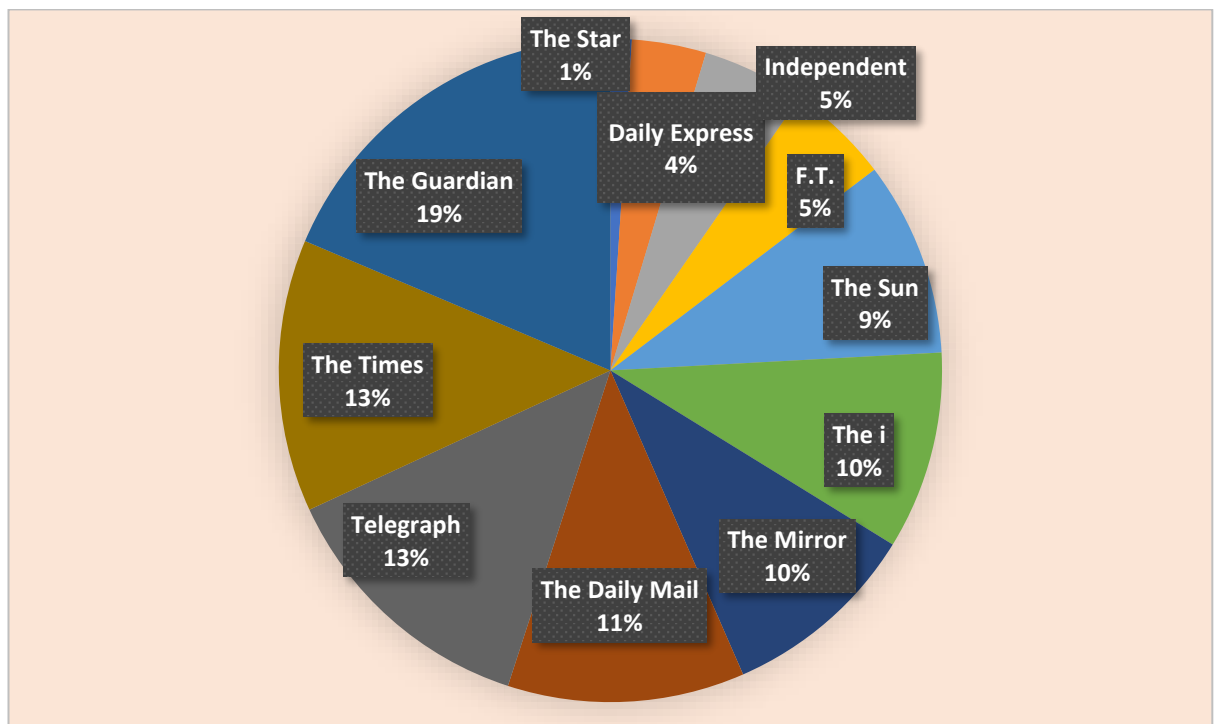


Figure 5.1: Proportion of articles in the corpus in Daily newspapers ( $n=586$ ) by newspaper title (unweighted by print circulation).



### Composition of Sunday newspaper articles in the corpus

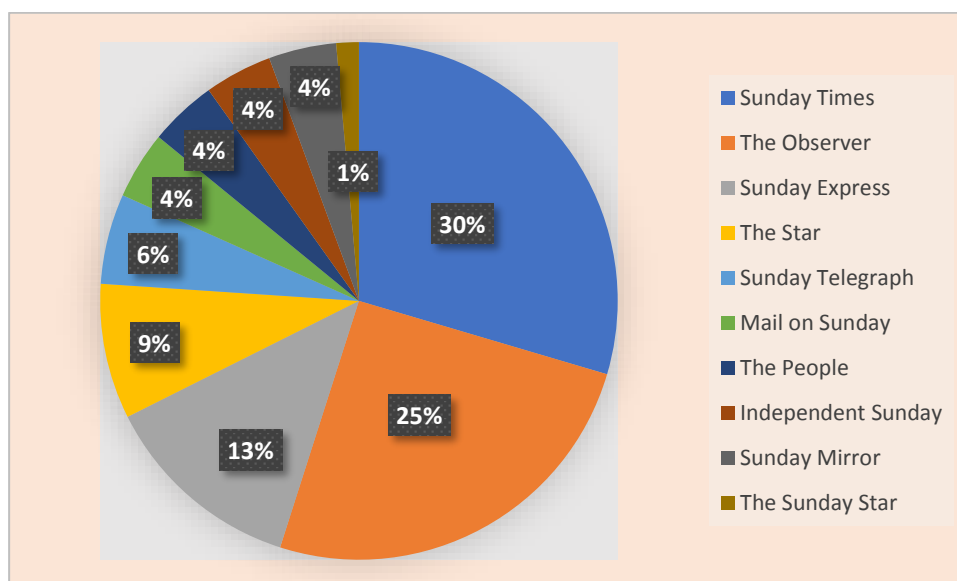


Figure 5.2: Proportion of articles in the corpus in Sunday newspapers (n=60) by newspaper title (unweighted by print circulation).

Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show which newspapers were more likely to refer to the licence fee when reporting on the BBC. However, this does not account for the circulation of individual newspapers. When the print circulation of each of the newspapers was taken into consideration, the articles in the right-leaning *Sun* and the *Daily Mail* were clearly dominant (see figure 5.3 below), reflecting these newspapers' high market share. This stayed constant when weighing by newspaper circulation figures at the time of each event (2010 licence fee settlement, 2015 licence fee settlement, 2015 Green Paper and 2016 White Paper) across a six year period (see figure 5.3).<sup>75</sup> Therefore, although the *Guardian* may have been the newspaper which contained the most articles which included the words 'BBC' and 'licence fee' (108 articles), the *Guardian's* low print circulation meant that these articles were less widely circulated,

<sup>75</sup> All circulation data taken from Audit Bureau of Circulation figures for October 2010, July 2015 and May 2016. These months were chosen because they cover the time periods for the newspaper coverage of the four events analysed for this study.

and therefore less likely to be read in print, than the articles about the licence fee in higher circulation newspapers.

**Prominence of Daily newspapers across the corpus weighted by print circulation**

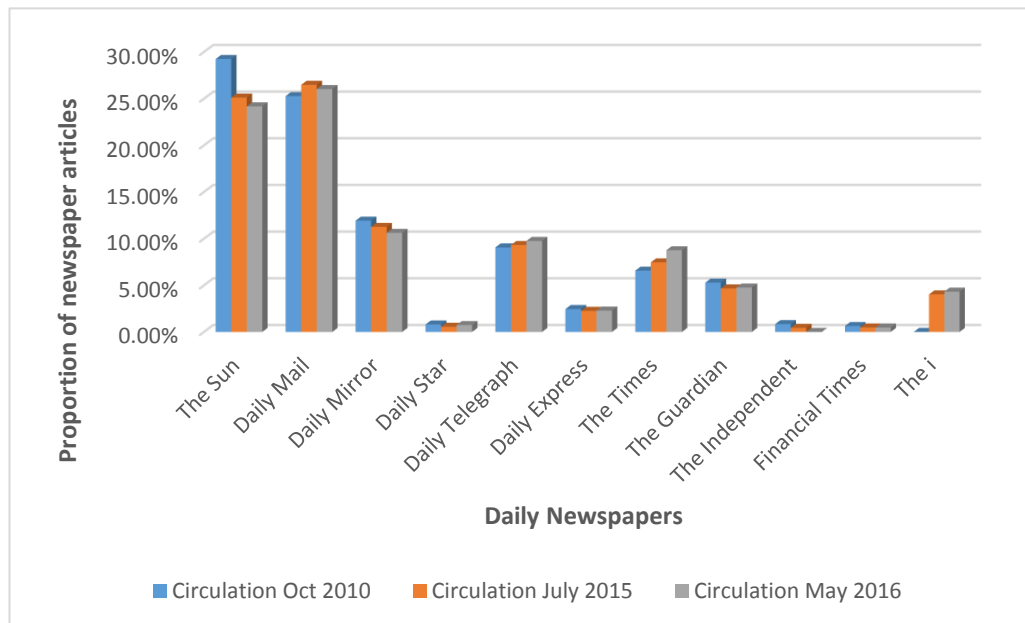


Figure 5.3: Proportion of articles in the corpus in daily newspapers (n=11) by newspaper title (weighted by print circulation for October 2010, July 2015 and May 2016).

Within the Sunday newspapers, the *Sunday Times* is consistently dominant above all other Sunday titles, both weighted and unweighted by print circulation.<sup>76</sup> Overall, therefore, as with the Daily newspapers in October 2010 and July 2015, the Sunday articles within the sample were dominated by a Murdoch-controlled newspaper, when weighted by circulation.

<sup>76</sup> Note that Figure 5.4 represents only the Sunday newspapers, separated out from the daily newspapers in figure 5.3, for ease of reference.

### Prominence of Sunday newspapers across the corpus weighted by print circulation

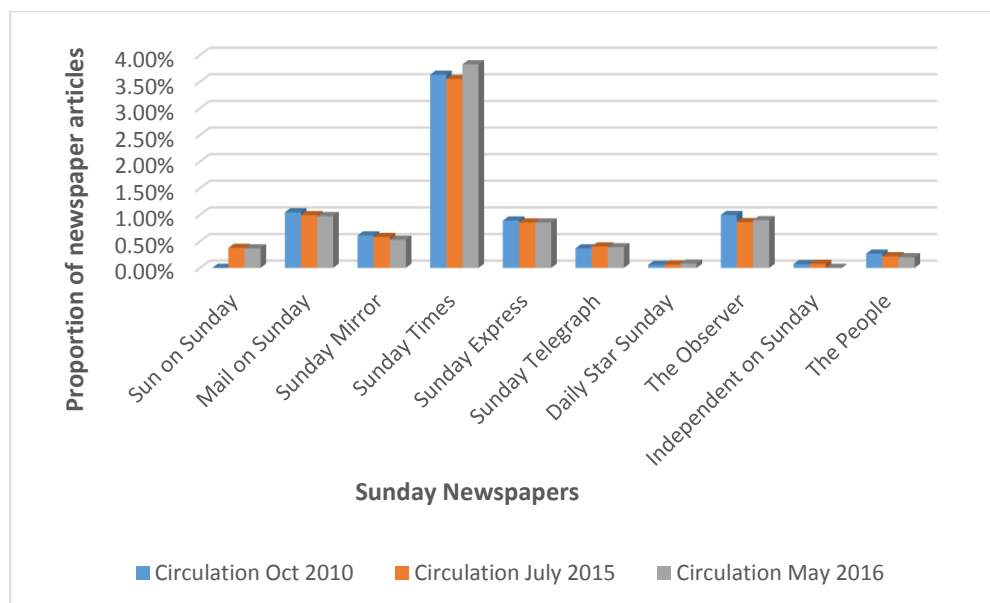


Figure 5.4: Proportion of articles in the corpus in Sunday newspapers (n=10) by newspaper title (weighted by print circulation).

Just 4 per cent of articles in the sample appeared on the front pages of the newspapers. The newspaper with the most articles on the front page was the *Guardian* (5 articles), followed by its Sunday equivalent, the *Observer* and *The Telegraph* (3 articles in each). For example, on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2015, before the publication of the licence fee settlement and Green Paper, an article on the *Guardian's* front page discussed job cuts at the BBC. However, the page on which articles most frequently appeared was page 2 with 42 per cent of articles (271) appearing before page 12. The type of article included in the first 12 pages differed depending on newspaper. While the *Guardian* had the highest number of articles in the sample (108 articles), less than half of these (45) appeared within the first 12 pages of the newspaper. The *Guardian* had no editorials (the opinion of the newspaper on the issues of the day) appearing within the first 12 pages of the newspaper, unlike, for example the *Financial Times* which contained four. Therefore, there were considerable variations in the prominence of different types or newspaper articles

(e.g. opinion, letter, editorial) across publications. Of course, a 25-word letter at the back of the newspaper was not considered equivalent to a larger article<sup>77</sup> on a newspaper's front page in influencing the debate on the BBC licence fee, and this was considered within qualitative analysis. However, reporting of the BBC licence fee is analysed in this study, not because it is a front-page issue, but because of its potential to provide information about discourses commonly employed within UK newspaper reporting around the public service broadcaster.

Overall, the concentrated nature of the UK media landscape (Media Reform Coalition 2019) means that articles in high-circulation, right-leaning newspapers dominate the sample, even though the raw data shows a high proportion of *Guardian* articles. Analysing both newspaper circulation and the position of articles within the newspaper is important to establish context for the prominence of the articles within individual newspapers. Next, the content of the articles is examined in more detail.

### **Distinct BBC positivity from some sections of the press**

The BBC has historically faced vociferous criticism from certain sections of the media and politicians but at the same time has also received copious praise as a great British institution (see chapter two, section two for further detail). Therefore, examining the tone of newspaper articles towards the BBC, to assess the extent to which the BBC was portrayed either positively or negatively, was crucial to understanding newspaper portrayal of the BBC licence fee. The following section of the chapter focuses on the tone of newspapers towards the BBC, including whether articles were considered BBC-relevant (as opposed to just mentioning the words 'BBC').

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<sup>77</sup> The median word count for articles in the sample was 353 words. The shortest article was 10 words and the longest 2,534.

Most articles within the sample (90 per cent) were judged to be BBC-relevant, while fewer than ten per cent of articles mentioned the BBC in passing or as part of a range of issues (for example, portraying the licence fee freeze as one of many austerity measures enacted by the government in 2010). The BBC did not struggle for representation as the BBC was the most quoted source across all the articles – 36 per cent of all sources quoted were from the BBC (followed by 22 per cent from government sources). The BBC, or persons related to it were quoted a total of 290 times, compared with the government, quoted 176 times and celebrities, who were quoted 100 times. This shows that the BBC cannot be characterised as struggling to gain influence within newspapers and BBC sources were a prominent feature within reporting. Furthermore, it indicates that coverage of the BBC was positive in certain sections of the press, as will be discussed in the next section of the chapter.

**Pro BBC newspaper coverage**

**Detailed tone of newspaper articles towards the BBC**

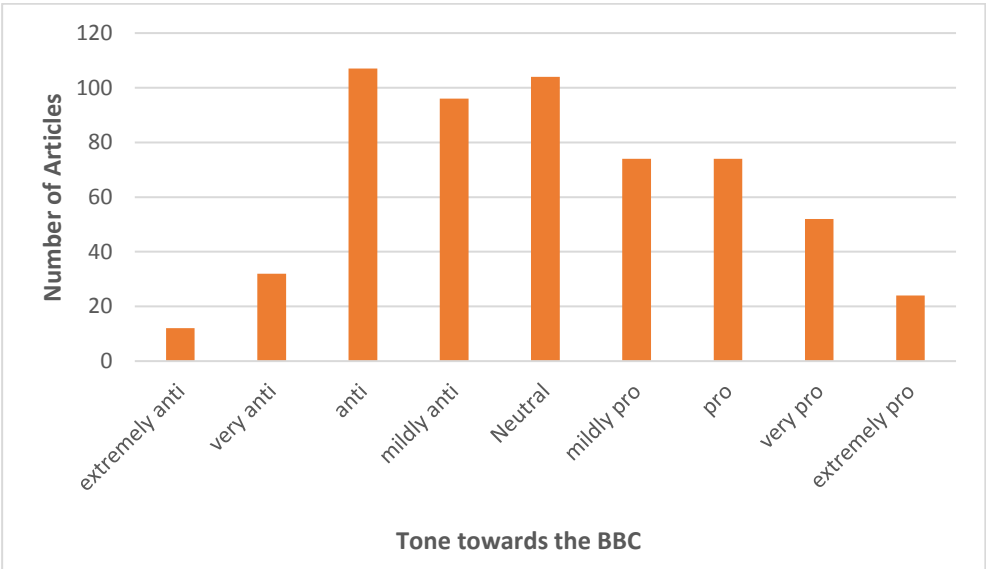


Figure 5.5: Breakdown of Detailed tone of newspaper articles towards the BBC in the sample (n=646), across all newspapers (unweighted by circulation).

Within the unweighted data, more than a fifth (22 per cent) of the articles were coded as neutral<sup>78</sup> towards the BBC when detailed tone was considered across the sample. Articles were frequently coded as neutral when they were judged not to be BBC (or licence fee) relevant.<sup>79</sup> Articles were judged as neutral when they contained a mix of arguments from both sides of the debate. For example, a *Guardian* article (Jane Martinson, Monday 9<sup>th</sup> May, p.10) speculating on the contents of the upcoming White Paper, provided a list of each of the areas for potential reform (e.g. pay). The appeared to include different opinions within each area, without suggesting it was in favour of the BBC or the government, such as “The BBC stands accused of deliberately scheduling popular programmes against ITV and other commercial broadcasters, which it denies.” This *Guardian* article was therefore coded as neutral. On the other hand, an article on the same day also about the potential contents of the White Paper published in the *Times* (Sam Coates, p.4) was coded as mildly anti-BBC, rather than neutral. This was because it’s headline ‘Get serious, BBC told in White Paper,’ suggests the BBC needed to change its output, because it was not currently ‘serious’ enough.

However, although there were a significant number of BBC-neutral articles, it was notable that more articles were assigned the extreme BBC-positive codes than extreme BBC- negative codes. Just 12 articles were coded as extremely anti BBC (nearly 2 per cent of the sample), while 24 (nearly 4 per cent) were extremely pro BBC (see figure 5.5). The fact that there are twice as many articles which are extremely pro BBC than extremely anti is indicative of a BBC positive element within the newspaper coverage. This BBC positivity was also reflected in the subjects

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<sup>78</sup> A full explanation of guidance for the researcher to determine whether an article was neutral is provided within the appendix.

<sup>79</sup> Of the 64 articles not considered to be BBC relevant, 71 per cent of these were coded as neutral. Of the 287 articles not considered to be licence fee relevant 91 per cent of these were coded as neutral.

present within the newspaper articles. For example, the Corporation was compared favourably with other public bodies, such as the National Health Service (NHS), more than twice as many times as it was compared negatively with other public bodies.<sup>80</sup> One article suggested:

Groping for British emblems to bind together an ever more diverse and fissiparous society, politicians struggle to find cultural and emotional social glue. Make your own list from the Queen to Glastonbury, but overwhelmingly people put the NHS and the BBC right up there near the top, deep-dyed into British DNA (Polly Toynbee, *Guardian*, Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2015, p. 31).

Furthermore, 17 per cent of articles mentioned that the BBC had a positive reputation, for example, suggesting the BBC was the ‘envy of the world,’ or that the BBC was loved by the British public.<sup>81</sup> Whilst by no means a large portion of the articles, this indicated that positive coverage of the institution existed in the press.

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<sup>80</sup> The coding manual contained the subjects ‘positive comparison between the BBC and other public bodies’ and ‘negative comparison between the BBC and other public bodies.’ There were 20 positive comparisons and eight negative comparisons across the sample.

<sup>81</sup> The variable ‘positive BBC reputation’ was created in SPSS to combine the following original subjects from the coding manual:

- BBC as the envy of the world
- BBC as unique on the world stage
- positive comparison between the BBC and other public bodies
- People couldn’t live without the BBC. (Reference to ‘Life Without the BBC’ study and opinion)
- BBC creates a shared sense of national identity
- Public love the BBC
- The BBC is an asset to the UK

### General tone of Daily newspaper articles towards the BBC

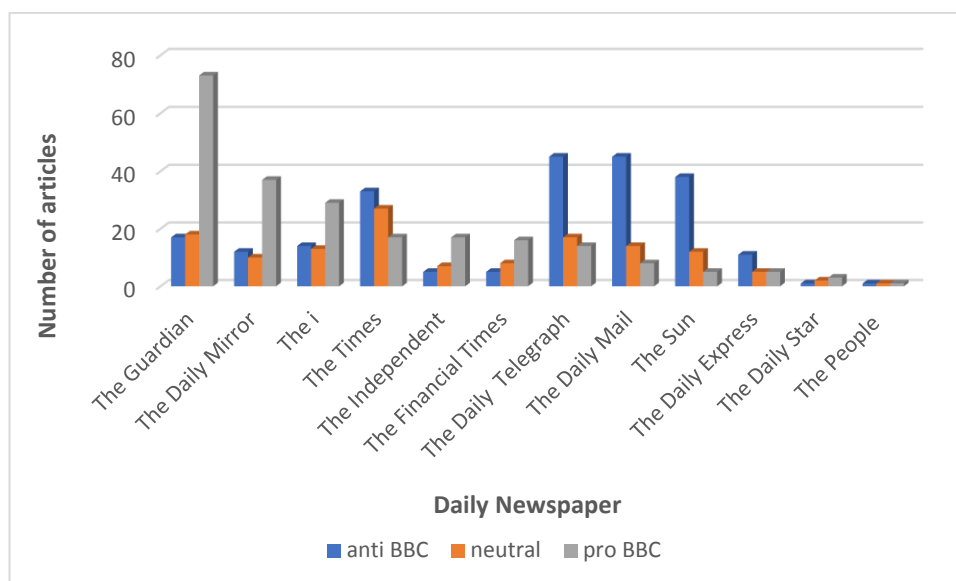


Figure 5.6: General tone of the newspaper articles (n=586) towards the BBC, by daily newspaper, (n=11) unweighted by circulation.

When the general tone of articles by daily newspaper was considered, there were clearly particular newspapers which were generally pro-BBC, most notably the *Guardian* and the *Daily Mirror* (see figure 5.6). When considering the *Daily Mirror's* detailed tone, this newspaper had more articles as 'very pro BBC' than any other detailed tone indicator. Articles in the *Mirror* frequently defended the BBC against what it perceived as a hostile Conservative government.<sup>82</sup> For example, an editorial on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2016 was headlined 'This is a Tory coup on our beloved BBC' and began with the sentence 'The eagerness of David Cameron's reckless revolutionaries to destroy the BBC is a triumph of extremist ideology over what the country loves' (*Daily Mirror*, Monday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p10). The *Mirror* adopted a highly anti-Conservative stance in its coverage of the licence fee. The BBC was portrayed as one of many public services which, according to the *Mirror*, the Conservative Party were intent on destroying. This article stated that the Conservatives 'can no more

<sup>82</sup> The *Daily Mirror* is one of the few newspapers in the UK which has consistently backed the Labour Party in general elections (Deacon and Wring 2016: 306), which can help explain its reaction to a Conservative government's BBC reforms.



leave it [the BBC] alone than they can the NHS, schools or council houses.’ The *Mirror* therefore used reforms of the BBC to criticise the government and, as a by-product of this, was supportive of the BBC.

**Contrast between left-leaning and right-leaning sections of the press**

**Comparison between a left-leaning and a right leaning popular newspaper towards the BBC**

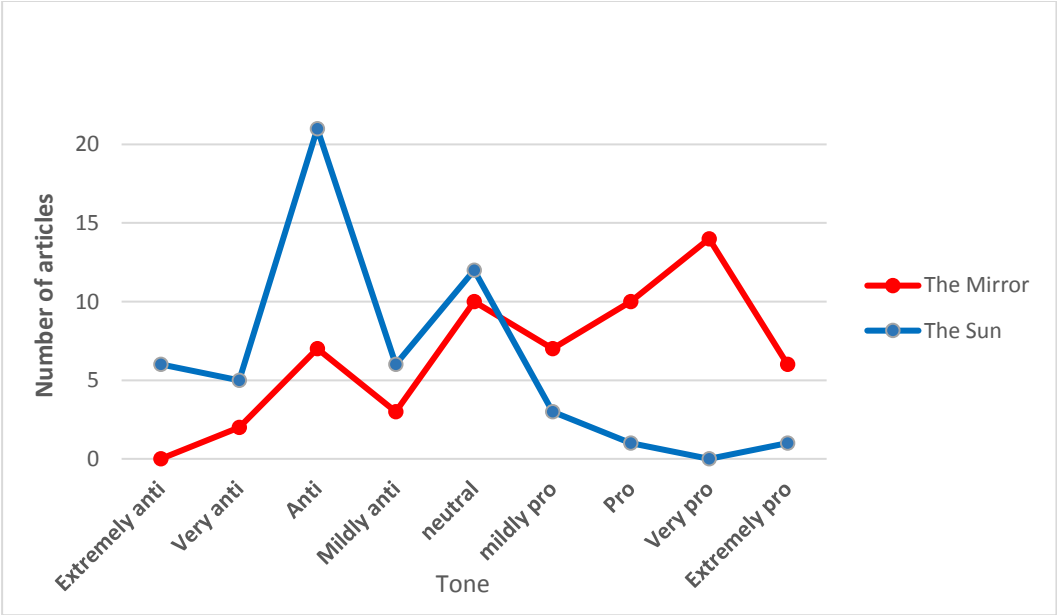


Figure 5.7: Detailed tone findings: Comparison between articles in a left-leaning (n= 56) and a right-leaning (n=55) popular newspaper. Note that the tone of the Sun (right-leaning) peaks at anti-BBC, whereas the tone of the Mirror (left-leaning) peaks at very pro BBC.

**Comparison between a left-leaning and right-leaning quality newspaper: detailed tone towards the BBC**

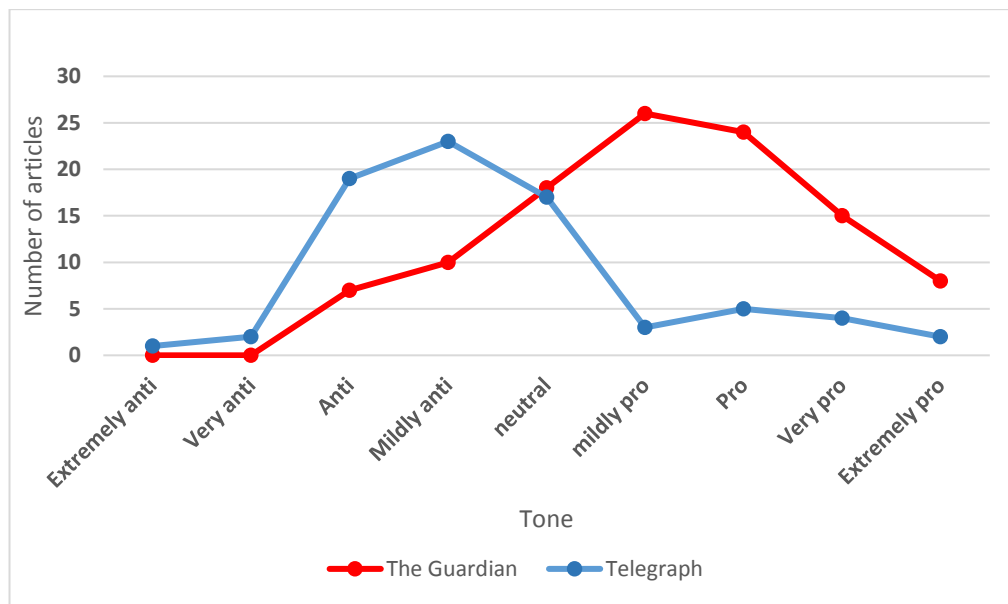


Figure 5.8: Detailed tone findings: comparison between articles in a left-leaning (n=108) and a right-leaning (n=77) quality newspaper. Note that the right-leaning Daily Telegraph peaks at mildly anti BBC tone, whereas the left-leaning Guardian peaks at mildly pro BBC tone.

The analysis of tone towards the BBC within the articles indicated that the more left-leaning newspapers such as the *Mirror* and the *Guardian* tended to be supportive of the BBC. This contrasted with the right-leaning, high-circulation *Sun*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*, which contained significant number of anti-BBC articles (see figures 5.7, 5.8, 5.9). The *Sun* only had 5 articles, or 9 per cent of its articles in the sample, with a general pro BBC tone, in contrast to 69 per cent of its articles (38) consisting of an anti-BBC tone. Within the *Daily Mail*, a similar trend is observed, with 67 per cent of its articles (45) generally anti-BBC and 12 per cent of its articles (8) generally pro (see figure 5.9).

### General tone towards the BBC in the highest circulation newspapers

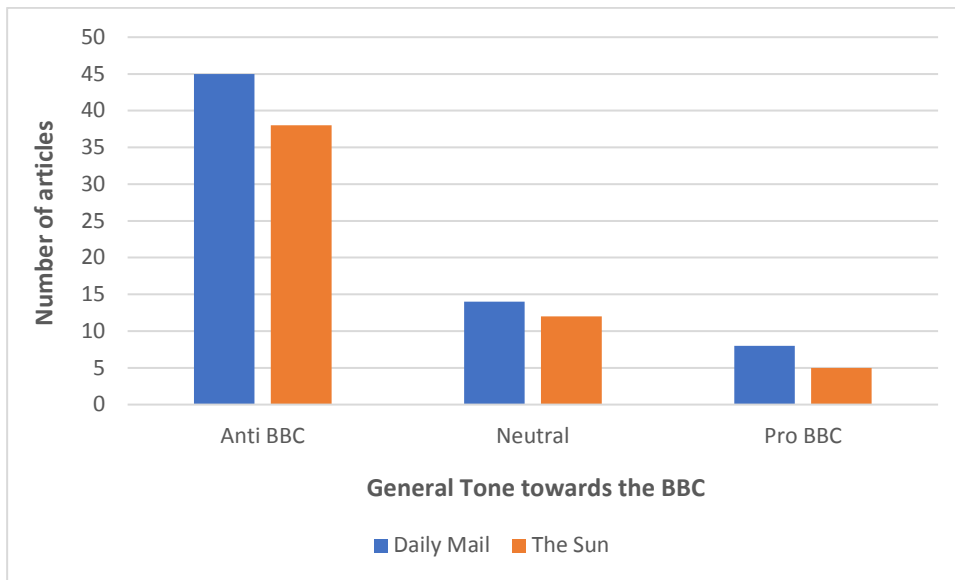


Figure 5.9: General tone of newspaper articles towards the BBC within the Daily Mail (n=67) and Sun (n=55) newspapers. This indicates the prominence of anti-BBC tone in the highest and second highest circulation newspapers in the UK during the time the events were analysed.

The trend observed between the political leanings of newspapers and their support towards the BBC is inconsistent in the case of the *Financial Times* which, despite 55 per cent of its articles coded as generally pro-BBC, called for a Conservative Party victory in the 2010 and 2015 general elections, so would be considered a 'right-leaning' newspaper. This was 'very weak Conservative' support in 2010 and supportive of the Coalition with the Liberal Democrats in 2015 (Deacon and Wring 2016: 304). This indicates that, although party political affiliation of a newspaper provides an indication of the way in which newspapers will represent the BBC, this is not uniform across all publications. The more BBC supportive tone of the *Financial Times* when compared with newspapers like the *Mail* and the *Sun* could be due to reasons of competition, rather than politics. Although Financial Times Limited had a not insignificant market share of around 10 per cent in 2015 (Media Reform Coalition 2015: 7), it is nowhere near the size of the market share commanded by

News Corp and the Daily Mail Group. The *Financial Times* is a quality newspaper with a more niche international focus on business and economic interests (Tunstall 1996: 355), rather than a more general interest, high circulation newspaper. Therefore, the *Financial Times* is less likely to view the BBC as a competitor for UK news audiences than other newspapers which compete directly with the BBC for audiences.

It is clear, therefore, that the quantitative data shows a mixed picture on tone towards the BBC within the sample of newspaper articles. Some newspapers have a more pro-BBC tone, notably the left-leaning *Daily Mirror* and *Guardian*. However, the higher circulation and right-leaning *Daily Mail* and *Sun*, are marked by their anti-BBC news reporting. The next section of this chapter investigates how criticism of the government's actions towards the BBC manifests itself in reporting.

## **1. Newspaper criticism of government**

All of the events selected for analysis within this study were driven by the government, in that they involved government policies which impacted or had the potential to impact upon the BBC. Therefore, the way in which the government's role influenced newspaper coverage of the BBC and its licence fee is analysed to show how the political leanings of newspapers influenced how government actions towards the BBC were portrayed in coverage.

## Portrayal of the relationship between the BBC and the government

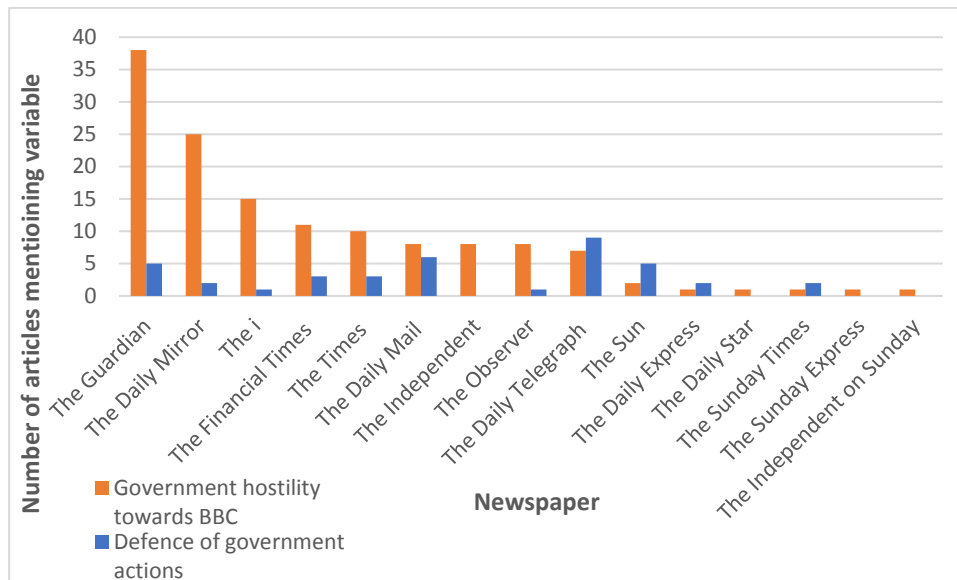


Figure 5.10: breakdown of the frequency in which newspaper articles contain the variable 'government hostility towards BBC' (n= 137), compared with frequency of the variable 'defence of government actions' (n=39).

More than a fifth (21 per cent) of the studied articles mentioned that the Conservative, or Conservative-led Coalition government's actions towards the BBC were hostile.<sup>83</sup> This is in stark contrast to the fact that, across the entire sample, only six per cent of articles (39) explicitly defended government actions towards the

<sup>83</sup> In order to distinguish whether newspapers presented the government as inherently hostile towards the BBC, a variable 'Government hostility towards BBC' was created in SPSS to encompass the following subjects from the coding manual:

- government exerting too much pressure on the BBC
- government forcing the BBC to make cuts
- accusation of government bias against the BBC
- government allowing rivals to the BBC to dictate the BBC's future
- government echoing the views of the Murdoch press
- government attitude towards the BBC threatens the Corporation's future

Although 'hostility' is a somewhat loaded term, it was felt that it was necessary to distinguish between subjects present which were simply negative towards the BBC (e.g. 'the BBC is biased') and subjects which specifically suggested that the government had an agenda towards the BBC. This is because the events selected for analysis were government-focused and allowed for a distinction to be made between newspapers' opinion about the BBC and newspapers opinion about government actions towards the BBC.

BBC.<sup>84</sup> Newspapers which supported the Labour Party in the 2015 general election contained more than half of all the mentions of the variable 'government hostility towards the BBC,' more than 30 per cent of mentions were in Coalition supporting newspapers while only 13 per cent were in Conservative supporting newspapers (see figure 5.11). The finding that Conservative supporting newspapers are less likely to suggest that the Conservative government would be hostile towards the BBC is unsurprising. However, it shows that newspapers' party-political affiliations broadly determine their reporting of the BBC.

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<sup>84</sup> To distinguish the extent to which the government's actions on the BBC were overtly defended within the newspaper articles, the variable 'defence of government actions' was created in SPSS to encompass the following subjects from the coding manual:

- Licence fee freeze justified due to austerity
- Extra funding responsibilities are necessary for the BBC
- Rationale for the BBC taking on welfare responsibilities
- Funding cuts will not damage BBC programming
- Funding cuts to the BBC in line with other public services: effective.

Note that the presence of the 'government defence' variable, does not intend to imply that in most articles where this variable was not present, they all vociferously disagreed with the government. This variable highlights where government policy was explicitly defended, rather than just a general sentiment.

**How party political affiliation of newspapers determined reporting of the relationship between the BBC and the government**

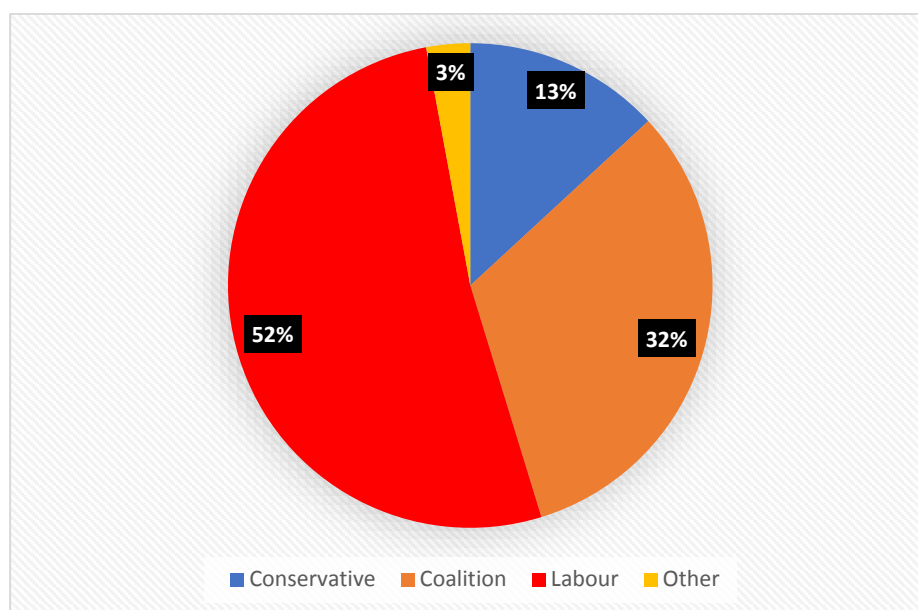


Figure 5.11: Percentage of articles which highlighted the variable government hostility towards the BBC (n=137), by party political affiliation of each newspaper during the 2015 General Election.

**Specific newspaper criticism of government: *Daily Mirror*, *Guardian* and *Observer***

Of the articles that suggest the government is hostile to the BBC, 28 per cent were within the *Guardian*, and 18 per cent were within the *Daily Mirror* (see figure 5.10).

In addition to the frequency of these variables, when considering the individual subjects<sup>85</sup> present across each newspaper, the *Guardian* and the *Mirror* also appeared highly critical of the government's treatment of the BBC. The most frequently occurring secondary subject in the *Guardian* articles suggested that government politicians viewed the BBC negatively, while the most frequently occurring primary subject area was that government reforms threaten the BBC's

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<sup>85</sup> As discussed in table 4.2, individual subjects appeared in the coding manual to enable the researcher to record what the article was about. In addition to combining subjects into variables, it was revealing to analyse how individual subjects were also used across newspapers.

independence. Both are indicative of the newspaper’s willingness to criticise the government’s actions towards the BBC. Furthermore, the most frequently occurring primary and secondary subjects in the *Mirror* were ‘accusation of government bias against the BBC,’ while the most frequently occurring peripheral subject was ‘the BBC as the envy of the world’ (see table 5.2). This shows the pro-BBC nature of coverage in the *Mirror* and indicates its overwhelming anti-government tone.

