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# British Media Coverage of the Press Reform Debate

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Journalists Reporting Journalism

Binakuromo Ogbemor

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Coverage of the Press  
Reform Debate

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## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction

As a consequence of the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal, the UK press became the focus of a heated public debate. Many questions were asked, and several answers offered. The press had behaved badly and needed to be tamed (Leveson 2012a, p. 195, para. 1.1–1.4). But how? Who guards the guardian? How can press regulation be strengthened? How can the press regain its trust? What does this spell for democracy? These were some of the questions asked, as politicians, journalists, the police, the judiciary and other citizens deliberated on how to ensure a viable press: one that can sustain rather than destroy democracy. Thus, the media became an arena for a heated debate on how to make the press more accountable, if at all. This book analyses how this debate was represented by the press. The aims are to challenge the press to serve as a democratic public sphere during debates about their policy, to enlighten readers on how the media represent debates about their policy and to stir up discussions on how to get the public to be more involved in media reform. I argue that the way debates about media policy are covered is partly responsible for the continuous emergence of weak press reforms. As a brief background on the scandal is essential for an understanding of my analysis of the debate, that will be my starting point.

The *News of the World* phone hacking scandal turned the British politico-media complex upside down. Newspaper editors, media owners, journalists, private investigators and even the police were placed in the spotlight for their role in the scandal. The phone hacking scandal came to

light in 2005 when some staff of the *News of the World* were accused of hacking the phones of members of the British Royal Family (Keeble and Mair 2012, p. 9; Davies 2014). The police report on investigations carried out between 2005 and 2007 declared that the crime was perpetrated by one “rogue” reporter, royal editor, Clive Goodman, and a private detective, Glen Mulcaire (Jones and Norton 2014, pp. 147–148). The report concluded that the victims were a handful of public figures (Lewis 2013, p. 72; Davies 2014). However, further investigations in 2011 revealed that not only was phone hacking widespread at the *News of the World* but that bribes were paid to police for information, and the voicemails of crime victims and their relations were intercepted in search of scoops (Keeble and Mair 2012, p. 9; Davies 2014).

The list of identified and alleged victims of the phone hacking contained more than 4000 names (Christopher 2012, p. 114) including a murdered school girl, 13-year-old Amanda Jane “Milly” Dowler; victims of the July 7 (2005) London bombings and relatives of deceased British soldiers (Davies 2014; Marsh and Melville 2014, p. 147). The case of hacking into the phone of the murdered school girl, in particular, resulted in public outcry against the *News of the World* possibly because this signalled extension of the use of subterfuge by the media to members of the public who were not public figures. News on the phone hacking scandal flooded front pages and headlines of the media worldwide; advertisers withdrew patronage from the newspaper and on 7 July 2011, the company announced the closure of the *News of the World*. The newspaper published its last edition on 10 July 2011 with the caption “Thank You and Good Bye”, bringing to an end its 168 years of publication (Keeble and Mair 2012, p. 12; Davies 2014).

The controversy did not end with the closure of the *News of the World* (also referred to as *NoTW* in this study). By 2014, there had been more than 100 arrests linked to the scandal; 63 of them journalists, including Rebekah Brooks, the former chief executive of News International and Andy Coulson, a former *NoTW* editor who became the then Prime Minister David Cameron’s spokesperson after his resignation from the newspaper during the first phase of investigations into the scandal (Ponsford 2014). Andy Coulson resigned from his position as David Cameron’s spokesperson in the heat of the second phase of the controversy. He was among those who received jail sentences for their role in the scandal, while Rebekah Brooks and a few others were found not guilty (Davies 2014). Other casualties of the scandal include a number of

high-profile resignations. Among them were two top police officers: Sir Paul Stephenson who was the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and John Yates, the then Assistant Commissioner in charge of specialist operations. Both resigned from their duties because of their role, or lack of it, in the investigation of the scandal (Christopher 2012, pp. 112–144).

News International (now News UK as part of a rebranding after the scandal—*BBC News* 2013), a subsidiary of News Corporation and parent company to the *News of the World*, spent over £400 million for civil litigation settlement of claims from victims of the phone hacking, with the likelihood of more settlement claims ahead (Simon 2019). In the midst of the scandal, News Corporation (as then constituted) had to withdraw its bid for the complete takeover of BskyB (Keeble and Mair 2012, p. 12). However, the bid was relaunched in 2016, through Rupert Murdoch’s 21st Century Fox company but it was lost to Comcast in 2018 (King 2016; Waterson 2018).

There were further allegations as well as confirmations that journalists from other newspapers (including papers in the Trinity Mirror group which rebranded as *Reach* in 2018) were involved in phone hacking and other unwholesome journalistic practices (*BBC News* 2018). It became clear early in the controversy that this was not just about the *News of the World* but about the press industry. Very importantly, this scandal led to the setting up of the Leveson Inquiry. The Leveson Inquiry (2012f) was arguably one of the most significant events in British newspaper history because it cast a much-needed critical eye over the ethical practices and culture of the press. This book examines the ways in which sections of the mainstream British press represented the ongoing debate about press ethics and the strategies they undertook to protect themselves from the threat of tighter regulation. A flurry of media coverage presented the ensuing press reform debate from different perspectives. Thus, the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry provided a veritable opportunity for an investigation into how the media cover debates about their policy.

The study of how the media cover debates about their policy is important because of the susceptibility of the media to abuse their power to control information when covering issues in which they have interests and the adverse effect this could have on the quality of media policies. Other institutions in society have little or no say on what or how much about them is published by the press. The situation is different for the press because since they have the power to receive and disseminate information,

they can choose what information about themselves is made public. This gatekeeping power of journalism gives the institution enormous powers which are prone to abuse when they cover debates about their policies. The media can use their gatekeeping and agenda-setting powers to influence decisions and opinion in favour of their position in a debate. They can also limit the information available in the public sphere by keeping silent on issues they do not wish discussed in such debates. When this occurs during the coverage of debates about media policy, it reduces the quality of information available to policymakers and members of the public on how to reform the press (see Chap. 2). This book shows how this was done during the coverage of the media policy debate that arose from the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. This debate is also referred to in this book as the press reform or media policy debate.

One way to sustain democracy is to hold the powerful in society to account. The media are powerful and as such should be held to account through regular analyses of how they cover issues in which they have interests. The study of media self-coverage serves as a media accountability system by stimulating the media to cover themselves based on democratic principles. Such studies can identify when the media are taking advantage of their power to control information and make recommendations accordingly. It can equip the public with knowledge of how to consume journalistic metadiscourse so that they can make informed decisions about media policy. The study of news self-coverage also helps to highlight the importance of press coverage of media issues and the consequences the manner of coverage could have for democracy. Such consequences could range from limiting the access of other stakeholders to public debates on media reform to the emergence of weak media policies that cannot guarantee an accountable press as was the case with the coverage of the media reform debate. Chaps. 8, 9 and 10 will expand on this.

With regard to weak media policies, a number of incidents have taken place after the media reform efforts that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal that raise questions about the strength of the reforms that followed the scandal. When the Leveson Inquiry was set up, it was hoped that it will make up for decades of unsuccessful efforts at taming the press (ensuring it does not abuse its powers) but several happenings after Leveson that raise doubts about the quality of the reforms made, making an investigation into how to avert weak press reforms essential.

For instance, in an article entitled “Sam Allardyce, the Telegraph and Another IPSO Failure” Cathcart’s (2018) criticised both the *Daily*

*Telegraph* and IPSO (Independent Press Standards Organisation) for their poor handling of complaints of inaccuracies and misleading information in the *Daily Telegraph*'s publication of an article on the then England football manager, Sam Allardyce. Cathcart's criticism relates to the *Daily Telegraph*'s publication headlined "Exclusive investigation: England manager Sam Allardyce for sale" (*Daily Telegraph* 2016). The news story reported that "Sam Allardyce used his position as England manager to negotiate a £400,000 deal and offered advice to businessmen on how to "get around" FA rules on player transfers" (*Daily Telegraph* 2016). The video recordings which led to Allardyce's resignation of his job as the England football manager was later found to have been distorted by the newspaper to give the impression that Allardyce was corrupt and that this was a scandal. The fact that the story was sourced through covert recording of reporters posing as businessmen raises questions about how much the press has changed after the media reform efforts that followed the phone hacking scandal.

Many of the arguments in the media reform debate were based on lay and specialist normative theories of the press because the debate was about press standards and normative theory relates to expectations on how the media ought to behave in order to be useful to society (McQuail 2010, p. 14). Since Britain like most Western nations functions as a liberal democracy, my analysis of the debate is based on liberal ideologies of democracy, specifically the neoliberal variant of the libertarian theory (Siebert et al. 1956; McQuail 2010) and the ideology of social democracy (Pickard 2015; Schlosberg 2017). These theories are relevant to this study on two levels: firstly, media coverage in Western democracies are often guided by these ideologies; secondly, previous studies show that arguments in media policy debates have drawn from these two ideologies.

Several scholars agree that journalism plays a vital role in the sustenance of democracy (Herman and Chomsky 2008; Lee-Wright et al. 2012, p. 3). Did the press fulfil its democratic function in its coverage of the press reform debate? Did it provide a space for public debate where citizens can participate in governance by deliberating on issues that concern them without any form of marginalisation? To what extent did it do this, if at all? To effectively answer these questions, this book engages with the public sphere concept (Habermas 1989; Fraser 1992). The public sphere concept, as used in this book, relates to the normative expectation that the media ought to function as a space where all stakeholders of a debate can contribute to the discussion, irrespective of their status (Habermas 1989).

Normatively, that would require the press to give proportionate access to various stakeholders in a debate; bring alternative views to the public sphere for discussion and encourage deliberations including constructive criticism, amongst others. The question is, “do the media do these when they cover debates about their policies?” Many scholars say that has not been the case (Carlson and Berkowitz 2014; Thomas and Finneman 2014).

Previous studies on metajournalistic discourse pointed out that media coverage of the press is often characterised by certain paradigm repair strategies (Carlson and Berkowitz 2014). The term “paradigm repair” was used by Bennett et al. (1985) to describe “how journalistic self-criticism protects existing paradigms rather than confronts entrenched deficiencies and contradictions” (cited in Carlson 2015, p. 4). The notion of paradigm repair has been employed by previous scholars to examine how the press cover themselves in relation to objectivity (Reese 1990, 1997); fabrications (Hindman 2005; Carlson 2009); reporting errors (Cecil 2002); paparazzi (Berkowitz 2000; Bishop 1999), scapegoating (Berger 2008); media scandal (Carlson and Berkowitz 2014) and press standards (Thomas and Finneman 2014). Studies on journalistic metadiscourse identified four strategies employed by the media to protect an existing paradigm. They include the paradigm strategies of “threat to the paradigm” or “catastrophisation”, self-assertion also known as self-affirmation, minimisation and individualisation or localisation (Berkowitz 2000; Cecil 2002; Thomas and Finneman 2014). My investigation into how the press covered the debate that arose from the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry revealed that these strategies were employed in the coverage of the press reform debate.

Content analysis and some principles from Norman Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis were used to examine the coverage of the debate in six of the top ten British national newspapers (based on combined print and online readership figures for April 2011 to March 2012—Source: NRS PADD 2012). The papers are *Daily Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mirror* and *The Sun*. I decided to examine national newspapers because of their nationwide reach. Though an examination of other media platforms’ coverage of the debate would be beneficial, I consider the newspaper a good starting point because of its place of significance in the debate (the scandal involved a national newspaper and the inquiry’s focus was on the printed press). This research can be built upon in future studies in the form of a comparison between the printed press’ coverage versus the broadcast or Web news coverage of this debate.

The following section provides a synopsis of the existing literature on the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry to make clear the contribution of this book to the broad literature.

## THE BROAD LITERATURE ON THE PHONE HACKING SCANDAL AND THE LEVESON INQUIRY

At the time of my investigation, the body of literature on the media coverage of the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry was still in its early stages. Much of what had been written was on the debate itself, and not on how it was covered by the press. There was need for detailed scholarly literature on how this debate, which had the potential to change the future of British journalism, was covered by the press. The body of literature on the phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry comprised of debates on how to regulate the press (e.g. see Bloy 2012; Carney 2012); how journalism ethics is and ought to be taught in the UK's higher institutions of learning (Petley 2012; Harding 2012b); and narratives of the scandal and the Leveson Inquiry (Davies 2014). Analysts in related fields of practice had also written about the phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry but mostly as a small part of a wider discussion (Curtis et al. 2013). Only few empirical studies had been done on the coverage of the media policy debate that arose from the phone hacking scandal and/or the Leveson Inquiry (Ramsay 2013, 2014; Carlson and Berkowitz 2014; Thomas and Finneman 2014), and not many of the studies went beyond the stage of the Leveson Inquiry.

While studies that covered the debate up to that point have been very useful, so much has happened after the inquiry that is worth examining—Sir Brian Leveson has presented his report; the press presented their own Royal Charter which was rejected; the government has set up the Royal Charter on press regulation which much of the press rejected and they have set up their own IPSO (Independent Press Standards Organisation); and IMPRESS, the first press regulator recognised by the Press Recognition Panel of the Royal Charter on Press Self-Regulation, has been set up (IMPRESS 2016; Mayhew 2016). This book fills the gap in the body of literature by providing in-depth analysis of the coverage of the debate beyond the stage of the Leveson Inquiry. As stated earlier, the aim is to present and analyse how the debate was covered; hoping that by so doing, I will enlighten readers on how the coverage of media policy contributes



to weak media reforms; how to consume journalistic metadiscourse on media policy; and some of the steps that can result in the creation of effective media policies. In the following paragraphs, I take a closer look at the existing literature on the phone hacking scandal, the Leveson Inquiry and the press standards debate that followed. By examining how similar or different they are to the content of this book, I intend to highlight this book's contribution to the broad literature.

The literature on how ethics are and ought to be taught on journalism courses across universities in the UK, which was often tagged "Teaching after Leveson" (Cathcart 2011; Harding 2012b), disclosed that ethics was only a minor part of the accredited courses in the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) curriculum. It demonstrated that journalism students in UK were taught to know their boundaries in terms of press regulations and media law but were not necessarily taught ethics in detail. The concern of this aspect of the phone hacking scandal and Leveson Inquiry literature is to examine whether teachers of journalism in the nation's universities played a role in encouraging or averting such press misconducts as exemplified in the phone hacking scandal. The literature proffered changes to how journalism is taught in Universities across Britain "after Leveson".

For instance, after the seating of the Leveson Inquiry, Harding (2012b) carried out an empirical study on the teaching of journalism studies in the UK. The study which was done under the auspices of the NCTJ was aimed at finding out the views of stakeholders (including academics and media executives) in the industry on the teaching of journalism prior to the phone hacking scandal. Most of those interviewed were dissatisfied with how it had been done in the past and agreed that there is need for a change (*ibid.*). This, they argue, would require placing premium on the teaching of ethics in journalism courses across the UK. The study also showed that there was a wide consensus among stakeholders that revelations at the Leveson Inquiry on how ethics had been taught in journalism courses across the nation's Universities dented the integrity of the teachers in particular, and the profession in general. Though a few academics expressed fears that the debate on ethics would lead to the stifling of good journalism, majority posited that "ethics do matter and matter a lot" (Greenslade and Harding 2013, n.p.). Harding's (2012b) recommendations included a mid-career ethical training for all journalists. Though how ethics are taught on journalism courses has implications for democracy, the literature differs from the focus of this book in the sense that their

object of study was media studies practitioners and not practising journalists.

Some practising journalists authored works on the scandal and the Leveson Inquiry but their focus was mostly on the narrative of the scandal or on the debate, not its media coverage (Dacre 2011; Keeble and Mair 2012, pp. 6–15; Davies 2014). In line with Thompson’s (2000, p. 36) observation that journalists and participants of scandals who have some form of insider knowledge write books and articles that “retell the stories of particular scandals” from different points of view, the *Guardian*’s Nick Davies (2014) wrote *Hack Attack: How the Truth Caught Up with Rupert Murdoch*, a book which gives an insider account of how the scandal at *News of the World* unfolded. Using the first-person narrative, Davies tells how he got wind of the unlawful activities that went on at *News of the World* and how along with some lawyers, MPs and celebrities, he was able to hold *News of the World* and its owner, Rupert Murdoch, to account (ibid.).

His work, which drew from exclusive interviews with private investigators, journalists, politicians, police officers and staff of the newspaper, tells of the unlawful activities that went on in the newsroom of *News of the World* (ibid.). Davies (2014, p. 76) described in detail how private investigators hacked phones for journalists; how they listened to live calls and bribed the police for information. The work also tells of how News International (now News UK) attempted to cover up the extent of its involvement in phone hacking with lies and money, how press regulators shirked their responsibility and failed to call the newspaper’s erring staff to account and how corrupt police officers broke official secrecy rules for money (Davies 2014). The author also narrates how politicians in power gave Rupert Murdoch privileged access to government, allowing him and his staff to intimidate anyone who stood up to them (ibid.). Davies’ (2014) publication differs from this book in the sense that it is only a narrative of the controversy and does not show how the media covered it. This study acknowledges the relevance of this narrative to the body of literature on the scandal and does not attempt to replicate this effort. So, unlike Davies (2014), my work does not deal directly with the scandal but with the press reform debate that arose from it and how this debate was covered by the media. However, basic knowledge of the scandal story will help the reader grasp the essence of the debate; that is why a brief narrative on the phone hacking scandal was provided earlier in this chapter.

An example of works in related fields of practice that have discussed the phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry as a small part of a wider conversation is (Marsh and Melville 2014). In their book *Crime, Justice and the Media*, the authors gave the phone hacking scandal as an example of secondary victimisation. This is a brief explanation of media involvement in secondary victimisation using the phone hacking as an example (Marsh and Melville 2014, p. 147). It explained how victims of phone hacking such as the murdered school girl Milly Dowler, victims of the July 7 (2005) London bombings and celebrities were all sufferers of secondary victimisation. Here, the scandal literature served as a tool for studies on the criminal justice system. In the field of law in particular, the phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry have formed parts of larger discussions on human rights, privacy and defamation (Smartt 2014, pp. 110–111).

There have been a few works written on how the media covered the debate that followed the phone hacking scandal. Very relevant among them are Thomas and Finneman's (2014) "Who watches the watchdogs? British newspaper meta-discourse on the Leveson Inquiry"; Carlson and Berkowitz's (2014) "The emperor lost his clothes": Rupert Murdoch, *News of the World* and journalistic boundary work in the UK and USA"; and Ramsay's (2014) study on "How newspapers covered regulation after Leveson". Similar to my analysis in this book, Carlson and Berkowitz (2014) employed the notion of paradigm repair to analyse journalistic metadiscourse. By comparing the US press coverage of the phone hacking scandal with that of the UK, Carlson and Berkowitz (2014) were able to show the differences in how the two countries used boundary work to articulate appropriate practices through their definition of deviant behaviour. Thomas and Finneman (2014) skipped the phone hacking scandal to focus on the press coverage of the Leveson Inquiry. Also using the notion of paradigm repair, their study revealed that the British press has "an institutional ideology that is quick to assert rights but largely resistant to notions of attendant responsibilities" (ibid., p. 172).

One way in which my work differs from those of Thomas and Finneman (2014) and Carlson and Berkowitz (2014) is that their investigations did not go beyond the Leveson Inquiry. While their studies are useful contributions to the body of literature on the media coverage of the phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry, they did not examine, for example, reactions to Lord Justice Leveson's report and the setting up of the Royal Charter on press regulation. Reactions to the coverage of these and other events that followed revealed trends in the coverage of media policy

that are beneficial to study. In addition to exploring news coverage of the media policy debate beyond the Leveson Inquiry, this book added one more paradigm repair strategy, historicisation, to Thomas and Finneman's (2014) four paradigmatic strategies (catastrophisation, self-affirmation, minimisation and localisation) to make allowance for the use of durational modes of analysis in the study of journalistic metadiscourse (see Chap. 5). It is one thing to say something is paradigmatic but the extent to which it is paradigmatic also matters. For example, Carlson and Berkowitz (2014) and Thomas and Finneman (2014) pointed out that the press asserted its usefulness (the strategy of self-affirmation); this book goes beyond that to show the extent to which the press asserted its usefulness, by providing statistical data (see Chap. 7), thus providing more details in the form of data on the level of application of some paradigmatic strategies.

This book contributes to the body of literature on the phone hacking scandal; the Leveson Inquiry; the coverage of media policy and journalistic metadiscourse by providing an in-depth analysis of the coverage of the media policy debate that arose from the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. It posits that the way the media cover debates about their policy is partly responsible for the emergence of weak media reforms. Using statistical data and remarkable examples from news articles, this book shows how the media failed to serve as a democratic public sphere during the debate on press standards that followed the phone hacking scandal. It also expands on existing knowledge on metajournalistic discourse (discourse about discourse on journalism) and provides statistical data to back up arguments on how the media cover debates about their policy. The scope and organisation of this book is summarised in the next subsection.

## ORGANISATION OF THIS BOOK

This book is made up of 11 chapters. Chapter 2 presents key subjects of the media reform debate that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. They include arguments relating press freedom, the public interest, privacy and media ownership. On press freedom, the chapter discusses its definition, the history of press freedom in the UK and its relationship with freedom of expression as spelt out in Article 10 of the Human Rights Act of 1998. The debate about press freedom is often linked to the “public’s right to know”. The press is endowed with the privilege of breaking some laws in order to let the public know, if the news

is in the public interest but what is the “public interest”? A brief background on the controversy about the meaning of the public interest is provided in this section. Many instances where the media were criticised for misusing “the public interest” clause have been on issues relating to the invasion of privacy. Therefore, this chapter discusses the tensions between the “public interest” and the right of citizens to have a private life.

My analysis of the debate about privacy draws from Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Some studies have argued that the media’s abuse of the public interest clause by invading the privacy of members of the public is the reason for the reduction of public trust in the press (Petley 2013). Scholars like McChesney (2008) attribute the blame for lack of trust in the media to media owners who exploit the press’ privileged position for selfish gains. This chapter highlights key debates on concentration of media ownership, comparing neoliberal perspectives with the political economy critique on media ownership. These perspectives on concentration of media ownership feature prominently in debates about media policy as such knowledge of these views is essential for effective analysis and comprehension of how the press cover debates about media ownership.

Chapter 3 extends the discussion of key debates on media policy to press regulation. It provides a brief background information on press regulation in the UK. It does this through a historical analysis of press regulation in the UK from the 1949 press commission to the Leveson Inquiry (2012). Efforts to regulate the press are critically analysed. Chapter 4 explores normative theories and ideologies of the press in relation to the coverage of media policy debates. The normative theories and ideologies examined are the neoliberal variant of the libertarian theory, the ideology of social democracy and the concept of the public sphere. Reviewing these ideologies and theories in relation to the coverage of media policy gives us insight into the logic behind the different styles of coverage of debates on media policy. To establish the role of the media in the coverage of media reform debates within a democratic society, the chapter examines the meaning and importance of democracy, the role of the press in a democratic society and various conceptions of the public sphere (Habermas 1989; Fraser 1992; Ornebring and Jonsson 2004). The chapter employs the public sphere concept both as “platform” (a space for citizens’ participation in public debates) and as “discourse” (demonstrating that multiple discursive publics can emerge from journalism’s interpretive community)

especially when the media attempt to maintain their boundaries in journalistic metadiscourse.

Chapter 5 attempts to make clear the difference between metajournalistic discourse and journalistic metadiscourse while arguing for a new definition of metacoverage. Clear definitions of these terms will promote understanding of their use in the book and will contribute to the academic literature on metacoverage. From clarification of terms, I move on to introduce the term “paradigm repair” and explain the paradigm repair strategies explored in my analysis of the media reform debate. Previous academic literature identified four paradigm repair strategies used in the coverage of debates about journalism. They are “threat to the paradigm”, self-assertion, minimisation and individualisation (Reese 1990; Cecil 2002; Thomas and Finneman 2014). I add to these the strategy of historicisation. These strategies will be used in Chaps. 6, 7 and 8 to explain how the press covered the debate that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal. Chapter 5 also gives insight into the research on which discussions in this book are based. It explains the method used for the study. Content analysis was supplemented by critical discourse analysis to show how six British national newspapers covered the media policy debate. Two newspapers from each classification of British newspapers (broadsheet, mid-markets and tabloids) were examined. This leads to analysis of the findings in the following chapters.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 show how various paradigm repair strategies were used in the coverage of the media reform debate and discuss the implication of the type of coverage for efforts at reforming the press and for democracy. Chapter 6 discusses how the strategies of “historicisation” and “threat to the paradigm” were used in the debate. The chapter shows how the “threat to the paradigm” strategy emerged as the dominant theme in the coverage. Chapter 7 discusses how the strategies of individualisation and self-assertion were utilised in the coverage of the media policy debate. Using the concept of political economy, it shows how blame was attributed for press bad behaviour in the journalistic metadiscourse. Chapter 8 shows how the strategy of minimisation was employed in an effort to downplay the phone hacking scandal and the institution set up to investigate the culture, ethics and practice of the press. These chapters aspire to enlighten readers on how the media cover debates about their policies so that they can separate the wheat from the chaff when they consume journalistic metadiscourse on media policy. In other words, they can discern when an article or argument on press reform is predicated on self-interest

and when it is for the public good. The chapter aspires to contribute to the development of an informed citizenry who can actively and intelligently participate in debates about media policy.

Using statistical data from my content analysis of 870 news articles, Chaps. 9 and 10 evaluate how the media served as a democratic sphere in their coverage of the press reform debate. In Chap. 9, I show how sources were used in news articles on the debate. The sources were categorised into press-related sources, policymakers, press-abuse-victims-related sources, Leveson and Royal Charter, judiciary, police and ordinary members of the public. Attempts at regulating the press are often enmeshed in both adversarial and reciprocal relationships between the press and policymakers. This chapter also examines this relationship. The goal is to bring to the fore behaviours (conscious or subconscious) of journalists and policymakers that have impacted on the creation of media policies. Chapter 10 expands on how the media represent debates about their policy focusing on the hierarchy of importance accorded to different arguments and issues of concern in the debate. Hierarchy of importance was measured using the inverted pyramid structure of news writing where the most important details in the news appear at the top of the narrative structure. By assessing the use of sources and the hierarchy of importance accorded to issues in the debate, the chapter reveals the extent to which the media served as a democratic public sphere in these areas.

Chapter 10 also reveals and analyses alternative views that emerged in the journalistic metadiscourse on the press reform debate. The alternative views identified include “strengthen checks on media ownership concentration”, “enforce existing laws on crimes such as phone hacking”, “avoid all forms of Royal Charter”, “a cultural revolution of journalists and proprietors is key to press reform”, “some level of privacy invasion is a necessary hazard of a free press” and “do not expect too much from the press”. Possible reasons for the lack of engagement with some of these views are offered along with their potential for media reform. Chapter 11, which is the final chapter, highlights key arguments in this book; it makes recommendations on how the media can serve as a democratic public sphere, a space where robust debates on media reform can take place. This book posits that such debates can give birth to ideas for effective media reform. As part of recommendations in Chap. 10, I make a case for non-governmental public reformism. This concept can be further developed in future academic literature.

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## CHAPTER 2

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# The Press Reform Debate

Issues relating to press freedom, the public interest, privacy and media ownership feature regularly in debates about press standards. That is because these issues can be linked to laws and policies that have been put in place to promote peaceful co-existence, prevent anarchy in society, uphold human rights and sustain democracy. For instance, privacy and press freedom relate to Articles 8 and 10, respectively, of the Human Rights Act 1998. Where they are violated, the structures that hold a democratic society together are weakened and the impact can be disastrous ranging from the press losing its ability to hold power to account to citizens committing suicides because of the pressures emanating from invasion into their private lives by journalists. Poor handling of any of the issues mentioned can result in the demise of democracy and peaceful co-existence. It is, therefore, not surprising that these themes are recurrent in debates about media standards. Because they were significant in the media policy debate that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal, this chapter provides background knowledge on these key issues. The concept of political economy is used to explain the debate on the issue of concentration of media ownership. All these will equip the reader with the information needed to understand my analysis of how journalists covered the media policy debate that arose from the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. I will begin with the issue of press freedom.

Press freedom refers to “that degree of freedom from restraint which is essential to enable proprietors, editors and journalists to advance the

public interest” (Royal Commission of the Press 1977, cited in Frost 2007, p. 43). It is essentially the creation of an enabling environment for the media to express opinion or publish articles without censorship. The history of press freedom in the UK is largely linked to the struggle against state suppression (Curran and Seaton 2010, p. 1). Significant among the steps to press freedom in the UK were the abolition of the Court of Star Chamber in 1641, the end of press licensing in 1694, the Fox’s Libel Act of 1792 and the repeal of the “taxes on knowledge” (tax on advertising, stamp duty, tax on paper) in the period 1853–1861. Some analysts claim that the press became free only at the tail end of these reforms (ibid.). However, there are still debates about whether the British press is truly free from both state and corporate influence. At the time of writing, press freedom in the UK was based on the human right to free expression. The right to free expression in the UK as spelt out in the Human Rights Act of 1998 was derived from the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Article 10 of the ECHR states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. The right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.

The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interest of national security, territorial integrity or public safety.

This Article protects the right to express as well as receive opinions and information. Freedom of expression is the foundation of a good number of democratic rights. For instance, it empowers the public to express their views in debates that could influence policy decisions. Freedom of expression, and by extension freedom of the press, also enables journalists to investigate and expose corrupt practices by the powerful in society. Examples are the BBC’s *Panorama* exposure of abuse of patients at Winterbourne View in Bristol, UK (BBC News 2011), and the role played by *Guardian* newspaper in exposing the extent of phone hacking at the *News of the World* (Davies 2014). Thus, freedom of expression is integral to the sustenance of democracy and good governance.

As shown in Article 10 (2) of the Human Rights Acts 1998, freedom of expression comes with responsibilities for all concerned. For democracy to thrive, each beneficiary must not overstep his or her bounds in freedom of

expression. The state must not censor the press needlessly and must protect the right to freedom of expression by the media. This is very important if the media is to fulfil its role as the watchdog of society (checking on the powerful to ensure they are accountable to society). The media must be free to access relevant information from public office holders, private organisations and other people in positions of authority, and should disseminate the news gathered to members of the public (Frost 2007, p. 40). The right of members of the public to express their views on this matter should also be protected. Protection of press freedom by the state must be accompanied by a commensurate protection of the right to freedom of expression by individuals. The press, for its part, must respect the citizens' right to privacy.

However, as mentioned earlier in this book, the press has often been accused of abusing its freedom by way of invasion of privacy and defamation of character. Many have asked whether “the media have gone too far, too often” especially since the death of Princess Diana in August 1997 (Sartore 2000, p. 49) and, more recently, with the hacking of the phones of some members of the public by the *News of the World*. There are laws in place for the protection of the freedom of others. For example, the law on defamation allows the award of compensation if a person's reputation has been dented (e.g. *Lachaux v Independent Print* [2019] UKSC 27). The law on defamation was reformed, resulting in the creation of the Defamation Act 2013. There is also a law against the interception of private communication through covert means such as hidden cameras and computer hacking (Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000). These laws, though not solely for the press, are being used to ensure that the media do not overstep their bounds in the exercise of their freedom. However, the media can be exempted from obeying these laws when their actions are in “the public interest” (Editors' Code of Practice 2016, Clause 10). This is where the controversy lies: what constitutes the “public interest”?

In democratic societies, the duty of the press is often articulated in terms of “the public's right to know” (ibid.). For instance, if government officials are misappropriating funds under their control or a business outfit is defrauding its customers, the press has an obligation to let the public know about it. If the only means of getting this information is through covert means, then the media would not be considered as having broken the law by using such means. That is because the news gathered was in the public interest (for the benefit of the public). Journalists are, by the

Editors' Code of Practice and by law, allowed to indulge in some otherwise unlawful acts when they are being done in the public interest. However, this "public interest" clause that journalists fall back on has often been "used and abused" (Leveson Inquiry 2012). Over the years, the public interest has come to mean things that are of interest to the public; in other words, things that satisfy the public's prurient interests and thereby boost the sales, viewership or readership of the news product (Frost 2007, p. 37). The debate is on where to draw the line in the public interest defence. So, what is the public interest? The meaning of the term has been the focus of a good number of journalistic debates. Some attempts have been made towards making the term clearer in order to prevent its abuse.

The *Guardian* updated its editorial code in the aftermath of the phone hacking scandal and came up with a list of principles on what can be classified as being in the public interest. The list which was drawn up by Sir David Omand, the former head of security and intelligence at the Cabinet Office, states thus:

There must be sufficient cause—the intrusion needs to be justified by the scale of potential harm that might result from it.

There must be integrity of motive—the intrusion must be justified in terms of the public good that would follow from publication.

The methods used must be in proportion to the seriousness of story and its public interest, using the minimum possible intrusion.

There must be proper authority—any intrusion must be authorised at a sufficiently senior level and with appropriate oversight.

There must be a reasonable prospect of success; fishing expeditions are not justified. (Guardian Media Group 2011, p. 4)

The guideline acknowledges that much of journalism is essentially intrusive and urged its staff to avoid invading people's privacy unless there is a clear public interest in doing so. The newspaper stressed that "proportionality is essential, as is proper prior consideration where privacy issues may be involved" (*Guardian* news and media editorial Code, August 2011, p. 4). The lists of guidelines on the public interest by the press, though helpful in checking the abuse of the public interest, still leave a lot of room for controversy. It is not in all cases that a journalist can correctly ascertain "the seriousness of story". For example, while the use of long focal lenses to take shots of a topless princess in a private holiday

environment is obviously not a serious story (and not in the public interest), it is not that clear to ascertain whether a journalist ought to be prosecuted for hacking the phone of a Member of Parliament, if he claims that he had strong reasons to suspect that the MP was involved in a criminal offence but only found out his suspicions were wrong after intercepting his phone messages? Similarly, while hacking telephone messages is a criminal offense, the public interest defence would have protected a journalist if, for example, Milly Dowler was found alive through information received from hacking into her voicemail.

Although it would be reckless to suggest that all covert investigations carried out by journalists should be excused based on claims that they are in the public interest, it is worthy of note that some stories of major public interest have been exposed by means of long focal lenses, deceit, bugging devices, false identities, trickery and even computer hacking. An example is the exposure of patterns of serious abuse at the Winterbourne View care facility which was revealed through secret filming by BBC *Panorama* (*Panorama* 2011). The public interest clause exists to make room for such coverage.

The version of the Editors' Codebook that was in operation at the time of the phone hacking scandal stated, "the public interest is impossible to define (Beales 2012, p. 86). So, the code does not attempt to do so". What it did instead was to list out what it described as "a non-exhaustive list" of what is in the public interest. A later version of the Editors' Code of Practice (2016) which came into effect in July 2019 also pointed out that there may be exceptions to specified clauses in the Editors' Code of Practice, where it can be demonstrated that they are in the public interest. It stated:

1. The public interest includes, but is not confined to:
  - Detecting or exposing crime, or the threat of crime, or serious impropriety.
  - Protecting public health or safety.
  - Protecting the public from being misled by an action or statement of an individual or organisation.
  - Disclosing a person or organisation's failure or likely failure to comply with any obligation to which they are subject.
  - Disclosing a miscarriage of justice.



- Raising or contributing to a matter of public debate, including serious cases of impropriety, unethical conduct or incompetence concerning the public.
  - Disclosing concealment, or likely concealment, of any of the above.
2. There is a public interest in freedom of expression itself.

The public interest clause also states that “the regulator will consider the extent to which material is already in the public domain ... or will become so” and that “editors invoking the public interest will need to demonstrate that they reasonably believed publication ... would both serve, and be proportionate to, the public interest and explain how they reached that decision at the time”. To give the Editors’ Code of Practice the benefit of the doubt, these are measures aimed at ensuring that the press does not abuse the “public interest” defence. However, the inexhaustible list as well as the scope of “reasonable belief” makes the meaning assigned to the term very broad such that the term remains fluid. The statement that “the regulator will consider the extent to which material is already in the public domain” has proven to be problematic, especially as the internet can make materials available across geographical locations even when such materials are restricted by law in other locations. For instance, if a story on the private life of an individual has been published in another country’s media, does that make it acceptable for the same material to be published in UK’s mainstream media since it is already in the public domain?

An example is the 2019 case of the English cricketer Ben Stokes and *The Sun*, which belongs to News Group Newspapers (NGN), where Ben Stokes and his mother sued the paper for publishing in England and Wales what the newspaper described as Ben Stokes’ family tragedy. NGN anchored its argument on the fact that the information had been widely published in New Zealand 31 years earlier—before the birth of the player. Nonetheless, UK’s Supreme Court ruled in favour of Ben Stokes on the grounds of damages caused by further intrusion into the English cricketer’s family’s privacy, thus stirring up a debate about the “availability in the public domain” aspect of the code’s public interest guideline. The case of *PJS v NGN* [2016] UKSC 26 is similar to Ben Stokes’ where information in the public domain (published in the USA and internet sites) was insufficient reasons to publish in the UK, and *The Sun* lost the case. The focus of this chapter is not to analyse the impact of internet on the “public interest” defence but to show how definitions of the “public interest” have

been ambiguous in the practice of journalism and this ambiguity has made room for its use to defend kiss and tell stories. Scholars have queried the fluidity of the press' definitions of the public interest, arguing that it is designed to make room for the use of this privilege for self-interested purposes such as intruding into the lives of members of the public (Petley 2013; Harding 2012). Many references to the "the public interest" were made in the journalistic metadiscourse on the media policy debate (see Chaps. 9 and 10).

Much of the debate on the public interest relates to invasions of privacy. How to strike a balance between protection of privacy and journalism in the public interest is one of the controversial issues in debates about media policy. Since the death of Princess Diana in 1997, there have been arguments in the UK about the extent to which the press report on the private lives of people (Petley 2013, p. 59). Aggravated by the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal, these arguments sought to answer the question, "how far can the press go in publishing private information about individuals and how far can the individual go in claiming the right to privacy"? Privacy is recognised both legally and philosophically as a basic human need (Barendt 2002). In the words of Barendt, privacy is important because:

It provides a space for individuals to think for themselves and to engage in creative activity, free from observation and supervision ... personal relationships could not develop if the participants felt that every move was watched and reported ... Privacy is an aspect of human dignity and autonomy. It enables individuals to exercise a degree of independence or control over their lives. Privacy therefore entails rights to be alone and to keep confidential correspondence and other documents, and to ensure that intimate activity is not filmed or reported. (Barendt 2002, pp. 14–15)

Human dignity requires the ability of people to control information about themselves (Frost 2015, p. 93). If individuals are to have a right to dignity, then they will need a right to respect for privacy. Respect to privacy is a fundamental human right that is guaranteed by Article 8 of the Human Rights Act (1998). The Article states:

Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence. There shall be no interference by public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interest of national security, public

safety or economic wellbeing of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals or for the protection of the rights and freedom of others. (Human Rights Act 1998, Chapter 42, Schedule 1, Article 8)

This means that a person whose privacy is invaded has the legal right to sue the culprit for invasion of privacy. Invasion of privacy refers to an intrusion into the private life of another person, without a justifiable reason (Human Rights Act 1998). Invasion of privacy can be applied to different forms of private information dissemination including internet privacy, data collection and workplace monitoring. Although there is no clear-cut privacy law in the UK, there are ways in which privacy is protected (Fenwick et al. 2007, p. 171; Hoffman 2011, p. 148). The most popular is the law of breach of confidence, which allows for the protection of confidential information (Kenyon and Richardson 2006, p. 154). Other laws used to protect privacy include laws on defamation, malicious falsehood, trespass and nuisance.

