



# Adequate Information Management in Europe

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## The Case of Great Britain

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## 1: NEWS MANAGEMENT

### 1.1: The Media Market

The domestic media market in the UK is becoming ever more competitive (Tunstall & Machin, 1999). In broadcasting, the stable relationship that existed for many years between the BBC, a public corporation funded by a licence fee, and the Independent Television sector, a network of private regional broadcasters funded by advertising revenue, has fragmented, as a consequence of the arrival of satellite and cable companies whose main revenues are derived from subscriptions. Particularly significant is the rise and rise of SKY satellite TV and its multi-channel packages, which is owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation. The terrestrial stations themselves have also recently entered the digital market place, with varying success. The BBC's non-subscription Free View service has so far proved moderately successful, delivering more dedicated programming aimed at niche audiences and subject areas. However, ITV's ventures into pay-view digital TV, launched as OnDigital in 1998, proved disastrous, being re-launched and then winding up as ITV digital in 2002 after incurring unsustainable losses.

The national newspaper market in the UK has always been a crowded one. There are currently nine daily and weekly up-market broadsheet titles and 10 tabloids that are distributed across the UK. This is by far the largest national newspaper press in Europe and has led some to question whether this is sustainable in a market the size of Britain. Long-term decline in readership figures (down 20% since 1990), rising production costs and falling advertising revenues have placed significant financial pressures across the sector, squeezing certain titles to the margins of viability. These pressures are also evident at local and regional levels of the newspaper market and have been exacerbated by the rise of free newspaper titles that are funded entirely by advertising revenue.

This intensifying competition has led to a growing concentration in ownership patterns both within and across media sectors, as smaller outlets are acquired by multi-media corporations whose economies of scale protect them to some degree from market pressures<sup>1</sup>. Those that resist remain highly vulnerable to pricing strategies designed to force them to the wall, adopted by larger competitors with deeper pockets. Successive governments have been sufficiently concerned about

this trend to have introduced regulations designed to inhibit the process. For example, the 1998 Competition Act sought to outlaw 'predatory pricing' in the media sector, while in the last stages of the passage of the 2003 Communications Act campaigners in the House of Lords managed to secure the inclusion of a 'plurality test' in which the new regulatory body, Ofcom, can block media mergers if they are deemed to give one media organisation too great a share of the 'public voice'. The fact that this amendment became widely and unofficially known as 'the Murdoch clause' clearly indicates where the gravest concerns on this matter lie. Whether such controls will be effective, is another matter, as successive government's records in enforcing existing statutory controls in this area has proved consistently unconvincing over the last twenty years.

### 1.2: Partisanship and the press

Concerns about the power and influence of media owners are, of course, nothing new. Back in 1931, the British Prime minister, Stanley Baldwin, lambasted the press barons Lord Rothermere and Lord Beaverbrook for seeking 'power without responsibility', as they threatened to use their papers against his party in their battle to secure free trade in the British empire protected by external tariffs. This is perhaps a slightly atypical example, as Baldwin was then leader of the Conservative party, and one of the traditional observations made of the British political scene is how closely media owners have been willing to ally themselves to the Tory cause. Debates about this matter were particularly evident during the 1980s. As successive Conservative governments pursued a radical assault on the institutions and values of the post-war consensus, Margaret Thatcher cultivated ever closer relations with media moguls like Rupert Murdoch and Conrad Black (who purchased the *Telegraph* newspapers in 1986-7). On many occasions this closeness seemed to descend into a disreputable collusion, where the ardent editorial support of newspapers owned by these international entrepreneurs was rewarded by privileged regulatory treatment for their business acquisitions. Certainly, Rupert Murdoch's towering presence in the British media scene could not have been achieved without Mrs Thatcher's favour. Existing monopoly legislation was interpreted favourably in 1981 to permit his company to purchase the *Times* and *Sunday Times* in 1981 and again in 1987 with his acquisition of the *Today* newspaper. Even more significant was

Mrs Thatcher's agreement in 1990 to allow Murdoch to merge the UK's officially licensed direct-to-home satellite TV service, British Satellite Broadcasting, with his new analogue SKY television service. This decision both transgressed the terms of the new 1990 Broadcasting Act and delivered him an absolute monopoly of satellite-to-home operations in the UK (something he has not managed to achieve in any of his ventures in other national markets around the globe).

On the face of it, things seemed to have changed quite substantially over the more recent period. Immediately after the 1992 election, Neil Kinnock, the Labour leader attributed the Conservative's surprise victory to the dominance and partisanship of the Tory press (Linton, 1992). In 1993 Labour started to draw up proposals that would have led to the break up of large multi-media corporations in the event of its election victory. In 1994, however, the situation changed rapidly. The newly elected party leader, Tony Blair, started a concerted charm offensive aimed at the proprietors of the Tory press, in particular the Murdoch empire, and proposals for restricting media ownership were conveniently and coincidentally jettisoned. This strategy seemed to bear fruit, as in the 1997 election the Sun and News of the World (both Murdoch titles) endorsed New Labour, leading other papers to follow. This trend seemed to be both consolidated and extended in 2001, when Labour commanded 72% of national press support in circulation terms.

However, to describe this as a significant realignment in national press partisanship is to misunderstand and overestimate what has actually occurred. Firstly, the core political values espoused in the editorial columns of these papers remain largely unchanged: i.e. they express views that are antagonistic towards increased public expenditure, progressive taxation, trades unions, and European integration, and they remain staunchly supportive of the free market and its values. The fact that these views can sit alongside an endorsement of Labour reveals more about the shift in the party political landscape than it does about any transition in the core values of these media organisations. Secondly, the nature of press partisanship in party political terms has changed. It has become more conditional and tepid and it no longer displays the visceral savagery so evident in the attacks on the Labour Party opposition in the 1980s and early 1990s. In effect, we have witnessed a dealignment rather than realignment in press opinion, and political parties

can have no future guarantees about how that support will arrange itself (Deacon & Wring, 2002). In this context, politicians remain highly cautious about antagonising media moguls, particularly in the field of media regulation. For whatever the precise relationship between the political stance of a newspaper and that of its owner (and it is important to appreciate that in many cases, editors and senior journalists are permitted considerable autonomy on this matter) media policy is the one area where the political interests of media barons are 'direct and fundamental' (Seymour-Ure, 2003). On a visit to the UK after the 2001 election, Rupert Murdoch deliberately shot across the bows of the government by remarking: 'It would be interesting if a lot of our newspapers weren't so Labour supporting. Then Tony Blair would not have to worry about being seen to be looking after his friends' (*Guardian*, 3. 11.01).

This hyper-competitiveness and the growing market presence of private media corporations that are lightly regulated and appreciably more orientated to profit than public service have generated concerns about their detrimental impact on the range and quality of media content. Complaints have increased about the dumbing down of media standards in the UK, driven by a deepening and excessive ratings consciousness. This trend is claimed to be particularly evident in news and current affairs coverage, where sensationalist and trivial media values that used to be the sole preserve of the most populist media sectors are said to be supplanting serious news values. Editors and journalists are accused of being less concerned with public service concepts and being motivated by the need to give their ever more distracted audiences what they want, rather what they need. However, accusations about 'tabloidisation' and 'infotainment' are easy to make but difficult to prove. Studies on this subject suggest the situation is more complicated than is allowed by any simplistic lament about a uniform decline in media standards and values (e.g. Winston, 2002). Perhaps the most comprehensive appraisal of this topic so far concluded: 'There is no obvious single tendency towards the tabloid that is operating uniformly across all media sectors and is equally present in each submarket' (Sparks & Tulloch, 2000: 14). The editors of this volume also remarked that concerns about dumbing down and tabloidisation seem appreciably more evident in a British context than elsewhere in Europe. For example, debates about the media in Nordic countries are more fixated

with the problem of maintaining diversity in restricted markets than the erosion of serious news values.

If the jury is still out on tabloidisation more generally, there does seem to be compelling evidence that there has been a change in political news reporting over a comparatively recent period. Politicians can have lower expectations about automatically receiving media attention. Gallery reporting of Parliament, for example, has reduced significantly over the last decade and many of the traditional flagship current affairs programmes have become sidelined in the broadcast schedules (Barnett & Seymour, 1999). Politicians now have to compete for a share of the news cake, which requires a privileging of media values over political values. In political reporting itself, there has been a shift from more descriptive 'issue based' reporting to 'strategic coverage' in which journalists are less concerned with channelling information and more interested in uncovering the process of politics and the strategies and motivations of the interested parties involved. A component of this process has been a growing reflection among journalists about their role in the conduct of political business and about the ways in which political parties seek to influence the media agenda. Although this trend is evident across many political systems, it seems particularly advanced in the UK. A recent study comparing the extent of this kind of 'metacoverage' in election reporting in the UK and Germany found appreciably higher levels of coverage in the UK (Esser/Reinemann & Fan, 2000). The authors' explanation for the difference only fleetingly addressed matters concerning the internal politics and economics of media systems. Far more significant, in their judgement, is the broader political context in which journalists pursue their craft. It is to this matter we now turn.

### **1.3 News Management and UK Political Communication: The promotion of politics**

In recent years political parties have widely adopted professional marketing strategies in the communication of their messages and the management of their affairs. The reasons for this change are complex, linked to declining party loyalties, the emergence of a more volatile electorate, supposedly more responsive to political communication and major changes in the media environment (in addition to those already mentioned, the proliferation of new media forms and the establishment of a global, 24 hour news cycle). In-

ter-party competition has also had a significant ratchet effect in the UK. The Conservative Party's election campaign of 1979 recruited top advertising and PR consultants to help shape a campaign strongly orientated towards the production demands and visual predilections of the media, in particular television. It took the Labour Party several years to respond in kind, but at the core of the 'new realism' advanced by Neil Kinnock and his modernisers from the mid 1980s onwards was the need to develop a more strategic approach to communication issues. As a result, campaign expenditure increased exponentially over the next decade. According to the Neill Committee on Standards in Public Life, national campaign spending by the two main parties grew from an average of £5 million in 1983 to £27 million in 1997.