**Top ten most frequently occurring primary subject areas**

<b><u>Subject</u></b>	<b><u>Frequency of occurrences</u></b>
Description of potential reforms to the BBC	44
BBC taking on welfare responsibilities	32
Accusation of government bias against the BBC	26
Animosity between the BBC and the government over reform	19
Government reforms threatening BBC independence	18
Negative impact of the BBC taking on welfare responsibilities	16
Size of the BBC: too big	16
BBC programmes should have popular appeal	14
Alternative to licence fee: subscription	13
Description of extra BBC funding responsibilities	12

*Table 5.1: top 10 most frequently occurring primary subject areas across the sample of newspaper articles (n=646).*

The top ten most frequently occurring primary subject areas within the newspaper articles contained the subject ‘negative impact of the BBC taking on welfare responsibilities’ (see table 5.1). This relates to the licence fee settlement from the government in 2015, which passed the responsibility of funding free licence fees for over 75s from the government to the BBC. The frequent appearance of this subject across the articles revealed that newspapers were frequently critical of this government policy. For example, following the 2015 licence fee settlement, an



article with the headline 'Osborne in £650m raid on the BBC; cuts could kill off a channel' appeared in the *Daily Mirror*. This described Chancellor George Osborne as having declared 'war' on the BBC 'by axing a fifth of its budget to fund his benefit cut' (Blanchard 2015: 2). The word choices in this article, such as 'raid,' present the licence fee settlement as something violent. Osborne is taking money from an organisation he appears to be against (the BBC) and uses this to fund an austerity project he supports (underlined using the possessive determiner 'his'). The *Mirror* highlights negative information about the licence fee settlement within this article, portraying the settlement as an unfair imposition by a government which, the reader is reminded, threatened to close the BBC during the last election.

**Most frequently occurring subjects (across all areas)**

<b><u>Newspaper</u></b>	<b><u>Most frequently occurring primary subject</u></b>	<b><u>Most frequently occurring secondary subject</u></b>	<b><u>Most frequently occurring peripheral subject</u></b>
The Daily Mail	BBC taking on welfare responsibilities	Size of the BBC: too big	BBC taking on welfare responsibilities
The Sun	BBC deception	Size of the BBC: too big	Licence fee poor value for money
The Guardian	Government reforms threaten BBC independence	Personal opinion of politicians towards the BBC - negative	Praise for an individual BBC programme or output
The Daily Telegraph	Alternative to licence fee: subscription	BBC too profligate: general	Alternative to licence fee: broadcasting levy
The Daily Mirror	Accusation of government bias against the BBC	Personal opinion of politicians towards the BBC - negative	BBC as the envy of the world
The Times	Description of potential reforms to the BBC	BBC hindering other media outlets	Alternative to licence fee: subscription
The Independent	BBC taking on welfare responsibilities	Negative impact of BBC taking on welfare responsibilities	Size of the BBC: too big
The I	BBC taking on welfare responsibilities	Negative impact of BBC taking on welfare responsibilities	Size of the BBC: too big
The Daily Express	BBC taking on welfare responsibilities	Negative impact of BBC taking on welfare responsibilities	Modernise the licence fee to cover on demand television/online services
Financial Times	Government reforms threaten BBC independence	Description of the BBC's position within the market	BBC taking on welfare responsibilities
Sunday Times	Description of potential reforms to the BBC	BBC hindering other media outlets	BBC taking on welfare responsibilities
The Observer	Accusation of government bias against the BBC	Not enough funding given to the BBC	Sections of the press are hostile towards the BBC

*Table 5.2: breakdown of most frequently occurring primary, secondary and peripheral subjects within each newspaper (n=12). Newspapers with fewer than 10 articles across the sample are omitted as there was not enough data to draw definitive conclusions on the mode subject areas.*

Within the sample, there were articles which presented the government as having an anti-BBC agenda for very specific reasons. For example, there were suggestions that the government policy towards the BBC was hostile to curry favour with Rupert

Murdoch.<sup>86</sup> Murdoch-controlled newspapers (the *Sun*, the *Times* and the *Sunday Times*) supported the Conservative Party in the 2015 general Election and several newspaper articles suggested that, in return for Murdoch's electoral support, the government was trying to curb the remit of the BBC to help Murdoch's business interests. However, these suggestions of the government's support for Murdoch were generally confined to opinion pages in left-leaning broadsheet newspapers such as the *Guardian* and the *Observer*. For example, the columnist, Polly Toynbee comments in the *Guardian* 'Barely a day goes by without the *Mail*, *Telegraph* and Rupert Murdoch's papers attacking the BBC' (Toynbee, *Guardian*, Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2015, p. 31). In analysis, the subject 'government echoing the views of the Murdoch press' was only mentioned in two per cent of the articles. Therefore, critiquing government actions on the BBC because of presumed government links with Murdoch was only a small part of the debate within newspapers. However, it was of interest to note that that some newspapers argued that the government sought to criticise the BBC because of Murdoch's electoral endorsements, presuming a lack of government independence in relation to the BBC. The fifth most frequently occurring primary subject area across the sample was 'government reforms threatening BBC independence,' which indicates that newspapers were critical of the government on the basis that it was hindering an independent public service broadcaster.

So far, the quantitative analysis has shown that the government's interventions on the BBC were criticised within newspapers, with left-leaning publications describing the government as hostile towards the BBC particularly frequently. Whilst this is an interesting finding relating to relations between the BBC and the government more

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<sup>86</sup> See chapter two, section one, for a more detailed historical explanation of Murdoch controlled newspapers' hostility towards the BBC.

broadly, it does not consider the BBC's funding system. The next section, therefore, examines the data specifically surrounding the licence fee.

## **2. Licence fee reporting**

This section of the chapter considers a) the extent to which articles were judged to be licence-fee-relevant and b) the tone of the newspaper articles towards the licence fee. It was important to evaluate these variables in a thesis focussed on licence fee reporting as whether an article is licence-fee-relevant provides important context for each article. An analysis of tone allowed for an overview of how particular newspapers in the sample constructed the licence fee, which was useful for understanding variations on the funding system within reporting. These variations could then be interrogated further within qualitative analysis.

### **To what extent were articles licence-fee-relevant?**

Across the four events, 56 per cent of articles (359) were judged to be licence-fee-relevant,<sup>87</sup> which meant that a reasonably large portion of the articles (44 per cent or 287 articles) were not licence-fee-relevant. This shows that the words 'licence fee' are used in articles where the BBC's system of funding is not the key focus. To show how it was determined whether an article was licence-fee-relevant, examples of two articles, with differing levels of engagement with the licence fee are outlined below.

A *Sunday Times* opinion piece published before the 2010 licence fee settlement was entitled 'The BBC has fallen in with a rough crowd' (Martin Ivens,<sup>88</sup> *Sunday Times*, Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2010, p.25). This article attacked the BBC for joining with other newspapers, such as the *Guardian*, in lobbying the then Business Secretary, Vince

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<sup>87</sup> Articles were judged as 'licence-fee-relevant' if the main concern of the article was funding the BBC. For more information on how articles were judged as licence-fee-relevant, see appendix.

<sup>88</sup> Martin Ivens was Deputy Editor of the *Sunday Times* when he wrote the article in 2010 and is currently Editor of the newspaper (News UK 2019).

Cable, to stop News Corporation taking over the portion of BSkyB it did not already own.<sup>89</sup> Whilst this article is of note, because it is a Murdoch controlled newspaper essentially foregrounding the interests of a Murdoch company, it also only mentions the licence fee once, in passing, in relation to BBC Director General Mark Thompson having 'difficult negotiations ahead with his licence fee'. Here, referring to the licence fee as 'his' personalises the licence fee as belonging to Thompson himself rather than as revenue which is invested in programming. However, the focus of this article is criticising the BBC and its executives rather than the licence fee as a system of funding specifically. It was therefore not considered to be licence-fee-relevant.

In contrast, a *Sunday Times* opinion piece written before the publication of the Green Paper in 2015 headlined 'Oh dear. Auntie's forgotten why she's even here; The BBC has spread itself far too thinly. If it is to survive, it must decide, quickly, why it exists' (12<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p.2), was considered licence-fee-relevant. The columnist, Rod Liddle<sup>90</sup> says:

The licence fee, resented by an evergrowing proportion of the population as a statist anachronism, stands at £145.50 - more than seven times the original fee after inflation is taken into account. And yet even that £5bn is not nearly enough for the BBC to do what it thinks it ought to do (Liddle 2015).

Here, the inaccurate amount of money received by the BBC is used to frame the rest of Liddle's discussion - the BBC did not receive £5 billion from the licence fee but £3.7 billion, at the time Liddle was writing (TV licencing 2016). The article goes on to discuss the BBC's inability to compete for the rights to show sporting events,

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<sup>89</sup> See chapter two, section one.

<sup>90</sup> The author Rod Liddle formerly worked for the BBC and, at the time this article was written was Associate Editor of right-wing publication the *Spectator* (Rod Liddle 2019).

so is broadly financial in its focus. The article contains references to the licence fee, such as stating how the BBC has 'lost touch' with licence-fee payers or 'the people who fork out £145.50 every year, like it or not.' The financial focus of the article, its framing and references to the licence fee therefore contributed to the classification of the article as licence-fee-relevant.

Within the sample, as the events analysed progressed, articles were increasingly funding-orientated (see figure 5.12). 34 per cent of articles around the 2010 licence fee settlement were licence-fee-relevant, compared with 57 per cent of licence-fee-relevant articles around the time of the 2016 White Paper. The increased focus of the articles about the licence fee can be attributed to context surrounding reporting of the licence fee in 2010. The licence fee freeze was announced as part of a range of policy measures which formed the Coalition government's Comprehensive Spending Review. This means that within newspaper reporting, at times the licence fee was simply mentioned as part of a list of measures within the Spending Review. For example, an article in the *Times* on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> September, (p.6-7), headlined 'Fears for the old as town hall frontline services take big hit' focused on local government spending, while only briefly referencing the licence fee freeze and other BBC funding commitments.

### Licence fee relevance of the newspaper articles

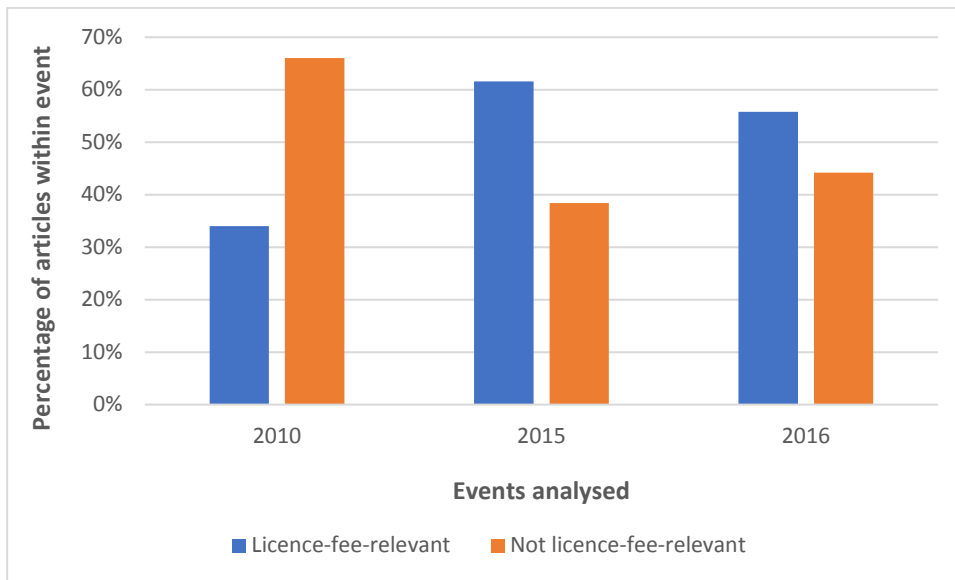


Figure 5.12: percentage of articles which were licence-fee-relevant ( $n=359$ ) across the events analysed. Note that the 2015 licence fee settlement and 2015 Green Paper are represented together here, given overlap between the events.

### **Licence fee tone**

64 per cent of the articles were coded as neutral towards the licence fee. The high proportion of neutral articles can be attributed to the fact that many mentions of the licence fee in news articles were simply describing a government reform, or a change in policy, rather than offering an opinion. For example, an article in the *i* on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> July 2015 (Andrew Grice, p.5) headlined ‘BBC could charge to use iPlayer in £650m cuts’ speculated on how viewers could be charged for access to iPlayer but did not engage with any substantive issues about the licence fee. Furthermore, the articles which were not considered to be licence-fee-relevant were always coded as neutral on the licence fee, accounting for the significant proportion of licence fee neutral articles.

### General tone of Daily newspaper articles towards the licence fee

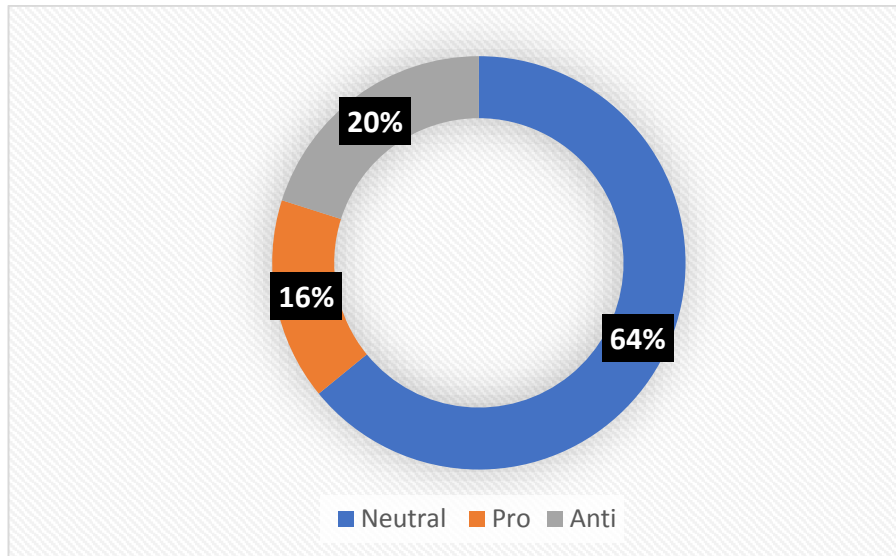


Figure 5.13: General tone of the Daily newspaper articles towards the licence fee (unweighted by circulation). Note that when weighted by average newspaper circulation across the events, these proportions remained the same.

130 articles in the sample (20 per cent) were coded with a general anti licence fee tone (see figure 5.13<sup>91</sup>). One clear example of an article with a detailed tone of extremely anti licence fee was an opinion piece in the *Daily Telegraph* by David Elstein on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2015 entitled 'It's death by a thousand cuts for the BBC - or subscriptions.' The article was critical of the BBC but particularly critical of the licence fee, concluding that:

As long as the BBC clings to a funding mechanism that condemns it to death by a thousand salami slices, rather than seizing the dynamic option of asking viewers to fund top-quality work through subscriptions, we should not waste too much sympathy on it. (Elstein 2015, p.14).

102 articles were coded with a pro licence fee general tone. When detailed tone was considered, only 11 of these (2 per cent) were coded as extremely pro licence fee,

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<sup>91</sup> These figures are unweighted by circulation, as weighting by circulation for each of the event time periods (October 2010, July 2015, May 2016) had a negligible effect on the percentage of articles coded at each tone.



showing that extreme praise for the licence fee was rare across the sample. For example, an editorial in the *Guardian* which describes the licence fee as a ‘shared resource’ and a ‘wonder’ (*Guardian*, Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2015, p.34) was a rare article which was extremely pro-licence fee. There were twice as many articles coded as extremely anti licence fee (22 articles) than coded as extremely pro licence fee (11 articles). This mismatch in extreme codes suggests that, although the articles were predominantly neutral on the licence fee, when the BBC’s funding system was discussed there was a tendency within the press to be critical.

**Tone towards the licence fee of articles within the most commonly occurring newspapers**

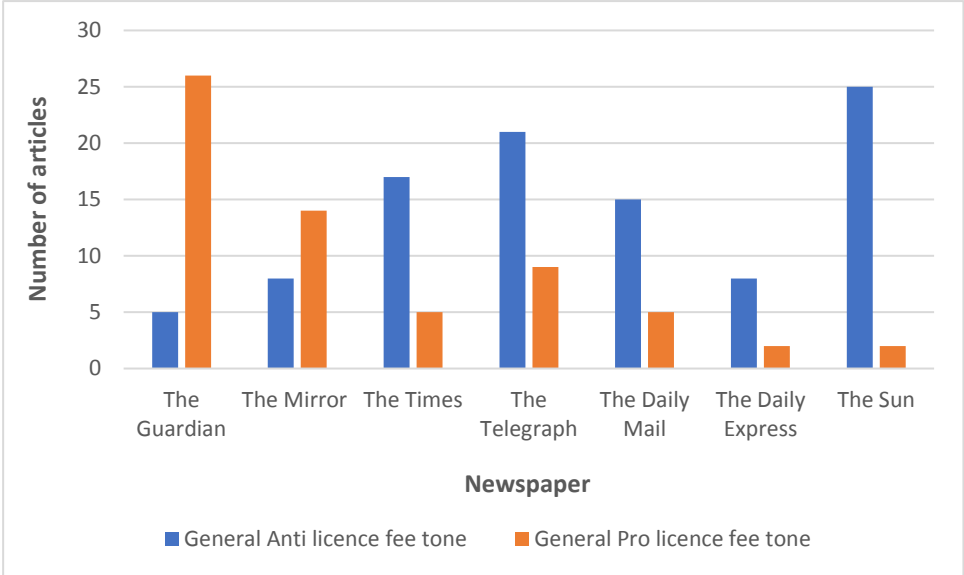


Figure 5.14: Breakdown of general pro and anti-licence fee tone, by the daily newspapers (n=7) which had the highest number of articles in the sample (total n=383). The left-leaning newspapers (*Guardian* and *Mirror*) are more pro licence fee, while the rest (right-leaning) are more anti).

As with tone towards the BBC, tone towards the licence fee varied depending on the political position of the newspaper. The *Guardian*, as a left-leaning newspaper, had 24 per cent of articles (26) with a general licence fee positive tone and just 5 per cent (5) a general licence fee negative tone. The *Guardian*’s more pro licence fee tone contrasts with the *Sun*, where just three per cent of articles (2) were considered to have a general pro licence fee tone, indicating that one of the highest circulation

newspapers in the UK rarely contained news articles in support of the licence fee. 45 per cent of articles (25) had a general anti-licence fee tone in the *Sun* (see figure 5.14). For example, a *Sun* editorial following the 2016 White Paper lamented ‘the anachronism of the licence fee’ which the BBC will use to ‘batter commercial rivals on TV, radio and the web’ (*Sun*, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p.10). In addition to tone towards the licence fee, the subjects present within *Sun* articles also indicated an anti-licence fee slant. The most frequently occurring peripheral subject area within the *Sun* articles was that the licence fee was poor value for money, (see table 5.2) which suggests that the newspaper, while not placing licence fee criticism at the heart of its reporting, frequently criticised the licence fee as a background issue to its main reporting.

When considering detailed tone towards the licence fee, another high circulation right-leaning newspaper, the *Daily Mail* contained no extremely pro licence fee articles. 15 of its non-neutral licence fee articles (22 per cent) were generally negative towards the licence fee, compared with just five articles (eight per cent) expressing a positive tone towards the licence fee. The day after the publication of the White Paper, the *Mail*'s editorial described the licence fee as ‘a compulsory levy which bears most heavily on the poor: a system which would quite rightly be seen as indefensible if introduced now’ (*Daily Mail*, Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2016). The right-leaning *Daily Express* had just two articles (9 per cent) with a licence fee positive tone, compared with eight negative articles, (38 per cent). One of its articles headlined ‘BBC reforms ‘duck chance to update unfair TV licence fee’ (13<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p.2) focused on the views of campaign groups such as the Taxpayers Alliance (TPA) who believe that the government missed an opportunity to reform the licence fee in

the White Paper. The TPA Chief Executive Jonathan Isaby<sup>92</sup> is quoted at length in the article stating that the licence fee:

[R]emains a throwback to an era when there was a single TV channel and the only way to watch it was via an unwieldy box in your living room...With the technology now in place for people to subscribe to their choice of thousands of competing channels and watch them wherever they happen to be, the time has surely come to explore a new, fairer funding model fit for the 21st Century' (Alison Little, *Daily Express*, Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p.2).

The article mentioned that the licence fee would rise with inflation but omitted any justification for why this was happening. It did not, for example, reference the White Paper itself which stated that 'the current system provides the BBC with a sustainable core income paid by all households who watch or receive television, and it commands wider public support than any alternative model' (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2016: 92). The *Express*, therefore, gave a highly partial reading of events surrounding the White Paper which appeared prominently within the newspaper, on page two. In addition to the generally negative tone of coverage towards the licence fee, an analysis of subject areas present revealed that just 10 per cent of articles (64) contained the variable 'licence fee defence.'<sup>93</sup> The subject 'replace the licence fee with subscription funding' was present in more articles (69)

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<sup>92</sup> The Taxpayers Alliance and Jonathan Isaby were quoted just 11 times in the sample of articles. Therefore, quoting an organisation such as the Taxpayers' Alliance, which has campaigned against the licence fee (TaxPayers' Alliance 2016), indicates the general anti-licence fee slant of the *Daily Express*.

<sup>93</sup> A new variable within SPSS was created entitled 'licence fee defence' which contained the following original subjects:

- Call for the licence fee to remain
- Licence fee value for money
- Universality of the licence fee – effective
- Licence fee should not be treated like a tax
- Celebrities defending the licence fee
- BBC income small compared with commercial broadcasters
- BBC output is good quality because of how it is funded.

than subjects defending the current funding system, and replacing the licence fee with subscription was one of the top ten most frequently occurring primary subject areas. The lack of support for or defence of the licence fee across the newspaper articles contrasts with the pro-BBC element in certain sections of the press.

Overall, therefore, there was a lack of support for upholding the licence fee as a system of funding the BBC, while articles in conservative leaning and high-circulation newspapers were critical of the licence fee. The next section of the chapter provides details of the analysis of variables and subjects which surround these criticisms of the licence fee, to draw further quantitative conclusions on the nature of newspaper reporting.

#### **4. The BBC hinders commercial media**

In both the *Sun* and *Daily Mail* 'BBC is too big' was the most frequently occurring secondary subject area (see table 5.2). This focus suggested that, although the BBC's size was not the primary concern of articles, it was a claim frequently used to support the primary subject areas within two newspapers where the tone was markedly anti-BBC. Overall, it was notable that 'the BBC is too big' was the third most frequent subject area (when considering all subjects – primary, secondary and peripheral) to appear across all articles in the sample (see table 5.3), in all newspapers, indicating that it was a recurring subject and instrumental in newspaper portrayal of the BBC more generally.

**Top ten most frequently occurring subjects (broken down by subject area)**

<b><u>Subject</u></b>	<b><u>Frequency of occurrences (all)</u></b>	<b><u>Frequency of occurrences (primary)</u></b>	<b><u>Frequency of occurrences (secondary)</u></b>	<b><u>Frequency of occurrences (peripheral)</u></b>
BBC taking on welfare responsibilities (for example: Free licence fee for over 75s)	121	32	23	66
Negative impact of BBC taking on welfare responsibilities	92	16	41	35
Size of the BBC: too big	85	16	37	32
Praise for an individual BBC programme or output (e.g. <i>Planet Earth</i> or <i>Bake Off</i> )	78	10	21	47
Description of potential reforms to the BBC	72	44	22	6
Alternative to licence fee: subscription	69	13	15	41
Animosity between the BBC and the government over reform	66	19	23	27
Personal opinion of politicians towards the BBC – negative	65	11	28	25
Online presence: should be cut back	64	5	17	42
Pay of talent (e.g. Graham Norton) too high	61	12	24	27

*Table 5.3: the top 10 most frequently occurring subjects across the articles (n=646), with breakdowns of the subject areas at which they each occur.*

Given the previous negative comments of Rupert and James Murdoch towards the BBC (1989; 2009), it was also salient to examine which subjects occurred most frequently in Murdoch-controlled newspapers, to investigate whether there were any patterns in reporting. Across all the Murdoch-controlled publications (*Sun*, *Times*, *Sunday Times*), the most frequently occurring subject, across all subject areas was ‘BBC taking on welfare responsibilities,’ which was descriptive and largely expected given the events selected for analysis. However, ‘size of the BBC: too big’ and ‘BBC hindering other media outlets’ were the third and fourth most common subjects

across the Murdoch-controlled newspapers (see table 5.4). Furthermore, 'BBC hindering other media outlets' was the most frequently occurring secondary subject area in the *Times* and *Sunday Times* when those newspapers were considered individually (see table 5.2). This suggests that, within the Murdoch-controlled newspapers, there is a background argument that the Corporation is preventing other media outlets from functioning in discussion of BBC reforms. This echoes James Murdoch's MacTaggart lecture, where he stated:

'The BBC is dominant. Other organisations might rise and fall but the BBC's income is guaranteed and growing... operating alongside the BBC, without access to its content or cross-promotional power, is not a task for the faint hearted. You need deep pockets, sheer bloody-mindedness and an army of lawyers' (Murdoch 2009: 16).

**Frequency of prominent subjects within Murdoch-controlled newspapers**

<b><u>Subject</u></b>	<b><u>Frequency of occurrences (all)</u></b>	<b><u>Frequency of occurrences (primary)</u></b>	<b><u>Frequency of occurrences (secondary)</u></b>	<b><u>Frequency of occurrences (peripheral)</u></b>
Size of the BBC: too big	21	7	9	5
BBC taking on welfare responsibilities	24	2	8	14
Alternative to licence fee: subscription	21	2	6	13
BBC hindering other media outlets	20	4	12	4
Online presence: should be cut back	19	3	4	12
Description of potential reforms to the BBC	18	11	6	1
Pay of talent too high	16	3	9	4
Praise for an individual BBC programme or output	16	1	5	10
Animosity between the BBC and government over reform	16	0	5	11
Criticism of an individual BBC programme or output	14	1	2	11

*Table 5.4: breakdown of subjects within Murdoch-controlled newspaper articles (n=154), by subject area.*

An example of a Murdoch controlled newspaper blaming the BBC licence fee for allowing the BBC to hinder other media outlets was an editorial in the *Sun* on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> July 2015 (p.8). This stated, ‘The BBC uses the cushion of the licence fee to protect itself from competition that exists in the real world - and to distort the market for everyone else.’ The language used within such articles is assessed in greater detail below, to examine how Murdoch-controlled newspapers criticised the licence fee. In addition, it is notable the subject ‘the BBC’s online presence should be cut back’ also occurred frequently both within the Murdoch-controlled newspapers (table 5.4) and across the sample as a whole (table 5.3). The way in which newspapers used language to discuss the BBC’s online presence is analysed later in the study to show how the BBC’s online presence is portrayed in relation to the BBC’s impact on commercial media.

### 5. Popular BBC programming, unpopular conduct

**Presence of subject areas related to programming across the sample**

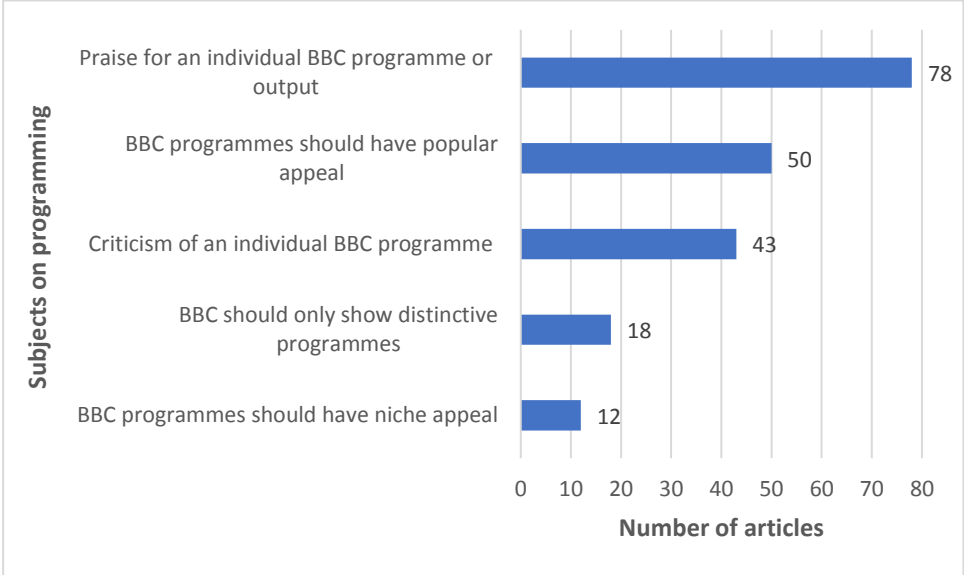


Figure 5.15: presence of subject areas on BBC programming within articles across the corpus (n=201).

As discussed earlier in the chapter, there was a distinct pro-BBC tone within the sample of newspaper articles, particularly apparent within left-leaning newspapers,

including the *Daily Mirror* and *Guardian*. It is therefore salient to consider which subjects were present within the sample of pro-BBC articles, to understand the basis upon which pro BBC tone was expressed. This section of the chapter compares the pro BBC subjects present in the newspaper coverage of the BBC (around the issue of programming) with more anti BBC subjects (generally around BBC conduct). Establishing patterns in the quantitative analysis allows for a more detailed analysis of language within the qualitative chapter.

### **Popular BBC programming**

19 per cent of newspaper articles<sup>94</sup> concerning the BBC praised the Corporation for its output (whether television, radio or online). These articles which praised the BBC ranged from a short letter in the *Sun* (Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p.38) about the BBC's tribute to Shakespeare on the anniversary of his death, from Gillian Reynolds in the *Telegraph* (Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2010, p.32) praising BBC Radio 4's 'A History of the World in 100 Objects.' The *Guardian* newspaper had 'praise for a particular programming output' as its most prominent peripheral subject area (see table 5.2), indicating that supporting the BBC's output was on the fringes of the *Guardian's* more positive representation of the BBC, as 67 per cent of articles in the *Guardian* were coded as generally pro BBC. Across the sample of newspaper articles BBC programming (or other output, including online) was praised almost twice as many times as it was criticised (see figure 5.15). Furthermore, there were some articles (50) suggesting that BBC programming should have popular appeal,

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<sup>94</sup> The variable 'positive BBC programming' was created in SPSS to combine the following original subjects:

- BBC programming is good quality
- Standards of BBC programming have improved
- Praise for a particular programme or output
- Praise for particular event coverage
- BBC programming creates a shared sense of national identity
- BBC programming helping the UK's soft power
- Defence of a particular programme
- BBC programming is good quality compared with other broadcasters



compared with a mere 12 articles suggesting that the BBC should have niche appeal. Furthermore, the subject 'BBC programmes should have popular appeal' was one of the top ten most frequent primary subjects across the sample (see table 5.1), indicating a trend within newspapers towards advocating programmes with a wide appeal on the BBC. For example, a letter in the *Guardian* signed by the General Secretaries of trade unions which represent BBC staff said:

The suggestion...that popular shows like *Strictly Come Dancing* and the *Great British Bake Off* should not be broadcast at peak viewing times, would be a huge mistake. Only the BBC would have thought to turn ballroom dancing and baking, two previously unfashionable British pastimes, into forms of mass entertainment for the 21st century (*Guardian*, Wednesday 1th May 2016, p.34)

Such sentiments suggest that there was support for the BBC's output within the newspaper articles. Furthermore, this praise focussed on the BBC showing popular programmes, (such as *Strictly* mentioned in the above quote) not just niche output. The BBC needs to show popular programmes in order to justify its universal licence fee and an analysis of subjects present in quantitative analysis indicates that newspapers are supportive of the BBC producing popular output. How newspapers use language around the BBC's programming (and other output including online) to present themselves as allies of newspaper readers against the BBC is examined in more detail in the next chapter.

### **Unpopular BBC conduct**

Although the quantitative data showed there was praise for the BBC's programming output within newspapers, this was not the case with the Corporation's conduct, particularly where finances were concerned. The pay of senior managers and talent appearing on BBC channels was a regular focus of coverage, as talent pay being

too high was the tenth most consistently recurring subject across the sample, out of a possible 369 different subjects (see table 5.1). For example, an article in the *Daily Mail* (Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2016, p.46) headlined ‘Revealed: the stars milking millions from your TV licence’ said: ‘We’ve compiled the details of the most jaw-dropping Beeb salaries and, as you’ll see, it’s little wonder that the BBC is known as the Big Bucks Corporation.’ This headline alone is heavily anti-BBC in the language used. It presumes that the BBC is widely referred to with an alliterative and humorous nickname ‘Big Bucks Corporation.’ The licence fee is presented as something which belongs directly to the reader, but which celebrities are taking away, in the sentence which says celebrities are ‘milking millions from *your* TV licence.’ The reader is also spoken to directly with the phrase ‘as you’ll see,’ which serves to present the newspaper as a friend or ally of the reader. Furthermore, the pejorative use of the word ‘milking’ to describe the celebrities’ action, suggests that the celebrities are systematically and consciously working at taking the licence fee while giving nothing in return. Overall, 22 per cent of all articles contained a variable which suggested that the BBC was profligate,<sup>95</sup> indicating that newspapers place emphasis on how the BBC spends money from the licence fee.

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<sup>95</sup> A new variable was created in SPSS ‘BBC profligate’ which contained the following original subjects from the coding manual:

- Executive pay too high
- Executive pay or redundancy pay – unjustified
- Executive/talent pay unjustified because of the licence fee
- BBC spending too much on running costs
- Pay of talent too high
- BBC too profligate – general
- BBC sending too many staff to particular events
- Senior BBC managers earning more money than the Prime Minister
- BBC spending too much on expenses
- Too many senior managers at the BBC

The variable ‘BBC profligate’ was created as some newspapers had primary, secondary or peripheral subject areas which reflected the subjects in the BBC profligate variable. For example, the most frequently occurring primary subject area in the *Sunday Express* was that the BBC was spending too much on its running costs and the most frequently occurring subject area in the *Daily Telegraph* was that the BBC was too profligate: general.

It would be expected that newspapers would scrutinise the spending of the BBC as a large public body funded by the licence fee. However, it is of interest to note that, within the quantitative data, there is a contrast between the ways in which the BBC's programmes are portrayed (positively) and the pay of celebrities who appear on those programmes (negatively). This contrast, together with the overall anti-licence fee tone in some newspapers (see figure 5.14), suggests newspapers were reluctant to criticise popular programming on the BBC (which many of its readers would watch) but were more eager to be critical of the way in which the BBC spends the licence fee (which many of its readers would pay). The language used in reporting of BBC programming and profligacy will be analysed in more detail later in the research.

## **Conclusion – How do the quantitative results influence qualitative analysis?**

Overall, the quantitative analysis conducted on newspaper articles surrounding the BBC licence fee found the following trends:

1. The tone of UK newspapers overall towards the BBC was varied, with left-leaning newspapers more likely to be positive, and right-leaning newspapers more likely to be negative.
2. The subjects present indicated that there was significant criticism towards the government for its actions towards the BBC within newspapers.
3. Praise for the licence fee as a method of funding the BBC was infrequent across newspapers, while criticism of the licence fee was particularly apparent in the high circulation, right-leaning *Sun* and *Daily Mail*.
4. There were prominent suggestions that the BBC was too big and hindered the activities of commercial media, with the 'BBC is too big' the third most frequently occurring subject across all the articles.

5. Subjects present indicated that newspapers frequently praised BBC output (including popular programming) but criticised the Corporation for the way in which it spent the licence fee.

The purpose of quantitative analysis for this study was to provide an overview of the most salient aspects of the data, which provide information about newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee. These could then be further analysed qualitatively. Therefore, this chapter concludes with a discussion of how the quantitative trends were influential for informing the qualitative analysis of the sample.

### **Us versus them**

As discussed in chapter three, this study uses an approach from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to qualitatively analyse newspaper articles. The approach taken is primarily influenced by the work of scholars such as Fairclough (1995) and Richardson (2007), in terms of the relationship between discourse and ideology, discourse naturalisation and the linguistic choices made within texts. Like some of Richardson's work (2004; 2009), this study also influenced by Van Dijk's 'ideological square.' Van Dijk's approach to CDA understands discourse in terms of defining social groups which results in the creation of in-groups ('us') and out-groups ('them'), leading to the 'positive presentation of self and the negative presentation of other' (Van Dijk 1997: 36). The quantitative trends identified in this chapter indicate that there are different groups present within the newspaper articles including the BBC, the government, celebrities appearing on the BBC and the licence fee payer. The anti-government sentiment from certain sections of the press suggests the government is a defined group within the debate on the BBC licence fee. However, only a detailed analysis of language within the newspaper articles can reveal whether and how these different groups are constructed and whether 'us versus them' is a consistent theme within the newspaper articles. The quantitative trends indicated that conflict was present between different groups within the texts.

Analysis of these trends in the next chapter allows for an assessment of how newspaper articles around the BBC licence fee are ideologically constructed, how relations between different groups are developed within the articles and the extent to which these relationships are naturalised. The different trends for analysis, how they appear to construct different groups within the texts and the conflict between them are detailed below.

### **Conflict: tone**

Tone towards the BBC and tone towards the licence fee (both detailed and general) were assigned to each article during quantitative analysis to provide an overall indication of how newspapers reported on the BBC licence fee. There was a clear trend towards right-leaning newspapers containing an anti-BBC and anti-licence fee tone in reporting, in contrast to the left-leaning newspapers, which were pro-BBC. However, this quantitative overview does not necessarily directly correspond to the presence of this trend within discourse around the BBC licence fee. The linguistic features used within newspaper articles which are notably pro or anti BBC merit further unpacking to investigate whether there are patterns in the language which contribute to the presence of discourses and themes around the BBC and its licence fee. A discourse analysis of the text of the newspaper articles in the next chapter will allow for further investigation into whether the left/right partisan divide is present.

Quantitative analysis found that left-leaning newspapers were also clearly critical of the government's actions towards the BBC, indicating that conflict between the government and the BBC may have been linguistically constructed within newspapers. Therefore, the basis upon which newspapers presented the government as hostile towards the BBC would benefit from further analysis of the language used by newspapers towards the BBC licence fee, together with an assessment of the wider political contexts (e.g. politicians' previous comments towards the BBC, the status of the parties in power, policies enacted such as

austerity). These trends (that certain newspapers are hostile towards the government, yet most positive towards the BBC) are examined in the next chapter.

Almost two thirds of the articles were coded as neutral on the licence fee, but there were more anti-licence fee articles than pro, particularly within high-circulation, right-leaning newspapers. This indicates that the right-leaning newspapers sought to portray the compulsory, universal licence fee as the antithesis to more libertarian ideals of choice and competition, hinting that a conflict between collectivist and neoliberal ideas (see chapter two, section four) is present within newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee. The next chapter therefore shows how a discourse described as 'competition is king' shows how language is used within newspaper coverage to portray the BBC licence fee as hindering the commercial media market.

### **Conflict: subject**

The quantitative analysis found that pro-BBC subjects were prominent, particularly about BBC programming. For example, the subject suggesting that the BBC should show popular programmes recurred more frequently than subjects present suggesting that the BBC should show only niche or distinctive programmes. The analysis of subjects present requires further qualitative analysis, to enable better understanding of how newspapers linguistically construct BBC programming, and how this contributes to a wider discourse about the BBC licence fee. It was of interest to investigate how programming was reported positively, to assess how far reporting patterns contributed to a wider discourse on the licence fee.