There are also statutes that protect privacy in certain situations. These include the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (Joint Committee on Privacy and Injunctions 2012, p. 10). Many scholars have argued that there may be a need for an outright privacy law in the UK but the courts appear to be reluctant to create one based on the argument that existing laws would suffice (Hoffman 2011, p. 137). Supporting this view, the report of the 2012 Joint Committee of the House of Commons and the House of Lords on Privacy and Injunctions states:

A privacy statute would not clarify the law. The concepts of privacy and the public interest are not set in stone, and evolve over time. We conclude that the current approach, where judges balance the evidence and make a judgment on a case-by-case basis, provides the best mechanism for balancing article 8 and article 10 rights. (Joint Committee on Privacy and Injunctions 2012, p. 5)

Celebrities are not often granted privacy protection because they are considered to have voluntarily placed themselves within the public eye (Frost 2007, p. 91). For instance, in the case of *Ferdinand v. Mirror Group Newspapers*, Rio Ferdinand, a one-time captain of the England national football team, took legal action against the *Sunday Mirror* for infringing

his right to a private life and misusing his personal information. In this case, Ferdinand's public image and role model status meant there was a public interest in the newspaper's disclosure, sufficient to justify the publication, and Ferdinand lost the case. However, between 2017 and 2020 a good number of celebrities won their claims for privacy (e.g. Ben Stokes v *The Sun* [2019]; *PJS v NGN* [2016]). Much earlier in 2004, Naomi Campbell won her privacy case against Mirror Group Newspapers (MGN).<sup>1</sup> The judgement left the Mirror facing a total legal bill of more than one million pounds (*BBC News* 2004; Gibson 2004). The European Court of Human Rights later ruled that the legal cost *Daily Mirror* had to pay was too high and that a balance be struck between privacy and press freedom (Halliday 2011).

One of the contentions on the issue of privacy is that high legal costs of privacy cases are an impediment to freedom of expression. The argument is that it could impede investigative journalism and restrain the press from fulfilling its watchdog role in society (Joint Committee on Privacy and Injunctions 2012b, p. 5). The Joint Committee on Privacy and Injunctions stated, "excessive costs limit the ability of newspapers and broadcasters to respond to threatened legal action and can result in them not challenging an injunction on the ground of cost" (Joint Committee on Privacy and Injunctions 2012, p. 36, para. 138). In relation to members of the public who need to claim their right to privacy, the argument is that only the rich, including celebrities and political office holders, have access to privacy protection because of the high legal costs involved (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2012, p. 332). The question is, "what is the best action for the government or other relevant authorities to take (or not take) to protect both the individual's right to privacy and freedom of the press?" The Leveson Inquiry discussed high legal costs on the part of both journalists and citizens. Its proposals on these costs formed part of the issues of contention in the press reform debate. The press reform debate

<sup>1</sup> *Campbell v. Mirror Group Newspapers*: Miss Campbell sued MGN for a breach of her privacy after it published a report about her drug addiction with a photograph of her leaving a Narcotics Anonymous meeting in King's Road, Chelsea. In March 2002 (a year from the month of publication), the model successfully claimed breach of privacy and the High Court ordered £3500 damages from the *Mirror*. Though an Appeal Court judgement overturned the High Court ruling in October 2002, ordering her to pay the paper's £350,000 legal costs, in May 2004 the House of Lords overturned the Appeal Court's decision, reinstating the High Court judgement and damages, based on breach of confidentiality and breach of duty under the 1998 Data Protection Act.

also featured arguments on the impact of media ownership on press standards, particularly its effect on the press' ability to fulfil its role in a democracy. The following section x-rays key arguments on the relationship between media ownership and the sustenance of democracy. Media ownership is one of the issues discussed during the media policy debate. Its impact on the coverage also makes it one of the key issues examined in this book.

### CONCENTRATION OF MEDIA OWNERSHIP

Concentration of media ownership refers to a situation in which the bulk of the mass media is increasingly being controlled (in terms of shares) by a small number of persons or organisations (Curran and Seaton 2010, p. 75). There are increasing levels of concentration of media ownership in most Western democracies (Baker 2007, p. 3; Media Reform Coalition 2019). This is the result of big media industries buying up smaller and weaker ones who are unable to survive the economic downturn in the media industry (Bagdikian 2004). The aim was often to take over their resources and thereby increase financial gains, readership/viewership and, invariably, power. From about the twentieth century most Western democracies began to identify the growing media concentration as a threat to democracy and a number of them adopted policies to check the trend (Baker 2007, p. 3). These policies, which were aimed at supporting press diversity, took the form of competition laws or subsidy arrangements for weaker/potentially viable media (ibid.). This was, however, insufficient to stop the trend in concentration of media ownership. A look at the ownership of the newspapers examined in this book will give us a picture of the level of media ownership concentration in the UK.

*The Sun* newspaper is owned by Rupert Murdoch's News UK which also owns *The Times*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Sun on Sunday* newspapers (News UK 2015). The *Daily Mail* is owned by Viscount Rothermere, owner of DMG Media (formerly Associated Newspapers), a subsidiary of DMGT (DMG Media 2017). DMG Media also owns the *Mail on Sunday*, *Metro*, *Wowcher*, *Jobsite* and *Jobrapido* (DMG Media 2017). Though the owner of *Daily Mail* delegates substantial management of the paper, including the management of its content, to an editor in chief, who at the time of my research was Paul Dacre, the paper has not functioned much differently from newspapers without that level of apparent detachment in terms of commercialisation (Cole and Harcup 2009, p. 85). The *Daily*

*Telegraph* belongs to the Telegraph Media Group (formerly, the Telegraph) which is owned by the Barclay Brothers (Telegraph Media Group 2017). The Barclay Brothers—David and Fredrick Barclay—also own the *Sunday Telegraph* (Telegraph Media Group 2017).

At the time of the debate that followed the phone hacking scandal, the *Daily Mirror* was owned by Trinity Mirror. As of 2017, Trinity Mirror was Britain’s largest newspaper group with more than 150 newspaper titles across the UK and Ireland. Its portfolio of newspapers included the *Sunday Mirror*, *Daily Record*, *Sunday People* and *Sunday Mail* (Trinity Mirror 2013). During the period covered in my investigation (2011–2013—the peak of the debate), the *Daily Express* belonged to Richard Desmond’s Northern and Shell company which also owned *Sunday Express*, *Daily Star* and *Daily Star Sunday* alongside three magazines: *OK!*, *New!* and *Star* (Northern and Shell 2017). It is important to note that by 2018, Trinity Mirror had bought Richard Desmond’s Express titles demonstrating that the issue of media ownership concentration heightened even after the Leveson Inquiry. The purchase of the Express titles led to Trinity Mirror’s change of name to Reach PLC. As of 2019, Reach plc was “the largest commercial national and regional news publisher in the UK”. Reach owned the *Daily Mirror*, *Sunday Mirror*, *Sunday People*, *Daily Express*, *Sunday Express*, *Daily Star*, *Daily Star Sunday*, *Daily Record*, *Sunday Mail*, *OK!* and *New!*, amongst others. However, in this book, my analysis will be based on how Trinity Mirror and the Express newspapers were constituted at the time of my research.

The *Guardian* is funded by the Scott Trust Ltd, owners of Guardian Media Group (GMMG). During the period covered by my study, they owned *Guardian* newspaper and its Sunday title, the *Observer*. Though Guardian Media Group sold its regional media business to Trinity Mirror in 2010 (Davoudi 2010), it still has “a diverse portfolio of business investments” (Guardian Media Group 2015). The Media Reform Coalition summarised media ownership figures in the UK:

Just three companies (News UK, Daily Mail Group and Reach) dominate 83% of the national newspaper market (up from 71% in 2015). When online readers are included, just five companies (News UK, Daily Mail Group, Reach, Guardian and Telegraph) dominate nearly 80% of the market, slightly up from our last report. In the area of local news, just five companies (Gannett, Johnston Press, Trinity Mirror, Tindle and Archant) account for 80% of titles (in 2015, six companies had the same share). Two companies

have 46% of all commercial local analogue radio stations and two-thirds of all commercial digital stations. (Media Reform Coalition 2019)

Surprisingly, despite the increasing rate of concentration of media ownership, it did not take a prime position in the debate at the Leveson Inquiry, leading to it being described by the Media Reform Coalition as “the elephant in the room” (Media Reform Coalition 2014). It is widely acknowledged that concentration of media ownership is dangerous to the health of democracy because it can result in “abuse of political power by media owners or the under-representation of some significant viewpoints” (Doyle 2002, p. 6). The impact of media ownership concentration on democracy can be understood through the political economy of the press. The following section provides a synopsis of key arguments on media ownership advanced by proponents of political economy and neoliberal theories of the press. By comparing the two perspectives on media ownership, the section seeks to acquaint the reader with the major ideological divides that featured in the media reform debate that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal.

### MEDIA OWNERSHIP: NEOLIBERAL AND POLITICAL ECONOMY PERSPECTIVES

In media studies, political economy refers to a critical approach to media analysis that investigates “how media and communication systems and content are shaped by ownership, market structures, commercial support, technologies, labour practices, and government policies” (McChesney 2008, p. 12). The key focus of the political economy analysis is to ascertain whether media structures serve to promote or undermine democracy, and to explore and recommend ways of ensuring a media structure that enhances democracy (Hardy 2014). Lazarsfeld and Merton ([1948] 2004, p. 236, cited in Freedman 2014, p. 50) emphasised the importance of investigating the media through the lenses of their economic structures. The authors were of the view that the “the social effect of the media will vary as the system of ownership and control varies” (ibid.). The political economy critique theorises that democracy is threatened where there is concentration of media ownership (Freedman 2014, p. 50). It argues that when only a few people own much of the media, it could result in the dominance of a few voices in debates in the media’s public sphere

(Freedman 2014, p. 51). The media content could be tailored to suit the ideology of the owner and where the owner has a high percentage of the media, his or her views become the most heard, giving his or her perspective undue advantage over others (McChesney 2004, p. 224).

An example is the case of Italy's former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi (Baker 2007, p. 18). Without any connection to organised political parties in Italy, Silvio Berlusconi, one of Italy's richest individuals at the time, formed his own party—Forza Italia—and used his massive media power (his media at the time controlled about 45 per cent of national TV along with important print media) to propel himself into the position of Prime Minister in the 1994 and 2001 elections, heading what was, at the time of writing, Italy's longest-lasting government since World War II (Ginsborg 2004; Baker 2007, p. 18). In terms of debates on media policy, the political economy critique would argue that concentration of ownership could limit the chances of having a democratic public sphere because the perspectives of the few owners may dominate the news.

On the other hand, neoliberal analysts argue that though media ownership is oligopolistic, the quest for profit will compel media owners to target diverse consumers and, as such, one owner may not necessarily transmit the same perspective via all his media outlets (Doyle 2002, pp. 12–14). Neoliberal analysts contend that diversity of ownership will not axiomatically translate into diversity of media content (*ibid.*). This is because where different media organisations depend on the same source for their news content, the perspectives may be from a narrow spectrum of sources. For example, where many media organisations depend on copy from news agencies, press releases and public relations material for news, they end up churning out the same messages, making news content from diverse media very similar (Davies 2009, pp. 58–60; Harcup 2014, p. 53). Their argument here is that emphasis should be placed on ensuring diversity of media content, not ownership.

The political economy analysis sees as anti-democratic the increasing media ownership mergers and convergence in most liberal democracies, such as in the USA and the UK. Media convergence refers to a situation in which one media group operates different forms of mass media, for example, broadcast and print, through either cross-media ownership acquisitions or other forms of expansion (Doyle 2002, p. 3). The political economy critical tradition argues that these mergers could result in conflicts of interest because some news organisations may find it difficult to give a comprehensive and fair report about a media outfit that it is



affiliated to (Allan and Zelizer 2010). For instance, my investigation revealed that *The Sun* newspaper found it hard to report freely about the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal because Rupert Murdoch owned both titles.

Conflict of interest resulting from concentration of ownership can also result in large sections of the press using their gatekeeping powers to limit or exclude from journalistic metadiscourse issues that they consider to be against their owner or his interest. As we shall see in Chap. 7, the issue of concentration of media ownership receive minimal attention from debates on media policy because it is often perceived as being against the corporate interest of media owners (McChesney 2008). This agrees with Mill's (1959, p. 18, cited in Freedman 2014, p. 33) argument that [media] power can be exhibited not only in action, but also in failure to act. The issue of concentration of media ownership has remained off limits in journalistic metadiscourse (McChesney 2008; Freedman 2014, p. 73). This may be a ploy to maintain the status quo in the concentration of media ownership.

As part of efforts to gain public trust and prevent further checks on concentration of media ownership, media magnates often advance the neoliberal argument that media owners are not involved in daily supervision of the content of their papers. For instance, *Daily Mail's* owner claims that he “delegates substantial management of the paper, including the management of its content, to an editor in chief” (Cole and Harcup 2009, p. 85). However, studies have shown that newspaper proprietors do interfere with news content either directly or by employing staff they believe will toe their line of argument (Cole and Harcup 2009, pp. 27–28) or even by nominating their children as chair and members of the board. The level of treatment or lack of treatment of the issue of media ownership in journalistic metadiscourse may differ from media outfit to media outfit depending on their structure—their revenue or ownership model (see Chap. 7).

For instance, commercially owned press may respond to issues of ownership differently to non-commercial media. This calls for attention to be placed not only on the plurality of ownership but also on diversity in ownership structure. Media organisations who feel threatened by bigger media conglomerates could call for more robust policies to guarantee plurality in ownership. From a neoliberal perspective, the aim would be for government to intervene by ensuring fair competition among media owners. While this could be classed under social democracy because it attempts to

enhance democracy by ensuring plurality of media ownership, Freedman (2014, p. 72) argues that it can also be described as neoliberal when the aim is to protect business not democracy. This argument will be further developed in my discussion of the political economy of the *Guardian's* coverage of the press reform debate that followed the phone hacking scandal in Chap. 7.

From the neoliberal perspective, the “lack of plurality” critique of media ownership has become obsolete with the coming of the internet (Compaine 2005; Benkler 2006, cited in Hardy 2014). Scholars with this perspective claim that “objectionable concentration” no longer exists because digital technology has made it easier for citizens to set up news websites, blogs, Twitter and other online platforms from which the public can source information (Compaine 2005; Jarvis 2009, cited in Freedman 2014, p. 6). In their view, regulation of ownership beyond what is currently provided is not necessary (Baker 2007, pp. 87–88). Those with this perspective reject worries about concentration of media ownership, contending that the internet will break it up and eliminate any need for regulation aimed at ensuring diversity in ownership (Compaine and Gomery 2000).

But political economy critics contend that even though the internet (social media, Twitter, Facebook, blogs, etc.) plays a role in promoting diversity in general media content, when it comes to news, people still rely more on mainstream media (Lee-Wright et al. 2012, p. 151). This argument supports data from empirical studies which reveal that readership of news on the internet is much higher on the mainstream media websites than on other websites (Ofcom Online Nation Report 2019, p. 27). For instance, *Mail Online* was the most visited website in the world in 2012, and its readership has continued to increase since then (Turvill 2016). It can, therefore, be argued that the “old” media owners are also very powerful in the “new” media. According to Baker (2007, p. 99), the contributions of the internet “are different from or are complementary to, and may often be in part dependent on the more traditional performance of the mass media”. There is a growing concentration in the ownership of corporate online websites, such as Google, Amazon and Facebook which gives credence to the fears that concentration of media ownership is being reproduced on internet platforms (McChesney 2008, pp. 18–19; Schlosberg 2017, p. 4). Freedman puts it this way:

Far from diminishing the importance of media moguls and tech giants, announcing the death of gatekeepers or lauding the autonomy of the public, we should be investigating the way the [media ownership] power is being reconstituted inside digital landscape. (Freedman 2014, p. 107)

Political economists contend that the internet does not eliminate worries concerning concentration of media ownership and that media-specific laws and regulatory policies are still needed to check ownership concentration (Baker 2007, pp. 99–101). Currently, in most Western democracies there are policies designed to promote plurality of media ownership but in some countries, such as the UK, critics argue that the anti-monopoly measures on media ownership are too weak to guarantee plurality of media ownership (Curran and Seaton 2010, pp. 328–338). They argue that British anti-monopoly rules would need to be further strengthened to enable plurality of media ownership (O’Carroll 2012a; Freedman 2013).

Neoliberals counter these arguments by insisting that an active audience plus press self-regulatory bodies would suffice to ensure that the media serve the public interest and are accountable to their readers. But as the Leveson Inquiry demonstrated, the then-existing press regulatory body, the Press Complaints Commission (PCC), was not living up to expectations in its role as regulator of press misconduct. Understanding both the neoliberal and political economy arguments on media ownership is essential for effective analysis of its representation in media reform debates. Contributing to the debate on how to better regulate the press, Freedman (2013) argues that changing the culture of the UK press requires much more than “better codes and a more forceful means of persuading newspapers to play by the rules ... but will involve a challenge to an ownership structure that has placed the press in the hands of a tiny group of oligarchs and moguls”. Alan Rusbridger, the then editor-in-chief of *Guardian* newspaper, warned of the danger of not giving adequate attention to media ownership (O’Carroll 2012b). He advised the inquiry to consider the “significant dangers to democracy” of media power being concentrated in too few hands (*ibid.*).

This book takes the position that the structure of media ownership can impact on news content. The structure of ownership can determine what concerns are allowed in through the gates of the public sphere and what is denied access; who gets to speak and whose voice is marginalised; and how

issues are represented in debates about journalism. This argument will be backed up with empirical data in my analysis of how the debate on media ownership was covered by the press (see Chap. 7). I argue that debates about how to achieve plurality of news content ought to go beyond advocating plurality of owners and one pattern of ownership to diversity of ownership structure (e.g. diversity of revenue generation models). My investigation of how the media policy debate was covered by the press explored the impact of the structure of ownership on the way the debate was represented. Another major issue of concern in the press reform debate was the issue of how the press should be regulated. In the following chapter, I provide background information on what can be described as the foremost issue in the media policy debate that followed the phone hacking scandal—press regulation in the UK. This will provide information needed to understand arguments relating to press regulation in media reform debates.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter explored key issues in media reform debates in order to highlight the recurrent issues in the journalistic metadiscourse on press reform. The issues examined include press freedom, the public interest, privacy and media ownership. Press freedom was defined as “that degree of freedom from restraint which is essential to enable proprietors, editors and journalists to advance the public interest” (Royal Commission of the Press 1977, cited in Frost 2007, p. 43). Journalists are, by the Editors’ Code of Practice, and by law, allowed to indulge in some otherwise unlawful acts when the acts are being done in the public interest. The problem is that this public interest defence has often been used to defend media coverage of kiss and tell stories, a situation which has led to calls for stricter definitions of the public interest than that currently provided by the Editors’ Code of Practice (Petley 2013).

Tensions between privacy and press freedom are also recurrent in debates about media reform. Privacy is recognised both legally and philosophically as a basic human need (Barendt 2002, pp. 14–15; Frost 2015, p. 93). This means that a person whose privacy is invaded has the legal right to sue the culprit for invasion of privacy. As explained in this chapter, invasion of privacy refers to an intrusion into the private life and family life

of another person, without a justifiable reason (Human Rights Act 1998). Most discussions on privacy in the journalistic metadiscourse on media policy relate to whether a media coverage that exposed the private life of an individual was in the public interest. Calls demanding for a fair balance between the freedoms of the press and those of individuals in society are on the rise. Such calls have been extended to privacy protection for celebrities who were once regarded as underserving of privacy protection because they willingly placed their lives in the public view.

Another issue that frequently shows up in debates about media reform is the subject of concentration of media ownership. I defined concentration of media ownership as a situation in which few individuals or organisations own the bulk of the mass media (Fourie 2001, p. 112). I pointed out that there are increasing levels of concentration of media ownership in most Western democracies (Baker 2007, p. 3; Media Reform Coalition 2019). It is widely believed that concentration of media ownership is dangerous to democracy because of its potential to result in the abuse of power by media owners (Doyle 2002, p. 6). The key arguments related to media ownership in the journalistic metadiscourse on media policy can be classified under two major perspectives: the political economy critique versus neoliberal perspectives, a variant of the libertarian theory of the press.

In media studies, political economy refers to a critical approach to media analysis that investigates “how media and communication systems and content are shaped by ownership, market structures, commercial support, technologies, labour practices, and government policies” (McChesney 2008, p. 12). The political economy critique posits that concentration of media ownership is detrimental to democracy because the owners’ views can dominate the news agenda. On the other hand, proponents of neoliberal perspectives on media ownership argue that diversity of ownership will not necessarily result in diversity of news content. This book takes the position that media ownership can impact on news content and that efforts to democratise news content should go beyond diversity of ownership to diversity of revenue or ownership model. Having provided insight into some of the key issues in the journalistic metadiscourse on media reform, the following chapter provides background information on the British press system and the debate on press regulation.

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## British Press System: Press Regulation and Accountability

How to regulate the press is arguably the foremost issue in media reform debates. Therefore, this chapter examines the history of press regulation in the UK as a way of highlighting recurrent trends in efforts at reforming press regulation and the outcomes of such attempts. To this end, this chapter discusses the history of press regulation in Britain, the British press system and relevant aspects of the Leveson Inquiry. The setting up of an inquiry to investigate press standards did not begin with the Leveson Inquiry. For approximately 70 years (at the time of writing), a number of commissions have been set up with a mandate to make the press accountable. These include the Royal Commissions on the press (RCP) 1949, 1962 and 1977 along with two Calcutt Committees (RCP 1949, 1962; Curran and Seaton 2010; Harcup 2014, p. 46). The 1949 Royal Commission on the press was set up by the British government to investigate the increasing concentration of ownership of newspaper and periodicals, and to promote free expression of opinion through the press (Frost 2007; Curran and Seaton 2010). Ironically, the 1949 Royal commission took for granted the power of media proprietors to determine editorial policy (ibid.).

The Press Commission declared that media proprietors should be free to run their publications the way they please on the basis that “proprietors had the right to safeguard their financial investment in a high-risk industry” like the press (Curran and Seaton 2010, p. 328). As Curran and Seaton (2010, p. 328) pointed out, “this hands-off approach assumed that

chain ownership will not develop into a major problem". The position of the 1949 Royal Commission of the press was condemned by the 1962 Press Commission. By that time, the share circulation controlled by media magnates had increased dramatically in all parts of the press. The three leading proprietors' share of the national daily press had risen to 89 per cent. The Commission acknowledged that these were obvious signs of concentration of media ownership; but after much deliberation, the Commission concluded that "there was no acceptable legislative or fiscal method of controlling the economic forces to ensure diversification of newspapers" (Frost 2007, p. 215). The 1977 Press Commission was very vocal in its condemnation of the growing trend of media concentration (Curran and Seaton 2010). It declared that the acceleration of media chain ownership since 1962 was unparalleled; "new acquisitions had also resulted in the same three proprietors dominating both the national daily and the Sunday markets" (Curran and Seaton 2010, p. 319). The 1977 Press Commission was critical of this development. For this Commission, "free press" was not synonymous with newspaper publishers running their papers the way they pleased without due regard for the good of society.

Despite these condemnations, the concentration of press ownership in the UK has remained high in comparison with other European countries. All three commissions on the British press (1949, 1962 and 1977) examined the issue of concentration of media ownership and its potential to cripple press accountability, but the closest they got to tackling the problem was to advocate anti-monopoly measures which did not work (Curran and Seaton 2010, p. 338). This failure has been attributed to policymakers' "fear of the press" because recurrently, when proposals are made on how to regulate the press and control media ownership, they are either not adopted or not implemented. The opposition of publishers to any form of statutory regulation is another recurrent trend during attempts to regulate the press.

The British press operates a system of self-regulation. Self-regulation refers to a system where an industry sets up a body to "control standards in the industry" (Frost 2007, p. 214). Such a body serves as a way of proving to their consumers that they are maintaining high standards. However, this does not appear to have worked well for the British press. Many people have condemned the ethical standards of the press in Britain (Frost 2007; Petley 2013). There has been a barrage of accusations on invasion of privacy, inaccurate reporting and other forms of malpractice (Spark and Harris 2010, p. 193; Cathcart 2018). Some have called for statutory

regulation of the British Press (O'Malley and Soley 2000, p. 178; Frost 2007, p. 236). Statutory regulation is a system of regulation that is set up by law and supported by government (Frost 2007, p. 250). The British press has continued to oppose statutory regulation of the press. The Council (which became the Press Council from 1963) was reluctantly set up in 1953 following threats of statutory regulation resulting from harmful journalism practices (Curran and Seaton 2010, p. 334).

Further threats led to the setting up of the Code of Conduct for journalists and after fresh threats the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) was set up in 1991 (*ibid.*). The PCC was described by many as “lacking teeth” (effectiveness) and ambition (Leveson Inquiry 2012a, p. 555, para. 3.34). Lord Justice Leveson, in his inquiry into the practices, culture and ethics of the media, declared that the PCC had failed in its responsibility as a self-regulatory organ of the press (Leveson 2012b, p. 12, paras. 41–46). Several commentators agree that the PCC failed as a regulator (Bloy 2012, pp. 19–20; Carney 2012, p. 323). The PCC’s investigation of the phone hacking scandal at the *News of the World* is a case in point. When Clive Goodman, the *News of the World* Royal correspondent, and Glen Mulcaire, a private detective employed by the newspaper, were jailed for phone hacking, the PCC investigated the use of subterfuge, phone tapping and compliance with the Editors’ Code of Practice but its report was widely criticised as a “whitewash” (Bloy 2012, p. 18). Andy Coulson resigned as Editor of the *News of the World*, and on that basis, the PCC concluded that he was no longer answerable to the regulatory body because its jurisdiction covered only journalists working for publications that subscribed to the self-regulatory system. The courts later cross-examined Andy Coulson and found him guilty of plotting to intercept voicemails between 2000 and 2006. He was sentenced to 18 months in prison (BBC News 2014).

Having had three major commissions and a PCC that could not ensure an accountable press, the Leveson Inquiry, which followed the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal, was embraced as a perceived opportunity to correct about 70 years of an ineffective press regulatory system in Britain (Leveson 2012b, p. 3, para. 1). The Leveson Inquiry was set up by the British government on 13 July 2011 to investigate the role of the press and the police in the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal (National Archive, Leveson Inquiry 2012a). The scope of the inquiry went beyond the scandal to include broader issues of press and police accountability. The inquiry was triggered by public outrage against the *News of the World*

for its involvement in wide-scale phone hacking, particularly the hacking of the mobile phone of the murdered school girl known as Milly Dowler (Leveson 2012b, p. 3, para. 1). The inquiry which began on 14 November 2011 had as its mandate an inquiry into the culture, practices and ethics of the British press, particularly its relationship with the public, the police and politicians.

The Leveson Inquiry has been described as “the most concentrated look at the press” the UK has ever known (Leveson 2012b, p. 3, para. 3). In a space of about nine months, 337 witnesses gave evidence in person in addition to about 300 whose statements were read into the record (*ibid.*). Among them were victims of press abuse, newspaper reporters, management and proprietors as well as police officers and politicians. The Inquiry’s report, which was released on 29 November 2012, contained proposals for future press regulation of the UK. I do not attempt to capture all information in the 2000-page report but will highlight those aspects that are relevant to discussions in this book. In the Inquiry’s report, Lord Justice Leveson recommended a system of press regulation referred to as independent self-regulation. This system requires the establishment of an independent regulatory body which should promote high standards of journalism and protect the rights of individuals. In the words of Lord Justice Leveson, the independent self-regulatory body should:

Set standards, both through a code and in relation to governance and compliance ... hear individual complaints against its members about breach of its standards and order appropriate redress while encouraging individual newspapers to embrace a more rigorous process for dealing with complaints internally; take an active role in promoting high standards, including having the power to investigate serious or systemic breaches and impose appropriate sanctions; and provide a fair, quick and inexpensive arbitration service to deal with any civil law claims based upon its members’ publications. (Leveson 2012b, pp. 14–15, paras. 56–57)

The appointment of the chairman and members of the independent regulatory body should be independent (Leveson 2012b, p. 15, para. 58). This, he said, can be achieved through the establishment of an independent appointments panel which can include one current editor but should have a majority of persons who are independent of both press and government (*ibid.*). The board of the regulatory body should include sufficient number of people with experience of the industry, such as former editors

and senior or academic journalists (Leveson 2012b, p. 15, para. 59). Those who cannot serve on the board are serving editors or members of the House of Commons or the government. The appointment process should be fair and open (*ibid.*). The idea here was to make the board independent of the industry while ensuring that it does not lack knowledge about its operations.

According to the Leveson Report, funding for the new regulatory body should “be agreed between the regulatory body and the industry with security of funding over a reasonable planning period” (*ibid.*). This ought to take into account “the cost of fulfilling the obligations of the regulator as well as the commercial pressures on the industry” (*ibid.*). This system would also require the setting up of a Code Committee whose role would be to advise the new regulator on the promulgation of a code of practice for the industry. This committee, according to the Inquiry’s report, should include serving editors and engage with the public to review the code. The report also suggested that the new regulatory body be encouraged to deal with complaints even where there is an option of legal action. It is also to issue warning notifications to the press on behalf of persons who become “subjects of unwanted press intrusion and ensure that newspapers are held accountable for all material they print” no matter from where it is sourced.

Lord Justice Leveson recommended that the new independent self-regulatory body provide guidance on interpretation of “the public interest” (Leveson 2012b, p. 15, para. 62). This service will include offering “voluntary pre-publication advice to editors” in need of guidance on how to interpret “the public interest” in a particular case, before they take a decision on whether to publish the story. This service is to be carried out without notifying the subject of the story. The independent self-regulatory body is also expected to create a whistle-blowing hotline as well as ensure that member organisations include a “conscience clause” in their employment contracts with journalists. The “conscience clause” is meant to protect journalists who feel that they are being compelled to do things that are “unethical or against the code”.

To encourage publishers to sign up to an acceptable self-regulatory establishment based on the Inquiry’s guidelines, Lord Justice Leveson recommended that the independent regulatory body be given the power to provide an arbitration service that would be recognised by the courts (Leveson 2012b, p. 16, paras. 66–67). Members of this arbitration body, he suggested, should be retired judges or senior lawyers who are experts in media law and whose charges would be paid by the media outfit

concerned (*ibid.*). They are to resolve disputes through cross-examination, striking out frivolous claims while resolving those with merit. The aim is to provide an incentive through the costs of civil litigation (*ibid.*). The Inquiry also recommended that if a publisher denies a claimant the opportunity of a cheap and fast arbitration because of his refusal to belong to the regulatory system, then the Civil Procedure Rules could give the court permission to deny that publisher its costs of litigation even if he wins the case, because resolving the issue could have been cheaper for all parties involved if the publisher had signed up with the regulator. On the other hand, if a newspaper that refused to subscribe to the new regulatory body is found guilty of infringing the rights of a claimant, such a newspaper would be subjected to payment of exemplary damages (Leveson 2012b, p. 16, para. 68).

Similarly, if a claimant takes advantage of his or her financial power and compels a newspaper who is a member of the self-regulatory body into a litigation, that newspaper would have the right to argue that “having provided a recognised low cost arbitral route, that claimant, even if successful, should be deprived of costs”, because they refused the cheap route to justice offered by the proposed regulatory body (Leveson 2012b, p. 17, para. 69). Of all the recommendations made by the Inquiry, what emerged as the most controversial was its suggestion that the proposed independent self-regulatory system be underpinned by legislation (Leveson Report 2012b, p. 17, para. 70). This became the nucleus of a number of arguments that followed the release of the Leveson Report.

Following Lord Justice Leveson’s proposal that the PCC be replaced by a new independent regulatory body underpinned by statute, the PCC was closed on 8 September 2014. The Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), which describes itself as “the independent regulator for the newspaper and magazine industry in the UK”, began on the same day (PCC 2017; IPSO 2016). The PCC website described IPSO as a replacement of the PCC (PCC 2017). By 2015, over 1500 newspapers and magazines had registered with IPSO. However, some scholars argue that IPSO is not much different from the PCC with regard to ensuring press accountability (Cathcart 2018, 2019). Lord Justice Leveson’s recommendation led to the setting up of the Royal Charter on self-regulation of the press in 2013, following negotiations and heated debates involving the three main political parties in the country at the time (the Conservatives who were in a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats, and the Labour Party), Hacked Off (a campaign organisation representing victims

of press abuse) and representatives of the press. A final version of the government's Royal Charter was published on 11 October 2013 and approved by the Privy Council on 30 October 2013 (DCMS and Miller 2013, n.p.). IPSO refused to sign up to the Royal Charter on Press Regulation because it was underpinned by statute. It posits that a press regulatory body with any form of statutory backing is a slippery slope to licensing of the press (IPSO 2016). On 25 October 2016, the Independent Monitor for the Press (IMPRESS) became the first press regulator to be recognised by the Press Recognition Panel of the Royal Charter on Press Regulation (IMPRESS 2016). By 2019, 129 publications had signed up to the regulator (IMPRESS 2019).

In 2018, despite several calls from media reform campaigners not to do so, the Conservative government rescinded on its decision to go ahead with the second part of the Leveson Inquiry which was to scrutinise the relationship between the press and the police. The government's reason for doing so was that the "the media landscape had changed and justice had been served through the criminal trials of many of those involved" (Waterson 2018). The Leveson Inquiry was designed to be in two parts; the first part focused on the press' relationship with the public and politicians. The second part of the inquiry, which is expected to examine the relationship between the press and the police, was put on hold because of the court cases that were in progress at the time. Cathcart (2018) argues that the second part of the Inquiry should not be shelved because the press refused to act on the findings of the first part of the Leveson Inquiry; the press failed to reform themselves; only Leveson 2 can reveal whether lawbreaking has ceased in the industry; cancellation would be a breach of political trust (government's promise to press victims); more needs to be revealed in order to build public trust in journalism; the cancellation of Leveson 2 ought to have been a cross-party action, not the action of only one party; and that without Leveson 2 "history will repeat itself" in the form of press abuse of power. Concerning the cancellation of Leveson 2, the Chairman of the Leveson Inquiry, Lord Justice Brian Leveson, said revelations after the Inquiry that phone hacking was widespread in other newspapers meant that the editors lied at the Inquiry and "that would have been an interesting part of Part 2" (Leveson 2019 cited by Evans and Johnson 2019, n.p.).

Not only was Leveson 2 cancelled, the government also announced that it would repeal section 40 of the Crimes and Courts Act 2013 (Mayhew 2018) which was the "carrot" meant to lure publishers to sign



up to a Royal Charter–approved regulatory body such as IMPRESS (Leveson 2012a, pp. 16–17, para. 68–69). Section 40 of the Crimes and Courts Act 2013 compels newspapers to pay the costs of legal action against them even if they win, if they have failed to sign up to a cross-party Royal Charter–recognised regulator (Parliamentary Communications Committee on the Crimes and Courts Act 2013). As of 2019, none of the mainstream newspapers, not even the *Guardian* newspaper which supported the establishment of the Royal Charter on press regulation, signed up to IMPRESS, which was at the time the only Royal Charter–approved regulator (IMPRESS 2019). Though it can be argued that some grounds were achieved in the fight for press reform, the government’s decision to shelve Leveson 2 and to revoke section 40 of the Crimes and Courts Act 2013 demonstrates the difficulty in achieving effective media reforms through government intervention.

The government and the press are self-interested parties in media reform. Reneging on or rejection of stringent proposals towards reforming the media is another recurrent outcome of efforts at effective press regulation. It can be argued that this is one of the results of the reciprocal relationship between the media and policymakers, a situation in which favours are rendered in return for good press coverage. This shall be elaborated on in Chap. 9. Tensions relating to press regulation remained at the time of writing. Some of the key tensions relate to the effectiveness of post-Leveson press regulation in the UK. There have been criticisms on IPSO’s operations relating to accuracy, misleading information, placement of corrections, inaction, omission, lack of independence and the powers conferred on IPSO’s Regulatory Funding Company (RFC—IPSO’s version of PressBoF). As this book’s focus in relation to press regulation is how arguments relating to the subject were covered by the press, I will not expand on these key tensions. Future literature can take this further by critically analysing the key tensions of press regulation after the Leveson Inquiry. The knowledge on press regulation provided in this chapter will facilitate an understanding of my analysis later in this book, of how the press covered the debate on press regulation and the implication of their manner of coverage for strong media reforms and democracy.

## CONCLUSION

Arguments related to press regulation in media policy debates often border around whether to create more stringent regulations in order to make the press accountable or to steer clear of any further regulation in the interest of a free press that can hold power to account. Arguments relating to more stringent regulation often include discussions about whether to introduce some level of statutory regulation. This chapter pointed out that the British press is averse to statutory regulation. Its resistance to statutory regulation has been recurrent in debates about media policy from the 1949 Royal Commission on the Press to the Leveson Inquiry (2011–2012). The press' response to such threats from the government has been to set up new self-regulatory bodies that promise to be better than the previous and capable of ensuring that the press is accountable. However, from 1949 to the time of writing, complaints have been that such bodies have not succeeded in this role.

For instance, the PCC which was created as an improved regulator following threats of statutory regulation was declared incompetent by the Leveson Inquiry. IPSO which replaced the PCC now receives similar criticism from media reform campaigners. The questions this raises are as follows: Does self-regulation of the press work? Should the paradigm of self-regulation as a prerequisite for a free press be re-examined? Can some level of statutory regulation of the press enhance democracy? These questions will continue to produce opposing views. This book argues that how these views are covered by the press matters. Equal attention should be given to the various arguments relating to press regulation so that neither the press nor the public is unduly advantaged in the representations of debates about press regulation.

Currently, the debate about how to make the press accountable is very narrow. Much of the talk focuses on statutory regulation. While some level of statutory regulation can be an option, the press needs to provide an environment that can allow debates to be more robust so that other options can emerge. There is need for more creativity with regard to how to make the press more accountable. This book argues that such creativity can emerge if the media serve as a democratic public sphere in debates about press how to make the press more accountable. The attitude of the press should not be to fight to protect the status quo but an open mind to find out the best way to achieve press accountability, a way that ensures that the freedoms of both the public and the press are protected. The

following chapter expands on the role of the media as a democratic public sphere during debates on media policy. It will also introduce some of the theories and ideologies that formed the basis of some of the arguments that are analysed in this book.

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## Media Policy, Democracy and Theories of the Press

In Western democracies, most arguments about media policy are premised on normative theories of the press (Christians et al. 2009, p. 5). These arguments are inspired by the idea that the media are entrusted with information power and how this power is used has consequences for democracy (Stromback 2005, p. 335). This chapter discusses some of the theories and ideologies on which arguments about media policy reform are predicated. An understanding of these theories is essential for the comprehension of these arguments. The normative theories discussed in this chapter include the neoliberal variant of the libertarian theory and the ideology of social democracy. The concepts of libertarianism and social responsibility are examined to provide background information on the neoliberal theory of the press. To emphasise the important role the media play in sustaining self-governance through citizens participation in public debates, I explore relevant conceptualisations of the public sphere. Specifically, Habermas' (1989) concept of a central public sphere; Fraser's (1992) conceptualisation of multiple publics and Ornebring and Jonsson's (2004) application of Fraser's concept of multiple publics are critically analysed. 'Journalism as an interpretive community', a concept put forward by Zelizer (1993), is expounded to show that in debates about their profession, the press can function as an interpretive community, multiple homogeneous publics and individual unique voices.

The media have become a very important part of contemporary human affairs (McQuail 2010, p. 162). Information on a wide variety of subjects

ranging from lifestyle to political issues can be accessed through the media. Top of the scale of the media's relevance to society is its role in the sustenance of democracy (Christians et al. 2009, p. 55). It has been argued that democracy cannot survive in contemporary society without the news media (Lee-Wright et al. 2012, p. 3). There is a wide consensus that the media ought to carry out certain functions in a democratic society (Schudson 2008). Though the views of scholars on the extent to which they do and ought to do this vary, many agree that one of the media's roles is to check on government to see that they are accountable to society (Lee-Wright et al. 2012, p. 3). The media are also expected to serve as the communication link between the public and political leaders, often acting as the voice of the people as well as advocate of the oppressed and less privileged. That is why any threat to responsible journalism is viewed by many as a threat to democracy.