As expenditure spiralled and the influence of publicity consultants extended, new trends became apparent in UK electioneering. Campaigning became more centralised, even presidentialised, and assiduous attention was given to the marketing of politicians' personalities as well as their policies. The importance of personal image has also increased, as the political gulf between the main political parties has narrowed. Politicians were tutored in how to dress and how to deport themselves publicly, to the point where personal image and political substance became increasingly hard to separate. Political image-makers sought to emphasise the biographies of key political figures as a means of demonstrating the depth and integrity of their political values. Margaret Thatcher was constantly advised to talk of her childhood as a grocer's daughter to show that 'she had not forgotten what it was like to look up the class mountain' (Rosenbaum, 1997: 194). Neil Kinnock spoke in the 1987 election of being the first Kinnock 'in a thousand generations' to attend university. In the contest for the Tory leadership in 1990 John Major made great play of his humble roots and itinerant childhood as the son of a trapeze artist, which led the political columnist Andrew Rawnsley to lampoon him as the only person ever to have run away from a circus to become an accountant.

In this ever more image-reliant, professionalised political culture, advertising and media management have become core strategic activities. With the former, political presence can be bought; with the latter, it has to be won. In the United States, political advertising has gained enormous significance, becoming 'the pre-eminent form of political oratory' (McNair, 1995: 83), but

there are several factors that have constrained its significance in the UK. Political parties have always been prohibited from buying advertising space in broadcast media, having to rely instead on fixed time allocated on a strict quota system. Even though there is some uncertainty about the future of these Party Election Broadcasts (commonly ignored by audiences, they are generally despised as a ratings killer by broadcasters and seen as an ineffective means for communicating with voters by the parties), the recent Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 explicitly ruled out an ending of the broadcast advertising ban. In fact, this Act does more than maintain the status quo, as it is explicitly intended to defuse the spiralling 'arms race' in national campaign expenditure identified by the Neill Committee in 1998. New expenses ceilings have been imposed on national campaigning, alongside the long-standing spending caps imposed on party campaigning at local constituency level.

These restrictions on party-controlled communication have meant that political parties in the UK have always placed great emphasis on mainstream media relations when developing their communication strategies. (This remains the case, despite the radical opportunities supposedly offered by 'new media' forms. Current evidence suggests that these technologies are supplementing rather than supplanting established channels of political communication.) Winning prominent and favourable editorial coverage has the twin benefits of being highly cost effective (the distribution costs being incurred by the mediators) as well as conferring additional status on the messages conveyed (getting others to say things on your behalf can have a significant halo effect). However, there are associated risks, in particular regarding the loss of control that can occur as to what issues are covered, whether they are covered and how they are framed.

#### 1.4: 'Spin'<sup>2</sup> and the media agenda

Over the last 25 years in the UK, politicians' desire to secure and control the mainstream media agenda has built to something of an obsession. The key political media in the UK are the national news organisations, which are all based around London. This situation seems likely to continue despite recent constitutional reforms that have led to the creation of the Scottish Parliament and Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies. This is not to say that local and regional media

are without political significance, rather that their role has become ever more supplemental as parties have developed increasingly centralised and presidentialised campaigning strategies.

Three points about the intensification and professionalisation of media management in the political realm in the UK are relevant. Firstly, 'spin' seems to have become its own justification. Mrs Thatcher may have deserved her characterisation as 'the mistress of the pre-planned carefully packaged appearance' (Cockerell/Hennessy & Walker 1984: 191) but there was always a sense that her political projection was ultimately subordinated to a clear political project. For example, her administration in the late 1980s expended considerable amounts of money and energy in attempting to sell the controversial and ill-fated 'poll tax' to a hostile media and public, but these promotional activities were only seriously addressed once an inflexible decision had been made to proceed with the reform (Deacon & Golding, 1994). Such a 'top down' approach would be inconceivable for the current Blair government where presentational considerations are now integral to policy formulation rather than relegated to the later stages of policy implementation. The last few years have seen the triumph of 'confection politics' over 'conviction politics' where appearance and public perception seem to matter more than substance and political vision.

Secondly, and ironically, the constant search for a 'good press' in the short term has soured relations between journalists and politicians in the longer term (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995). Until the 1970s, a state of competitive equilibrium was evident in political reporting in the UK: journalists were more willing to defer to the political values of their sources in their reporting, while journalists and politicians were jointly motivated to manage and restrict conflict when it occurred. Regardless of whether such cooperative cohabitation was a good or bad thing, it has been obliterated by recent events. Relations between British journalists and politicians are now coloured by suspicion and mutual recrimination. This was summed up in a recent newspaper article written by Steve Richards, a former BBC political correspondent, which described attitudes of journalists working at the BBC that can be found more widely. As he put it, 'Parts of the corporation choose to work on the assumption that politicians and their advisers, especially spin-doctors, are up to no good. That is their starting point, the prism through which

they view politics... How can we be biased if we treat them all like bastards?' (*The Independent on Sunday*, 29.6.03, p.23)

Thirdly, although journalists are ready to cast themselves as the victims of an abusive 'spin' culture, they have played an important part in the acceleration of this process. The current Labour government's obsession with media management and presentation derives directly from the savage treatment meted out to the party by sections of the British media throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Spin is therefore the product as well as progenitor of journalistic disdain. The recent resignation of Alistair Campbell as the government's communications chief may have been used as an opportunity to signal its intention to move away from 'government by spin', but any claims that we are now entering a new post-spin period are surely premature. Fights are only stopped by defeats or truces, and there are few signs that the more hostile sections of the media are willing to become less combative as an equivalent and reciprocal act.

### 1.5 News management beyond politics

News management, understood as the attempt by news sources to influence or control the character and extent of media coverage of their activities, has been closely associated most of all with the political sphere. It is widely regarded as a feature of recent UK governments, not least the 'new Labour' regimes of Tony Blair. In recent years this has fostered a rapid growth in communications activity, so that by 1990 the government had become the second biggest advertiser in the country (see Golding, 1990: 95). Between 1986 and 1992 government advertising increased in real terms by 16% having more or less doubled in the previous decade (Deacon & Golding, 1994: 6). Allocations to the Government Information and Communication Service and its predecessors rose from £607,000 in 1996-97 to over £4 million in 2002-03 (*Hansard* Jan. 14<sup>th</sup> 2004 Col. 767W). Growing public unease about this growth, and not least the reputation of the 'new Labour' government for using spin, especially as formulated by Mr. Blair's close associate and director of communications, Alastair Campbell, prompted an inquiry under an experienced broadcasting executive (Phillis, 2004). The report recommended the abolition of the GICS and started with the stark assertion of 'The three-way breakdown in trust between gov-

ernment and politicians, the media and the general public.' (ibid, 2).

News management is not, then, in this usage, the organisational control of news production within organisations, but a process arising from the relation between news sources and journalism. Manning has pointed to the inevitable limits of, especially, political news management and 'spin doctors', which is 'constrained by the porosity of the political structures within which they work' (Manning, 2001: 116). To review all evidence of this process would require a review of all news production studies and memoirs in recent times, a mammoth task. Nonetheless it is worth noting the attention to news management in four forms of literature. The first is in the work of news sources – pressure groups, interest groups, and others, for whom publicity and news coverage are a central organisation goal. The increasing efforts in this direction within the voluntary sector are an example of such news management strategies (e.g. Deacon & Monk, 2002; Deacon/ Fenton & Walker, 1995). Secondly, news management is to be found in the detailed analysis of particular events or periods. A notable example is the case of the 'poll tax', the local government tax initiative which did much to bring down Mrs. Thatcher when her attempt to impose it failed. The news management of this project and the natural history of its promotion are detailed in Deacon & Golding (1994).

The third area of research in which news management may be seen displayed is in the analysis of newsroom and journalism practice. Tunstall's seminal early work (1971) shows how specialist correspondents build up close working relationships with their sources, and indeed with each other ('competitor-colleagues') which play a large part in the nature and output of their work. Golding and Elliott (1979), in a comparative study, demonstrate the accommodation to external information input made by busy and stretched television newsrooms. In various news studies since, this pattern has reappeared. Such studies are not plentiful – the continuing suspicions and prickly relationship between academic research and senior journalists has ensured this. But in many studies (including, for example, Chibnall (1977) on crime journalists, Schlesinger (1978) on the BBC newsroom, Anderson (1993) on environmental pressure groups, Golding and Middleton (1982) on welfare news, Tracey (1978) on television news and current affairs) it has been readily apparent that journalists are the recipients of a grow-

ing volume of increasingly diverse and sophisticated information, tailored to 'manage' the news agenda.

Finally, and somewhat scarce, are studies of news sources located within the corporate world. Davis (2002) suggests that 'the arguments and ideas of corporate elites have gained privileged access to the mass media in a way that reflects their privileged access to the state' (ibid. 176) but is careful to point to the complexity and inconsistencies behind this apparently simple observation. This topic is not new (see Newman, 1984) but has been far less frequently explored than the role of news management in relation to trade unions (Manning, 1998) or voluntary and charitable organisations.

## Section 2: Journalism Culture

In this section we review the culture of journalism in the UK in its historical and organisational context. By journalistic culture we understand it to be the views, values, beliefs, and working conventions that underpin the practice of journalism in the UK, in particular those that may mark it as distinctive in the wider European context. Journalism has a long history in the UK, and that longevity has much to do with the particularities of UK practice. Among the many distinctive (though not unique) characters of journalistic culture in the UK are:

- A focus on national, London based media
- A sharp distinction between reporting of 'facts' and 'comment',
- Emphasis on craft and pragmatism rather than theory or abstract training.
- An early emancipation from party political control

Another distinctive feature of UK journalism is its relative imperviousness to academic inquiry. The deeply rooted suspicion of all things 'intellectual' and the wide divide between craft occupations and university training have made UK media largely hesitant, or openly hostile, to research. While there have been distinguished empirical investigations in the past (Tunstall, 1971 is a notable example), the difficulties in publishing the major investigation of the BBC by industrial sociologist Tom Burns (Burns, 1977) are frequently narrated by later researchers (see for example Schlesinger, 1978; Born, 2004) as characteristic of a closed occupational world unimpressed by and largely inhospitable to the gaze of the academic researcher.

## 2.1 What journalism is like in the UK

It has been said that journalism in the UK is 'an invention of the 19<sup>th</sup> century' (Chalaby 1996, p. 304). This was the era when new technology, increased urbanisation, growing literacy and an expanding retail sector converged to create what would become recognisable as the kind of journalism which is published throughout Britain today – a journalism with specific professional characteristics, based on fact, rather than opinion, and laden with the public expectation of being an independent 'Fourth Estate'.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries 'news' was fettered by a whole range of restrictions. The licensing laws of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century ensured support for the Crown in all publications. After the revolution of 1689, political diatribes or speeches formed much of the staple diet of newspapers and were usually written either by printers themselves or by politicians who subsidised the publications. Factional politics took hold and publications were open to be used by every propagandist.