Incidents of positive reporting of BBC programming contrasted with reporting of the BBC's financial conduct, where subjects present widely criticised the Corporation for its profligacy, particularly the high pay of celebrities. The contrast between reporting on programming and reporting on conduct indicates that newspapers were likely to praise BBC programmes (which many of their readers may watch) but criticise how

the BBC spends money (from the licence fee, which many of their readers are likely to pay), indicating conflicting ways in which newspapers would report the BBC licence fee. These quantitative trends suggested that newspapers' coverage of the BBC licence fee was responsive to the sensibilities of their readers, the licence fee payers and constructed viewers and licence fee payers as a separate group to BBC celebrities and executives who are perceived as highly paid elites. However, the construction of the two different groups cannot be confirmed through quantitative analysis alone. How the licence fee payer and celebrities were represented in discourse is therefore analysed in the next chapter.

Furthermore, trends emerging from the quantitative data indicated the prominence of subjects suggesting that the size of the BBC meant it could dominate the UK media at the expense of commercial competitors. This presentation suggested a potential conflict within the articles between the public service broadcaster and the newspapers (many of which are owned by commercial companies which have interests in broadcasting and online media). However, to establish whether this conflict existed, it was necessary to undertake close analysis of newspaper articles to provide an assessment of whether language about the size of the BBC was created in discourse. Qualitative analysis allows for an investigation of whether two distinct and conflicting sides were created (the BBC vs commercial media) and whether one side is promoted or naturalised at the expense of the other (see research question 2). These findings then contribute to studies within Critical Discourse Analysis which assess the extent to which the interests of private companies were prioritised over public service.

## **Chapter Six: Qualitative analysis chapter**

### **Introduction to qualitative analysis**

This chapter builds upon the results outlined in chapter five, using an approach from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). For the qualitative analysis undertaken here, the large quantitative sample was narrowed down to cover newspaper articles from case studies which fell within the four discrete periods outlined in the introduction.

These included:

- David Cameron's 'delicious' comments about the BBC (October 2010)
- The 'Luvvies Letter' signed by celebrities in the *Daily Mirror* in support of the BBC and associated newspaper coverage of the letter (July 2015)
- Quentin Letts' reporting of the *Great British Bake Off* (July 2015) in the *Daily Mail*
- George Osborne's 'imperial ambitions' comments on *The Andrew Marr Show* (July 2015)
- Rod Liddle columns in the *Sunday Times* and the *Sun* about the BBC 'crown jewels'
- BBC recipes (May 2016)

The case studies were selected for further analysis because they show the ideological nature of newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee. Within the newspaper articles, a variety of case studies could have been selected for further analysis from within the four events – as a three-week time period analysed around each event meant that there were varied sub sections of the licence fee story which newspapers reported on. Nonetheless, these specific case studies were chosen because they were the best examples of where coverage was shaped by ideology in order to assess the conflicts between groups outlined at the end of the previous chapter.



Qualitative analysis for this study found that:

- As with quantitative analysis, conflict is present within newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee, with distinct 'in groups' and 'out groups' created. For example, the 'ordinary' licence fee payer is constructed in opposition to the 'elite' BBC.
- There are distinct discourses present which rely on the creation of conflict within newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee. These are referred to as 'tyranny of the minority,' which presents the licence fee payer and the BBC on opposing sides, and 'competition is king' which places the BBC in opposition to commercial media.
- These two discourses are used contradictorily and flexibly to ideologically construct the BBC licence fee. In other words, these discourses are perpetuating ideological narratives that a) the BBC should cater for licence fee payers (who form a majority) instead of what newspapers perceive as BBC elites and minority audiences ('tyranny of the minority'); and b) that the interests of commercial media should be prioritised over public service ('competition is king').

To date, no systematic textual analysis has been conducted which examines how the BBC licence fee is constructed within UK national newspapers, and whether and how this relates to commercial media. This study brings together research on newspaper reporting and on the BBC licence fee using CDA to conclude that the licence fee is used within newspapers in different ways to criticise the BBC.

The qualitative analysis in this chapter is split into five different sections. The first - 'anti-government, pro Beeb' - highlights the criticism of the government and praise for the BBC which is present across some sections of the press. To do this, the case studies of David Cameron's 'delicious' comments in a press conference and the

'Luvvies letter' (a letter signed by many celebrities in support of the BBC) are analysed in detail. Given the context of government cuts to spending, a close reading of the coverage on Cameron's 'delicious' comments allows for an examination of how newspapers reported the government's inclusion of the BBC within its austerity narrative. This section highlights the presence of pro-BBC themes in certain sections of the press, which will later be contrasted with the more critical ideological discourses present within newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee.

The second section of this chapter discusses the 'tyranny of the minority' discourse, providing a full definition of the details and origin of this discursive construction in relation to the licence fee within the newspaper texts. This section begins by continuing the discussion of the 'Luvvies letter,' specifically analysing the way in which the *Daily Mail* uses the letter to create 'us versus them' or 'elites versus licence fee payers' to feed in to 'tyranny of the minority.' This construction is furthered through the discussion of Quentin Letts' opinion piece on the popular reality television programme *Great British Bake Off* in the *Mail*. Letts uses sinister rhetorical tropes to mock the BBC's 'politically correct' worldview. Following this, the themes and rhetorical tropes used by Letts are highlighted as prominent within further *Daily Mail* coverage around the BBC and licence fee.

The third section of this chapter examines the 'competition is king' discourse. It begins with an analysis of newspaper coverage the then Chancellor George Osborne's comments around the BBC's 'imperial ambitions.' This analysis of Osborne's comments highlights the discussion of the key themes which are evoked within newspaper coverage of the licence fee, which construct the 'competition is king' discourse. These themes are taken in turn, including the BBC's size, the BBC's aggression, attributing blame to the licence fee, and the reimagining of public service broadcasting for commercial ends. This section concludes with an analysis

of the columnist Rod Liddle's articles on BBC programming, to emphasise how blame is attributed to the licence fee within 'competition is king.'

The final analytic section of this chapter underlines the flexibility within which the 'tyranny of the minority' and 'competition is king' discourses are used for ideological means by newspapers, through an analysis of newspaper reporting of BBC recipes. A background to the BBC recipes is firstly provided, to underline their ideological salience. It then outlines the ways in which 'tyranny of the minority' and 'competition is king' discourses are operationalised contradictorily in the *Daily Mail* and *Sun*. Finally, this section examines how discussion of the recipes in the *Guardian*, a left-leaning newspaper, indicates that the discourses present transcend party political debate, as even left-leaning newspapers, generally supportive of the BBC, are critical of the licence fee where commercial interests (e.g. maintaining profit from online media) are concerned. This section shows that similar language is used, and discourses evoked between newspapers of different formats and political leanings to criticise the BBC. The conclusion summarises the findings and relates these to the wider debate on the BBC and licence fee.

## **Section One: Anti-government, pro Beeb**

This section analyses coverage around two specific events within the sampled time periods. They focus specifically on interventions from the government towards the BBC licence fee, and newspaper reaction to these. Analysis of these two events allows for focus on a) how newspapers reported the BBC licence fee in relation to the Prime Minister's austerity policies,<sup>96</sup> which is important in determining how newspapers respond to government actions; and b) assessing the pro-BBC articles in certain sections of the press.

The first event analysed is David Cameron's 'delicious' comments. The week after the October 2010 licence fee settlement was announced, Prime Minister, David Cameron, attended a news conference in Brussels. In response to a question from *Newsnight's* Michael Crick,<sup>97</sup> who asked Cameron how he would justify a European Union budget rise of 2.9 per cent to the British public, Cameron replied:

'I would explain patiently – as I hope you will on *Newsnight* – that we were facing a 6 per cent increase. We've pegged that back to 2.9 per cent. At the same time, I will say, 'We're all in it together, *including, deliciously, The BBC*, who in another negotiation agreed a licence fee freeze for six years. So what is good for the EU is good for the BBC' (quoted in Martin, *Daily Mail*, Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2010, p.12, emphasis added).

Before taking Crick's question, Cameron had said "Good to see that costs are being controlled everywhere - let's take the third question from the BBC" (quoted in Kirkup and Midgley, *Daily Telegraph*, Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2010, p. 15). This is a suggestion from Cameron that the BBC was not focusing on reducing its spending.

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<sup>96</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>97</sup> Michael Crick was political editor of the evening current affairs programme, *Newsnight* between 1992 and 2011.

When the comments were made, Cameron's Coalition government had been in office six months and placed a great deal of emphasis on austerity measures due to the size of the budget deficit, which was 10 per cent of the economy in 2010 (Cowley and Kavanagh 2015: 6). Cameron's narrative, even before he became Prime Minister following the 2010 election,<sup>98</sup> was highly focused around reducing the deficit. In this news conference, therefore, Cameron appeared to be emphasising that the BBC needed to play its part in reducing spending, as if the BBC was a government department rather than an editorially and operationally independent broadcaster. Cameron's comments therefore have wider implications about how the role of the BBC is perceived by key politicians within government, which is why newspaper reporting of his comments is considered here.

The second event analysed is the 'Luvvies letter.' On 15<sup>th</sup> July 2015 (the day before the publication of the government's Green Paper on the BBC), the *Daily Mirror* newspaper ran an exclusive story that a group of prominent celebrities had signed a letter to the Prime Minister in support of the Corporation. The letter stated that 'a diminished BBC would simply mean a diminished Britain,' and was an example of extremely strong support for the BBC from celebrities. The letter appeared to be a unique intervention to the debate, within the sample of newspapers analysed. Although other articles had indicated celebrities expressing support towards the BBC, this was notable for the sheer number of celebrities from all areas expressing their support.<sup>99</sup> It was also of interest that this letter appeared in the *Mirror* as an exclusive. The *Mirror* therefore became the first newspaper to show the strength of celebrity support to towards the BBC, the day before the publication of the government Green Paper on the BBC's future. This made the letter and further

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<sup>98</sup>At a speech to Conservative Party Conference, before he became Prime Minister, Cameron stated 'we must...live within our means in the long term' (Cameron 2009).

<sup>99</sup> 30 celebrities in total signed the letter including comedians, sports presenters, writers and actors.

newspaper coverage surrounding it, a fascinating case study to analyse, revealing the ways in which newspapers ideologically constructed conflict between different groups – celebrities, the government and the BBC.

## **David Cameron's 'delicious comments'**

### **Article headlines**

Negative information about the government was amplified through the language choices within the headlines of traditionally left-leaning newspaper articles about Cameron's comments. The *Mirror* headlined their article (Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2010, p.8) 'PM's gloat fury' and within the first paragraph, Cameron was accused of 'gloating over the BBC licence freeze that unions have warned will lead to job losses.' The syntax of this headline implies that Cameron was rejoicing directly in people losing their jobs, even though, in his comments to the press conference, he did not mention job losses anywhere. The *Guardian* article used an alliterative title 'Beeb baiting spending freeze 'delicious' – PM (Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2010, p.30). The headline implies that Cameron considered criticising the BBC to be a sport ('Beeb baiting' sounds very similar to bear baiting), which naturalises the idea that Cameron had an inherent anti-BBC agenda. The use of the word 'baiting' suggests an ongoing, considered antagonism towards the BBC, rather than a one off or impulsive action. Furthermore, the choice of words in an *Observer* editorial headlined 'The BBC deserves better than Mr Cameron's sneers' (31<sup>st</sup> October 2010, p.34) is also significant. The use of the word 'sneers' instead of 'remarks' or 'comments' suggests that Cameron does not hold the Corporation in the high regard which the *Observer* believes it 'deserves.' This contrasts with the *Daily Telegraph*, whose article about Cameron's comments was headlined 'Anger as Cameron teases BBC over 'delicious' cuts' (Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2010, p.15). The use of the word 'teasing' instead of 'sneering' (as is used in the *Observer* article) is a much less loaded term which suggests that Cameron's comments were good natured,

harmless fun. Describing Cameron's actions as merely 'teasing' also creates a sense that the anger following his comments is unreasonable because he was simply having a joke.

### **Linguistic tools in traditionally left-leaning newspapers to discredit Cameron**

The portrayal of the Prime Minister as an untrustworthy individual was a theme within the *Mirror*, the *Guardian*, and the *Observer's* coverage about his 'delicious' comments, with emphasis placed on the negative aspects of Cameron's past and personality. Within the first two sentences of the *Observer* editorial (31<sup>st</sup> October 2010, p. 34), the reader was reminded of Cameron's past career 'as a media public relations expert' where he was 'lobbying against, among others, the BBC.' The mention of Cameron lobbying against the BBC in his career is not supported with any examples.<sup>100</sup> However, invoking this episode from Cameron's past suggests that he has a predisposition against the BBC. The description of Cameron's activities as 'lobbying' creates an image of his activities as shady and outside of the public domain, as the business of lobbying in the UK has been described as 'simply hidden' by transparency campaigners (Cave and Rowell 2014: xi). The description of Cameron as a 'PR man' connotes an untrustworthy individual who has undue influence over the media from behind the scenes, as the increased influence of public relations professionals over newsgathering has been documented in the literature (Lewis et.al 2008a; 2008b).

The *Guardian's* reporting of the press conference also portrayed Cameron as having a chequered past:

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<sup>100</sup> David Cameron was Head of Communications and then Director of Corporate affairs for television company, Carlton Communications, between 1994 and 2001 (Davis and Seymour 2010: 751).

'As a modernising Tory, David Cameron does well to hide his past as a traditionalist who would once have fulminated against the Bolshevik Broadcasting Corporation. But a hint of the old Cameron slipped out yesterday when he interrupted a press conference at the EU summit to speak of the 'delicious' BBC spending freeze' (Watt, the *Guardian*, Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2010, p. 30).

The tongue-in-cheek way in which the BBC was referred to as the 'Bolshevik Broadcasting Corporation' presumes that the Conservative Party views the BBC as extremely left wing. The suggestion that Cameron 'interrupted' the press conference to say how pleased he was about BBC spending cuts portrays him as wanting to deliberately antagonise the BBC. The use of verbs in the sentence, such as Cameron trying to 'hide' his past and how his comments 'slipped out,' reinforces the suggestion in the description of lobbying that he is hiding his true anti-BBC beliefs. Similar linguistic tools were used in a *Daily Mirror* article where the Labour MP David Cairns is quoted saying "The Tories have always hated the Corporation and Mr Cameron's comments have let the cat out of the bag" (James Lyons, *Daily Mirror*, Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2015 p.8). The use of the common idiom 'let the cat out of the bag,' like 'slipped out,' indicates that Cameron was hiding his true feelings against the BBC which have now been exposed. In addition, '[t]he Tories have always hated the Corporation' comment is not justified with any examples, or any quotes from Conservative MPs to the contrary. However, it suggests that the Conservative-led government cannot be trusted with the BBC. The way in which Cameron and the Conservative Party have been portrayed in this case, therefore, supports the quantitative trend identified: the more Labour-supporting newspapers emphasise negative information about the government in reporting.



## **Right-leaning newspapers support for austerity through repetition**

Right-leaning newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun* focused on Cameron's comments as evidence of the BBC's profligacy during a time of austerity. Nowhere in articles from right-leaning newspapers are government cuts to public spending questioned. It is simply portrayed as common sense that the BBC should be included within austerity measures, even though the BBC should be operationally independent from government. The *Sun* article (Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2010, p, 10) headlined 'Rap for 11 BBC Staff', completely omitted Cameron saying, 'we're all in this together, including deliciously, the BBC.' This de-emphasises the Prime Minister's comments, which could be perceived as negative (describing cuts as delicious). The article promotes negative information about the BBC, focusing entirely on the fact that Cameron rebuked the Corporation for sending too many staff to cover the press conference. The number of BBC staff who attended the press conference (11) is emphasised in the title and is repeated in the second paragraph of the article. The number of correspondents that the BBC sent (three) was also emphasised in the reporting and this number was repeated several times in a very short article. For example, it says that Cameron looked at the 'three reporters' before saying 'I'm sure some savings are available.' This repetition of the number of reporters and BBC staff suggested the BBC was wasteful did not recognise the need to save money. The *Daily Mail* reporting of the conference also emphasised the number of staff sent by the BBC twice within its article (*Daily Mail*, Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2010, p. 12). The level of detail in the *Mail* about the number of BBC personnel suggested that the BBC was being profligate by sending 'reporters' 'along with producers and cameramen.' The BBC would not be an effective broadcaster if it did not send reporters, producers and camera operators to a press conference with the UK's head of government. However, simply having the equipment and personnel for broadcasting is portrayed as extravagant by the *Mail*.

The way in which the sequence of the press conference was reported differs greatly between left-leaning and right-leaning newspapers. Whilst the *Sun* omitted part of David Cameron's comments, the *Guardian* reported the press conference in detail, explaining the sequence of events in which journalists from the BBC asked questions. The *Guardian* reported the first journalist (BBC's Europe editor) asked about Cameron's decision to ask for a cut or a freeze for the European Union Budget. This is a logical question for a Europe editor to ask. The second journalist was the Nations and Regions correspondent asking about the government's proposal to fine higher-rate taxpayers who claim child benefit. Including this level of detail allowed the reader to see that, although it was all BBC journalists asking the questions, these were clearly on different topics and from journalists with different specialisms. This made Cameron's response to Michael Crick's question seem unreasonable, bordering on aggressive. The way in which events are reported in the *Guardian* legitimises the BBC and questions the credibility of the Prime Minister, whereas this is reversed in the *Sun* and the *Mail*. The *Mail* interpreted Cameron's use of the word 'deliciously' in the press conference in a way which neutralises his comments and implicitly criticises the BBC:

When *Newsnight* political editor Michael Crick asked why he had agreed to the 2.9 per cent EU budget rise, Mr Cameron pointed out that it was a 'deliciously' ironic question when the BBC had agreed to a six-year licence fee freeze (*Daily Mail*, Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2010, p. 12).

The *Mail* chooses to report that the Prime Minister thought it was 'deliciously' ironic (not just 'delicious') that the BBC were asking about budget rises for the EU when their budget was being frozen. This contrasts with the quote from the Labour Party MP Tom Watson, included in the *Mirror* article, which places Cameron's comments in an entirely different context:

“People will lose their jobs as a result of BBC cuts and the Prime Minister thinks it is 'delicious'. Shame on him” (*Daily Mirror*, Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2010, p.8).

This quote places Cameron’s comments in an entirely different light to the *Mail*, directly blaming Cameron for job losses. There are, therefore, marked differences in reporting of the press conference between left-leaning and right-leaning newspapers. However, the differences between reporting within newspapers of different political leanings are not translated to reporting of the licence fee, as outlined below.

### **General lack of licence fee focus**

The licence fee was not at the forefront of the newspaper reporting of Cameron’s ‘delicious’ comments in the press conference. Of the five newspapers which covered the press conference, four mentioned the ‘six-year licence fee freeze’ as an aside; the main focus of the articles were Cameron’s comments, which were interpreted as either evidence of his agenda against the BBC or evidence of the BBC’s profligacy. The *Observer* was the only newspaper to specify the unique nature of the licence fee stating:

The licence fee isn't a tax, to be turned on or off like some Whitehall tap. It is contract between viewer and corporation. It matters that this contract now seems in tatters. It matters, too, that politicians in power wipe the smiles from their faces as the damage is done (*Observer*, 31<sup>st</sup> October 2010, p. 34).

This was one of the few articles in the sample which specified that the licence fee is not the same as a tax (only seven articles across 646 in the sample mentioned this) and should remain independent from government. Cameron stating ‘what is good for the EU is good for the BBC’ conflates the BBC with other areas of public spending and does not engage with the idea of the licence fee as a funding stream which

preserves the BBC's independence (see chapter two, section three). However, this was not focused on within newspaper coverage of Cameron's comments, which indicates a general lack of focus on defending the licence fee, consistent with the trends identified in quantitative analysis.

Overall, therefore, the case study of Cameron's 'delicious' comments shows that left-leaning newspapers such as the *Observer*, *Mirror* and *Guardian* can report an event entirely differently to right-leaning newspapers like the *Daily Mail* and *Sun*. This is indicative of newspapers' partisan leanings – the *Mail* and *Sun* are traditionally supportive of the Conservative Party and Conservative governments, while the left-leaning newspapers are either Labour Party supporting or at least against the Conservative-led Coalition government. Although Cameron's comments were associated with the licence fee (as the government sets the level of the licence fee and can therefore determine the level of BBC finances), newspapers did not generally draw upon the licence fee in discussion. Instead they focused on discrediting Cameron's personality (left-leaning newspapers) or the BBC (right-leaning newspapers).<sup>101</sup> The lack of licence fee focus shows that the licence fee is not always a prominent topic of discussion within newspapers, a theme which continues in newspaper coverage of the next event for analysis – the 'Luvvies' letter.

### **'Luvvies' Letter**

On 15<sup>th</sup> July 2015, 29 celebrities signed a letter to the Prime Minister expressing their support towards the BBC. The letter appeared as an exclusive in the *Daily Mirror*. Analysing the language in the letter and how other newspapers used the letter in reporting shows variations between newspapers in reporting the same event and provides insight into how newspapers construct different groups (and conflict between them) in newspaper coverage. As the focus of this research is articles

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<sup>101</sup> See table 4.2 for definitions of left-leaning and right-leaning newspapers.

including the words 'BBC' and 'licence fee' articles about the letter within the sample<sup>102</sup> were limited to the *Mirror's* coverage, a news article in the *Daily Telegraph*, two articles in the *Sunday Mirror*, and a newspaper article, editorial and a column in the *Daily Mail*. Other newspapers covered the letter, for example the *Sun* article: 'Save the BBC and our mega-salaries; backlash at TV stars' letter' (Newton Dunn 2015a: 8), but as these articles did not mention the licence fee they could not be considered in this study. Furthermore, as the letter was published the day before the Green Paper, it is likely that most newspapers chose to focus on the contents of the consultation document, rather than the letter. Nevertheless, the articles analysed here effectively illuminate how 'us versus them' is present as a theme within the newspaper articles.

A diverse range of celebrities, many of whom appeared on BBC channels, signed the letter to the Prime Minister including chefs, comedians and sports presenters.

The latter part of the letter read:

We are writing to place on record at the very start of the process our concern that nothing should be done to diminish the BBC or turn it into a narrowly focused market-failure broadcaster.

In our view, a diminished BBC would simply mean a diminished Britain. The BBC is a very precious institution. Like all organisations, it has its faults but it is overwhelmingly a creative force for good...The BBC is trusted and loved at home by British audiences and is the envy of the world abroad.

During the course of the Charter, we will continue to make the case for a strong BBC at the centre of British life and will be vocal in making the case

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<sup>102</sup> A Lexis Nexis search between 15<sup>th</sup> July 2015 and 30<sup>th</sup> July 2015 (encompassing the day the letter was published, up until the end point of analysis for this study) found that 32 articles mentioned the celebrities' letter without mentioning the licence fee.

for the BBC as it approaches its centenary (*Daily Mirror*, Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p. 12).

In addition to the language used to strongly support the BBC (e.g. 'precious institution), the word 'diminished' or 'diminish' is used three times throughout the letter and the idea that the BBC should not be reduced in any way or be 'turned into a narrowly focused market failure broadcaster' is prominent. This suggests the BBC should continue to make popular programmes rather than be reduced to areas which would not be served by the commercial market. As discussed in chapter five, defence of the BBC's size is extremely rare across the sample, underlining the high levels of support for the BBC within the letter from celebrities. Furthermore, within their letter, the celebrities have opted to use the size of the BBC as a positive argument, directly stating that a reduction of the BBC's size would be harmful (using the word 'diminished'). A frequently occurring subject in the quantitative analysis was that the BBC was too big, indicating that the BBC's size is often reported negatively (as will be discussed in detail elsewhere in the study). This makes the fact that the celebrities have chosen to use size as a positive even more remarkable and shows why the letter and subsequent reporting of it requires further analysis.

### **From *Mirror with Love*: *Daily Mirror* coverage of the celebrity letter**

The letter was accompanied by a news article entitled 'Save Our Beeb: 007 leads stars' attack on PM' (Nicola Methven, *Daily Mirror* Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> July 2015: 6).

The choice of words in the headline alone is reflective of the *Mirror's* consistent pro-BBC stance. Using the possessive pronoun of 'our' in 'our Beeb' instead of 'the BBC' suggests there is a close connection between the celebrities who wrote the letter and the Corporation, as if it is a treasured family member rather than simply a broadcaster. In Northern England, colloquially family members are referred to as 'our,' which usage of this pronoun evokes in the article. 'Our Beeb' therefore suggests that the BBC belongs to people and has a connection to people which

could not be replicated with privately owned media (it would be absurd to say ‘our Netflix,’ for example). The description of the letter as ‘stars’ attack on PM’ presents the celebrities and the government as on opposing sides, consistent with the theme of ‘us versus them’ and frames the sending of the letter as an act of aggression against the government when, alternatively, it could be seen as an act of support for the BBC. Furthermore, the description of celebrities as ‘stars’ serves to place them in a positive light, in contrast to David Cameron who is described more simply as ‘the PM.’

There is a long list of celebrities who signed the letter that Methven could have referred to in the headline. However, Daniel Craig, the actor who has played secret agent James Bond since 2005, has been chosen. Metonymy<sup>103</sup> is used to pithily describe Craig as ‘007.’ This use of Bond’s secret agent number, 007, instead of referring to ‘Bond’ or the actor ‘Daniel Craig’ foregrounds the secret agent status of Bond’s job, which adds gravitas to the ‘attack’ on the BBC. James Bond’s fictional ‘job’ is essentially to defend the country against villains so, by suggesting that he is leading an attack on the Prime Minister, this casts Cameron in the role of a villain who needs subduing by a secret agent. Suggesting that Craig is leading the celebrities’ charge against the government’s reforms to the BBC is also contradicted within the article which later states that the ‘appeal’ to the Prime Minister was ‘organised by TV astronomer Brian Cox.’ Writing that an astronomer was going to defend the BBC against the Prime Minister would not have as much impact in a headline as ‘007.’ James Bond is a character who has become part of Britain’s national identity and so mentioning the BBC alongside him elevates the identity of the BBC.

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<sup>103</sup> See chapter four for full explanation.

Within the main body of the article the idea that the Prime Minister needs to be stopped from harming the BBC is continued. It states that the celebrities ‘urged him [David Cameron] not to allow changes that would turn it [the BBC] into a ‘narrowly focused market-failure broadcaster.’ This presumes that David Cameron is already poised to wave through changes which would reduce the scope of the BBC. It suggests that the changes are imminent, when the publication of a Green Paper simply means that the government is launching a consultation for future policy. Suggesting that changes to the BBC are imminent injects a sense of urgency into the *Mirror’s* story that the government needs to be stopped immediately from damaging the BBC. It is a ‘call to arms’ to the *Mirror’s* readers, in support of the BBC and against the government, consistent with the *Mirror’s* anti-government stance which was identified in quantitative analysis.

James Bond or ‘007’ is also mentioned directly in the main body of Methven’s article:

The BBC enjoys broadcast rights for events including Glastonbury Festival, and the Olympic Games up to 2020. The audience for its coverage of the 2012 London Games opening ceremony alone, in which 007 star Daniel Craig did a James Bond sketch with the Queen, peaked at 27.3 million.

Here, the BBC’s coverage of the 2012 London Olympics opening ceremony is highlighted. At the time it was aired, the opening ceremony was one of the most watched BBC programmes in the Corporation’s history (Plunkett 2012), so including this in the article places this example of successful programming by the BBC at the forefront of the reader’s mind. Methven mentions James Bond ‘sketch’ with the



Queen during the Olympic opening ceremony.<sup>104</sup> Mentioning the BBC in collocation with the Queen and James Bond puts the BBC on a pedestal with two figures who are often considered 'key national institutions and cultural legacies' in the UK (Oettler 2015: 245). Overall, the framing of the quintessentially British figure, James Bond as leader of the 'attack' on the Prime Minister, implies that opposing the BBC is tantamount to the entire nation and its key institutions.

The way that the broadcast rights for Glastonbury are cast as something to 'enjoy' in Methven's article contrasts with the *Daily Mail*. In the sample of newspaper articles analysed, the *Mail* lamented the amount of time and energy the BBC spent covering Glastonbury. For example, in a *Mail* article entitled 'Why does the BBC fawn over Glasto?' the BBC was criticised for sending hundreds of staff to cover 'a commercial event making an estimated £70 million' (Peter McKay, *Daily Mail*, Monday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2015). In contrast to the *Mail*, Methven's *Mirror* article chooses to focus on Glastonbury as a success, mentioning it in the same paragraph as the successful BBC coverage of the 2012 London Olympics opening ceremony. This is consistent with the quantitative trend that the certain sections of the press will highlight the BBC's programming successes.

### **Use of quotations by the *Mirror***

Quotes from Shadow Culture Secretary, Chris Bryant, were given prominence in the *Mirror* news article which, again, corresponds with the newspaper's longstanding support for the Labour Party. Bryant's comments appear throughout the article. Firstly, it is mentioned that 'Chris Bryant warned that the Tories could make the BBC a 'national irrelevance.' Then at the end of the article, Bryant is quoted saying:

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<sup>104</sup> A section of the 'Isles of Wonder' London 2012 Olympic opening ceremony featured Her Majesty the Queen with James Bond (Daniel Craig) appearing to jump out of a helicopter (Oettler 2015: 250).

The BBC is our nation's cultural NHS and the golden thread through it all is that it provides something for everyone. The Tories' war on the BBC could mean no more popular shows on a Saturday night, no more sport and an irrelevant and barely recognisable BBC come 2027.

The suggestion that the Conservatives want to stop popular shows is reinforced in the middle of Methven's article saying that 'John Whittingdale will propose it [the BBC] concentrates on niche, worthy shows, rather than those with mass appeal.' Both Bryant's quote and stating that the Green Paper will force the BBC to focus on 'niche, worthy shows' rather than the 'popular' presumes that the Green Paper is focused on trying to take away parts of the BBC which are presumed to be popular.

Within Bryant's quote, the description of the BBC as 'our cultural NHS' serves to reinforce the idea that the BBC is a treasured institution which is uniquely British (like the NHS) and which forms part of the UK's national mythology. This is emphasized by Bryant's choice of the words '*our* cultural NHS' (emphasis added) instead of 'the cultural NHS.' In Methven's *Mirror* article, the BBC is held up as a symbol for the whole of the UK (like the Queen, James Bond and the NHS) rather than just a broadcaster. The comparison with the NHS,<sup>105</sup> when the BBC's funding system is considered, is inaccurate. The NHS is funded through taxation and is free at the point of use, regardless of income. In contrast, the BBC is funded through the licence fee, the non-payment of which denies access to television or leads to a fine or prison sentence if BBC television is consumed without paying the TV licence. However, the BBC and the NHS are unique and have a public service ethos, which newspapers allude to in comparisons, even though the BBC and the NHS are funded differently. The *Mirror's* reporting of the letter does not mention the licence

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<sup>105</sup> Quantitative analysis found that comparisons between the BBC and NHS appeared in just three per cent of newspaper articles in the sample, and over half of these mentions occurred within the *Daily Mirror* and *Guardian*.

fee as a reason for defending the BBC. More emotive, generalised arguments in support of the Corporation which are easier or more appealing to communicate (including comparing the BBC to the NHS) are used. The licence fee is therefore not at the forefront of positive BBC news reporting.

### **Coverage of the letter in the *Daily Telegraph***

The *Daily Telegraph* was the only newspaper to discuss the celebrities' letter on its front page (Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> July 2015, Anita Singh), with the headline 'Stars attack Cameron over BBC; Call off the attack dogs, BBC stars tell Cameron.' This article used the celebrities' letter as a gateway into wider discussion about the potential contents of the Green Paper on the future of the BBC, rather than just focussing on the letter itself, or the celebrities involved. The article engaged with the licence fee more than other articles about the celebrities' letter. Singh mentions the government suggesting the licence fee should be replaced with a household tax and referred to BBC Director General Tony Hall stating that the "great majority" of people are happy to pay the current licence fee. The *Telegraph* placed a keen focus on the idea of combat between the two sides in the debate between the BBC (and the celebrities who support it) and the government, emphasised using the word 'attack' twice in the title. Metaphors of the Corporation going to war are contained within the article as it is stated that the publication of the BBC's annual report 'provided ammunition' for its critics because it showed that the 'wage bill approached £1 billion.' However, even though high wages at the BBC were mentioned (hinting at suggestions of the BBC's profligacy), the Director of Finance and Operations at the BBC and Director General Tony Hall were both quoted defending BBC spending. Singh's article also mentioned the need for extra staffing for events such as the World Cup, the Scottish Referendum and the 2015 General Election, so the higher staffing budget appeared justified rather than used as a byword for BBC greed. Unlike the *Mirror*, the *Telegraph* quoted BBC Director General, Tony Hall, at length, speaking about the

future of the BBC. Doing this added to the focus of the article on the combative nature of the upcoming Green Paper on Charter Review as it said Hall ‘warned politicians and commercial rivals to back off’ [the BBC] (Singh 2015:1). The use of the phrase ‘back off’ was not a direct quote from Hall, but the *Telegraph’s* interpretation of his comments. Hall’s comments are therefore presented as deeply hostile: ‘back off’ is something that might be said during a fight. It implies that commercial rivals and politicians are trying to fight the BBC and views the entire debate about the BBC as a conflict. Overall, the *Telegraph* article was a relatively balanced piece using quotes from a range of individuals, rather than appearing slanted in favour of one position. It focused mainly on the ‘battle’ between the BBC and government evoked in the celebrities’ letter, by using the language of conflict, but did not weigh in support of one side or another.

Overall the case studies of David Cameron’s ‘delicious’ comments and the ‘Luvvies letter’ have highlighted how newspaper reporting can be positive towards the BBC and criticise the government. Reporting of Cameron’s comments shows that there was a party-political divide within newspaper reporting, with right-leaning newspapers reporting Cameron’s comments in a way which was critical of the BBC, while reporting in left-leaning newspapers criticised the government and defended the BBC. Reporting of the Luvvies letter in the *Mirror* was an example of how the left-leaning press used reporting to defend the BBC against the Conservative government. To do this, the letter and the *Mirror’s* reporting of it collocated the BBC with iconic British institutions (James Bond and the National Health Service), and foregrounded BBC programming successes like the 2012 London Olympics Opening Ceremony. By constructing the BBC in this way, any government reforms would be seen to be against the entire British nation, with the government presented as ‘them’ against a much-loved BBC. Reporting of the letter in right-leaning newspapers, such as the *Daily Telegraph*, while focusing on conflict between two

sides, did not use the same nationalistic construction as the *Mirror*. This demonstrates the partisan nature of reporting around the 'Luvvies Letter' as the left-leaning *Mirror* is hyperbolically vociferous in its defence of the BBC, while the right-leaning *Telegraph* is more restrained. Therefore, the next section of this chapter further discusses newspaper reporting of the 'Luvvies letter' in other right-leaning newspapers to consider how these newspapers compare with the *Mirror* coverage. It examines how these newspapers construct groups to evoke a theme of 'us and them' within discourse.

## **Section Two: For the many, not the few: how ‘Tyranny of the minority’ shows who and what the BBC should be for**

### **‘Tyranny of the minority’ in newspaper coverage: an introduction**

Qualitative analysis of newspaper articles has shown that newspapers evoke a discourse which is described as ‘tyranny of the minority.’ The following key themes were found to be present within this discourse:

1. The licence fee payer is a majority group and assumed to have a homogenous, generally conservative-leaning worldview, represented by newspapers.
2. The BBC is constructed as a minority elite, preventing the majority worldview from being expressed.
3. The BBC should appeal to a wide audience because it receives the licence fee and therefore should serve the majority who pay for it. This means that the licence fee is not directly criticised.
4. The licence fee payer is presented in opposition to the BBC, to create a divide between ‘us’ (the licence fee payer and newspaper reader) and ‘them’ (the BBC, celebrities and executives associated with the Corporation).

To investigate how ‘tyranny of the minority’ was evoked, this analysis returns to an examination of coverage of the ‘Luvvies letter’ in the *Daily Mirror*. However, while the previous section focussed on the positive coverage of the letter in the *Mirror*, this section begins with a discussion of the less positive reporting of the letter in other newspapers. This discussion sets the scene for how ‘tyranny of the minority’ presents two sides, the BBC and the licence fee payer, who are supposedly in opposition to one another, and shows how the creation of ‘us and them’ manifested itself within discourse. This section then discusses *Daily Mail* reporting of programmes on the BBC such as Great British Bake Off, and how programming was

discussed in the *Mail* in the wake of the Green Paper, to highlight how ‘tyranny of the minority’ was further evoked. The themes within the *Mail*, which were also observed in reporting of the BBC licence fee in the *Sun*, are then discussed.

### **Luvvies versus licence fee payers: the construction of ‘us versus them’ within newspaper coverage**

The following newspaper articles (news, opinion and editorial) from the *Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Mirror*, around the Luvvies letter will be considered within this section:

- ‘The Luvvie elite paid millions in licence fee payers cash’ (Ledwith, *Daily Mail*, Thursday 16th July 2015, p.6)
- ‘A clumsy deception which shames the BBC’ (*Daily Mail*, Friday 17th July 2015, p. 14)
- ‘Arrogant, naïve and just plain dishonest’ (Stephen Glover, *Daily Mail*, Friday 17th July, p. 7)
- ‘BBC Luvvies need a big reality check’ (Carole Malone, *Sunday Mirror*, Sunday 19th July 2015, p.25)
- ‘Tories don’t have a licence to kill Beeb’ (*Sunday Mirror*, Sunday 19th July 2015, p. 14)

These articles about the ‘Luvvies letter’ were more critical of the BBC than the articles discussed previously. Several rhetorical techniques were used by the newspapers to represent the celebrities who signed the letter in clear opposition to licence fee payers. The most notable technique was referring to the celebrities who signed the letter as ‘Luvvies.’ For example, Ledwith’s article headlined ‘The Luvvie elite paid millions in licence fee payers cash’ (Ledwith, *Daily Mail*, Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p.6). Here, the fact that it is specifically ‘licence payer cash’ which the ‘Luvvies’ are paid is instrumental in the construction of the headline. The word

'Luvvie' is generally considered a derogatory term for pretentious people in the acting profession. The *Mail* could choose to describe the letter's signatories as 'stars' or 'celebrities.' However, the newspaper has chosen a much more loaded term (Luvvies) as an adjective. Alliteratively juxtaposing the 'Luvvie elite' with the 'licence payer' - who is not elite because the majority of people who watch television pay the licence fee - places the two groups in opposition to one another and serves to de-legitimise the arguments in the celebrities' letter from the outset of the article.

Table 6.1 shows how newspapers often used contrasting adjectives within coverage to describe the BBC, celebrities who signed the letter, BBC executives and the licence fee payer as opposite groups. Stephen Glover uses the word 'arrogant' to describe the BBC three times (*Daily Mail*, Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p.7) compared with the 'ordinary' and 'sensible' licence payer. The final paragraph of Glover's piece drew clear battle lines between the BBC and the licence payers:

In confecting this letter and then denying authorship - and also in trying to evade the reasoned argument to which any public body should be open - these overmighty and presumptuous panjandrums have shown how much they think of themselves, and how little of the ordinary licence payer (Glover 2015: 7).