It is widely accepted that what legitimates the media is their role in the sustenance of democracy (Franklin 2004; Herman and Chomsky 2008). This view is, however, not without contestation. Some analysts have described the claim as both a "stereotype and a myth" (Merrill 2000; Graber 2003). The latter argument may hold water when viewed against the background that the media and indeed journalism exist in nations that do not practice democracy. In such nations, the media serve as an instrument of propaganda (Scammell 2000) and not as an agent of democracy. However, in today's liberal democracies, the media play a vital role in the growth and sustenance of democracy. Since "democracy" is a broad term, it is important to clarify the type of democracy this book is concerned with. There are diverse definitions of democracy yet two major divides: the minimalist and maximalist definitions (Lipset and Lakin 2004, pp. 19–22). While the minimalist definition focuses on democracy as a system in which adult citizens of a community have the right to vote in a leader of their choice (Schumpeter 1943, cited in Saxer 2013, p. 5), the maximalist approach to democracy goes beyond the political sphere to include social and economic values, such as freedom to receive and give information, freedom of association, equal opportunities and press freedom (Ewald 2013, p. 52). The maximalist approach is based on the idea that all aspects of society should be run democratically. In other words, democracy can be practiced in different domains of life, such as in the media, business, non-governmental organisations, meetings, families and schools.

Unlike the minimalist approach to democracy, which is based on the elitist view of Schumpeter (1943) where democracy is confined to an elite

group voted into power by the people, maximalists see democracy as a system of government in which power rests with the populace, not only their right to vote in a leader of their choice but also their right to equal participation in public debates through which they could influence decisions that affect them (Cheema 2005, p. 4). As stated earlier, this book is concerned with the maximalist approach to democracy. Therefore, the definition of democracy as “governance by the people, for the people and of the people” (Lincoln 1863/2009) is interpreted in this book as the ability of “the people” (citizens) to take part in governance, not only by voting in the right leader, but also by taking part in public debates that can influence policy decisions (Gunther and Mughan, cited in Christians et al. 2009, p. 25). This book engages with the maximalist approach to democracy. Did the media play its role of sustaining democracy through its facilitation of citizens’ participation in the media policy that followed the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal? This book provides answers to this question. It takes the position that creative and effective ideas for media reform can emerge from the press if it serves as a democratic space for public debates.

It is widely acknowledged that democracy is the best form of government (Dahl et al. 2003, p. 29). However, this view is not without contestation. Some philosophers like Plato (cited in Dahl et al. 2003) and Aristotle in his *The Politics* (2010, 335–323 BC) have questioned the endorsement of democracy as the ideal form of government. Towing this line, scholars like Merrill (2000), Graber (2003) and Barry (2011) argue that democracy is not necessarily the ideal type of government but that each country should be allowed to develop the style of government that best suits their culture (Merrill 2000, pp. 197–199). However, several empirical studies have identified democracy as a popular form of government (Norris 1999; Dahl et al. 2003). Though Dahl et al. (2003, p. 29) admit that “democracy is not an unmitigated blessing”, they contend that its advantages far outweigh its shortfalls. The latter argument is the position of this book. Democracy is important because it promotes human rights including freedom of expression (Dahl et al., *ibid.*). In an age where freedom of the individual to speak, be informed and publish is recognised as universal human rights, democracy promotes freedom as no feasible alternative can (Dahl 1989, pp. 88–89).

As the former UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill said, “Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time” (Mishler and Rose 1999, cited in Richard



et al. 2009, p. 23). It is worthy of note that despite arguments for and against democracy, it has emerged as the choice system of government in the twenty-first century (Held 2006, p. 1). Countries with strikingly different political systems have all claimed to be democratic (Held 1996, p. 1; Manza and Uggen 2006, pp. 17–18) but there is a great difference between actual and ideal democracy (Sartori 1987, pp. 7–8). Actual democracy refers to the definite way the concept is practiced in a specific group while ideal democracy is normative. Some scholars have argued that going by the definitions of democracy, ideal democracy is impracticable (Wolff 2013, p. 11). Does this imply that evaluating media coverage based on normative theories of the press in a democracy is asking too much of the media? The following section attempts to answer this question by reviewing relevant literature on normative theories of the press in a democratic society.

### NORMATIVE THEORIES AND MEDIA POLICY

Normative theories relate to expectations from citizens on how the media ought to operate in order to achieve or maintain prevailing social values (McQuail 2010, p. 14). The media have been entrusted with the task of controlling information, a role which is integral to the success of any democracy. Scholars argue that since the public has entrusted this power to the media, with which it can hold power to account, set the agenda of public discourse and perhaps shape public opinion, the public has the right to make some demands of the media—a kind of implicit contractual agreement (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2003, pp. 51–52). Normative theories make allowances for journalism to be analysed based on moral obligations. Many scholars accept that the overarching moral obligation of the press is to protect democracy (Carey 1997, p. 332, cited in Schudson 2008, p. 11). Consequently, normative theories of the press provide foundations for arguments on how the media can sustain democracy. Some analysts contend that normative theories promote ideals that are not achievable and as such ought to be abandoned (Hallin and Mancini 2004).

This book takes the position that though normative theories may not be 100 per cent achievable, they serve as ideal models for people to aspire to, in order to achieve acceptable press standards (Wolff 2013, p. 11). Siebert et al.'s (1956) four theories of the press are largely accepted as the maiden academic attempt at providing normative theories of the press. Siebert et al. (1956) advanced four theories, namely the authoritarian, the

Soviet communist, the libertarian and the social responsibility theories. These “theories” have come under heavy criticism due to their inconsistent conceptual framework, inability to provide acceptable universal press theories and failure to contain the diversity of media forms (Hallin and Mancini 2004). Despite these shortcomings, Siebert et al.’s (1956) normative models, particularly their libertarian theory, are still very applicable to the study of the coverage of media policy in Western nations like Britain (McQuail 2010, p. 176).

In Western democracies, such as Britain, participants in media policy debates propagate ideas based on the libertarian theory. Though the libertarian theory has been modified over the years, exploring it in its original form will help us understand its variants during debates about press reform. Much of the commercial press in Britain propagate ideas about media policy that draw from the libertarian theory. The libertarian theory advocates that the press should be a marketplace of ideas where diverse views can be aired without fear of suppression or oppression (Siebert et al. 1956, p. 70). It posits that the press should be a medium through which arguments, opinions and evidences are presented to the public on the basis of which they can check on the powerful and make informed decisions (Siebert et al. 1956, p. 3). Proponents of this theory argue that the press should be autonomous and free from every form of state regulation because a state-regulated press cannot call the government to account (Scammell 2000). They contend that a state-regulated press will hamper efforts to expose corrupt politicians; that it will serve as a clog in the wheel of journalists’ efforts to equip the public with the information they need to contribute intelligently to public debates and make informed decisions on other areas of life.

Libertarian theory warns that journalism cannot function as the watchdog of society without press autonomy. The theory claims that press accountability will be provided for by the media market. It argues that competition to gain readership will motivate the press to represent a wide range of views and perspectives in society (Siebert et al. 1956, p. 71; McQuail 2010, p. 176). This perspective assumes an active audience whose patronage or withdrawal of patronage will compel publishers to serve the interest of the public (Biagi 2014, p. 348). Though the libertarian theory claims to protect democracy through its watchdog and information roles, the theory has been criticised by several scholars for having negative implications for democracy (Glasser 1986, p. 93, cited in McQuail 2010, p. 176). Christened “negative freedom” because of its resistance to

state intervention (Berlin 1969, cited in Pickard 2013, p. 343), the libertarian concept of press freedom has often been described as freedom for publishers to publish whatsoever they wish without any form of responsibility (Curran and Seaton 2010). It can be argued that the libertarian concept of press freedom serves the business interests of media owners and makes it easier for the press to encroach on the liberty of others (Pickard 2015).

The libertarian claim that accountability will be provided for by competitiveness in the media market is questionable because history has shown that rather than ensure accountability, competitive media markets have instead triggered anti-democratic practices (Fenton 2011; Dawes 2013). Fenton (2011, n.p.) asserts that “markets do not have democratic intent at their core” because when markets come under pressure, ethics are brushed aside in pursuit of commercial profit. In defence of the libertarian “market accountability” claim, Bettig and Hall (2012, pp. 16–17) argue that the role the media have played over the years in exposing journalistic scandals is proof that “the media market place is free and competitive enough to ensure that the truth generally prevails”. Bettig and Hall, however, agree that such self-policing leaves serious gaps in press coverage of media issues (*ibid.*). Similar criticisms of the press gave rise to the notion of social responsibility (McQuail 2010).

The notion of “social responsibility” was initiated by the 1947 Hutchins Commission on freedom of the press in the USA (McQuail 2010, pp. 170–171). The Commission was set up in response to widespread criticism of the American press, and particularly its sensationalism, commercialism, ownership concentration, the alleged abuse of its powers and the consequent need to ensure press accountability (Hartley 2011). In tandem with the philosophy of the social contract, the social responsibility model of the liberal theory argues that freedom to receive and disseminate information should be accompanied by some form of responsibility to the public: what scholars refer to as “positive freedom” (Berlin 1969; Pickard 2015, p. 40). This responsibility, it states, should include not only the representation of comprehensive, factual and accurate reports but also the promotion of public debates (Commission on Freedom of the Press 1947, pp. 21–27).

Unlike the libertarian theory, the notion of social responsibility sees a place for government intervention in media accountability systems (Biagi 2014, p. 348). It posits that where the news media fall short in their responsibility to society, a public agency or government should be allowed

to intervene to ensure press accountability. The Hutchins Commission (Commission on Freedom of the Press 1947) puts it this way:

The media has an obligation to be socially responsible; to see that all sides are represented and that the public has enough information to decide; and that if the media do not take on themselves such responsibility, it may be necessary for some other agency of the public to enforce it. (cited in Siebert et al. 1956, p. 5)

So, unlike the libertarian theory which sees no place for government intervention in ensuring press accountability, the notion of social responsibility welcomes external participation in matters of the press, if the press falls short of its responsibility to society. Though it agrees with the libertarian theory that press self-regulation and press freedom are integral to the fulfilment of the media's informational and watchdog role, its concept of press freedom differed from the libertarian perspective. Though many of the proposals of the Hutchins Commission (Commission on Freedom of the Press 1947) were criticised and rejected by the commercial press, the Commission can be credited for an improved consciousness of the need for responsible journalism in the commercial press in several countries including the UK (Pickard 2015, p. 187). The report of the Hutchins Commission served as exhibit or information for national and international debates on media policy, particularly, on the role of the press in a democracy. For instance, Britain's first Royal Commission on the press is recorded to have used documents from the Hutchins Commission as exhibits (Pickard 2015, p. 188).

One perspective views the notion of social responsibility as an improvement on the libertarian press theory (Nerone et al. 1995). For those with this view, the notion of social responsibility is a more public service-oriented model of the liberal theory: one that makes room not only for the press but also for the public (McQuail 2010, p. 184). A different perspective contends that the social responsibility model only led to weak reforms (Curran and Seaton 2010, p. 338). Those with this view argue that rather than replace the libertarian theory, as claimed by some scholars, the social responsibility concept "essentially enabled a slightly tweaked libertarian model to continue to prevail unabated" (Pickard 2015, p. 195). By the 1970s, a variant of libertarianism known as neoliberalism had become the hegemonic ideology in debates on media policy (Plehwe et al. 2006, p. 39; Phelan 2014). The neoliberal ideology remains rife in contemporary

debates about press policy; as such it will form part of the framework for my analysis of how the press covered the media policy debate that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal, especially the debate on freedom of the press.

The neoliberal theory of the press took its origins from the broad concept of neoliberalism. The term “neoliberalism” was formed by participants at the Walter Lippman Colloquium in Paris in 1938, in a bid to describe their desire to reconstruct classical laissez-faire liberalism (Jones 2012, p. 6, cited in Davis 2016, p. 29). It was defined by the colloquium as “the priority of the price mechanism, the free enterprise, the system of competition, and a strong and impartial state” (Livingstone 2013, p. 436). Key proponents of the ideology include Milton Friedman and Austrian School economists Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek (Plehwe et al. 2006, p. 18). In later years, it became associated with the free trade, deregulation and privatisation moves of former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and former US President Ronald Reagan (Springer et al. 2016, p. 144). The ideology has gone through several modifications and cultural transformations since then (Hayek 1944; Friedman 1962; Harvey 2005). Neoliberalism in its contemporary form is “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free market and free trade” (Harvey 2005, p. 2). Freedom is a major feature of the neoliberal theory. Neoliberalism, which is a variant of libertarianism, advocates what has been described as the “negative” view of freedom where, as explained earlier, press freedom is interpreted as freedom from state interference. This contrasts with the positive liberty advanced by left-wing ideologists (Phelan 2014).

According to the neoliberal ideology, the role of the state is to create a conducive environment for the private sector to thrive in businesses and that includes intervening to prevent market failure (Harvey 2005, p. 2). In relation to media self-coverage, an example of a neoliberal argument would be that the government should intervene in media regulation only to ensure fair play in media ownership. Proponents of the neoliberal theory believe that by intervening to save private businesses, the state indirectly caters for the needs of individuals in society because entrepreneurs are then able to offer jobs and other deliverables to society (Harvey 2005). The neoliberal ideology posits that government involvement in business poses a threat to freedom, and that “the market, as a self-organising

system in which individuals freely choose to participate, is best suited to guarantee freedom” (Mayes 2015, p. 35). So, while the pure libertarian theory refuses any role for the state, its neoliberal variant, just like the social responsibility model, approves of a small role for the state but in its case, that role should be to prevent market failure (Harvey 2005, p. 2).

The neoliberal theory of the press refers to a situation in which the media is viewed primarily as a business enterprise. From the neoliberal press perspective, the press should be commercially or privately owned; the press must be self-regulated so as to have the autonomy it needs to call the powerful to account and fulfil its informational role in a democracy; it should serve the public interest (though what this means is contested; see Chap. 2); a small role for the state is acceptable, for example, in the making and implementation of laws that guarantee fair competition in the media business (McChesney 2001). Other aspects such as service and accountability, it contends, should be left in the hands of the media’s self-regulatory bodies and the market (*ibid.*). Neoliberal conceptualisation of press freedom is hegemonic (commonsensical) in discourses about media policy (Lichtenberg 1990; Phelan 2014). Alternative interpretations of press freedom are often marginalised or presented as illogical in the light of hegemonic neoliberal interpretations of what guarantees a free press (Putnis 2000; Curran and Seaton 2010).

However, counter-hegemonic discourses labelling the neoliberal theory of the press as anti-democratic and calling for more public interest journalism appear to be on the rise (Schlosberg 2017). For instance, the theory of social democracy has emerged as a major challenger of the neoliberal hegemony in debates about media policy (Pickard 2015). Social democracy as an ideology emerged in the mid-twentieth century following decisions by Western socialists to revise their goals. One way they did this was to reform rather than abolish capitalism (Heywood 2017, p. 123). Social democracy aims to correct the fundamental defects of capitalism and “pursue goals that reduce the inequalities that exist within the system” (Lightfoot 2005, p. 17). It posits that capitalism is “a morally defective means of distributing resources, because of its tendency towards poverty and inequality” (Heywood 2017, p. 123). The social democratic ideology contends that the defects of the capitalist system can be corrected through both economic and social interventions (Miller 1998, cited in Craig 2000, p. 836). The theory of social democracy is based on this ideology.

Proponents of the social democratic theory are critical of the “negative liberty” advanced by the neoliberal variant of the libertarian theory where press freedom is interpreted as freedom from state interference (Meyer and Hinchman 2007). The theory sees the state as the custodian of public interest journalism, and as such, it accepts state intervention in press regulation to guarantee press accountability (Meyer and Hinchman 2007). Cushion (2012, p. 198) and Lichtenberg (1990, p. 105) agree that some level of statutory regulation can enhance rather than impede democracy. Critics of social democracy argue that the theory is idealistic, vague and sounds like a socialist compromise to capitalism or “capitalism-lite” (Keane 2016). One of the major criticisms against the theory of social democracy is that it underestimates the possibility of state intervention to impact negatively on press freedom. Though these concerns are not inconsequential, studies have demonstrated that a mechanism can be put in place to ensure that statutory regulation does not impede the media from fulfilling their watchdog role in a democracy (Humphreys 1996, p. 107). There is, however, no denying the fact that measures to check the abuse of government intervention in press regulation have not always been successful (Badsey 2013, p. 67). The bottom line is that both theories have pros and cons. The focus of this discussion is not to advocate one theory over another but to acquaint the reader with the two major theories on which debates on media policy are based and to argue that both theories have strengths and weaknesses and none of these two should be hegemonic in debates about media policy. In a democracy, the media ought to be a democratic public sphere (Habermas 1989; Fraser 1992). The following section explores the concept of the media as a democratic public sphere during debates about media policy.

### THE MEDIA AS A DEMOCRATIC PUBLIC SPHERE

Habermas conceptualises the public sphere as an arena where people meet to discuss societal concerns and through their arguments influence political decisions (Habermas 1989; Garcia-Blanco et al. 2009). According to Habermas, equality was brought about by a complete disregard for status because decisions were not based on societal standing but on the best rational argument (Habermas 1989, p. 4). The author observed that in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, coffee houses, salons and clubs were meeting points for these public deliberations. In modern democracies, discussions in salons (coffee shops and bars) rarely carry the

same weight due to the large numbers of people that make up most political communities today. This places a premium on the role of the media as a democratic public sphere: a public space where citizens can debate issues that concern them. According to Habermas' (1989, p. 83) account of the "golden age of the liberal public sphere", discussions were centred on issues of common concern and citizens were able to set aside individual preferences and arrive at a consensus based on "the common good".

However, from the late nineteenth century, the public sphere began to degenerate, and the quest for profit began to override public interest journalism (Habermas 1989). Facilitators of debates in the media's public sphere became more concerned about "what interests the public" rather than what was "in the public interest" with the goal being to increase readership and attract advertisers. This degeneration of the public sphere manifested itself in the trivialisation of news content. The result was that citizens became a consumer audience, mainly interested in being entertained and consuming dumbed down information (Habermas 1989, p. 164; Franklin 1997). The media assuaged this appetite by inundating this space with infotainment (information plus entertainment). A degenerated public sphere in relation to the coverage of media policy can mean shifting focus from in-depth analysis of key issues of concern in press standards to infotainment and other trivial news relating to media policy. Infotainment can be detrimental to media policy debates because it can promote ignorance on the subject by presenting to readers sensational news rather than in-depth analysis of key issues of concern. As Barber (1999, p. 582) points out, public ignorance is detrimental to democracy because a citizenry without sufficient information may not be able to adequately evaluate the alternatives before them and could, as a result, advocate policies that are harmful to society.

This book argues that the degeneration of the public sphere is more complex than previous studies have shown. Most studies on the media as a public sphere have focused on the media representation of others and not of themselves. As such, scholars did not take into consideration the commodification of a public sphere in which the deliberation relates to the facilitator of the sphere. The result was that commercialism was limited to prioritisation of gains made from advertising ("selling customers to advertisers"), adopting paywalls and direct product sales (McQuail 2010, pp. 222–224), whereas in the media coverage of debates on journalism, commodification of the public sphere can go beyond the aforementioned to the prioritisation of the media's personal interests (giving priority to the



promotion of the newspaper's argument in the debate). In this case, the media's personal interests can override "what interests the public". One feature of Habermas' (1989, pp. 189–193) degenerated public sphere that can be seen in the coverage of media policy is that commercial interest (the interest of media owners) merges with the interests of policymakers, to turn the public sphere from a democratic forum for public debate into a capitalist haven where prioritisation of profit becomes the order of the day (Habermas 1989, pp. 189–193). Profit goes beyond financial gains to successful advancement of one's ideology in an argument, good press coverage for policymakers and high readership for newspapers which can earn their owners power of influence and the patronage of advertisers. Habermas sees advertising as one of the causes of the degeneration of the public sphere (Habermas 1989, pp. 189–193).

It can be argued that job constraints have also led to the degeneration of the public sphere. The pressures brought on journalists by the constraints of their job have been blamed for some of the press' bad behaviour (Shoemaker and Reese 2013, pp. 140–142). Examples of such constraints include limited time of production made worse with the introduction of the 24/7 news routine, financial constraints and, more remarkably, the emergence of digital journalism (ibid.). The coming of the internet has transformed journalism and poses a threat to the continued existence of print journalism (Allan 2006, pp. 2–4). The move of *Independent* newspaper from print to online intensifies that argument (Independent 2016). While the extinction of the printed press was at the time of writing a contested view (Pavlik 2001; Franklin 2008), there is no doubt that the coming of digital journalism has led to the drop in the readership of print newspapers and the exodus of both readers and advertisers to online platforms (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2019). The competition resulting from these has increased the lure of subterfuge as a means of news gathering, the aim being to get scoops that sell. Though the online news had not surfaced at the time Habermas wrote *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1989), it can be argued that in the twenty-first century, pressure brought on the printed press by the emergence of digital journalism facilitated the degeneration of the public sphere. The consequence of this for democracy is that providing a democratic platform for public debate is no longer its primary concern. The questions this discussion on degeneration of the public sphere raises are, "in the coverage of the media policy debate that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal,

did the media serve as a degenerated public sphere? If so, what impact did this have on efforts at reforming media policy”? Discussions in Chaps. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 will provide answers to these questions.

It is important to point out that there are a number of issues with Habermas’ concept of the public sphere. One of the problems is that it is not clear whether Habermas was referring to a historical situation or a normative ideal (Dahlgren 1995). Several scholars have argued that there never existed a public sphere with Habermas’ ideal (Schudson 1992; Dahlgren 1995). Those with this view contend that right from the period of Habermas’ ideal public sphere, there had always been in the public space trivial and dumbed-down discussions with commercial interest overriding the public interest. This book sides with the argument that Habermas’ concept of the public sphere is better employed as normative. The public sphere concept is useful for the analysis of the representation of media policy both in its original form, as used to discuss the degeneration of the public sphere earlier in this chapter, and in modified forms. For example, Fraser’s (1992) modification of the concept. However, more modifications are needed before the concept can be effectively used for the analysis of discourse on media policy.

Several scholars have critiqued and modified Habermas’ concept of the public sphere. Examples of such modifications are Fraser’s (1992) alternative publics and “subaltern counterpublics”, where equality is hinged on multiple rather than a single comprehensive public sphere; Chantal Mouffe’s (2005a, b) agonistic public sphere, which argues for contestations (‘radical’ discourse) in place of “consensus building through rational discourse”; and Bennett and Entman’s (2001) policy sphere, which refers to the aspect of the public sphere that relates to media representations of governmental policies and decision making. The above list is not exhaustive, and this book does not attempt to examine all criticisms of the public sphere. It will only concern itself with arguments that are relevant to my analysis in this book. One of such relevant modifications is Fraser’s (1992) discussion on multiple publics.

Fraser (1992, pp. 117–118) queries four assumptions of Habermas’ concept of the public sphere. They are the assumption that it is possible for participants in “a public sphere to bracket status differentials and to deliberate as if they were social equals”; that “a single, comprehensive public sphere” is more democratic than multiple and competing publics; “that discourse in the public sphere should be restricted to deliberation about the common good” and that “a functioning democratic public

sphere requires a sharp separation” from the state. Fraser (1992) argues that while Habermas lays claims to universality in his ideal public space, his focus on a single public—the bourgeois—excludes some sections of the public such as women who were at the time excluded from public debates (Fraser 1990, pp. 58–60).

Fraser contends that rather than eliminate inequality, bracketing a single public endorses inequality by denying diverse groups and interests, a voice within the public sphere; the result being that the interests of the marginalised groups or persons are overlooked (*ibid.*, p. 77). Fraser’s argument is that democracy is enhanced not with a single comprehensive public sphere but with “arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing publics” (Fraser 1992, p. 122, cited in Butsch 2007, p. 5). She referred to these competing publics as alternative publics and “subaltern counterpublics”. They are alternative in the sense that each sphere is a “homogenous group rather than a diverse deliberative body” (Warner 2002, cited in Butsch 2007, p. 18) and “subaltern counterpublics” because they are discursive spaces where members of subordinate social groups can introduce counter discourses (Fraser 1992, pp. 123–125).

Her use of the word “contestation” to describe debates between multiple publics links to another critique against Habermas’ concept which is that discourse in the public sphere should not be restricted to “deliberation about the common good”. Along with scholars like Benhabib (2002) and Mouffe (2005a, b), Fraser (1992) says the common good is difficult to determine; the interest of publics may vary and the demand for consensus may only keep out of debates issues that may later be recognised as being of public interest. As an example, Fraser (1992, p. 129) points to the fact that the issue of violence against women was in the past regarded as a private interest and not “for the common good”. It was an issue to be discussed in family settings and not in the public sphere, but feminists forming a “subaltern counterpublic” kept up debate about domestic violence which led to its eventual acceptance as a matter of common concern.

In line with my argument that no theory should be hegemonic in the representation of arguments on media policy, Fraser (1992, pp. 129–131) contends that there should be no limits to the issues and arguments that gain access to the public sphere. According to her, “what will count as a matter of concern will be decided precisely through discursive contestations” (*ibid.*, p. 129). For Fraser, contestations (arguments, alternative views, etc.), rather than a consensus, remain closer to the democratic ideal (*ibid.*). This shifts the focus from Habermas’ deliberative model of

democracy (where deliberation leads to a consensus within the public sphere) to a participatory model where the focus is access of all concerned to the debate within the public sphere. Consensus can then be reached by policymakers based on the knowledge gathered from informed contestations in the media's public sphere.

Taking a cue from Fraser (1992), Ornebring and Jonsson (2004) applied the concept of multiple public spheres to the press. In their application of the concept, the tabloid press can serve as an alternative public sphere to mainstream media (by mainstream media, they refer to major media outlets such as major newspapers, radio stations and television stations). According to the authors, social media, specialised journals and other media outlets outside the mainstream news can serve as counterpublics from which non-elitist groups can counter dominant elite discourses. I refer to this group as "public sphere as platform". This book argues that the public sphere as platform may or may not be a counterpublic.

In Ornebring and Jonsson's (2004, p. 286), view, participants in a media discourse can also be an alternative public sphere if the participants differ from those who normally dominate the media discourse. I will call this "public sphere as people". The authors also argued that a public sphere can be alternative when "other issues than those commonly debated in the mainstream are discussed—or that issues not even debated at all in the mainstream are discussed in the alternative sphere" (ibid.). I will call that "public sphere as issues". Their fourth mediated alternative sphere model is somewhat duplicitous; it comprises of "ways or forms of debating and discussing common issues than those commonly used in the mainstream media" (ibid.). I will call that "alternative methods as public sphere".

This book adds to this portfolio: the public sphere as discourse. This agrees with Warner's (2002, pp. 413–415) argument that the meaning of "public" cannot be limited to Habermas' elucidation of "the public as people"—the discussants. Warner (2002, p. 414) established that public can also refer to the discourse. In this case, the sphere can be "a public"; a body of discourse, a perspective in a debate, common interest on an issue and such like. This book engages with the concept of the public sphere both as platform and as discourse. It examines "public sphere as platform" in the sense that it explores how the media as platform (mainstream press in this case) serve as a democratic public sphere. It examines "public sphere as discourse" by investigating publics within discourse. Having discussed the importance of the media platform as a democratic public sphere

earlier in this chapter, I now move on to explore concepts that can facilitate our understanding of the public sphere as discourse. Based on Fraser's (1992) conceptualisation of multiple public spheres, I argue that there can be several discursive publics within journalism's interpretive community.

Zelizer (2004, pp. 12–15) conceptualises journalism as an interpretive community, a notion she borrowed from Stanley Fish's explanation of interpretive communities in relation to literary text (Fish 1980, cited in Zelizer 2004, p. 13). An interpretive community consists of "people engaged in common activities and common purposes who employ a common frame of reference for interpreting their social setting" (Berkowitz and Terkeurst 1999, p. 127, cited in Carlson 2015, p. 3). Interpretive communities affect how a phenomenon is interpreted (Zelizer 2004, pp. 13–14). Applying this to journalism, Zelizer (2004) argues that a person's view of journalism will be affected by the person's background, perspectives or the field in which he or she works. To explicate further, Zelizer (2004, pp. 30–32) compared interpretations of journalism by journalists with that of academics. As an example, she used five metaphors to show that the way each group talks about journalism is influenced by their field of work (*ibid.*).

Zelizer pointed out that while journalists use metaphors like "sixth sense" (nose for news), container (space, news hole), mirror (that reflects reality—though contested), child (as in "put the news to bed", meaning complete the circle of news production or cast the news) and service (crusader role of journalism), to talk about journalism, a journalism scholar is more likely to discuss journalism in terms of it being a text, a profession and an institution, and as people and as a set of practices (*ibid.*). She observed that neither account is comprehensive because each of them only tells part of the story of what journalism represents. Zelizer (1993, 2004) posits that their interpretations were influenced by their background, in this case their field of work (*ibid.*). This concept presents journalists as a united front—one interpretive community in the way they perceive and describe their profession (Berkowitz 2000, cited in Carlson 2015, p. 3).

Viewing Zelizer's explanation of interpretive communities from the lenses of Fraser's (1992) conceptualisation of multiple public spheres, and Ornebring and Jonsson's (2004) extension of that concept to the press, I argue that though journalists have a shared understanding of their practice, which can make them function as one interpretive community, journalists can also function as multiple interpretive communities in discourses about journalism. Newspaper classification, ownership patterns and

business model are examples of factors that can give birth to multiple publics within journalism's interpretive community. I argue that in debates about journalism, there can be multiple homogeneous public spheres with each homogeneous sphere standing as a united front on an issue of common concern. I refer to such multiple spheres of homogeneous discourses as sub-interpretive spheres. Multiple sub-interpretive spheres can arise from differences and similarities in the press' interpretations of journalistic paradigms such as press freedom and objectivity. The demarcation may or may not be along the lines of media outfits because they are spheres of discourses. The homogeneity of a sub-interpretive sphere does not preclude disagreements on certain issues within each homogeneous public. For example, though feminism features as a homogeneous public sphere, there are still different schools of thought among feminists (Tong 2014, pp. 1–6). Their uniting factor would, therefore, be a high degree of similarity in their expressions on an issue or argument.

In studies where homogeneous publics emerge within an interpretive community, a confederation pattern of analysis can be employed to fish out both collective and individual patterns in the coverage. Confederations are “loose governing arrangement[s] in which separate republics or nations join to coordinate foreign policy and defense but retain full control over their domestic affairs” (Jillson 2013, p. 63). Applying this to media studies, I define “confederation pattern of analysis” as a pattern of critique that allows analysis of media content both in groups (e.g. a group of newspapers) and individually (individual newspapers). This allows room for the identification of unique trends and styles within discourse. Using a confederation pattern of analysis, this book analyses newspapers in groups of discourse (sub-interpretive spheres) when they were united for certain causes and individually in areas where they had unique differences. That is because in the coverage of media policy, democracy is achieved when the press makes room for contestations among diverse competing discursive publics (Fraser 1992, p. 122, cited in Butsch 2007, p. 5).

## CONCLUSION

The media are expected to carry out certain functions that are integral to the sustenance of democracy. One of such functions is to operate as a public sphere where citizens can participate in debates that can affect policy decisions. How the media facilitate debates in this space can affect the outcome of debates on policy. With regard to debates on media policy, a

degenerated public sphere would produce a shallow and dumbed down debate with narrow perspectives that are shaped by self-interest. Such a public sphere would lack the creativity and robustness needed to generate discussions that can result in the establishment of an accountable press. The normative expectation is that the media should serve as a democratic public sphere, one that gives voice to all parties involved in a debate irrespective of their argument or their status in society. The exclusion or marginalisation of any of the parties involved from a debate on media policy will run contrary to “democracy’s claim of universalism” (Dahlgren 1995; p. 36). The type of space or amount of coverage given ought not to be based on the media’s self-interest. The media ought to function as a marketplace of ideas during debates on media policy (Milton 1644/1961; Mill 1859/1978).

The neoliberal press theory argues that for the press to function as a marketplace of ideas where diverse views can be aired without fear of suppression or oppression, it must be autonomous of the state (*ibid.*). In democratic societies, it is widely accepted that the press should be given the freedom it requires to check the powerful so that they do not abuse their powers. What is often contested is the level of autonomy necessary to fulfil this role. Should all types of state intervention in press regulation be viewed as a slippery slope to licensing of the press? Is this perspective a paradigm that needs to be reconsidered? Can some levels of state intervention help to check press bad behaviour? The theory of social democracy argues that a little bit of state intervention in press regulation may not necessarily result in the loss of press freedom. It posits that measures can be put in place to ensure that government does not overstep its bounds. This book argues that no side of the argument should be suppressed or marginalised in debates about media policy. A public sphere that gives proportionate access to arguments based on diverse ideologies would feature more robust debates and is more likely to generate more creative and effective ideas for media reform.

This chapter applies the public sphere concept to discourse. In agreement with Fraser’s (1992) argument that multiple publics rather than a single central public sphere are closer to the democratic ideal, this chapter argues that debates on media policy should make room for multiple discursive publics. It points out that in debates about media policy, journalism would not necessarily function as one interpretive community. I am of the view that this is a good thing because it reflects plurality of views in the debate. As Fraser (1992) argues, within the public sphere, contestation rather than a consensus is closer to the democratic ideal. Problems may

arise from a situation where one discursive public dominates the discussion. Such a situation is akin to Habermas' central public where consensus rather than contestation within the public sphere was depicted as the democratic ideal. This book posits that democracy is enhanced not with a single comprehensive discursive public sphere, but with a situation that makes room for contestations among diverse competing discursive publics.

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## CHAPTER 5

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# Investigating the Press Reform Debate

Discussions in this book draw significantly from a research I carried out on the media coverage of the press reform debate that followed the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. Therefore, this chapter explains the methods used for that research. The study was designed to produce empirical data on the way the debate that arose from the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry was covered by the British press. As stated earlier, I posit that the way the media cover debates on media policy can impact on the outcomes of efforts at media policy reform. A combination of content and discourse analyses was used to provide statistical data and in-depth analysis on how the media policy debate was covered. This chapter also defines and elaborates on some of the key terms and paradigm repair strategies engaged with in the study. The terms “metacoverage”, “metajournalistic discourse” and “journalistic metadiscourse” are defined and critically analysed to clarify their usage in this book and other academic literature. The paradigm repair strategies of threat to the paradigm, self-assertion, minimisation, individualisation and historicisation are explored to throw light on how critical discourse on the press has been represented over the years. I begin by exploring definitions of metacoverage. This will help the reader understand my working definition of metacoverage and serve as a springboard for my discussion of relevant terms such as “metajournalistic discourse” and “journalistic metadiscourse”.

Metacoverage can simply be described as self-referential coverage (Esser et al. 2001). The term, popularised by Gitlin (1991, p. 122 cited Carlson 2015, p. 10) and D'Angelo and Esser (2014), is often used to refer to the increasing trend of journalists covering themselves during political campaigns. (Gitlin 1991; D'Angelo 1999; Esser et al. 2001). Esser et al. (2001, pp. 16–17) defined metacoverage as the news “media’s self-referential reflections on the nature of the interplay between political public relations and political journalism” (cited in Young 2010, p. 14). I argue that limiting metacoverage to self-referential coverage of the media during political campaigns is constrictive. The word “meta” is a Greek preposition meaning “with, after” (Liddell et al. 1883/2015; Dixon 2014, p. 165). In the nineteenth century, it came to be used as a prefix in English and can be seen in words like “meta-thorax”, “metaphor” and “metabolic” (2014, pp. 165–166). It also metamorphosed into the term “self-referential”. As Dixon elucidates, “one current use is that a *meta-X* is an “X” describing an “X” (ibid.). Examples are meta-data which means data about data (Baca 2008, p. 1) and meta-cognition meaning cognition about cognition (Beran et al. 2012, p. 98). Considering the composition of the word “metacoverage” (“meta” and “[media] coverage”) plus the fact that self-referential media coverage is diverse, I contend that “metacoverage” can adequately serve as an umbrella term for all forms of self-referential coverage by the media. Therefore, my working definition for metacoverage is that it refers to all forms of self-referential coverage by the media.

Based on my working definition, metacoverage can focus on diverse themes and take place on various media platforms. For example, metacoverage can be on politics, the environment, media scandals, media advertisements and media critique programmes such as Newswatch. It can take place on different platforms, such as on television programmes, news websites, news broadcasts, magazines or on the pages of newspapers. This book is concerned with metacoverage on news or journalistic platforms: what Deuze (cited in Brin and Drolet 2009, p. 271) referred to as journalism about journalism. The textual content of such coverage is known as journalistic metadiscourse (Brin and Drolet 2009, p. 271; Thomas and Finneman 2014). This should not be confused with what Carlson refers to as metajournalistic discourse.

In the term “journalistic metadiscourse”, the “meta” or “self-referential” status is conferred on “journalism”, that is, journalism about journalism, but in Carlson’s conceptualisation of metajournalistic

discourse, the “meta” status is placed on discourse, that is, discourse about discourse on journalism or, simply put, discourse about news (Carlson 2015). Carlson (2015, p. 2) defines metajournalistic discourse as “public expressions evaluating news text, the practices that produce them or the conditions of their reception”. According to Carlson (2015), metajournalistic discourse can take place on journalistic (internal) and non-journalistic (external) sites. By this definition, metajournalistic discourse will include debates or discussions on journalism in public fora, journalism journals, the news, TV shows and so on. As Carlson pointed out, metajournalistic discourse can include comments by both journalists (insiders) and non-journalists (external actors). For example, journalistic work on journalism can also include comments by government functionaries, victims of press abuse and ordinary members of the public who are not journalists. Going by Carlson’s definition of metajournalistic discourse, Brin and Drolet’s (2009, p. 271) “journalistic metadiscourse” would form an aspect of Carlson’s (2015) conceptualisation of metajournalistic discourse. Since this book deals with journalists’ coverage of journalism, I will provide more discussion on this aspect of metajournalistic discourse.

The term “journalistic metadiscourse” will, henceforth, be used to refer to the discursive field of metacoverage on journalistic sites. This field of metadiscourse includes journalists’ self-referential coverage of diverse sorts including press controversies, scandals, performance, practices, debates on journalism, government policies on journalism and press promotions. According to Carlson (2012b, pp. 268–269), journalistic metadiscourse “reveals attempts by journalists to articulate, negotiate, defend, and even obscure their cultural, social and political significance”. Through journalistic metadiscourse, journalists make attempts to define and defend the boundaries of journalistic practice, assert the legitimacy of the profession and shape its reception (*ibid.*). Previous studies argue that journalistic metadiscourse is highly defensive and characterised by a lack of self-critique (Eason 1988; Alexander et al. 2016). A number of reasons have been given for this trend of journalistic metadiscourse. Notable among them is commercialism, particularly the fear of losing profit due to a reduction in advertising revenue, readership, sales, views and/or patronage (Haas 2006; McQuail 2010, pp. 222–224). The press has been accused of vehemently opposing anything that it perceives poses a threat to its commercial viability. Journalistic metadiscourse that is averse to self-critique limits the information available to the public to contribute knowledgeably to debates on journalism.

A key function of journalism in a democratic society is the provision of sufficient information that will enable the public to make informed decisions. A public sphere that lacks self-critique would portend some risks to the health of democracy. Ironically, journalism's defence against external criticism is often hinged on its democratic role in society. However, Dahlgren (1995) points out that this claim does not always translate into journalistic text. Previous studies on journalistic metadiscourse identified certain recurring strategies used by the press to cover themselves when the boundaries of their profession are called into question due to acts of deviance by members of the profession. These recurring patterns of press coverage are referred to as paradigm repair strategies (Bennett et al. 1985; Thomas and Finneman 2014).