All this changed as the 19<sup>th</sup> century dawned. The libel laws were relaxed, stamp duty – the tax on paper – was abolished, new steam and cylinder press technology allowed larger and faster print runs, and the rapid distribution of newspapers around the country via developing transport systems fuelled an increasingly urbanised and literate population's interest in information. By 1851, two thirds of men and half of all women could read (Asquith 1978, p. 102). The retail sector was growing and the amount of advertising in newspapers began to grow. The 'penny paper' was born, bringing newspapers within the financial reach of ordinary people and making the provincial press strong. New economic laws enabled newspaper companies to expand and the number of newspapers grew dramatically. Newspapers rapidly became vehicles to sell products, rather than peddle propaganda. Political patronage was no longer needed because advertising had made them self-supporting. They also steered clear of overtly political propaganda to avoid alienating their customers.

By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, journalists had become indispensable, particularly to the London press, stationed at the centre of domestic politics and the British Empire. People were able to earn a living from journalism, transforming it into a full-time occupation, which was becoming increasingly profession-

alised. Reporters, who could use shorthand, were in great demand to cover parliament and public events. Innovations like the telegraph allowed the practice of 'double-checking' information, still a key concept within journalism today (Conboy 2004, p. 125).

The arrival of the news agencies, initially selling financial information to diverse audiences abroad, also helped to dictate an 'opinion-free' style with the emphasis on facts. The observing and reporting of reality accurately were giving the concept of neutrality to journalism. News as a modern day concept was able to take hold because the economic climate enabled it to flourish. What Van Ginneken (1996) called 'the ideology of objectivity' became embedded. The idea of journalism as an independent Fourth Estate was established and has survived to this day, despite the increasingly commercialised aspects of the media since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As the press became more organised as an industry, the fight for readers had a major effect on writing and reporting styles and this so-called 'New Journalism', which evolved at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is still a major characteristic in modern journalism in the UK. The need to attract an audience led to brighter, bolder, crisper writing (Lee 1976, p. 120), larger headlines, extensive use of sub-headings and a demand for stories that would help sell papers. The advertising revolution of the late nineteenth century enabled newspapers to sell at low prices on the basis of largely commercial revenue. With growing urbanisation and levels of literacy gradually a wider readership emerged. The major national popular titles were mostly created around the turn of the century, although a large-scale working class national readership only emerged in the period 1920-1940. No newspaper was exempt from the pressure to win readers. Newspapers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century became big business. Circulation wars became cutthroat in the fight for advertisers and readers, and many papers went to the wall in the 1920s and 1930s, leading to a general concentration of owners. The general circulation trend is still down and competition remains rife.

Thus, the development of the print media established the values of the UK media generally. As Williams put it;

...the duty of journalism in the first half of the nineteenth century...was not to discover truth. The emphasis was on the polemical power of the writer's pen...

By the end of the century technology and commercial need had elevated accuracy and reliability, as well as the ability to meet the daily news deadlines, to the heart of the (true) profession of journalism (Williams 1998 pp.54-55).

The print monopoly was broken with the introduction of national radio in the 1920s. Britain was the birthplace of public service broadcasting. The BBC was set up as a public company, free from commercial or direct political interference and funded by a licence fee on consumers. The expansion of broadcast organisations with the launch of BBC television in the 1930s, commercial television in the 1950s, local BBC radio in the late 1960s, local commercial radio in the 1970s, national commercial radio in the 1990s and subsequently web-based publications and digital, interactive media more recently, have further fuelled competition.

The plethora of journalistic outlets in a competitive multi-media world has led to changing working practices, a jockeying for position of all media and, despite a continued public service ethos in broadcast news, and free-to-air services in an increasingly free-market cultural environment.

However, at the heart of journalistic practice in the UK is still the notion that 'comment is free but facts are sacred' (C.P. Scott, Editor, Manchester Guardian 1871 – 1929, writing in an editorial in the paper May 6<sup>th</sup>. 1926). This famous dictum was later to be satirised by the fortnightly magazine *Private Eye* as 'comment is free but facts are expensive', and the sharp distinction between facts and tendentiousness has been prey to the analytical and quizzical observations of much later research and commentary. Broadcast law in the UK requires journalists to be fair and impartial. Newspapers, although partisan, must still comply with the laws of libel. As audience reach has become more and more crucial, increasingly heavy emphasis has been placed on reflecting the perspective of 'ordinary' people. The human-interest angle is important. Reporters are taught to look for stories that affect people.

## 2.2 The current state of UK media

Today, in the UK, the press is still characterised by a metropolitan focus – almost all its national newspapers are published in London – and its diversity – there are 11 national dailies, and 12 Sunday newspa-



pers. Of these, 11 are tabloids, which focus mainly on light news and entertainment, whereas the so-called quality press is more focused on politics, economics and foreign news. Regional and weekly newspapers, paid-for and free, concentrate almost entirely on local issues. Newspapers are free from political control and funded entirely by cover price and advertising.

Working practices in newspapers and the broadcast media have been changed dramatically both by the opportunities provided by new technology and by the political and industrial climate created by the Thatcher government of the 1980s and unchanged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Rupert Murdoch’s move from Fleet Street to Wapping (that is, from the traditional centre of newspaper production in central London to new, non-unionised locations in a newly developed industrial area of south-east London), effectively broke the power of the unions and paved the way for a more flexible workforce. It also effectively eradicated an entire layer of print workers.

In the broadcast industry, de-regulation since the 1990s has both fragmented the audience and, conversely, concentrated ownership. There are about 15 regional commercial television licenses, though ownership is concentrated; hundreds of commercial radio stations, although the sector is characterised by large-groups; and, this year, the green light was given for a new tier of community radio stations. Television viewers can also access 24-hour news stations such as BBC 24, SKY News and CNN via cable and satellite and web sites complement many, if not most, of the news outlets.

The distinctive character of the UK media; metropolitan, historically rooted in an early emancipation from political party control of the press, thoroughly commercial in structure and organisation, yet with a seminal public service broadcasting institution at its core, is unique. Hallin and Mancini allocate the UK media to the north Atlantic or liberal model in their tri-partite classification (the other two being Mediterranean or polarised pluralist, and north European or democratic corporatist). The UK finds itself in this category alongside the USA, Canada and Ireland. However, it would not be difficult to see important elements of each model within the UK, and the authors acknowledge the awkward fit of the empirical reality to the model, not least in recognising that ‘the common idea of an “anglo-american” model of journalism is in part a myth’ (Hallin & Mancini, 2004:69).

### 2.3 The workforce

Estimates about the number of journalists working in the UK vary but the most comprehensive survey recently was carried out for the Journalism Training Forum by the Sector Skills Council for the Audio-Visual Industry, Skillset, and the National Training organisation for the Publishing Industry (*Journalists at Work*, 2002). It puts the number of journalists in the UK at between 60,000 and 70,000. Almost half the workforce is female (49%). 70% are under 40. 96% are white and 55% work in London and the South East. 98% have a degree and almost all come from middle-or upper-class families.

National Union of Journalists membership is now 36,021. Of these 14,258, 39.6%, are women. The fastest growing sector is provincial newspapers. The breakdown of union membership by sector is shown in the following table.

NUJ MEMBERSHIP ON SEPTEMBER 30 2004

	Men	Women	Total
Books	369	841	1210
Broadcasting	2804	2247	5051
Freelance	4226	2419	6645
Magazines	1653	138	3033
National papers	2385	952	3337
New Media	123	75	198
News agencies	351	143	494
PR	994	753	1747
Provincial papers	363	198	5618
Unknown	10	4	14
Temporary	340	290	630
Life	2706	385	3091
Honour	28	4	32
Unemployed	163	148	311
Suspense	274	392	666
Student	1699	2245	3944
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>21763</b>	<b>14258</b>	<b>36021</b>

Source: NUJ supplied to authors direct.

Union research shows:

- Nearly half of all UK journalists earn less than the national average wage of £26,151.
- Almost three-quarters of journalists earn less than the UK average wage of a professional worker of £35,766.
- Journalists starting rates are at least £7,000 less than the median starting salary for graduates. The

average graduate starting salary is double what trainees in some media companies earn.

- One in five journalists have no pension arrangement
- A higher proportion of female journalists is in the lower earnings categories. 70 per cent of female journalists earn below £30,000 compared to 56 per cent of men.

Journalism as a graduate profession is a very recent phenomenon. One of the most distinctive aspects of UK journalism has always been its craft status. There have never been any formal entry requirements for journalism, and learning 'on-the-job' has traditionally been regarded as the best training. The standard method of entry into journalism was straight from school into local newspapers, with a gradual progression, either to the national press in London or into radio journalism and subsequently television journalism. Formal pre-entry training was only established in the 1960s, and journalism education only moved into universities in the 1970s, in stark contrast to other countries such as the United States where university courses for journalists were established at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The move of journalism training into universities is widely regarded as a result of the mass expansion in higher education in the UK, rather than a desire by the journalism industry for graduate entrants.

Whereas this move by journalism training into higher education has had a massive effect on the demographics of the industry, training methods have remained largely the same. A huge number of non-practical media courses have been developed at universities throughout the UK, leading to confusion among students and employers as to which are the best courses, but practice-based courses are still regarded as essential by the journalism industry. Most (though by no means all) entrants into print, radio or television journalism jobs have received training at vocational courses run mainly within higher education and validated by industry-led bodies such as the National Council for the Training of Journalists and the Broadcast Journalism Training Council. The Journalism Training Forum report in 2002 put the number of journalists holding a journalism qualification at 58%.

## 2.4 Working practices and current issues

The major debates in British journalism today stem from the competitiveness of the industry. De-regu-

lation and technological advances such as convergence, interactivity and the internet, have resulted in a cut-throat fight for market share and thrown up a multitude of questions about skill-needs, journalistic ethics and accountability, and accusations of dumbing-down. Diversity has become a key issue, particularly for public sector broadcasters.

The concept of journalism as a Fourth Estate in the UK remains strong, but is sometimes challenged by everyday reality. Twenty-four hour broadcast news has forced the print media to re-examine their prime function and re-locate themselves in the wider media world. The 'tabloidisation' of the media – that is the perceived decline in serious reporting and analysis in the press, fuelling a similar trend in the broadcast media – is a major concern (McLachlan & Golding, 2000; Conboy, 2004)

Consumer news, relatively cheap to produce, has become prevalent as news organisations follow the market and value, in particular, their female audiences. Style over substance – 'infotainment' – is a constant complaint. Serious investigations, which cost money, have suffered as organisations keep their workforces lean so as to compete more cost effectively.