The use of alliteration in 'presumptuous panjandrums' creates an image of pompous and self-important officials, contrasting this with the 'ordinary' licence payer. The word panjandrum, a word which was invented by Samuel Foote in 1754, has been used by the *Daily Mail* in other articles, with the newspaper trying to make this the 'accepted collective noun for those shadowy 'left-liberal, anti-traditionalist' personages running the country' (Mullan 2002). Furthermore 'overmighty' is the amalgamation of two words: over and mighty. This combination of words contributes



to the idea of the overbearing celebrities and managers at the BBC who have too much power over ‘the ordinary licence payer.’

**Contrasting adjective use in ‘Luvvies Letter’ articles**

<b><u>The BBC and associated parties</u></b>	<b><u>The licence fee payer</u></b>	<b><u>The Licence fee</u></b>
Self-serving	Star struck	OUR money
Machiavellian	Sensible	Our money (without the capitals)
Dopishly naïve/naïve	Ordinary	Universal
Clumsy	Taxpayer	A courtesy
Luvvies	Has absolutely no say in what the BBC does	
Luvvie elite		
Arrogant/ depressingly arrogant		
Careless/complacent		
Gilded		
Immature		
Blairite		
Beleaguered		
Daft		
Hysterical/ hysterical shroud waving		
Over-defensive		
Myopically resistant to criticism		
Overpaid/highly paid bosses/fat salaries/ludicrous wage bill		
Imperial		
Relentless expansion		
Presumptuous panjandrums		
Bureaucratic empires		
Melodramatic		
A law unto itself		
Plain dishonest		
Supposedly neutral		
Deeply unconservative		
Refused a proper discussion of immigration		
Desire to jack up ratings in the manner of a commercial broadcaster		

*Table 6.1: the contrasting use of adjectives used to describe the BBC and the licence fee payer in the articles about the ‘Luvvies letter’ (n=6).*

Many newspaper articles, particularly those in the *Daily Mail*, conflated the licence fee payer and taxpayer to contribute to the construction of two opposing sides within the debate on the BBC licence fee. The stereotype of a taxpayer is an ordinary individual who contributes to society, in contrast to 'Luvvies' who are part of a pretentious minority who have the luxury of freeloading off the taxpayer. For example, a *Mail* editorial (Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p. 14) expressed outrage as:

These celebrities - Clare Balding, Stephen Fry and the rest - receive tens of millions of pounds a year between them from the taxpayer. Are they really qualified to lecture us on whether the BBC is spending too much? (*Daily Mail*, Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p.14).

Here the taxpayer and the licence payer are conflated by stating in the article that the 'taxpayer' pays the wages of BBC celebrities. This is untrue as the BBC's main source of income is the licence fee, not tax; one can pay tax without choosing to pay the licence fee and one's earnings can stay below the tax threshold which does not impact on one's choice to pay the licence fee. Asking whether the celebrities are 'qualified to lecture us on whether the BBC is spending too much' is a straw man argument as the text of the celebrities' letter did not mention BBC spending.

However, this rhetorical question suggests that the BBC is being profligate and trying to dictate the debate around its spending. Furthermore, the 'taxpayer' and the well-paid celebrity are placed on two opposing sides, with the celebrities cast in the role of people who 'lecture us,' which is an alternative way to describe celebrities on the BBC who are usually associated with entertaining and are even afforded

'national treasure' status.<sup>106</sup> The use of the pronoun 'us' creates an in-group which places the reader on the same side as the newspaper, against the celebrities.

The possessive pronoun 'our' was also used to create a connection between the newspapers and their readership. For example, in the *Sunday Mirror* (Carole Malone, 19<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p.25), 'our' was used three times in relation to the licence fee – describing the system of funding as 'our money' (and once OUR even appeared in capital letters, for emphasis. Using the phrase 'our money' instead of 'the licence fee' makes explicit the connection between the BBC and the licence fee payer, which makes it appear all the more shocking when readers are told that 'our money' is being used to fund excessive salaries of hysterical, dishonest celebrities. Malone's article suggested that a minority of celebrities and executives are preventing a sensible review of how the licence fee is being spent.

To further construct a divide between celebrities who signed the letter and licence fee payers, the links between the celebrities who signed the letter to the Prime Minister and the BBC were explored. Mario Ledwith (*Daily Mail*, Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July, p.14) listed some of the signatories of the letter and provided information about how the BBC has helped progress their careers or their earnings. The article sought to delegitimise the arguments made in the letter by implying that financial motivation was the only reason the celebrities signed the letter. For instance, the article stated that presenter Graham Norton 'is thought to receive well over £1million a year from the Corporation.' This assertion is extremely vague; no specific figure is given, and it is not mentioned who claims that Norton earns this amount. The use of the word 'receive' instead of 'earn' suggests that celebrities are just given money from the licence fee for nothing. Furthermore, the article states that actor and comedian Sir

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<sup>106</sup> Sir David Attenborough, who signed the letter is, a presenter known for his nature documentaries on the BBC, was described as a national treasure by Prince William, Duke of Cambridge.

Lenny Henry was 'handed his big break by the BBC.' The use of the word 'handed' suggest Henry was undeserving of his position and did not have to work for it. The selection of celebrities from minority groups (Lenny Henry is BAME and Graham Norton is homosexual) shows that the *Mail* is attacking diversity at the BBC and speaks to the newspapers' anti-equalities agenda (Cameron and Panovic 2014: 71).

Although the focus of the newspaper articles was the letter signed by celebrities, they also included a host of other criticisms of the BBC, surrounding its spending, were cited in coverage to undermine the celebrities who signed the letter. These were not directly related to the contents of the letter but are related to the theme of profligacy by the BBC and, by extension, a profligate public sector. For example, an article in the *Sunday Mirror* (Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p.25) included information about the pay of BBC bosses and their 'absurdly generous redundancy packages' and how 174 BBC managers earn more than the PM David Cameron. Alliteration was used to describe the BBC's 'multimillion pound mistakes' (the digital initiative and the cost of relocating to Salford). The salaries of MPs were mentioned (they had recently received a 10 per cent pay rise), alongside the salaries of BBC executives: 'while we're screaming about MPs getting a 10 per cent rise why aren't we screaming about the six-figure salaries of BBC management?' This equated the BBC with MPs, who were criticised for their corruption during the 2009 Expenses Scandal. It also evoked a link between the BBC and licence fee payers: MPs are expected to be accountable to the people who vote for them and, therefore, by implication, the BBC is expected to be accountable to the licence fee payers who fund them. Furthermore, the coverage used similes to suggest there would be disarray within the BBC now the government has suggested they need to reduce their spending. Malone's article stated, 'Its [the BBC's] executives are running around like headless chickens terrified that all those heady years when they could throw our money around like confetti are over.' This emphasises chaos at the

Corporation and suggests that the BBC is reckless with licence fee spending, to further delegitimise the BBC in the eyes of the reader.

As with the newspaper articles about David Cameron's 'delicious' comments, a number of articles on the 'Luvvies letter' criticised the BBC itself rather than the licence fee. Whilst, Malone's *Sunday Mirror* article does not directly criticise the licence fee as a system of funding the BBC, it does use the fact that the BBC is funded by the licence fee to criticise the BBC's profligacy, rather than attacking the licence fee itself. It states:

Till now it's been able to spend the £3.5bn that comes courtesy of the licence fee however it likes. Now it must be more accountable for what it produces and what it spends. But why shouldn't the Government question the BBC's profligacy? Why shouldn't a taxpayer-funded organisation face proper scrutiny?

The description of the BBC's funding as 'courtesy' of the licence fee implies that the licence fee is a gift bestowed upon the BBC. Suggesting the money can be spent 'however it [the BBC] likes,' implies that the BBC is an organisation which faces little or no checks on the way it spends money and produces programmes. This is, of course, untrue, as, at the time the article was written, the BBC Trust governed the BBC to 'to act as stewards of the licence fee, guardians of the public interest and to promote the public purposes' (DCMS 2015: 64).

Now it has been established that the 'Luvvies letter' constructed the BBC and the licence fee payer as opposites, the chapter will now discuss rhetorical techniques used to emphasise the BBC as 'them', in opposition to licence-fee payers in reporting. Detailed analysis of how 'them' or an 'out group' is significant for analysis

as it allows for conclusions to be drawn about how language is used in ideological constructions of the BBC licence fee.

### **Hysterical and dishonest Luvvies – reinforcing the construction of ‘them’**

The celebrities’ letter was featured in the *Mirror* the day before the government published its 2015 Green Paper consulting on the future of the BBC for the upcoming Charter Review period. This meant that commentary around the celebrities’ letter was often discussed in tandem with the Green Paper. It was frequently argued that the celebrities’ letter was emblematic of the BBC responding to the contents of the Green Paper in a hysterical fashion, even though the letter was published the day before the Green Paper, so could not comment directly on its contents. An opinion piece by Steven Glover, headlined ‘Arrogant, naïve and just plain dishonest’ (Glover, *Daily Mail*, Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p. 7) was extremely critical of the celebrities’ letter and the BBC. The previous week (Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p. 7), Glover also wrote an article headlined ‘Ignore all the wailing: the Tories have let the bloated BBC off the hook.’ Glover is a longstanding columnist for the *Mail* who often criticises the BBC.<sup>107</sup> However, the constructions of these two headlines help to minimise the idea that Glover has an agenda. In the first, the use of ‘just plain dishonest’ suggests that an imagined speaker is reluctantly calling the BBC dishonest. In the second, ‘ignore all the wailing’ makes it appear as if the article is only being written because the BBC’s reaction to the licence fee settlement is misleading. It is notable that Glover’s opinion pieces are not on the front page and therefore lack the prominence of the *Daily Telegraph* front page article about the letter. However, Glover’s opinion piece appears on page seven, which gives the

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<sup>107</sup> Stephen Glover is a longstanding columnist for the *Daily Mail*. In one of his columns he described the 2012 Olympic opening ceremony shown on the BBC (which the *Mirror* and the *Guardian* highlighted as an example of BBC programming success) as ‘Marxist propaganda’ (Glover 2012).

article much more prominence than opinion pieces in newspapers such as the *Guardian*, which, across the sample appeared most frequently on pages 30 to 34.

Glover's piece (Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p.7) begins on a generally positive note with him conceding that 'At home and abroad there are tens of millions of people who believe that, whatever else, Auntie is basically honest.' Here, using the reference 'Auntie', instead of 'the BBC,' seems an affectionate term. The next several paragraphs, however, construct the BBC as being dishonest:

[T]he revelation that its senior management orchestrated a self-serving letter in its own defence and then covered up its own role in the affair - and at the time of writing seemingly continues to do so - is deeply shocking.

Referring to the BBC as 'Auntie' and then discussing how the Corporation has tried to 'mislead sensible licence payers' is almost akin to suggesting that a member of the family has deceived the reader (who is likely to also be a licence payer). More widely, referring to the BBC as 'Auntie' here, suggests that a much-loved national institution has lost its way. Glover used alliteration to reinforce the idea of the BBC's dishonesty, describing the letter as 'a concoction calculated to mislead.' The potential 'involvement' in the letter of the BBC's Director of Strategy, James Purnell, who was Culture Secretary in the last Labour government, is cited by Glover as evidence that the BBC is biased against the Conservative Party. He suggests that Purnell 'seems to be carrying on a war against the Tories from behind the ramparts of the supposedly neutral Corporation.' This presents the BBC as untrustworthy and failing readers in its commitment to impartiality.

Rhetorical devices similar to Glover's were repeated in the *Daily Mail's* editorial and a *Sunday Mirror* opinion piece about the letter. The *Mail* editorial which accompanied Glover's article (Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p. 14) accused the celebrities

of being 'melodramatic' and 'hysterical' stating that the Green Paper 'merely calls for a measured debate on [the BBC's] overall purpose, whether it has grown too big and if a universal licence fee is still a fair charge in this multi-platform age.' The opinion piece in the *Sunday Mirror* contained similar criticism to the Mail, describing the Corporation as 'screaming' 'melodramatic rot' (Carole Malone, *Sunday Mirror*, 19th July 2015, p.25). This created an image of the BBC as completely unreasonable, almost likening the Corporation to a hysterical spoiled child.

Alliteration was used in the *Sunday Mirror* to contrast the hysteria of the BBC with the powerlessness of those who consume BBC services. For example, the sentence 'its bosses can't keep bleating about a diminished Britain when Brits have absolutely no say in what the BBC does.' The suggestion that 'Brits' are powerless against the BBC is also invocative of the theme of 'us' and 'them' – where the BBC is on one side and the licence fee payers are on another.

It is notable that the editorial which appeared in the *Sunday Mirror* on the same day contrasted with Malone's opinion piece, in that it expressed support for the BBC. The editorial headlined 'Tories don't have a licence to kill Beeb' (19<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p. 14), was highly critical of the Conservative government and Rupert Murdoch. The Green Paper is portrayed as being a gift to the Murdoch media empire, stating 'The expected reforms will make his News UK empire of Sky and news websites the dominant media platforms in Britain.' The Green Paper is depicted as a gift to the Murdoch family by the government, reining in the BBC in return for Murdoch newspapers' favourable coverage of the Conservatives in the 2015 general election. The BBC was compared with the NHS while described as 'our greatest global ambassador.' The range of services and programming provided by the BBC is hailed as an 'intricate cultural tapestry' with the warning that 'once you start picking away at one strand, it all falls apart.' The BBC's popular programming is highly praised, and portrayed as at risk because of proposed reforms in the Green Paper:



If the Tories had made these changes 50 years ago, I doubt we'd have Dad's Army, Fawlty Towers or Morecambe and Wise.

But these popular shows, like Strictly and Top Gear, are sold for profit around the world.

They make money for us! So why are the Tories going ahead with this? It's payback for the one pensioner who can easily afford a licence fee but would love to see it scrapped - Rupert Murdoch.

It is interesting to note the contrasting nature of the editorial and Malone's opinion piece in the *Sunday Mirror*. Malone criticises BBC profligacy and how she considers celebrity reaction to the Green Paper hysterical, while the editorial rails against the government and Murdoch working together to (supposedly) stop popular BBC programming. Overall, the editorial is likely to more accurately reflect the 'voice' of the *Sunday Mirror*, rather than Malone's opinion piece on page 25. Murdoch-controlled newspapers (*Sunday Times* and *Sun on Sunday*) are commercial rivals to the *Sunday Mirror* which may explain the anti-Murdoch editorial line. However, although two articles in the same newspaper have different arguments, both opinion piece and editorial are using language to support a majority of people, or the newspapers' readers (the licence fee payer and/or those who watch BBC programmes), over what is constructed as an elite minority (celebrities or commercial media owners). This suggests that supporting the 'us' or their readers against an enemy (whether this be commercial interests or celebrities from within the BBC) is a common feature within newspapers and integral to the construction of 'tyranny of the minority' in reporting about the BBC licence fee.

So far, this section has focused on the discussion of the 'Luvvies letter' to show how newspaper coverage has sought to construct oppositional sides, invoking 'us and

them' in the debate around the BBC licence fee. Next, the use of language with *Daily Mail* reporting of BBC programming is considered to further investigate how newspapers use 'tyranny of the minority' to construct their ideal of who and what the BBC should be for.

### **Contestant criticism: The *Great British Bake Off***

On Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> July 2015, the columnist Quentin Letts<sup>108</sup> wrote an opinion piece in the *Daily Mail* (p.15) entitled 'I adore Bake Off. But why does it have to be so right on?'<sup>109</sup> The article focused on series six of the TV series *The Great British Bake Off*<sup>110</sup> (GBBO), which, at the time Letts' article was written, aired on BBC One. The article was written several days before the first episode of this series of the show was aired, so did not (and could not) engage with the content of the show. The article was, however, focused on criticising the contestants competing in the series. Letts argued that the BBC selected a group of 'fashionable minorities' as contestants to promote the Corporation's 'politically correct' worldview. The article used humour to suggest that the BBC was using a popular programme to 'manipulate' viewers into sharing the Corporation's agenda:

Ping!' went the kitchen timer. Out of the Beeb's oven, along with that vegan Lithuanian muscle-lady, came a tray of the most faultlessly politically correct women. There were six of them, every one a box-ticking cracker.

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<sup>108</sup> Quentin Letts is a columnist who frequently writes for the *Daily Mail* as well as other right-leaning newspapers such as the *Daily Telegraph*. His articles have been described as 'capable of boiling over with fury about the BBC' (Higgins 2015: 167).

<sup>109</sup> This article was selected for further qualitative analysis as it was the only article which featured the subject 'the BBC is too politically correct' as its primary subject area.

<sup>110</sup> The Great British Bake off is produced by Love Productions and features amateur bakers competing against each other to complete various baking challenges in a series of rounds. The first seven series of the show appeared on the BBC, the show then moved to Channel Four, after Love Productions signed a three-year deal with the channel. The latest season of the show, season ten, was aired in 2019 (The Great British Bake Off 2019).

Ping! And here came six blokes. Must have exact gender balance, you see. Anyway, where would any BBC reality programme be these days without that must-have item, a househusband?

In the Harriet Harman-ised world inhabited by BBC executives and their casting directors, there would be a Maoist people's tribunal hearing if you so much as suggested women were keener on cake-baking than men were. Corporation controllers lose their jobs for far lesser thought crimes.

The description of 'Harriet Harman-ised,' a reference to Harriet Harman, the former Deputy leader of the Labour Party, advocate for women's rights and senior female Member of Parliament (Harman 2017: 29). The mention of Harman implies that the BBC was anti-Conservative Party, biased towards feminism, women's rights and 'political correctness,' which serves as a catch-all term for an attack on equality and diversity. Letts further stated that the BBC would conduct a 'Maoist people's tribunal' for anyone suggesting that women preferred baking to men. This reference to Communist Mao Zedong and mentioning 'thought crimes' (a term used in Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*),<sup>111</sup> evokes a sense that questioning the BBC's perspective has sinister consequences and paints the BBC as totalitarian, trying to brainwash its viewers.

Letts mentioned the words 'licence fee' only once, when describing Nadiya Hussain, the contestant who won series six of the competition and subsequently went on to develop her own career as a TV personality and writer (Hussain 2018):

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<sup>111</sup>A thoughtcrime was an illegal thought, holding a belief which questions the ruling party

Next comes Nadiya, 30, a smiley Muslim head-dress wearer and full-time mother. Loving it already. Licence fee-payers will have, as the saying goes, their prejudices challenged. See? Muslim folk love Chelsea buns, too.

The article mentions that 'licence-fee payers will...have their prejudices challenged' instead of 'people' or 'viewers,' to further the idea that the BBC is using diversity amongst its contestants to promote its own worldview which those who pay the compulsory licence fee have no choice but to consume. This uses the fact that the BBC is licence fee funded to suggest that the BBC is trying to covertly impress its worldview upon the general population, many of whom pay the licence fee.<sup>112</sup> The BBC's aspiration to include a more diverse range of people in its programming is no secret as the Corporation published a 'Diversity and Inclusion Strategy' for 2016 to 2020. Therefore, the assertion by Letts that the BBC was trying to covertly introduce diversity into its programming appears unfounded. Throughout Letts' piece there are underlying assumptions that more diversity in BBC programming is generally undesirable and that the BBC is trying to foist minorities on licence fee-payers, which is emphasised by Letts employing a mocking and satirical tone.<sup>113</sup> It presupposes that viewers of GBBO and readers of the *Daily Mail* are not minorities. For example, Letts lists the different contestants on the programme and draws conclusions about how this 'manipulated' the 'average' GBBO viewer:

Bloke with tattoos, check. Muslim with a headscarf, check. Househusband, check. Afro-Caribbean, check.

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<sup>112</sup> There were 26.2 million TV licences in force across the UK in the year 2017/18 (Parliament, House of Commons 2019: 6).

<sup>113</sup> This satirical tone was characteristic of Letts' writing on the BBC in articles across the sample of articles analysed. For example, in discussing the Labour Party's response to the Green Paper on the BBC, Letts criticised Shadow Culture Secretary, Chris Bryant for looking like 'a pop eyed chorister' and bemoaned the Labour Party's 'histrionic, hysterical reply to the Government's actually terribly mild Green Paper' (Letts, *Daily Mail*, Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p. 18).

It's only a ruddy cake competition, but inspecting the cast members for this, the sixth series of the baking world's answer to *The X Factor*, the average British viewer may have felt distinctly manipulated. Laughably so, really. It is more multicultural and right on than a Benetton<sup>114</sup> catalogue.

After criticising the backgrounds of the contestants, Letts states 'I'm sorry if all this sounds world-weary and cynical. I do like *Bake Off*.' However, he qualifies this by explicitly stating 'I just wish I didn't feel, as I looked at the contestants yesterday, that I was being preached at and that the BBC's social engineers were up to their transparently political tricks again.' Referring to people involved in producing *GBBO* as 'social engineers' engaged in 'political tricks' suggests that the BBC was attempting to manipulate viewers to subscribe to a particular worldview which is accepting of minority groups. Given the popularity of *GBBO* (it was one of the most watched TV shows in the UK in 2015) it would have been difficult for Letts to criticise the content or the concept of the programme. He therefore, attacked the contestants in a manner which corresponds with comments from the then *Daily Mail* editor, Paul Dacre, who said that the BBC was guilty of promoting a worldview that was left-leaning, too politically correct and too supportive of multiculturalism (Dacre 2007).<sup>115</sup> Letts' comments are consistent with how the *Mail* has been described by other scholars. For example, Cameron and Panovic stated:

The *Mail* is a right-of centre-newspaper...it champions conservative values – it is for 'Britishness', the monarchy, law and order, traditional sexual morality and respect for/obedience to authority, and against internationalism, republicanism, multiculturalism, permissiveness and 'political correctness'. It

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<sup>114</sup> United Colours of Benetton is an Italian fashion brand. The company's prominent and sometimes controversial advertising campaigns were famous for making political statements and tackling issues such as racism. For example, Benetton's Art Director between 1982 and 2000, Oliviero Toscani, used visual statements in advertising such as 'a nun and priest kissing' (Cochrane 2017).

<sup>115</sup> See chapter two, section six for full discussion of Dacre's comments.

is particularly hostile to any kind of identity/diversity politics which enables minorities (ethnic, religious, sexual or linguistic) to assert their rights at the expense (as the Mail sees it) of the majority's traditions and values (Cameron and Panovic 2014: 71).

Cameron and Panovic's description includes 'multiculturalism,' 'political correctness' and 'diversity politics...which enables minorities' as concepts which the *Mail* is hostile towards. In Lett's article about *GBBO*, all of these concepts are evoked as integral to the BBC and against licence fee payers.

The final paragraph of Lett's article reads:

When some of us accuse BBC management of being politically skewed, we do not simply mean that they incline to a particular political party. The bias is more cultural, more sinister, than that.

It is a leaning to modernity, to fashion, to the 'alternative', the 'different', sometimes for reasons of group-think, sometimes out of a desire to jack up the ratings in the manner of a commercial TV station. It is in keeping with the creed of egalitarianism. It is deeply unconservative.

Lett's article ends with the suggestion that the BBC is doing more than simply providing broadcasting but is trying to promote a way of thinking which will be inconsistent with what he presumes as the views of the typical *Daily Mail* reader. This is, in effect, placing the BBC in opposition to *Mail* readers, invoking 'us versus them.' Lett assumes that 'egalitarianism' and being 'unconservative' are undesirable values, in accordance with the *Daily Mail's* historic Conservative leanings. In addition, within this conclusion for his article, Lett introduces the suggestion that the BBC is trying to include 'fashionable minorities' as contestants to improve ratings and compete with commercial broadcasters. Suggesting that

contestants are being selected for *GBBO* to improve ratings is contradictory. The programme was (and still is on Channel 4) consistently an extremely popular programme with high viewing figures.<sup>116</sup> Therefore, the BBC did not need to improve ratings on this particular show, through selection of contestants or otherwise, as ratings were already high. Overall, Letts suggests egalitarianism is merely a performance by the BBC rather than an ideal for the Corporation to strive towards. Next, this section will consider how, elsewhere in the *Daily Mail's* reporting, similar themes to those in Letts' article are evoked to contribute to the newspaper's discursive construction of the BBC.

### **The *Mail* pours further scorn on the BBC appealing to minorities**

The suggestion that the BBC excessively promoted minorities and minority viewpoints was not confined to Letts' article about one particular programme. The language used in the *Daily Mail* often suggested that the BBC promoted a worldview which was out of touch with the general population. This meant that the *Mail* made assumptions about a 'majority' worldview and about its own readership which remained unchallenged in reporting. In an editorial the day after the publication of the 2016 White Paper entitled 'Wasted opportunity to rein in the BBC,' the *Mail* said:

For years the BBC refused proper discussion of immigration, even though millions of licence-fee payers wanted it to be aired.

Equally it has been (until recently) avowedly Europhile, pro-minority, anti-marriage, pro-euthanasia, anti-church, opposed to private education and averse to any questioning of the NHS.

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<sup>116</sup> The 2014 final of *GBBO* was the most watched non-sporting event of the year, with an average of 12.3 million viewers (Watt 2014).

This is why the BBC must not be allowed to sail complacently on (Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p. 14).

Here, the *Mail* blames any perceived lack of discussion on immigration on the BBC, rather than the government or politicians. The *Mail* is implying that many 'licence-fee payers' have opposing views to the BBC, suggesting that the Corporation tries to push a point of view which is not shared by the people who fund it.<sup>117</sup> Referring to 'licence fee payers' rather than 'viewers' or 'people' underlines how everyone pays the licence fee in order to have a stake in the BBC and subsequently their views represented. Describing how the BBC has 'refused' something that 'millions' apparently wanted (a discussion of immigration) suggests that the BBC is not accountable to the licence fee payers. Here, rather than opposing the licence fee, the *Mail* is using the fact that everyone who consumes BBC output pays the licence fee, and uses this to criticise the BBC for lack of accountability; without the licence fee creating a link between the viewer and the Corporation, the *Mail* could not criticise the BBC in this way. Presenting one-sided views as self-evident was identified in previous studies of the *Mail's* representation of events. Panay's 2017 study of the *Daily Mail Online* article 'Prime Minister Corbyn and the 1000 days that Destroyed Britain.'<sup>118</sup> This presented 'readers towards actionable rejection of the politics of wealth redistribution, social equality and peace through disarmament, and ultimately persuades them towards acceptance of the historical status quo, offering only this as an alternative to the dystopia of progressive politics' (Panay 2017: 60).

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<sup>117</sup> The idea that the BBC being 'avowedly Europhile, pro-minority, anti-marriage, pro-euthanasia, anti-church, opposed to private education and averse to any questioning of the NHS' is at odds with the views of people within the UK is questionable. For example, according to the British Social Attitudes survey in 2015, when the article was written, 48 per cent of people described themselves as having no religion, suggesting a large portion of the UK is 'anti-church' (National Centre for Social Research 2017).

<sup>118</sup> This was published in August 2015, during the Labour Party leadership contest in which Jeremy Corbyn was the left-wing candidate. It was a work of 'journalistic fiction' which warned of 'of an existential threat to Britain's political and economic future from a potential Labour Government led by Jeremy Corbyn' (Panay 2017: 46).



The *Mail's* coverage of the BBC presents a conservative anti-egalitarian worldview as the self-evident correct way of thinking to its readers.

The normalisation of a conservative majority viewpoint was furthered in Tom Utley's opinion piece in the *Mail* (Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p. 14) headlined 'The BBC's secret file on yours truly and why it's so maddening Auntie's escaped unscathed.' The use of the phrase 'yours truly' in the headline personalises the issue and serves to place Utley alongside his readers. In the article, Utley discusses the contents of the White Paper, and expresses outrage about how apparently, within the BBC, his views are considered 'very right wing.' For Utley, this suggests that the BBC is 'skewing the national debate so that even old-fashioned liberal Tories like me are seen as extremists.' Utley's description of himself suggests that the category of an 'old-fashioned liberal Tory' is one with which a majority of people would identify. Utley also criticises the BBC's supposed 'soft-Left ethos,' when discussing reforms in the White Paper, stating:

[L]ess are the staff likely to object to the requirement that they must give greater focus to underserved audiences, in particular those from black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds and from nations and regions, who are currently 'less well served'.

As we all know, BBC employees can't get enough of this sort of thing although I suspect that most viewers, of every race and creed, have had it up to here with patronising programmes imagined by white, Oxbridge-educated, *Guardian*-reading Islington-dwellers to appeal to minorities.

Utley is directly scornful of the BBC's minority programming and those at the BBC in charge of commissioning programmes— even though it is a requirement of the BBC's remit to make programmes which have minority appeal, including programming for

'minority language groups' (DCMS 2015: 14). Utley suggests that the BBC making programmes to appeal to minorities is something which is forced upon the public by an 'elite' section of the population (those who went to Oxford or Cambridge universities), which 'most viewers' are tired of. The mention of the fact that people who make the programmes are 'white' further suggests that appealing to minorities is simply a performance by the BBC, rather than the duty of a public service broadcaster. Utley uses overlexicalisation (Machin and Mayr 2012: 37) to criticise the people who make minority programming (using hyphenated adjectives such as '*Guardian-reading*') to alienate them from the general *Daily Mail* readership. Using so many adjectives to describe the 'patronising programmes' emphasises Utley's suggestion that the BBC is elitist and out of touch with the ordinary licence fee payer.

Furthermore, the editorial in the same edition of the *Mail* as Utley's article (Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p.14) suggests that:

[T]he greatest problem is that a liberal, politically correct, anti-conservative mind set, which is contrary to many traditional British values, prevails in every nook and cranny of the BBC.

The idea that the BBC is the antithesis of 'many traditional British values' positions the BBC as against Britain. The reader is not told what these 'British values' are, so they cannot make an objective judgement on whether they subscribe to these or not. The reader is left to assume that 'British values' mentioned are the opposite of a 'liberal' 'political correctness.' Suggesting that the BBC is the opposite of the 'many' is, again a criticism of what the *Mail* perceives as the BBC's appeal to minorities. Placing the BBC as the antithesis of British values contrasts with the *Daily Mirror*, which collocated the BBC with the Queen, James Bond and the National Health Service to suggest that the BBC was integral to the UK's national mythology.

The way in which the *Mail* uses Britishness and nationalism to construct an ‘other’ within discourse was discussed by Stoegner and Wodak, in their analysis of a 2013 *Daily Mail* article ‘The man who hated Britain’ about the then Leader of the Opposition’s father, Ralph Miliband. Stoegner and Wodak found that the *Mail* used implicit and explicit anti-Semitic stereotypes to question Ralph Miliband’s patriotism (Stoegner and Wodak 2016: 199). By extension, this criticism was applied to Ed Miliband. While questioning the Britishness of the BBC is not the primary trope used in newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee, it is a tool used by the *Mail* to help present the BBC as an ‘other’ to the newspaper reader. Overall, *Mail* reporting of the BBC is focused on placing the licence fee paying majority against a minority of elite BBC executives, invoking a discourse of ‘tyranny of the minority.’ However, this discourse is not limited to the *Daily Mail* which will be discussed in the next part of the chapter.

### **‘Tyranny of the minority’ in the *Sun***

An editorial in the *Sun* after the publication of the White Paper entitled ‘Luvvies Charter’ (Monday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p. 10) criticised the BBC’s religious programming. It referred to an article within the same issue of the newspaper entitled ‘Songs of Rage’. The article criticised the comments of the BBC’s Head of Religion and Ethics, Aaqil Ahmed, who said that the BBC was ‘too Christian’ (Halls 2016: 6). The *Sun* portrayed Ahmed’s comments as outrageous, suggesting that the BBC would have to broadcast Muslim call to prayers on a Friday in the same way that they broadcast *Songs of Praise* (a long running religious programme which shows singing of Christian hymns) on a Sunday. If the BBC were to broadcast a call to prayer it would arguably fit the remit of the BBC as a universal public service broadcaster – catering for a range of different religions. However, the *Sun* suggested that Ahmed’s comments were an attack on the Christian values of the UK, presuming that the BBC should exist only to appeal to Christianity. Ahmed’s comments were evidence,

according to the *Sun*, of the 'boxticking Beeb' pushing 'PC [politically correct] nonsense on everyone, regardless of what they want.' It is assumed that the *Sun* knows what 'everyone' wants (so is speaking up for the majority), and that egalitarianism is 'nonsense' rather than what could be considered part of the Corporation's role as a public service broadcaster.

The editorial continued:

Of course the Beeb should be inclusive and reflect British society. But that hasn't stopped it treating views like anti-immigration and Euroscepticism as the fringe opinions of cranks and racists.

Like the *Daily Mail* editorial on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2016 (p.14), the *Sun* suggested that the BBC gives too much airtime to 'minority' Muslim views and not enough to anti-Europe viewpoints. Again, assumptions are made about *Sun* readers: they will not be Muslim or value a diverse society but will be Eurosceptic and anti-immigration. However, as a universal public service broadcaster, committed to impartiality, it is the role of the BBC to provide content for all religious minorities and both pro and anti-Europe perspectives. Like the *Mail*, the *Sun* appears critical of the BBC for not reflecting views on immigration and Europe which are, supposedly, the views of most British people, and are similar to the newspapers' own. The White Paper, which the editorial criticises using war metaphor as 'the government's limp surrender,' recommended that the BBC was 'for the diverse communities across the UK and that every demographic group is being served by the BBC to some extent' (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2016: 29). The *Sun* clearly disagrees with the suggestion that the BBC should serve all demographic groups and, like the *Mail*, feels the BBC should concentrate on what it perceives as a majority point of view.

Previous studies of British newspaper reporting which employ Critical Discourse Analysis found similar discursive patterns of reporting to the *Sun* and *Mail*. For example, Baker *et al.*'s (2013) examination of the representations of Islam in the British press (1998 to 2009), references a *Mail* article which construct Muslims as an 'out group' and place them together with another 'out group' 'the elites,' both of whom benefit at the expense of the 'taxpayer' (Baker *et al.* 2013: 208). As with coverage of BBC executives, the pro-Muslim elite is presented in the *Sun* as 'Guardianistas' (Baker *et al.* 2013: 193) which is reminiscent of the 'Guardian-reading Islington dwellers' who make 'patronising programmes' according to the *Mail* (Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p. 14). Coverage of Islam in the *Sun* was found by Baker *et al.* 'to link two disliked groups, Muslims and politically correct people' in its stories, such as the Red Cross apparently banning Christmas trees in its charity shops to ensure no Muslim people were offended (Baker *et al.* 2013: 261). Connecting the two groups in opposition to newspaper readers was a feature of *Mail* coverage of the 'Luvvies letter' which connected the celebrities who signed the letter to BBC executives like James Purnell, associated with the Labour Party. Therefore, the two highest circulation UK newspapers, in reporting the BBC licence fee, employ techniques which are used within its wider newspaper reporting about separate issues to position one group against another.

Overall, newspaper coverage in the *Mail* and, to a lesser extent, the *Sun*, suggested that the BBC should not provide 'something for everyone' but rather 'something for everyone who shares our perspective.' Here the BBC and associated parties (like the celebrities in the Luvvies letter) are portrayed as ridiculous for focusing on minorities at the expense of a presumed conservative majority. This serves to place the BBC in opposition to newspaper readers and licence fee payers. The discourse evoked, for the purposes of this thesis is described as 'tyranny of the minority' as it

suggests that an elite minority (within the BBC) is trying to force its worldview upon a majority of people who conveniently share the editorial position of the newspaper.

Amongst its criticism of the BBC appealing to minorities, within its editorial on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2016 (p.14), the *Mail* also expressed concern for the Corporation's impact upon commercial competitors:

The BBC's colossal size - its multiple TV and radio channels, international interests and monolithic website - and the unfair advantage it derives from its guaranteed funding, enable it to crush rival news groups, including local papers, commercial radio and online competitors. This is not good for Britain's creative industries.

This sentence does not fit within 'tyranny of the minority.' It is directly critical of the BBC's size and funding stream, rather than criticising the BBC for failing to appeal to licence fee payers. It is of interest to examine this different line of argument further because it suggests that there is a separate discourse evoked within the newspaper articles. The next section of the chapter will therefore explore how newspapers discuss commercial media in relation to the BBC, and how the interests of 'rival news groups' to the BBC are discussed within newspaper reporting.

### **Section Three: ‘Competition is king:’ how newspapers normalised the interests of commercial media in coverage of the licence fee**

As discussed in chapter two, the role of the BBC’s relationship with commercial media has been long debated. Questions have been raised over whether the BBC should use the licence fee to make popular programmes which could be made profitably by the commercial sector and whether the licence fee gives the BBC an unfair advantage over commercial media. This section explores how newspaper coverage portrays the BBC in relation to commercial media, considering whether discourses present within newspapers evoke the idea that BBC should reduce its influence to benefit a commercial market in which newspapers are competing. For the purposes of this study, ‘commercial media’ encompasses all media outlets run predominantly for profit rather than public service, which include the UK’s national newspapers and news websites.

This section outlines how the discourse of ‘competition is king’ is deployed through the following themes:

1. Emphasis on the size of the BBC, suggesting the BBC is too big within the UK’s media landscape
2. Aggression from the BBC, suggesting that the BBC is using its size to crowd out commercial media
3. The BBC’s size and aggression are fuelled by the BBC’s compulsory licence fee
4. Re-imagining the BBC’s role as a public service broadcaster in a way in which would reduce the BBC to providing programmes and output which would not be produced by commercial media

Overall, the 'competition is king' discourse normalises the interests of commercial media (and newspapers which are associated with them). The commercial media is represented as the victim of a large, aggressive, publicly funded BBC. This suggests that newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee is ideological – newspapers are promoting their business interests within their coverage – as the presumption is that commercial companies would have more opportunity to raise profits if the licence fee funded BBC did not exist. These interests are not promoted explicitly but within discursive constructions of the BBC licence fee. The dominant discourse in reporting has been labelled 'competition is king' because it captures how newspapers use language to promote the interests of commercial competition in the UK media landscape, in a way which implies that 'the market' is the only logical method of media provision. Newspapers do this through a degradation of the BBC and its licence fee and how they do this is discussed in this section. Note that this section of the chapter focusses mainly on broadcasting, while the next section of the chapter examines coverage of online services.

The 'competition is king' discourse is particularly visible around newspaper reporting of George Osborne's 2015 'imperial ambitions' comments on the BBC. Newspaper coverage contains recurrent themes (the BBC's size and aggression) which, within later news reporting of the Green Paper and White Paper, are evoked to ensure that 'competition is king' discursively dominates the newspaper coverage. Following a discussion of Osborne's comments, this section conducts a detailed analysis of the linguistic choices made by newspapers to emphasise the BBC's size and aggression, followed by a discussion of how the licence fee is fuelled as portraying this. Next, how newspapers re-imagine public service broadcasting is outlined. Finally, this section analyses how columnist Rod Liddle discusses BBC programming in two separate Murdoch-controlled newspapers, to underline how the sensibilities of the market were normalised within reporting.



### **Setting the scene: George Osborne's 'imperial ambitions' comments**

On Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2015, the Chancellor, George Osborne,<sup>119</sup> appeared on *The Andrew Marr Show*.<sup>120</sup> This was several days before Osborne was due to give his first Budget as Chancellor since the Conservative Party won the general election in May 2015, two days after the 2015 licence fee settlement and several weeks before the publication of the Green Paper on the BBC's future. In the *Review of The Papers*, which takes place weekly on the *Marr Show*, stories about the government passing the cost of free licence fees to the over-75s on to the BBC were discussed. The BBC's Political Editor, Nick Robinson, pointed to a *Sunday Times* article which described the government's policy proposal as a 'clever raid.' The mention of this article prompted the following discussion between the presenter, Andrew Marr, and Osborne:

**Marr:** There's some cheerfully menacing stories about the BBC in the newspapers, standing back a bit, what kind of BBC would you like to see?