### INVESTIGATING THE PRESS REFORM DEBATE: PARADIGM REPAIR STRATEGIES

The term “paradigm repair” was used by Bennett et al. (1985) to describe “how journalistic self-criticism protects existing paradigms rather than confronts entrenched deficiencies and contradictions” (cited in Carlson 2015, p. 4). It refers to a situation in which metajournalistic discourse is used to protect press standards and values from scrutiny (Carlson 2012b, p. 267). The concept of paradigm repair was drawn from Kuhn's (1962, cited in Reese 1990) work which linked creation with paradigmatic allegiances. Kuhn (1962, cited in Reese 1990, p. 392) stated that “paradigms provide examples rather than explicit rules” such that the paradigm is learnt “by engaging in the discipline”. As stated in Chap. 1, the notion of paradigm repair has been employed by previous scholars to examine journalistic metadiscourse on press “deviancy” in relation to objectivity (Reese 1990), fabrications (Hindman 2005; Carlson 2009), reporting errors (Cecil 2002), paparazzi (Bishop 1999; Berkowitz 2000), scapegoating (Berger 2008), media scandal (Carlson and Berkowitz 2014) and press standards (Thomas and Finneman 2014).

One news paradigm that is of importance to this book is the perception of the journalist as a crusader; one who uses the weapon of “the pen” to fight for justice for the less privileged; the voice of the voiceless and the provider of information to the public that enables them to hold the powerful to account—the watchdog of society. Franklin (1997, cited in Frost 2007) breaks this self-perception (and to some extent public perception)



down into six norms which are journalism is a quest for truth, journalism is independent of government, newspapers are pluralistic organisations, journalists are independent of economic pressures, journalists are watchdogs and journalism creates a public sphere with the bottom line being that journalism is central to democracy. Closely linked to the “crusader image paradigm” is the “press freedom” or “press autonomy” paradigm. Press freedom is critical to journalism’s fulfilment of its crusader or watchdog role, particularly freedom from state interference. As stated earlier, from neoliberal perspectives, if journalists must call politicians to order and expose corruption, they must be independent of government (Deuze 2005). They are also allowed to use clandestine means to obtain information if that information is in the “public interest” (see Chap. 2 for more on public interest). This freedom enables the press to carry out investigative journalism as well as fulfil other watchdog and informative roles that will help enhance democracy (Waisbord 2013). The British press would frown at any effort or perceived effort to rob it of its autonomy and would likely use its power to control information to protect the freedom of the press and repair its image as a crusader.

This view of the journalist as a crusader is not without contestation. There are several instances where journalists have been accused of abusing their freedom (McQuail 2003, p. 81; Squire et al. 2005, p. 254). Scholars have contested the image of the journalist as a crusader based on these lines: journalists do not always tell the truth; their relationship with government is collusive; they are not independent of economic pressures because competitive markets cause them to throw ethics to the wind; they are not watchdogs but lapdogs; they are not pluralistic and do not serve as a democratic public sphere (Franklin 1997). Previous studies show that oftentimes when public outrage against press “deviancy” leads to the setting up of a press commission, steps taken by such commissions to check the abuse of press freedom have been interpreted in journalistic metadiscourse as a “threat to press freedom” and, by extension, a threat to democracy (Putnis 2000). Reese (1990), Cecil (2002), Carlson and Berkowitz (2014) and Thomas and Finneman (2014) examined how journalists’ metadiscourse followed certain patterns when they perceived threats to their paradigm. In line with Eason’s (1988, cited in Carlson 2015, p. 4) argument, these studies showed that the journalistic metadiscourses were defensive rather than self-critical.

In his study about how journalists in the USA responded to perceived threats to the objectivity paradigm, Reese (1990) examined three types of

paradigm repair: “(a) disengaging and distancing the threatening values from the reporter’s work; (b) re-asserting the ability of journalistic routines to prevent threatening values from ‘distorting’ the news, and (c) marginalising the man and his message; making both appear ineffective” (Reese 1990, p. 390). Cecil (2002, p. 46) talks about a type of paradigm repair “in which the logic of journalism is reasserted in response to an outside challenge”. Referring to it as paradigm overhaul, Cecil (2002) found that while criticising challenges to the “objective news paradigm”, journalistic metadiscourse overhauled that paradigm, “reasserting objective news without altering or even questioning its underlying assumptions” (Cecil 2002, p. 47). He pointed out that “no changes were deemed necessary” (ibid.). The journalist(s) who were accused of deviant behaviour were described as a few “bad apples” and “the problem was “solved” by simply purging the reporters from the ranks” of good journalism (ibid.).

In this way, the journalistic metadiscourse sought to repair its paradigm by localising the bad behaviour and asserting the profession’s importance and achievements without considering making amendments to the paradigm. Alternatives to the paradigm were labelled deviant (ibid.). The process by which journalists strive to build walls to isolate deviant journalists from the “noble profession” have been described as boundary maintenance (ibid, p. 50). In addition to maintaining its boundaries through journalistic metadiscourse, the news organisation responds by either correcting or eliminating the bad apple(s) responsible for the mistake (Reese 1990, cited in Cecil 2002, p. 50). Cecil (2002, p. 50) emphasised that “the individual reporter, editor, and producers; not news organisations or the news paradigm itself, tend to receive the blame for breaks in the paradigm”.

While individualisation (also, ostracisation, localisation or bad apple) strategy has proved useful in the analysis of paradigm repair, limiting paradigmatic markers to individualisation of deviancy restricts the tools for analysis of paradigm repair. As Carlson and Berkowitz (2014) observed, paradigm repair interpretive strategies can also include extensions of deviancy from the individual to the general. The general can include a news organisation; a class of newspaper, for example, the tabloid; a media platform or even the whole media. Using as an example, the media coverage of the demise of two US regional newspapers, *Rocky Mountain News* and printed *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, Carlson (2012b, p. 267) demonstrated that paradigm repair can include situations where the perceived problem

of an individual newspaper is interpreted by the press as a reflection of the challenges faced by all newspapers. Here, the perceived threat to the printed press paradigm was “repaired” by re-asserting the “importance and superiority” of the printed press over other forms, especially online news forms. Carlson referred to this extension from the individual to the general as “second—order paradigm repair” (ibid.).

Another case for expansion of paradigm repair to include generalisable interpretive strategies can be found in Carlson and Berkowitz (2014) where the deviancy (phone hacking) of an individual newspaper, the *News of the World*, was interpreted by both journalistic and non-journalistic actors as a manifestation of the deviancy of all printed press in the UK; and the Valerie Plame’s case where the misconduct of Miller was translated as the deviance of the press (Carlson 2012a, pp. 111–137). Carlson and Berkowitz (2014, p. 392) described this extension of deviancy from the individual to the general as “synecdoche deviancy”, a term he borrowed from the figure of speech; synecdoche, which means using part to represent the whole. He says, “with journalism, this may refer to efforts to extend a scandal from its immediate context to incorporate a broader set of news practices—such as using a scandal at one tabloid newspaper to extend to the whole of tabloid newspapers” (ibid.). I argue that both individualised (ostracisation, localisation) and generalisable (synecdoche) deviancy can emerge from the same incident and could occur at different stages of, for example, a scandal.

Synecdoche deviancy in journalistic metadiscourse is often triggered by scandals in which the press is the culprit. Examples of such scandals are the Valerie Plame’s case of 2003; the Pulitzer Prize-winning “news” story in the *Washington Post*, written by Janet Cooke about a non-existent eight-year-old heroin addict, published in 1980; the *Time* magazine cover “photo illustration” of O.J. Simpson at the time of his murder trial in 1994, with darkened skin tone; the “Rathergate”—a scandal in which the CBS anchor-man Dan Rather was accused of using fake documents in a report on George W. Bush dodging National Guard duty (Bettig and Hall 2012, p. 16); and more recently, the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal. Scandals can encourage public discussions on sensitive and controversial issues (Lull and Hinerman 1997, p. 1). According to Lull and Hinerman, contemporary media scandals provide “a clear and compelling entry point for criticisms of the media in society” (ibid.). In the case of the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal, the controversy generated

important questions relating to how the media cover themselves and the implication of their manner of coverage for democracy.

In line with Carlson's argument for the use of the notion of paradigm repair to study synecdoche deviancy in journalistic metadiscourse, Thomas and Finneman (2014) used paradigm repair to study the media coverage of the Leveson Inquiry, an offshoot of the phone hacking scandal (see Chap. 3 for more on the Leveson Inquiry). Their study sample consisted of "editorial comment in mainstream national daily and Sunday newspapers on the Leveson Inquiry from its inception to the conclusion of its hearing phase". Using the media coverage of the hearing stages of the Leveson Inquiry as its study sample, Thomas and Finneman (2014, p. 172) summarised interpretive patterns used in previous analysis of metadiscourse into four main strategies:

1. Catastrophisation—[also "threats to the paradigm"].
2. Self-affirmation (affirming journalism's value to a democratic society)—[also known as self-justification, self-assertion or re-assertion].
3. Minimisation (downplaying the significance of the phone hacking scandal and therefore questioning the legitimacy of the inquiry and other measures aimed at checking press irresponsibility).
4. Localisation (localising the damage to the community to acts committed by a handful of members).

Localisation, which is also known as ostracisation, individualisation and the bad apple interpretive strategy, is a type of deflection strategy. The press can use different strategies of deflection to exonerate themselves of blame by deflecting it to others. Deflection strategies are also referred to in this book as self-exoneration strategies. From their findings, Thomas and Finneman (2014, p. 172) concluded that the journalistic metadiscourse during the hearing stages of the Leveson Inquiry revealed "an institutional ideology that is quick to assert rights but largely resistant to notions of attendant responsibilities". Though the authors' categorisation is very relevant to the study of journalistic metadiscourse, their categories do not make room for durational modes of interpretation (*ibid.*).

According to Zelizer (1994, cited in Cecil 2002, p. 51), journalistic metadiscourse takes place on two planes: the local and the durational modes of interpretation. While the local mode of interpretation is concerned with the immediate occurrence and how it is made meaning of in

journalism's interpretive community, the durational mode of interpretation "offers a historical perspective, a discussion of past occurrences, which is often reinterpreted to fit into a more localized frame" (*ibid.*). Journalists discuss past stories such as Princess Diana's death and paparazzi (1997), the topless princess photo (2012) and the Watergate scandal (1970), and talk about how this fits in with the present occurrence and what that means for journalism and democracy. Such discussions are often used to reinforce the boundaries of journalistic practice. This is what I refer to, in paradigm repair studies, as the strategy of historicisation (White 2004, p. 98; Mumford 2009, p. 72).

"Historicisation" is a term I borrowed from dramatic theory where German playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) used it to describe the following theatre scenarios:

- Distancing (contemporary) phenomenon by placing them in the past
- Presenting events as the product of historically specific conditions and choices
- Showing differences between the past and the present and evidencing change
- Showing similarities between the past and the present and urging change
- Revealing received versions of history as the views of the ruling class
- Giving air to suppressed and interventionist histories
- Presenting all versions of history as serving vested interests (Brecht, cited in Mumford 2009, p. 72)

Historicisation becomes a paradigm repair strategy when similar techniques as those outlined by Brecht are employed by the press in an attempt to repair its paradigm (*ibid.*). The concept of paradigm repair strategy assumes that the press would only protect its paradigm(s); but the press can also challenge journalistic paradigms (Carlson 2012a). Interestingly, the strategy of historicisation can also be used to challenge an existing paradigm. In such a case, it is not a paradigm repair but a paradigm challenging strategy. The strategy of historicisation can, therefore, be defined as an interpretive approach in which history is used to strengthen or explicate contemporary meaning-making in journalistic metadiscourse, in an attempt to protect or challenge a journalistic paradigm.

In journalistic metadiscourse, historicisation is mostly (though not exclusively) located in the opinion sections of newspapers where it is used to strengthen diverse arguments. Historicisation would most often express

the newspaper's position in an argument. For instance, newspapers that propagate the neoliberal ideology can use the strategy of historicisation to warn against state intervention in press regulation while those advancing social democratic perspectives can use the strategy to stress the need for state intervention. Historicisation can be used to either call for or oppose press reform. It can also be used as an element of drama; to assert the media's importance; or to affirm that the press has gone too far too often. Historicisation is a broad paradigmatic approach that can embrace other paradigm strategies such as self-assertion and individualisation. Adding the strategy of historicisation to the four paradigm repair strategies—the strategies of threat to the paradigm (catastrophisation), self-assertion (affirmation), minimisation and individualisation (localisation; bad apples)—enabled me to investigate both historical and local modes of interpretation in the press coverage of the debate that arose from the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. Having discussed the terms and strategies that I engaged with in my analysis of the coverage of the debate that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal, the following section explains the model of content and discourse analyses used for my investigation.

### INVESTIGATING THE PRESS REFORM DEBATE: CONTENT AND DISCOURSE ANALYSES

Content analysis is the systematic and objective analysis of texts such as can be found in newspaper articles, television clips, books, adverts and so on (Holsti 1969, p. 14, cited in Stemler 2001, p. 17). In content analysis, textual components (words, phrases, images, etc.) relevant to the findings of one's research are counted, recorded and then calculated with the use of statistical methods (Riffe et al. 2005, p. 3). The understanding is that the results when analysed can provide answers to the question(s) posed by the study. Content analysis is suitable for analysing huge volumes of texts (Mosdell and Davies 2006, p. 98). This made it the most suitable research method for my investigation which examined more than 800 newspaper articles. In my research, content analysis was used to measure the use of sources, the hierarchy of importance accorded to different issues of concern, the range of alternative views, the dominant themes and the extent to which paradigm repair strategies were used in the coverage of the media policy debate.

Measuring sources enabled me to evaluate the sources used and ones most frequently quoted. This provides empirical data on how the media used sources of information in their coverage of the press reform debate. In a democracy, the normative expectation is that all stakeholders in a debate would have proportionate access to the public sphere. My decision to investigate sources in the media policy debate is in response to this expectation and the claim that ordinary citizens and sources critical of the press are allotted a weak position of access to the media (Galtung and Ruge 1965, cited in Harcup and O'Neill 2010, p. 270). Using content analysis, I was able to identify the dominant theme in each newspaper and the whole coverage; ascertain whether the press gave limited coverage to views that were critical of them; measure attributions of blame and alternative views; and gauge the degree of manifestation of different paradigm repair strategies in the journalistic metadiscourse. In sum, content analysis helped to provide statistical data on how the British press covered the media policy debate that arose from the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. A coding scheme was designed to enable me to input the data for my content analysis.

My study sample comprised all news articles on the press reform debate in six of the top ten British national newspapers (based on combined print and online readership figures for April 2011 to March 2012—Source: NRS PADD 2012): two newspapers from each category of the main newspaper classification in the UK. My decision to do only two from each category is for the purpose of manageability, considering the depth of analysis and available period of study. As mentioned in Chap. 1, I chose to look at national papers because of their nationwide reach. The national newspapers in Britain are categorised in terms of social class, although this classification does not always reflect reality (McNair 2000, p. 14). The categories are the broadsheets, mid-market and the tabloids (Williams 2009, pp. 9–10). These categories have different target audiences and diverse manners of coverage. This was taken into consideration during the analysis of the coverage. However, these categories were bypassed where a phenomenon cuts across paper classifications.

The broadsheets, also known as quality newspapers, deliver hard or “serious-minded” news content. They are regarded as “the most information dense of the print media” (McNair 2000, p. 16). Their target audience consists of the upper- and middle-class people “with higher levels of income, educational attainment and social status” (Williams 2009, p. 9). They are often referred to as the elite titles (McNair 2000, p. 16). At the

time of my research, the broadsheet newspapers included *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Sunday Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, *Independent*, *Independent on Sunday* and *Financial Times*. The broadsheet newspapers examined are the *Daily Telegraph* and *Guardian*. The choice of these two quality newspapers was based on their wide reach and consequent potential to impact society. The *Guardian* had the biggest combined (print and digital data) monthly readership for broadsheet newspapers in the year to March 2012 with a total of 8.95 million readers, followed by *Daily Telegraph* with 8.82 million readers (NRS PADD 2012; Halliday 2012). Both papers were, thus, the most read British national quality newspapers within the period of the debate that followed the phone hacking scandal. The role *Guardian* newspaper played in exposing the extent of the scandal adds to its importance in the sample.

Next in line are the mid-market titles which at the time comprised *Daily Express*, *Sunday Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday*. Their target audience is believed to be middle and upper working-class people. There is some confusion with this classification because papers in this group were former broadsheet newspapers (The *Mail and Express* newspapers) which changed from the broadsheet to tabloid print format (McNair 2000, p. 14). Some scholars use the term “red-top tabloids” to refer to the group commonly known as the tabloids, in order to differentiate them from the “broadsheets” in tabloid format. Representing the mid-markets in the study are *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*. Their Sunday editions, as well as the Sunday publications of all other newspapers studied, were excluded from my research to reduce it to a manageable size. The *Daily Mail* also has great potential to impact society; it came next to the *Sun* as the paper with the second largest combined monthly readership across all classes of UK newspaper in the year to March 2012 with a total of 16.4 million readers (NRS PADD 2012; Halliday 2012). Though the *Daily Express* was far behind in readership figures (4.6 million readers), it serves as the only other mid-market newspaper, and examining it evens up the number of newspapers being studied to two newspapers per category of British national newspapers (ibid.). Providing an alternative newspaper per category of newspaper examined makes available opportunities to investigate whether a phenomenon was characteristic (or not) of a newspaper category.

The “popular” press, red-top tabloid or tabloid titles are at the end of the spectrum in terms of social status. They are known to have a high level of readership despite the fact that they publish less “serious” and more celebrity, sensational and entertainment-style news. At the time of this



study, the tabloid newspapers were *The Sun*, *Sun on Sunday*, *Daily Mirror*, *Sunday Mirror*, *Daily Star*, *Daily Star Sunday* and *People*. My study examined *The Sun* and *Daily Mirror*. *The Sun*'s reach is significant being that it had the highest combined monthly readership across all categories of UK newspapers in the year to March 2012 with a total of 17.8 million readers (ibid.). The fact that *The Sun* newspaper belongs to the owner of the defunct *News of the World* strengthens its relevance to the study sample. It afforded me an opportunity to examine how one of Rupert Murdoch's papers covered the misdemeanour of one of their own. The *Daily Mirror*'s 10.6 million monthly combined readership also made it a paper to be reckoned with; the figure makes it third in the ranking of overall UK national newspaper monthly combined readership in the year to March 2012 (ibid.). As previously stated, all six newspapers examined are among the top ten in terms of combined readership of national newspapers in the UK (ibid.). It is important to note that with the current trend of "tabloidisation" (the "dumbing down" or "going down market" of the more rational press to the sensational in order to attract a numerically larger audience), the lines are blurring among these three categories of newspaper (Williams 2009, pp. 9–10).

All news articles on the media reform debate in the six national daily newspapers were examined. The period of coverage was from 14 November 2011 (when the hearing began at the Leveson Inquiry) to 14 November 2013 (the aftermath of the Privy Council's approval of a Royal Charter on press regulation). This two-year period falls within the time frame when media coverage of the press reform debate was at its peak in the UK (Macfarlane and Torpey 2012, n.p; *Independent* 2013). Although editorials are where the newspaper's opinions are often heard (Hindman 2003, p. 671), I decided against limiting my research to editorials because as Wahl-Jorgensen (2008, p. 67) pointed out, "in the British context ... expression of judgements and opinions is frequently not limited to the op-ed and editorial pages, but increasingly pervades every section of the newspaper". Therefore, limiting the study to editorials risks leaving out interpretations of the debate that featured in the news section of the newspapers. My data, thus, included both opinion and news articles that captured the media policy debate which followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal.

The news articles were obtained from Nexis UK, an electronic archive service with full text access to all UK national newspapers. Using the search terms "press regulation" or "press laws" or "public trust" or "media

ownership” or “public interest” or “privacy” (anywhere in the text) and “Leveson” or “News of the World” or “phone hacking” (anywhere in the text), my search produced a total of 1485 news articles. A broad range of issues on the press reform debate including articles relating to the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), the Press Standards Board of Finance (PressBoF), Hacked Off, the Royal Charter and the Privy Council were represented in the result. After cleaning the sample by deleting repeats and unrelated stories, the sample was reduced to 870; 323 from *Guardian*, 199 from *Daily Telegraph*, 173 from *Daily Mail*, 28 from *Daily Express*, 96 from the *Sun* and 51 from *Daily Mirror*. The large reduction in the number of articles from 1485 to 870 was largely due to the high number of duplicate articles in Nexis UK, especially with articles from *Guardian* newspaper where the results, at the time of study, contained articles from both their online and print versions, despite excluding websites through the search preferences. My research examined written content only. Although a study on the visuals would also be interesting, that is outside the scope of this study. This study is quite broad and excluding visuals helped to make it a manageable project. Visual analysis of the coverage would be an interesting focus for future study.

Berelson (1952, p. 18, cited in Richardson 2007, p. 15) emphasised the characteristic of content analysis as an objective research procedure, free from the researcher’s interference. This “objectivity” requirement of content analysis also requires that the research be done in such a way that it can be replicated by anyone who chooses to do so (Krippendorff 2004, pp. 18–19). To take care of this requirement, a coding sheet was drawn up along with guidelines that helped to make the study replicable. The coding sheet was tested and re-tested by two trained postgraduate student coders. Thirty stories randomly selected from the study sample were tested until the overall percentage agreement reached an average of 95.9 per cent, with the lowest variable reaching 80 per cent agreement. The high level of percentage agreement across all variables helps to guarantee that this research can be replicated. The calculations were made using ReCal2 0.1 Alpha ([dfreelon.org](http://dfreelon.org)). ReCal2 is an online reliability calculator for two coders which calculates intercoder reliability coefficients for nominal data and produces results for percentage agreements. The result of my intercoder reliability test was Krippendorff’s Alpha 0.822. A codebook that explains each variable was designed to enhance comprehension of the coding sheet. Though content analysis has huge benefits, among which are its cost effectiveness, unobtrusiveness and replicability (Berelson 1971, p. 18;

Krippendorff 2012), the results it produces can be problematic because statistics from quantitative measurements can be interpreted out of context (Richardson 2007, pp. 15–18). To take care of such shortcomings, discourse analysis was used as a supplementary method to content analysis

Discourse analysis is multifarious and so are its definitions (Wodak and Meyer 2009, p. 24). van Dijk (1988, p. x; 1998 cited in Devereux 2007, p. 174) explains that discourse analysis allows the analyst to investigate the underlying meaning of words. Gee and Handford (2012, p. 1) advanced this understanding by defining discourse analysis as “the study of language in use”. Discourse analysis (DA) is “the study of the meanings we give language” and what that does within a particular context (*ibid.*). This is based on the “understanding that language does not passively reflect our experiences” but can be manipulated (consciously or unconsciously) by the powerful to advance their interests (Phillips and Jorgensen 2002, p. 63). “Powerful” within the context of this study includes those with access to the media’s public sphere and those upon whom the public has conferred the authority to both introduce and coordinate discourses within this public space (Phillips and Jorgensen 2002, pp. 2–3; Hall 1997). Some approaches to discourse analysis are largely linguistic, some are more focused on the construction of “themes or images” in texts while others are interested in linking language to social and cultural issues of contention with the aim of locating the resultant social consequences (Gee and Handford 2012, p. 1). The latter, which is known as critical discourse analysis, is the approach used for my research. Though discourse analysis was not the main method for the research, some of its principles were used to explicate my findings. Hence, the need to briefly discuss critical discourse analysis.

Critical discourse analysis, hereafter referred to as CDA, is diverse (Wodak and Meyer 2009, p. 5). Forms of CDA include the Foucauldian CDA and dispositive analysis (Jager and Maier 2009); the social cognitive approach (van Dijk 2009); the social psychological approach (Wetherell and Potter 1992); the discourse-historic approach of the Vienna School (Wodak and Meyer 2009) and Norman Fairclough’s approach to CDA (Fairclough 1992a, b, 1995a, b, 2005). I used principles from Norman Fairclough’s approach to CDA because unlike some models of CDA that focus primarily on linguistic analysis, Fairclough’s CDA makes room for the analysis of power relationships in communicative discourse in relation to wider social and cultural structures (Leifeld 2016, p. 39). Fairclough’s approach to CDA is beneficial for this study because an investigation into

how the press covers debates about their policy and the implication of their manner of coverage for media accountability and the sustenance of democracy involves investigating the distribution of communicative power between the press and other stakeholders in the media policy debates. Fairclough expects that by using his approach to CDA, people can contribute to social change along the lines of more equal power relations in communicative discourse (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, p. 258). One normative expectation of CDA is to promote democracy by pointing out non-egalitarian discourses so that steps can be taken to make them democratic (Phillips and Jorgensen 2002). Though some aspects of van Dijk's (1988, 1998, 2009) approach to CDA can be useful in this study (e.g. its investigation into communicative power and ideology analysis), the systematic and well-developed analytical construct of Norman Fairclough's CDA and its emphasis on social issues as against van Dijk's (1988, 1998, 2009) focus on the political gave it an edge in this study. Fairclough's three-dimensional analytical model (discursive, linguistic and social practice) makes his CDA a good supplement to my content analysis.

As stated earlier, CDA was a supplementary method of analysis in my research; it was used to elucidate the results of my content analysis and for the analysis of how paradigm repair strategies were used in the coverage. News articles on the debate were scrutinised in search of words, linguistic devices and discursive patterns that could reveal underlying meanings. Fairclough's (1995a, b, 2005) style of linking language-use to social practice was also employed in my analysis. For example, results from the coverage of the debate on media ownership were linked to the structure of media ownership in a democratic society. One unique feature in this style of mixed methodology is that there is no specific number of articles set aside as the sample for discourse analysis. Feltham-King and Macleod (2016, pp. 1–9) used a similar pattern of mixed methods when they used content analysis to supplement discourse analysis. The flexibility with which I could use principles drawn from CDA to analyse the data from content analysis at various points of my analysis is a feature that attracted me to this method. Supplementing content analysis with critical discourse analysis allowed me to interpret statistics based on the context within which they appeared, enabling in-depth analysis of the results of my investigation. It also enabled me to examine the construction and extent of usage of different paradigm repair strategies.

Following the lines of Fairclough's three-dimensional analytical model (linguistic [grammar], discursive and social practice), I analysed linguistic

devices such as “you-centeredness”, metaphors, hyperboles and adjectives to unearth their underlying meanings as suggested by Fairclough (1992b, pp. 158–194). This helped to affirm the use of some paradigm repair strategies in the coverage of the press reform debate. For example, my analysis of doom-laden adjectives in the media’s description of measures aimed at reforming their policy helped to affirm the use of “threat to the paradigm” strategy. On the discursive level, I identified the “us” and “them” pattern of discourse which attempted to portray the “us” (the press) as good and the “them” (campaigners for stringent press reform) as bad. I scrutinised discourses to see if arguments were based on the neoliberal or social democratic theory. I also investigated discursive patterns including silences in media texts and their implication. In terms of social practice, I analysed texts in my study sample based on the social, economic and political conditions under which they were produced. For instance, I linked the journalistic metadiscourse on media ownership to issue of media ownership concentration in the UK.

In this study, Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of analysis was not used chronologically but at various points of my analysis. Despite its richness, CDA does have some weaknesses. Scholars have argued that the fact that there is no specific way of selecting the study sample for CDA makes studies done with CDA subjective and prone to researchers’ interference (Blommaert 2005). This weakness is addressed in this study because CDA was used only to complement my content analysis. Consequently, all discourses analysed were drawn from the study sample for my content analysis which was chosen through a relatively objective method. Complementing content analysis with critical discourse analysis enabled me to provide comprehensive and comprehensible analysis of the coverage of the media policy debate.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the method used for my investigation into how the media represented the debate that arose from the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. Content analysis was supplemented by critical discourse analysis to provide comprehensive data on how the media cover debates about their policy. The chapter clarified the meanings of the terms “metacoverage”, “metajournalistic discourse” and “journalistic metadiscourse”. I called for a review of the definition that limits metacoverage to the increasing trend of journalists covering

themselves during political campaigns (Esser et al. 2001). I argued that based on the composition of the word, it should refer to all forms of self-coverage by the media. Going by my definition of metacoverage, the media content analysed in my research falls within the category of metacoverage in the field of journalism, what Brin and Drolet (2009, p. 271) described as journalistic metadiscourse. I explained that journalistic metadiscourse is what Carlson (2015) referred to as metajournalistic discourse on journalistic platforms.

The concept of paradigm repair can be used to analyse journalistic metadiscourse on press reform. Journalists use paradigm repair strategies to protect press standards and values from scrutiny (Bennett et al. 1985, cited in Carlson 2015, p. 4). The paradigm repair strategies discussed in this chapter include “threat to the paradigm” (warnings of attacks on journalism), self-assertion (affirming the importance of journalism to democracy), minimisation (downplaying the significance of the phone hacking scandal and questioning the legitimacy of measures aimed at checking press irresponsibility), individualisation (localising the damage to the community to acts committed by a few journalists) and historicisation (using history or collective memory to repair (or challenge) journalistic paradigms).

I examined all news articles on the media policy debate in the *Guardian*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Express*, *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail*; from 14 November 2011 when the Leveson Inquiry was set up, to 14 November 2014—the aftermath of the sealing of the cross-party Royal Charter on press regulation. A total of 870 news articles were examined: 323 from *Guardian*, 199 from *Daily Telegraph*, 173 from *Daily Mail*, 28 from *Daily Express*, 96 from the *Sun* and 51 from *Daily Mirror*. A coding sheet, a codebook, Nexis UK database and the Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS) were used for my primary investigation. Results from this research are used to support my analysis of how the media cover debates about their policy.

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## Paradigm Repair and Journalistic Metadiscourse

Media scandals often lead to scrutiny of press standards with the aim of ensuring that the malpractice does not repeat itself and the media fulfil their role in a democratic society. Such scrutiny could take the form of commissions or inquiries into press standards (see Chap. 3). For example, in the case of the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal, it was the Leveson Inquiry into the culture, ethics and practice of the press. These inquiries have consumed huge amount of resources (time, money, etc.) due to the important role the media play in democratic societies (see Chap. 4). Despite the amount of resources devoted to such enquiries the impact in terms of media reforms has been ominously minimal and largely ineffective (Curran and Seaton 2010). For instance, less than a decade after the Leveson Inquiry and the subsequent setting up of the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) as an improved Leveson-compliant press regulator, the press is again accused of publishing several embarrassing stories relating to the Duchess of Sussex, Meghan Markle. Such stories led to Prince Harry's so-called war against the tabloid press and Meghan's suing of the *Mail on Sunday* for publishing her hand-written letter to her estranged father, on the grounds of misuse of private information, infringement of copyright and breach of General Data Protection Regulation (Waterstone and Davies 2019).

This book takes the position that media reform efforts are weakened to a large extent, because of the way the media cover debates about their policy. As explained in Chap. 5, one way through which the media can

weaken press reform efforts is by using paradigm repair strategies. Paradigm repair occurs when a press paradigm is called into question and the press refusing to examine its ways to see if there is need for change and instead chooses to protect the existing paradigm(s) through the use of different discursive strategies (Bennet et al. 1985 cited in Carlson 2015, p. 4). Based on information gathered from previous literature and my preliminary examination of news articles on the press reform debate, I identified two paradigms the press attempted to repair or protect during their coverage of the debate. They are the “press freedom” and “journalists as a crusader” paradigms. The strategies used to protect these paradigms include catastrophisation, historicisation, individualisation, self-assertion and minimisation (see Chap. 5). This chapter presents my findings on the use of the strategies of catastrophisation and historicisation. I will begin with an analysis of how catastrophisation was used in the media coverage of the press reform debate that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal.

“Threat to the paradigm” and “threat to press freedom” are used interchangeably to talk about the press’ use of the strategy of catastrophisation to protect its conceptualisation of press freedom. This strategy entails the media’s use of diverse techniques to raise an alarm that the paradigm under scrutiny (in this case, press freedom) is under attack. My investigation revealed that the press functioned as two sub-interpretive spheres during their coverage of the press reform debate that arose from the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. Sub-interpretive spheres emerge from a situation in which journalism, rather than function as one interpretive community in its attempt to mark the boundaries of their profession (Zelizer 1993), instead functions as multiple homogeneous publics (Fraser 1992). The multiple spheres of homogeneous discourses created within a journalistic community are what I refer to as sub-interpretive spheres. Multiple sub-interpretive spheres can arise from differences and similarities in the press’ interpretations of journalistic paradigms, such as press freedom, objectivity and news in the printed format. Sub-interpretive spheres may or may not be divided along the lines of media outfits because they are abstract spheres of discourses. In this book, however, the sub-interpretive spheres were divided along the lines of newspapers.

As stated earlier, I identified two sub-interpretive spheres in the media coverage of the debate that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. One sub-interpretive sphere comprises *The Sun*,

*Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* while the other consists of the *Guardian* newspaper. The press reform debate was often along the lines of these two sub-interpretive spheres. This grouping does not imply that newspapers in each of the two categories agreed on every point of the press reform argument. The homogeneity of a sub-interpretive sphere does not preclude disagreements on certain issues within that homogeneous public. The categorisation of the sub-interpretive spheres in this study was based on the degree of similarity in their expressions and interpretations of key points in the press reform debate, particularly their views on what constitutes press freedom. To be able to analyse these newspapers' representation of the press reform debate as sub-interpretive spheres as well as individually, this book adopts a confederation pattern of analysis.

"Confederation pattern of analysis" as a pattern of critique that allows analysis of media content both in groups (e.g. of a group of newspapers) and individually (individual newspapers). This allows room for the identification of unique trends and styles within discourse. For instance, though *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* all advanced a similar interpretation of press freedom, the newspapers differed in their representation of *News of the World*'s owner Rupert Murdoch and the Press Complaint Commission, as we shall see in Chap. 8. Understanding my use of sub-interpretive spheres and the confederation pattern of analysis will enable the comprehension of my analysis of the journalistic metadiscourse, especially in relation to the grouping and individual examination of newspapers. In the next section, I discuss how the "threat to the paradigm" strategy was used in the journalistic metadiscourse on the press reform debate.

### THREAT TO THE PARADIGM: PRESS FREEDOM UNDER ATTACK?

When public outrage against press "deviancy" leads to the setting up of a press commission, steps taken by such commissions to check the abuse of press freedom have often been interpreted in journalistic metadiscourse as a threat to press freedom and, by extension, a threat to democracy (Curran and Seaton 2010, pp. 327–338; Steel 2012). One of the ways through which it has done this is by using the "threat to the paradigm" or catastrophisation strategy to warn that measures designed to check abuse of press

power were a threat to press freedom (Thomas and Finneman 2014). Table 6.1 not only affirms this argument but also shows the extent to which it was done. “Threat to press freedom” was the overall dominant theme in the journalistic metadiscourse on the debate that arose from the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. It was the dominant theme in 20.6 per cent of the study sample, appearing in 62.5 per cent of articles in *The Sun*, 35.7 per cent of *Daily Express*, 25.5 per cent of *Daily Mirror* and 18.1 per cent of *Daily Telegraph* (see Table 6.1). It was only surpassed in the *Daily Mail* by the theme “Critiquing critics of the press”; yet it still managed to exceed the *Guardian*’s usage of the strategy, emerging in 13.3 per cent of articles in *Daily Mail* as against *Guardian*’s 11.5 per cent of articles. This result reflects a trend that runs through the journalistic metadiscourse on the press reform debate, where the *Guardian* operated as a different interpretive community from the rest of the newspapers in my study sample, leading to my grouping of the *Guardian* as one sub-interpretive sphere and the rest of the press as another sub-interpretive sphere. This division of the press reform debate into two interpretive communities will become clearer as I delve deeper into the analysis of the media policy debate that arose from the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry.

This division into two interpretive communities was also identified in the debate on the Leveson Inquiry’s proposal for press regulation underpinned by statute. “Support for statutory underpinning” of a new press regulatory body was the dominant theme in the *Guardian* newspaper, appearing in 22.3 per cent of its sample as against 3.5 per cent in the *Daily Telegraph*, 1.2 per cent in the *Daily Mail* and zero per cent in *The Sun*, *Daily Express* and *Daily Mirror* (see Table 6.1). This result demonstrates that apart from the *Guardian*, all newspapers in my study sample advanced a discourse that was opposed to statutory regulation; this includes a regulatory body underpinned by statute. As with previous inquiries into press regulation and accountability (see Chap. 3), much of the press opposed the Leveson Inquiry’s proposal for press regulation underpinned by statute. This resistance to statutory regulation accounted for arguments “against statutory underpinning” emerging as the dominant theme in 12.7 per cent of the sample for *Daily Mail*, 10.7 per cent for *Daily Express*, 9.8 per cent for *Daily Mirror*, 6.0 per cent for *Daily Telegraph*, 5.2 per cent for *The Sun* and 4.0 per cent for *Guardian*. As Curran and Seaton

**Table 6.1** Dominant theme in the study sample

<i>Dominant theme</i>	<i>Guardian</i> (%)	<i>Daily Mail</i> (%)	<i>Daily Mirror</i> (%)	<i>Daily Telegraph</i> (%)	<i>Daily Express</i> (%)	<i>The Sun</i> (%)	<i>Total</i> (%)
Threat to press freedom	11.5	13.3	25.5	18.1	35.7	62.5	20.6
Support for new press' own regulatory system	1.5	4.6	3.9	2.5	3.6	4.2	2.9
Against politicians' Royal Charter	2.8	4.0		3.0		3.1	2.9
Against press law/statutory underpinning	4.0	12.7	9.8	6.0	10.7	5.2	6.9
Press achievements	0.6	6.9	2.0	1.5	7.1	1.0	2.4
Against self-regulation of the press	0.9	0.6					0.5
Support for Leveson Inquiry	10.5		7.8	2.5	7.1	3.1	5.5
Enforce existing laws		2.3	3.9	4.5			1.7
Critiquing critics of the press	0.6	14.5	2.0	5.0	3.6	8.3	5.4
More dialogue needed	1.5						0.6
Privacy	6.2	9.2	9.8	11.1	10.7	3.1	7.9
Against new press regulatory system formed by the press	2.5			1.0			1.1
Support for politicians' Royal Charter	6.8	2.9	2.0	1.0			3.4
Support for press law/statutory underpinning	22.3	1.2		3.5			9.3
Media owners/ownership checks are needed	5.0	1.2	2.0	4.5	3.6	1.0	3.4
Support for self-regulation of the press	5.6	1.7	2.0	9.0	3.6	2.1	4.9

*(continued)*

**Table 6.1** (continued)

<i>Dominant theme</i>	<i>Guardian</i> (%)	<i>Daily Mail</i> (%)	<i>Daily Mirror</i> (%)	<i>Daily Telegraph</i> (%)	<i>Daily Express</i> (%)	<i>The Sun</i> (%)	<i>Total</i> (%)
Against Leveson Inquiry	0.6	8.7			3.6	3.1	2.4
The politicians' Royal Charter may never work	2.8	2.3	2.0	0.5			1.7
Promoting supporters of the press	0.3	2.9					0.7
Promoting supporters of the statutory underpinning argument				0.5			0.1
The press behaved badly	0.6	6.4	11.8	11.1			4.7
The press is not to blame		4.0	5.9	6.5			2.6
Other	13.3	0.6	9.8	8.0	10.7	3.1	8.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(2010) argue, this aversion to statutory regulation by the press is largely responsible for weak reforms in press regulation.