Surveys consistently show the public having little trust in journalists, although broadcast journalists fare better than print journalists and quality press journalists fare better than tabloid journalists. Much of the criticism has stemmed from invasions of privacy into the lives of celebrities, MPs and the royal family, including Princess Diana, who was perceived to have been hounded to her death by the paparazzi. Despite several warnings that the press was 'drinking at the last-chance saloon', the government has consistently held back from imposing a privacy law, preferring the press to regulate itself.

Newspapers have been criticised for 'stings', where journalists have assumed false identities to trap suspects. Criminal trials have had to be abandoned when papers were accused of paying witnesses and the Press Complaints Commission has issued a new code with tougher restrictions.

Political news is seen as being increasingly affected by 'spin-doctors' and the separation between fact and opinion has become increasingly blurred (Deacon/Golding & Billig 2001). The 2004 Hutton report

into the death of Iraq arms expert David Kelly sent shock waves through the journalist community when it concluded that a BBC reporter's story about government handling of intelligence on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq was flawed, and criticised the public broadcaster's editorial procedures. Allegations of government pressure persisted. The BBC announced internal reviews and the creation of a journalism training college to improve standards. Despite the criticism that the Hutton report was a 'whitewash', it did highlight the difficulties of journalists working at high speed, in an intensely competitive environment and the underlying issues of accountability and responsibility.

Many of the current debates have been exacerbated by the changes in working practices brought about by industry developments. Increasingly journalists are required to be multi-skilled and multi-functional while conversely needing highly specialised skills. Journalism educators are under pressure to deliver fully-rounded professionals who can work instantly, with little or no further training, and who can turn their hand to a variety of different functions. Converging technologies mean that journalists must be able to tailor their news to a number of differing outlets, including mobile phones. Niche markets have created countless different interpretations of what makes news, and how it should be 'packaged'. The BBC is exercised by how it can satisfy its public sector remit by reaching and reflecting all sectors of its audience in a time of increasing consumer choice. However, as news organisations have slimmed down, the drive is for 'cheaper' news, both gathered and produced more cost-effectively, and that can mean an emphasis on processing news rather than originating new stories. Larger conglomerates can share their news output, fuelling fears that the diversity of news on offer is actually limited.

## 2.5: The regulatory framework

There are essentially two regulatory regimes in the UK, although these are in a state of flux. Until the new Communications Act came into effect in late 2003, all UK broadcast media were subject to regulation by a range of statutory bodies. The Broadcasting Standards Commission had industry-wide jurisdiction and issued two Codes of Practice addressing broad matters of programming standards and specific issues con-

cerning privacy and fairness. Additionally, all licensed commercial TV broadcasters (the regional ITV licensed companies, BSkyB, Channel 4 and Channel 5) were regulated by the Independent Television Commission (ITC), which was required to incorporate the 'general effect' of the BSC Codes into its programme codes. The commercial radio sector was supervised in a similar manner by the Radio Authority. The BBC, although accountable to the Broadcasting Standards Council, was permitted a degree of self regulation through the implementation and enforcement of Producer Guidelines by its own Programme Complaints Unit, located within the Corporation's Public Policy Division.

This regulatory framework has been transformed with the passage of the 2003 Communications Act. Its intention is to produce a new statutory framework better geared to dealing with increasingly convergent and complex communications sector and, most importantly, to promote competition within it. This latter objective will be achieved by the adoption of a 'lighter touch' to media regulation, in particular through the relaxation of existing rules restricting the concentration of media ownership. Newspaper groups are no longer barred from purchasing broadcast media, regional Independent Television companies now have greater freedom to arrange mergers with each other, and radio companies are freer to consolidate. The Broadcast Standards Council, the Independent Television Commission and Radio Authority have been combined with the telecommunications and radio communications regulators, OFTEL and the Radio Communications agency, into one super regulator, OFCOM (the Office of Communications). As things currently stand, the BBC is accountable to OFCOM on taste and decency issues, but this situation may change with the renewal of the BBC Charter in 2006. This new regulator is expected, in the words of the sponsoring minister, to deliver 'a new regulatory framework that will be light touch and unobtrusive wherever possible, but decisive and robust wherever necessary' (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, news release, 17.03.03). Only time will tell as to how effectively this body will manage to reconcile the not automatically compatible aims of freeing up the market, maintaining media plurality and standards, and protecting the interests of public. Widespread concerns remain about the impact these changes will have for media variety and standards, despite the government's last minute concession to include a 'plurality test' in the legislation.

Newspapers in the UK have always been self-regulating with regard to their content. However, the possible imposition of some statutory controls in this area has been a recurring matter for political debate for the last twenty or so years. In the mid-1980s two Private Member's Bills were introduced to the Commons on laws on privacy and the right of reply. Both failed due to lack of parliamentary time but they attracted widespread cross-party support. As a result, the government set up a wide-ranging review of the law governing press intrusions headed by David Calcutt QC. The first report of this Privacy Committee was published in June 1990 and recommended that the Press Council, an industry-based body set up in 1953 and widely deemed ineffectual, should be replaced by a statutory tribunal. However, Calcutt accepted that the press should be allowed one last chance to set its own house in order. In response, the industry replaced the press council with the Press Complaints Commission and introduced a new Code of Conduct, which set out standards for all newspapers, magazines and periodicals published in the UK. The Code covered a wide range of issues (among them 'privacy', 'accuracy', 'opportunity to reply', 'harassment', 'comment, conjecture and fact', 'discrimination' and 'intrusion into grief or shock') and has been developed and strengthened over recent years.

Despite the solemn promises made by editors across the land that they would observe both the letter and spirit of the Code, the second report of the Privacy Committee, published in 1993, concluded that the Press Complaints Commission and the Code were not working and that the original proposals for a statutory tribunal be adopted. The government declined to do so, producing a White Paper on Privacy in 1995 that made no mention of legislation. Meanwhile the press industry introduced a further tranche of measures designed to strengthen the hand of the Press Complaints Commission as well as perceptions of its credibility. For example, the original stipulation on 'privacy' asserted: 'Intrusions and enquiries into an individual's private life without his or her consent are not generally acceptable and publication can only be justified when in the public interest'. By 2003, an additional clause had been added prohibiting the use of long-lens photography in private places without the subject's consent.

There is now a broad acceptance that the Code and the Press Complaints Commission have curbed the

worst excesses of press intrusiveness; nevertheless, the prospect of some form of statutory regulation through a general law regarding privacy rights remains a distinct possibility. Particularly significant has been the introduction into domestic law of the European Charter of Human Rights through the Human Rights Act 1998. This now provides all British citizens with a legal right to privacy and has already been invoked in several cases concerning press intrusiveness. The most high profile case was an action taken out by Catherine Zeta Jones and Michael Douglas against the celebrity magazine, *HELLO!*, in which they successfully sued the magazine for its publication of unauthorised photographs of their wedding day. The recent report of the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee on 'Privacy and Media Intrusion' (House of Commons 458-1, 2003) paid great attention to this case, arguing that it demonstrated that the existing law on confidentiality did not adequately cover the requirements of the Human Rights Act and that a common law concept of privacy was emerging piecemeal on the basis of judicial decisions. Such a fundamental matter, the Committee argued, should be dealt with more appropriately by the legislature rather than the judiciary, allowing for a more strategic and democratic approach.

The government immediately rejected the select committee's core recommendation. Immediately after publication of its report, the Culture Secretary stated 'The Government continues to believe that a free press is vital in a democracy and that self-regulation is the best regulatory system. But that does not mean that there is no room for improvement' (quoted in *Daily Mail*, 17/6/03:10). This reaffirmed an earlier insistence by the Home Secretary in 1999 that the adoption of the Human Rights Act would not lead to a new privacy law by the back door. It begs the question as to why governments from across the political spectrum have been so implacable in their opposition. In part it may reflect the invidious position any government would be placed in by sponsoring such legislation: opponents would inevitably accuse it of censorship or identify a self-serving motive on the part of political elites to restrict press freedom and thereby consolidate their own power. An undoubted factor here is the strength and unanimity of opposition across the press industry. Even the *Guardian* newspaper, which in 1998 sponsored a Privacy and Defamation Bill, indicated to the committee that it was now opposed to legislation in this area. It would require considerable

political will and self confidence for the government to disregard such opposition; in the context of the Blair government's current troubles there may well be have been an element of pragmatic judgment that this is one fight that would be best avoided. Another explanation lies in the broad ethos emerging in government regulation of the communications sector as a whole, which seeks to foster self-regulation wherever possible and light-touch regulation wherever necessary. To impose statutory controls on the press would involve swimming against a very strong tide.

### Section 3: The European Public Sphere

#### 3.1 The UK debate about the Public Sphere

Jurgen Habermas's (1989 [1962]) original thesis on the public sphere was at least partly inspired by the British experience of the formation of 'public opinion' during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He appreciated the historical significance of free and open discussion in the London coffee houses and the forum provided by publications such as *The Spectator* and *The Times*, harbingers of a 'free press', for voicing the liberal interests and opinions of an emerging bourgeoisie at a time of great social and cultural transformation. Young Habermas told a tragic rise-and-fall story about the bourgeois public sphere, whereby commercial considerations came to delimit rational-critical debate from the late nineteenth century, and news declined into a branch of business and governmental public relations during the first half of the twentieth century. Habermas (1992) later acknowledged E.P. Thompson's (1968 [1963]) research on something like a proletarian public sphere in Britain during the early nineteenth century, which was harried and persecuted by the state. Although Habermas (1992 & 1996 [1992]) has since revised his earlier and overly pessimistic analysis of the fate of the public sphere – including his underestimation of the politics of popular culture and of feminism – he never quite deserved the full force of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's (1993 [1972]) critique. He did not simply ignore the proletarian public sphere and the working-class struggle for inclusion in the liberal democracy that was enjoyed legally by men of property in Britain from 1832.

Yet, curiously, Habermas's theory of the public sphere and his work in general have had peculiarly little in-

fluence on social-scientific research into culture, media and politics in Britain, certainly in comparison with the United States. The eminent political scientist David Marquand (2004) recently published a book entitled *The Decline of the Public* that mentions neither Habermas nor, indeed, the concept of the public sphere. He uses a much less well worked-out notion of 'the public domain'. Which is not to say that Habermas's theory of the public sphere has had no influence at all in Britain. There are some rather important contributions by British scholars in this respect, though they are few and far between and largely theoretical in nature. The sociologist William Outhwaite (1994 & 1996), for instance, is an excellent commentator on and anthologist of Habermas's work. He has drawn out the links between Habermas's discourse ethics and his enduring concern with the problematic of the public sphere.