**Osborne:** The BBC is a fantastic institution which produces some of the best TV and radio in the world and we want to give it a sustainable future in an age where technology is changing and there are lots of other broadcasters out there. But the BBC is also a publicly funded public institution, so it does need to make savings and contribute to what we need to do as a country to get our house in order. We're talking to the BBC, we've got the Charter

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<sup>119</sup> George Osborne was Chancellor of the Exchequer in the UK between May 2010 and July 2016. Within the newspaper sample for this study he was quoted 35 times, the third most quoted source across the sample (only the Culture Secretary John Whittingdale and the Director General of the BBC, Tony Hall, were quoted more frequently).

<sup>120</sup> *The Andrew Marr Show* is a leading current affairs programme on BBC One at 9am on Sunday mornings. It usually features interviews with UK politicians, with at least one member of the Cabinet or Shadow Cabinet. The comments made by politicians at these interviews usually set the agenda for reporting for the rest of the day and sometimes the following day.

renewal process going on and when we have conclusions we can talk about, we can come and talk about them.

**Marr:** Over 75s licence fees would have a net cost the equivalent of closing a channel, is that the kind of thing you'd be comfortable with?

**Osborne:** I remember five years ago doing a deal with the BBC with the then Director General Mark Thompson, where actually the BBC did make around £500m of savings, or took on £500m of responsibilities, with things like the World Service, I was told at the time by people that they would close down the BBC, they always seem to pick the juiciest fruit on the tree, I would say that the BBC is a well-run organisation by Tony Hall, I'm absolutely sure that they can make a contribution. I want the BBC to have a strong future. There are technological changes which mean, if we don't address them, that the licence fee will disappear, and I think that's the basis of a deal we can do.

**Marr:** Should the BBC be pure market failure, things that nobody else would do, or should it be making big, popular programs, things like *Strictly*?<sup>121</sup>

**Osborne:** Well I absolutely want the BBC to go on making popular programmes like *Strictly*. I would say you want the BBC to be producing popular programmes that people want to watch, if you decide that the BBC will only do niche things then it loses its argument. But I think you are able to say to the BBC, and this is more for the Charter renewal, if you look at your website, and compare it with *The Times* or the *Telegraph* or the *Daily Mail* or the *Sun* and the *Mirror* are going to look like in ten years' time, it's going to be online, probably. So, then if you've got a website, that's got features and cooking and recipes, eventually the BBC website becomes the national

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<sup>121</sup> This refers to the TV programme *Strictly Come Dancing*.

newspaper as well as the national broadcaster and it's those sorts of issues which I think we need to look very carefully at. You wouldn't want the BBC to completely crowd out national newspapers. And if you look at the BBC website, it's a good product, but it is becoming a bit more imperial in its ambitions (Andrew Marr 2015).

This was a telling exchange around the BBC and how it was viewed by a key politician within the Conservative government at the time newspaper coverage was analysed for this study. The Chancellor complimented the BBC as a 'fantastic institution' which he wants to have a 'strong future' and clearly said he wanted the BBC to make popular programmes. This was despite the fact that, at the time, the *Daily Mirror* suggested that Conservative politicians were excessively hostile to the BBC to the point where they wanted to ban popular programmes such as *Strictly Come Dancing* (*Daily Mirror*, Monday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p.10). However, Osborne also described the BBC's website as 'imperial,' implying the BBC has expansionist ambitions. Newspaper reporting of Osborne's comments is discussed in detail below, to investigate how his comments were represented and what reporting of the exchange on *The Andrew Marr Show* can begin to show about newspaper priorities in reporting the BBC.

Osborne's comments were mentioned in 19 articles across the sample.<sup>122</sup> The day after Osborne's *Marr* interview (Monday 6<sup>th</sup> July 2015), his comments were predominantly mentioned in news articles but following this he was mainly quoted or mentioned within opinion pieces. Osborne's comments were still mentioned in opinion pieces reacting to the Green Paper nearly two weeks after the interview (e.g. Stephen Glover, *Daily Mail*, 17<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p.14). Very few articles referenced

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<sup>122</sup> There were seven articles which mentioned Osborne's imperial comments but were not included in the sample because they did not mention the words 'licence fee' or 'TV licence.'

Osborne's positive comments on the BBC. For example, only one short *Daily Mirror* article reported the section of Osborne's interview where he said, 'I absolutely want the BBC to go on making popular programmes like *Strictly*.' One article mentioned Osborne saying the BBC was 'an important national institution and a fantastic broadcaster that produces some of the best television and radio in the world' (Andrew Grice, *Independent*, Monday 6<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p.8). This lack of reporting of Osborne's more positive comments about the BBC suggests newspapers were more willing to highlight conflict rather than positivity when reporting government reforms to the BBC.

In contrast, all articles quoted Osborne saying that the BBC website was 'imperial' in its ambitions. Most of these articles included Osborne's comments within the text, but some articles included his comments within the title, for example, 'Imperial BBC is threat to free press, warns Osborne' (Daniel Martin, *Daily Mail*, Monday 6<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p. 14). The syntax of this title suggests that the BBC is challenging the freedom of the press, as a threat to a 'free press' suggests the creeping imposition of censorship. Nowhere in his comments did Osborne mention the BBC preventing 'freedom', although this is how the *Daily Mail* has chosen to interpret it – in an article which went on to describe how the Chancellor said the BBC's 'well-funded website... was creating unfair competition to the free press.' This contrasts the BBC website with the ideal of a 'free press' and is implicitly critical.

The week after Osborne's interview, the front page of the Culture section of the *Sunday Times* was headlined 'Taming the BBC beast: George Osborne accuses the corporation of imperialism; certainly its urge to smother rivals now threatens the national press, but with funding cuts looming, some of its services are vulnerable' (Tim Rayment, *Sunday Times*, 12<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p. 1). The adjectives in the article used to describe the BBC within this *Sunday Times* headline begin to construct the BBC as too big and seeking to dominate commercial media. The alliterative

suggestion that the BBC is a 'beast' which needs 'taming' by Osborne transfers animal-like qualities onto the BBC and suggests that the Corporation cannot be controlled. This is furthered using the noun 'urge', which suggests that BBC acts impulsively, rather than through considered policy. Furthermore, the verb 'smother' connotes that the BBC is killing the commercial market in a somewhat sinister manner suggesting that the BBC is stronger than the commercial sector so can deprive it of oxygen. Within the text the BBC's activities are also described as 'instinct' and 'competitive impulses' which again emphasises the idea that the Corporation is an uncontrolled animal. Within the article Rayment asks 'What of the empire's effects? Does the BBC's success in using public funds to reach 96% of the population stifle competition?' while the word 'empire' is used to refer to the BBC twice in collocation with 'imperial.' The concept of 'empire' can also be linked with oppression and brutality, which is how it appears within Rayment's article about the BBC when used alongside words such as 'stifle.' Rayment suggests that the BBC's overbearing nature is felt from all sides as he quotes the *New Statesman*<sup>123</sup> editor to show that now even 'the left' is 'alarmed' and 'admit[s]' that the BBC is using public money to compete with and dominate commercial news organisations online. The BBC is quoted at the end of the article for balance. However, the language used in the title and throughout the rest of the almost 1,500-word article is firmly critical of the BBC and evokes the 'competition is king' discourse.

Articles which were published a week or more after the *Marr* interview mainly agreed with Osborne's sentiment that the BBC was 'imperial'. For example, Stephen Pollard in the *Times* (Monday 13<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p. 24) commented:

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<sup>123</sup> The *New Statesman* is a weekly publication which describes itself as 'the leading progressive political and cultural magazine in the United Kingdom' with 'progressive and liberal politics' (New Statesman 2018).

Let's also end what George Osborne rightly called the BBC's 'imperial ambitions' for its website. Backed by its public subsidy, it not only kills the market for any possible competitors; it's also played a large part in destroying the local newspaper industry.

Attributing the words 'kills' and 'destroying' to the BBC implies that the Corporation is excessively aggressive. Left-leaning newspapers also supported Osborne's 'imperial' comment. Peter Preston in the *Observer* stated, 'Of course Osborne is right to fret over 'imperial' ambitions and wonder where the borders of future state broadcasting should henceforth be drawn' (12<sup>th</sup> July 2015 p. 41). Furthermore, across the sample, the sentiment behind Osborne's 'imperial' comment (suggesting that the BBC seeks to dominate the UK media landscape) was barely challenged. An article by James Cusick in the *Independent* headlined 'Osborne's assault on the BBC is doing Murdoch's dirty work' (Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p. 25), criticised Osborne's comments. Cusick compared Osborne's remarks on the BBC to those by James Murdoch,<sup>124</sup> linking Osborne's anti-BBC comments to Murdoch newspaper support for the Conservative Party in the 2015 general election.<sup>125</sup> However, apart from this, there were few challenges to Osborne's interpretation of the BBC's 'imperial' presence within the sample.

Overall, newspapers frequently quoted Osborne saying the BBC was 'imperial' in its online ambitions and rarely quoted Osborne's positive comments about the BBC and its programming. It is reasonable to assume that newspaper readers would be interested in other comments within Osborne's interview, for example, his suggestion that the BBC should keep making popular shows. However, in citing his 'imperial' comments newspapers have chosen to focus on the part of Osborne's

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<sup>124</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>125</sup> See table 2.1 for party political affiliations of newspapers in General Elections.

interview which is relevant to their model of operation: newspapers are concerned about their declining circulation and profitability and contrast this with the BBC's use of the licence fee to expand. Most newspaper articles which reported Osborne's 'imperial ambitions' comments emphasised the size of the BBC and the negative impact of a dominant BBC on commercial media. The next section of the chapter therefore conducts a thorough textual analysis of a selection of newspaper articles to show how emphasis on the size and aggression of the BBC mentioned in analysis of Osborne's comments, are applicable to a wider analysis of articles.

### **BBC voices within newspaper coverage – but the 'behemoth' remains unchallenged**

Furthering the description of the BBC as 'imperial,' the size of the BBC was also discussed in relation to the Corporation needing to lose weight or, more colloquially, 'slim down.' This is a lexical tool using conversational language to suggest that the BBC needs to become smaller. For example, a news article headlined 'Corporation Axe for Beeb: Auntie to slim down, TV shows and radio stations in the firing line' (Tom Newton-Dunn, *Sun*, Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p.2). The phrase 'Corporation Axe,' is a play on words as it rhymes with 'corporation tax,' while the use of the word 'axe' is evocative of the BBC being cut or having its services reduced. Describing the BBC as 'Auntie' rather than 'the BBC' occurred 53 times across the sample of newspaper articles. This referential strategy suggests familiarity with the BBC and is a mildly affectionate term. However, referring to the BBC as Auntie in collocation with 'slimming down' transfers the qualities of an overweight family member who needs to go on a diet onto the BBC. Using this rhetorical trope to describe the BBC allows these oversize qualities attributed to the BBC to be more present within the minds of the readers.

The *Times* also emphasised the BBC (or Auntie) slimming in an editorial headlined 'Slimming Auntie: The culture secretary intends to put the BBC on a diet. A well-

padding and expansive broadcaster should swallow it' (*Times*, Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p. 29). The title alone has two references to slimming and diet with the adjectives 'well padded' and 'expansive' underlining the theme that the BBC is too big. Throughout the article, the idea of the Corporation as a large, almost monstrous entity is present:

Technology has allowed the BBC to expand as if on steroids. Twenty years ago it operated two TV channels and five national radio stations. Now it has nine channels, ten national radio stations and, as Mr Whittingdale notes, 'a huge online presence reaching millions of people every day' or nearly 300 million every week. Ninety-seven per cent of Britons access its services for an average of 18 hours a week. It should consider itself lucky that Mr Whittingdale sees this as a vote of public confidence rather than overwhelming, and therefore troubling, market dominance.

This section of the editorial uses a fact that could be deployed in support of the BBC, that a lot of people access its services, to emphasise the Corporation's dominance at the commercial market's expense. Using the phrase 'as if on steroids' rather than simply saying 'technology has allowed the BBC to get bigger,' attributes blame to the BBC for its size. Anabolic steroids are a drug often associated with bodybuilders and other athletes who take them to enhance muscle mass and help performance, which is banned in sporting competitions. The idea that the BBC is taking steroids, or, more colloquially 'on steroids,' therefore suggests that the BBC is deliberately cheating to give itself an advantage over commercial media.

James Purnell, the BBC Director of Strategy and Digital, was given space to respond to the *Times* editorial in a letter on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p. 26, entitled 'Slimming the BBC.' The article is very defensive of the BBC and the licence fee arguing that:



The BBC has been slimming down and will continue to do so. Making the BBC have a core licence fee and a top-up subscription would further narrow it; we would no longer bring the country together. Audiences that wanted the same content as before would pay twice as much; those who opted out would save only 5p a day.

Purnell's letter shows that an entirely one-sided argument about the BBC does not exist in the *Times*, as the BBC was given an opportunity to reply to the editorial. However, although Purnell defends the licence fee as value for money, he does not fundamentally question the argument that the BBC's impact on the commercial market should be a concern. He argues that 'the BBC has not expanded as if 'on steroids'' and provides statistics to show that the BBC does not dominate the market. But nowhere is the primacy of the commercial market in providing broadcasting questioned, it is presumed that the BBC's impact on the commercial market needs to be discussed.

James Purnell's article was not the only occurrence of an opinion piece from an individual within the BBC appearing in a Murdoch-controlled newspaper. The *Sun on Sunday* featured an opinion piece by the BBC's Political Editor Nick Robinson (19<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p. 13), headlined 'Beware the Beeb Critics.' However, despite being written by a BBC insider, this article focused more on criticism of the politicians who decide the future of the BBC, rather than posing any meaningful challenge to 'competition is king.' Robinson stated:

Any organisation as big as the BBC which forces us all to pay for it and which its competitors will understandably worry about, deserves to have a long, hard look taken at what it spends and what it does. Perhaps we can agree on this though? Be very scared when politicians want to tell you what's good for you (Robinson 2015: 13).

This opinion piece shows that a prominent figure from the BBC has a 'voice' in the *Sun* on its reporting of the Green Paper. However, it indicates an acceptance of two themes that were evoked within reporting of George Osborne's imperial ambitions comments: that the BBC is 'big' and that it is somehow 'forced' upon the reader. The perception of the BBC's size and aggression is reinforced in analysis of numerous articles, as adjectives such as 'behemoth,' were used to emphasise the Corporation's size (see tables 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3). Aggressive behaviours were attributed the BBC, and, within reporting, the Corporation's aggression was always directed towards the commercial market (e.g. 'Batter Commercial rivals'). The licence fee is described as fuelling the BBC's size and aggression, while the BBC's role as a public service broadcaster is re-imagined.

This section of the chapter uses examples of how newspaper coverage employed a four-pronged strategy (emphasising size, aggression, the licence fee and re-imagining public service broadcasting) to evoke the discourse of 'competition is king' within reporting. Given Murdoch's business interests in the UK broadcasting sector and that members of the Murdoch family have spoken out publicly against the BBC, focussing on Murdoch-controlled newspapers in the first instance, allowed for an examination of the extent to which these interests manifest themselves within coverage. If the 'competition is king' discourse was present within Murdoch newspaper coverage, where the anti-BBC business interests were obvious, this study could further investigate whether this was present in other newspapers.

**Descriptors for the BBC and licence fee surrounding 'Competition is King'**

<b><u>Description of the BBC and its actions</u></b>	<b><u>Suggested action for the BBC</u></b>	<b><u>Description of the licence fee</u></b>
Behemoth	Slim down/Slimming	Guaranteed vast income
Empire	Swallow it [the government's reforms]	Statist anachronism
Auntie	Compete with high-quality American dramas	£3.7billion annual gift
Well-padded and expansive	Promote public service principles	Compulsory levy
On steroids	Cut down to a realistic and affordable size	£3,726 million
Overwhelming and troubling market dominance	Make sure there is quality	£5bn
Chasing viewers	Provide more public service programmes/public service programming	Resented by an evergrowing proportion of the population
Replicate output of its commercial rivals	Stop behaving as if it is a competitor, rather than complementary to other broadcasters and media outlets	Huge licence fee cushion
Strangling other things in the marketplace/kills the market	Continue to wallow in its vast publicly funded subsidy	£4bn subsidy
Embattled	Have a long, hard look taken at what it spends and what it does	eye-watering treasure chest...filled from viewers' pockets
Meretricious ratings fodder		
Go after other broadcasters		
Anachronism		
Propped up by the licence fee		
Trample on private sector rivals with public funds/Batter commercial rivals		
Publicly funded colossus		
Big		
Forces us all to pay for it		
Smothers rivals		
Threatens the national press/destroys the local newspaper industry		
Too big for its boots		
Authoritarian regime		

*Table 6.2: Key descriptors within the newspaper articles analysed for section 3 (n=30).*

### **Aggressive Beeb trampling commercial rivals**

Within newspaper coverage, the depiction of the BBC as aggressive was always shown to be directed against the commercial marketplace. For example, an article on the front page of the *Sunday Times* (and continued on page four), several days before the publication of the Green Paper was headlined 'Tories give BBC reform ultimatum; Demands for broadcaster to stop chasing viewers; Box-set fan Cameron wants BBC to compete with high-quality American dramas' (12<sup>th</sup> July 2015, Tim Shipman, p.1). Selecting the verb 'chasing' to describe the BBC's approach suggested the Corporation was a threatening force. The BBC, as a public service broadcaster, should arguably be above 'chasing' viewers, and the word 'chasing' suggests a tawdry desperation on the part of the BBC. The syntax of the sentence, stating that the government needs to 'demand' that the BBC 'stop chasing viewers,' presumes that the BBC was already chasing viewers and that this behaviour from the Corporation needs to be stopped by the government. The portrayal of the BBC 'chasing viewers' was repeated within the text of the article:

A government green paper, due to be published on Thursday, will also question whether the entire mission statement of the BBC is correct or whether it should stop chasing viewers and provide more public service programmes.

Within Shipman's article, the BBC making popular programmes was characterised as 'chasing viewers' which connotes aggression, rather than a justification for receipt of a universal licence fee. It was presumed within Shipman's article that the 'mission statement' of the BBC is to chase viewers and not provide public service

programmes. However, the public purposes<sup>126</sup> of the BBC at the time the article was written did not suggest that the BBC should 'chase ratings.' Shipman included this as a presumption within the article to reinforce the idea that the BBC's aggression was sanctioned by its public purposes. Shipman then quoted a source close to David Cameron, discussing how the Prime Minister perceives BBC programming:

The source said the BBC should not abandon all popular programmes because the licence fee means it needs broad appeal. But he added: 'The issue is making sure there is quality without strangling other things in the market place.'

The use of the verb 'strangling' to describe the impact of the BBC on the 'market place' in the selected quote is attributing a metaphor of physical violence to the BBC. One needs to be stronger than one's victim to strangle them, so this suggests the BBC is stronger than the rest of the media market to the point where it can subdue it or stifle it.

The idea that the commercial market struggles against the BBC continued from coverage of the 2015 Green Paper to coverage of the 2016 White Paper. For example, an opinion piece headlined, 'White paper? Limp reforms are white flag of surrender to the march of smug BBC Leftie luvvies' (Trevor Kavanagh, *Sun*, Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p.10). This play on words in the headline (taking the fact that a government policy document setting out proposals for legislation, a White Paper, is

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<sup>126</sup> The 2007 BBC Charter, which was applicable when the article was written listed the BBC's public purposes as:

1. sustaining citizenship and civil society;
2. promoting education and learning;
3. stimulating creativity and cultural excellence;
4. representing the UK, its nations regions and communities;
5. bringing the UK to the World and the World to the UK and;
6. in promoting its other purposes, helping to deliver to the public the benefit of emerging communications technologies and services and, in addition, taking a leading role in the switchover to digital television (DCMS select committee 2015: 19).

the same colour traditionally as a flag used to symbolise surrender), suggests that the BBC is an aggressive force which the government has no choice but to surrender to. The use of the word 'march' in the headline, with its militaristic association, suggests that the BBC is akin to an army determined to fight its commercial rivals in an organised way. Kavanagh underlines the BBC's aggression with reference to its size and licence fee, stating:

One of [the government's] first tasks was to have been the root-and branch reform of the BBC which, with a huge licence fee cushion, has grown too big for its boots.

Instead, Downing Street has watered down Culture Secretary John Whittingdale's feverishly anticipated reforms into little more than a damp squib.

Nothing serious will be done to curb this publicly funded colossus. It will continue to wallow in its vast publicly funded subsidy... Yet these limp proposals are greeted with a howl of false outrage from left-wing luvvies who rely on the BBC's £4BILLION subsidy for their living. This eye-watering treasure chest is filled from viewers' pockets.

The use of the idiom 'too big for its boots,' emphasises the size of the BBC and is mocking towards the Corporation, suggesting the BBC has a grandiose self-image. The use of adjectives such as 'colossus' and verbs such as 'wallows' furthers this as 'wallows' is a word often associated with hippopotamus or other large animals, so this emphasises the size of the BBC. The licence fee is also highlighted here. It could be argued that the licence fee is a mechanism that allows equal access to broadcasting because nobody can pay more to get a better BBC (Higgins 2015: 211). However, using 'colossus', 'wallows' and the repetition of 'publicly funded' in

this sentence suggests that the BBC uses the public funding simply to make itself bigger rather than to provide output which benefits licence fee payers. It also portrays the public sector negatively. The size of the licence fee itself is emphasised as a 'huge' 'cushion' and an 'eye-watering treasure chest' of £4bn (which has rounded up the £3.7bn the BBC receives annually from the licence fee). The emphasis on size suggests that the licence fee is inherently too generous and unfair, while the reference to the 'left-wing luvvies' who 'rely' on the licence fee further suggests that the licence fee is what allows the BBC to propagate a particular worldview. How the licence fee is blamed for the BBC's size and aggression in coverage is discussed in more detail below.

### **The anachronistic licence fee fuelling the BBC's aggression**

Whilst this section has underlined the BBC's portrayal as large and excessively hostile towards the commercial market, it has not yet examined how the licence fee is constructed as fuelling this aggression. In a *Times* opinion piece (13<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p.24) Stephen Pollard states:

In today's world of choice, competition and quality, the idea of a broadcaster funded by a compulsory levy is an anachronism, from a postwar era where rationing was the norm. But while the rest of the world has moved on, the BBC has remained fundamentally the same, propped up by the licence fee. What turns that from an anachronism to a scandal is that the BBC uses its guaranteed vast income - £3,726 million from the licence fee last year - to go after other broadcasters.

Mentioning the licence fee in collocation with 'a post-war era where rationing was the norm,' suggests it should be consigned to history, just like rationing. Pollard explicitly links the existence of the licence fee with the BBC's impact on commercial competitors by suggesting the BBC is 'propped up by the licence fee' and 'uses its

guaranteed vast income...to go after other broadcasters.’ This advocates that if the licence fee did not exist then the BBC would not be able to compete with other broadcasters. As with the use of the word ‘chasing,’ in Shipman’s article, the idea that the BBC will ‘go after’ other broadcasters attributes aggressive qualities to the Corporation and positions the other broadcasters as passive. This is certainly not the case with Rupert Murdoch’s News International which has attempted to control the portion of UK broadcasting they do not already own (Waterson 2018). Pollard further argues that the licence fee is fuelling the BBC’s aggression in this article, stating that the BBC ‘cannot expect a renewed charter to endorse a status quo that lets it trample on private sector rivals with public funds.’ Here, mentioning that the trampling is done specifically ‘with public funds’ creates imagery of a huge licence fee trouncing the private sector. Commercial TV receives more money in advertising than the BBC receives from the licence fee.<sup>127</sup> However, the article gives the impression that the BBC can quash the private sector solely with the licence fee by describing the system of funding as ‘vast’ source of income. Furthermore, this description does not account for the fact that the ‘public funds’ of the licence fee had been frozen for nearly five years at the time the article was written. Overall the ‘public funds’ here is used ideologically to engage in a narrative that competition is good and that public funding represents state intervention which impedes the market. Shipman’s terminology allows commercial broadcasting to be normalised at the expense of public funding.

Within an editorial alliteratively headlined ‘Beeb Bottlers,’ which criticised the government for not reining in the BBC enough during Charter Review, the *Sun*

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<sup>127</sup> In 2018, UK commercial TV broadcasters accumulated £5.11bn in advertising revenue (McCarthy 2019), while in 2017/18 the BBC’s total revenue was £5.06bn, £3.8bn of which was from the licence fee (Parliament, House of Commons 2019).



explicitly stated that the licence fee was to blame for the BBC's impact upon commercial competitors. The article discusses how the White Paper ensured that:

The anachronism of the licence fee will go on, and even rise with inflation.

Yes, in this 21st Century era of subscription services and vast choice you will still be forced under threat of prosecution to pay a tax on your telly.

And the BBC will continue to use this £3.7billion annual gift to batter commercial rivals on TV, radio and the web (*Sun*, Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p. 10).

This *Sun* editorial compares the licence fee with the current '21<sup>st</sup> Century era of subscription services,' in a way which presumes subscription to be superior. The language in the *Sun* suggests that the newspaper is having an imagined conversation with the reader, the use of the word 'yes,' makes it seem as if the reader has responded with a disbelieving comment, and it's the *Sun's* job to break the news to the reader. The use of synecdoche<sup>128</sup> with the alliterative phrase 'tax on your telly' instead of 'your TV licence' is also conversational. The phrase has negative connotations as it implies that the BBC is trying to impose unfair taxes on an everyday object. The licence fee is described as a 'gift' which the BBC uses to 'batter commercial rivals.' This is a jarring description, as it seems inappropriate for the BBC to be using a gift to inflict damage. However, the word choice highlights that the licence fee should not be used to fund the BBC, as licence fee payers give it as a 'gift,' but it is used by the BBC aggressively against commercial rivals.

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<sup>128</sup> Synecdoche is where a part of something is used to represent the whole (Machin and Mayr 2012: 172).

## **Re-imagining public service broadcasting in the market's image**

As illustrated in table 6.2, a course of suggested action to remedy the BBC's dominance of the commercial market was that the BBC should focus on public service broadcasting. For example, this description of the actions of the Culture Secretary:

Whittingdale warned privately last week that the BBC should do more to promote the public service principles outlined by Lord Reith, the corporation's first director-general, rather than replicate the output of commercial rivals (Tim Shipman, *Sunday Times*, 12<sup>th</sup> July, p.4).

The article assumes that the BBC is currently striving to 'replicate the output of commercial rivals' and failing to uphold Reith's public service principles. No information is given about what these public service principles are, but it is taken as a given that they consider commercial rivals. This point of view was presented within the quote as Whittingdale's opinion, but no alternative opinion was presented within the article, either attributed as a quote or otherwise. The quote also presumes that the BBC should exist as a complementary broadcaster to the market, rather than universal.

The presumption that the BBC no longer provides public service programming, is made again within a news article in the *Times* headlined 'Embattled BBC faces curbs on website and reality shows':

The green paper, to be published on Thursday, will question whether the BBC should continue trying to reach more than 90 per cent of Britain's TV audience and instead concentrate on providing more public-service programming (Alexi Mostrous, *Times*, Monday 13<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p. 7).

Mostrous here presumes that the BBC's wide reach in terms of TV audience is the antithesis to public service programming. Mostrous does not consider that the BBC's wide reach could be because it provides public service programming and thus appeals to different sections of the audience.

An opinion piece in the *Times* headlined 'Public Service Broadcasting is the BBC's X-Factor' (Stephen Pollard, *Times*, Monday 13<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p.24) was also focussed on the BBC's role as a public service broadcaster. Pollard begins the article stating that 'As a supposed public service broadcaster, too much of the BBC's output is meretricious ratings fodder.' This casts doubt on the BBC's role as a public service broadcaster from the outset and places public service broadcasting as the antithesis of meretricious output. Pollard claims that the BBC is no longer providing a public service by stating, 'If the BBC is to justify its existence, it needs to return to offering something as unique and special as its ethos. It could try public service broadcasting again.' By praising the 'ethos' of the BBC, Pollard omits to explain what this is but presumes the BBC has moved away from it. By positioning himself as someone who appreciates the BBC, saying it is unique and special, he also lends his criticism credibility. Pollard suggests that if he, someone who respects the BBC, cannot see past the Corporation's faults then they must be serious. Pollard's article is explicit about what he feels the BBC should be for:

The BBC is a behemoth that needs to be cut down to a realistic and affordable size. It must then stop behaving as if it is a competitor, rather than complementary to other broadcasters and media outlets.

Pollard makes bold presumptions about the purpose of the BBC. Stating that the BBC 'needs to be cut down to a realistic and affordable size' implies that the BBC is too big and that Pollard has the authority to determine what a realistic and affordable size is. The article also presumes that the BBC is intended to be 'complementary' to

other broadcasters when the Corporation has long been considered a universal broadcaster (Goddard 2017a:1096). Pollard reimagines the BBC and public service broadcasting, to mean whatever activities do not obstruct the profitable services which commercial broadcasters wish to provide. Nowhere is a definition of public service broadcasting given, but it is implied in Pollard's article that it should consider its impact on the commercial market.

Overall, therefore, public service broadcasting, within newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee, is not simply presented as anomalous or damaging. Public service broadcasting is held up as a gold standard to which the BBC falls short, but it is also re-defined as a concept which benefits the commercial market. The programmes which are shown on BBC television are central to this argument in considering what the BBC should show to retain its status as a public service broadcaster. An analysis of how BBC programming is used to normalise the commercial values of the market within newspaper reporting is set out below.

### **The BBC and the 'crown jewels'**

The columnist Rod Liddle wrote in both the *Sun* and the *Sunday Times* about the BBC losing the broadcasting rights to the Olympic Games. Liddle's opinion in the *Sun*, (Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2015, p. 8) is featured within a news article (by Leigh Holmwood). The headline of the article asks a clear question 'Without the 'crown jewels' what is the point of the BBC?' This is reporting the BBC losing rights to show some sporting events.<sup>129</sup> The *Sun* title contrasts with the *Daily Mirror's* article about the issue, entitled 'BBC loses Olympics: US rival grabs sports crown with

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<sup>129</sup> News articles in the dataset on discussing the BBC's sports rights mentioned the following events:

- The International Olympic Committee awarding TV rights for the Olympics to Discovery Channel's Eurosport from 2022
- BBC signing a new contract to share Six Nations rugby games with ITV
- Sky gaining the rights to the Open Golf Championship from the BBC from 2017
- The Grand National horse racing being shown on Channel 4 since 2013.

£920million bid' (Methven, Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2015, p. 10). The *Mirror* portrays the BBC as having been the victim of a 'grab,' while the *Sun* suggests that a loss of one section of the BBC's programming simply negates the purpose of the BBC. Throughout Liddle's section of the article, the BBC is depicted as redundant because it has lost some sports programming. He states:

If the BBC still has a purpose then it's surely to bring the people of our country together to enjoy big national occasions...If the BBC can't compete for the big sporting events what is it there for?

Here, Liddle calls on the Reithian idea that the BBC live broadcasting major events has the effect of 'making the nation as one man' (Born 2005: 28). According to the BBC Trust, sporting events on the BBC (the subject of Liddle's article) do attract the biggest audiences of any type of programme with one England football match in Euro 2012 bringing over 20 million viewers to BBC One (BBC Trust 2014: 26). However, this does not mean that sports are the sole reason that people tune into the BBC. Liddle does not consider the popularity of the BBC's drama and factual output. The opening episode of *Planet Earth 2* in 2016, for example, attracted 9.2 million viewers (Jackson 2016). Liddle contradicts himself later in his article by stating it's a 'problem' that 'the licence fee has to cater for everyone.' However, if the licence fee were to be replaced by subscription, not everyone would subscribe to sporting events on pay per view channels (BBC Trust 2014: 26). This would mean that such events would not have the same capacity to bring people together as they do under a universal funding system. Many people would be excluded from watching sports because the high costs of subscription – a Sky Sports subscription

cost approximately £28 per month (£336 per year) compared to the £145.50 per year licence fee.<sup>130</sup>

Two weeks after his *Sun* article, Liddle wrote a much longer 1,392 article about the BBC and sports programming the *Sunday Times* (12<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p. 2). It was headlined ‘Oh dear. Auntie's forgotten why she's even here; The BBC has spread itself far too thinly. If it is to survive, it must decide, quickly, why it exists.’ This title presumes that the BBC lacks purpose as a public service broadcaster and that its survival is something which can be questioned, by using the words ‘if it is to survive.’ Suggesting that the BBC had ‘spread itself far too thinly’ implies that the BBC is doing too much and does not focus on any positive aspects of BBC programming. The personification of ‘Auntie’ who’s ‘forgotten why she’s even here’ suggests that the BBC is an organisation struggling to cope. Using metonymy in this instance, substituting the BBC for ‘Auntie’ evokes a metaphor of the BBC as a forgetful old relative in slow decline. The idea that the BBC was in decline contrasts with the recommendations in the White Paper on the Corporation’s future which was committed to the continuation of the broadcaster. John Whittingdale’s foreword to the White Paper stated, ‘We want the BBC to thrive in a world of increasing technological, social and economic change’ (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2016: 5). Liddle’s suggestion that the BBC may not exist in the near future was therefore entirely hyperbolic and unfounded.

Moreover, Liddle directly criticises the licence fee. As observed in previous *Sunday Times* and *Sun* articles, the licence fee is linked with the BBC’s impact upon the commercial market:

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<sup>130</sup> Licence fee and Sky subscription costs correct in June 2015 when Liddle’s article was published.

'The licence fee, resented by an evergrowing proportion of the population as a statist anachronism, stands at £145.50 - more than seven times the original fee after inflation is taken into account.

And yet even that £5bn is not nearly enough for the BBC to do what it thinks it ought to do. It is certainly enough to infuriate opponents of the BBC - both its commercial rivals in the media and the free-market ideologues who loathe its very existence. But it is not remotely enough to allow it to compete for the sort of stuff it once took for granted - the top sporting events, the big-name stars. And as each new technology comes along, the corporation feels the need to expand and stretch itself ever thinner, thus enraging competitors in the free market' (Liddle, *Sunday Times*, 12<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p. 2).

Here, the total amount which the Corporation receives includes the BBC's commercial revenue (approximately £1.3bn) in addition to the licence fee (£3.7bn), to make £5bn, which makes the licence fee appear much greater.<sup>131</sup> Repeatedly mentioning the BBC's revenue suggests that the Corporation is a lost cause, as it can receive large amounts of money, but still is not able to compete for the best programming. Liddle is portraying the BBC as a directionless force, once again repeating the idiom from the title that it has spread itself 'ever thinner.' The reinforcement of this undermines the idea that the BBC produces quality output – someone spreading themselves too thin suggests that they are doing so many things that they are unable to perform any tasks well. Liddle claims that the BBC's impact on the commercial market is a primary cause for concern. He argues that the licence fee should be resented, stating that the BBC has 'lost touch with a vast tranche of the population, the people who fork out £145.50 every year, like it or not.'

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<sup>131</sup> A similar linguistic tool was used by Pollard who described the licence fee as £3,726 million in his opinion piece. Portraying the amount from the licence fee (in millions) appears a much greater amount than writing £3.7 billion.

Liddle's criticism does not consider arguments in favour of everyone paying their licence fee, for example that the licence fee enables quality programming which is cheaper for everyone (BBC 2015: 5). Considering that the focus of Liddle's piece is programming, it is plausible that this link would be made, but instead the licence fee is criticised.

In his discussion of programming, Liddle continues with a presumption that the BBC is powerless against market forces:

[E]ach time it is revealed that the BBC has lost more sporting rights, it is seen as another nail in the corporation's coffin. These big occasions, when the nation comes together! That's what the BBC is for, isn't it? Not any longer. It may be what BBC executives believe is one of the things the broadcaster does best, but it cannot do this stuff any longer. It is gone, for good.

Much of the BBC's current problems are a consequence of things beyond its control: a rapidly changing marketplace and a multiplicity of rivals geared to specific audiences.

Liddle's *Sunday Times* article implies it is inevitable that the BBC is redundant because it has lost programming rights to some sports fixtures. Liddle's arguments are somewhat contradictory: he criticises the BBC for receipt of licence fee income yet is also critical that it does not have enough money to compete for sporting rights. If Liddle wants the BBC to compete for rights to sports, a logical argument would be that the Corporation should receive more funding. However, with both of Liddle's criticisms, the obvious conclusion is to remove the BBC.

It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the Liddle opinion pieces have been written in two different Murdoch-controlled newspapers. Murdoch's interests in broadcasting



mean that a BBC which is 'gone for good' would provide him with the opportunity to control a further share of the broadcasting market in the UK.<sup>132</sup> These articles in the *Sunday Times* and the *Sun* are examples of Murdoch commercial interests being promoted around debates concerning the BBC licence fee, through the presence of the 'competition is king' discourse. The discourse echoes James Murdoch's MacTaggart lecture where he stated:

Being funded by a universal hypothecated tax, the BBC feels empowered and obliged to try and offer something for everyone, even in areas well served by the market.

This whole approach is based on a mistaken view of the rationale behind state intervention and it produces bizarre and perverse outcomes. Rather than concentrating on areas where the market is not delivering, the BBC seeks to compete head-on for audiences with commercial providers to try and shore up support – or more accurately dampen opposition – to a compulsory licence fee (Murdoch 2009: 14).

Liddle's article suggested that new technological developments have further enabled the BBC to hinder commercial media. He stated, 'as each new technology comes along, the corporation feels the need to expand and stretch itself ever thinner, thus enraging competitors in the free market' (Liddle, *Sunday Times*, 12<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p. 2). The focus on 'new technology' is evident within another *Sunday Times* article (28<sup>th</sup> June 2015, p. 24) headlined 'Buy a TV licence? You must be joking; Generation Xbox won't pay for programmes it can watch for free on smartphones.

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<sup>132</sup> Examples of Murdoch control of the broadcasting market include, in 2018, when Murdoch attempted to control the 61 per cent of Sky he did not already own. This was blocked by the Competition and Markets Authority as it was said this would give the Murdoch family too much control over the UK news media. Murdoch's company was more successful with regards to sports broadcasting, when in 2016, Murdoch's News UK took over Wireless Group, the owner of the Premier League football broadcaster talkSport (Williams 2016).

What must the BBC do to make itself a valued and indispensable service to viewers of all ages?' It stated:

The BBC was the first mainstream media organisation to grasp the power of the internet, but has struggled to get it right. Heavy investment in its website has brought conflict with newspaper publishers who complain it is misusing public money to skim off their readers (Hellen, *Sunday Times*, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2015, p.24)

This article criticises the BBC on the basis that it hinders commercial competition but is specifically focused on how the Corporation uses its online presence, or 'new technology,' to do this. How 'competition is king' is evoked in a discussion of development of the BBC's online services will be considered in more detail in the next section of the chapter. While this section has predominantly examined right-leaning newspapers, this did not mean that all newspapers across the sample which evoked the discourse of 'competition is king' are right-leaning. The next section of the chapter examines how left-leaning newspapers also naturalise the 'competition is king' discourse.