Support for or against statutory underpinning of a new press regulatory system underpinned several arguments relating to the “threat to press freedom” theme in the journalistic metadiscourse on the press reform debate. The result reveals that “threat to press freedom” was the most prominent argument and issue of concern in the journalistic metadiscourse. The “threat to press freedom” strategy was used liberally in all newspapers in the study sample but more prominently in the sub-interpretive sphere comprising of *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*. Studies have shown that the opposition of the British press to statutory regulation goes beyond a commitment to protect press freedom, to a determination to control information without being accountable for its management (Curran and Seaton 2010; Petley 2013). Ensuring press accountability was one of the mandates of the Leveson (2012f). However, in its coverage of the debate that arose from





slippery slope to press licensing” (10.9 per cent), actions that can have a “chilling effect on investigative journalism” (10.6 per cent), “retribution” against the press by corrupt politicians (6.1 per cent) and “draconian or punitive” (5.6 per cent). These findings demonstrate that in journalistic metadiscourse on media policy debates, the media attempt to protect existing boundaries of media policy from change by representing measures aimed at ensuring press accountability in a negative light. It can be argued that such representations contribute to the introduction of weak reforms that cannot guarantee an accountable press.

The statistical data will be better understood if we take into consideration the context within which they were used, for example, description of proposed measures as “Independent press self-regulation” (16.8 per cent), “Tough press regulation” (13.4 per cent) and “Leveson compliant” (7.4 per cent). Though the sub-interpretive sphere comprising *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* gave prominence to a discourse that kicked against statutory backing of a new press regulator, they largely supported the idea of “tough” rules to check press irresponsibility (see Table 6.2). They contended that the press is capable of setting up its own regulator that would have tough rules as recommended by the Leveson Inquiry but without a statutory underpinning (Shipman 2012, p. 16). In fact, all parties in the debate including victims of the press, campaigners for victims and politicians advocated tough measures to check press misconduct. That accounted for the high frequency of the use of the word “tough” to describe measures aimed at ensuring press accountability (see Table 6.2). It was used in 20 per cent of the *Daily Express*, 16.2 per cent of *Daily Mail*, 13.4 per cent of *Daily Telegraph*, 12.4 per cent of *Guardian*, 12.4 per cent of *The Sun* and 10.1 per cent of *Daily Mirror*. “Tough press regulation” was among the top three words used to describe measures aimed at checking press behaviour (see Table 6.2). It was surpassed only by “threat to press freedom” (27.8 per cent) and “independent press self-regulation” (16.8 per cent).

Considering how the word “tough” was used in the journalistic metadiscourse, I am disinclined to refer to it as an evidence of catastrophisation, unlike what I thought before I embarked on the study. However, the high frequency of its usage makes it significant. The question this raises is, “does the high frequency of usage demonstrate strong commitment on the side of the press to ensure a post Leveson accountable press”? In 2016, two years from the setting up of the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), the Pilling’s review commissioned by IPSO says it

demonstrates such commitment but *Hacked Off* founder Brian Cathcart disagrees. In an article published in [Byline.com](http://Byline.com), entitled “IPSO: The Toothless Puppet Rolls over for its masters (again)”, Cathcart (2018) argues that the post-Leveson press regulator, IPSO, is far from being the “the toughest press regulator in the western world”, as it claims. It can be argued that the representation of the then-proposed IPSO as “tough” during the debate was aimed at stalling the setting up of the Royal Charter on press self-regulation (see Chap. 3) or, at worse, excusing the press from signing up to a regulatory body that could perhaps make it more accountable.

Similar to how the word “tough” was used in the journalistic metadiscourse of the press reform debate, the phrase “independent press self-regulation” was not “catastrophised” (used to sound an alarm of threat to press freedom); it was used liberally by all parties in the debate to advance their proposals. They all claimed that their proposal for press reform would guarantee independent press regulation (e.g. see Wintour 2013, p. 9). The description was used more frequently in the *Guardian*, where it was often used to criticise the proposal for IPSO as not being independent enough to effectively check press excesses. As shown in Table 6.2, the phrase “independent press self-regulation” appeared in 31.1 per cent of the *Guardian* as opposed to 11.1 per cent in *Daily Express*, 8.5 per cent in *The Sun*, 7.7 per cent in *Daily Telegraph*, 6.9 per cent in *Daily Mail* and 10.1 per cent in *Daily Mirror*. The way “tough” and “independent press self-regulation” were used differed from my expectation before the study.

What I found was that the use of catastrophisation was limited to proposals perceived as having the potential to change the press paradigm. For instance, as Table 6.3 shows, “threat to press freedom” was the most frequently presented reason why the press should not sign up to the Royal Charter on press self-regulation. That reason was contained in 49.8 per cent of the study sample, followed by “Slippery slope to licensing of the press” (19.9 per cent). In a bid to convince readers that the press should not sign up to the Royal Charter on press regulation, much of the British press advanced the argument that “the press is able to set up [its] own regulator” (16.4 per cent), warning that [signing up to the Royal Charter] “could lead to bankruptcy of smaller newspapers” (7.6 per cent) and that there were “already too many curbs on the press” (5 per cent). As with the results on dominant themes, the “threat to press freedom” argument featured prominently in all newspapers in the study sample but more prominently in the sub-interpretive sphere comprising *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*,

**Table 6.3** Reasons why the cross-party Royal Charter for press regulation should not be patronised by the press

<i>Description</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
Threat to press freedom	49.8
Slippery slope to licensing of the press	19.9
The press is able to set up own regulator	16.4
Already too many curbs on the UK press	5.0
Could lead to bankruptcy of smaller newspapers	7.6
Other	1.3
Total	100.0

*Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* than in the *Guardian* newspaper, demonstrating that the strategy of “threat to the paradigm” is a major weapon used against efforts at reforming the press.

### THREAT TO THE PARADIGM IN A DEMOCRATIC PUBLIC SPHERE

This book engages with the public sphere concept both as discourse and as platform (see Chap. 4). As platform, it argues that the media ought to be a space where all parties in a debate can deliberate on issues that concern them without any form of marginalisation (Habermas 1989). The focus is not to exalt one argument or theory over another but to point out that all stakeholders in a debate should have proportionate space to advance their views on the issue in the media’s public sphere. In relation to the public sphere as discourse, this book takes the position that ideas for effective media reform and its execution can emanate from media policy debates that make room for multiple spheres of homogeneous discursive publics (Fraser 1992). In this section, I begin with a discussion on the discursive publics that featured in the journalistic metadiscourse of the press reform debate, especially in relation to how these discursive publics (also referred to as sub-interpretive spheres) engaged with the threat to the paradigm strategy. As stated earlier in this chapter, I identified two discursive publics in the media coverage of the debate that arose from the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. The discursive public that comprised *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*,

*Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* adopted a neoliberal line of argument while the second discursive public, made up of the *Guardian* newspaper, advanced arguments based on the theory of social democracy (see Chap. 4).

Though there were opinion articles from all newspapers in the study sample that argued against the Royal Charter on press regulation, the editorials of *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* advanced the neoliberal argument that signing up to the Royal Charter on press regulation was a threat to press freedom because it was backed by statute (Dunn and Well 2012, p. 6). The *Guardian* newspaper argued that a statute with the power to ensure that the Royal Charter on press regulation would not be easily overturned by politicians is not the same thing as statutory regulation of the press (Toynbee 2013, p. 29). *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* used the “threat to the paradigm” strategy to advance their arguments. For example, they used doom-laden phrases such as “slippery slope to the licensing of the press” (Beattie 2013, p. 26), “damage to our democracy” (McKinstry 2013, p. 14) and the loss of “300 years of press freedom” (Rayner 2012, p. 6) to warn readers that any proposals for press regulation with statutory backing was a threat to press freedom. The *Guardian* newspaper denounced such warnings as a “false alarm”. It did this by deconstructing the arguments made by the other newspapers. For example, where other newspapers used headlines such as “Royal Charter causes outrage as freedom of the press is cast aside after 300 years” (Brown and Little 2013, n.p.), the *Guardian* countered such discourses with headlines such as “Press freedom: a tug of war, not the end of 300 years of glorious liberty” (White 2013b, n.p.). *Guardian’s* article read:

The chorus of mostly Tory editorial writers and columnists who have been denouncing any external constraint on their right to have a good time keep claiming that Britain is facing the end of “300 years of press freedom”. Stirring stuff, but not true. Why should we believe their dire predictions for the future when they can’t even be bothered to get the past right? (ibid.)

The *Guardian* criticised the rhetoric of “the 300 years of press freedom”, describing it as one born out of the self-interest of media proprietors and their staff (White 2013a, n.p.). The *Guardian’s* argument agrees with scholars like Curran (2013) and Allan and Jukes (2015, p. 31) who have queried the accuracy of the information that Britain has had

approximately 300 years of press freedom. Their argument is predicated on the fact that the “taxes on knowledge” (tax on advertising, stamp duty, tax on paper) were repealed between 1853 and 1861 (see Chap. 3). This raises questions about accuracy during debates about media reform. Though all newspapers except the *Guardian*, regardless of their classification, advanced the warnings of threat to the paradigm, the tone of language was harsher in the tabloid and mid-market newspapers. For example, while *The Sun* newspaper (Kavanagh 2013, p. 8) used the headline “PM a political dwarf: sleepy, dopey, grumpy” for an editorial that condemned the then Prime Minister David Cameron’s succumbing to calls for the Royal Charter on press regulation to be underpinned by statute, *Daily Telegraph*’s editorial (*Daily Telegraph* 2013, p. 23) on the same issue had the headline “MPs cross the Rubicon on press regulation”. *The Sun*’s article likened David Cameron’s spokesperson and the then Conservative MP for West Dorset Oliver Letwin to a “tethered goat”, described the then Labour leader Ed Miliband as “geeky” and a “Marxist-born lefty”, the former Prime Minister Gordon Brown as an “ex-grunt” and Hugh Grant as a “faded showbiz luvvie”. Of all the newspapers, *The Sun*’s tone of language was the most demeaning.

In line with Carlson (2012, p. 113) argument, perceived threats to journalism were interpreted as threats to the public. The journalistic meta-discourse of all the newspapers except the *Guardian* was often constructed to portray the public as the victim of any form of statutory intervention in press regulation. Linguistic devices such as hyperboles, “you-centeredness” (direct address), sensational vocabulary and powerful imagery were employed to make the reader visualise the press as the crusader and the public as victims, while politicians, victims of press abuse and campaigners for such victims appear as villains. For example, an article in the *Daily Mail* captioned “A rotten day for freedom” stated:

They want to ordain how we run your newspapers. They’ll be coming after you next, mes braves. Thou shalt not think impure thoughts. Thou shalt conform and applaud the Westminster elite. All hail to The System. All must subscribe to egalitarianism. All must suppress their inner eruptions. Control, control: This is the impetus. (Letts 2013, n.p.)

In this article, the linguistic device of “you-centeredness” as described by Fairclough (1995, cited in Marston 2002, p. 86) was used to persuade the reader to see politicians, victims of press abuse and campaigners for

such victims as their enemies. This interpretation runs contrary to Lord Justice Leveson's claim (Leveson 2012, pp. 14–15) that his proposal of a statutorily backed press regulatory body would protect the members of the public from press abuse. As with Putnis' (2000, pp. 106–110) analysis of newspaper coverage of the media policy debate in Australia, echoes from George Orwell's *1984* were used to strengthen arguments against statutorily backed press regulation (e.g. see Beattie 2013). The *Daily Express* wrote:

In practice, statutory regulation would mean government censorship. Our reading matter would be vetted by official bureaucrats, accountable not to the public but to the politicians, Whitehall and probably even the European courts. We would soon be sliding down the road towards Orwell's Ministry of Truth, the sinister organisation that directed the press in the novel *1984*. (McKinstry 2012, p. 14)

Similarly, in its comments section, *Daily Mail* stated: "But today MPs must put such petty bitterness aside. Labour and the Lib Dems should remember they are the heirs of Hardie, Orwell and John Stuart Mill—true giants in the fight for freedom and democracy" (*Daily Mail* 2013a, n.p.). These quotations also reveal the press' use of the "us" and "them" contrast (Marston 2002, p. 86) to position the reader on the side of the press, thus creating an in-group (using "We" and "Our") with the policymakers as the outsiders and potential enemy.

Again, the *Guardian* countered the other newspapers' interpretations of statutorily backed press regulation including their use of echoes from George Orwell's *1984* and other scholars, as can be seen in these statements:

The Guardian, FT and Independent agreed with the parliamentary route [statutory underpinning]. It is unclear why Milton, Wilkes or Orwell would be happy to bequeath freedom of expression to the government of the day. (Rusbridger 2013, p. 26)

The public rightly snort in derision at high-flown cant about press freedom while scoundrels brandish quotes from Milton and Orwell as cover to let them bully as they please. (Toynbee 2013, p. 29)

All newspapers except the *Guardian* used hyperbolic comparisons to advance the argument that a statutorily backed regulatory body would make Britain a totalitarian regime like Russia, China, Iran, Venezuela,

Zimbabwe and Saudi Arabia, and warned that even such regimes are appalled by Britain's decision (Johnson 2012, pp. 10–11). A *Daily Mail* headline read, “How even the Kremlin and Iran scorn Britain for shackling a free press—from New York to Sydney, the world condemns appalling and unimaginable gag on liberty” (*Daily Mail* 2013b), and an article written by the then Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, for the *Daily Telegraph* stated:

All my life I have thought of Britain as a free country, a place that can look around the world with a certain moral self-confidence. How can we wag our fingers at Putin's Russia, when we are about to propose exemplary and crippling fines on publications that do not sign up to the regulatory body? How could we have criticised the Venezuela of Hugo Chavez? (Johnson 2013, p. 24)

The *Guardian* newspaper also contested these warnings as can be seen in this example:

Then there was *The Sun's* claim that, if the press were subject to statutory regulation, Britain would, like Russia, Zimbabwe and Iran, have “state stooges ... deciding what can or can't be printed in your *Sun*”. It quoted a YouGov poll showing 75% of Britons thought that, under press regulation set up by parliament, there was “a risk” that politicians would try to stop newspapers criticising them. It neglected to mention that 63% did not trust the industry to set up “a fair system of press regulation”. The *Mail's* Richard Littlejohn argued—or, rather, screamed—that statutory regulation would lead to journalists who exposed tax avoiders being jailed. (Wilby 2012, p. 30)

This warning by the neoliberal press of a “threat to press freedom” if press regulation is underpinned by statute also surfaced during descriptions of the Leveson Inquiry in the journalistic metadiscourse on the press reform debate. Table 6.4 shows that the Leveson Inquiry was described as a threat to press freedom in 27.1 per cent of the study sample: in 38.0 per cent of *The Sun* newspaper's, 33.3 per cent of *Daily Express's*, 28.2 per cent of *Daily Mirror's*, 28.6 per cent of *Daily Telegraph's*, 28.9 per cent of *Daily Mail's* and 20.5 per cent of *Guardian's* descriptions of the Leveson Inquiry. The threat to press freedom argument came behind “solution to efforts at curbing press excesses” which emerged in 28.4 per cent of the study sample (see Table 6.4). It appeared in 48.9 per cent of the *Guardian* newspaper, 20.5 per cent of *Daily Mirror*, 16.7 per cent of *Daily Express*,



**Table 6.4** Description of Leveson Inquiry

<i>Description</i>	<i>Guardian</i> (%)	<i>Daily Mail</i> (%)	<i>Daily Mirror</i> (%)	<i>Daily Telegraph</i> (%)	<i>Daily Express</i> (%)	<i>The Sun</i> (%)	<i>Total</i> (%)
A threat to press freedom	20.5	28.9	28.2	28.6	33.3	38.0	27.1
Harmful to UK's reputation	2.3	3.9	5.1	7.8	5.6	12.0	5.4
A chilling effect on journalism	8.7	17.1	20.5	26.0	22.2	15.2	15.0
A fair deal	12.8	3.9	2.6	11.7	0.0	0.0	7.9
Solution to efforts at curbing press excesses	48.9	15.8	20.5	13.0	16.7	8.7	28.4
Illegitimate/unfair to the press	0.5	18.4	10.3	3.9	5.6	15.2	7.1
Anti-democratic	3.7	9.2	10.3	7.8	16.7	9.8	7.1
Other	2.7	2.6	2.6	1.3	0.0	1.1	2.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

15.8 per cent of *Daily Mail*, 13 per cent of *Daily Telegraph* and 8.7 per cent of *The Sun*.

While it is expected that *Guardian* would have a high percentage of references to the Leveson Inquiry as a “solution to efforts at curbing press excesses” due to its preferred interpretation of press freedom which is in step with much of Leveson’s proposals, the high percentage of references to Leveson Inquiry as a “solution to efforts at curbing press excesses” by the other newspapers looks contradictory on face value. An exploration of the context within which those references were made, however, showed that the press, apart from the *Guardian*, in an effort to promote their then proposed self-regulatory body, the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), described it as Leveson compliant and, as such, a solution to efforts at curbing press excesses. This accounted for the seemingly contradictory data of the Leveson Inquiry being described as both a threat to press freedom (27.1 per cent) and a solution to efforts at curbing press excesses (28.4 per cent) in Table 6.4.

In sum, the neoliberal concept of press freedom featured in the debate as a paradigm which the commercial press fought hard to protect rather than scrutinise to see if there is need for change or modification. The fact that *Guardian* newspaper challenged the neoliberal perspective shows that

the press does not always function as one interpretive community (Zelizer 1993) when it goes about maintaining the boundaries of its profession. As stated earlier in this chapter, the press functioned as two homogeneous publics (sub-interpretive spheres) during their coverage of the media reform debate. While multiple spheres of homogeneous publics are closer to the democratic ideal as argued by Fraser (1992, p. 129), the problem here is that the bulk of the press (five out of six newspapers in the study sample) advanced the neoliberal perspective as compared to one (*Guardian*) which advanced a social democratic view. While the *Guardian* had a high volume of coverage of 323 out of 870 news articles on the debate, all of its stories only reached its print readership of 4.06 million between 2011 and 2012 (readership figures for April 2011 to March 2012, NRS PADD 2012). Even with its combined print and online readership of about 9 million, the reach of *Guardian* is beaten by the combined readership of the six newspapers: 20.5 million print and 49.4 million combined print and online readership (readership figures for April 2011 to March 2012, NRS PADD 2012). This shows the imbalance in the potential power of influence between the neoliberal and the social democratic press.

The danger this poses to democracy is that propagators of the neoliberal perspective have an unfair advantage over the propagators of other views because their perspective reaches the bulk of the print readership including policymakers. This promotes inequality between arguments that could advance the “freedoms of the media” and arguments that could protect the “freedoms of the public”. This does not reflect a democratic public sphere. The implication is that because the newspapers in this sub-interpretive sphere that advanced a neoliberal discourse are commercial and, therefore, market driven, any reform with a capacity to inhibit the commodification of news, even when it can effectively check malpractice, was represented in much of the news as a threat to press freedom. As stated in the introductory chapter, one of the aims of this book is to show how the media cover debates about their policy and the implication for their manner of coverage for media reform efforts and democracy at large. Having examined how the strategy of “threat to the paradigm” was used in the coverage of the media reform debate, the following section discusses how the strategy of historicisation was used in the debate.



(8.9 per cent). The least used among the codes provided was “It is not new to journalism” which was used in only 1.6 per cent of the study sample. Others were “The work of a few bad apples in journalism” (8.5 per cent); “Demonstrates the importance of a free press” (3.3 per cent); “Anti-democratic” (2.1 per cent); “Unavoidable” (1.9 per cent) and “Other” (0.5 per cent) (see Table 6.5). Most of these variables will be expatiated in Chap. 8. At this stage, it will suffice to point out that these results reveal a high frequency of condemnation of the phone hacking scandal and other acts of press misconduct in the journalistic metadiscourse.

This acknowledgement of wrongdoing by the press via the strategy of historicisation may or may not be for the purpose of self-critique. It can be argued that historicisation was used for infotainment rather than self-critique. My investigation revealed that all six newspapers in the study sample employed historicisation to affirm press bad behaviour and the narrative was often entertaining (e.g. see Sabbagh 2011, p. 19). The reasons could be to boost readership or could just be a subconscious urge to entertain readers. This affirms the argument that journalists often exaggerate dramatic elements in stories in order to enhance their newsworthiness (Galtung and Ruge 1965, cited in Frost 2007; Hall et al. 1978, cited in Allan 2010). It also agrees with Stiegler’s (2013, p. 137) assertion that during the coverage of media policy debates, the press use negative stories as infotainment.

An example is an article by the *Guardian* newspaper headline “what journalistic ‘operators’ got up to in the past”, an excerpt from Keeble and Mair’s book *The Phone Hacking Scandal: Journalism on Trial* (Greenslade 2012, n.p.). While acknowledging press bad behaviour, the article highlighted the “scoop-getting exploits” of journalists in the 1950s–1960s which included “composing quotable quotes because interviewees were often inarticulate or tongue-tied”; “impersonating a pop group manager in a telephone call in order to trap an impresario suspected of taking back-handers when booking bands”; obtaining pictures from a police accomplice of a house on fire in which an elderly former actress died and using the “services of an “earwigger”, a person employed to listen in to police radio calls which was arguably an illegal activity” (ibid).

Another way historicisation was used in the coverage of the press reform debate, outside acknowledging bad behaviour, was to argue that the present-day press is better than the press of yesteryear. For some, it was used to argue that phone hacking is not new in the sense of subterfuge being used for news stories. It was also used to call attention to the need

to check the concentration of media ownership. For instance, the example from the *Guardian*, “what journalistic ‘operators’ got up to in the past” (Greenslade 2012, n.p.), not only acknowledged press excesses through historicisation but also used the strategy to affirm that the present-day press is, to a large extent, better than that of the past as well as to call attention to the problem of concentration of media ownership. Though there was wide acknowledgement of press misconduct in the journalistic metadiscourse, a study of the context within which this was expressed showed that the underlying reason for such acknowledgement of wrong was often in defence of the press. This explains why despite the fact that 40 per cent of the study sample described phone hacking as bad and irresponsible journalism, this view emerged as a dominant theme (under the name “the press behaved badly”) in only 4.7 per cent of the study sample (see Table 6.1).

Historicisation was also used to strengthen arguments for and against press reform. All newspapers examined except *Guardian* used historicisation to argue against press reform, particularly against the statutory underpinning of a new press regulatory body. For example, in a bid to convince readers that statutory regulation is not synonymous with good press behaviour, the *Daily Mail*, in an article headlined “Kate’s right to be angry. But only King Canute would think privacy laws can hold back this tide” argued that the French press despite being bound by constitutional right to privacy printed topless pictures of the Duchess of Cambridge taken through clandestine means while the British press refrained from doing so. The story which used historicisation to argue that the British press has improved since the death of princess Diana concluded by saying that “the best protection against violation of privacy is self-regulation”.

On the other hand, the *Guardian* used historicisation to strengthen arguments in support of a statutorily backed press regulatory body (Robinson et al. 2011, p. 1). While stressing the need for reform, a report by the *Guardian* entitled “Leveson inquiry: Analysis: Calls for new laws after evidence that puts the out-of-control paparazzi in the frame” stated:

It was as if nothing had changed in the years since *The Sun*, the *News of the World* and *Hello!* announced they had stopped using paparazzi pictures of Kate Middleton after she was mobbed outside her house at the time of her 25th birthday in 2007—or, of course, since Diana died trying to evade the photographers at high speed in Paris in 1997. (Sabbagh 2011, p. 19)

Each sub-interpretive sphere (*Guardian* as one interpretive sphere and the other five newspapers as another) used the strategy of historicisation to buttress their stance for or against statutory underpinning of press regulation. This divide in interpretation runs through much of the journalistic metadiscourse on the press reform debate that arose from the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry, defying newspaper class divisions. A force stronger than newspaper classification shaped the debate and that force needs to be investigated to see that it does not rob the press of its autonomy to function as a democratic public sphere. If the force is commercialism, then arguments for plurality of media ownership would need to go beyond concentration of ownership to plurality of business models because different patterns of funding appear to produce differences in interpretations. The issue of media ownership and its possible impact on journalistic metacoverage will be examined in greater detail in Chap. 8.

## CONCLUSION

Using statistical data, this chapter showed how the strategies of “threat to the paradigm” and “historicisation” were used in the coverage of the debate that arose from the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. The strategy of historicisation was used to acknowledge press bad behaviour while serving more as an element of drama in the journalistic metadiscourse. This affirms the argument of scholars who assert that debates are often presented as infotainment and with an element of drama, for the purpose of entertaining readers and boosting sales (Galtung and Ruge 1965, cited in Harcup and O’Neill 2010). Infotainment, depending on how it is used, can be detrimental to democracy. It can lead to the dumbing down of news and make readers a consumer audience whose appetite is assuaged by such coverage, distracting them from active participation in efforts at reforming the press.

Historicisation was also used to back up arguments that the present-day press is better behaved than the press of the 1950s and 1960s. *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* used the strategy to argue against press reform, thus protecting their conceptualisation of a free press. The *Guardian* used the strategy to support press reforms, challenging the other papers’ neoliberal interpretation of press freedom. Historicisation did not feature as a dominant paradigm repair strategy in the journalistic metadiscourse on the press reform debate. “Threat to the [press freedom] paradigm” was the most prominent

strategy used in the coverage. It featured more prominently in *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* newspapers.

These newspapers used the strategies of “historicisation” and “threat to the paradigm” to protect the neoliberal concept of press freedom. Using diverse linguistic devices including hyperboles, “you-centeredness”, adjectives and doom-laden rhetoric, they warned that statutory underpinning of a press regulator was a slippery slope to licensing of the press and, as such, a threat to press freedom. Using the sustenance of democracy as their defence, they kicked against statutory underpinning of a new press regulatory body warning that a press regulatory body underpinned by statute would harm the reputation of the UK. My investigation revealed that their interpretation of press freedom was hegemonic in the journalistic discourse on the press reform debate because much of the British press advanced this argument.

Though it can be argued that the *Guardian* served as an alternative public in the debate, the *Guardian* was one out of six national newspapers. There are also questions about whether the *Guardian*’s counter-discourse was in the public interest or was for the protection of its image as a crusader (for more on the crusader image see Chap. 8), as the medium through which the extent of the scandal came to light. This question became more pertinent because of *Guardian*’s failure to sign up to the regulatory body underpinned by statute (the Royal Charter on press regulation), the same body it had encouraged other press organisations to embrace. The *Guardian*’s decision to support the cancellation of the second part of the Leveson Inquiry in 2018 (*Guardian* 2018) also adds weight to that suspicion.

It is important for consumers of media coverage of debates about their policy to become aware of the ideologies behind the representations and the strategies used to advance the various arguments. “Threat to the paradigm” and “historicisation” are part of that knowledge needed to fully comprehend journalistic metadiscourse on media policy debates. An understanding of the way the media cover debates about their policy will help the public digest the coverage of debates on media policy intelligently and push for healthy and effective media reform. Having examined how the media used the strategy of “threat to the paradigm” and historicisation” in this chapter, the following chapter will show how attributions of blame for the scandal were represented in the journalistic metadiscourse. It will also reveal how the strategies of individualisation, self-assertion and minimisation were utilised in press coverage of the debate.

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## Paradigm Repair: Bad Apples and Self-Assertion

The chapter is divided into two major parts. The first part shows how the strategy of individualisation was used to protect the press freedom paradigm as well as repair the “journalist as a crusader” paradigm which had been badly damaged by the phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. The second part, entitled “Self-Assertion: The Journalist as a Crusader”, shows the extent to which journalists affirm their importance in journalistic metadiscourse on media policy debates and the effect this had and was intended to have on the debate on press regulation. This is followed by a discussion on the political economy of the *Guardian’s* coverage of the phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. I begin by analysing the press’ use of the strategy of individualisation in their coverage of the media policy debate.

One of the paradigms that journalists often seek to protect in the event of a media scandal is the image of the journalist as a crusader, and one way they go about trying to repair this paradigm is by distancing themselves from the offender (Cecil 2002, p. 55). This can be done at different levels or stages of the scandal coverage. The more commonly discussed in journalistic metadiscourse is where an organisation distances itself from the journalist alleged to be at fault (ibid.). Such a journalist is often described as a “rogue” reporter (Dawes 2013, p. 17; Carlson and Berkowitz 2014, p. 403). This ostracising of the “culprit(s)” emerged in the journalistic metadiscourse of the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry at their early stages (O’Carroll 2012a). News International (now News UK)

as an organisation distanced itself from *News of the World*'s royal editor Clive Goodman and private investigator Glen Mulcaire, who were both given jail sentences for their role in the scandal (see Chap. 1). The owner Rupert Murdoch denied knowledge and the emanating journalistic metadiscourse described the culprits as rogue reporters: a few bad apples that should not taint the image of a largely good press. For example, *The Sun*'s article stated:

So far as we know, despite the biggest police inquiry in history, the bad and sometimes possibly criminal behaviour that led to the Leveson Inquiry was confined to a tiny number of journalists. The innocent majority have been tarred by the inquiry .... And a tiny number of incidents of grotesque treatment of ordinary people were examined. They should be set against the huge number of cases of ordinary people who have been helped by the papers. Rogues are exposed, injustice reversed, wonderful, inspiring achievements are celebrated every day by papers such as this. (Satchwell 2012, p. 42)

The truth of this claim has since been debunked by revelations few years later that *The Sun* was also involved in phone hacking (Jackson 2016; Waterman 2019). In a public question-and-answer session at Oxford University in 2019, Lord Justice Leveson said he had known newspaper editors were lying to him during the Inquiry. Concerning *The Sun*, he stated:

It is interesting is it not, that *The Sun* newspaper has paid out millions to people who complained that they were hacked by *The Sun*, although we were told [at the Leveson Inquiry] *The Sun* wasn't involved at all? (Leveson 2019, cited in Evans and Johnson 2019, n.p.)

It can, therefore, be argued that the strategy of individualisation was being used to protect a neoliberal interpretation of press freedom that makes room for the sorts of journalism practice that led to the phone hacking scandal. This agrees with Bennett et al.'s (1985) argument that "journalistic self-criticism protects existing paradigms rather than confronts entrenched deficiencies and contradictions" (cited in Carlson 2015, p. 4). Table 7.1 shows that the strategy of individualisation (also ostracisation or localisation of bad apples) was employed by all newspapers in the study sample. Though it surfaced in only 8.5 per cent of descriptions of phone hacking in the study sample, it was used profusely by *The Sun* newspaper where it appeared in 25.7 per cent of its descriptions of phone

**Table 7.1** Description of phone hacking: bad apples

<i>Description</i>	<i>Guardian</i> (%)	<i>Daily Mail</i> (%)	<i>Daily Mirror</i> (%)	<i>Daily Telegraph</i> (%)	<i>Daily Express</i> (%)	<i>The Sun</i> (%)	<i>Total</i> (%)
Unavoidable	0.8	2.3	4.4	1.7	0.0	2.9	1.9
The work of a few bad apples in journalism	10.6	3.5	6.7	4.2	16.7	25.7	8.5
Anti-democratic	4.1	1.2	4.4	0.0	0.0	2.9	2.1
<i>Bad journalism/irresponsible</i>	43.1	39.5	46.7	38.1	50.0	22.9	40.0
It is not new to journalism	1.6	0.0	2.2	3.4	0.0	0.0	1.6
Less serious than portrayed	21.1	4.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	22.9	8.9
<i>Criminality</i>	17.9	44.2	28.9	45.8	33.3	22.9	33.2
Demonstrates the importance of a free press.	0.0	4.7	6.7	5.9	0.0	0.0	3.3
Other	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

hacking. Despite being owned by the same proprietor as the *News of the World*, *The Sun* attempted to protect its crusader image and the neoliberal interpretations of press freedom by ostracising the culprits. The paper described the phone hacking scandal and other acts of press misconduct as the failings of a few journalists as discussed earlier and emphasised in this statement: “it is vital for our democracy that a free press is protected, whatever the failings of a few journalists” (Dunn and Well 2012, p. 6). The strategy of individualisation was used in 16.7 per cent of *Daily Express*; 10.6 per cent of *Guardian*; 6.7 per cent of *Daily Mirror*; 4.2 per cent of *Daily Telegraph* and 3.5 per cent of *Daily Mail* (see Table 7.1).

Though the setting up of the Leveson Inquiry and the mandate given to it to examine the culture, practice and ethics of the press demonstrated that the phone hacking scandal was regarded by policymakers and many outside the press as a synecdoche deviance (extension of deviancy from the individual to the general); synecdoche deviance (Carlson and Berkowitz 2014, p. 392) was contested in the journalistic metadiscourse that followed the phone hacking scandal; and blame was often localised. So, unlike in the case of the media coverage of the demise of two US regional

newspapers, *Rocky Mountain News* and the printed *Seattle Post Intelligencer* where the perceived problem of an individual newspaper was interpreted by the press as a reflection of the challenges faced by all newspapers (Carlson 2012, p. 267), here the flaw of the *News of the World* was localised and the journalistic metadiscourse warned that it should not be interpreted as the problem of all newspapers. An example is this headline from the *Daily Express*: “Don’t tar all of the press with the same brush” (Forsyth 2012, p. 17). This raises questions about the self-interestedness of journalistic metadiscourse. This affirms that news is not a mirror of reality but a representation (Hall 1997), a discourse shaped by different interests, and this needs to be considered during the consumption of journalistic metadiscourse.

As the Leveson Inquiry progressed, the individualisation of the culprit advanced beyond persons to groups (Mason 2012, p. 10). Ostracising labels such as “sections of the press” and “parts of the media” were used to refer to the tabloid press, especially by the quality press (O’Carroll 2013, n.p.). They were also used by the mid-markets to distance themselves from press bad behaviour:

Indeed, this paper has long shared the public’s distaste over the conduct of some sections of the Press and since the phone hacking scandal (exposed by a newspaper) we have helped draw up plans for a new and much tougher regulatory body. (*Daily Mail* 2012, n.p.)

The phrase “The work of a few bad apples in journalism” in Table 7.1 shows that though the strategy of individualisation of bad apples has been identified by previous studies as a major paradigmatic marker (Cecil 2002) and though it featured in all newspapers in the study sample, the strategy was used only in 8.5 per cent of descriptions of the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and other acts of press misconduct in the journalistic metadiscourse. This does not reflect minimal attributions of blame in the representation of the press reform debate. Table 7.1 shows that blame was also attributed to other institutions in society. To understand the attributions of blame in the journalistic metadiscourse of the media policy debate, it is important to examine its political economy.

Political economy of the media is the critical approach to media analysis that investigates “how media and communication systems and content are shaped by ownership, market structures, commercial support, technologies, labour practices, and government policies” (McChesney 2008, p. 12;



discursive sphere comprising *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* than in the *Guardian* newspaper. 51.6 per cent of blame in the *Daily Mirror* was attributed to journalists. In *Daily Mail*, it was 46.9 per cent; 40.4 per cent in *Daily Telegraph*; 24.1 per cent in *The Sun* and 20 per cent in *Daily Express*, as against 8.1 per cent in *Guardian* (see Table 7.2). The reason for this was that while the *Guardian* also advanced discourses that condemned the phone hacking and other press excesses as bad, and while it was also involved in ostracising the culprit, it was not as involved in deflecting the blame to other institutions as the other newspapers.

The Press Complaints Commission (PCC) came second in the hierarchy of attributions of blame receiving 25.6 per cent of blame for press misconduct, the highest coming from *Guardian* (48.1 per cent of its attributions of blame). The PCC was often criticised in the paper for lacking the teeth to ensure good press behaviour. The other newspapers were also critical of the PCC but to a smaller degree: *Daily Express* (33.3 per cent) *The Sun* (17.2 per cent), *Daily Telegraph* (11.9 per cent) and *Daily Mail* (8.6 per cent) (Table 7.2). All newspapers apart from *Guardian* and *Daily Express* were quick to make excuses for the PCC. The journalistic metadiscourse comprised statements such as “the PCC could not do much to prevent some level of press excesses because it lacked the power to do so” (Winnett 2012, p. 18); “what is needed is strengthening of the PCC not a new press law” (Embley 2012, pp. 8–9) and “a new self-regulatory body should be/has been set up that makes up for all the weaknesses of the PCC” (Shipman 2013, p. 16).

The sympathy of *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* newspapers for the PCC can be attributed to the fact that the chief executives or owners of these newspapers were members of PressBoF (The Press Standards Board of Finance), the funding body of the PCC. The then Chairman of PressBoF, Lord Black of Brentwood, was the Executive Director of the Telegraph Media Group; Paul Dacre, the then editor-in-chief of Associated Newspapers, publishers of *Daily Mail*, was a former Chairman of PressBoF and, at the time, one of its directors; Paul Vickers, the then Secretary and Group Legal Director of Trinity Mirror, publishers of *Daily Mirror*, was also one of PressBoF’s directors (Companies House, Press Standards Board of Finance 2014).

*The Sun*’s sympathy towards the PCC was also expected as *The Sun*’s owner, who was also the owner of the defunct *News of the World*, had often been accused of having a powerful influence over the PCC (Davies 2014,



p. 18). The then executive chairman of Rupert Murdoch's News International, Les Hinton, who was also known as Murdoch's right-hand man (*Guardian* 2011), chaired the committee of editors that drew up the PCC Code of Practice for several years (Cole and Harcup 2009). As mentioned in Chap. 2, the then owner of *Daily Express* titles, Richard Desmond, had pulled his papers out of the PCC following a rebuke from the body in 2008 (Desmond 2015, p. 291) which may have accounted for the high level of condemnation of the PCC in its journalistic metadiscourse. Though Alan Rusbridger, the then editor-in-chief of *Guardian* newspaper, was also a member of the PCC Code Committee, he resigned following his dissatisfaction with the committee's handling of the phone hacking scandal allegations (Frost 2015, p. 293). So, though all newspapers in the study sample agreed that the PCC had fallen short in its regulation of the press, the level of attribution of blame reflected each paper's political and economic relationship with the body. It is, therefore, important that consumers of journalistic metadiscourse consider how political economy may have impacted on the news they consume about media policy. This is important because citizens who employ critical thinking skills in their consumption of journalistic metadiscourse on media reform will be in a better position to support as well as initiate effective media reforms.

Still on attributions of blame, "News proprietors" and "The Criminal justice system" received the same proportion of blame (15.1 per cent each) for press misbehaviour in the journalistic metadiscourse. This makes them third in the hierarchy of recipients of blame for press irresponsibility. This is interesting because "media ownership" appeared as a dominant theme only in 3.4 per cent of the study sample (see Table 7.2). A close look at Table 7.2, however, shows that a high proportion of that blame discourse emanated from *Guardian* newspaper—20.6 per cent as against 13.6 per cent from *Daily Mail*, 12.9 per cent from *Daily Mirror*, 12.8 per cent from *Daily Telegraph*, 6.7 per cent from *Daily Express*, and the lowest was from *The Sun*—3.4 per cent (see Table 7.2). Whether in defence of democracy or for the security of its media economy, the *Guardian* newspaper attributed much of the blame for press misconduct to news proprietors and used such opportunities to advocate for checks on concentration of media ownership in the UK.

The Murdoch media empire was mostly, though not exclusively, used as an example of the negative consequences of the concentration of media ownership in the *Guardian's* opinion sections (Williams 2013, p. 35). The paper's moral justification for its critique of the concentration of media

ownership was the need to protect democracy by ensuring plurality of views in the public sphere and preventing abuse of media power. Very little was said about the need to ensure healthy competitiveness among newspapers, though that was of primary concern to the *Guardian* as we shall see later in this chapter. The rhetoric was that democracy will be at risk if media ownership concentration is not checked. As can be seen in the headline “Comment: Ownership is the key to the corruption of the media: Murdoch’s grip on British politics was the product of corporate control of the press. Ending it is a democratic necessity”—(Milne 2012, p. 28) and in this statement:

The present level of media concentration is one of the reasons the phone hacking scandal erupted because the politicians were scared of News International and, as the evidence around phone hacking and Leveson revealed, News International was scared of nobody. (Williams 2013, p. 35)

All other newspapers (*The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*) were different in their representation of the debate on media ownership. They were less critical of media proprietors and less concerned about the concentration of media ownership as shown in Table 7.2. For example, *Daily Mail* newspaper used deflection strategies to redirect focus from newspaper proprietors to the ownership patterns of the BBC and internet news websites as can be seen in the headline: “Google and BBC should face media ownership review rules watchdog” (Thomas 2012, n.p.). The article argued that the real threats are technology, proprietorship of internet news websites and the dominance of the BBC. Arguably, a more in-depth analysis of the impact of the internet on print journalism would have added a more robust angle to the debate.