In media studies, scholars currently, or at one time, at the Polytechnic of Central London (now the University of Westminster), where the journal *Media, Culture & Society* is based – James Curran (1991), Nicholas Garnham (1990 [1986] & 1992), John Keane (1991 & 1998), Paddy Scannell (1989) and Colin Sparks (1998) – have made significant contributions to contemporary thinking on media and the public sphere. There is also work on the public sphere associated with the University of Leicester's Centre for Mass Communication Research in the 1970s and '80s and since then Loughborough University's Department of Social Sciences, such as Peter Golding's (1995) paper on the public sphere and the information society. Habermas's theory of the public sphere has also had a smattering of influence on areas of study in Britain that are adjacent to media studies, such as literary and aesthetic theory (Eagleton, 1984, 1990), policy-oriented cultural studies (McGuigan, 1996 & 2004) and even popular engagement with archaeology (Matsuda, 2004).

Nicholas Garnham has written two separate papers on the public sphere, both of them entitled 'The Media and the Public Sphere', the first originally published in 1986 (and reprinted in Garnham, 1990), the second delivered at the conference that was held in North Carolina in 1989 on the occasion of the publication of the English translation of *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, 27 years after it was first published in German (Calhoun, ed., 1992). Anglophone readers without German had hitherto relied on Habermas's short encyclopaedia article on the public sphere of 1964 (re-

printed in Bronner & Kellner, 1989). The first version of Garnham's 'The Media and the Public Sphere' is a critical response to what he calls 'a reinforcement of the market and the progressive destruction of public service as the preferred model for the allocation of cultural resources' (Garnham, 1990: 104). He goes on to say, '[i]t is very much in the interests of the controllers of multinational capital to keep nation-states and their citizens in a state of disunity and dysfunctional ignorance unified only by market structures' (p113). Garnham is speaking here out of a British experience, where there has been a very strong tradition of public service broadcasting, literally invented with the foundation of the BBC in the 1920s, as an alternative to the market and, also, as a means of regulating commercial television from the 1950s and commercial radio from the 1970s. Although he did not exactly equate the public sphere with public service communications, Garnham certainly saw such arrangements as constituting a necessary institutional framework for the national public sphere to flourish in a highly mediated society. Scannell (1989) has also commented on the national public sphere in relation to public service broadcasting, although he is more sceptical of Habermasian rationalism than Garnham. However, there is an obvious problem with both of their arguments that has come to the fore since the 1980s, which is to do with the much discussed phenomenon of 'globalisation' and its negative implications for any exclusively national way of conceptualising social and cultural processes. Garnham himself stressed the universalism of the public sphere in his original paper and argued that it should be considered as coterminous with the political sphere in the sense of the nation-state. While notice of the nation-state's demise, rather like the obituary of himself that Mark Twain complained about reading in a newspaper, is somewhat premature, an exclusively national perspective on culture and society is clearly unsatisfactory now. Garnham very soon realized that this was so and sought to rectify the error in the second version of 'The Media and the Public Sphere'. There he argues: 'the development of an increasingly global market and centres of private economic power are steadily undermining the nation-state, and it is within the nation-state that the question of citizenship and of the relationship between communication and politics has been traditionally posed' (Garnham, 1992: 361-2). He then contends that since economics and communications media are increasingly 'global', the public sphere must become global as well. When confronted with the problem of cultural difference that such an

argument inevitably raises, Garnham asserts the universal validity of the public sphere idea and, moreover, the very principles of the European Enlightenment out of which it emerged. The idea of a universal public sphere covering the whole world, a global public sphere, may be entirely fanciful. It lacks concreteness and might be compared unfavourably with particularistic reasoning on the public sphere, such as American philosopher Nancy Fraser's (1992) 'subaltern counter-publics', exemplified for her by feminism in the USA with its communicative networks.

Other notable contributions from Britain to rethinking the concept of the public sphere in a late-modern context include James Curran's (1991) model of a radical-democratic public sphere, contrasted with liberal, critical Marxist and communist conceptions. Recent work has tended to focus upon different kinds of public sphere, like the *cultural* public sphere of art and entertainment as distinct from the *political* public sphere of the news and current affairs (McGuigan, 2005), and the plurality of actually existing public spheres. The political philosopher John Keane (1998) has usefully distinguished between three types of public sphere: *micro*, *meso* and *macro*. The creation of micro-public spheres is a feature of social and cultural movement politics, including 'single-issue campaigns'. Keane also notes the less formal development of micro public spheres such as children's use of computing and video games as intuitive engagement and interaction with the dynamics of meaning and power. This is one example of a desire on the part of British researchers to broaden theorising on the public sphere to cover aspects of popular culture that have otherwise been treated as mere distraction and noise in the system.

According to Keane, '[m]eso-public spheres are those spaces of controversy about power that encompass millions of people watching, listening or reading across vast distances. They are mainly coextensive with the territorial state' (1998: 174). In this respect, Keane sees television talk and audience participation shows as manifestations of a popular public sphere, somewhat differently from the 'serious' news agenda and great public issues that mostly concern more solemn Habermasians. For Keane, it is mistaken to complain about the exclusion of popular voices from public discourse when forms do exist that are all about letting 'the people' speak on issues of urgent concern, which are usually to do with 'private' and personal matters of relationships and everyday conduct.

Keane's category of macro-public spheres has affinities with Garnham's 'one-world' perspective, but here also it is stated in the plural rather than the singular. It takes in continental formations – associated with, say, the European Union – and global formations, linked to the United Nations. The problem with Keane's extremely suggestive thinking is that it is relentlessly upbeat and optimistic and hardly ever critical of existing arrangements. Appreciation of actually existing public spheres is not necessarily inconsistent, however, with a critical attitude to 'systematically distorted communication', in an old Habermasian phrase.

Some writers have attempted to recast the distinction between public and private in the light of technological and social changes. Sheller and Urry, for example, suggest that 'massive changes are occurring in the nature of both public and private life and especially of the relations between them'. They argue, in line with Urry's general argument about the widening importance of 'global fluids', that new mobilities are creating a transformation in 'public and private life that have arisen from "complex" configurations of place and space: the dominant system of car-centred automobility whose spatial fluidities are simultaneously private and public; and various globalizations through the exposure of 'private' lives on public screens and the public screening of mediatized events' (Sheller & Urry, 2003). Their argument, that 'this divide may need relegation to the dustbin of history' is a bold one, and places rather heavy emphasis on the impact of new communication technologies. Many would regard it as a substantial overstatement of the collapse of a distinction between public and private, not least because of the very differential experience of these changes and because of the continuing materiality of what is unduly regarded as 'virtual' or 'fluid'.

### 3.2 The UK media and Europe

The academic study of the British media and their attitudes to Europe is relatively sparse. The flurry of research activity surrounding the 1979 European elections soon petered out, and only since the mid-90s can we see any sustained attempt to analyse British media attitudes to Europe. The research that has been done can be broadly viewed under the headings of contextual, comparative, content and impact studies. Questions about the manner in which audiences interpret,

receive and consume media messages are important, and relationships between the nature of media coverage and the public's perception of Europe have been examined (Blumler & Fox, 1982; see for example Bruter, 2003; 2004). However, these audience studies will not be reviewed within this report. Instead, this report will review the relatively small amount of research on contexts, comparative data and media content in this field to date.

In this section it is useful to consider the main theoretical concepts that form the starting points for much research on British media attitudes to Europe. It has been argued that identification is key to the evolution of the European Union (Gavin, 2000) and as a result much research in the field starts with how British media coverage of Europe relates to national identity (see Hardt-Mautner, 1995; Brookes, 1999). A link has been made between theories of 'identity', the 'nation' and 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983) and the media's role in the construction and re-presentation of the EU. The imagined cultural identity in Britain often refers back to imperial attitudes and a 'Churchillian' perception of British identity and its relation to the 'other' (Anderson & Weymouth, 1999). The imagined community (Europe) is not only a political, economic or geographical entity: it also crucially depends on how it is represented and imagined (Hall, 2002). It is the importance of the role of symbols and myths in 'imaginings' of the EU, and questions about whose imaginings prevail and why (Cram, 2001), that motivates research in this field. For many in the UK, 'Europe' remains a place that is elsewhere: people peak of travelling *to* Europe, or of the virtues or otherwise of the UK being in Europe, sentiments clearly at odds with any sense that the UK is inherently, politically, or culturally, already part of something called Europe. The recent and unexpected success of the UK Independence Party in the 2004 European Elections, (standing on an explicitly anti-EU platform, and obtaining 16% of the vote from a standing start), is a recent and stark illustration of this national mood.

Within the double challenge of European integration: the meeting of the different nation states and the creation of the supra-national identity (Hardt-Mautner, 1995), an important question is whether it is possible for Europe to be 'imagined' or treated conceptually as a nation (Ifversen, 2002). The cultural and linguistic differences may hinder any real possibility of a European national identity. Despite the potency of ques-

tions such as this, Europe as a political, economic or geographical reality is argued to exist, above all, in discourse (Ifversen, 2002: 14; Golding & Bondebjerg, 2004). It is the argument that Europe exists primarily as discourse that makes the concept of the nation relevant. The mass media in Britain plays a role in the overt reinforcement of discourses of Europe, but equally interesting is the concept of 'banal' nationalism (Billig, 1995) where the everyday, unnoticed reinforcement and maintenance of national regimes is highlighted (Cram, 2001). Questions about the possibility of a European national identity can also be explored via instances of a 'banal' Europeanism (Cram, 2001).

The established concepts of new values, framing and agenda-setting understandably form the basis for research on British media and the EU. Questions about how news values and newsworthiness (such as conflict, personalisation and immediacy) might affect coverage (Siune, 1983) are important. Despite this there is a scarcity of research in the cross-cultural field of agenda setting (Werder, 2002). The research that has been done has investigated framing (Vreese/ Peter & Semetko 2001) and the agenda setting role of news media with regard to European issues, particularly through the mass audience of television news (Gavin, 2000; Siune, 1983) and print media (Werder, 2002; Firmstone, 2004). Within this body of work it is thought that the media's agenda setting role is more significant in 'foreign' rather than 'domestic' news (Morgan, 1995), as the audience is thought to be 'media dependent'; where the public has no direct experience of an issue (and relatively few have direct experience of Europe beyond the tourist enclaves of the Mediterranean), the concept of media dependency is perhaps more salient to Europe issues than domestic ones (Gavin & Sanders, 1997).