## **Section Four: A bitter battle? An analysis of newspaper reporting of BBC recipes**

The previous sections of the chapter outlined the evocation of two main discourses within newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee:

1. **Tyranny of the minority** – the BBC is criticised for attempting to appeal to what the newspapers (particularly the *Daily Mail*) perceive as a minority interests (both ethnic minorities and an elite minority of BBC bosses). The licence fee is not directly criticised, but the universality of the licence fee means it is operationalised to suggest that the BBC should exist to provide popular output, appealing to all licence fee payers, rather than to minorities. Conflict is constructed within newspaper articles whereby the licence fee payer is portrayed as ‘us’, and the BBC is portrayed as ‘them.’
2. **Competition is king** – the BBC’s size and aggressive behaviour, enabled by its licence fee, is criticised for hindering the commercial media market. ‘Competition is king’ places commercial media as a victim of the BBC’s size and aggression. Within this discourse, the interests of the commercial market are normalised at the expense of the BBC. The BBC is criticised for not providing public service broadcasting, but public service broadcasting is conceptualised in newspaper coverage as activities which place the BBC as secondary to the commercial media.

This section builds upon the identification of discourses through an analysis of the events of May 2016, when the BBC moved recipes from the licence fee funded BBC Food to its commercial arm, BBC Good Food. This was referenced briefly in George Osborne’s *Andrew Marr* interview comments where he stated:

If you've got a website that's got features and cooking and recipes, eventually the BBC website becomes the national newspaper as well as the national broadcaster and it's those sorts of issues which I think we need to look very carefully at (Andrew Marr 2015).

The recipes move was selected as a case study to examine how discourses were operationalised in newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee. The uproar over recipes removal effectively illustrates commercial concerns about the BBC's perceived market dominance and have important ideological implications for reporting. This section of the chapter shows that, in reporting of the BBC recipes, newspapers flexibly use two contradictory discourses in order to criticise the BBC. Analysis of newspaper coverage of BBC recipes shows that these discourses are not confined to a certain newspaper or set of newspapers depending on ownership or political leaning. Ultimately the discourses are used to attack the BBC because the Corporation and the press are both providing online services and newspapers resent the BBC's ability to use public money to do this.

Firstly, this section of the chapter provides an overview of the BBC recipes incident, followed by an explanation of its ideological importance for this research. This is followed by an examination of how the 'tyranny of the minority' and 'competition is king' discourses were operationalised contradictorily in the high-circulation *Daily Mail* and *Sun* newspapers. Finally, the flexible use of the discourses in newspapers, irrespective of their political leanings will be discussed, using the *Guardian* as a prominent case study.

### **What was the recipes controversy?**

On Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2016, several days after the White Paper on the future of the BBC was published, the Corporation published their Online Creative Review. This document set out the BBC's vision for a 'more focused and distinctive' online service

(BBC 2016: 4) and produced a list of services that would 'either be closed or scaled down.' This list included plans to 'close the BBC Food site' while 'BBC Worldwide's Good Food site will remain' (BBC 2016: 4). BBC Food and BBC Good Food provided recipes online and the rationale for this merger was that the Food section of the licence fee funded BBC website overlapped with the commercially owned BBC Good Food (BBC 2016: 6). Therefore, BBC Food needed to be removed to ensure the BBC was not using licence fee money to overlap with commercially funded websites providing recipes. An 'unnamed' source from the BBC (Shepherd 2016) was initially reported suggesting that the recipes would 'fall off the face of the internet' (Martinson *et al.* 2016). Confusion about whether people would be able to access BBC recipes followed, there was public outcry and more than 200,000 people signed a petition to stop the BBC's collection of recipes being cut. The BBC later clarified that the recipes would not disappear; the Corporation would archive recipes shown on BBC television channels for 30 days after transmission on BBC Food, and BBC Good Food would still be accessible. The BBC Food website currently states:

The BBC Food website is part of BBC Learning and has a mission to teach and encourage people to cook more. The site primarily publishes recipes from television programmes, but sometimes commissions original recipes to accompany public service campaigns (BBC Food 2018).

The provision of recipes by the BBC was considered an integral BBC service, which had a longer history than the provision of the BBC's online services. Chief Press Officer at the BBC, Ben Wiseman said:

I think they're all recipes from BBC programmes so they've been created with the licence fee, we've always done recipes for years so even back to

when there were cookery shows on the Home Service<sup>133</sup>...People would write into Broadcasting House and ask for the recipe...they'd provide a stamped address envelope and then they'd be provided the recipe in return. It's something the BBC's always done, it's the idea that that content was created for the audience so they should be able to carry on enjoying the benefits of the recipes in the future if they wanted to (interview with Wiseman, 18<sup>th</sup> April 2018).

The idea that recipes were an integral part of the BBC was supported by a creator of the original BBC Food site, Lloyd Shepherd. He wrote on the day the BBC Food announcement was made:

The idea [behind BBC Food] was very simple: take the recipes from BBC programmes, repurpose them into a database, and then make that database run a website, a mobile site...Create relationships between recipes based on ingredients, shows, cuisines...And then run it with as small an editorial team as possible whose job was simply to turn telly recipes into a database of recipes (Shepherd 2016).

For Shepherd, BBC Food did not create 'new content' online because the recipes from BBC programmes had already been paid for by the licence payer. Furthermore, the BBC's provision of recipes plays an important public health role, providing free recipes to encourage cooking at home and help combat obesity (Jewell 2016).

Despite this, the 2015 Green Paper, which specifically mentioned recipes, focused on how BBC recipes impacted on other online providers:

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<sup>133</sup> The Home Service was a radio station which began at the beginning of the Second World War in 1939 and closed in 1970 (Crisell 2002: 59).

The growth of the internet as a medium for consuming information is one of the most notable developments over the current Charter period; in this context the challenge for the BBC will be in setting itself apart from others in the online space and potentially seeking to avoid providing services such as, for example, recipes where a range of other websites already do so (DCMS 2015: 39).

In the Green Paper, therefore, BBC recipes were not associated with public service broadcasting or public value provided by the Corporation but presented as an issue that impacted on the commercial market. There is, therefore, an important ideological element to the provision of BBC recipes. The recipes, on the one hand, are an example of the BBC providing a universal public service. On the other hand, the provision of recipes on a free to access website might hinder competition, as many other commercial media outlets (particularly newspapers), also provide recipes, both within their print editions and in their online counterparts. The provision of recipes therefore highlights a clear conflict between the provision of a public service and the interests of commercial competition. Consequently, newspaper reporting of BBC recipes was analysed to show how newspaper coverage prioritised commercial competition at the expense public service values. Overall, while the recipes only form a small section of newspaper reporting within the sample, they have much wider implications for the discursive construction of the BBC licence fee in newspaper coverage. The recipes are an illustration of how commercially funded newspapers respond to the existence of a service from the licence fee funded BBC, which newspaper owners feel overlaps with a service they provide. This has emerged with the advent of online services. As the Chief Press Officer at the BBC said:

[W]hen you had two products like physical newspapers and TV broadcast they were complementary and didn't overlap, not least because they were

designed not to...the BBC broadcast in the evening, solely, so people could get their news from daily newspapers in the morning and so they lived quite happily alongside each other for a long time. When both are providing news on a computer screen at the same time of the day in similar ways then there's inevitably going to be tension (interview with Wiseman, 18<sup>th</sup> April 2018).<sup>134</sup>

This section, therefore, analyses the 'tension' between the BBC providing similar content to newspapers and how it is reflected in reporting of BBC recipes. This analysis is considered within the wider contexts of declining print newspaper circulations and debates surrounding the scope of the BBC within a changing media landscape (see chapter two, section five). This section shows how these contexts impact on the way discourse is operationalised in newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee.

Across the sample, there were a total of 15 newspaper articles concerning BBC recipes. This consisted of five news articles (*Times*, *The i*, *Daily Mirror*, *Financial Times*, *Guardian*), four opinion pieces (two in the *Observer*, one in the *Guardian* and one in the *Sun*), one editorial (*Daily Mail*) and five letters (two in the *Guardian*, two in the *Daily Express*, and one in the *Daily Telegraph*). This meant that articles about the recipes which contained the words 'licence fee' were present in most newspapers across the sample, with the greatest number of articles appearing in the *Guardian* and *Observer* newspapers. Most of the articles appeared on either Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> May or Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2016, (the day the BBC made the announcement over recipes or the day after), with some of the opinion pieces and

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<sup>134</sup> At the BBC's inception, the Corporation had an agreement with newspaper proprietors that it should not broadcast news before 6pm, so that it did not 'scoop' newspapers (Higgins 2015: 141). This is contrast to the present day when the BBC and newspapers are in direct competition for news both in print and online.



letters appearing later in the week. Except for a *Financial Times* article (which appeared on page 2) and a *Sun* opinion piece (page 8), articles did not have a prominent position in the newspaper (within the first 12 pages). However, the recipes articles are not analysed because of the prominence of the issue. The articles are considered because they form a salient case study to show how ‘tyranny of the minority’ and ‘competition is king,’ are flexibly and, at times, contradictorily, operationalised within newspaper articles.

### **Cooking contradictions as ‘tyranny of the minority’ and ‘competition is king’ appear together**

Earlier sections of this chapter detailed how the ‘tyranny of the minority’ and ‘competition is king’ discourses were evoked within newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee. However, the focus of the sections was mainly centred on how ‘tyranny of the minority’ was evoked within the *Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday* newspapers, and how ‘competition is king’ was evoked in Murdoch-controlled newspapers such as the *Sun*. This analysis of reporting of recipes shows that these discourses are not wedded to one newspaper or set of newspapers with a particular owner or political leaning. The way in which the *Mail* and the *Sun* reported the recipes showed that both newspapers operationalised both discourses, even where doing so was contradictory, in order to criticise the BBC’s actions. Detail of how the newspapers did this is set out below.

An editorial in the *Daily Mail* on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2016 (p.14) was headlined ‘How the BBC cooked up a cynical storm.’ The recipe controversy was discussed for the first 220 words of the 577-word editorial. The idiom, ‘cooked up a storm,’ was used by other newspapers in their reporting of the recipes (e.g. Ashleigh Rainbird, the *Daily Mirror*, Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p.16). However, the *Mail* was the only newspaper to use this as its headline, while referring to the BBC as ‘cynical.’ Using ‘cooked up a storm’ is a play on words as it has links to food, but also, idiomatically

suggests that the BBC has used the recipes to create excessive fuss for its own benefit. Within the editorial, the *Mail* suggested that the BBC's announcement over the recipes was orchestrated to 'achieve minimum savings, upset the public and cause maximum embarrassment to the Government.' The editorial criticised the BBC for making 'footling' savings (such as the scrapping of recipes) when:

Corporation bosses know full well they could make massive economies in their £5billion budget by scrapping whole areas of their empire that would hardly be missed and could safely be left in the hands of the commercial sector.

This, together with the later description of the BBC as 'Machiavellian,' suggested that the Corporation was scheming against the commercial sector, who would 'safely' look after the services which the BBC is dominating with its 'empire.' The BBC is referred to as the 'shroud-waving public sector,' placing it in direct contrast with the 'safety' of the commercial sector. No information is given about the 'areas' which the BBC could make savings in or why the commercial sector would be better to safeguard these services; it is simply presumed that the BBC is selfish and not managing its budget adequately.

The description of the BBC as the 'shroud-waving public sector' suggests hysteria and places the BBC in a negative light as a public sector organisation. Following the 2008 Financial Crash, studies of media reporting showed that the public sector was framed negatively (for example Berry 2016, p. 848). This broader narrative of an inefficient public sector is evident within reporting of BBC recipes. The *Mail* also described the BBC as a 'bloated behemoth,' which is, again invocative of the 'competition is king' discourse, suggesting that the BBC is too large. Similar language was used in a *Sun* opinion piece on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> May (p. 8), when

James Delingpole’s<sup>135</sup> column was headlined ‘Bloated Beeb websites are a recipe for leftie domination’. This is an inaccurate title, as the justification for the BBC moving recipes from BBC Food to BBC Good Food was so that it could provide a more ‘distinctive’ service, which is the opposite of the BBC trying to achieve ‘domination’ of the internet. However, the title effectively and pithily communicates two themes of the BBC being too big and too left wing. The end of Delingpole’s article also refers to the BBC as the ‘bloated overmighty behemoth.’ Table 6.3 shows how this and other linguistic choices were used to emphasise the BBC’s aggression (similar choices are also shown in tables 6.1 and 6.2, earlier in the chapter).

**Key descriptors for the BBC and licence fee used in articles about BBC recipes**

<b><u>BBC and associated parties/ organisations/the BBC’s actions</u></b>	<b><u>Suggested actions for the BBC</u></b>	<b><u>Licence fee</u></b>
Machiavellian	Scrapping whole areas of their empire and leave these ‘safely in the hands of the commercial sector’	£5billion budget
Empire	Tighten its belt and produce distinctive output	A British tax
Shroud-waving public sector	Rein in the service	Public cash
Holds licence-fee payers in contempt	Needs to be more distinctive/more focussed and distinctive/ensure distinctiveness of the website	Wilting budget
Bloated behemoth/bloated/Bloated overmighty behemoth	Has to be sensitive to market impact and not be directly going out of its way to compete with commercial offerings	Hundreds of millions
Run by left-wing ideologues	Stop it competing with newspapers	
Cynical/cooked up a cynical storm	Needs a recipe that will make it stand out from the rest	

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<sup>135</sup> Delingpole is editor of the London branch of the libertarian Breitbart News Network and has also written for the *Spectator*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Telegraph* and *Times*. He is a climate-change sceptic and has criticised the BBC’s coverage on climate change as “warmist propaganda” (Rusbridger 2018a: 350).

Upset the public and cause maximum embarrassment to the government	Cannot be all things to all people	
Near monopoly	Meant to be about broadcasting	
Shuts free enterprise out of the market	Trims its website	
Public media giant		
World's biggest broadcaster		
Seeks to cut costs without losing relevance		
Leftie domination		
A leftover from 1920s 'Big Brother' Britain		
Become too big for its boots/the world's biggest broadcaster		
Seeks to dominate British life		
Hit us in the stomach		
A forced marriage between Buzzfeed and Woman's Own		
Crush commercial 'rivals'		
Cooking up a storm		
Attendant luvvie fanclub		

Table 6.3: Key descriptors around the BBC and licence fee used within the articles about BBC recipes (n=15).

A feature of many of the news articles about BBC recipes was quoting celebrities and high-profile public figures (such as former Labour Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott<sup>136</sup>) and celebrity chefs, typically saying how much they value the recipes on the BBC. For example, the *Daily Mirror* (Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> May, page 16) quoted the Hairy Bikers:<sup>137</sup>

'We are saddened by the closure of the BBC recipe site, both as contributors and also cooks who like to use it. It's a great resource which we feel very privileged to be a part of. We write recipes that are intended to be used and everything that is out there that we do on the television we want people to have access to and to be able to cook...We're not sure whether it was a

<sup>136</sup> Prescott tweeted about the recipes from his account @johnprescott on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2016 'Take one online petition. Now add 1m angry people who want a BBC free of Tory & Murdoch interference', together with a link to the change.org petition.

<sup>137</sup> The Hairy Bikers, David Myers and Simon King, are TV presenters who have fronted numerous cooking shows on the BBC.

move motivated by the BBC or whether it was inflicted on the BBC by Government cuts. It's just daft.'

In the *Sun*, Delingpole references celebrities but, instead of showing how celebrities value the BBC, he used celebrity endorsement of the recipes to argue that the BBC is trying to promote a particular 'liberal' and 'politically correct' worldview. He begins his article by mentioning (not directly quoting) two celebrities who spoke out against any cuts to the BBC recipes, describing them as 'left-wing activist Billy Bragg<sup>138</sup>' and Jack Monroe<sup>139</sup> 'Britain's leading transgender antipoverty food campaigner.'

Delingpole conversationally writes that if 'Billy and Jack' are against cuts to recipes:

[T]hat must be a good thing. Not because they are nasty or evil but because they are classic examples of nannystate Britain, well-meaning fools who sincerely believe the only way to create a better society is with yet more handouts from the public sector.

As within the *Mail* article, the *Sun* characterises the supporters of the BBC as part of a 'public sector,' which is used in collocation with the idea of the 'nanny state' distributing 'handouts.' This use of language implicitly suggests that the commercial sector is superior. This is reinforced later in the article when Delingpole describes the BBC as 'the propaganda arm of the metropolitan, politically correct elite whose trendy leftist obsessions are often of little interest to people in the country at large.' The lexical choices here do more than simply suggest the BBC is left-leaning politically but discursively construct the idea that the BBC is a highly elitist organisation, eschewing the viewpoints of many people.

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<sup>138</sup> Billy Bragg is a singer who has vocally advocated support for more left-leaning UK politicians, supporting the Labour Party leader at the time of writing, Jeremy Corbyn.

<sup>139</sup> Jack Monroe identifies as non-binary. They campaign around the issues of hunger and food bank usage in the UK wrote a blog, 'A girl called Jack' where they shared recipes they created as a single mother on a budget.

Delingpole refers to the size of the BBC in detail, to highlight the interests of commercial media:

If the BBC didn't exist, it wouldn't mean a sudden end to handy online tips on how to bake a lemon drizzle cake or dress a crab. All it would mean is the internet traffic would go to cookery sites run by private enterprise rather than to a leftover from 1920s 'Big Brother' Britain.

This is what Chancellor George Osborne was talking about last summer when he described the BBC as having become 'imperial in its ambitions'. He meant the organisation - devised by its founder Lord Reith to 'inform, educate and entertain' - has become too big for its boots.

From Teletubbies to Radio 1, Today and Woman's Hour to Any Questions, from the Last Night Of The Proms to its wall-to-wall Glastonbury coverage, the BBC doesn't just reflect but seeks to dominate British life - social, artistic, economic, political, sporting and, yes, even culinary.

This description of the BBC as a 'leftover from 1920s 'Big Brother' Britain,' suggests that the BBC is Orwellian in its drive to dominate every aspect of life in the UK. This is reminiscent of Quentin Letts (*Daily Mail*, Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p.15) discussing the BBC's worldview in terms of language used in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* and is supported by Delingpole's later comparison of the BBC's dominance of news output to a 'totalitarian state.' The phrase 'too big for its boots' was also used in a Trevor Kavanagh opinion piece in the *Sun* (Friday 16<sup>th</sup> May, p.10), indicating that this is a common expression used in the *Sun* to describe the BBC. Delingpole is explicitly critical of the licence fee for feeding the BBC's dominance in relation to its website:

But what the BBC's protected, heavily subsidised - to the tune of £4.8billion last year - near-monopoly does is shut free enterprise out of the marketplace. How are commercial newspapers expected to compete when the BBC, with its eye-watering online budget of £201million - up from £174million in 2014, by the way - can afford to employ on its free website a full-time football correspondent, Phil McNulty, just to compose written match reports? Or with the BBC's vast battery of political experts, from Laura Kuenssberg to Nick Robinson, all of whom also provide written contributions to its website.

Describing the licence fee as a subsidy implies that the BBC is receiving something for nothing. Furthermore, the figure of £4.8bn includes the BBC's earned income from its commercial activities (around £1.3bn). This allows the BBC's income from the licence fee to appear much larger than the £3.7bn it received. Later in his article, Delingpole questioned the scope of the BBC in having a website at all by asking 'Since when was it the BBC's job to have a website anyway? It is supposed to be a broadcaster, not a publisher.' Delingpole's use of conversational language, prefacing his question with 'since when,' directs anger towards the BBC, which implicitly casts doubt on whether the BBC should have a website. This emphasises the 'competition is king' discourse, whereby the BBC is cast as unfairly competing with the commercial sector, rather than fulfilling its role as a public service broadcaster.

The suggestion that the BBC should not 'stifle' the commercial market around the recipes was set out in a letter from a member of the public in the *Daily Express*:

It is a good thing that the online recipes are being removed, because without people visiting other recipe web pages, which carry adverts, these websites will not make any money. The licence fee is not there to stifle free enterprise

and for once the BBC has done the correct thing in re-moving all these recipes and promising not to leave new ones uploaded for more than 30 days (Carl Brown, *Daily Express*, Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2019, p.25)

Here, the letter's author agrees with the BBC's detractors that it hinders commercial competition and hopes that the action will allow other web pages 'which carry adverts' to make money. This argument was not shared in the *Mail's* editorial (Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p.14). Despite praising the 'safety' of the commercial sector in comparison to the BBC, the *Mail* did not praise the BBC for trying to prevent overlap with the commercial market (the justification for moving the recipes to BBC Good Food). Instead, the *Mail* stressed that the BBC moving the recipes was an example of the Corporation holding 'licence-fee payers in contempt.' The fact that the BBC is funded by everyone, was used to support the argument that the BBC should continue with the popular recipes service. This was invocative of the 'tyranny of the minority' discourse which uses the licence fee as a way to criticise the BBC for appealing to an elite minority rather than a majority of licence payers (or, in this case a majority of people who support the BBC recipes).

The *Mail* editorial did not directly criticise the recipes in reporting but instead focused on criticising the BBC for threatening to cut them. In fact, adjectives used around the recipes were relatively positive, describing them as a 'popular archive,' one of the 'valued services' from the BBC and 'a low-cost, high-quality service relied upon by countless amateur cooks.' The *Mail* appeared to defend the recipes because they are popular and was critical of the BBC for placing the future of a service which many value, in jeopardy. Criticism of the removal of the recipes, because of its effect on the licence fee payer, was echoed in a second letter in the *Daily Express*:

WHAT a ridiculous decision and a total waste of money to remove recipes from the BBC Food website. There is no way that any commercial providers



can replicate what the BBC does and it seems absurd that suddenly we are reaping less value from our licence fee than before (Mary Taylor, *Daily Express*, Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p.25).

Here, the author focuses on how BBC action on recipes inconveniences those who pay the licence fee. The use of the pronoun 'our' makes clear the link that the licence fee creates between those that pay it and the BBC, and it suggests that the licence fee payer has been let down by the Corporation, rather than criticising it for receipt of the licence fee. This is a key method of disseminating the 'tyranny of the minority' discourse, placing the licence fee payer in opposition to the BBC, in order to criticise the Corporation.

Overall, both the *Sun* and the *Mail* used 'competition is king' and 'tyranny of the minority' in their coverage of BBC recipes. Both were highly critical of the BBC, by linking it with the public sector, which was constructed as inferior to the commercial market. In addition, both newspapers evoked the representation of the BBC as an elite minority against an assumed majority mindset. The *Sun* is more directly critical of the licence fee, while the *Mail* uses the fact that everyone pays the licence fee to marshal criticism of the BBC. Difference between the *Mail* and the *Sun* indicate that there are variations in the way the system of funding is used in reporting to discursively construct the BBC. The licence fee is either used to criticise the BBC for failing those who pay it ('tyranny of the minority') or is criticised as an entity in itself for allowing the Corporation to hinder commercial rivals ('competition is king'). Nonetheless, the newspapers ultimately use both discourses to denigrate the BBC, regardless of any inconsistency or contradiction, and even evoke both discourses within the same articles. This use of discourse is ideological, indicating that newspapers prioritise criticism of the BBC (which they view as a threat) over consistent discursive construction.

### ***Guardian* reporting: Hands-off our harissa spiced lamb!**

On Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2016, the front page of the Media section of the *Guardian* was headlined 'BBC to drop online recipes as part of slimmed-down website - The broadcaster has agreed to archive 11,000 recipes from its website as part of savings intended to stop it competing with newspapers' (written by Jane Martinson). This headline is a clear statement that the BBC is infringing on the newspaper market, even though the online Creative Review did not specifically mention competition with newspapers as a reason for the BBC to make savings; this is the newspaper's interpretation. The main body of the article is heavily reliant on quotes from different sources. It frequently quotes the Corporation, including a 'BBC Source' and a 'BBC Insider' and mentions the comments of the Director General, Tony Hall and Director of News, James Harding. George Osborne's comments about the BBC's 'imperial' ambitions are also quoted at length, prefacing Osborne's quote with the sentence 'Osborne indicated that the licence-fee-funded BBC should not be allowed to crowd out newspaper competition.' Osborne had many comments to make on the BBC, including praise for the Corporation (see section three). However, the article foregrounded his comment 'you wouldn't want the BBC to completely crowd out national newspapers.' The *Guardian* had previously been highly critical of the government's handling of the Charter Review process in previous articles, while also praising the BBC. A *Guardian* opinion piece warned that 'Before wielding axes, Tory MPs should think hard about constituents who spend 18.5 hours a week with the BBC - and of its place in national life as an unmatched cultural treasure' (Polly Toynbee, *The Guardian*, Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2015, p.31). It is therefore notable that the *Guardian* would reproduce the quote of a high-profile Conservative which was critical of the BBC. In the case of the recipes, highlighting the BBC competing with newspapers and a quote about its 'imperial ambitions' is evocative of 'competition is king.' The newspaper has included Osborne's quote for credibility and to show that the *Guardian* views the BBC as a threat to its business interests.

An opinion piece by Christian Patterson (Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p. 13) in the *Guardian* clearly indicated that ‘tyranny of the minority’ and ‘competition is king’ were key to the discursive construction of BBC recipes within newspaper reporting. The article was headlined ‘Is it really the BBC's role to publish free recipes for harissa spiced lamb? You can love the national broadcaster yet see that its commercial strategy is doing the nation a disservice’. The choice of ‘harissa spiced lamb’ as the recipe to refer to within the title is a particularly decadent, exotic, middle class dish implying it should not be something provided as a public service. Any recipe could have been chosen to appear in the title. However, the answer to the question ‘is it really the BBC’s role to publish free recipes for apple crumble?’ (or any other more mundane, generally popular dish), would be less provocative. Referring to exotic recipes available online was used in other newspaper’s reporting of BBC recipes to a similar effect. For example, stating ‘the removal of recipes such as Lobster Thermidor with chips prompted uproar’ (Adam Sherwin, *i*, Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p.26), suggests hysteria around the recipes (as nobody really needs Lobster Thermidor with chips to survive), and devalues the BBC’s recipe provision as a public service. Harissa spiced lamb and Lobster Thermidor are expensive to produce and the implication, therefore, is that if one can afford to make these recipes then one does not need them to be freely available online. They are recipes which only wealthy people can enjoy which suggests that the furore over recipes is led by the middle classes. In addition, in describing the actions of the BBC over the recipes as a ‘commercial strategy’ ‘doing the nation a disservice’ Patterson suggests that the Corporation is scheming to make money for itself while placing the country at a disadvantage. It is also inaccurate to propose that the BBC was implementing a ‘commercial strategy’ as the BBC justified altering the recipes so that they were ‘more focused and distinctive’ to reduce their impact on commercial competitors (BBC 2016: 4).

At the beginning of her article, Patterson uses repetition, hyperbole and humour to describe the reaction to the BBC's supposed plans to cut the recipes:

'It didn't take a strike. It didn't take a march, or placards, or even a referendum on the future of the BBC to get those recipes back. What it took was a lot of journalists, and a lot of cooks, and a lot of outraged people signing a petition, to say that they couldn't live without 'easy spaghetti Bolognese' and 'microwave spaghetti Bolognese' and the Helmsley sisters' spaghetti Bolognese, which doesn't even use spaghetti...

Junior doctors must be jealous. It has taken them months to fight what they have seen as a threat to the most cherished national institution: months of bitterness and cancelled operations. The nation was sympathetic. Of course, the nation was sympathetic. But what you really need to rally the troops in the face of political threats is to hang a sword of Damocles over 46 recipes for risotto and 74 for chocolate mousse...

Hands off our harissa spiced lamb! If it was not exactly Tahrir Square, it was the middle-class British equivalent. What do we want? A national recipe service, free at the point of use. When do we want it? Now and for ever.

Mentioning the junior doctor strike<sup>140</sup> and the idea that people were calling for a 'national recipe service, free at the point of use' evokes the National Health Service (NHS). This use of irony suggests that the public considers free recipes to be as much of an essential as the provision of free healthcare. Patterson consistently lists the numbers of different types of recipes available which makes the BBC's recipe offering appear huge and the outcry over cutting recipes more hysterical. For

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<sup>140</sup> Over several months in early 2016 in the UK junior doctors went on strike over changes to their contracts.

example, 'instant access to 14 recipes for spaghetti Bolognese' is described as a 'human right.' Describing the outcry over the recipes as 'the middle-class British equivalent' of 'Tahrir Square'<sup>141</sup> implies that BBC recipes were solely the preserve of the middle class (which is untrue as they are free, so income is not a factor in accessing recipes). This, together with using 'harissa spiced lamb' as the recipe in the title, evokes 'tyranny of the minority' as it suggests that the BBC is elitist.

As with the *Daily Mail* editorial, Patterson says that the BBC threatened to cut recipes for its own self-interest because the Corporation knew there would be a backlash against a popular service. For Patterson, the BBC could become more distinctive by cutting '*Bargain Hunt* or 19 seasons of *Homes Under The Hammer*,' but instead chose to cut a popular service, like the recipes, to cause maximum upset. In addition, like the *Mail*, throughout the article, Patterson praised the recipes, describing them as 'lovely' and 'precious.' Here, the *Guardian* uses similar strategies to the *Mail* in its reporting, pointing out BBC cynicism around the BBC cutting recipes while emphasising the recipes' popularity. This indicates that newspapers of different types (quality and mid-market) and political persuasions (left-leaning and right-leaning) use similar techniques to represent the BBC in reporting.

After Patterson introduced the recipes and described what happened using humour, she turned to the main subject of her article, the BBC's scale and scope:

The question none of the protesters [against cutting recipes] seems to have asked is exactly why the world's biggest broadcaster has spent hundreds of millions on a website that sometimes looks like a forced marriage between BuzzFeed and Woman's Own...

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<sup>141</sup> Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt, was the focal point of the Egyptian revolution in 2011, during the Arab Spring.

But does it really need public money to commission and publish ‘the cute animal quiz’ and ‘the world’s deadliest animals’? And show us how to swap spaghetti for ‘courgetti’? Isn’t the BBC meant to be about, you know, broadcasting?

Describing the BBC as ‘the world’s biggest broadcaster’ instead of simply ‘the BBC’ echoes how newspapers such as the *Times* and the *Sun* frequently evoked a theme that the BBC was oppressively large (see table 5.4). Here, Patterson is asking ‘Isn’t the BBC meant to be about broadcasting?’ which is essentially the same question asked by James Delingpole in the *Sun*: ‘Since when was it the BBC’s job to have a website anyway?’ and also Rod Liddle in the *Sun*, in his 2015 article ‘Without the crown jewels, what is the point of the BBC?’ All are using rhetorical questions to emphasise that the BBC is overstepping its remit by providing similar services to commercial competitors. Furthermore, describing the licence fee as ‘public money’ is inaccurate as the licence fee is not the same as a tax. Overall, the *Guardian* is using similar linguistic tools to the *Sun*, to present the BBC as overstepping its remit.

Patterson describes the BBC website as ‘a forced marriage between BuzzFeed and *Woman’s Own*.’ This connotes the BBC as being aggressive, with the use of the word ‘forced’ and conjures up an image of a website which tries to appeal to an impossibly wide audience base.<sup>142</sup> It suggests that the problem with the BBC website is that it is trying to copy other providers and, as a result is neither distinctive nor good quality. Patterson’s focus on distinctiveness is also apparent later in her article where she concludes that if the BBC wants to keep its Royal Charter ‘it will need a recipe that will make it stand out from the rest.’ This challenges the notion of the BBC as a public service broadcaster and suggests that

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<sup>142</sup> BuzzFeed and *Woman’s Own* appeal to entirely different demographics as *Woman’s Own* is a weekly magazine for the over 40s focused on home and lifestyle, while BuzzFeed is a news and entertainment website aimed primarily at young people aged 16 to 30.

the Corporation should be limited to providing what other areas of the market do not. It normalises the concept of distinctiveness, set out in the Green Paper, as a standard for the BBC, even though this is a problematic concept (Goddard 2017a).

The normalisation of distinctiveness around the recipes continued in an *Observer* article by Peter Preston (22<sup>nd</sup> May 2016, p. 44) which concludes:

Mergings and closures aren't necessarily the end of this BBC world. They can rationalise a service grown alike haphazardly. They can create one good place for vegetable lasagne rather than slop it across the board. They can bring news together in a more meaningful whole. They can decide what needs to be paid for and what doesn't. Distinct progress, you might say.

The *Observer's* headline suggests that 'the Corporation and its print rivals' can 'work together' online. Preston supports the recipes moving from BBC Food to BBC Good Food because it would mean that they would all be in one place and 'the only distinctive thing about BBC Food is its ad-free' format. Preston uses a familiar dish to create an image of having 'one good place for vegetable lasagne' rather than it being 'sloped across the board,' to emphasise his argument. This and the idea of the BBC making 'distinct progress' subtly normalises distinctiveness. It does not consider concerns that the BBC's obligation to be distinctive could 'become a wedge to drive out universality as a basic principle of public service media' (Gibbons 2017: 41), for example.

Patterson explicitly contrasts the high salaries of executives who work on BBC Digital, with the average salary of a local newspaper journalist (£22,250). This is reminiscent of 'us' versus 'them,' where the BBC is portrayed as the highly-paid elite against the struggling newspaper journalist. The link between BBC and local news was also made in the *Observer* which stated 'Can it really make sense for the BBC's

wilting news budget to use free money to plaster recipes all over the site? How many news reporting jobs would axing the meat and veg save?' (Peter Preston, the *Observer*, Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2016, p.44). Patterson links BBC online to the closure of local newspapers. She personifies 'local and regional newspapers,' suggesting they have been 'dying,' in contrast to the BBC's website which has been built using 'British licence fees.' The licence fee is directly linked to the demise of local newspapers as Patterson writes 'when a newspaper closes, nobody suggests that the government should bail them out, even though it's a British tax that has played a part in their death.' The debate about the decline local newspapers is complex (Ponsford 2017), but here, Patterson chose to focus solely on the BBC's impact on local newspapers, rather than, for example, the decline in print advertising revenues as a primary reason for newspaper decline. Patterson focuses on the licence fee using highly emotive language. The licence fee is not the same as a tax, but it evokes more emotion than calling it a 'fee' as it suggests that all taxpayers are responsible for directly 'killing' the newspapers as part of a bloated public sector. Using aggressive verbs to describe the impact of the licence fee continues throughout the article, for example stating that the BBC should not exist to 'crush commercial rivals with public cash.' As with Pollard's *Times* article, the use of the verb 'crushing' is transferring aggressive qualities onto the BBC and feeds in to the 'competition is king' discourse.

Overall, there were similarities between newspapers of different political leanings and of different formats in their reporting of the BBC licence fee. Language used in the *Guardian's* reporting of the recipes was similar to that in the *Daily Mail*, *Times*, *Sunday Times* and *Sun*. Yet, these newspapers are very different in terms of political leaning (see table 2.1). While the letters pages of the *Guardian*, the days after Patterson's article was published challenged some features of the analysis, under the headline 'BBC's public service remit includes recipes (Friday 20<sup>th</sup> May



2016 p. 34), the 'competition is king' discourse was not effectively challenged in the news, opinion or editorial sections. This evocation of 'competition is king' can be attributed to the *Guardian's* history of expressing concern about the BBC's online impact. *Guardian* Media Group (GMG)<sup>143</sup> have argued that the *Guardian* and the BBC compete for audiences both in the UK (Oliver & Ohlbaum Associates 2016: 166) and overseas (Oliver & Ohlbaum Associates 2016: 180). According to the Culture Minister Ed Vaizey, 'the only organisation that has ever lobbied me to clip the wings of the BBC is the *Guardian*' (Burgess 2016: 17). GMG was undoubtedly under pressure as a commercial organisation at the time the articles were analysed. The print circulation of the *Guardian* fell by almost 35 per cent between 2010 and 2015, while the circulation of the *Observer* fell by 36 per cent in the same period (ABC 2010; 2015). The White Paper noted that the 'Guardian Media Group is reportedly facing 20 per cent cuts to running costs over the next three years' (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2016: 94). The commercial interests of the *Guardian* as a business therefore, trump the sentiment that 'GMG is a strong supporter of the BBC, its core values of public service and its contribution to British public life' (Guardian Media Group 2017: 1) when examining how BBC recipes are reported in UK national newspapers.

Overall, the wider contexts of the *Guardian's* business interests cannot be ignored in its reporting of the BBC licence fee. Analysis of reporting of BBC recipes show that a newspapers' interest as a commercial business can influence discourse to transcend a newspaper's party-political affiliation. This research showed that the *Guardian* had numerous articles that were supportive of the BBC, but when the newspaper's online interests were considered under direct threat from the BBC,

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<sup>143</sup> Guardian Media Group (GMG), a commercial media organisation, is the owner of *Guardian* News & Media (GNM) which publishes theguardian.com and the *Guardian* and *Observer* newspapers (Guardian Media Group 2017: 1).

ultimately, a commercial model of media was normalised. The discourses 'tyranny of the minority' and 'competition is king' identified in newspaper coverage were arguably contradictory, as 'tyranny of the minority' criticised the promotion of the interests of a supposedly elitist BBC at the expense of the licence fee payer, while 'competition is king' directly criticised the licence fee for fuelling the BBC's size, aggression and subsequent ability to hinder commercial media. However, newspapers used language to operationalise both these discourses to promote an ideological assumption about the primacy of a commercial model of broadcasting in reporting of the BBC licence fee within UK national newspapers.

## **Summary of qualitative analysis - a bruised licence fee and a battered BBC**

Overall, qualitative analysis of newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee drew three main conclusions:

1. Newspapers, particularly those which are left-leaning, will praise the BBC and use government actions towards the Corporation to criticise the government;
2. However, although there is not uniform criticism of the BBC, newspapers use two discourses, 'tyranny of the minority' and 'competition is king' to promote further ideological assumptions about the BBC and its impact on the commercial market;
3. Even though there are contradictions between these discourses, such as how they portray the licence fee, these discourses are operationalised flexibly by newspapers.

This chapter has provided a thorough textual analysis of newspaper articles from a selection of case studies about the BBC licence fee. The first section of analysis found, through analysis of David Cameron's 'delicious' comments (a press conference where the Prime Minister was discussing public spending), that there were clear party-political divides in reporting. Left-leaning newspapers reported the Prime Minister's comments in a way which was critical of the government by using verbs and idioms to paint a picture of Cameron as an untrustworthy individual. This contrasted with right-leaning newspapers which sought to depict the BBC, rather than the government in a negative light through constructing the event in an entirely different manner, particularly through highlighting the number of reporters the BBC

sent to the press conference. This section also began analysis of the ‘Luvvies Letter’ (a letter signed by celebrities in support of the BBC) which appeared in the *Daily Mirror*. Analysis of the letter itself, and the news article in the *Mirror* accompanying it, found that the *Mirror* collocated the BBC with iconic British national institutions (such as the NHS) and individuals (James Bond and the Queen). The government was presented as a force which needed to be stopped from destroying the BBC and, by extension, the key British institutions which the BBC was collocated with. Overall, the government was constructed as an outside group, or ‘them,’ acting against the wishes of newspaper readers and, indeed, the nation.