Unlike the *Guardian* newspaper which urged the Leveson Inquiry to pay more attention to media ownership concentration, *Daily Mail* argued that media ownership is not within the Inquiry’s ambit and it ought not to have strayed into it. The paper stated:

the inquiry has strayed ‘into issues of policy, such as cross-ownership rules which weren’t really appropriate for a judicial inquiry to determine. Those are policy questions for ministers and Parliament’. (Martin 2012, n.p.)

Similarly, an examination of the context within which the issue of media ownership was discussed in the journalistic metadiscourse revealed that

much of the press adopted an angle of discussion that tactically avoided the issue of concentration of media ownership: talking about media owners but rarely in connection to concentration of media ownership. Let us, for example, examine references to the defunct *News of the World*'s owner, Rupert Murdoch, by the two discursive publics. While *Guardian*'s meta-discourse on ownership was very critical of Rupert Murdoch with regard to concentration of media ownership and its consequences, *The Sun* newspaper reported little on ownership and on Murdoch. It is important to note that *The Sun* is also owned by Rupert Murdoch (see Chap. 2). The paper's discourse on its owner was minimal and far from critical.

For instance, *The Sun*'s report on Rupert Murdoch's appearance at the Leveson Inquiry was like a narrative (not critical) and a letter of apology from Rupert Murdoch (Grant 2012, p. 12), while *Guardian*'s report on the same event was very critical of the media magnate and accused him of "selective amnesia" (Greenslade 2012). The closest *The Sun* got to critiquing its owner was an acknowledgement by Rupert Murdoch that he had failed. To make the aforementioned story more sympathetic, the age of Rupert Murdoch was juxtaposed with his apology: "Mr Murdoch, 81, admitted that he failed to personally probe the scandal, adding: "I'm very sorry" (Grant 2012, p. 12). It can be argued that *The Sun*'s report was constructed to avert the anger of the public against the Murdoch Empire in order to regain their patronage. Considering the paper's tone of language towards the failings of other persons (and institutions), such as politicians and celebrities, it can be argued that *The Sun*'s representation of Murdoch and its minimal discussion on media ownership in the debate were the result of conflict of interests. This may have accounted for the minimal attribution of blame to newspaper proprietors in *The Sun*'s meta-discourse (see Table 7.2).

Not all newspapers in the sub-interpretive sphere to which *The Sun* belongs were as sympathetic as *The Sun* towards Rupert Murdoch in their metadiscourse, though they were not as critical of the media magnate as the *Guardian*. Most of them gave minimal attention to concentration of media ownership, preferring to discuss Murdoch in relation to sensational issues such as Murdoch's chief Rebekah Brooks' love affair with another of his former staff, Andy Coulson which spanned two pages (1371 words—Nexis UK) in the *Daily Mirror* (Shaw 2013, pp. 4–5). Rupert Murdoch was also mentioned by newspapers in this sub-interpretive sphere in relation to the unfolding of the scandal, the amount of trouble he was in and so on, but rarely in connection to an analysis of the consequences of

concentration of media ownership (Flanagan 2012, p. 4; McTague 2012, pp. 10–11).

There were sympathies for Rupert Murdoch and even for the defunct *News of the World* in some of the newspapers in sub-interpretive sphere comprising *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* (Glover 2013, n.p.). Of all the remaining four papers in this sphere (apart from *The Sun*), *Daily Mail* was more sympathetic towards the media mogul and his titles, at times defending him and criticising attacks on him by politicians, *Guardian* and the BBC (Slack and Doyle 2013). The *Daily Telegraph* was closest to *Guardian* in writing critical comments about Rupert Murdoch. In all, *The Sun*'s coverage of ownership and its owner agrees with arguments in previous studies that media organisations downplay and give limited coverage to views that are critical of their owners (McChesney 2008). This is a type of silent strategy, as if to say, “just don’t discuss it” or “give minimal coverage to the issue that is not perceived to be in your best interest”.

As Bachrach and Barataz (1962, p. 948, cited in Freedman 2014, p. 66) rightly noted, the exercise of power also involves “the ability to prevent potentially dangerous ideas from being raised” (cited in Freedman 2014, p. 66). Congruently, all newspapers apart from *Guardian* used their agenda-setting and gatekeeping powers to keep out from the public sphere discussions on concentration of media ownership. Freedman (2014, pp. 72–73) stressed the need to identify forces that are responsible for silences that permeate media policy. Though some may argue that media ownership did not take a prime place in the Leveson Report and as such it may not be out of place to talk less about it in the press, but as Hackett (2005, p. 90) observed, the media should not stop at transmitting debates but should also initiate relevant subjects for discussion. The *Guardian* newspaper did this when it critiqued the sparse treatment of the issue of media ownership at the Leveson Inquiry (Evans 2012, p. 47). As we shall discuss later in this chapter, the *Guardian*'s coverage of the issue is also not free from query.

The way the press covered the issue of concentration of media ownership during the debate may be connected to their ownership patterns. As discussed in Chap. 2, all newspapers in the sub-interpretive sphere to which *The Sun* belongs are commercially owned and are involved in varying degrees of concentration of media ownership (Cole and Harcup 2009; News UK 2015; DMG Media 2017; Telegraph Media Group 2017). The *Guardian* also has a stake in media ownership; this will be explained later in this chapter. Some proprietors of newspaper also have publications in

large and small quantities outside the UK (see Chap. 2). That possibly explains why even though only three companies (News UK, Daily Mail Group and Reach) dominate 83 per cent of Britain's national newspapers (Media Reform Coalition 2019), media ownership emerged as a dominant theme in only 3.4 per cent of the journalistic metadiscourse on the press reform debate that followed the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal (see Table 7.2).

It can be argued that commercial interests influenced the interpretations and discourses advanced by the press on the issue of media ownership. This confirms that media organisations give minimal coverage to arguments that they perceive are not in their interest (Stiegler 2013, p. 137). The consequence of this for democracy is that it removes from public debates the issue of concentration of media ownership, thus preventing opportunities for deliberations that can lead to the creation of policies to guarantee plurality of views and media ownership. It gives the press enormous powers that can be exploited for commercial gain to the detriment of larger society. Such powers can mean that citizens are at the mercy of media owners, and that includes their privacy and the information they receive because nothing against media owners is tabled for discussion in the public sphere. Freedman (2014, p. 73) described such silences “as a socially constructed phenomenon that reflects the unequal distribution of power in society”. Jansen (1991, p. 134, cited in Freedman 2014, p. 73) argues that “media policy silences” are constructing forces that attempt to “render the system of control of industrial capitalism extremely resistant to criticism”. Such information hoarding can also reduce trust between the media and the public, especially when the public get to know of such omissions. It can also leave media owners unchecked and create in them a culture of impunity.

As previously stated, Table 7.2 also shows that “the criminal justice system” received as much blame for press irresponsibility as “News proprietors” (15.1 per cent). The quantity of attributions of blame to the criminal justice system were more in the sub-interpretive sphere made up of *The Sun*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* than in *Guardian*. *The Sun* contained the highest percentage of blame for the criminal justice system than any other newspaper in the study sample (37.9 per cent). *Daily Express* followed with 26.7 per cent, *Daily Telegraph* with 17.4 per cent and *Daily Mail* with 17.3 per cent. Attributions of blame to the criminal justice system were also found in 8.8 per cent of *Guardian* newspaper and in 6.5 per cent of *Daily Mirror*'s. An examination of the context

within which these attributions of blame to the criminal justice system were made revealed that they functioned differently in each of the discursive spheres.

In the sphere comprising *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*, the press used deflection strategies to re-direct blame for press misbehaviour to the criminal justice system, thereby exonerating themselves from blame and protecting their crusader and press freedom paradigms. These papers advanced the argument that phone hacking is a criminal offence that can be checked by existing laws. Ironically, newspapers in this sub-interpretive sphere were at the forefront of arguments against the second phase of the Leveson Inquiry which was to focus on the relationship between the press and the police (Bond 2017). A possible reason could be that more investigation into the scandal may further incriminate the press. Howbeit, their trend of discourse accounted for the high proportion of descriptions of phone hacking as “criminal” in Table 7.1, and it culminated in claims that the failure of the police to reveal the extent of the phone hacking scandal revealed failings on the part of the criminal justice system rather than failings on the part of the press (McKinstry 2012, p. 14; Luckhurst 2012, p. 25), and that it was a vibrant press that exposed the extent of the scandal, not the criminal justice system. An article written by a former editor of the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Evening Standard* and published by the *Daily Mail* stated:

Somewhere, Leveson lost his way in the course of his inquiry, which he allowed to roam untethered across the landscape for many months in a fashion quite unworthy of a competent judge. Above all, he fails to understand that the central issue, that illegal phone-hacking and thus gross breaches of privacy reflected not a lapse of Press ethics, but large-scale criminality. The only organisation that ever was, or ever will be, capable of investigating such behaviour is the police. It was Scotland Yard’s failure to probe misconduct at News International properly in its review of the investigation in 2009 that allowed wrongdoing to continue for so long. (Hastings 2012, n.p.)

The papers in this sphere said that based on these arguments, there is no need to change the status quo of press self-regulation, neither was there any need for the Leveson Inquiry (this was before the setting up of the “Leveson-compliant” IPSO). The *Daily Express* stated:

THE absurdity of the entire Leveson business is that we never needed the expensive inquiry in the first place, for the behaviour of a minority of journalists was already against the law. The problem was not an absence of state regulation but an initial failure of enforcement by the police. (McKinstry 2012, p. 14)

As previously stated, arguments relating to the criminal justice system featured in 8.8 per cent of articles in *Guardian* newspaper but was interpreted differently. The *Guardian* used its editorial pages to critique the other newspapers' blame on the criminal justice system. It attempted to redirect blame back to the press by pointing out that the failure of the police force to reveal that phone hacking was widespread at *News of the World* was the result of an unhealthy relationship between the police force and the media (*Guardian* 2013, p. 34).

It is worthy of note that the discursive public comprising all newspapers except *Guardian* did not totally absolve themselves of all blame. It was largely accepted in the journalistic metadiscourse of the debate that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal that the media had behaved badly and that there was a need for press regulatory reform. For instance, in one of its opinion articles, *Daily Mirror* stated that "the excesses and criminal behaviour of parts of the media over the past few years created an unanswerable case for reform" (*Daily Mirror* 2013, p. 8). This was before it was discovered that *Daily Mirror* was also involved in phone hacking (*Trinity Mirror* 2015). A similar article from *Daily Telegraph* stated:

Regulation could not have prevented the hacking scandal; this was a criminal not a regulatory matter, but the PCC failed to draw attention to it after the event. So, no change is not an option. There must be effective regulation of the press. A new self-regulatory system must have powers to investigate wrongdoing and to summon journalists and their editors to give evidence .... Above all, it must be independent from government, Parliament and state. (Luckhurst 2012, p. 25)

However, there was to a small degree the discourse of total exoneration. This discourse absolved the press of all blame in the phone hacking scandal and argued that there was no need for press reform. Those who advanced such views argued that a little privacy invasion is the hazard of a free press (Hume 2013, p. 32). It is important for consumers of journalistic metadiscourse to understand that the purpose of these self-exoneration

strategies (individualisation, bad apples, localisation, ostracisation or deflection) was to repair the “journalist as a crusader” and “press freedom” paradigms, which had come into question as a result of the phone hacking scandal. In sum, blame was first accepted and then deflected to others including other journalists (a few bad journalists), other media organisations (sections of the press) and other institutions (criminal justice system). This made the wide acknowledgement of wrongdoing in the journalistic metadiscourse, and especially the high attribution of blame to journalists, appear hypocritical. This affirms that journalistic metadiscourse is highly defensive and characterised by a lack of self-critique (Haas 2006, cited in Carlson 2015, p. 9).

The lack of self-critique in the coverage of media policy can be attributed to the prioritisation profit, including power of influence, over the public interest. It is worthy of note that newspaper proprietors do not only seek financial profit but also influence (Freedman 2014). Ownership of newspapers give the owners enormous amount of influence, especially when they have a high readership. Control of the representation of issues to many readers empowers them to make demands of politicians in exchange for favourable coverage (ibid.). As both financial gain and power of influence can be directly or indirectly achieved through high readership, gaining a good image before the readership through self-defence and lack of self-critique becomes important to the press. In this regard, journalism is treated as a commodity.

“Journalism as a commodity” implies that everyone of its coverage will be weighed against its ability to generate profit for the company. Any representation that would not generate profit for the newspaper must be done away with. In this perspective, sustaining democracy is secondary. Democracy can be enhanced only if it generates profit (be it financial or clout) for the paper. This agrees with Habermas’ (1989, pp. 189–193) conceptualisation of a degenerated public sphere where commercial interest merged with the interests of policymakers to turn the public sphere from a democratic forum for public debate into a capitalist haven where prioritisation of profit and readership became the order of the day.

Congruently, “commercialism” and political leaders (Labour and Conservative governments) received only minor attributions of blame in the coverage. Table 7.2 shows that political leaders received only 3.1 per cent of the blame for press irresponsibility; of that amount 1.9 per cent was attributed to the Conservatives (the government in power at the time of the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal) and 1.2 per cent to the Labour



government (the opposition party). Commercialism received only 3.3 per cent of attributions of blame. No blame was attributed to commercialism in *The Sun* and *Daily Express* newspapers, and it was blamed for press irresponsibility in only 6.5 per cent of *Daily Mirror*; 4.9 per cent of *Daily Mail*; 3.8 per cent of *Guardian* and 1.8 per cent of *Daily Telegraph* (see Table 7.2). This appears to be very much like the silent treatment given to the issue of media ownership.

Another area that received less mention than I expected was attribution of blame to job constraints of print journalism, especially the constraints brought about by the emergence of digital technology. Table 7.2 shows that “job constraint” and “technology” received only 4 per cent and 3.5 per cent of attributions of blame, respectively. Considering the decline in the sale of newspapers due to the flow of traffic of both readers and advertisers to online platforms following the emergence of the internet (Allan 2006, pp. 1–4) and 24-hour news which is arguably a major cause of press irresponsibility, one would have expected a sizeable proportion of blame to go to technology and the impact of job constraints on print journalism. This demonstrates that the debate could have been more robust.

Fenton (2011, n.p.) argues that ethics get thrown to the wind when the market comes under pressure. The debate that emerged from the phone hacking and the Leveson Inquiry would have been a veritable platform to discuss possible ways of tackling this and other challenges, but the focus of the debate was too narrow—a zero-sum game of statutory or no statutory underpinning of a new press regulator; most other arguments, including the warnings of threat to press freedom, emanated from these. Thus, very little room was left for deliberation on other issues of concern. Carlson (2012, p. 267) spoke of instances where rather than brainstorm on a future business model for the printed press, perceived threat to the printed press paradigm was “repaired” by re-asserting the “importance and superiority” of the printed press over other forms, especially forms of online news. The strategy of self-assertion is another way the media tried to protect news paradigms in their coverage of the debate that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. How it went about doing this is the focus of the next section.

### SELF-ASSERTION: THE JOURNALIST AS A CRUSADER

Previous chapters have shown how the press used the paradigm strategies of “historicisation”, “threat to the paradigm” and “individualisation” to cover the debate that arose from the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. This chapter discusses how the paradigm strategy of self-assertion was used to repair the “press freedom” and “journalist as a crusader” paradigms and the implication of this type of coverage. The strategy of self-assertion refers to a trend in journalistic metadiscourse where the press repairs its paradigm by asserting its importance without taking steps to evaluate or make changes to the paradigm where necessary (Thomas and Finneman 2014, p. 172).

Table 7.3 (an excerpt from Table 6.1) shows that the strategy of self-assertion (written as press achievements) was used by all newspapers in the study sample but emerged as the dominant theme in only 2.4 per cent of the coverage: *Daily Express* (7.1 per cent), *Daily Mail* (6.9 per cent), *Daily Telegraph* (1.5 per cent), *Daily Mirror* (2.0 per cent), *The Sun* (1.0 per cent) and *Guardian* (0.6 per cent). A look at the context of usage revealed that in most cases, the strategy of self-assertion was a sub-theme (not a

**Table 7.3** Dominant theme in the study sample: self-assertion

<i>Dominant theme</i>	<i>Guardian</i> (%)	<i>Daily Mail</i> (%)	<i>Daily Mirror</i> (%)	<i>Daily Telegraph</i> (%)	<i>Daily Express</i> (%)	<i>Sun</i> (%)	<i>Total</i> (%)
Threat to press freedom	11.5	13.3	25.5	18.1	35.7	62.5	20.6
Support for new press' own regulatory system	1.5	4.6	3.9	2.5	3.6	4.2	2.9
Against politicians' Royal Charter	2.8	4.0		3.0		3.1	2.9
Against press law/statutory underpinning	4.0	12.7	9.8	6.0	10.7	5.2	6.9
<i>Press achievements</i>	0.6	6.9	2.0	1.5	7.1	1.0	2.4
Against self-regulation of the press	0.9	0.6					0.5
Support for Leveson Inquiry	10.5		7.8	2.5	7.1	3.1	5.5

dominant theme), used as a means to an end. In the sub-interpretive sphere consisting of *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*, it was often used to warn that the press would no longer be able to fulfil its crusader role if it was regulated by statute and that this would pose a risk to press freedom and ultimately endanger democracy. Such stories had “threat to press freedom” or arguments “against statutory underpinning” as the dominant theme.

For example, *Daily Mirror* used the strategy of self-assertion to accentuate the importance of a free press. In an article headlined “The key to a fair and free press is the difference between two Royal Charters”, the paper wrote:

The *Daily Mirror* is committed to high-quality journalism in the public interest giving the working people of Britain a voice in the corridors of power. We are proud that the Mirror, by breaking the alibi of club doorman Levi Bellfield, helped put the killer of Surrey schoolgirl Milly Dowler behind bars. (*Daily Mirror* 2013, p. 8)

By asserting its worth and stressing the importance of a free press, *Daily Mirror* attempted to garner support for the newspapers’ plan for a Royal Charter for press regulation which was later rejected by the government (*BBC News* 2013), while condemning the cross-party Royal Charter on press regulation because it was underpinned by statute. As previously stated, all newspapers apart from *Guardian* interpreted any regulation underpinned by statute as an impediment to investigative journalism and, as such, a threat to press freedom. They argued that the achievements of the press would not have been possible under a regulatory system underpinned by statute. This article from *Daily Express* states this clearly:

His [Leveson] mission was not to ban hacking. It was to procure the end of investigative journalism (I will call it IJ) .... Needless to say the establishment loathes IJ with a passion and has lusted for years after a way of crippling it. Leveson, a pillar of the establishment like all judges, delivered the methodology. (Forsyth 2013, p. 17)

As with other discourses advanced by *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*, *Guardian* countered the arguments these newspapers made with the use of the strategy of self-affirmation (O’Carroll 2012b) and then used the same strategy to repair its crusader

paradigm. The *Guardian* newspaper attempted to repair its crusader image that had received a dent due to the revelation at the Leveson Inquiry that the *News of the World* did not delete Milly Dowler's voicemail messages as the paper had claimed in its publication. The report to correct that mistake began by praising *Guardian* newspaper as can be seen in the headline "Leveson report: Judge addresses *Guardian's* story on hacking of Milly Dowler's phone: Report praises paper's public interest journalism, NoW probably did not delete voicemail messages" (Booth 2012, p. 15). The correction was only a sub-theme in that story. Predominantly, the story highlighted the bravado of *Guardian* in exposing the extent of the scandal, how correct the bulk of the story was and other heroic acts achieved by *Guardian* newspaper in the past.

Both sub-interpretive spheres (*Guardian* versus *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*) employed the strategy of self-assertion (also self-affirmation or self-justification) as sub-themes aimed at repairing the "journalist as a crusader" paradigm. It can be argued that this quest to repair the crusader paradigm was more in the interest of the press than for the selfless purpose of comforting and reassuring the public that they have in the press, a defender, and a protector of democracy. In this light, the quest of *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* to repair their crusader paradigm may not be unrelated to a desire to protect their commercial interests. As stated earlier, all the newspapers in this sub-interpretive sphere are commercially owned. Commercial newspapers need high readership figures to attract advertisers (Klaehn 2010, p. 28). Repairing this paradigm helps to retain the patronage of their readers, thereby enabling high readership figures which will secure the profit they make from the sale of the newspapers as well as preserve their power of influence and the patronage of advertisers (ibid.). Unlike the other newspapers, the ownership structure of the *Guardian* is different; it is funded by the Scott Trust Ltd (Guardian Media Group 2015). The question this raises is, "could it be that ownership and funding patterns are the determining factor of how debates on media policy are represented"? The next section attempts to initiate a debate on this by exploring the political economy of *Guardian's* coverage of the press reform debate.

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF *GUARDIAN*'S COVERAGE  
OF THE PRESS REFORM DEBATE

As explained earlier, political economy is a media analysis critique that investigates “how media and communication systems and content are shaped by” ownership structures, government policies and technology, amongst others (Murdock and Golding 2005, cited in Freedman 2014, p. 24). I investigated the political economy of *Guardian* newspaper by examining the paper’s ownership structure. *Guardian* newspaper is a subsidiary of Guardian Media Group (GMG) which is owned by Scott Trust Ltd, formerly Scott Trust until 2008 (Guardian Media Group 2015, n.p.). Unlike other newspapers in my study sample, the Scott Trust is the only shareholder of Guardian Media Group (Forgan 2016). The Scott Trust does not distribute dividends; its profits are ploughed back into journalism (Forgan 2016). Though Scott Trust Ltd is responsible for appointing the editor of the *Guardian*, it has a policy of not interfering with the newspaper’s content. The paper claims to safeguard journalistic independence and liberal values and argues that its ownership structure (having no shareholder order than the Scott Trust) makes the paper more accountable to its readers (ibid.). One line of argument is that the ownership structure of the *Guardian* facilitated, amongst others, the role the paper played in exposing the extent of the phone hacking scandal. This argument is strengthened by the fact that it welcomed external intervention in press regulation exemplified by its support for statutory underpinning of a new press regulator, its support for the Leveson Inquiry, its support for victims of the scandal and its advancement of the arguments of victims’ campaigners.

Comparing the journalistic metadiscourse of the two spheres, it appears *Guardian*’s coverage of the press reform debate fits better into the image of “the journalist as a crusader” and a selfless protector of that paradigm. However, that view is contestable. A different line of argument is that *Guardian* newspaper is not a selfless protector of the crusader paradigm for three main reasons. Firstly, *Guardian* newspaper is not as completely free of corporate interests as it appears (Klaehn 2010; Guardian Media Group 2015). The steps it took to expose the extent of the scandal and deflect blame for press bad behaviour may have been premised on its need to sustain readership (and power of influence) and take up a powerful position in the media market. As Klaehn (2010, p. 28) argued, *Guardian* “is very much part of the business world and establishment .... It is part of

the competitive media industry and plays politics to gain clout and readership” (ibid.).

As previously stated, Scott Trust Ltd, funders of *Guardian*, is the owner of Guardian Media Group (GMG), a business enterprise (Ahmed, cited in Cook 2015). Their portfolio of investments includes Ascential plc, “a global business-to-business media company listed on the London Stock Exchange” (Ascential 2017). Though the company claims that its investments are there “to secure the financial and editorial independence of the *Guardian*” (Cole and Harcup 2009, p. 77; Scott Trust 2016), it can be argued that *Guardian* may have felt threatened by Rupert Murdoch’s media empire and the likelihood of it winning the bid for the remaining 60.9 per cent of shares in BskyB (it already owned 39.1 per cent of the shares) (*BBC News* 2010) and the detrimental effect that would have on their paper’s power and popularity. *Guardian*’s publication of the *News of the World*’s hacking of Millie Dowler’s voicemail was done at the peak of negotiations on the bids. The paper’s fears about its place in the media market can be confirmed from its publication headlined “BskyB bid: Cautious Hunt set to reject approach from Murdoch”. The article stated:

At issue is whether News Corporation’s buyout of BSkyB would lead to the creation of a media company that with £7.5bn of UK turnover is so large that rival newspapers and broadcasters are progressively unable to compete. Objectors to the deal include an unlikely alliance of the owners of Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, Daily Telegraph and Guardian, who argue that the tie-up would lead to a loss of “media plurality” in the UK. (Sabbagh 2010, n.p.)

Let me pause here to mention that the focus of this analysis is not to give a moral judgement on whether or not it was right for Rupert Murdoch to bid for complete ownership of BskyB, but to show that it is possible that *Guardian*’s coverage of the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and the debate that followed it could have been inspired by a neoliberal ideology (to protect its business from market failure) rather than a quest to liberate the masses and protect democracy. That may explain why the *Guardian* newspaper did not sign up to the regulatory body underpinned by statute (as of 2020) even though the paper advocated for the press to sign up to it in its journalistic metadiscourse. It may also be that though other newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Telegraph* were not in support of the deal, they could not adopt the “the crusader role” employed by the *Guardian* because they may have been practising the

same dark arts as *News of the World* (as has been revealed in the case of Trinity Mirror and *The Sun*), or because it could affect their profit in some other ways.

This line of argument is further strengthened by the *Guardian's* support for the cancellation of the second phase of the Leveson Inquiry which was to investigate the relationship between the press and the police (*Guardian* 2018). Having played the crusader role in its coverage of the first part of the Leveson Inquiry, many expected the *Guardian* to advocate for Leveson 2 to take place, but the paper disappointed many including campaigners for media reform, some victims of press abuse and several academics when it published its position in an opinion article, headlined “The Guardian view on Leveson part two: look ahead, not behind”. In this article, the paper supported the government’s position that the culture, practice and ethics of the press can be improved and journalism in the public interest can be promoted without recourse to the second part of the Leveson Inquiry (*Guardian* 2018). This decision of the *Guardian* was tagged an act of betrayal by campaigners of media reform including some academics (Jukes 2016; Cathcart 2018; *Guardian* 2018b).

But was that an act of betrayal or another phase of *Guardian's* continued tactics to promote its media economy? By using the word “betrayal”, the critics of *Guardian's* position on Leveson 2 assume the paper had played the crusader role in its coverage of Leveson 1. Maybe it did that to an extent, but my investigation reveals some cracks in this image of the *Guardian* as the crusader. The paper’s underlying concern appears to be the protection of its media economy. This concern resurfaced during *Guardian's* defence of its position on Leveson 2. Employing the strategy of threat to press freedom in a way that it had previously condemned, the paper highlighted what it believed should be the government’s focus in the place of Leveson 2:

The concentration of power in the hands of a few tech and press barons is a menace to society. Media plurality rules should be used to defuse this threat. Journalists must be responsible for standards and ethics but it is wrong to think a state body should hold the exercise of power by the press to account. (*Guardian* 2018, n.p.)

By 2018, the *Guardian* had begun to use the rhetoric it condemned in the past to protect its media economy. Note also that a problem to the press was again represented as a problem to the public, a menace to society.

Though it can be argued that the change in the paper's editorial position was the result of a change in the editor-in-chief of the paper—Alan Rusbridger was replaced by Katharine Viner in 2015 (*Guardian* 2015)—there are still reasons to suspect that the *Guardian* may not have been a selfless crusader in the media reform debate. It can, therefore, be argued that in both interpretive spheres, the underlying motivation was neither a defence for democracy nor a reassurance to the public that, in journalism, they have a crusader who is there to protect them from opportunistic politicians but rather that the motivation was market-driven, a move to secure their media economy. In this neoliberal setting, profit is primary; democracy may or may not be a by-product (it could be if it generates profit). This raises serious questions about the capability of the media to serve as a democratic public sphere in debates about media reform. Some form of external intervention, free of such levels of self-interest, would be needed to ensure that the media serves as a democratic public sphere in debates about their policy.

## CONCLUSION

The way the strategies of individualisation and self-assertion were used in the coverage of the press reform debate that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal reveals that the media highly value the paradigm of the “the journalist as a crusader” (the voice of the voiceless; the hero who fights for the good of the less privileged). The reason being the ability of the crusader persona to earn the press high patronage which is essential for both political and commercial power. This explains why much effort was put into protecting this image. Although there are times when journalists fulfil this role (Bernstein and Woodward 1974; BBC News 2011), in the coverage of the media policy debate, claims to this status was more of an act of image laundry; the strategy of self-assertion is the tool used to achieve this. The two sub-interpretive spheres (*Guardian* versus other newspapers examined) examined used it for that purpose. It is important for consumers of journalistic metadiscourse to bear this in mind when they consume debates about media policy especially when such debates follow a scandal involving the media.

Another important finding was that the journalistic metadiscourse featured high acknowledgement of guilt which did not translate into self-critique. It can, therefore, be argued that the high acknowledgement of guilt in the journalistic metadiscourse was a Public Relations (PR) stunt.



Acknowledgement of guilt is used as a PR technique when offence is obvious and the offender attempts to attract mercy by playing the role of “the repentant sinner”. Number 6 of Forbes’ 13 golden rule of PR crisis management says, “first apologise, then take action”. For more on how acceptance of guilt is used as a crisis management strategy, see Moon and Rhee (2012; Hearit 2006). So, when consuming journalistic metadiscourse, it is important to be aware of the fact that attributions of blame could be a crisis management strategy; whether or not the apologies are sincere can be deciphered from the action that follows. In the case of the journalistic metadiscourse on the debate that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal, apologies were followed by deflection of the blame to others including to other new organisations, other journalists and other institutions. The strategy of individualisation (also ostracisation) was used to achieve this. A culprit is identified and condemned as a bad apple who should not be allowed to tarnish the crusader image of journalists; usually the good journalists are the group to which the writer belongs or supports. As stated earlier, individualising labels such as “parts of the media”, “sections of the press” or “rogue reporter” were used by the different newspapers to distance themselves from the culprit(s) as part of efforts to protect the crusader image and argue against stringent press reform.

This book argues that while the acknowledgement of guilt is a welcomed response, deflection of blame should be replaced by media self-critique. The action that follows such acknowledgement of guilt needs to be significant enough to ensure high press standards. However, the fear of losing economic and political power has kept the media from submitting itself to any significant action that will lead to change. While in PR crisis management strategy the action needs to be significant enough to convince their customers that the crisis would not repeat itself, in the case of media misconduct, individualisation is used to convince the readers that there is need for only little or no change, giving the impression that the change does not have to be significant because the bad egg has been removed or taken care of. What the public need to realise is that this performance of the press is to gain their patronage—they are the ones being courted. Failure to understand this can lead to public patronage of press arguments on media policy that can wreck their lives. In Chap. 8, I expand on how the public can play a role in media reform. The next chapter shows us more of how the media cover debates about themselves using the strategy of minimisation.

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## Minimisation: The Pizza Charter

Media scholars have observed that mainstream newspapers trivialise and denigrate efforts at ensuring press accountability, in a bid to protect their self-interest (McChesney 2008, p. 451). It is this trivialisation and denigration of attempts at reforming media policy that is referred to as the strategy of minimisation. In the media reform debate that arose from the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry, the strategy of minimisation emerged in discourses that cast doubts on the legitimacy of the Leveson Inquiry through allegations of conflicts of interest, revenge, lack of objectivity and neutrality, and through the use of the character smear technique. All these were geared towards protecting the neoliberal interpretation of press freedom. Minimisation refers to a trend in journalistic metadiscourse where the media downplays a wrongdoing or an alleged wrongdoing as part of efforts to protect a press paradigm. The strategy of minimisation was used by all newspapers examined but featured more prominently in the sub-interpretive sphere comprising *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*. It manifested in a number of ways: (1) playing down the cross-party Royal Charter on press regulation, (2) playing down the Leveson Inquiry, (3) playing down the scandal, (4) in a discourse of “unfair” treatment of the press and (5) critiquing critics of the press’ position.

Following negotiations that led to the final drafting of a Royal Charter on press regulation which saw the charter being underpinned by statute, the press (apart from the *Guardian*), obviously displeased by the

outcome, sought to undermine the decision by portraying the meeting as unserious and unfair: “Unfair” because, according to newspapers in this sphere, Hacked Off, the campaign group for victims of press abuse, was invited to the meeting and the press was not (Forsyth 2012, p. 12); and “Unserious” because, according to them, the meeting took place around 2am and they had pizza for refreshment. The emerging journalistic meta-discourse in all newspapers apart from *Guardian* undermined the meeting because of the resultant Royal Charter underpinned by statute. As if in collaboration, one with another, they all were careful to point out that the meeting was over a pizza meal:

- This week, the Queen will be told to approve a shabby Royal Charter, stitched up at a secret 2am pizza party in Ed Miliband’s office by party leaders and Hacked Off vigilantes. (Kavanagh 2013c, p. 8—*The Sun*)
- No wonder the *New York Times*, perhaps the world’s most respected newspaper, opposed this state Royal Charter, agreed in a late night pizza stitch-up by politicians and a pressure group, with the press excluded. (*Daily Mirror* 2013, p. 8)
- To date, there has been no compromise at all. The Royal Charter currently before Parliament is unchanged from the deal agreed by Mr Grant’s friends over pizza in March. (Slack 2013, n.p.—*Daily Mail*)
- But the useless article who, munching a pizza at 2am in a closed room with the above, gave 300 years of press freedom away with a whimper was David Cameron’s “strategic adviser” Oliver Letwin, another Old Etonian and apparently, a born capitulator. (Forsyth 2013, p. 15—*Daily Express*)
- They were cobbled together late at night over pizza and Kit-Kats with no thought for the legal and constitutional issues involved. (Mason 2013, p. 27—*Daily Telegraph*)

By playing down the meeting, the press sought to undermine the decision reached in that meeting and warn of the threat such a decision posed to press freedom and that it would ultimately prove harmful to democracy. As with most other arguments advanced by this sub-interpretive sphere, the *Guardian* newspaper condemned their coverage of the negotiations. Media commentator/City University’s Emeritus Professor of journalism Roy Greenslade published in the *Guardian* a rebuttal by the Hacked Off’s Executive Director, Brian Cathcart, in which Professor Cathcart dismissed



the pizza charter story as “another silly myth” stressing that no pizzas were served at the meeting and Hacked Off was invited in “to honour the prime minister’s promise to hear the views of victims” (Cathcart 2013 cited by Greenslade 2013). By labelling the meeting a pizza and kit-kat gathering, the press sought to de-legitimise the Royal Charter on press self-regulation by representing the negotiations that led to its final drafting as unserious and unfair. Another way the press used the strategy of minimisation to advance their position in the press reform debate was by describing measures aimed at reforming the press as revenge. How they did this will be the focus of the next section.

### PRESS FREEDOM UNDER ATTACK: POLITICIANS SEEK REVENGE?

“Snub the press charter ... it’s a monstrous folly by politicians out for revenge: Boris slams gag on newspapers” is a headline from *Daily Mirror* that summarises the discourse of minimisation we shall discuss in this section (McTague 2013, p. 24). Attempts by politicians to reform the press have often been interpreted as “political self-interest” (Putnis 2000, p. 110). Table 8.1 shows that this strategy, which is referred to as “retribution” on the table, featured in 6.1 per cent of the coverage. Though this may seem small when compared with the use of some other descriptions, for example “threat to press freedom” (27.8 per cent), it is important to note that “retribution” is just one aspect of the strategy of minimisation. Others will be discussed later in this chapter. “Retribution” was used most frequently in the *Daily Telegraph* (11.3 per cent) followed by *The Sun* (9.2 per cent), *Daily Express* (6.7 per cent), *Daily Mirror* (5.8 per cent) and *Daily Mail* (4.6 per cent). It appeared least in the *Guardian* newspaper (3.4 per cent). The result reveals that this minimisation strategy featured more in the sub-interpretive sphere comprising *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* than in the sub-interpretive sphere made up of the *Guardian*. By representing statutory underpinning as a revenge tool, all newspapers apart from *Guardian* sought to de-legitimise the Royal Charter, the purpose possibly being to garner public support in its debate against press regulation underpinned by statute.

This sub-interpretive sphere sought to undermine the Royal Charter by interpreting the move by politicians to underpin the Royal Charter with a statute as one born out of a revenge for the press’ exposure of the MPs’

**Table 8.1** Description of measures to check press misconduct: minimisation

<i>Description</i>	<i>Guardian</i> (%)	<i>Daily Mail</i> (%)	<i>Daily Mirror</i> (%)	<i>Daily Telegraph</i> (%)	<i>Daily Express</i> (%)	<i>Sun</i> (%)	<i>Total</i> (%)
Independent press self-regulation	31.1	6.9	5.8	7.7	11.1	8.5	16.8
Tough press regulation	12.4	16.2	10.1	13.4	20.0	12.4	13.4
Chilling effect on investigative journalism	6.5	14.6	15.9	15.5	8.9	9.8	10.6
Threat to press freedom	20.2	30.8	26.1	30.3	28.9	39.9	27.8
State control or slippery slope to press licensing	8.6	11.5	11.6	10.6	17.8	13.1	10.9
Draconian or punitive	3.9	10.0	10.1	3.5	4.4	5.9	5.6
<i>Retribution</i>	3.0	4.6	5.8	11.3	6.7	9.2	6.1
Leveson compliant	11.6	5.4	14.5	6.3	0.0	0.0	7.4
Other	2.4	0.0	0.0	1.4	2.2	1.3	1.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

expenses scandal (Forsyth 2013, p. 15) as can be seen in the headline “MPs want revenge on press over expenses” (*Daily Mail* 2013, n.p.). The MPs’ expenses scandal came to light in 2009 when *Daily Telegraph* newspaper published uncensored leaked information from the MPs’ expenses files that showed that some members of the British Parliament had misused their privilege to some allowances (*BBC News* 2009). The news sparked public outrage and led to resignations, prosecutions, repayment of expenses and apologies by some MPs (Crace 2014, p. 64). All newspapers apart from *Guardian* also argued that if the Royal Charter was backed by statute, “journalists would live in fear that if they angered MPs—by exposing another expenses scandal, for example—they could get revenge by making the rules even more draconian” (*Daily Mail* 2013, n.p.).

This use of the retribution theme, in the press coverage of the debate that followed the phone hacking scandal, affirms claims made by previous studies on how the press represent debates about themselves (Carlson and Berkowitz 2014; Thomas and Finneman 2014). McChesney (2008, p. 451) is of the view that such coverage is born out of the refusal of media

owners to be accountable to authority. Media magnates possess enormous powers as a result of weak press regulatory systems, powers which even political leaders are wary of, because they can be used to mar political careers (Papandrea 2000, p. 12, cited in Putnis 2000, p. 105, 451). As stated earlier, such “freedom” earns them not only money but also influence. Warnings of retribution or political self-interest serve as defence mechanisms to protect this enormous power. As previously stated, political self-interest is not the only form of minimisation strategy used by the press in their coverage of the press reform debate. The sub-interpretive sphere made up of *Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* also attempted to denigrate the Leveson Inquiry, its report and other proposals to reform the press, by promoting discourses that questioned the legitimacy and relevance of the inquiry. The next section examines how they used the paradigm strategy of minimisation to do this.