The main data collected that demonstrates the influence of the context of production of media output are interviews and surveys with media personnel. This work looks to highlight the structural relationship between the EU and British journalists.

Gavin (2001) suggests that much research that deals only with media content may lead to the idea that journalists are hostile to the EU, which is at best 'unproven'. Instead coverage may be best understood with the concepts of 'news value' and 'newsworthiness' alongside the adversarial style that is established within British journalism.

Blumler (1979), as part of a nine-nation enquiry into the role of broadcasting in the European elections of 1979, conducted interviews with personnel in an attempt to identify their views on media approaches to election coverage. It was found that the European elections were regarded as 'lower status' than the general election and as a result the coverage was taken less seriously by broadcasters. Butler and Marquand's (1981) study on the European election found that this view was equally held in the press, as little space was given to campaign news, and it appeared that little thought was given to the elections altogether. The unfamiliarity with European elections meant that the media ignored the political implications for the vote and focused on the question of whether it justified special attention at all (Blumler, 1979: 517).

Morgan's (1995) interview-based research, conducted during 1993/1994 with British reporters based in Brussels, looks at their views on access, constraints, sources and the EU 'news story' itself and also attempts to identify the efficiency of EU institutions to manage the media. It was found that following the accusation by Margaret Thatcher in 1980 of British journalists in Brussels 'going native', 'these reporters are conscious of their position *vis-à-vis* their colleagues in European capitals and their London editors' (Morgan, 1995: 322). Often journalists have to compete with EU news from other sources and, of course, other non-EU news and thus feel pressure to give the editors in London what they want. Subsequently journalists are constantly aware of the role of editorial input and what is considered acceptable to the British public (and contexts of domestic politics). It was found that journalists were generally happy with the amount of coverage given to EU news, but not necessarily happy with the quality of that coverage – particularly that of tabloid newspapers (Morgan, 1995). Furthermore, the tabloid tendency of emphasising differences was thought of as damaging to British reputations and interests (Morgan, 1995: 335) in Europe. The style of journalism in 'quality' newspapers could be seen as equally problematic in maintaining communication about Europe as it was found that 'the adversarial style of British reporters does not travel well in Europe' (Morgan, 1995: 337).

As important as the style of British journalism to the coverage of Europe in the media is the style of news management provided by the EU institutions themselves. Journalists find European Commission information policy confusing and felt they were not ori-



entated or equipped to deal with the complexity of the communications system, which may be of some significance in their coverage from Brussels (Morgan, 1995). Within the existing research on the use of the media by the EU it is emphasised that there are real problems in the relationship between journalists and the EU; 'here the literature stresses the difficulties and contradictions implicit in the attempt to use the media to promote European integration' (Morgan, 1995: 323 see also, Schlesinger, 1991; 1994; Venturelli, 1993). Tumber (1995) found there were two main issues for the EU in their management of the news; the 'openness' and 'selling' of its policies.

Access of information was generally unproblematic, but tended to become 'difficult precisely when reporters needed it most' (Morgan, 1995: 326) at times of conflict or decision making (for example GATT negotiations, monetary and fishery policy).

Morgan's (1995) study on the British press in Brussels found that journalists had difficulty identifying the 'line' due to EU internal rivalry and anxiety about compromising negotiating positions. The constraints articulated by journalists, apart from the usual: space, deadline and human resources, also highlighted 'concern over Commission and national sensitivities' (Morgan, 1995: 237). Journalists do not always get the copy they want to send to the editors back in the UK, which causes friction between British journalists and EU officials. Officially the sources of news for EU reports are mainly EU institutions, although British sources for news were the most frequently cited single source. 'Union institutions have to compete to provide significant news and are not always well placed to do so (Morgan, 1995: 328). It is thus argued that the EU lacks clarity and direction in presenting its ideas and policies to the British media (Gavin, 2001: 301).

It has been argued that the 'comparison of news coverage across different national media systems has been a useful process for ascertaining common news agendas, informational sources, and journalism practice, particularly in an increasingly globalised news environment' (Kevin, 2003: 4) (see Blumler & Fox, 1982; Blumler, 1983; Morgan, 1995; Palmer et al., 2000; Vreese/ Peter & Semetko, 2001; Werder, 2002; Kevin, 2003; Firmstone, 2004).

The first research into British media coverage of Europe was part of a comparative study across nine Eu-

ropean countries that formed the basis of the a general study of television in the first European parliamentary elections of 1979 (see, Blumler & fox, 1982; Blumler, 1983) which included a content analysis of all campaign messages on television election programmes (Siune, 1983) and comparison between run-up and campaign coverage (Kelly & Siune, 1983).

Blumler and Fox (1982) conducted a comparative analysis of political communication systems and behaviours during the European elections of 1979. Using survey data the research looked to explore the individual voters' behaviours and activities of the news media. It found that voters' attitudes to the European community, formed before or during the campaign, played a pivotal role in the level of participation. However it lacked appeal for many of the younger, less educated and left-wing electors of Europe, and in particular, there was the inability to arouse those holding negative or 'middle-ground' views (Blumler & Fox, 1982: 154). Campaigns 'differed markedly in vigour, focus, content and style – and therefore in electoral reaction – from one country to another' (Blumler & Fox, 1982: 154). Similarly the varying campaign structure was evident in the programmes that covered the campaign in the different countries; 'each country drew on different election broadcasting traditions and reacted differently to the European election stimulus' (Kelly & Siune, 1983: 61). Important similarities in style were identified where legitimate voices in the news tended to be political figures and journalists. During the campaign it was found that there was more attention given to the election or the European Parliament and tended to be ideological 'visions of Europe'. A comparison was also made of the themes explored by journalist and politicians and it was found that journalists in the main focused upon the election itself, whereas politicians solely focused on economic policy and 'vision of EU' – this pattern reminiscent of research findings of Patterson (1980) on media coverage of elections in the United States. British journalists also tended to question the relevancy of the elections to ordinary voters and whether people would indeed turn out to vote (this trend was also evident in Italy, the Netherlands and Germany); overall 'treating the election ... as a somewhat problematic affair' (Siune, 1983: 229). Unlike other countries, the British media focus on issues of food and agriculture and expressed themselves more negatively than positively, leading to the conclusion that this negativity towards Europe was 'a nationally characteristic pattern' (Siune, 1983: 231).

Vreese/ Peter & Semetko (2001) conducted a cross-national comparative study of television news in four European countries (Germany, Great Britain, Denmark and The Netherlands) in 1999 in which they investigated the 'visibility of political and economic news in general and the launch of the Euro in particular' (Vreese/ Peter & Semetko, 2001: 107). The framing aspects of news coverage were seen as a main focus for this cross-national comparative study with regard to the themes identified in preceding research of conflict and economic consequences (see Semetko & Valkenburg's study of Dutch national television news, 2000). 54% of British news was devoted to political and economic topics, including the Euro, this was the highest percentage of the four countries. 20% of which was on the launch of the Euro (compared to Germany 18%, Denmark 26% and the Netherlands 23%). However it is important to note that 'the coverage of the Euro was entirely event driven and disappeared almost entirely in the immediate aftermath of the launch' (Vreese/ Peter & Semetko, 2001: 115). British news tended to focus less on the economic consequence of the launch than the other countries, such as Germany. In general circumstances conflict played a key part in the framing of coverage in news stories in all four countries, even more so than economic consequences. However it was found that the reverse applied to coverage of the launch of the Euro arguably due to the long-term planning involved and the ease of the launch itself (Vreese/ Peter & Semetko, 2001). The reality of the existence of the Euro meant that the focus was on the implications for non-involvement in 'Euroland'. Overall, the research found 'interesting differences between journalistic traditions' (Vreese/ Peter & Semetko, 2001: 118), particularly the degree to which journalists focus on economic consequences. Explanations for these differences may be found in research on the journalist's role perceptions; the German 'missionaries' and the British 'bloodhounds' (Köcher, 1986), and other research referred to earlier (see section on contexts).

Werder's (2002) study of cross-national agenda-setting function of print media looks at debates around the Euro currency in the British and German press. The research attempted to identify whether differing levels of support were demonstrated in coverage of the same issue and if differences existed in the framing of the issue in the two nations examined. Content analysis of major national 'quality' newspapers in 1998 and 1999 allows a comparison between coverage pre- and post- the establishment of the monetary union (the

'birth of the Euro'). The research found that British coverage was more likely to take a negative stance on the issue and 'would maintain its opposition even if the source were in favour of the Euro' (Werder, 2002: 226). The British press used as much feature and commentary as hard news, contributing to the 'episodic' style of reporting (as opposed to 'thematic', see Iyengar, 1991). Interestingly, the British press exhibited a tendency to use the episodic style to express anti-Euro positions, using only 25% hard news; however, pro-Euro or neutral positions were expressed mainly via the hard news format (60%). This trend was also found by Cole (2001) in a content analysis of 3 months of daily newspapers; 'the results show that for both hardcopy newspapers and their online equivalents the anti-European press is passionate in its beliefs, whereas the pro-European press are largely solid but unexciting in theirs' (Cole, 2001: 124).

Kevin (2003), as part of a content analysis of media in eight European countries, subjected the British press during two one week periods in May and June 1999 to quantitative and qualitative analysis respectively. There was a general exploration of television programming for six weeks during May and June 2000 and a detailed analysis provided for two weeks in September 2000. Kevin was interested in the role of the media in the democratic system, how they provide information and provide a platform for debate on EU issues. The UK media mainly focused on the single currency during the European election, with the EMU being referred to in almost half of all election coverage. Consequently 'common foreign policy hardly surfaced in the UK media' (Kevin, 2003: 73); the UK had the lowest coverage of all countries studied that dealt with other member states in the news programming, with only 5% of election news. 'Despite the disinterest displayed in the UK media outlets when reporting on other member states, the UK was the most frequently mentioned EU member in France, Germany, Ireland and Italy' (Kevin, 2003: 78). The British media tended to use the election to focus on 'home' issues and the divisions within the main parties on EU politics (Kevin, 2003), resulting in 'Europe' being used as some sort of testing ground for domestic politics; 'the debate in Britain remains a highly domestic one, unlike in other countries where the coverage is more "Europeanised"' (Kevin, 2003: 107). Also there were signs of media self-referentiality; where media commentary on the nature of media coverage itself (i.e. lack or debate of real issues)

was discussed and, similar to the findings of Blumler (1979), questions were raised about the level of voter turnout expected for the election (Kevin, 2003: 83; see also Deacon/Golding & Billig 2001 cited in section 2).