Within this positive construction of the BBC/negative portrayal of the government’s action towards the BBC, it was notable that the Corporation’s system of funding, the licence fee was rarely evoked. Reporting focused on personal attacks on members of the government, such as the *Guardian* criticising David Cameron’s background on the ‘delicious’ comments. It highlighted aspects of the BBC such as the Corporation’s programming successes, or comparing the BBC to other institutions, such as the NHS, which were presumed by the newspapers to be popular public sector institutions which formed part of the British national mythology. The ways in which the licence fee can arguably enable quality programming and create a link between the viewer and the BBC (or any further arguments in support of the licence fee – see chapter two, section three) were not engaged with by the newspapers. This shows a lack of licence fee focus when newspapers sought to portray the BBC positively.

The second section of this chapter continued the discussion of the ‘Luvvies letter’ and showed how different stereotypical groups were constructed within newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee. The section outlined how a discourse entitled ‘tyranny of the minority’ was constructed within reporting, mainly focussing on the *Daily Mail* newspaper. The language used to portray the celebrities who signed the

letter depicted their actions as hysterical, juxtaposing 'us' (the licence fee payer or even the taxpayer) with 'them' (the luvvie elite stereotype) to create opposition between the BBC and 'ordinary' newspaper readers. Furthermore, analysis of how the *Mail* reported BBC programming both with specific BBC programmes (such as the *Great British Bake Off*) and in the wake of the Green Paper emphasised the construction of 'licence fee payers' versus 'the BBC.' Humour was used to suggest an elitist BBC was foisting an oppressive worldview, emphasising 'political correctness' upon licence fee payers. The *Mail* presented a set of conservative opinions as those shared by a majority (or readers of its newspaper), naturalising conservatism against a BBC which was depicted as a left-wing, elite, politically correct minority. This linguistic construction mainly used humour, overlexicalisation and making assumptions about the nature of its readers' point of view. These implicit assumptions are ideological, as they place power with an imagined majority of people with a conservative point of view which newspapers support and the BBC is against. The overall discourse evoked is described as 'tyranny of the minority' as it suggests that an elite minority, the BBC, is trying to force its views upon a majority of people who conveniently share the editorial position of the newspaper.

The ideological assumptions made within newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee were also discussed in the third section of the chapter, but this time they manifested themselves through a discourse described as 'competition is king.' Here, an analysis of predominantly Murdoch-controlled newspapers showed that language was used to emphasize the BBC's size and aggression (see table 6.2). While individuals from within the BBC were given a space to respond, nowhere was the discourse that the primary concern of the BBC should be its impact upon commercial media meaningfully challenged. Public service broadcasting was held up in newspaper reporting of the BBC as an ideal to which the BBC should aspire. However, newspapers attempted to narrowly re-define public service broadcasting

to conceptualise PSB as any activities which did not hinder commercial media. This section concluded with an analysis of two Rod Liddle articles discussing BBC programming, which made a series of ideologically charged and contradictory presumptions about the purpose of the BBC, all of which pointed to the conclusion that the Corporation could no longer exist.

Sections two and three of this chapter therefore found that two key discourses were present in the newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee: 'tyranny of the minority' and 'competition is king.' These discourses differed in the way in which they constructed the licence fee as being relevant within reporting. 'Tyranny of the minority' did not employ direct criticism of the licence fee. Instead, it drew upon the fact that the licence fee is paid for by everyone who consumes BBC services to criticise the BBC for appealing to minorities, elites and profligacy. To do this, the possessive pronoun 'our' was used excessively to describe the licence fee as 'our money,' making the connection between licence fee payer and viewer explicit. 'Tyranny of the minority' did not suggest that the licence fee as a system of funding the BBC was problematic but used the fact that the licence fee is 'our money' as a way to emphasise the BBC was not acting in the interests of 'us.' This was instrumental in the creation of two sides 'us and them' or 'licence fee payers and luvvies' within 'tyranny of the minority.'

On the other hand, within 'competition is king' the licence fee was directly criticised and portrayed as fuelling the BBC's size and aggression. For example, suggestions that the licence fee could allow the BBC to 'trample on rivals with public funds' and 'wallow in its vast publicly funded subsidy.' The amount received by the BBC from the licence was repeated to emphasise its contribution to the BBC as a 'behemoth,' and the licence fee was often dismissed as an 'anachronism.' Directly criticising the licence fee for hindering commercial media is key to the 'competition is king' discourse which suggests the BBC's impact on commercial competition is

paramount and emphasises how the licence fee gives the BBC an unfair advantage in the media marketplace. It does not consider the commercial model of broadcasting to be anything other than a norm which the BBC runs counter to. The fact that both 'tyranny of the minority' and 'competition is king' are present is a result of the licence fee paradox whereby, to justify the licence, fee the BBC has to make popular programmes, but when it does so, it is often accused of behaving in the manner of a commercial broadcaster. The 'tyranny of the minority' discourse approves of the BBC making popular programmes, but its 'competition is king' counterpart accuses the BBC of behaving like a commercial broadcaster. The licence fee paradox is therefore reflected in newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee.

The 'tyranny of the minority' and 'competition is king' discourses make ideological assumptions within reporting. However, 'tyranny of the minority' makes assumptions about an imagined conservative leaning 'majority,' for whom it purports to speak, while 'competition is king' assumes the BBC should be secondary to the commercial market. Despite these clear differences, the final analysis section of this chapter showed that both discourses were simultaneously operationalised in newspaper articles about BBC recipes. Section four explained the background to the BBC recipes incident to show how, as a case study, it highlights a site of perceived competition between the BBC and commercial media which demonstrates how the discourses employed are ultimately ideological. Articles about the recipes in the *Daily Mail* and *Sun* were analysed to show how, despite their contradictions, discourses were used flexibly across the newspapers. A number of articles criticised the BBC simultaneously for being part of the public sector (instead of the commercial sector) but also criticised the BBC for being an elitist organisation which eschewed the views of licence fee payers. Finally, the *Guardian* also evoked 'tyranny of the minority' and 'competition is king' discourses, using the same

language as newspapers like the *Sun* to criticise the BBC. Overall, the case of BBC recipes showed that newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee reflects the commercial interests of newspapers, rather than the interests of those who consume BBC services. The BBC and its licence fee are, essentially, blamed for the popularity of the BBC's services, in contrast to newspapers struggling to adapt to changes in the media landscape.



## **Conclusion – newspapers’ commercial interests normalised in discourse**

### **Overview of study findings**

This research has provided unique, systematic Critical Discourse Analysis on newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee during several critical periods in the recent history of the Corporation’s funding model. It builds on Petley’s (2015) assertion that ‘the Murdoch press has waged a relentless campaign against the BBC’ to reveal that criticism of the BBC licence fee was not just confined to the Murdoch press. This thesis found that UK national newspapers evoked discourses flexibly and contradictorily, using the licence fee to foster ideological criticism of the public service broadcaster. While focused on the British context, the research contributes to an international body of research about the role of public service media in an increasingly online and commercialised media environment (McNair 2015; McNair *et al.* 2017; Cushion 2019; Kuhn 2019; D’Arma 2019).

The findings were generated from a quantitative analysis of a sample of 646 newspaper articles, followed by a more detailed qualitative analysis of a selection of articles. First, the quantitative analysis found:

1. The tone of newspapers overall towards the BBC was varied, with left-leaning newspapers more likely to be positive, and right-leaning newspapers more likely to be negative.
2. The subjects present indicated that there was significant criticism towards the government for its actions towards the BBC within newspapers.

3. Praise for the licence fee as a method of funding the BBC was infrequent across newspapers, while criticism of the licence fee was evident in the high circulation, right-leaning *Sun* and *Daily Mail*.
4. Certain right-leaning newspapers suggested that the BBC was so big that it hindered the activities of commercial media, with the 'BBC is too big' the third most frequently occurring subject across all the articles.
5. Subjects present indicated that newspapers frequently praised BBC output (including popular programming) but criticised the Corporation for the way in which it spent the licence fee.

These quantitative trends provided the basis from which to select newspaper articles for a more detailed qualitative analysis of the language and discourses used. The trends within the quantitative analysis indicated that there were conflicts present between different groups within the newspaper coverage (e.g. BBC vs commercial market). However, the way in which language was used to construct these conflicts and the relationships between language and wider context of the UK media landscape could not be investigated using quantitative analysis alone. Therefore, a smaller sample of articles based around selected case studies were qualitatively examined using an approach from Critical Discourse Analysis influenced by the work of Richardson (2004; 2009). The qualitative analysis found:

1. Newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee engages with two main discourses ('tyranny of the minority' and 'competition is king').
2. Within the 'tyranny of the minority' discourse the BBC was criticised for elitism, 'political correctness' and ignoring the interests of licence-fee payers. The licence fee was not directly criticised, but the universality of the licence fee meant the system of funding was operationalised in newspaper coverage

to suggest that the BBC should exist to provide output for a majority of licence fee payers, rather than appeal to minorities (ethnic minorities in wider society and elite minorities in the BBC). Newspapers construct the licence fee payers as a conservative-thinking majority, placed in opposition to an elitist minority BBC.

3. Within the 'competition is king' discourse it was suggested that the BBC's size and supposedly aggressive behaviour, enabled by its licence fee funding, meant that the Corporation could hinder commercial media, which was portrayed as a victim of the BBC. Unlike 'tyranny of the minority,' 'competition is king' was directly critical of the licence fee, for fuelling the BBC's hindrance of commercial media. Furthermore, the BBC was portrayed as failing to provide public service broadcasting, which was re-imagined by newspapers to simply involve activities which do not impact upon the profit-chasing areas of the media.
4. The presence of these discourses meant that the BBC was criticised on two fronts: a) for not serving a majority of licence fee payers and b) for being too big and hindering the commercial sector.

The discourses evoked are reflective of the licence fee paradox – as the BBC is paid for by everyone it needs to make popular programmes to justify the licence fee, while also, as a public service broadcaster, serve minorities and take risks in programming. However, when the BBC makes popular programming it is accused of behaving in the manner of a commercial broadcaster (Born 2005: 54). 'Tyranny of the minority' presumes that the BBC's *raison d'être* is to be popular, while 'competition is king' presumes that the BBC exists to provide services which would not be profitable for commercial providers. Ultimately, 'even the BBC is in competition with commercial broadcasting, they rely upon their ratings to justify the licence fee to the government and the public' (Fairclough 1995: 42). Essentially, the

licence fee paradox creates a line of vulnerability within the BBC which its critics can condemn and, within their coverage, newspapers have been critical on both sides of the paradox.

The first section of this concluding chapter shows how the research questions have been addressed. It then highlights the wider implications for these findings on the UK media landscape. The answers to the research questions, while allowing insight into the under-researched area of newspaper coverage of the BBC, provide opportunities and avenues for further research into more recent events, and with different methodological directions. The chapter therefore goes on to outline areas for potential further study that build on this research project.

## **Section One – How this study answered the research questions**

As outlined at the beginning of this thesis, the articles analysed related to four events in the recent history of the BBC licence fee (2010 licence fee settlement, 2015 licence fee settlement, 2015 Green Paper and 2016 White Paper). However, the study found that different discourses and themes were present which were common across all of the events selected. This section is therefore organised to comment on the shared findings across the events in relation to the research questions, rather than specifically singling out the events which formed the inspiration for analysis.

### **Research Question One: What is the character of the discourses and themes present within newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee?**

The themes present within the newspaper articles around the BBC licence fee were not of a univocally negative nature. For example, left-leaning newspapers praised the Corporation for its public service values and were critical of any perceived

attacks from the Conservatives government to these values. The positive themes are listed in more detail below.

### **Left-leaning newspapers: Pro Beeb, but anti-government**

This study found that the partisan nature of UK national newspapers impacted upon reporting of the BBC licence fee. Although this study did not analyse newspaper coverage of directly party-political events (such as General Elections), analysis found that the political leanings of newspapers influenced coverage of the BBC. For example, left-leaning newspapers such as the *Daily Mirror* were highly critical of government actions towards the BBC in its coverage, portraying the government as attacking a valued, British institution in pursuit of an austerity programme. The *Mirror* consistently portrayed the government as a threat to the institution, presuming that the BBC was under attack, for example suggesting that the Chancellor, George Osborne had declared ‘war’ on the BBC (Blanchard 2015: 2). Overall, newspapers were mainly critical of the government for its actions towards the BBC, rather than explicitly critical of the weakness in the licence fee model highlighted by Mills (2016) – that the government in power sets the level of the licence fee, so increasing government influence over the BBC. The *Guardian*, for example, was critical of the threat that the 2010 licence fee freeze and over-75s licence fee settlement posed to the BBC’s independence, but not critical of the government’s relationship with the licence fee. Left-leaning newspapers used government reforms to the BBC as a method of criticising the government over austerity policies (e.g. David Cameron’s ‘delicious’ comments), rather than assessing relations between the BBC and the government more widely.

## **Praise for the BBC**

The BBC has been described as part of the UK's 'national mythology' (Tunstall 2010: 145). This description was reflected in some newspapers which portrayed the BBC as an institution integral to British national identity, on a par with other 'institutions' such as the National Health Service (NHS), the Queen and James Bond. Comparisons between the BBC and the NHS were linked to outrage within newspapers over what was perceived as government decimation of an institution 'deep-dyed into British DNA' (Polly Toynbee, *The Guardian*, Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2015, p. 31). Quantitative analysis showed that the BBC was compared favourably with public bodies such as the NHS almost twice as often as it was compared negatively to public bodies. Comparisons with the NHS were also present within qualitative analysis. For example, a *Mirror* article quoted the then Shadow Culture Secretary Chris Bryant describing the BBC as 'our cultural NHS' (Methven 2015, p.6). Both quantitative and qualitative analysis indicated that newspapers chose to highlight what they perceived as BBC programming successes such as coverage of the London 2012 Olympic opening ceremony which foregrounded "key national institutions and cultural legacies" – the Queen, James Bond and the NHS (Oettler 2015: 245).

The themes reflecting positivity towards the BBC were a feature of quantitative analysis and observable in the qualitative analysis. However, these positive themes, though present, were not reflected in the way in which the licence fee was discursively constructed within newspapers. Discourses reflected these themes but did so in a way which reinforced ideologically charged criticism of the BBC within the newspaper coverage. The way in which two prominent discourses were constructed in newspapers is outlined below.

## **'Tyranny of the minority'**

The discourse described as 'tyranny of the minority' used the BBC's universal funding, wide appeal and popularity of programming to criticise the Corporation. 'Tyranny of the minority' suggested the broadcaster should provide popular programmes but criticised the BBC for failing licence fee payers by appealing to a minority of people – either 'elite' BBC executives or ethnic minorities. 'Tyranny of the minority' was not simply the suggestion that the BBC failed in its duty of impartiality. The idea that the BBC was funded by a universal licence fee was used to criticise the Corporation for not representing the views of a majority of people. This 'majority' viewpoint was constructed within newspapers as being conservative-leaning and anti-egalitarian. The 'tyranny of the minority' discourse did not simply suggest that the BBC was biased towards a political party. It evoked the idea of a BBC minority elite imposing a left-leaning, 'politically correct' worldview on licence fee payers. 'Tyranny of the minority' was invocative of 'us versus them' where the licence fee payer is presented as 'us' and the BBC is presented as 'them.'

The 'tyranny of the minority' discourse did not criticise the licence fee. Instead it used the fact that the BBC is universally funded to criticise the Corporation for failing to serve television licence payers and represent their point of view. The licence fee was used as a platform upon which newspapers invoking the 'tyranny of the minority' discourse criticised the BBC. Ultimately, however, the existence of the television licence was not questioned – if the BBC was not funded by the universal licence fee it would be difficult for newspapers to criticise the Corporation for failing to appeal to the newspapers' construction of a wide audience base. Within the sample the BBC's funding system was not uniformly criticised, as many articles were not judged to be licence-fee-relevant. This indicated that the television licence was not always used by newspapers within their reporting of the BBC, to either support or criticise the Corporation. Significant high-circulation, right-leaning

newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* rarely contained any praise for the licence fee, according to quantitative analysis. Although the implementation of the television licence as a mechanism for funding the BBC in the 1920s was introduced to ensure good quality programming (Barnett and Curry 1994: 6), within the newspaper coverage links were rarely made between the universality of the licence fee and how, at least in principle, it enables quality programming on the BBC to be available to everyone.

Overall, this study found that the licence fee was used within ‘tyranny of the minority’ to enable wider criticism of the BBC. Within this discourse, the system of funding was not directly criticised, but the universality of the licence fee enabled newspaper condemnation of the Corporation for not appealing to a constructed ‘majority’ of licence fee payers. The BBC’s funding was therefore used to enhance ideological criticism of the BBC’s perceived ‘minority agenda,’ particularly in right-leaning newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*.

### **‘Competition is king’**

Both the quantitative and qualitative analysis found that the BBC’s size and impact on the commercial market were focused upon in newspaper coverage. A discourse described as ‘competition is king’ was found to be evoked within newspaper articles. This used language to emphasise the BBC’s size (e.g. descriptions like ‘bloated behemoth’) and aggression (e.g. the BBC described as ‘strangling other things in the marketplace’). Coverage normalised the interests of profit at the expense of public service, presuming that the Corporation should not hinder commercial rivals in service provision. It did not consider that the presence of the BBC can be a positive influence on the commercial media more widely (Barwise and Picard 2014; Cushion 2019) or that the Corporation can address failures inherent in market-based systems of media (Davies 2004). Instead the ‘competition is king’ discourse



naturalised the BBC as secondary to the commercial market and presumes that the BBC should reduce its influence to ensure commercial companies can make a profit. Within the 'competition is king,' discourse, the licence fee was portrayed as fuelling the BBC's ability to dominate the commercial market. The statement that the BBC seeks to 'crush commercial rivals with public cash' (Christina Patterson, *Guardian*, Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p. 13) shows how newspapers blamed the BBC's funding system for hindering commercial rivals, while favouring the values of the commercial sector at the expense of the public service broadcaster.

Subscription as an alternative funding mechanism to the licence fee which would benefit commercial companies, while not the central focus of newspaper coverage, was one of the most frequently occurring primary subject areas within the quantitative analysis (see table 5.1). Newspapers suggested the licence fee should be replaced to criticise the system of funding. The 'competition is king' discourse cited developments in technology as a reason for replacing the licence fee, which was frequently described as an 'anachronism.' Often it was presumed that because the licence fee had existed since the 1920s and technology had advanced that it must be replaced. Ultimately, the profit-making ability of commercial media, particularly newspapers, has been threatened by changes in the media landscape, including the growth of news online and social media. Newspapers therefore sought to undermine the licence fee, perceiving it as providing the BBC with an unfair advantage over them as commercial businesses.

The discourses, 'tyranny of the minority' and 'competition is king,' were not unique to one newspaper or set of newspapers under certain ownership or political leaning. Newspapers used these discourses flexibly and contradictorily, even within the same newspaper articles to criticise the BBC. Analysis of BBC recipes found that the *Guardian*, a left-leaning broadsheet newspaper, used similar language to the right-leaning tabloid *Sun* to normalise a commercial model of broadcasting,

prioritising the *Guardian's* interests as a business in the commercial media market. The BBC recipes furore is not a major incident in the history of the BBC, meaning further analysis is needed around how newspapers construct discourse around the BBC's online activity and how this links to political economy. However, this thesis has shown that, when newspapers and the broadcaster are providing similar services (in this case, recipes), newspapers will defend their own interests as businesses within reporting, at the expense of the Corporation.

**Research Question Two: To what extent do the discourses present within newspaper coverage serve to normalise a commercial model of broadcasting in which the BBC, as a public service broadcaster is presented as anomalous or, at worst, damaging?**

This research found that Murdoch-controlled UK newspapers were critical of the licence fee on the basis that it hindered commercial media. This builds upon articles by Petley (2015) and Freedman (2015), written when the Green Paper on the future of the BBC was published, linking critical newspaper coverage of the Corporation with Murdoch's commercial interests. However, this study found that it was not just the *Sun*, the *Times* and the *Sunday Times* which evoked the 'competition is king' discourse and were critical of the broadcaster based on business interests.

*Guardian* articles around the BBC's online services were highly critical of the Corporation's online presence. Although the *Guardian* is traditionally a more left-leaning newspaper, which often praises the collectivist ethic of the BBC and its licence fee, this research found that it was critical of the Corporation in providing a website which is similar to the newspapers' own. Overall, the way in which the 'competition is king' discourse was used across coverage of newspapers, irrespective of political leaning, indicates that a commercial model of broadcasting is normalised within newspaper coverage.

Although the benefits of a commercial system of broadcasting were extolled and unchallenged within newspaper articles, this did not mean that public service

broadcasting (PSB) was attacked by newspapers. Newspapers did not directly criticise PSB but attempted to re-define the model of broadcasting in line with commercial interests. The BBC was criticised from straying from an ideal of PSB and for making popular programming. However, a clear definition of what constituted PSB was not provided by the newspapers, it was presumed to involve whatever activities would not hinder commercial companies. This portrayal of PSB reflects Thomas and Hindman's (2011) findings in their study of newspapers' (2009) reaction to the BBC's decision not to air an appeal to raise money for refugees in Gaza. They found prominent themes within newspaper discourse included the suggestion that the Corporation was violating the principles of public service broadcasting through its actions. According to Thomas and Hindman, criticising the BBC for failing as a public service broadcaster, 'contributes to an ongoing weakening of the BBC's armour, clearing the way for alternative ideas, namely, as argued by some editorials and op-eds, a move to a free-market model' (Thomas and Hindman 2011: 584). The way public service broadcasting was portrayed within newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee similarly contributes to an 'ongoing weakening' of the BBC, as the values of the commercial market and profit-making were prioritised over public service.

This study has shown that newspaper coverage of the licence fee did not simply involve newspapers explicitly portraying commercial broadcasting as superior to PSB. Rather, newspapers re-framed the way in which the BBC should be considered as a public service broadcaster - subservient to the commercial sector. Flaws in the commercial model of broadcasting were not directly considered within the newspaper coverage. Instead, the 'competition is king' discourse evoked a narrative that a commercial model of broadcasting should be the norm for a media system in the UK. Newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee therefore has implications, not just for how the television licence fee is considered, but how public

service broadcasting is portrayed more widely. Public service broadcasters across Europe have been criticised by commercial and political rivals for failing to deliver their public service objectives (e.g. see D'Arma 2019). Therefore, the findings within this study have implications for wider debates about the commercial challenge to public service media across democracies globally.

**Research Question Three: Within newspaper coverage, to what extent are the BBC and BBC licence fee held responsible for changes in the UK media landscape which have affected newspapers?**

Changes to the UK media landscape which have affected newspapers include the increase in online news consumption, the decline in print newspaper circulation and changes to funding through advertising. The ways in which these changes were linked to BBC funding through the licence fee varied. Newspapers' portrayal of the television licence in reporting was complex and there were differences in the ways that each discourse used the licence fee. On the one hand, the licence fee was not always discussed in detail within newspaper articles – 44 per cent of the articles were found not to be licence-fee-relevant. The 'tyranny of the minority' discourse was not overtly focused on the Corporation's funding system. It used the licence fee as a weapon with which to criticise the BBC, but at no point was it suggested the system of funding was responsible for wider changes to the media market.

On the other hand, the 'competition is king' discourse directly criticised the licence fee and held the BBC responsible for changes in the media market which have affected newspapers. In one article, Rod Liddle directly connected technology, the BBC's expansion and how this affects the free market by stating '[A]s each new technology comes along, the corporation feels the need to expand and stretch itself ever thinner, thus enraging competitors in the free market' (Liddle, the *Sunday Times*, 12<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p. 2). Within newspaper reporting, the licence fee was portrayed as fuelling the BBC's ability to expand online and the commercial media cast as the victim of this. The linguistic choices used to emphasise the BBC's size,

(e.g. being 'too big for its boots') implied that the Corporation was trying to step into areas of the media which should be – according to 'competition is king' – occupied by commercial media (either TV companies or newspapers). The discussion of recipes showed that newspapers held the BBC responsible for hindering their online presence. Furthermore, opinion pieces in the *Guardian* and *Observer* about the recipes (e.g. Patterson 2016) directly blamed the BBC and the licence fee for the decline in local newspapers. They did not consider other factors in local newspapers' decline, such as fall in advertising revenues.

The BBC was condemned for not altering its funding model because of changes to the wider media landscape. One article criticised the Corporation for not developing a funding model 'fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' (Alison Little, *Daily Express*, Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p.2). Newspapers were critical of the BBC's guaranteed funding stream when UK newspaper companies have increasingly struggled to make a profit to survive as online news consumption has increased. Online, the BBC and newspapers both provide news, rather than the broadcaster delivering news on screen and newspapers providing news in print. There is therefore tension between the two providers which manifested itself in newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee, particularly around the Corporation's popular, freely available website.

The Cairncross Review, published in February 2019, examined the future of 'high-quality' journalism in the UK. It found that:

Some publishers see BBC News Online, which is free at point of use, as an obstacle to selling subscriptions... [the BBC should] think more carefully about how its news provision can act as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, commercial news (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2019: 8).

However, the report also stated that the evidence is 'less clear' on whether the Corporation 'crowds other competitors out' of the online news market. Most people use multiples sources of news making the BBC, 'a large – but not the only – player in an increasingly crowded news market' (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2019: 26). This shows that the impact of the BBC on commercial media is debatable and it is not a foregone conclusion that the Corporation stops other news outlets selling subscriptions. Therefore, newspapers blaming the BBC for changes to the media landscape in reporting is likely to be motivated by ideological self-interest by the newspapers as businesses.

### **What are the wider implications of the findings in this study?**

The presence of two discourses within newspapers – 'tyranny of the minority' and 'competition is king' – which use the licence fee in different ways to criticise the BBC, could be a difficult storm for the BBC to weather in the future. This study found that, in some newspapers, the BBC was portrayed positively, but rarely when it came to the licence fee. The fact that the benefits of the licence fee as a system of funding were rarely mentioned within newspaper articles, and the television licence was criticised so vehemently within the 'competition is king' discourse, does not augur well for the future of the licence fee as the system of funding the BBC. When considering the reporting of BBC recipes, entirely different newspapers, the *Sun* and the *Guardian*, directly questioned the Corporation's use of licence fee money for online recipes which were also provided by newspapers.

Given the trend towards people consuming news and other forms of magazine content online rather than in print, and the state of flux of the modern media landscape, it may be that the calls for the BBC to rein in its licence fee spending online become increasingly louder. This could subsequently call the relevance of the licence fee into question amidst a changing media landscape. The current Royal Charter recommended that the licence fee increase in line with inflation until

2021/22. However, if the discourses normalising commercial media at the expense of public service continue, this could raise the question of the licence fee's continuance when it is next reviewed. Ultimately the debate about the future of the licence fee remains salient and this study has shown that there is a less than sympathetic press influencing the national conversation about the licence fee.

In his November 2018 Society of Editors Speech, the former *Daily Mail* editor, Paul Dacre,<sup>144</sup> criticised the BBC licence fee:

Giving the Hugh Cudlipp Lecture some years ago, I outlined the dangers of what I dubbed the 'subsidiariat': that section of the media which seems to take great pride in being economically unviable – the vast BBC with its compulsory licence, the *Guardian* with its bottomless Scott Trust coffers...Freed from the obligation of having to connect with enough consumers to turn a shilling, such media organisations lose contact with the real world, and have little idea how money works (and, indeed, are suspicious of profit). Often hijacked by ideologues, invariably from the Left, they almost always regard with contempt the mass selling papers which need to appeal to large audiences in order to survive commercially.

It's the country's worst kept secret that the *Guardian* is the in-house newspaper of the BBC, that subsidised behemoth. If the Corporation, Britain's main news provider and its thousands of journalists – far more than employed by Fleet Street – hold the same financially irresponsible views as

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<sup>144</sup> Paul Dacre stood down as *Daily Mail* editor in November 2018 and was replaced by Geordie Greig, previously *Mail on Sunday* editor. Greig's appointment was described as 'a clean break from a toxic journalistic culture in which angry tub-thumping and personal vindictiveness have frequently been elevated above accuracy and fairness' (Barnett 2018).

its in-house crib sheet, then Britain has a huge problem if it is ever going to return to economic solvency (Dacre 2018).

Dacre's criticism is reminiscent of the discourses identified in newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee within this study. Dacre argued that there is a growing divide between the 'behemoth' BBC and the 'majority' of people who are 'disenfranchised by the values of the political class and the BBC' (Dacre 2018). He attacked the *Guardian*<sup>145</sup> together with the BBC, holding it up as detached from the real world. Dacre's comments are reminiscent of the description of BBC executives 'Guardian-reading, Islington dwellers' in Tom Utleby's *Mail* article (Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2016, p.14). He also criticised the licence fee and stressed the value of commercial competition within the British media, which hints at 'competition is king'. Overall Dacre's comments show that the discourses identified in newspaper coverage in 2010, 2015 and 2016 still feature heavily within the wider debate around the BBC licence fee.

Dacre is not the only person to criticise the BBC and its licence fee in recent years. The Corporation has faced backlash for the way in which it has reported on issues such as the UK's referendum to leave the EU (Cohen 2018). Brexit and other political developments have raised questions over whether the BBC's impartiality practices are fit for the current political climate (Damazer 2019). Given the uncertainty of the BBC's role in a volatile political landscape, questions over the licence fee are expected to become more common over the coming years. Analysing debate around the licence fee, whether in print newspapers (as in this study) or online, is therefore likely to be relevant in the future, to consider the evolution of how the funding mechanism of the BBC is perceived. While analysing

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<sup>145</sup> Dacre previously attacked the *Guardian* while he was editor of the *Daily Mail*. For example, he responded to a cartoon in the *Guardian* which blamed *Sun* and *Mail* coverage of Islam for the North London bombings (where a van deliberately ran into a crowd outside a mosque, killing several and injuring others) by describing the *Guardian* as 'the fascist Left and the REAL purveyors of hatred' (Barnett 2017).



media coverage of the licence fee does not purport to safeguard it, understanding how the licence fee is considered in the wider media provides an indication of the future for funding of the BBC. The findings within this study therefore provide a platform for future research around the ongoing debates of how media are funded in the digital age.

## **Section Two: Areas for further research and future discussion**

The natural methodological limitations of this thesis mean that there is scope for further research into areas relating to public service broadcasting and newspapers. This study focused specifically on analysing newspaper coverage of four government-initiated events within the recent history of the BBC. While this thesis has drawn important conclusions in the thus far under researched area of how the BBC is reported on in newspapers, it did not employ any international comparisons of newspaper coverage of licence fee related events in other countries which have a similar model to fund broadcasting (e.g. Denmark, Sweden, Norway). Also, it did not employ comparisons between the UK and countries where public service media has faced similar political challenges (e.g. France and Italy) or countries with an increasingly concentrated and online newspaper sector (e.g. Australia). Following this thesis, future research could compare the nature of newspaper coverage of the licence fee in the UK to countries with a similar model and/or similar commercial and political conditions. Such studies could assess whether the ideological nature of commercial newspapers' coverage of public service broadcasters was applicable beyond a UK context. For example, in 2018 there was a referendum in Switzerland on whether the television licence should continue (Ramsey and Herzog 2018: 431), with 71 per cent of voters opting to keep the licence fee (BBC 2018b). It would be of interest to examine how the referendum campaign and result was covered within the wider Swiss media. Furthermore, this study was limited to just one subject of analysis (the BBC) in one form of media (print newspapers). It provided evidence

that the BBC as a public service broadcaster is criticised ‘by commercial competitors who believe they gain an unfair competitive advantage by benefitting from guaranteed sources of public income’ (Cushion 2019: 70). The time and resource limitations for this research meant that a larger scale study, analysing the portrayal of UK public service broadcasting in wider commercial media, could not be conducted adequately. A broader project could focus solely on how public service media was portrayed on commercial television channels, for example. Alternative methodologies could be used for such studies for example, focus group interviews or analysis of reaction on social media.

The methodology applied in this project covered four selected events for analysis between October 2010 and May 2016. In the intervening three years since this research was devised, there have been many important events both politically and in the development of the BBC and its licence fee.<sup>146</sup> Therefore, an examination of newspaper coverage of the licence fee during events following this study would allow for an assessment of whether the discursive nature of newspaper coverage of the licence fee had altered or stayed the same. The impact of government reforms to the BBC announced in 2015 which are analysed in this study are currently being debated. Most recently, the implications of the 2015 licence fee settlement<sup>147</sup> came to the fore, as government funding of the over-75s licence fees is due to end in 2020. This carried serious financial implications for the BBC. Funding the scheme would have cost the Corporation £745m – or a fifth of the BBC’s current budget (BBC 2018d). Therefore, following a consultation, in July 2019, the BBC announced plans to end the automatic eligibility to a free TV licence for all over-75s. The

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<sup>146</sup> Politically, since the events analysed in this study, the 2016 Brexit referendum the 2017 General Election have taken place. Within the BBC, a change to require a licence fee for iPlayer (September 2016) was enacted, the local democracy reporting service was introduced and free television licences for over-75s removed.

<sup>147</sup> In July 2015 the government passed the cost of funding free television licences for over-75s from the Department of Work and Pensions to the BBC.

Corporation said they would, instead, provide TV licences to over-75s who claim pension credit, a means-tested benefit for older people (Waterson 2019a). The BBC's decision met with different reactions in the press. For example, the *Guardian* attacked the government, with an editorial headlined, 'The *Guardian* view on the BBC: a broadcaster, not a welfare agency' stating:

This is a wrongheaded and mean policy forced upon the BBC by former Conservative chancellor George Osborne, who should not have been allowed to load the cost of his damaging social and economic policies on to the corporation (*Guardian*, Friday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2019).

This editorial is reminiscent of the *Guardian* and other left-leaning publications using the BBC as a tool with which to criticise the government, identified within this thesis. A future project could examine newspaper coverage of this announcement in more detail, to compare the findings within this research with more recent newspaper reporting.

This research concluded, through an analysis of recipes, that technological change and the impact of increased internet usage and online news consumption had resulted in tension between the Corporation and newspapers. Since the 'BBC recipes furore' in 2016 there have been further technological advances which would be of interest to analyse, to investigate whether the conclusions drawn in this research were borne out in other case studies. The impact of what Dacre (2018) referred to as the 'streaming giants' (e.g. Netflix and Amazon Prime) on the Corporation, particularly the BBC's on-demand service, iPlayer, has increased over the past several years. For example, in 2018, Netflix announced that it would spend \$8 billion (£6.2 billion) on original TV and movie content production (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2019: 53). In July 2019, the BBC and ITV announced they will join forces to create a new subscription service, BritBox, launching in autumn

2019, to challenge the dominance of Netflix (Waterson 2019b). A further study into how newspapers reported the increase in consumption of television through streaming services could investigate whether 'competition is king' continued to manifest itself in another potential site of tension between the BBC and commercial providers.

Recent years have seen analyses published on BBC output and recommendations provided about how the Corporation can improve to meet standards of impartiality. For example, the Media Reform Coalition (MRC),<sup>148</sup> identified a series of 'failings' from the BBC in a *Panorama* programme broadcast on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2019 about anti-Semitism in the Labour Party (Media Reform Coalition 2019). Other studies have found that certain sections of the media were explicitly critical of the BBC with regards to its impartiality. During the 2017 General Election campaign, 'alt-left' news websites such as Skwawkbox and the Canary<sup>149</sup> criticised the BBC for mimicking the 'agenda of the right-wing press' (Moore and Ramsay 2017: 44). Therefore, there is criticism of the BBC from news websites which have emerged following the events for analysis within this study. A further analysis of the discourses used by these alternative news websites in reporting of the BBC and its licence fee would be a salient study following this research. Such a project could assess whether there were any similarities between the way in which national newspapers and mainstream news websites evoked discourse around the BBC licence fee. Although the more right-leaning political slant of the UK press is, theoretically, the opposite of these left-leaning news websites, this study found that there were similarities between reporting of the BBC licence fee in the left-leaning broadsheet *Guardian* and the right-leaning tabloid *Sun*. Furthering this, it would be of interest to

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<sup>148</sup> In 2018 the MRC published proposals for 'radical reform' of the BBC, including a reformed licence fee (Media Reform Coalition 2018).

<sup>149</sup> News websites such as the Canary and Skwawkbox are run by activists and 'push unashamedly left-wing narratives' (Waterson 2017).

investigate whether newspapers and news websites with supposedly opposite political affiliations share any similarities in the language used when reporting the BBC licence fee.

Overall, this study concludes that newspaper coverage of the BBC licence fee shows, unlike Reith's prediction, that there is a "struggle" between the Corporation and the press (Reith quoted in Higgins 2015: 165). Analysis has revealed that newspaper coverage flexibly uses contradictory discourses to evoke ideologically-charged criticisms of the BBC. Chapter one referenced Higgins' assertion that the *Daily Mail* newspaper had 'arguably lost' the struggle between the BBC and the press. However, this thesis has shown that the struggle has yet to be won by either side in a complex and ever-changing UK media landscape. Analysis has confirmed that, although the Corporation still stands firm, 'the wolves of the free market are at the BBC's door and are howling louder than ever' (Thomas and Hindman 2011: 584).

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## Appendix

### Coding advice

#### Article type

Each article is assigned a type based on the following criterion:

**News:** This appears to be a sweeping umbrella term, as it is difficult to define what ‘the news’ is in UK newspapers (Harrison 2008: 39). For the purposes of this study a news article is taken to mean reporting on one of the particular events, not purported to be the opinion of a particular columnist or newspaper, designed to inform readers about a particular event.

**Opinion:** A piece giving an opinion on an event or subject, for the purposes of this study ‘opinion’ is taken to include pieces by columnists who may or may not contribute to the newspaper regularly, or one-off opinion pieces from people on all sides of the licence fee debate, for example, the Chairperson of the BBC Trust. Used to provide the ‘distinctive voice’ of the newspaper on a variety of issues and does not have to fit within the rules of objective journalism (Wahl-Jorgensen 2008: 70).

**Editorial:** As above but opinion is presented as the ‘voice’ of the newspaper (Robinson *et al.* 2010: 116) rather than attributed to a particular author.

**Letters:** Written to the newspaper, often members of the public expressing their opinion on a particular event though can also be written by high profile individuals such as academics or celebrities. Letters indicate the editorial slant of the paper as ‘letters to the editor help communicate a newspaper’s brand identity’ (Richardson 2008: 58).

**Features:** Features can take many different forms, allowing the newspaper to ‘take the reader behind the headlines; they can amuse, infuriate, stimulate and inform’ (Niblock 2008: 46). Common forms of feature articles include profile interviews, nostalgia articles and exposes (Niblock 2008: 48).

#### Subject area

How is it decided whether subject (s) are considered the primary area (s):

The primary subject area should indicate the overall subject (s) which run throughout the article/ the main focus of the piece. This may be difficult to determine in a situation where a particular event is being described as a number of subjects can be listed within one article.

As a general rule, it is effective to examine the article title and the first few paragraphs of the piece, and determine whether there is one particular

subject in this section that the author has used to frame the article, BBC independence or transparency for example. If this is the case, and particularly if that same subject is referred to again within the article (e.g. at the end or within quotations) then this will be (most likely) the primary subject area of the article.

One approach to determining the primary subject area (s) is to read through the article, at first without looking at the coding manual, and summarising, in one sentence, what the article is about. It is likely that this will correspond to one or two subject areas which represent the primary subject area (s).

How to decide whether a subject is secondary or peripheral:

The approach to determine whether a subject is 'secondary' rather than peripheral is, when first reading through the article, to note down all the subjects that are present. If a subject area is mentioned more frequently than once or twice within the article then, generally speaking, this can be considered a secondary subject. If the subject is expanded upon by giving a few lines/paragraph to its discussion then this would almost certainly be considered the main subject.