#### LEVESON INQUIRY: NOT OBJECTIVE, NOT NEUTRAL

Studies have shown that the press resist reforms aimed at making them accountable by portraying institutions given the responsibility for such reforms as incompetent, illegitimate or lacking the moral justification to reform the press (Pickard 2015, pp. 177–189). In his coverage of media policy debates in Australia, Putnis (2000, p. 110) observed that the press’ comments about the body set up to reform it were disparaging. The media challenged the political intellect of the body. Similarly, Pickard (2015, pp. 177–189) found that the American press disparaged the Hutchins Commission and its report even before the report was officially released. He wrote, “Indeed, in the weeks leading up to and following the report’s publication, it was disparaged in various media coverage as the product of a communist cabal endeavouring to subvert press freedoms” (Pickard 2015, p. 178). In the case of the press reform debate that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal, the press disparaged the Leveson Inquiry, political leaders and the Royal Charter on press self-regulation. Table 8.2 reveals that the use of this discourse of minimisation that described the Leveson Inquiry as illegitimate and unfair featured in 7.1 per cent of the coverage. It was expressed more prominently in the sub-interpretive sphere comprising *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*: appearing in 18.4 per cent of *Daily Mail*, 15.2 per cent of *The Sun*, 10.3 per cent of *Daily Mirror*, 5.6 per cent of *Daily Express*, 3.9 per cent of *Daily Telegraph* and 0.5 per cent of *Guardian*. This

**Table 8.2** Description of Leveson Inquiry: minimisation

<i>Description</i>	<i>Guardian</i> (%)	<i>Daily Mail</i> (%)	<i>Daily Mirror</i> (%)	<i>Daily Telegraph</i> (%)	<i>Daily Express</i> (%)	<i>Sun</i> (%)	<i>Total</i> (%)
A threat to press freedom	20.5	28.9	28.2	28.6	33.3	38.0	27.1
Harmful to UK's reputation	2.3	3.9	5.1	7.8	5.6	12.0	5.4
A chilling effect on journalism	8.7	17.1	20.5	26.0	22.2	15.2	15.0
A fair deal	12.8	3.9	2.6	11.7	0.0	0.0	7.9
Solution to efforts at curbing press excesses	48.9	15.8	20.5	13.0	16.7	8.7	28.4
Illegitimate/unfair to the press	0.5	18.4	10.3	3.9	5.6	15.2	7.1
Anti-democratic	3.7	9.2	10.3	7.8	16.7	9.8	7.1
Other	2.7	2.6	2.6	1.3	0.0	1.1	2.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

discourse of minimisation questioned the objectivity and neutrality of the inquiry. One way it did this was by alleging that there were “potential conflicts of interest” involving some members of Lord Justice Leveson’s team of assessors.

This discourse questioned the fairness and impartiality of the inquiry based on the fact that three out of its six assessors had “direct or indirect links” with Common Purpose, a charity which the papers alleged had links to Hacked Off, the campaign organisation that represented victims of press abuse and was advocating for tighter press control (*Daily Mail* 2012). In an 11-page article (3030 words on Nexis UK—*Daily Mail* 2012) headlined “A nuclear bomb that dropped on the press—and the motley crew who seized their chance”, the *Daily Mail* attempted to establish that Sir David Bell, a member of Lord Justice Leveson’s team of assessors had links that meant there was a conflict of interest that should de-legitimise the Leveson Inquiry. The detail of the alleged links is that “Sir David Bell is a co-founder of the Media Standards Trust, the group behind the Hacked Off campaign. He is also a trustee and former chairman of Common Purpose, a charity that runs leadership courses”.

The other two Leveson Inquiry assessors were also linked to Common Purpose (Kavanagh 2013a, p. 8). This conflict of interest discourse also

accused the then Prime Minister David Cameron of not declaring he had links with Common Purpose in the register of ministerial interests until after the inquiry had been set up (Allen 2013, n.p.). By pointing these direct and indirect links to Common Purpose, the papers used their power to control information to discredit the Leveson Inquiry, portraying it as partial and a conspiracy to stifle press freedom. This article from *The Sun* summarises the press' argument:

He [Sir David Bell] was a founder of Common Purpose, a shadowy organisation dedicated to curbing the Press. He helped set up the Media Standards Trust which virtually scripted Leveson proceedings, Hugh Grant's Hacked Off, and the disastrous Bureau of Investigative Journalism which led the BBC to falsely suggest Lord Alistair McAlpine was a paedophile. (Kavanagh 2013a, p. 8)

The *Guardian* newspaper (Wilby 2012, p. 30) carried a counter-discourse relating to the allegations of conflicts of interest propagated by the other papers, particularly as it related to Sir David Bell. In an editorial with the headline "Cameron's dilemma: the press can still ruin careers: Coverage of the Leveson inquiry proves why the press must be reformed, but also shows the risk involved in doing so", the *Guardian* pointed out that such treatment given to Sir David Bell by the press was what could lead to statutory regulation of the press (Wilby 2012, p. 30). A similar article from the *Guardian* with the headline "Laughable Daily Mail 'investigation' smears Leveson Inquiry assessor" (Greenslade 2012, n.p.) described the discourse advanced by the other papers as "a classic example of conspiracist innuendo"; "a farrago of distortion with added vilification". It then went on to deconstruct the argument, interpreting it as "prejudice against the Leveson Inquiry" (ibid.).

The undermining journalistic metadiscourse of lack or potential lack of fairness of the Leveson Inquiry also included complaints of unfair treatment of the press because law firms and business enterprises found to have been involved in clandestine activities were not brought before an inquiry or prosecuted as was being done to journalists (Slack and Doyle 2013, n.p.). For example, an article in *The Sun* with the headline "You've nicked hackers ... now expose the buggers" lamented: "Our Serious Organised Crime Agency has been sitting for years on proof that major law and drug firms paid ex-cops to bug private phones and computers; hacking is

illegal—and universal. But the only people in the dock are journalists” (Kavanagh 2013b, p. 8).

The journalistic metadiscourse accused politicians of spending too much time and resources on the Leveson Inquiry to the detriment of “matters of higher social and economic importance”. An example is an article published by *The Sun* with the headline, “Stop gagging the press and fix the economy; that’s what you tell MPs” (Wood 2012, p. 6). This discourse spelt out the cost of the Leveson Inquiry and tried to convince the public that a huge amount of tax payers’ money was being wasted on an unnecessary course, for political reasons (McKinstry 2012). An example is this excerpt from the *Daily Express*:

Yet now that principle [press freedom] is under grave threat. Today, Lord Leveson finally issues his recommendations on the future of the press following his lengthy, £5.6 million inquiry into media standards in the wake of the phone hacking scandal at the *News of the World* newspaper ... That statutory framework is certainly what many politicians at Westminster want, since they despise the idea that rumbustious newspapers should be able to challenge their power and expose their wrongdoing. But any form of state control would be a disaster for democracy ... THE absurdity of the entire Leveson business is that we never needed the expensive inquiry in the first place, for the behaviour of a minority of journalists was already against the law. (McKinstry 2012, p. 14)

The reasons for this “expensive gagging of the press”, the press argued, was to cover up the politician’s messy role in the scandal as well as stifle the press so that it could no longer challenge corrupt politicians; it was also described as an emotional response to public outrage over a criminal offense whose penalty had already been provided for in law, and, worse of all, their actions would (or had) dealt a terrible blow to press freedom. Though the protection of press freedom is essential for the sustenance of democracy, it is important for the public, policymakers and other stakeholders to discern when the call for the protection of press freedom is actually a quest for the protection of the mechanisms that facilitate abuse of press power. The resolve to protect such mechanisms results in the use of the “pay back” technique on anyone who attempts to weaken the potential for the press to abuse its power (Putnis 2000, p. 105). In the journalistic metadiscourse on the press reform debate, pay back took the form of minimisation; for instance, the press embarked on what can be described as a character smear of those who opposed its resistance to stringent reforms. The next section is an analysis of how this was done.

### CHARACTER SMEAR: CRITIQUING CRITICS

“Critiquing critics of the press” was one of the minimisation techniques employed by the press to run down proposals for reform that it considered to be against its interest. It involved what can, arguably, be described as a character smear of persons with views opposed to those of the press in the media policy debate that followed the phone hacking scandal. To gauge the extent of its usage, I noted where the press made disparaging comments about individuals or institutions that were actively involved in advocating tighter press controls. Such remarks took the form of castigating the individual and pointing out that such a person was among those calling for statutory backed press regulatory body.

An excerpt from the dominant themes table (Chap. 7), herein referred to as Table 8.3, reveals that this character smear technique featured as a dominant theme in 5.4 per cent of the coverage. It is concerning that this emerged among the top ten, out of 24 dominant themes in the coverage. It was used most by *Daily Mail*, appearing as the dominant theme of 14.5 per cent of its coverage. Unexpectedly, “Critiquing critics of the press” came ahead of the “threat to press freedom” theme in *Daily Mail* (see Table 8.3). However, it can be argued that it acted as a feeder to the threat to press freedom argument. In *The Sun*, this character smear minimisation technique came second among dominant themes in the paper’s coverage of the debate, just after the “threat to press freedom” argument. It also emerged as the dominant theme in 8.3 per cent of *The Sun*, 5.0 per cent of *Daily Telegraph*, 3.6 per cent of *Daily Express*, 2.0 per cent of *Daily Mirror* and 0.6 per cent of *Guardian* (see Table 8.3).

This character smear technique was used to cast a shadow of doubt on the integrity and legitimacy of the Leveson Inquiry. For instance, *The Sun* newspaper revealed what it referred to as the “Loverson scandal”, and based on it, much of the press contested the legitimacy of the Leveson Report (Nash and Schofield 2013, p. 2). The “Loverson Scandal” came to light in April 2013 when *The Sun* newspaper carried a story alleging a love affair between David Sherborne, counsel to actor Hugh Grant and other victims of the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal, and Carine Patry Hoskins, one of Leveson’s team of advisers. The story disclosed that David Sherborne and Carine Hoskins spent a holiday together at the Greek Island of Santorini four months before the end of the inquiry (Nash and Schofield 2013, p. 2). The pair later explained that they went on the holiday together to discuss the possibility of a future relationship and decided

**Table 8.3** Dominant theme in the coverage: critiquing critics

<i>Dominant theme</i>	<i>Guardian</i> (%)	<i>Daily Mail</i> (%)	<i>Daily Mirror</i> (%)	<i>Daily Telegraph</i> (%)	<i>Daily Express</i> (%)	<i>Sun</i> (%)	<i>Total</i> (%)
Threat to press freedom	11.5	13.3	25.5	18.1	35.7	62.5	20.6
Support for new press own regulatory system	1.5	4.6	3.9	2.5	3.6	4.2	2.9
Against politicians' Royal Charter	2.8	4.0		3.0		3.1	2.9
Against press law/statutory underpinning	4.0	12.7	9.8	6.0	10.7	5.2	6.9
Press achievements	0.6	6.9	2.0	1.5	7.1	1.0	2.4
Against self-regulation of the press	0.9	0.6					0.5
Support for Leveson Inquiry	10.5		7.8	2.5	7.1	3.1	5.5
Enforce existing laws		2.3	3.9	4.5			1.7
Critiquing critics of the press	0.6	14.5	2.0	5.0	3.6	8.3	5.4

against it, but changed their minds after the inquiry. Lord Justice Leveson (and much later, the Bar Standards Board) excused the action of Sherborne and Carine saying it did not stand in the way of a credible report from the inquiry (ibid.).

The “Loverson scandal” was used by the press, with the exception of the *Guardian*, to de-legitimise the Leveson report and call for a revocation of the Royal Charter. The emerging discourse warned that the relationship between a lawyer in Leveson’s team of advisers and the barrister representing campaigners for statutory regulation of the press shows the whole inquiry was not impartial but a “panto stitch-up”: a conspiracy to stifle press freedom. The papers then went on to call for the Leveson Report to be scrapped, as can be seen in this headline from *Daily Mail*, “Calls for press regulation plan to be scrapped after revelations” (Seamark 2013, p. 14). A similar article from *The Sun* reads: “Press must withdraw



from panto stitch-up” (Kavanagh 2013a, p. 8). The discourse, particularly that of *The Sun* newspaper, employed demeaning language to belittle the parties involved in the “scandal”, Lord Justice Leveson and the Leveson Inquiry as can be seen in this excerpt:

STROPPY Lord Justice Leveson was accused yesterday of being the “only person” who did not know his inquiry’s barrister was having an affair with a rival lawyer. *The Sun* revealed in April how married mum-of-two Ms Patry Hoskins, was dating perma-tanned Mr Sherborne, who worked for alleged newspaper victims. The snooty law chief, who refused to talk about press regulation told the Commons Culture Committee he had not heard earlier rumours about the fling—dubbed the Loverson scandal. (Ashton 2013, p. 6)

The amount of money paid to the lawyers was also highlighted, probably to attract public contempt and reduce the public’s acceptance of the Leveson Report, as can be seen in the *Daily Telegraph*’s headline, “Leveson lawyer who had affair was paid £220,000 of taxpayers’ money” (Swinford 2013, n.p.). Though the “Loverson Scandal” featured in the *Guardian*, it was not interpreted in the same way. The paper only went as far as mentioning that Lord Justice Leveson defended Carine Hoskins’ involvement in the “developing relationship”, saying that it did not compromise the Leveson Report because she only played a minor role such as proofreading the report (O’Carroll and Halliday 2013, p. 17). On the other hand, those who supported the press’ position in the debate were given “a good press” (Chapman 2013, n.p.).

## CONCLUSION

In summary, my investigation into how the strategy of minimisation was used in the press coverage of the debate that followed the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal revealed that the strategy was used in varying degrees by all newspapers in the coverage. It manifested in the forms of press disparagement of the Royal Charter which they nicknamed the Pizza Charter; interpretations of press reform proposals as acts motivated by political self-interest; by de-legitimising the Leveson Inquiry, describing it as illegitimate and unfair; and by using the character smear technique against supporters of stringent press reforms. This list is not exhaustive. This agrees with the claim of previous studies that during the

coverage of media policy, newspapers trivialise and denigrate efforts at ensuring press accountability in a bid to protect their self-interest (Stiegler 2013, p. 137).

Such coverage of media policy debates is bound to rob citizens of their freedom of expression in media policy debates. Politicians, campaigners for media reform and any other stakeholder can withhold views that can translate into effective media reform because of the fear of pay back or being minimised by the press. Such fears can be likened to what is experienced in authoritarian governments where citizens are afraid to critique political leaders because of the fear of “pay backs”. By using the strategy of minimisation during media policy debates, the media stifle, rather than enhance, democracy. One way to check such stifling of democracy is to enlighten consumers of journalistic metadiscourse on media reform debates on the various strategies used by the media in the coverage. Knowledge of the various minimisation techniques used by the media, the extent to which they are used and how they are used will provide participants of media policy debates with a better understanding. The press on their part will need to refrain from the use of strategies that will undermine its claim to the promotion of democracy.

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## Journalistic Metadiscourse: Access to the Media's Public Sphere

In a democratic society, it is expected that all sections of society have access to the press because it serves as a major medium of information and communication. If individuals are to contribute to policymaking through participating in public debates, then all sections of society will need to have access to the press, especially when issues that concern them are the subjects of debate; this has not been the case. The press has often been accused of giving more access to elite and official sources to the detriment of the less powerful in society (Galtung and Ruge 1965, cited in Harcup and O'Neill 2010, p. 270). Reference to “elite” sources here is not so much the politically powerful, as may have been the concept of Galtung and Ruge but is what Harcup and O'Neill referred to as “the power elite”. The power elite could be celebrities, policymakers and the press, amongst others.

The danger of favouring the debates of the “power elite” is that the views of a stratum of society dominate the media discourse while those of the less powerful are hardly heard. The “power elite” can become the primary definer of the debate (Hall et al. 1978. pp. 57–59, cited in Allan 2010, p. 84). The primary definers define the trend of the debate because they often come high up in the news narrative and as such the rest of the debate may be a response to their argument or to their definition of the subject. Relating this to media reform, ideas and interpretations for press reform may be limited to those mentioned or advocated by the primary definers. This can result in the media transmitting a narrow spectrum of ideas on media reform. Their proposals or arguments on media reform

may also get more reads if readers stop at the first few paragraphs of a report on media policy. In the journalistic metadiscourse on the press reform debate that followed the *NoTW* that followed the phone hacking scandal, the press emerged as a major power elite. This chapter shows how the press took advantage of its powers to control information to give more quality access to arguments that it perceived to be in its interest, to the detriment of other stakeholders in the press reform debate.

To a lesser degree, policymakers, victims of press abuse and their campaigners also emerged as key sources used in the journalistic metadiscourse on the press reform debate. In this book, a source refers to “any person, institution, or document to which the reporter explicitly attributed information” (Hallin et al. 1993, p. 754). Table 9.1 reveals that 46.1 per cent of news sources on the debate were press related; out of this number, 37.3 per cent were journalists (not editors), 3.7 per cent were news editors; 2.8 per cent were from press bodies such as the PCC and IPSO, while 2.3 per

**Table 9.1** Frequency of sources

<i>Sources</i>	<i>Frequency of sources</i>	<i>Percentage of sources</i>
Campaigners for victims of press abuse	537	4.5
Leveson Inquiry	827	7.0
Royal Charter	97	0.8
Campaigners for press freedom	495	4.2
The press	4420	37.3
Press body such as IPSO	331	2.8
News editors	441	3.7
Newspaper and magazine publishers	278	2.3
Conservative spokesperson	776	6.5
Police	253	2.1
Labour shadow government	573	4.8
Coalition Liberal Democrats	325	2.7
Cross-party	85	0.7
Culture, media and sport	255	2.2
Government spokesperson	453	3.8
Other politicians	454	3.8
Victims of press abuse	559	4.7
Ordinary members of the public	184	1.6
Judiciary	263	2.2
Other	252	2.1
Total	11,858	100.0

cent came from newspaper and magazine publishers (see Tables 9.1 and 9.2), demonstrating a clear inequality in the distribution of sources used by the press in its coverage of the debate.

This inequality in the distribution of sources was also identified in the category of writers of articles in the study sample. Understandably, newspaper staff wrote the bulk of the stories on the coverage, accounting for 91.5 per cent of writers of articles on the debate (see Tables 9.3 and 9.4). What is of interest is the distribution of other contributors (writers) from outside the newspaper's staff. Out of the remaining 8.5 per cent of contributors (outside the newspaper's staff), 4.3 per cent were press related: 2.2 per cent were from "other media" organisations, 1.4 per cent were written by campaigners for press freedom and 0.7 per cent were from former media executives (see Table 9.4). The remaining 4.1 per cent were shared among eight other contributors. This result does not reflect a democratic public sphere. It agrees with arguments by previous studies that the media is dominated by a narrow spectrum of sources (Grabber and Dunaway 2014). The dominance of the media as sources within an already narrow spectrum of sources is a double cause for concern. The gap between press-related sources and other sources in the discourse (see Table 9.2) demonstrates how the gatekeeping power of the press can be used to their advantage (Lewin 1947, 1951, cited in Shoemaker and Vos 2009, p. 1).

Kurt Lewin (1947, 1951) used the theory of gatekeeping to show "how food made its way from the grocery store or garden to the dinner table" (cited in Shoemaker and Vos 2009, p. 109). White (1950, cited in Shoemaker and Vos 2009, p. 112) extended the gatekeeping concept to

**Table 9.2** Source types in related categories

<i>Source type</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Press-related sources	46.1
Policymakers	24.5
Press abuse victims-related sources	9.2
Leveson and Royal Charter	7.8
Judiciary	2.2
Police	2.1
Ordinary members of the public	1.6
Other	2.1
Total	100.0

**Table 9.3** Category of writers

<i>Category of writers</i>	<i>Guardian (%)</i>	<i>Daily Mail (%)</i>	<i>Daily Mirror (%)</i>	<i>Daily Telegraph (%)</i>	<i>Daily Express (%)</i>	<i>The Sun (%)</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
The newspaper's staff/ representative	88.2	98.3	94.1	91.5	92.9	88.5	91.5
Campaigners for victims of the press	0.9			1.0		1.0	0.7
Victims of press abuse	0.9						0.3
Campaigners for the press	1.2	1.2	2.0	0.5		4.2	1.4
Representatives of associations	0.9						0.3
Former media executives	0.6			0.5	7.1	1.0	0.7
A member of the public			2.0	1.0			0.3
Government Politicians	1.2			1.5			0.3
Business/ corporate organisations		0.6		2.5		1.0	1.1
Academics	1.5		2.0	0.5		1.0	0.9
Other media	4.3			1.0		3.1	2.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Table 9.4** Category of  
writers in groups

<i>Writers</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Newspaper staff	91.5
Press-related sources	4.3
Policymakers	1.4
Press abuse victims-related sources	1.0
Academics	0.9
Representative of associations	0.3
Corporate organisations	0.1
Ordinary members of the public	0.3
Total	100.0



mass communication research. Applying this theory to news, Shoemaker and Vos (2009, p. 1) pointed out that the enormity of information available to the media and the limited amount of space to transmit it necessitated the need for the press to filter information in order to transmit a manageable quantity to the public. The process by which the media decide which stories among the lot to tell, which not to tell, who speaks about them (sources) and what versions of interpretation to relay to the public is what is referred to as gatekeeping (Shoemaker and Vos 2009; White 1950, cited in Vos and Heinderyckx 2015, p. 3).

In the words of Shoemaker and Vos (2009, p. 1), gatekeeping “is the process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people each day” (Shoemaker and Vos 2009, p. 1). This process of selection can be based on cultural, economic and ideological factors. Examples of such factors include a newspaper’s political ideology, its ethos, ownership and business interests. This endows the media with enormous powers because they have the power to decide whether to allow some arguments or sources into the news or whether to give them limited access or to keep them out completely (Rozell and Mayer 2008, p. 328). This gatekeeping power, if not checked, can be used in a way that gives the press undue advantage in their transmission of debates, especially debates about themselves (Van Heerden 1996, cited in Fourie 2001, p. 205). Shoemaker and Vos (2009, p. 122) affirmed that gatekeeping can be used in the selection of sources.

The gatekeeping theory is closely linked to agenda-setting (McCombs et al. 1997; McCombs 2004, 2014). Agenda-setting “is the process of the mass media presenting certain issues frequently and prominently with the result that large segments of the public come to perceive those issues as more important than others” (Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch 2009, p. 147). Agenda-setting studies have shown that media messages, depending on a number of political and social factors, can influence an individual’s action as well as determine his or her depth of knowledge on the issues represented (Negrine 1989, pp. 3–4). Agenda-setting studies have “established that journalists and editors have great power both to shape the main topics of importance to audiences as well as the details of those issues” (Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch 2009, p. 154). My intention is not to argue for or against media effects but to highlight the fact that how the media cover debates about their policy is important because it could (depending on other social and political factors) shape the public’s perception and consequent action about media reform. The results of my research

confirms that in the coverage of the media reform debate, the press used their gatekeeping powers to see to it that their voices dominated the debate, particularly regarding arguments on how the press should be regulated.

In their use of press-related sources, a trend emerged which I would like to flag up for further investigation. It is a trend in which newspapers reported the publications or transmissions of other media organisations about the debate: a situation that can be described as “media coverage of media coverage of media issues”—a kind of second-level metacoverage. This manner of coverage was done by the two sub-interpretive spheres, each using it to strengthen their own argument while countering opposing views in the press reform debate. Headlines such as “*Times* editor says papers will go ahead with own regulator” in the *Guardian* newspaper (O’Carroll and Halliday 2013, p. 16); ‘The *Economist* call press regulation deal ‘a shameful hash’ ’ in the *Guardian* newspaper (Greenslade 2013b); “Now the *Economist* rejects rotten plan to shackle free press” in *Daily Mail* (Chapman 2013, n.p.) and “The *Spectator* says NO to the press regulator” in the *Guardian* newspaper (Greenslade 2013a, n.p.) are some examples of this second-level metacoverage. This pattern of coverage featured more in *Guardian* than in other newspapers in the study sample.

*Guardian* newspaper used this second-level metacoverage both to commend papers that were of a similar view to its position in the debate and to condemn those newspapers that were of a different view. For example, in an article headlined “Editors speak out on regulation” Neild (2013, p. 8) in his report for the paper analysed the editorial sections of *Financial Times*, *Independent* and itself—*Guardian*, celebrating their views on statutory underpinning of the new press regulator and pointing out that all three [at the time] did not consider statutory underpinning as a threat to press freedom:

An editorial in today’s FT said the failure to agree on a regulatory regime would threaten vital economic reforms and could result in a backlash. “What is now needed is a practical gesture of goodwill to break the deadlock and avoid a sweeping press law” it said. The *Guardian*, in its editorial, ... warned that by refusing to give ground on regulation, editors were gambling with the freedoms they sought to protect. The *Independent* said that the arguments against some form of statutory underpinning had lost perspective. “Even reasonable half-way measures are characterised as press freedoms eroded and democratic principles laid waste,” it said. (Neild 2013, p. 8)

In a similar article, it wrote, “Finally, medals to the *Financial Times*, the *Independent* and the *Guardian* for holding out against ferocious peer pressure from the rest”. Meanwhile, in another article headlined “Will the press repent its nasty ways?” *Guardian* used this second-level metacoverage to condemn other media for arguing that statutory underpinning amounted to a threat to press freedom. The papers were used as sources in order to ridicule them and portray their arguments as lacking substance, as can be seen in this excerpt from *Guardian*:

I loved the heroics of Spectator editor Fraser Nelson, saying he’d never pay any fine from an “underpinned regulator”: “Whether I’d go to prison or not is up to the enemies of press freedom to decide. At least it would make clear what they are proposing.” ...Oh, the lofty rhetoric of the *Sun*, quoting from those they would have hounded at the time—JF Kennedy, Ralph Miliband, Adlai Stevenson, John Stuart Mill and Gandhi. But it has been sad to see some of the wiser commentators on the Times and Telegraph follow their masters’ voice, warning that the end is nigh when they must know quite well that’s nonsense. (Toynbee 2013, p. 29)

Similarly, *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Telegraph* reported the comments of other media organisations, using the method to either advance or counter arguments. An example is an article from *Daily Mirror* which attributed the closure of the *News of the World* to inaccurate reporting on the part of *Guardian*:

Roll forward five months and a much smaller story appeared on the front of The Guardian. The headline—“New inquiry into Dowler hacking launched”—gave little clue as to the revelation in the story, namely that the deletion exposé was wrong. The single-most stomach-churning element of the whole saga was, in fact, incorrect. It seems the messages had most likely been deleted automatically and not by journalists “thirsty for more” as the initial Guardian report claimed. (Embley 2012, pp. 8–9)

There were also headlines such as “Politicians in control risks media like Russia’s, warns Lebedev” (Ross 2012, p. 8). Evgeny Lebedev, the owner of the *London Evening Standard* and *Independent* newspaper (solely online at the time of this study), was speaking on The Andrew Marr Show on BBC1. This dominance of the opinions of the press in the journalistic metadiscourse on the debate affirms that the media does not serve as a democratic public sphere during debates about their policy. Both spheres

of journalistic metadiscourse took advantage of their gatekeeping powers to allocate disproportionate amounts of space to their voices in the press reform debate. As stated earlier, about half of the total number of sources used in the coverage were press related.

The press became the major power elite with the dominant voice while the rest of society were, apparently, at its mercy in the debate. Though it can be argued that there are various channels through which the public can participate in this debate, such as from online news websites and blogs that advance counter discourses, it has been established through previous research that considerable numbers of people still depend on the mainstream press for hard news content (Haas 2012, p. 148). Despite the dive in newspaper readership in the UK (Newsworks 2016; Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2019), the national press examined in this study, at the time of writing, still had an average daily readership of 12.2 million which demonstrates the number of people in society consuming discourse from this doubly narrow spectrum of sources. Interestingly, the views of the press were not only expressed by press-related sources but were also passed across through other sources such as policymakers. In this book, policymakers refer to the government, government institutions and politicians.

Out of the remaining 53.9 per cent of sources (apart from the press' 46.1 per cent), policymakers made up 24.5 per cent of sources: 6.5 per cent of the number were Conservative Party spokespersons, 4.8 per cent were from the Labour Party, 3.8 per cent were Government spokespersons, another 3.8 were "other politicians", 2.7 per cent were from the Liberal Democratic Party who were then in coalition government with the Conservatives; 2.2 per cent of sources were from the Department of Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS); and 0.7 were cross-party—a team made up of the three major political parties—Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and Labour (see Tables 9.1 and 9.2). Similarly, policymakers made up a significant proportion of contributors outside of journalists (see Tables 9.3 and 9.4), making them another significant group used as sources.

Policymakers play a vital role in media policy debates, in the sense that they are the decision-making sphere; they are the forum where contestations in the media's public sphere can progress to the stage of a consensus and the stage where the debate can influence political action. In this case, the political action to be taken is a decision on how to ensure an accountable press but as Putnis (2000, p. 105) observed, "the interdependence of

politics and the media renders media policy making a particularly fraught and contentious process". That is because the media and policymakers depend on each other for a number of purposes. O'Heffernan (1991, p. 38) divided policymakers' use of the media into four categories. He noted that policymakers use the media "for immediate useful information"; "in the early stages of an issue to make a decision"; as "the only source of policy information" in times of crisis and as "critical information for policy making" (ibid.). It is important to note that policymakers' uses of the media go beyond the making of policy to other more personal reasons, such as the promotion of their political image or popularity (Silverstone 2007, cited in Sanders 2008, p. 38).

As Putnis (2000, p. 105) pointed out, policymakers are not uninvolved parties in media policy creation or reform because "they crave media support; and their political fortunes are influenced by media reporting". Their power to make policy decisions also makes the media dependent on policymakers for what they consider to be favourable media policies. Collusion or mutual support between politicians and the media has the potential to shape media content and affect media policy reform. Politicians are known to have entered mutual agreements with media proprietors to give favourable coverage to their political party in exchange for media policies that favour the proprietors' corporate interests. For instance, the Labour Party's Tony Blair was said to have made an agreement with Rupert Murdoch before the 1997 general election in the UK, whereby his papers' support for the Labour Party was earned as a reward for cross-media ownership rules that favoured the media mogul (Franklin 2002, p. 30). Franklin described the period as one "characterised by an extraordinary degree of non-decision making in media policy" (ibid.).

Similarly, former Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron's close relationship with Rupert Murdoch was also suggested as one of the reasons for his election successes (Mason and Martinson 2016). Within 18 months, from April 2015 to September 2016, "News Corp executives had 20 meetings with senior government representatives" in Downing Street (Mason and Martinson 2016, n.p.; Media Reform Coalition 2017). Shortly after taking up office as Prime Minister, Theresa May visited the media magnate Rupert Murdoch in New York, when she visited for a United Nations meeting (Mason and Martinson 2016), affirming the cosy relationship between policymakers and the media. This reciprocal relationship is arguably the reason why Rupert Murdoch who lost his initial bid for the remaining shares of BskyB (he owned 39 per cent at the time) in

the heat of the phone hacking scandal was able to relaunch his bid for Sky in 2016, through his 21st Century Fox company (*Guardian* 2016; BBC News 2017). Note that in 2014, BskyB (a merger of British Satellite Broadcasting and Sky Television) further merged with Murdoch's Pay-Television companies in Germany (Sky Deutschland) and Italy (Sky Italia) to form Sky (Reuters 2018).

Rupert Murdoch's relaunch of the Sky bid shows that the phone hacking scandal was not enough to put the owner of the defunct *News of the World* on the government's blacklist. As part of rebranding after the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal, Rupert Murdoch divided his media empire into 21st Century Fox, comprising of his cable network programming, filmed entertainment, television, direct broadcast and satellite TV (21st Century Fox 2017); and News Corporation comprising of his print media (News Corporation 2017). 21st Century Fox was vying for an £11.7 billion takeover of the broadcast company (Dean 2017). The deal was cleared by the European Commission competition authorities but following a petition posted on the campaigning website 38 Degrees, which gathered over 300,000 signatures (38 Degrees 2017; Sweney 2016, n.p.), the deal was referred to Ofcom, the communications watchdog, for a public interest assessment in relation to media plurality and broadcasting standards (Dean 2017, n.p.). Though Ofcom reported that the deal could give the Murdoch family "increased influence", 21st Century Fox was eventually given the go-ahead to participate in an auction for Sky along with Comcast and Walt Disney (*Guardian* 2016; King 2016). Though this contest culminated in 21st Century Fox company's loss of the Sky bid to Comcast in 2018, it can be argued that Rupert Murdoch was allowed to bid for Sky despite the involvement of his defunct *News of the World* in the phone hacking scandal because of the cosy relationship that existed between him and the government (Financial Times 2018; Waterson 2018).

The relationship between policymakers and the media during periods of media policy debates has also been adversarial. Adversarial in the sense that the press gives indirect warnings to politicians that there would be casualties (political payback) if they go ahead with press reforms, especially where statutory regulations are proposed (Putnis 2000, pp. 105–110; Curran and Seaton 2010; Pickard 2015, pp. 177–189). History has confirmed that there are indeed casualties for persons or institutions that advocate stringent press reforms. For example, David Mellor, when he was National Heritage Minister (now the Department for Culture, Media and Sports), in 1989 warned the press that they were "drinking in the last

chance saloon”; in other words, the press had one more chance to improve their conduct or be slammed with a privacy law (Keeble 2008, p. 136). He lost his job over a sex scandal revealed by the press in 1992 (Keeble 2008, p. 136; Fletcher 2015). Similarly, Maria Miller, who was Culture Secretary during negotiations for a Royal Charter underpinned by statute, was forced to resign from the role over an expenses scandal reported by the press (BBC News 2014). Though the MPs’ expenses scandal first emerged in 2009, the problem with her expenses was brought to the fore by the press in 2014, after she began negotiations to underpin the press regulatory body with a statute. This demonstrates the power of the press to manage information to its own perceived advantage.

Resistance to press reform shapes the way media policy debates are covered and the way they are covered can determine the outcome of media policy. Considering the importance of the media to the sustenance of democracy, steps need to be taken to ensure that media representation of media policy does not jeopardise efforts at effective media reform. In the journalistic metadiscourse on the press reform debate, the press apparently used their gatekeeping powers to ensure that policymakers who expressed support for their position in the debate had more opportunities to function as contributors in their newspapers. For instance, policymakers who were contributors to *Daily Telegraph* were largely in support of the argument that statutory underpinning was a threat to press freedom (Johnson 2012a, p. 4; Mason 2012, p. 26), while those who were contributors to news articles in *Guardian* countered the argument that statutory underpinning posed a threat to press freedom (Lester 2012, p. 30; Fowler 2013, p. 24; Huhne 2013, p. 36). And in the articles, some policymakers virtually reproduced the newspaper’s position in the debate. For example, Boris Johnson, who was the then Mayor of London (at the time of writing, he had become UK’s Prime Minister), wrote an article in *The Sun* titled “It’s one of the glories of this country that we have free, exuberant media. They keep public life much cleaner & that makes Britain a wonderful place to live” (Johnson 2012b, pp. 10–11). The dominant theme of that report was “against press law and statutory underpinning”.

On the other hand, an article written by a member of the House of Lords, Norman Fowler, and published by *Guardian* newspaper expressed support for statutory underpinning of a new press regulatory body (Fowler 2013, p. 24). The fact that Norman Fowler, a former Conservative Cabinet minister and party chairman, gained access to publish his view on the debate in the left-wing-leaning *Guardian* goes a long way to show that

the primary criteria for access in this metacoverage may have been tied to the position of the newspaper in the debate. It appeared as if the press had said “you either dance to our tune or find somewhere else to publish your view”. This trend can, arguably, be described as collusion between politicians and the media.

When it was revealed in 2016 that four newspapers (*The Sun*, *Independent*, *Mail on Sunday* and *Independent on Sunday*) were privy to information that the then chairman of the Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, John Whittingdale, had previously been involved in a relationship with a woman he met on an online dating website who happened to be a sex worker, and had not published it, some media reform campaigners and the Labour Party alleged that some sort of deal may have taken place between this executive and the press (BBC News 2016). John Whittingdale, who was then the Conservative MP for Maldon and East Chelmsford, denied any such deal with the press, and the newspapers claimed they decided not to publish because he was not a minister at the time of the relationship and as such it was not in the public interest (*ibid.*). Though this sounds reasonable, history has shown that the same “reasonable” position is not applied to all politicians as the unsubstantiated piggate publication by *Daily Mail* shows. In the piggate story Ashcroft and Oakeshott (2015) claimed that while studying at Oxford University, the then Prime Minister took part in an initiation ceremony at a Piers Gaveston event in which he “inserted a private part of his anatomy into the animal’s mouth”. The *Daily Mail* did not reject this story even though David Cameron was not a PM when it allegedly happened. This suggests the special treatment given to John Whittingdale may be a form of collusion.

There were also assumptions that Boris Johnson may have danced to the tune of the bulk of the national press in the press reform debate because he had an ambition to become the next Prime Minister of Britain after David Cameron and would, therefore, need the support of this large section of the national press. It is interesting to note that at the time of writing, Boris Johnson had become the Prime Minister of Britain. Whether or not there was a deal between the press and John Whittingdale or even a personal move by Boris Johnson to seek the press’ favour for political ambition, the fact remains that some politicians in both spheres largely reproduced arguments of the press in the debate. It is worthy of note that while the Leveson Inquiry condemned the relationship between the press and politicians for being “too cosy” (Leveson 2012, p. 1969; Winnett



2012, p. 11), the very coverage of the inquiry and that of the rest of the debate appear to have been shaped by a similar level of closeness.

The consequence for democracy here is that checks needed to prevent abuse of power by both the fourth and third estates of the realm gradually become eroded (Allan and Zelizer 2010, p. 48). As discussed in Chap. 2, the press in a democratic society is expected to keep political and other powerful institutions in check by exposing corruption, providing information they need to make quality decisions and providing the masses with the relevant information they need to vote in the right political leaders. That is why collusion between the press and politicians poses a threat to democracy. It can, for instance, result in the emergence to power of a politician who though without the quality to lead cosied up to the press or benefited its financial interest in some way. It can also weaken the power of politicians to make policy decisions that can ensure a responsible press.

Another significant group of sources (though to a smaller degree when compared with the press—46.1 per cent, and policymakers—24.5 per cent) in the media coverage of the press reform debate is press abuse victims-related sources. They were used as sources in 9.2 per cent of the coverage: 4.5 per cent were campaigners for victims of press abuse, while 4.7 per cent were the victims themselves. The categorising of campaigners for victims and the victims themselves was a little difficult because some prominent campaigners for victims, like Hugh Grant, were also victims of press abuse. At such times, the context of the story determined the group they fell into. For instance, if Hugh Grant was used as a source with regard to victims, he was recorded as a victim, but if he was cited with regard to victim campaigners, then he was considered a campaigner for victims. The following section analyses the use of sources related to victims of press abuse.

### VICTIMS AS “THE STAKEHOLDERS”

Though the number of press victims-related sources is far less than the number of press and policymakers-related sources (see Tables 9.1 and 9.2), the victims of press abuse and their campaigners still emerged as one of the stakeholders whose voices featured in a significant proportion of the debate, accounting for 9.2 per cent of the sources and 1 per cent of the 8.5 per cent of contributors that are not newspaper staff (see Tables 9.1, 9.2, 9.3 and 9.4). While I agree that this demographic is very important to the debate and ought to have been given more space in the journalistic

metadiscourse, I argue that the construction of victims as “the stakeholders” is further marginalisation of other sections of society.

One major problem with the construction of victims as “the stakeholders” is its composition. A look at the victims used as sources revealed that they were mostly famous (well-known) people. They included persons whose life stories attained the status of newsworthiness because of their celebrity status or high public profile (Harcup and O’Neill’s 2010, p. 270). Among them were actor Hugh Grant (Sweney 2013, n.p.), comedian Steve Coogan (O’Carroll 2012, n.p.), singer Charlotte Church (Glover 2012, n.p.) and author JK Rowling (Luckhurst 2012, p. 25).

Another group of victims used as sources included persons who became famous because of their connection to a newsworthy event such as the Dowlers (Rayner 2012, p. 6), the McCanns (Beattie 2013, p. 26), Christopher Jefferies (Allen and Evans 2012), the 7 July 2005 London bombing survivor (Hill 2012), or persons closely related to any of the two categories of victims (Cohen 2013). So, famous people that have been hurt by the press were constructed as “the stakeholders”. That is of course a narrow spectrum of stakeholders of the British press. Though victims of crime such as the Dowlers and the McCanns have been described as ordinary people in some news articles, that is contestable. The debate can thus be classed as an elitist debate. Though it may be argued that the press would more likely invade the privacy of the rich or famous than the ordinary citizen in society, studies show that ordinary citizens are also affected by press excesses: an example is minority groups who are often stereotyped in the news. Such people ought to have been adequately represented in the debate on press standards in the media’s public sphere.