The most recent research on media attitudes to Europe has been conducted by Firmstone (2004), who offers 'a comparison of the internal organisational factors that contribute to the formation of newspapers' agenda and editorial policies on the politics of European integration in the British press' (Firmstone, 2004: 2). Interview data with 22 key personnel from eight British newspapers is compared with the results of a content analysis of editorial comment from newspapers during January 2002 when the Euro was introduced. The research found a complexity of internal factors: allocation of resources; internal structures; motivations behind writing; ways in which content and line are agreed upon; the contribution of other journalists and the editor; that vary widely between newspapers. It was found that 'it is not the case that editorial comment on European issues is simply a function of the views of the editor and/or proprietor as is commonly assumed' (Firmstone, 2004: 29). Though key individuals (such as editors and senior journalists) can contribute significantly to editorial agendas on EU issues, this point has been supported by other research (Anderson & Weymouth, 1999; Gavin, 2001). Firmstone (2004) highlights an important point that none of the tabloids have EU correspondents in Brussels and subsequently rely on reporters in Westminster for news on Europe, this, she argues, leads to a more nationally focused content compared to those reporting from Brussels. This has important implications for the validity of the EU in the eyes of the press and public alike.

Wilkes and Wring (1998) trace a changing attitude to Europe in the British Press by looking at coverage of relevant political events over fifty years from 1948 to 1998. Commencing with the event of the first speeches proclaiming Western European Unity by Ernest Bevin, and the first press debate over the merits of European co-operation, it was found that the press coverage at this time exhibited a vaguely pro-community stance. This developed over the next thirty years into unanimous Euro-enthusiasm. The media bias in favour of the European Community at that time led to a press critical of the government's decision to hold a referendum in 1975 on the issue. However, the 1980s and 1990s would not see the continuation of

this trend. Wilkes and Wring (1998) found that there was a distinct turn during the 1980s in the coverage of Europe (or lack of it) in the press; 'If anything the complexity of the subject and perceived public disinterest combined to keep the issue off the top of the agenda' (Wilkes & Wring, 1998: 197). When Europe returned to the top of the news agenda, attitudes had changed somewhat; *The Sun* newspaper's attack on the French during the 1990s ('Up Yours Delors' being one of its more celebrated and symptomatic front page headlines) was a marked change from the careful optimism of earlier media coverage. Tabloid hostility is increasingly outright and more pervasive (e.g. endless coverage of 'Brussels Bureaucrats', the 'gravy train') uses of pejorative stereotyping 'racist discourse of cultural difference, isolation and economic threat' (Gavin, 2001: 306 see Hardt-Mautner, 1995). It is really this move towards sensationalist stories in tabloid coverage of European issues that dominates contemporary research into media attitudes to Europe (for example, Hardt-Mautner, 1995; Brookes, 1999; Anderson & Weymouth, 1999). More generally on the tabloidisation of the UK media see McLachlan & Golding, 2000).

Cross and Golding examined UK elite media coverage of the future introduction of the Euro in the mid-1990s (Cross & Golding, 1997). They note the popular anti-European views given an airing in the popular press in relation to football coverage. 'For example, when it became clear that England would meet Germany in the semi-finals, references to 'Krauts', 'Huns', 'Fritz' and the War were mobilised with gleeful abandon. The *Daily Star* for example announced 'Herr We Go: Bring on the Krauts' whilst the *Daily Mirror* screamed, 'Achtung! Surrender: For you Fritz ze Euro 96 Championship is over'. Indeed, the *Mirror* even went so far as to formally declare 'footballing war' against Germany'. The study investigates in detail the coverage by 'quality' papers of the European debate, especially about the Euro, in the context of this undercurrent of anti-European sentiment, expressed in both resentment of EU bureaucracy and heavy-handed regulation, and the bizarre and strange cultural preferences of a 'foreign' other.

Hardt-Mautner (1995), taking a discourse analytic approach, investigates the ways in which four British newspapers (the *Guardian*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Sun*) construct national identity in the context of debates around Europe using select-

ed data between 1971 and 1992. He found discourses around the ideas of distance and separation, and the use of pejorative stereotyping expressing specifically anti-French and anti-German prejudice. In a similar study by Brookes (1999) on the BSE/CJD crisis and the British press found during the 'beef war' of 1996 'spectacular images of jingoism and xenophobia' (Brookes, 1999: 247). Following the government admittance that BSE and CJD could be linked, 'panic gripped the nation', according to the press. The media, ignoring the implications for scientific or government agricultural policy, concentrated on the Euro-issue. *The Sun's* coverage expressed disbelief at the story, and economic effects were of more concern than health issues with a focus on reporting of the banning of British beef in many European countries. The subsequent denial by newspapers that it was an exclusively British problem led to wholesale retaliation to the ban, where 'European action was defined in terms of European nations pursuing their own self-interest' (Brookes, 1999: 260) and references to the World War(s) were once again given an airing. This reliance on stereotypes by the press bolsters perceived ideas about typical responses by a community under threat, as stereotypes are argued to reinforce national identity. Another study offers a look at the British press and its overwhelmingly negative coverage of Europe. Anderson & Weymouth's (1999) assessment was of British press coverage in eight weeks preceding the 1997 General Election, and during the British presidency of the Union from January to June 1998. Here it is argued that Euroscepticism in the British press is rife. Spiering (2004) has termed Euroscepticism 'journalese', as it was first used in the British press. Possible explanations for this include the notion that the British press sector is weighted very heavily towards the right-of-centre, hence 'Eurosceptic voices are in the majority' (Anderson & Weymouth, 1999: 61). However, anti-European sentiment is not simply distributed across a one-dimensional political spectrum. As found by Cole (2001) and Werder (2002), anti-European arguments are put forward much more passionately than pro-European ones, thus Eurosceptic discourse is found to be 'highly conversational, emotive and often strongly xenophobic' (Anderson & Weymouth, 1999: 61). To try to understand why Euroscepticism has such a strong hold on media coverage of Europe, some writers have put forward the possibility of a cultural predisposition towards Euroscepticism due to the physical separateness of the UK and the dominance of the English language (therefore British

people tend to be poor speakers of other languages) (Anderson & Weymouth, 1999). A key strand in Eurosceptic discourses in the press is the development of a 'Euromythology'. The mythology of an EC obsession with trivia (reports on EU insistence that bananas be of a regulation size and colour, 'square strawberries', prawn cocktail flavoured crisps (a peculiarly British delicacy), the imposition of standard sized Euro condoms on larger 'British assets', a ban on British Bulldogs and the extinction of the English apple in favour of cheaper apples from southern Europe, and the like) led to a government response in a Foreign Office Booklet.

Criticism of Anderson and Weymouth (1999), which is also applicable to other research in this section, is that it is based on dissatisfaction with media coverage and is therefore 'explicitly judgemental' (Gavin, 2001: 307). The argument put forward by analysts like Anderson and Weymouth relies upon the idea that the British media can, and should, adopt a critical-rational perspective on issues relating to the EU, which, could be argued, is overoptimistic. Also press criticism, whilst highly emotive, is playing an important role in airing common-held doubts about the viability of Britain in Europe (Gavin, 2001). These criticisms highlight that ultimately 'our evaluations of coverage are highly contingent on what we chose as the basis of the "reality" that reports reflect' (Gavin, 2001: 309).

### *Television*

Almost all of the research on British television coverage of EU issues has been conducted as part of a cross-national comparative study (outlined above). However, Gavin's (2000) study on BBC and ITN television news during 1996 & 1997 tries to fill this gap in research activity. The main focus of the study is on 'portrayals of economic symbolism, civic entitlement and issues of economic benefit and loss' (Gavin, 2000: 353). He found a tendency in broadcast news to discourage, rather than encourage, European identity. The economy is one of the most recurrent themes in television news, and Europe is a 'persistent and significant aspect of coverage ... it should be taken seriously in an assessment of European identity formation' (Gavin, 2000: 361). The study found that the amount of European reporting rarely dips below 10% of all economic coverage, and within this it was found that the single currency did not dominate the cover-

age. A key theme that was found absent in the coverage for the time period studied was the issue of external threats, thus lacking the 'us' and 'them' which helps shape identity (Schlesinger, 1993). Because of this, Gavin argues that 'community identities or loyalties are unlikely to emerge in this sort of media climate' (Gavin, 2000: 362).

The research outlined in this section has tended to focus on particular events (planned or unplanned), such as European elections, the launch of the Euro or the 'beef war', and subsequently has scrutinised only the extremes of media coverage on EU issues. As outlined in the introduction to this report, it is perhaps more relevant to look at the everyday 'banal' coverage that is produced by the mass media in Britain, the subtleties of which are not outlined in existing research. It is clear from this brief survey of existing literature that the majority of work done has been either cross-national comparative studies of broadcasting or British research on the press and journalists. Research on tabloid newspapers has highlighted the xenophobic and Eurosceptic tendencies prevalent in British media. Few analysts, however, have criticised coverage by the BBC or ITV for editorialising and, as a result, press journalism looks quite dismal in comparison (Gavin, 2001: 305). It is also useful to acknowledge that the stories tend to feature clashes or division, this is what makes them 'newsworthy', but this sort of coverage is 'symbolically at odds with the notion of a unified or solidaristic community' (Gavin, 2000: 368).

The main findings of the research completed can be summarised as follows;

- The British media, and the press in particular, has moved from a pro-community or neutral stance, to one that can broadly be described as negative or 'Eurosceptic'.
- The mismatch between the EU institutions' arguably unsuccessful approach to news management and British news values forms an important context for media production.

A conclusion made, following research on the European election of 1979, that 'the British media have so far failed to live up to their responsibilities' (Butler & Marquand, 1981: 165) is perhaps still valid today.