A subject is considered peripheral if it is mentioned 'in passing' or appears to be present mainly to support a primary or secondary subject area. For example, the subject area 148 (BBC managers/talent earning more than the Prime Minister) would be peripheral if it was mentioned that a certain number of celebrities earned more than the Prime Minister, which was used as evidence towards a wider point that the BBC was too profligate. However, if the article went on to speculate about those celebrities who earned more than the PM or consider a variety of opinions about 'why a TV presenter should earn more than the head of government' then this would become a secondary subject area.

If completely unsure on the status of a particular subject area, the best practice approach should be to make a clear note of this and then come back to it later in the process (perhaps when there is other instances of a similar occurrence) and aim to make a more decisive judgement.

### **Persons quoted**

If a person or organisation's opinion is included in quotation marks then they are quoted in the article.

### **Persons present**

If the opinion of a person or an organisation is included within indirect speech then this person/organisation should be marked as present within the article (the logic being that it's someone's opinion, but is just not present in quotation marks, so is relevant to seeing whether that person is 'given a voice' within the article).

For example, David Cameron is present in the article if it reads ‘David Cameron was outraged at the suggestion’ rather than ‘David Cameron said ‘I am outraged.’” If an article is simply expressing an opinion on a particular organisation (e.g. ‘the BBC trust should have considered the implications of their actions’) that does not mean that the BBC Trust is present within the article. This is because it is someone talking about the Trust, the Trust is not given a voice.

A list of possible persons who could be present within the article are listed within the coding manual and each given a numerical value (e.g. John Whittingdale, Jeremy Hunt). Some categories are specific but some are more general, e.g. ‘Labour MPs’. This is because it was unnecessary to create a separate number for every single person who was a Labour MP when the analysed events took place. However, some individual MPs who may have been more outspoken on the BBC or licence fee have been given their own number because they were frequently identified in newspaper reporting.

There is some crossover with certain personnel a) because the timing of the different events means that an individual’s position had changed and b) because across the events analysed (encompassing nearly 6 years) people have sometimes held multiple positions where they are likely to contribute to the debate on the BBC. For example, John Whittingdale was the Chair of the DCMS select committee from 2005 and then was made DCMS Secretary in May 2015.

## **Tone**

Tone towards the BBC and the licence fee is recorded nominally, with 1 representing extremely anti licence fee and 9 representing extremely pro licence fee. Rather than just assign positive, negative or neutral to the articles, it was decided during the pilot study that assigning articles a number for tone on a scale of 1 to 9 would help capture subtle variances in tone between the articles. For example, while articles assigned 7 or 8 are both supportive articles, it was necessary to account for the differences between an article which was almost wholly supportive (8) and an article which was more generally supportive (7) of the BBC or licence fee.

To try and make coding decisions consistently as possible, the following should be considered by the researcher:

1. Extremely Anti BBC/licence fee – nothing in defence of the Corporation, all attack/ A piece completely attacking the licence fee with nothing in its defence.
2. Very Anti BBC/licence fee – mainly attacking the Corporation/ mainly attacking the licence fee, perhaps heavily pushing forward licence fee alternatives.
3. Anti BBC/licence fee – a general anti BBC sentiment within the article/A general anti licence fee sentiment within the article. For example, citing poll evidence which says support for the licence fee is waning but not citing evidence to the contrary.

4. Mildly anti BBC/licence fee – has pros and cons but the balance is tipped in favour of BBC criticism/ licence fee criticism
5. Neutral – this presents pro and anti BBC/licence fee arguments relatively evenly or doesn't express an opinion either way on the BBC/licence fee
6. Mildly pro BBC/licence fee – balance is tipped in favour of BBC positivity/ there may be cons of the licence fee suggested but the article is generally positive towards the licence fee
7. Pro BBC/licence fee - A generally positive story about the BBC/licence fee in the article, perhaps criticising the alternatives to the BBC/licence fee (e.g. advertising).
8. Very pro BBC/licence fee - mainly supportive of the Corporation/ An almost wholly positive story about the licence fee – perhaps explicitly linking the licence fee with high quality programming or creating a shared sense of national identity.
9. Extremely pro BBC/licence fee – all in praise of the corporation/ An article completely supportive of the licence fee with nothing criticising the system of funding.

General coding considerations:

- The use of the 'extreme' codes: The most extreme codes (1 or 9) should only be used when there is blanket opinion for or against the BBC or licence fee. Even a quote in support of the licence fee in an otherwise negative article, would mean that a 2 (very anti licence fee) would need to be assigned instead of a 1 (extremely anti licence fee).
- The use of 5 (neutral): If an article does not express an opinion on the licence fee, or only including it as a subject in passing (e.g. a reference to 'the licence fee will rise with inflation') then this should be considered neutral towards the licence fee. If an article is considered to be purely descriptive about the BBC or the licence fee/ or the issues raised do not offer a clear opinion either pro or anti (because of equal attention given to both sides) then this should also be considered neutral.
- The event (s) which the article is reporting on should be considered as whole. Is a particular aspect of the event used to dominate the rest of the article? Are any aspects of the event omitted?
- Who is quoted within the article? Is a quote expressing a particular opinion balanced out with the opposite opinion? Are assertions made against a particular organisation defended?
- It may be that particular subject areas in the article influence the tone indicator of the article – for example if secondary subject areas include that the BBC is unique on the world stage and its news output is respected around the world, this could indicate some positivity towards the BBC. However, this is only a guide and a certain combination of subjects should not automatically be considered to correspond with one particular tone.



Considerations specific to licence fee, when deciding on tone:

- Does the article question the existence of the licence fee or take for granted that the licence fee is the way the BBC should be funded?
- Is a different funding model mentioned? If so how is this portrayed? (Holding up subscription as a panacea would suggest a more negative perception of the licence fee, for example).
- Are polls/surveys/statistics about public attitudes towards the licence fee mentioned? Are these being used to advance a positive or negative perception of the system of funding?
- If several different points about the licence fee are made, what order do they come in/which is given the most prominence/is this reflected in the title in any way?

Considerations specific to the BBC, when deciding on tone:

- Does the article suggest that the BBC's future is questionable? Is this supported with evidence?
- Is the article concerned with the BBC's independence and if so how is it discussed?
- How does the article approach the topic of the BBC's size/impact on the media market?
- Has bias been mentioned? Is the BBC given a space to respond to accusations of bias?
- Is BBC programming mentioned and in what light is this considered? Are programming success stories prioritised?

### **Extent to which the article is licence fee relevant/BBC relevant**

Within the corpus of articles, there will be articles which mention the BBC, the licence fee or both 'in passing' or as part of a wider number of issues. The researcher should record whether the article is BBC or licence fee relevant with a simple yes or no answer represented as 0 or 1 on the coding sheet.

The following questions should be asked of each article to determine licence fee relevance:

- Is the article mainly about the way in which the BBC is funded or is it mainly concerned with another issue like scandal or governance? (The number of subject areas which appear under funding could be a way to try and determine this).
- Is the article surrounding who should or should not pay the licence fee? And does it consider how the level of the licence fee determines the BBC's ability to produce quality output, programming etc.?
- Is the licence fee used at the beginning of the article as a platform for further opinion about the BBC?
- Is there an opinion expressed about the licence fee within the article? (whether positive or negative)

- In the letters pages, what is the title of the letter and what is the first letter of the pile concerned with? Does this express a strong opinion towards the licence fee?

The following questions should be asked to determine BBC-relevance:

- Is the title of the article about the BBC?
- What is the focus of the piece? In a larger article, is the BBC relevant issue swamped by other information?
- Within an opinion piece, does the author express their thoughts on a number of issues, with the BBC being just one?

### Coding sheet

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Result</u>
Article Number	
Article Title	
Newspaper	
Date	
Author	
Page	
Type	
Article length	
Subject area (s): Primary	
Subject area (s): Secondary	
Subject area(s): Peripheral	
Person(s) quoted directly	
Person(s) present	
Tone towards the licence fee	
Tone towards the BBC	
BBC relevant	
Licence fee relevant	

## Coding Manual

### Subjects

Subjects used within analysis are grouped into nine broad areas outlined below.

#### FUNDING

This would cover attitudes to the licence fee, other sources of funding the BBC (commercial arm) and alternatives suggested. For example, an opinion piece advocating replacing the licence fee subscription based funding, would have 'alternatives to funding: subscription' within its primary code.

*Secondary codes numbered 1-53 for funding*

1. Too much funding given to the BBC
2. Not enough funding given to the BBC
3. Licence fee increases: positive
4. Licence fee freeze: justified due to austerity
5. Licence fee freeze: unjustified
6. Call for the licence fee to be abolished
7. Call for the licence fee to remain
8. Licence fee evasion should be decriminalised/fair to decriminalise the licence fee
9. Licence fee evasion should not be decriminalised
10. Licence fee collection as a form of surveillance
11. Licence fee value for money
12. Licence fee poor value for money
13. Principle of the licence fee should remain
14. Licence fee should be made voluntary
15. Universality of the licence fee: effective
16. Comparison between psb funding in other countries and the BBC
17. Alternative to licence fee: subscription
18. Alternative to licence fee: advertising
19. Alternative to licence fee: general taxation
20. Alternatives to licence fee: broadcasting levy/household levy
21. Licence fee difficult to justify
22. Extra funding responsibilities (e.g. World Service, S4C) – will be problematic for BBC
23. Extra funding responsibilities – necessary for BBC
24. Description of extra BBC funding responsibilities
25. Licence fee history
26. Licence fee means BBC competes for viewers, not revenue
27. Licence fee will not survive in the long term
28. Licence fee will survive in the long term
29. Description of BBC commercial activities
30. BBC should not increase its commercial ventures
31. Celebrities defending the licence fee

32. BBC taking on welfare responsibilities (for example: Free licence fee for over 75s)
33. Rationale for BBC taking on welfare responsibilities
34. Negative impact of BBC taking on welfare responsibilities
35. BBC should receive funding from government departments (such as the foreign office)
36. BBC should not receive funding from government departments
37. BBC has too little money to provide something for everyone due to funding cuts
38. Range of channels/output offered by BBC declining due to funding cuts
39. Licence fee as a funding mechanism means the BBC is under too much scrutiny
40. BBC should be funded like commercial channels
41. BBC are making an effort to save money
42. BBC too quick to agree to funding cuts
43. BBC correct to agree to funding cuts for future security
44. Licence fee old fashioned
45. Licence fee denies the viewer of choice
46. Licence fee freeze: effectively a funding cut
47. BBC will survive despite financial changes
48. BBC's income is small compared with commercial broadcasters
49. Call for the licence fee to be reduced
50. Comparison between how other sections of the UK media are funded and the BBC
51. Licence fee encourages the BBC to do too much
52. Licence fee funding hinders other forms of media (e.g. local newspapers)
53. Licence fee is regressive

### **PROGRAMMING**

This should include debates about the programmes the BBC shows, whether they are popular, unpopular, fulfilling the BBC's remit, out of touch with the public. There is likely to be overlapping with funding and market impact here, however, it was felt there should be a separate category for programming in order to encompass subtleties in the arguments about the BBC and quality in programming (high quality programming may be referenced to support the licence fee, poorer quality to suggest abolition) and speculation around programming schedules in the green and white paper.

*Secondary codes numbered 54-92 for programming*

54. BBC programming is popular
55. BBC programming is not popular
56. BBC programming is good quality
57. BBC programming is not good quality
58. Standards of BBC programming have declined
59. Standards in BBC programming have improved

60. Extra government money for particular programming – positive
61. Poor decision making in programme production – general
62. Poor decision making in programme scheduling
63. Competing with commercial channels in programme scheduling – criticism
64. Competing with commercial channels in programme scheduling – defence
65. Criticism of cuts to a particular program (radio or TV)
66. Defence of cutting a particular program
67. Praise for an individual BBC programme or output
68. Criticism of an individual BBC programme (for example, the Voice)
69. Praise for BBC coverage of a particular event (e.g. the Olympics)
70. Criticism of BBC coverage of an event
71. Too much repeat programming on BBC channels
72. BBC programming creates a sense of shared national identity
73. BBC programming helping the UK's 'soft power'
74. Cuts to BBC's international programming offer (e.g. World Service): negative
75. BBC produces distinctive programming
76. BBC programmes should have popular appeal
77. BBC programmes should have niche appeal
78. BBC should only show distinctive programmes
79. BBC should provide more language programming
80. BBC should provide more children's programming
81. Prevention of particular programming output (e.g. Panorama)
82. BBC programming content is bland
83. Funding cuts could damage programming
84. Funding cuts will not damage programming
85. BBC losing the right to broadcast particular programming (such as sports)
86. Funding cuts mean it struggles to make quality programmes
87. Funding should prioritise distinctive programming
88. Too much non British programming purchased with licence fee money
89. BBC programming should be more widely available
90. BBC needs to produce more programming to for a particular section of the UK (e.g. the regions)
91. BBC too cautious in its programming
92. Defence of a particular programme

## **CONDUCT**

This would include issues such as executive pay, celebrity pay (headlines such as 'BBC hid salaries of its highest paid stars'), transparency of the BBC and management structures. The articles about the BBC spending too much on their outgoings would be likely to have conduct as their primary code. For example, an article in *The Sun* on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2015 with the headline 'BBC HQ's a waste of space; £47k on room hire.'

*Secondary codes numbered 93-138 for conduct*

93. BBC lacking in transparency
94. Attempts for more transparency
95. Executive pay: too high

96. Executive pay or redundancy payment: unjustified
97. Justification for expenditure on executive pay
98. Defence of levels of talent pay
99. Lacking transparency on executive/talent pay
100. Calls for more transparency over pay
101. Executive/talent pay unjustified because of the licence fee
102. Lacking transparency over expenses
103. Attempts for more transparency over expenses
104. BBC spending too much on running costs (e.g. taxis, tea and coffee)
105. Defence of spend on running costs
106. BBC too profligate: general
107. BBC accused of hypocrisy
108. Pay of talent (e.g. Graham Norton) too high
109. Pay of talent earning over a certain amount should be revealed
110. Talent pay should not be revealed
111. Jimmy Savile and/or Lord MacAlpine scandals
112. Scandal: unspecified
113. BBC responding effectively to complaints
114. BBC mismanagement of complaints
115. BBC acting 'as though it's above the law'
116. Accusations of bullying at the Corporation
117. Job cuts: unnecessary
118. Job cuts: necessary
119. BBC sending too many staff to particular events (e.g. Glastonbury)
120. BBC managers/talent earning more than the Prime Minister
121. BBC deception (e.g. asking celebrities to sign a letter in its favour)
122. BBC apologising for misconduct
123. BBC content 'propaganda' to justify its own existence
124. Lacks diversity in personnel (e.g. lack of female programme hosts)
125. BBC attempts to improve diversity
126. BBC making cuts in the wrong places
127. BBC making cuts in the right places
128. Ageism towards female presenters/female presenters paid less
129. BBC out of touch with reality
130. BBC scandals are self-inflicted
131. BBC spending too much on expenses
132. Corporation cutting costs
133. Kelly Affair: mishandled by the BBC
134. Sachsgate: fault of the BBC
135. Sachsgate: defence of the BBC
136. Too many senior managers at the BBC
137. Debate about the BBC's future becoming hysterical
138. BBC good at managing its finances

## **BIAS**

Articles would be coded here if they assert that the BBC has bias towards any particular point of view or discussing the BBC's impartiality.

An example of an article stating the BBC was biased would be describing the situation working for the BBC as 'The aching political correctness, an atmosphere in which the Tories were held as antediluvian, Eurosceptics as maniacal xenophobes, people who oppose untrammelled immigration as racists' (Rod Liddle, *The Sunday Times*, 12<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p.2)

*Secondary codes numbered 139 to 186 for bias*

- 139. Assertion of bias: unspecified
- 140. Left wing
- 141. Right wing
- 142. London-centric/ metropolitan
- 143. Middle class
- 144. Oxbridge-educated workforce
- 145. Liberal
- 146. Establishment orientated
- 147. Anti-Monarchy
- 148. Pro Labour Party: general
- 149. Pro Labour Party during the 2015 general election
- 150. Pro Conservative Party: general
- 151. Anti Jeremy Corbyn
- 152. Anti-Conservative Party: general
- 153. Anti-Conservative Party during the 2015 general election
- 154. Anti-Scottish National Party
- 155. Against Scottish independence during the Independence referendum
- 156. Biased conduct during televised general election debates
- 157. Disrespectful to politicians
- 158. Failing to represent minority communities
- 159. Over representation of minorities
- 160. Over-sympathetic to immigration
- 161. Over-sympathetic to Europe (general)
- 162. Failure to represent popular opinion on EU/Europe
- 163. Misrepresenting climate change
- 164. Biased against a particular politician – news
- 165. Biased against a politician in programming
- 166. Unbalanced reporting on a particular politician or celebrity
- 167. Coverage of the Middle East: against Israel
- 168. Bias against commercial media (e.g. newspapers, Sky)
- 169. Against Christianity
- 170. BBC not impartial: general claim
- 171. Defence of the BBC's impartiality
- 172. Difficulty of achieving impartiality
- 173. BBC too 'politically correct'
- 174. BBC promoting drug use



- 175. Incorrect use of the name 'Islamic state' by the BBC
- 176. Accusations of bias appear from both the right and left
- 177. Political Editors (e.g. Laura Kunnesberg) not upholding impartiality
- 178. Too much bias in programming – licence fee should be abolished
- 179. Licence fee makes the BBC too concerned with bias
- 180. Defence of bias accusations
- 181. BBC reporting of austerity – biased against government
- 182. Biased during a General Election – general claim
- 183. Elitist
- 184. Won't be impartial during EU referendum coverage
- 185. Anti Unionist (Northern Ireland)
- 186. Praise of the BBC's EU referendum coverage

### **MARKET IMPACT**

This area encompasses the effect of the BBC on the commercial media landscape and arguments about whether the BBC is (or should strive to be) 'distinctive'.

*Secondary codes numbered 187 to 242 for market impact.*

- 187. Size of the BBC: too big
- 188. Size of the BBC: adequate
- 189. BBC's share of the UK media market has reduced
- 190. Description of growth in BBC services
- 191. Description of BBC's position within the market
- 192. BBC should only operate in areas not supplied by the market
- 193. BBC should not only operate in areas already served by the market
- 194. BBC should be able to deliver in areas also served by the market
- 195. BBC undertaking activity outside its remit
- 196. BBC hindering other media outlets
- 197. BBC stops new commercial ventures entering the market
- 198. BBC not hindering other media outlets
- 199. Services from BBC overlapping audiences
- 200. BBC raising overall broadcasting standards
- 201. BBC stifling market: TV
- 202. BBC stifling market: Radio
- 203. BBC stifling market: news
- 204. BBC stifling market: local newspapers
- 205. BBC stifling newspaper/news market: general
- 206. BBC not to blame for decline in newspaper market
- 207. Newspapers attacking BBC for impacting too much on news market
- 208. Quotas for BBC production requirements: positive
- 209. Quotas for BBC production requirements: negative
- 210. More BBC programmes should be made by independent producers
- 211. BBC output is good quality compared with other broadcasters
- 212. BBC output is too similar compared with that of other broadcasters
- 213. BBC output is good quality because of how it is funded
- 214. BBC expansion of services: positive
- 215. BBC expansion of services: unjustified within the market

- 216. BBC services should be reduced
- 217. BBC services should not be reduced
- 218. BBC services should be repositioned
- 219. BBC services should remain the same
- 220. Future as BBC becoming a monopoly in public service broadcasting
- 221. BBC doesn't have a future within UK broadcasting ecology
- 222. BBC's future dependent on distinctive output
- 223. BBC online presence fulfils the BBC's remit
- 224. Online presence: should be cut back
- 225. Other broadcasters performing as well as BBC without the licence fee
- 226. Top slicing licence fee to share with other broadcasters: description
- 227. Top slicing: negative
- 228. More innovation needed within the BBC
- 229. BBC too concerned with ratings, not remit
- 230. BBC delivers public value
- 231. BBC does not deliver public value
- 232. Online content not distinctive enough from other outlets
- 233. BBC defence of its role within the market
- 234. BBC output should be curtailed due to lack of distinctiveness
- 235. Description: how BBC could change to be different from competitors
- 236. BBC's remit shouldn't be constrained by the market
- 237. Criticism of definitions of distinctiveness
- 238. BBC cross marketing of services
- 239. Proposed reforms to BBC could hinder commercial marketplace
- 240. BBC reforms/funding settlements will benefit the commercial market
- 241. Description of success of commercial/other broadcasters
- 242. Description of failure of commercial/other broadcasters

## **GOVERNANCE**

This area would contain arguments that the BBC has too much management, including articles which concern the personnel governing the BBC, the relationship with the BBC Trust and the BBC's core values. There will be overlap with government relations, however, separating out the categories was necessary to encapsulate the nuances of BBC's relationship with government.

*Secondary codes numbered 243 to 272 for governance*

- 243. Charter length should be extended
- 244. Charter length should be shortened
- 245. BBC Trust: effective
- 246. BBC Trust: ineffective
- 247. BBC Trust: both 'cheerleader and regulator'
- 248. Need for external regulator, not BBC Trust
- 249. BBC Trust should be replaced
- 250. BBC Trust: defence of current structure
- 251. Link between licence payers and the Trust
- 252. Reforms to the systems of governance: unspecified.
- 253. Current governance: failure
- 254. Description of Ofcom's remit
- 255. Ofcom's regulatory powers over the BBC should be extended

- 256. Ofcom's regulatory powers over the BBC should not be extended
- 257. National Audit Office access to BBC accounts: positive
- 258. NAO access to BBC accounts: negative
- 259. Description of BBC values/mission/purpose
- 260. BBC failing to meet core values/mission
- 261. BBC meeting core values/mission
- 262. Governance issues resulting in editorial failings
- 263. Call for the Chair of the Trust to resign
- 264. Defence of the Chair or the Trust
- 265. History of BBC governance
- 266. BBC Trust sidestepped in important decision making
- 267. More oversight of the BBC is needed
- 268. Less oversight of the BBC is needed
- 269. BBC Trust should be replaced with a unitary board
- 270. BBC Trust should safeguard the public interest
- 271. Reforms needed to the Board of Trustees
- 272. Problems with a unitary board

### **GOVERNMENT RELATIONS**

This would cover how the BBC interacts with the government on issues like funding, it's future, any government or politicians' feeling (or perceived feeling) towards the BBC. This also contains opinions about the BBC's independence from government.

*Secondary codes numbered 273 to 310 for government relations*

- 273. Government exerting too much pressure on the BBC
- 274. Government forcing the BBC to make cuts
- 275. Charter length should change due to the political/electoral cycle
- 276. The Corporation independent from government due to the licence fee
- 277. BBC not independent from government: general
- 278. BBC not independent from government due to funding settlement
- 279. Funding settlements increase the BBC's independence
- 280. Government too quick to make decisions on BBC's future
- 281. Government too quick to make decisions on licence fee settlement
- 282. BBC criticism of government actions
- 283. Personal opinion of politicians towards the BBC – negative
- 284. Personal opinion of politicians towards the BBC – positive
- 285. Accusation of government bias against the BBC
- 286. Government allowing rivals to the BBC to dictate the BBC's future
- 287. Government echoing the views of the Murdoch press
- 288. Ministers shouldn't decide future of the BBC
- 289. Government has too much power in appointing BBC management
- 290. Government has a market driven agenda towards the BBC
- 291. Government praise of the BBC
- 292. Government is too sympathetic towards the BBC
- 293. Prime Minister intervening to ensure composition of the board
- 294. Independence of Corporation from government - positive
- 295. Transparency of BBC-government relations
- 296. Transparency of charter review
- 297. Politicians suggesting BBC closure would be positive

- 298. Politicians will be unpopular if they suggest BBC closure
- 299. Government opinion BBC should be cut with other public services
- 300. Government cuts to BBC in line with other public services: effective
- 301. Government cuts in line with other public services: damaging
- 302. Government attitude towards the BBC threatens Corporation's future
- 303. Government reforms threatening BBC independence
- 304. Government requesting the BBC make efficiency savings
- 305. Politicians from all parties support the BBC
- 306. Description of potential reforms to the BBC
- 307. Animosity between the BBC and the government over reform
- 308. Government caving into outside pressure on the BBC
- 309. Personal opinion of politicians towards the BBC – neutral
- 310. Animosity between the BBC and government: general

### **REPUTATION**

This would concern, for example, whether the BBC is viewed as trustworthy, comments that the BBC is the 'envy of the world.'

*Secondary codes numbered 311 to 344 for reputation*

- 311. BBC: trustworthy
- 312. Trust levels declining
- 313. BBC as the 'envy of the world'
- 314. BBC unique on the world stage
- 315. Life without the BBC study
- 316. People 'couldn't live without' the BBC: opinion
- 317. Accountable to audiences
- 318. Amount(s) of time people spend consuming BBC broadcasting/output
- 319. Positive comparison between BBC & other public bodies (e.g. NHS)
- 320. Negative comparison between the BBC and other public bodies
- 321. Polls showing public opinion is against the licence fee
- 322. Polls showing public opinion supports the licence fee
- 323. Public want a reduced licence fee
- 324. Public want a frozen licence fee
- 325. People would pay an increased licence fee
- 326. Audience satisfaction has increased
- 327. Audience satisfaction has decreased
- 328. BBC not representing licence payers' interests
- 329. Particular demographic not consuming BBC services
- 330. Polls showing BBC is no longer value for money
- 331. Public do not want a smaller BBC
- 332. BBC creates a shared sense of national identity
- 333. BBC no longer viewed as unique or special
- 334. Celebrities defending the BBC (general – from cuts to channels etc.)
- 335. Public want the BBC to stay the same
- 336. Scandals damaging the BBC's reputation
- 337. Lack of public consultation on BBC changes
- 338. BBC news output well respected
- 339. Public love the BBC
- 340. Public hate the BBC
- 341. Needs to be more accountable to the licence payer

- 342. Sections of the press are hostile towards the BBC
- 343. Sections of the press defend the BBC
- 344. BBC is an asset to the UK

## TECHNOLOGY

This includes arguments about the impact of new technology upon the BBC, and how its forays into new technology/digital are impacting on the wider market. This will have some overlap with market impact, technology is a separate category to investigate whether new technology is used as an argument against the licence fee/calling for alternative funding systems.

*Secondary codes numbered 345 to 369 for technology*

- 345. Modernise licence fee to cover on demand TV/online services
- 346. Licence fee irrelevant in an age of new technology
- 347. The BBC itself is redundant because of new technology
- 348. The BBC can be reinvented to adapt to a digital age
- 349. BBC needs increased funding to adapt to a digital age
- 350. BBC changes to online or on demand services
- 351. BBC is serving areas already served by the market online
- 352. New technology doesn't negate uniqueness of the BBC
- 353. Online platforms lacking BBC commitment to impartiality
- 354. Closure of the iPlayer loophole is positive for the BBC
- 355. iPlayer service inadequate for viewers
- 356. Closure of the iPlayer loophole negatively impacts on viewers
- 357. Change in viewing habits because of technology: opportunity for BBC
- 358. Change in viewing habits because of technology: hinder the BBC
- 359. iPlayer should be accessed by a form of subscription
- 360. Viewing habits have changed because of new technology
- 361. BBC online presence stifling commercial competitors
- 362. BBC should contribute towards the cost of rural broadband
- 363. BBC should not contribute to the cost of rural broadband
- 364. Description of how consumption of BBC has changed
- 365. Changes in consumption of BBC services means BBC loses revenue
- 366. Changes in consumption of BBC services means revenue increase
- 367. BBC online/ iPlayer is popular
- 368. Rise of new technology threatens the BBC
- 369. BBC should be free to develop new technology

## **Personnel present/quoted in the articles**

Within the articles it is of interest to record both who is present and who is quoted in order to draw conclusions on who are the most frequently occurring persons within newspaper reporting of the BBC licence fee.

The different persons have been into categories according to their position (for example anyone who is in government). This is so that, at the end of the coding exercise it is possible to gauge which areas (for example, political) are most quoted in newspaper coverage of the BBC, which will be helpful in gaining a sense of the discourse (s) present throughout the newspaper coverage of the events.

The categories for personnel are as follows:

### **Government** (numbered 1 to 25)

1. Prime Minister David Cameron
2. Sec of State for DCMS Jeremy Hunt,
3. Sec of State for DCMS John Whittingdale
4. Sec of State for DCMS Sajid Javid
5. Sec of State for DCMS Maria Miller
6. The government
7. Downing Street Source
8. A DCMS source
9. Chancellor George Osborne
10. Treasury Minister
11. Treasury Source
12. Home Secretary Theresa May
13. Minister at DCMS
14. Ed Vaizey, Minister of State DCMS
15. Sec of state for Business, Innovation and Skills
16. Cabinet Minister (unnamed)
17. A Whitehall Source
18. Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg
19. Former Prime Minister Tony Blair
20. Former Prime Minister Gordon Brown
21. Former Sec of State for DCMS
22. Sec of State for Business, Innovation and Skills - Vince Cable
23. Cabinet Office
24. Defence Secretary/a source close to the Defence Secretary
25. Miscellaneous (e.g. a former Ambassador)

### **Political** (numbered 26 to 65)

26. Leader of the Labour Party – Jeremy Corbyn
27. Leader of the Labour Party – Ed Miliband
28. Chair of DCMS Select Committee Jesse Norman

29. Chair of the DCMS Select Committee John Whittingdale
30. Member of the DCMS Select Committee/Select committee as a general body
31. APPG on the BBC
32. Member of APPG on the BBC
33. Labour MP Andy Burnham (former DCMS secretary)
34. Labour MPs
35. Conservative MPs
36. Liberal Democrat MP
37. Don Foster, LD Culture Spokesperson
38. Leader of the Liberal Democrats – Tim Farron
39. Shadow Sec of State for DCMS – Ben Bradshaw
40. Shadow Sec of State for DCMS - Chris Bryant
41. Shadow Sec of State for DCMS - Maria Eagle
42. Conservative MP Nigel Evans
43. Conservative MP Philip Davies
44. First Minister for Scotland
45. Nigel Farage
46. MP - UKIP
47. Jon Nicholson SNP culture spokesperson
48. SNP culture spokesperson/SNP MP
49. MEP
50. House of Commons Public Accounts Select Committee
51. Craig Oliver (No. 10 Director of Communications)
52. House of Lords Communications Committee Member
53. Labour peer
54. Conservative peer
55. Liberal Democrat peer
56. Crossbench peer
57. Speaker of the House of Lords
58. A political source
59. Shadow Chancellor – Alan Johnson
60. Shadow Sec of State for DCMS – Ivan Lewis
61. Labour MP Tom Watson
62. Miscellaneous
63. Conservative MP Andrew Bridgen
64. Leader of the House of Commons
65. MPs: general (party not specified)

**BBC** (numbered 66 to 95)

66. The BBC or 'the Beeb'
67. BBC spokesperson
68. Rona Fairhead - Chair of Trust
69. Michael Lyons - Chair of Trust
70. A BBC source/BBC insiders
71. Director General of the BBC - Tony Hall
72. Director General of the BBC – Mark Thompson
73. BBC journalist: unnamed
74. BBC Trustee/former BBC Trustee
75. Nick Robinson Political Editor
76. Laura Kuenssberg, Political Editor
77. James Purnell, Director of Strategy and Digital
78. Former Chair of the Trust or Board of governors

79. Former Director General – Greg Dyke
80. Former Director General – Mark Byford
81. Controllers of particular channels – (e.g. Danny Cohen)
82. John Simpson, World Affairs Editor
83. Radio station Controller or Director of BBC Radio
84. Director, BBC North, Peter Salmon
85. The BBC Trust
86. Chief Operating Officer of the BBC
87. *Newsnight* political editor Michael Crick
88. Senior BBC executives/BBC executives
89. BBC World Service/Bush House
90. BBC Trust Spokesperson
91. BBC Online spokesperson or Managing Editor
92. James Harding, BBC Director of News
93. Director of Sport
94. BBC Chairman/former BBC Chairman
95. BBC Worldwide

**Commercial and other broadcasters** (numbered 96 to 110)

96. James Murdoch
97. Rupert Murdoch
98. News International Spokesperson (also include News UK)
99. Sky Spokesperson
100. Jeremy Darroch, chief executive of BSkyB
101. BSkyB Spokesperson
102. David Elstein, Chief Executive of Channel 5/Channel 5 representative
103. Channel 4 Spokesperson
104. Independent TV production company spokesperson
105. Chief Executive of private media company
106. Representative/former representative of commercial radio station
107. Peter Bazalgette
108. Miscellaneous commercial/unnamed ‘commercial rivals’ to the BBC
109. News Corp source
110. ITV executive/representative

**‘The public’** (111 to 125)

111. A licence fee payer
112. An individual criminalised for non-payment of the licence fee
113. An individual who refuses to pay the licence fee
114. A viewer of BBC programmes
115. An individual who only watches BBC online (through iPlayer or otherwise)
116. A respondent to a poll about the BBC
117. An individual who has participated in the ‘life without the BBC’ study
118. A fan of the BBC
119. The taxpayer
120. Miscellaneous
121. Someone who’s signed an online petition about the BBC

**Associated government bodies** (125 to 130)



- 126. Arts Council England
- 127. Magistrate and Sentencing Council

**Academics** (131 to 140)

- 131. Steven Barnett, professor of media at the University of Westminster
- 132. Richard Sambrook, Director of the centre for journalism studies at Cardiff University
- 133. Patrick Barwise, professor of management and marketing at London Business School
- 134. Professor Jean Seaton
- 135. Geoffrey Wood, professor of economics at the Cass Business School
- 136. Roger Mosey
- 137. Simon Schama
- 138. Representative from the British Library

**Pressure/campaign Groups** (141 to 150)

- 141. The Freedom Association
- 142. The Taxpayer's Alliance
- 143. TPA Jonathan Isaby
- 144. Save BBC3 campaign
- 145. The Voice of the Listener and Viewer
- 146. Age UK
- 147. National Pensioners Convention

**Think tanks** (151 to 160)

- 151. Enders Analysis – Clare Enders or a representative
- 152. Adam Smith Institute
- 153. Policy Exchange
- 154. Institute of Economic Affairs
- 155. Civitas
- 156. IPPR
- 157. Reform
- 158. IFS
- 159. Oliver & Ohlbaum
- 160. Unnamed 'industry figures'

**Trade unions** (161 to 170)

- 161. Bectu – Assistant General Secretary Gerry Morrisey
- 162. NUJ
- 163. Unite
- 164. GMB
- 165. Prospect Union
- 166. RMT/Bob Crow
- 167. PCS Union/Mark Serwotka
- 168. Unison
- 169. Prison Officers Association
- 170. Unions/Broadcast Unions (general)

**Celebrities/talent** (171 to 200)

- 171. David Attenborough
- 172. Brian Cox
- 173. J.K. Rowling
- 174. Joan Bakewell
- 175. Lord Alan Sugar
- 176. Clare Balding
- 177. Noel Edmonds
- 178. Sir Terry Wogan
- 179. Jeremy Clarkson
- 180. Peter Kosminsky, Wolf Hall director
- 181. Julian Fellowes, Downton Abbey writer
- 182. Gary Lineker
- 183. Graham Norton
- 184. Judi Dench
- 185. Justin Webb, Today Programme Presenter
- 186. John Humphrys, Today Programme Presenter
- 187. Aidan Turner (Poldark)
- 188. Chris Moyles
- 189. Damian Lewis
- 190. Chris Evans
- 191. Gabby Logan
- 192. Frank Skinner
- 193. Miscellaneous
- 194. Bob Geldof
- 195. Daniel Radcliffe
- 196. Steve Coogan
- 197. Olivia Coleman
- 198. Melvyn Bragg
- 199. Armando Iannucci
- 200. Lenny Henry

**Regulators** (201 to 205)

- 201. Ofcom
- 202. Sharon White - Ofcom Chief Exec
- 203. National Audit Office
- 204. TV licencing authority
- 205. Office for Budget Responsibility

**Newspaper columnists/writers/contributors** (206 to 210)

- 206. AA Gill
- 207. Polly Toynbee
- 208. Rod Liddle
- 209. Steve Hewlett
- 210. Miscellaneous

**Judges/legal** (211 to 220)

211. David Perry QC

**Online** (221 to 225)

221. Google

222. Netflix

**Celebrities continued** (226 –240)

- 226. Jonathan Dimbleby
- 227. David Dimbleby
- 228. Claudia Winkleman
- 229. David Walliams
- 230. Daniel Craig
- 231. Stephen Fry
- 232. Frank Cottrell Boyce
- 233. Writers of BBC programmes (e.g. Dr Who)
- 234. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
- 235. Anne Morrison, Bafta chairwoman
- 236. Sue Perkins
- 237. Mark Rylance
- 238. Jeremy Paxman
- 239. Celebrity chefs
- 240. Des Lynam

**Political continued** (241 to 255)

- 241. Plaid Cymru leader, Leanne Wood
- 242. Aung San Suu Kyi
- 243. Margaret Thatcher
- 244. Chair of Public Accounts Select Committee
- 245. Former Deputy PM John Prescott
- 246. Scottish Labour Party Spokesperson
- 247. Ulster Unionist politician
- 248. Grant Shapps, Conservative Party Chairman

**BBC continued** (256 to 270)

256. Controller of BBC Daytime

**Commercial continued** (271 -280)

271. *Guardian* News and Media Group

**Government continued** (281-292)

281. Department for Work and Pensions Source/spokesperson

282. Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

283. Foreign Secretary

284. Foreign Office Source/Spokesperson

285. Cabinet Office Source

286. Home Office Source/Spokesperson

287. Home Secretary Theresa May

288. Scottish Culture Secretary Fiona Hyslop

289. Secretary of State for Wales

**Further celebrities**

293. Judi Murray

294. Andy Murray

## Newspapers

The articles will come from the following national and Sunday newspapers. These are each assigned a number for ease of input for analysis:

### **Newspapers:**

1. The *Guardian*
2. The Times
3. The Telegraph
4. The *Daily Mail*
5. The Express
6. The Sun
7. The Daily Mirror
8. The Daily Star
9. The People
10. The Financial Times
11. The Independent
12. The i

### **Sundays:**

13. The Observer
14. The Sunday Times
15. The Sunday Telegraph
16. The Mail on Sunday
17. The Sunday Star
18. The Sunday Express
19. The Independent on Sunday
20. The Sun on Sunday
21. The News of the World

### **Sections of the newspaper**

1. News
2. Editorial
3. Letters
4. Opinion
5. Features
6. Specialist news (news but in the business or media section for example)
7. Specialist opinion (opinion but in a particular section of the newspaper)

### Intercoder reliability results

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Level of agreement</u>
Newspaper	100%
Page	96.8%
Word count	100%
Author of article	100%
Section of newspaper	95.2%
Subject	85.7%
Persons quoted	93.7%
Persons present	88.9%
Licence fee tone	92.1%
BBC tone	84.1%
Licence fee relevant	85.7%
BBC relevant	96.8%

## **Interview transcript**

The transcript of the interview with Ben Wiseman, Chief Press Officer at the BBC, is available on request, please e-mail [C.J.Owen@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:C.J.Owen@liverpool.ac.uk).