It is important to note the limitations to the research outlined in this report. Many state that they are sim-

ply offering a 'snapshot' of coverage. For instance, there have been no detailed studies on EU coverage in Scottish or Welsh national press (Spiering, 2004) so the 'British' media attitudes referred to here are overwhelmingly 'English' in origin. Content analysis of media output can tell us much about media attitudes to Europe, yet it is argued that we shouldn't jump to conclusions about media impact (Gavin, 2001); just because the EU gets bad press and there is an increase in public scepticism you cannot presume that these are directly related. It is precisely because of this that more work needs to be done; 'the 'impact' of European news is now a clear and glaring gap in our understanding' (Gavin, 2001: 311). The nature of media attitudes may be clearly identified through research, but how imaginings and constructions have real consequences is far from clear (Müller, 2002)

### 3.3 The UK public and Europe

The notorious scepticism of the UK public, and especially of its media, towards the EU as a set of political institutions and Europe as a more diffuse cultural and geographical 'other', means that the notion of a European public sphere embracing debate and public consciousness in the UK is largely illusory. Studies of UK media content on Europe readily identify the insistent hostility of the UK media to Europe or its invisibility as an area of recurrent interest (Kevin, 2003. Cross and Golding, 1997). Even in the last election in the UK, when 'Europe' was anticipated to be a major issue of election debate, only 8.7% of all news stories touched on this field (Deacon/Golding & Billig, 2001)

The Eurobarometer surveys bring home this entrenched absence of a European public sphere in UK national consciousness (Eurobarometer 61). Such surveys have consistently shown that the level of interest in the UK towards EU affairs is usually the lowest in the Union. There is a steady flow of evidence that this lack of interest has as one of its primary causes a basic lack of knowledge on EU affairs. Only 30% of the most recent UK poll believed the country had benefited from EU membership. This contrasts with average figures of 47% across the EU and figures as high as 82% in Greece.

Compared with just 13% of the European Union that considers that the EU is presented too negatively in the media, the UK figure is more than twice this aver-

age at 27% – substantially ahead of the next highest figure from Portugal at just 18%. Among the many complexities of UK attitudes in this sphere is the finding that UK audiences have a high mistrust for their media and believe the media overstate the negative features of EU membership. At the same time they also largely share those negative responses to the EU, raising the question of how far the influence of the media is at all mitigated by awareness of media imbalance. The general findings of the Eurobarometer surveys, including the UK data, and their implications are discussed more extensively in the general introduction by the Editors.

If the existence of a European public sphere implies the presence of a space in UK culture for insistent and manifest debate about the nature and future of the UK's role in the 'European project', then it would have to be regarded as at best latent or embryonic. Insofar as the media provide for such a space, the tenor of debate remains largely hostile and quizzical. The likely conduct of a referendum on the treaty establishing the new European Constitution anticipated in early 2006 (i.e. after the next general election), seems bound to propel European issues to a higher position in the agenda of public debate. However no national newspaper carries a 'European section' as such, even though news from Europe is commonly prominent in the foreign news pages of the 'up-market' press. Even if a European public sphere is conceptualised as the 'europeanisation' of national debate rather than the emergence of a pan-national cultural or political space, this would have to be regarded as rudimentary and deterrent within the UK as currently constituted.

### 3.4 A European Public Sphere?

Within the UK, debate about Europe has not been intense, and at a political level has split both major parties. For this reason the subject has rarely been a major election issue, and the failure of European political debate to light any touch paper of concern among the population reflects both ignorance of and indifference to the 'European project'. Within the parties the double split makes the issue problematic as a mobilising discourse or ideal. On the right the EU is seen positively as a vehicle for the expansion of free trade, and as a major opportunity for the extension of free market principles internationally. Others on the right, however, often take a 'little England' view, in which

the EU is seen as a federalising threat to UK sovereignty and a diversion from the UK's primary loyalties to the Commonwealth and to the USA. This view was once again prominent in the most recent EU elections, and was at the core of the unexpected success of the UK Independence Party. On the left the EU represents a positive move towards the internationalist ideals long central to left social democracy, and also offers a check and balance to the more neo-liberal inclinations of both the Thatcher and Blair governments. The role of the EU in setting legal restraints on the working week, and for incorporating social democratic principles into welfare legislation, for example, are much cherished in this context. On the other hand, many on the left have seen, and continue to see, the EU as a vehicle for the domination of business interests and mercantile concerns, and as a latter day version of the bankers' Europe feared in past generations.

Section 3.1 has shown how the debate about a public sphere within the UK is neither intense nor extensive, but has certainly been deployed in the continuing debate about the future of public service broadcasting, in which it is often felt to offer a theoretical maxim against which the claims of PSB defenders and detractors alike may be measured. The extent to which a European public sphere is possible has exercised several UK analysts. The obvious structural absence of a common language, a single political structure, a European common medium of debate and news, or a single citizenship all form part of the play of discussion both about the politics of Europe and also of the theoretical potential of a European public sphere.

The debate in the UK about the European public sphere, apart from concern about how Europe is constructed and reported in the media, has also been concerned with the extent to which there is, or could be, a cogent identity associated with 'Europeanness'. If there is a European public sphere in construction, then at its heart would lie some shared sense of a common history and culture, construed by its subjects as 'European'. Kohli (2000) has argued that 'that there is indeed a potential for hybridity, that there are carrier groups for it (e.g. border populations or migrants)' and that this would therefore increase the potential for a mix to lead to a new common European identity. This is analogous to older assessments of the USA as a 'melting pot', in which crucible separate, ironically normally European, émigré, identities would be melded. Bruter (2004), drawing on focus group stud-

ies in France, the UK, and the Netherlands on what citizens believe to be 'Europe' and 'Europeans', argues that citizens are relatively cynical with regard to the perceived bias of the media on the European question. They relate to Europe through its symbols, with references to peace, cosmopolitanism and what Bruter describes as other 'anti-identity' values.

The problematic character of a 'European' identity, rooted in a mythical history (Hall, 2002) and very much a cultural construction, plays a major rhetorical role in the political communications of the mainstream UK media (see section 3.2 above). But it is present elsewhere in cultural artifacts. Soysal (2002) has undertaken a study based on analysis of school textbooks. She argues that European identity is not a conflict between the national and an emerging transnational identity, but is rooted in common allegiance to abstract values of democracy, rationalism, progress, equality and so on. The mistake is to equate Europe with the *demos*, i.e. the political structure. Study of textbooks shows that Vikings become generic warriors and adventurers, and heroes like Joan of Arc or Saint Francis are celebrated not as national figures but as common embodiments of abstract virtues. Thus the identity evoked is based on universalistic principles. Outhwaite (2000) argues that a European identity may be emerging as national identities decline; but at the same time draws attention to the rise of other supranational identities (Hispanic, Anglo-American) and the limited amount of travelling, cross border working, the lack of a European newspaper, and the continuing significance, indeed dominance, of national languages.

Other analysts, however, have focused more on the potential role of the emerging supra-national political structure as a source, rather than a consequence, of a European public sphere. Chalmers (2003), for example, argues that 'the three practical tasks of the European Union – polity-building, problem-solving and the negotiation of political community – are debated and resolved around the four values that have underpinned the development of politics as a productive process – those of transformation, validity, relationality and self-government. The organisational reform required for this involves a wide-ranging revisiting of the structures of the European polity'. It may be therefore that the emergence of a European public sphere is unlikely, simply because the nascent cultural and social structures this demands are contrary to the plural and co-existing structures which

could constitute a single but multiplex European cultural and political space. Rumford (2001), for example, suggests that: 'despite its popularity, the concept of civil society is of limited use for understanding European society. Second, European society should not be seen as a unified and coherent whole but as a series of non-integrated, fragmented and autonomous public spheres. Third, European society cannot be understood in the singular. A plurality of European public and social spaces exist, often beyond the control of, or unrelated to, the EU or its member states. In short, European social spaces are not harmonious and cohesive, nor are they necessarily constituted by European integration'.

Schlesinger (1997, 1999) has also argued that a European public sphere is as yet embryonic, and liable to the domination of commercial and economic interpretation. Despite this, he suggests that supranational developments have induced an important shift in which the public sphere is no longer equated with the boundaries of the nation-state. Thus an emergent Euro-polity has developed an important space for a supranational elite policy community to operate. Alongside this, the growth of transnational media (newspapers, magazines, television news) has worked to sustain a restricted elite space rather than to herald generalised access to communication by European publics. These tendencies tend to confirm, rather than to challenge, the European Union's existing 'democratic deficit'. The emergence of a European public sphere cannot happen in a single space but rather in a multiplicity of spaces; this may in turn evolve into a coherent European polity, but this is impossible without 'broad public engagement in European public affairs', a factor notably absent in the UK perhaps more than anywhere else. He argues that:

A hypothetical European sphere of publics would, among other things, (a) involve the dissemination of a European news agenda, (b) need to become a significant part of the everyday news-consuming habits of European audiences, and (c) entail that those living within the EU have begun to think of their citizenship, in part at least, as transcending the level of the member nation-states. Moreover, these rational attributes would need to be accompanied by an affective dimension. Without such conditions obtaining we could not meaningfully talk of the provision of a genuine sphere of publics at this level (Schlesinger, 1999).

#### 4. Conclusion

This review of recent research and discussion in the UK of the news management and the European public sphere shows a number of distinct aspects to the empirical and theoretical work within the UK. In summary these are, especially:

1. A journalistic tradition that, at least in principle, separates rigidly the notion of objective reporting from commentary and opinion
2. A journalistic culture that is changing fast, not least with the rapid growth of graduate education into the profession
3. A concern about news management that is rooted in debate about the increasing sophistication and energy of political manipulation and influence in the media, but which also recognises the growing efforts placed in increasingly sophisticated press and public relations from many other sectors.
4. Lack of coverage of European issues generally in the UK media, though when covered the institutions and purposes of the EU in particular have been reported largely negatively, a fact widely recognised and disliked by the UK readership, but apparently nonetheless effective in fostering sceptical views of the EU and related developments such as the Euro.
5. Limited discussion of the theoretical concept of the public sphere, though a fruitful importation of it into more political debates about the prospects and future of public service broadcasting
6. Recognition of the complexity of development of a European public sphere, regarded as unlikely without the conditions for its creation – a common language, significant common spaces of debate and rhetorical encounter, socially in cross-national media; more extensive shared experience through travel and employment. The associated concept of a European identity has been much discussed, but largely sceptically, with a focus on the resilience of national cultures, and interest in the mythological and sometimes xenophobic constructions of the European 'mythos'.
7. Growing debate about the potentiality of a European public sphere in multiple forms and locations, not least among a developing European elite of intellectuals, political actors, and possibly commercial actors, embraced within cross-national activity to a greater extent than the public as a whole. This might be an embryonic formation that has yet to extend to a wider section of the population.

<sup>1</sup> In 2002, the entire national press was owned by seven companies. The four largest of these accounted for 87% of sales (News International, 37%; Trinity Mirror, 20%; Daily Mail group, 18%; Northern and Shell, 11%).

<sup>2</sup> 'Spin' is 'an unscientific neologism coined by journalists to describe the complex process of intensifying political PR and political marketing' (Esser/ Reinemann & Fan, 2001: 20)

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