People from other sectors of society such as those who have not faced any form of press misconduct should have also formed a relevant demographic as their views may be much more neutral in relation to how to balance the issue of privacy with that of press freedom. My intention here is not to belittle the importance of the victims of press misconduct to the debate but to argue that they are only one relevant demographic out of a number and that should have been reflected in the journalistic metadiscourse. There is the tendency that victims advocating for press reform can make suggestions out of anger and frustration at the press. Therefore, a mix of those that have experienced press abuse and those that have not been directly hurt would have made a more balanced group of stakeholders. What emerged instead was a rhetoric or discourse that constructed the victims of press abuse as the only demographic that needed the service of

an accountable press. As such, whatever proposal was going to be made by the Leveson Inquiry must pass “the victims test”. Policymakers, the press and even the victims themselves all advanced this rhetoric as can be seen in this statement written by *Guardian*'s Dan Sabbagh:

Victims have a veto. David Cameron, giving evidence, said that the test of the effectiveness of the Leveson Inquiry would be its impact on those who have suffered from press intrusion. “If families like the Dowlers feel this has really changed the way they would have been treated, we would have done our job properly,” he said. (Sabbagh 2012, p. 11)

This portrayal of victims as “the stakeholders”, the only demographic to benefit from press reforms, was more pronounced in the *Guardian* newspaper where several headlines contained a reference to the victims as can be seen in the headline, “Leveson report: PM defies press victims: 1.30pm ... Lawyer for Milly Dowler's parents says PM has ‘failed the Dowler test’” (Wintour and Sabbagh 2012, p. 1). A similar headline from *Guardian* stated: “When Leveson reports, parliament must act swiftly.... We would be betraying the media's victims if we ignored its findings” (Miliband 2012, p. 26). This construction of victims as “the stakeholders” was also identified in the other newspapers' coverage of the media reform debate, although not with the same intensity, and it was used a bit differently—to critique arguments advanced by the victims' campaigners as can be seen in the headline “Hacked off don't speak for victims, insists 7/7 father” (Cohen 2013, p. 28). This construction of victims as “the stakeholders” may have accounted for victim-related sources emerging among the top three sources used in the coverage as shown in Table 9.2.

From the statistics, we see that just three groups (press related, policymakers and press abuse victims) made up 79.8 per cent of the sources (see Tables 9.1 and 9.2). While I share the view that the press were vital participants because the debate was about them, policymakers were important because they were the decision-making sphere, and the victims were vital because they had first-hand experience relevant to the debate, I argue that limiting the debate in the media's public sphere to this narrow spectrum of stakeholders risks leaving out large sections of the society that do not fall within these major categories but are inarguably stakeholders in the debate on press standards. In a democracy, how the press should be regulated is a matter that concerns the whole of society and that ought to have been reflected in the distribution of sources. The risk to democracy here is

that only a few sections of society dominated a debate on a matter that concerns all. One of the problems with this is that some sections of society may develop apathy towards the debate and not see it as a matter that concerns them. It can be argued that this narrow spectrum of sources reduced the diversity of views about press reform expressed in the media and limited the options that were available to policymakers from which they made decisions on how to regulate the press.

## CONCLUSION

The coverage of the press reform debate featured a doubly narrow spectrum of sources, “doubly narrow” because the range of sources was narrow and within the narrow spectrum, access tilted heavily in favour of press-related sources. Policymakers came next to the press in the hierarchy of access to deliberations about media policy in the media’s public sphere. One of the challenges with making effective media policies is that both the media and policymakers are self-interested parties. The power of political leaders to make policy decisions on the media and the power of the press to either make or mar a political career make them collaborate with one another for “favourable” press coverage to promote a political career in exchange for “favourable” media policies that advance the interest of the commercial press. I argued that the reciprocal relationship between policymakers and the press makes it hard for policymakers to advance effective media reforms.

This collaboration between the press and policymakers reflected in how some politicians advanced the arguments of the bulk of the press in their opinion articles. As long as the media possess the power to mar political careers, it would be difficult for the politicians to give complete backing to effective press reform. That is why this book argues that external pressure outside the press and the government is essential for the creation of the kind of media policy that will produce an accountable press. This will be discussed further in Chap. 10. This chapter also points out that in the coverage of the press reform debate, victims of press abuse were represented as “the stakeholders” rather than “a stakeholder” of the debate. I acknowledged the importance of the victims to the debate but argued that limiting the stakeholder status to those who have been hurt by the press results in a limited range of views and risks shutting down more neutral voices that could have enriched the debate in the media’s public sphere. Having examined how sources were distributed in the press coverage of

the media policy debate that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal, the next chapter discusses the importance accorded to diverse issues of concern in the public sphere.

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## Representation of Media Policy

The term “media policy” as used in this book refers to “all law and regulation dealing with an information production chain that includes information creation, processing, flows and use” (Braman 2004, p. 153). Media policies in modern democracies are diverse with a single nation having different media policies for different sorts of media. For instance, in the UK, policies for the broadcast media differ in some ways to those for newspapers, and policies for newspapers differ from those for social media and so on (Freedman 2008, p. 15; Psychogiopoulou 2012, p. 231). Since this book deals with the printed press, my focus will be on media policies in relation to newspapers. As stated earlier, newspapers in Britain are self-regulated. The Editors’ Code of Practice sets guidelines that the press is to adhere to and failure to do so attracts penalties (see section on press regulation earlier in this book).

There are also policies such as the competition rules instituted by the government to check for unfair competition in media ownership (see earlier in this book). All these policies are put in place to ensure that the press fulfils its function in society which, as explained in Chap. 4, includes ensuring an informed citizenry, providing a democratic forum for public debates, introducing relevant topics to the public sphere for deliberations and by so doing sustaining democracy. The potential of the press to either sustain or destroy democracy makes the development of media policy that can guarantee an accountable press vital to every democratic society. That is why when there is perceived abuse of press power, calls are made for

inquiries or commissions to be set up to investigate the press practices with the purpose of calling the press to order where necessary. As discussed in Chap. 3, attempts to call the press to order often result in public debates about how to create or reform media policies.

The coverage of debates about media policy presents a unique situation in which the media has the responsibility of managing debates on their policy. In Western democracies, it is widely accepted that what legitimates the media is its claim to the protection of democracy (see Chap. 4). In debates about media policy, the media is, therefore, expected to serve as a democratic public sphere (see Chap. 4). The normative expectation in a democratic society is that during such debates, the media should give access to all parties in the debate irrespective of whether the party advances arguments different from the position of that media organisations in the debate. If this does not take place, any view different from that of the press will not be given access into the media's public sphere. If the media must serve as a free marketplace of ideas (Mill 1966; Curran and Seaton 2010), then the various arguments and issues of concern during media policy debates will need to be accorded equal priority in the press. Was that the case in the coverage of the debate that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry? The answer is no. My investigation revealed a serious shortcoming in the coverage of media policy debates, a situation where the media gives quality space to arguments it considers to be in its favour while discourses calling for stringent reforms are either left out or given less quality space in media narratives on press reform.

#### REPRESENTATION OF MEDIA POLICY: HIERARCHY OF IMPORTANCE

The inverted pyramid style of news writing suggests that journalists would often put the issues they consider to be most important at the top of the narrative (Pottker 2003, p. 501; Franklin et al. 2005, p. 122). Though this style of writing news is being contested, it is still the prevalent form of news writing. As such, it was the method used in this book, to measure the importance accorded to different arguments in the press reform debate. Table 10.1 presents the arguments that emerged at the top position in the narrative structure of articles in the coverage of the media policy debate that arose from the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry.

**Table 10.1** Hierarchy of importance: frequency of arguments at the top position in the narrative

<i>Issues of concern</i>	<i>Guardian</i> (%)	<i>Daily Mail</i> (%)	<i>Daily Mirror</i> (%)	<i>Daily Telegraph</i> (%)	<i>Daily Express</i> (%)	<i>The Sun</i> (%)	<i>Total</i> (%)
Against press laws and statutory regulation/underpinning	6.0	24.5	41.7	26.5	23.5	24.3	19.3
Press freedom	21.6	26.5	25.0	33.3	23.5	25.7	25.9
Public trust	1.8	0.0	4.2	5.9	0.0	0.0	2.1
Against politicians' Royal Charter	9.6	9.2	4.2	2.9	5.9	6.8	7.3
Against self-regulation	1.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6
Against the Leveson Inquiry	3.6	14.3	0.0	2.0	11.8	18.9	7.9
Support for press laws and statutory regulation	3.0	2.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	1.9
Privacy	14.4	7.1	4.2	8.8	5.9	1.4	8.9
Public interest	8.4	7.1	8.3	18.6	23.5	8.1	10.8
Against new press regulatory system formed by the press	5.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.9
Support for politicians' Royal Charter	10.2	1.0	8.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.1
Support for the Leveson Inquiry	10.8	1.0	0.0	1.0	5.9	2.7	4.8
Other	5.4	7.1	4.2	1.0	0.0	17.6	6.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

In my analysis, “the top” is regarded as the first position in the narrative structure of a news article.

The top three in the hierarchy of importance were arguments relating to press freedom (25.9 per cent), press law and statutory regulation or underpinning (19.3 per cent) and, interestingly, the public interest (10.8 per cent). The least in the order of importance was “against self-regulation” (0.6 per cent). Arguments relating to “press freedom” featured more prominently in the sub-interpretive sphere made up of *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*, appearing as the

first subject of discussion in 33.3 per cent of *Daily Telegraph*; 25.7 per cent of *The Sun*; 26.5 per cent of *Daily Mail*; 25 per cent of *Daily Mirror* and 23.5 per cent of *Daily Express* compared to 21.6 per cent of *Guardian* (see Table 10.1). Arguments related to press freedom in *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* warned that statutory underpinning of a new press regulatory body, as proposed by the Leveson Inquiry and subsequently applied to the Royal Charter on press regulation, was a threat to press freedom. The *Guardian*'s discourses relating to press freedom were mostly counter-arguments to the position of the other newspapers, as explained in previous chapters.

Some issues received no mention at the top of the narrative structure of some of the newspapers. This trend of giving prime place in the narrative structure to arguments perceived to be in their interest, with little or no mention of opposing views within that sphere of importance, was identified in the sub-interpretive sphere comprising *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*. In both *The Sun* and the *Daily Express*, identical issues received no mention in this sphere of importance. They include "public trust", "against self-regulation", "support for press law and statutory regulation/underpinning", "against new press regulatory system formed by the press" and "support for politicians' Royal Charter". For the *Daily Mail*, it was "public trust", "against self-regulation" and "against new press regulatory system formed by the press". Similarly, the *Daily Mirror* kept out of this quality space arguments "against self-regulation", in "support for press laws and statutory regulation/underpinning", arguments "against new press regulatory system formed by the press" and, interestingly, arguments in "support for the Leveson Inquiry" and arguments "against the Leveson Inquiry". The same trend was identified in the *Daily Telegraph* which did not include at the top of the narrative structure arguments "against self-regulation", in "support for politicians' Royal Charter" and "against new press regulatory system formed by the press". This affirms that the commercial press used their gatekeeping powers to accord more importance to arguments or issues they considered to be in its favour during the media policy debate.

*The Sun* gave prime place (at the top of the narrative structure) to arguments that warn of threats to press freedom (25.7 per cent): "against press laws and statutory regulation/underpinning" (24.3 per cent) and "arguments against Leveson Inquiry" (18.9 per cent). A similar trend played out in other newspapers in this sub-interpretive sphere. However, in the *Daily Express* "public interest" featured prominently at the top of its

narrative structure (23.5 per cent). Though this is commendable, the interpretation of what constitutes the public interest raises questions which will be examined more closely later in this chapter. It is worthy of note that in the sub-interpretive sphere comprising *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*, arguments against the new press regulatory system formed by the press did not feature at all in this sphere of importance.

Despite its importance to democracy and the sustenance of newspaper readership, the issue of “public trust” was among the subjects that received the least attention in the journalistic metadiscourse. A closer look at the context within which the issue of public trust was used by the press revealed that they rarely discussed their own need to build public trust but instead turned its readers’ attention to other institutions facing the same challenge. The journalistic metadiscourse contained instances where institutions other than the press were criticised for the lack of public trust on their operations. An example is this article from *Daily Telegraph*:

NEW Labour’s policy of “spin” and media “manipulation” has damaged democracy and undermined public trust in politics, Lord Leveson said. (Ross 2012, p. 10)

Here, the Labour Party rather than the press received the blame for the public’s lack of trust. Only few stories touched on the need for the press to build public trust (Huhne 2013, p. 28). The implication of this manner of coverage for democracy is that the problem of lack of public trust is not addressed and as such is not tackled. The need to pay more attention to the issue of public trust is given credence by the results of a survey carried out by YouGov which shows that only 7 per cent of the public trust newspapers to behave responsibly (Media Standards Trust 2009) while as much as 75 per cent believe “newspapers frequently publish stories they know are inaccurate” (Ibid., n.p.). Such a high level of lack of trust in the media can result in a breakdown of effective communication between the media and the public.

As discussed in Chap. 2, the media plays a very important role in modern democracy. It serves as a medium for information dissemination and mobilisation to many in society. Where trust between the press and the public becomes eroded, people may lose faith in deliberations in the media’s public sphere, no longer depend on the press for information or not take the content of their productions seriously. This can impact

negatively on effective governance as well as on the political, economic and social wellbeing of any society. If citizens are no longer interested in debates within the public sphere, this will of course impact on their participation in debates about media policy. One of the consequences is that they would neglect their role in ensuring effective media reform. Unlike “public trust”, the issue of the “public interest” was given substantial space at the top of the narrative structure of stories on media reform, making it the third issue of concern in the hierarchy of importance. It was surpassed only by “press freedom” and “arguments against press law and statutory regulations”. Overall, it appeared at the top of the narrative structure in 10.8 per cent of the issues at the top.

As discussed in Chap. 2, the press had often used the public interest defence as an excuse to invade the privacy of people with a public profile and indulge in other clandestine activities. The controversy in defining what constitutes the public interest is what prompted Lord Justice Leveson to propose an optional pre-publication advice service for newspaper editors (Leveson 2012, para. 62, p. 15). Ironically, the journalistic metadiscourse on the coverage of the inquiry and the ensuing debate on press standards also faced the controversy of what exactly constitutes the public interest; even conflicting arguments were said to be in the public interest. Both sub-interpretive spheres of discourse (*Guardian* versus *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*) stressed the importance of journalism done in the public interest. Newspapers in both spheres laid claim to practising journalism in the public interest. Such claims were usually made when they felt the need to repair their crusader image.

For instance, when the *Guardian* newspaper discovered it was wrong in accusing the *News of the World* of deleting messages from the voicemail of the murdered school girl, Milly Dowler, the story that attempted to acknowledge its mistake had as its headline: “Leveson report: Judge addresses *Guardian*’s story on hacking of Milly Dowler’s phone: Report praises paper’s public interest journalism NoW probably did not delete voicemail messages” (Booth 2012, p. 15). *The Sun* did the same when some of its staff were arrested for allegedly making payments to public officials for stories (Kavanagh 2012a, p. 12). Similarly, *Daily Mirror* while trying to promote the press’ Royal Charter on press regulation, which was later rejected, said: “The *Daily Mirror* is committed to high-quality journalism in the public interest, giving the working people of Britain a voice in the corridors of power” (Daily Mirror 2013, p. 8). Journalism done in

the public interest is one of the normative expectations of journalism in a democratic society. The use of “public interest” as a defence and image repair strategy explains why it emerged as one of the key subjects of the debate even though it received far less attention than the issue of press freedom (see Table 10.1). Indeed, the subject of “public interest” served different purposes in the journalistic metadiscourse of the press reform debate that followed the phone hacking scandal. One way it functioned was as a reason for the press’ opposition to statutory regulation. For example, an article in *The Sun* stated:

But let’s not bring good journalism to its knees in the process by introducing state regulation that can and would be used by those seeking to stifle genuine wrongdoing that is firmly in the public interest. (Moore 2011, p. 13)

The statement is one of many comments made to drive home the point that statutory underpinning would endanger public interest journalism. It was used by *Daily Express* when it rebuked the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) for allowing itself to be “brainwashed by Leftist dogma”:

Shamefully, it [the NUJ] has joined the calls for statutory press regulation, arguing that the “right to free expression cannot be absolute” but must be “balanced by the public interest”. To a Left-winger the “public interest” means the suppression of unacceptable opinions. (*Daily Express*, 29 November 2012, p. 14)

*The Sun* advanced the same argument in an article with the headline “Regulating the press is not in public interest ... it’s in the interests of politicians; 300 years of freedom under threat this week” (Hodges 2013, p. 10). The article debunked claims by politicians on the left that their argument for the Royal Charter on press regulation to be underpinned by statute was because it was in the public interest. It stated:

And ask yourself if they really are pressing for media regulation because they think it’s in the “public interest”. The answer, of course, is it is nothing to do with the public interest. It is all about their interests. This week 300 years of Press freedom is in the balance. And it could end because our politicians want it to. (ibid.)

The press also debunked claims by campaign organisations that their call for press laws was in the public interest. It then went on to promote



the discourse of the British press as an architect of “journalism in the public interest”, each paper or class of paper promoting itself as working in the interest of the public. *The Sun* quoted Tim Luckhurst, a Professor of Journalism at Kent University, as saying: “Popular newspapers are bold defenders of the public interest. It protects our liberties and holds power to account. MPs should search their conscience and vote for freedom of expression unlimited by state intervention” (Dunn 2013, pp. 6–7). The press debunked the claims of all other parties in the debate to the pursuit of a form of journalism that would be in the public interest while maintaining that the journalism being practised by the British press was in the public interest. It can be argued that such arguments sought, amongst others, to maintain the status quo in press standards (Beckford 2012, p. 21). In summary, the emergence of high mentions of the “public interest” at the top of the narrative structure on the press reform debate did not reflect concern for the public; it was instead used for self-interested purposes such as protecting the crusader image of the press and arguing against statutory regulation or underpinning of press regulation. One area where the “public interest” clause is often quoted by journalists is in defence of invasion of privacy. When can privacy invasion be in the public interest?

It is worthy of note that one of the major contentions in the press reform debate was how to strike a balance between the protection of press freedom and the protection of privacy. While campaigners for victims sought to protect privacy (O’Carroll 2013, n.p.), much of the press channelled their resources towards the protection of the neoliberal concept of press freedom (Forsyth 2013, p. 15). All newspapers examined appeared to have been against more privacy laws (Roberts 2011, n.p.; Embley 2012, pp. 8–9; Forsyth 2012, p. 12; Kampfner 2012, p. 29; Moir 2012, n.p.). Instances where this was demonstrated include the coverage of the invasion into the privacy of the Duchess of Cambridge in France (Greenslade 2012, n.p.; Kampfner 2012, p. 29) and the response of the French press to ex-IMF (International Monetary Fund) boss Dominique Strauss-Kahn’s alleged sexual escapades (Forsyth 2012, p. 12; Kavanagh 2012b, p. 10). Newspapers in both spheres pointed to these as proof that proper self-regulation, not more privacy laws, was what the British press needed as can be seen in the *Guardian*’s article with the headline “Proper self-regulation works better than the law to protect privacy”. The article stated:

The court victory secured on behalf of Prince William and his wife certainly doesn't prove that the French privacy law is so good that we should have one here. Just the opposite. (Greenslade 2012, n.p.)

There were, however, some differences in the depth and treatment of the issue of privacy among the papers. *Guardian's* treatment of privacy consisted of analyses of academic works on the issue of privacy, news on incidents of invasion of privacy by the press, critical analysis of the Leveson Inquiry's proposals on privacy and discussions on regulations on privacy as contained in the Royal Charter on press regulation. Like all other papers in the study sample, *Guardian* newspaper was against the proposal of exemplary fines for papers who refuse to sign up to the new regulatory body even if the paper wins the case as can be seen in its article headlined "Tory and Leveson plans for exemplary privacy damages 'may be unlawful' " (O'Carroll 2013, n.p.) but its opposition to it was not as intense as that from other papers. It argued that the printed press could overlook that flaw in the Royal Charter and still sign up to it. One key distinguishing feature between *Guardian's* treatment of the issue of privacy and that of some other papers was that it rarely used the platform of discussions on privacy to criticise campaigners for tighter privacy laws.

The *Daily Telegraph's* treatment of the subject of privacy was closer in form to that of *Guardian* newspaper in that its opposition to tighter privacy laws was not as intense as those of *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*. This may not be unconnected to the fact that *Guardian* and *Daily Telegraph* are both quality newspapers. However, there was not much in-depth analysis on the issue of privacy in *Daily Telegraph*. Most of *Daily Telegraph's* articles on privacy were in its news section (Adams 2011, p. 17; Rayner 2012, p. 7) as if it deliberately avoided giving opinion on the issue of privacy. The few discussions on privacy were mainly warnings that privacy invasion by the internet was a bigger problem than that done by the printed press (Johnson 2012, p. 24).

*The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* were not that cautious in their approach to the coverage of privacy. The bulk of their stories on privacy were attacks against those who campaigned for tighter privacy laws, both celebrities and representatives of campaign organisations. Unlike the *Guardian* and *Daily Telegraph*, they minced no words in expressing their revulsion against tighter privacy laws and the people who propagate such arguments, as can be seen in this article from *Daily Mail* newspaper:

Sienna Miller is on the cover of *Vogue* this month and, if not actually invading her own privacy, then at least tiptoeing across it over five gorgeously scrumptious pages inside ... In the accompanying interview, Sienna talks about being the subject of sustained paparazzi interest ... 'Miller said; That level of scrutiny has a massive effect on me personally .... It was just a fishbowl.' Yet isn't it laughably hypocritical of her to dive naked into that very same fishbowl when it suits? ... Don't make me laugh. Sienna is handled with the kiddiest of kid gloves the interviewer wonders if Miller will marry fellow British actor Tom Sturridge, the father of her four-month-old child, but refrains from asking. She doesn't want to pry! Is this really what the British press has come to? What a joke. (Moir 2012, n.p.)

Though as tactless with words as the other three (if not more), *The Sun* gave privacy minimal attention (see Table 10.1). On all four fronts, there was little or no in-depth analysis on privacy protection. The stories centred on their campaign against tighter privacy laws and news narratives on incidents of privacy invasion which, it can be argued, served as entertainment to their readers. In summary, the treatment of the issue of privacy in the journalistic metadiscourse on the debate that followed the phone hacking scandal was largely shallow and characterised by a lack of self-appraisal. This finding confirms the claim by previous studies which say the press avoids or gives limited coverage to criticisms against themselves and that journalistic metadiscourse is characterised by a lack of self-critique (Eason 1988; Haas 2006, cited in Carlson 2015, p. 9; Alexander et al. 2016). A similar argument posits that alternative views are marginalised and/or silenced in debates about the media (Casey et al. 2008, p. 194; Savigny 2016, p. 12). The next section discusses alternative views in the journalistic metadiscourse on the press reform debate and the implication of such manner of coverage.

### THE MEDIA POLICY DEBATE: ALTERNATIVE VIEWS

Aforementioned scholars have argued that alternative solutions that do not fall in line with popular views in the public domain receive minimal treatment thereby narrowing the options placed in the public sphere for deliberation. In this book, alternative views refer to all views in the debate that were not mainstream arguments. This comprised views that were not common, were different from popular opinion or only featured occasionally. After a preliminary study of articles on the coverage, I came up with



The next in line was the view “strengthen checks on concentration of media ownership”. This view followed with far fewer occurrences, with 14.4 per cent of alternative views. It was advanced in greater proportion by the *Guardian* newspaper, making up 24 per cent of its alternative views. It emerged as 16.7 per cent of the *Daily Mirror*’s alternative views, 14.5 per cent of *Daily Telegraph*’s, 4.5 per cent of *Daily Mail*’s, 3.8 per cent of *The Sun*’s and not at all in *Daily Express*’ alternative views. The results suggest this argument may have been stifled in the commercial press due to a conflict of interest caused by concentration of media ownership (McChesney 2008). The alternative views that received the fewest representations were “cultural revolution of journalists and proprietors is key” to media reform and “do not expect too much from the press” emerging as 5.1 per cent and 5.6 per cent, respectively, of alternative views in the coverage of the media policy debate.

One view that was not included in the list of alternative views but turned out to be an alternative view was that the process of getting a new press regulatory body was rushed and that with more time they could have arrived at a decision that was acceptable to all parties (Rusbridger 2013, p. 26). Though this call for more time was included in the dominant themes table, it appeared as the dominant theme, “more dialogue needed”, in only 0.6 per cent of the study sample and only in the *Guardian* newspaper. Another such theme was that press membership to the new press regulatory body should be made compulsory by law (Cathcart 2013, n.p.). Though this view had the potential to prevent the Desmond syndrome (a media organisation refusing to join the press regulatory body—Desmond 2015, p. 291), it was, apparently, nipped in the bud and was not developed by any of the newspapers.

## CONCLUSION

The coverage of the debate that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal demonstrates that during debates about their policy, the media allocate more quality space to arguments perceived to be in their interest than to those considered to be against their interest. For example, warnings of threat to “press freedom” featured more frequently than any other theme at the top of the narrative structure of news articles on the media policy debate while arguments against self-regulation and against the new press regulatory system formed by the press were among issues that had the fewest occurrences within this sphere of importance (the first two

paragraphs of a news story). The advantage of featuring more prominently within this space is that the views expressed at the top of the story would likely get more reads than others lower down in the narrative structure of the story because more people tend to read the first few paragraphs of a story even when they do not read the whole article.

The emergence of quality media reform would require robust debates on media policy within a democratic public sphere. There is need for equality in the representation of views on media policy. Views and issues of concern should be accorded priority in a news article not because they are the position of the media but because of the weight of their importance in the debate. Failure to do so will disadvantage ideas, some of which may contribute to the emergences of strong media reforms. My investigation revealed that though prominent space was given to the issue of the “public interest”, discussions related to the subject were aimed at asserting the importance of newspaper, each newspaper claiming that they practice journalism in the public interest. The various interpretations of “public interest” in the journalistic metadiscourse demonstrate that the problem of “what constitutes the public interest” is far from over. Considering the impact of irresponsible journalism on society, it is high time the public started playing an active role in defining what constitutes the public interest. For example, the public can become more vocal in criticising news publications that are not in the public interest, support newspapers that engage in public interest journalism and withdraw their patronage from defaulting newspapers.

This chapter also analysed alternative views; these are arguments expressed in the media policy debate which were given very little attention. The alternative views expressed in the debate that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry are “enforce existing laws on crimes such as phone hacking”, instead of the introduction of more stringent regulations; “strengthen checks on concentration of media ownership”; “avoid all forms of Royal Charter”; promote “cultural revolution of journalists and proprietors”; “people should not expect too much from the press” and the view that “some level of privacy invasion is a necessary hazard of a free press”. There was also a call for more time for dialogue towards arriving at a media policy reform acceptable to all parties involved. The manner of coverage of the press reform debate did not encourage the exploration of these and other alternative views to press reform. This agrees with the argument of Savigny (2016, p. 12) that alternative views are marginalised or silenced in debates about the media. The

coverage of the press reform debate facilitated a zero-sum game of “statutory” or “no statutory” regulation/underpinning. All other arguments fed these two positions. The debate was too narrow and lacked robustness such that other options, for example, public reformism, were not explored as a means of achieving press accountability. This manner of coverage is toxic to democracy.

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## Conclusion

Democracy feeds from people's participation in their own governance (Lincoln 2009 [1863]). That would, from the maximalist approach to democracy, require citizens' participation in the decision-making processes of matters concerning them (Lipset and Lakin 2004, p. 20; Ewald 2013, p. 52). One way this is done is through citizens' participation in public debates within a democratic public space, what Habermas (1989) refers to as the public sphere. In today's large democracies, the media serves as a space for public debates with the hope that through such debates, it can impact on policy decisions. The normative expectation is that the media ought to serve as a democratic public sphere, not only during debates about other institutions in society but also during debates about their policy. Aforementioned studies contend that this has not been the case (Stiegler 2013; Carlson and Berkowitz 2014). The susceptibility of the media to exploit their power as the facilitators of the public sphere to promote their views above those of other stakeholders during debates about their policy gives relevance to the study of the coverage on media policy debates.

The study of the coverage of media policy debates thus serves as an accountability system to check abuse of this public sphere by the media during debates about their policy. The *NoTW* phone hacking scandal provided an opportunity for this study because it stirred up a debate on press reform that was widely covered by the press. Broadly speaking, the book attempted to show how the media covered the press reform debate that

arose from the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. Its hope was that in the process, it would provide information for stakeholders (including members of the public, policymakers, campaigners for media reform and academics, amongst others) on how to ensure effective media reform in addition to enlightening readers on how to consume metacoverage on media policy. Let me pause here to briefly explain how the terms “metacoverage”, “metajournalistic discourse” and “journalistic metadiscourse” were used in this book.

In this book, metacoverage refers to all types of self-coverage by the media. In Chap. 5, I argued that because of the original meaning and composition of the word, it should not be limited to journalists covering themselves during political campaigns as used by previous scholars (Esser et al. 2001). As explained in Chap. 5, the word “meta”, in this context, is a Greek preposition meaning “with, after” (Liddell et al. 2015 [1883]). The use of the word as a prefix in the English language became popular in the nineteenth century. Examples are words like “meta-thorax”, “metaphor” and “metabolic” (Dixon 2014, pp. 165–166). It also metamorphosed into the term “self-referential”. One way in which it is used is that “a *meta-X* is an “X” describing an “X”” (ibid.). An example is metadata which means data about data (Baca 2008, p. 1). In this book, I argued that considering the composition of the word “metacoverage” (coverage about coverage) and the fact that self-referential media coverage is diverse, the word can adequately be used as an umbrella term for all forms of self-referential coverage by the media. Based on this, this book advocates that metacoverage be defined as all forms of self-referential coverage by the media.

Going by that definition, the discussion in this book falls within the category of metacoverage in the field of journalism, what Brin and Drolet (2009, p. 271) described as journalistic metadiscourse. I explained, in Chap. 5, that journalistic metadiscourse is what Carlson (2015) referred to as metajournalistic discourse on journalistic platforms (see Chap. 5). My analysis of the journalistic metadiscourse of the press reform debate was based on a study of how the debate was covered in six of the top ten British national newspapers (based on combined print and online readership figures for April 2011 to March 2012, NRS PADD 2012), two from each class of newspaper (at the time of investigation). For quality newspapers, I examined *Guardian* and *Daily Telegraph*; representing the mid-markets were *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail*, and for the red top tabloid newspapers, I examined *The Sun* and *Daily Mirror*.

The research used the method of content analysis and some principles from critical discourse analysis to investigate how these newspapers covered the media reform debate. The results revealed that there were two spheres of discourse in the press coverage of the debate. The spheres of discourse were referred to, in this book, as sub-interpretive spheres. *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* made up one sub-interpretive sphere while *Guardian* advanced the second sphere of discourse. The sphere to which many of the newspapers belonged interpreted press freedom based on neoliberal ideologies which advocated press self-regulation without state interference. While the second sub-interpretive sphere consisting of the *Guardian* newspaper welcomed state interference in the form of a statute-backed press regulatory body, arguing that minimal state intervention in press regulation to check press accountability would not result in a loss of press freedom. I argued that the *Guardian's* style of coverage of the press reform debate leaned towards a social democratic approach.

Analysing findings from my investigation based on these two spheres helped to reveal the major division in the press' attempt to maintain, assert and/or renegotiate their professional boundaries through journalistic metadiscourse in the aftermath of the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal. The grouping of newspapers into spheres of discourse does not mean there were no differences among newspapers within the same sphere. What it means is that newspapers in the same sphere had similar interpretations on major issues in the debate. The uniqueness and difference in interpretation of each of the newspapers were also considered in the analysis. In showing how the debate was covered, I explored how paradigm repair strategies were used in the coverage, the extent to which they were used, the way sources were used, how blame was attributed and the quality of space given to the various arguments in the coverage of the press reform debate that followed the phone hacking scandal.

My investigation revealed that the press used five paradigm repair strategies to protect as well as repair its "press freedom" and "crusader image" paradigms. In agreement with the findings of Thomas and Finneman (2014), this study found that the press used the strategies of (1) "threat to the paradigm" (warning of threats to journalism's paradigms, also catastrophisation); (2) "self-assertion" (affirming journalism's value to a democratic society); (3) "minimisation" (downplaying the significance of the phone hacking scandal and therefore questioning the legitimacy of the inquiry) and (4) "individualisation" (localising the damage to acts

committed by a handful of journalists, also bad apples or localisation) in their representation of the press reform debate. I added to this a fifth one, the strategy of “historicisation” (using history to explicate contemporary meaning [in this case, the press’ preferred meaning]).

“Threat to the paradigm” was the dominant paradigm strategy used in the coverage. All newspapers examined in my investigation, apart from *Guardian*, used a high percentage of their space to warn that any form of state intervention in press regulation was a threat to press freedom. Linguistic devices such as hyperboles, “you centeredness” or direct address, adjectives and doom-laden rhetoric were used to spread the warning that press freedom was under attack. This affirms that when media scandals lead to calls for further regulation of the press, the resultant debate is often constructed in journalistic metadiscourse as a threat to press freedom (Carlson 2012; Steel 2012). While not completely ruling out the existence of such threats, consumers of journalistic metadiscourse will need to take into consideration the political economy behind such claims.

In Chap. 6, I showed how the coverage featured a blame game demonstrating a lack of willingness to accept change to the status quo. Blame was first accepted before self-exoneration strategies (individualisation, bad apples, localisation) were used to deflect the blame to other institutions, journalists or media organisations. For instance, blame for the phone hacking scandal was attributed to the criminal justice system, the Press Complaints Commission (PCC), other newspaper proprietors, politicians, technology, job constraints and commercialism. So, though there was wide acknowledgement of wrongdoing by the press, such acknowledgements only served as platforms from which blame was deflected to others. This made the high percentage of attribution of blame to journalists appear hypocritical. In Chap. 7, I argued that the apologies were probably a PR stunt to attract forgiveness from the public in order to retain their patronage. The strategy of historicisation was used in a similar fashion. It was used to acknowledge press bad behaviour, but in some cases, the detailed description of the bad behaviour served as infotainment (information designed to entertain). Infotainment can be detrimental to democracy because it can lead to the dumbing down of news and make the public a consumer audience, whose appetite is assuaged by such coverage (McManus 1994, p. 24; Franklin 1997). This can distract the public from active participation in efforts at reforming the press.

My investigation also revealed that measures aimed at ensuring press accountability were interpreted in the sub-interpretive sphere comprising *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* as unfair, illegitimate, unnecessary, a waste of resources, harmful to the reputation of the country and motivated by a thirst for revenge. This book showed that the strategy of minimisation (see Chap. 5) was used to achieve this. It was used to denigrate people and institutions that advocated any policy perceived as not being in the interest of the commercial press. Among those de-legitimised were the Leveson Inquiry, the Royal Charter on press self-regulation, politicians, victims of press abuse and campaigners for victims of press abuse. The press' minimisation of opposing views, along with the arguers of such views, shows how the media take advantage of their position as the facilitators of the public sphere to trivialise and denigrate efforts at reforming the press in a bid to prevent checks on news gathering methods that may destroy lives while generating high readership, power and money (McChesney 2008, p. 451). Measures aimed at ensuring press accountability were described as a "chilling effect on investigative journalism", "state control", "slippery slope to licensing of the press" and a loss of "300 years of press freedom". From these constructions, it can be seen that efforts at reforming the press were mostly portrayed in a negative light. The *Guardian* newspaper challenged most of these representations, and especially the claim that a statutorily backed press regulatory body would result in a loss of "300 years of press freedom". However, it did not sign up to the Royal Charter on press regulation, raising doubts questions about the motive of its position in the media reform debate.

The strategy of self-assertion (also self-affirmation or self-justification) emerged as a minor theme designed to assert the importance of journalism within articles that stressed that a statutorily backed regulatory body would pose a threat to press freedom. This strategy was also used to protect the crusader image of the press when it comes under attack because of deviant behaviour. For example, when the *Guardian* realised that *News of the World* may not have deleted the voicemail of Milly Dowler as the paper had earlier published, the strategy of self-assertion was used to highlight the crusader attributes of the paper. When such self-affirmations emerge in journalistic metadiscourse on media reform debates, it is very likely that some error has been committed.

In terms of access to the media's public sphere, this book argues that the coverage of media reform debates features a doubly narrow spectrum

of sources. I described it as “doubly narrow” because the range of sources was narrow, and within the narrow spectrum, press-related sources dominated the discourse. The sources used were categorised into press-related sources, policymakers, sources related to press abuse victims, Leveson and the Royal Charter, the judiciary, the police, academics, business organisations and ordinary members of the public (any individual not linked to a corporate body). The content analysis results showed that press-related sources were the most used (46.1 per cent) while ordinary citizens were the least used (1.6 per cent), demonstrating that the press gave disproportionate access to its own interpretations in the debate, to the detriment of the arguments of other stakeholders. I critiqued the representation of victims as “the stakeholders” rather than “a stakeholder” of the debate. While acknowledging the importance of the victims to the debate, I argued that limiting the stakeholder status to those who had been hurt by the press results in a limited range of views and risks shutting down more neutral voices that could have enriched the press reform debate.

The coverage followed a trend in which arguments perceived to be in the media’s self-interest were given more quality space (high up in the narrative structure) than those considered to be against their interest. For example, “press freedom” featured more frequently than any other theme at the top of the narrative structure while arguments “against self-regulation” and “against the new press regulation formed by the press” were among issues that had the least appearances at the top of the narrative structure. This is one example of how the gatekeeping powers of the media are prone to abuse when the media cover debates about their policy. This privileging of the press over other stakeholders in the media policy debate was more prominent in *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* than in *Guardian* newspaper. I argue that this manner of coverage can have an adverse effect on efforts at ensuring effective media reform because the bulk of the arguments that gets transmitted to the public may be those that protect the status quo in media regulation.

The issue of “public trust” received only minimal coverage, showing the need to give this issue more attention in debates about press standards. There were some alternative views in the debate that can be further explored. They include the need to make press membership to a reformed press regulatory body compulsory by law, enforce existing laws on crimes such as phone hacking, strengthen checks on concentration of media ownership, allocate more time to discussions on media reform and promote cultural revolution of journalists and proprietors. Unlike what Stiegler

(2013, p. 137) found with the coverage of net neutrality in 2010, the media policy debate that followed the phone hacking scandal received very wide coverage in the press. While the overall wide coverage is commendable, a close look at the number of articles from each newspaper reveals an uneven amount of coverage among the newspapers. The bulk of the articles came from *Guardian* newspaper (323 out of 870). It was followed by *Daily Telegraph* with 199 articles and *Daily Mail* with 173 stories. The *Sun*, *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Express* were not that liberal with their coverage of the media policy debate having only 96, 51 and 28 news articles on the debate, respectively. The implications of the overall coverage will be the focus of the next section.

### COVERAGE OF MEDIA POLICY

The way the media covered the press reform debate that emanated from the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal reveals trends in the coverage of media policy that warrant scrutiny because from an understanding of the manner of coverage would come insight into how to manage the coverage of media policy in such a way that it does not weaken media reform. Clearly, the press did not serve as democratic public sphere in its coverage of the debate. Instead, the press used its gatekeeping powers to advance its own views while limiting or preventing arguments which were against its self-interest from gaining entrance into the public sphere. It can be argued that this reduced the quality of the debate on press reform by inhibiting the kind of robust deliberations that produce plurality of views on media reform (ibid., p. 36). What emerged was a manner of coverage in which diverse paradigm repair strategies were used by the commercial press to give prominence to a discourse based on neoliberal ideologies where the press can only be self-regulated and where government must not intervene in press regulation if the press must be free to hold power to account.

Proponents of social democracy argue that this neoliberal conceptualisation of press freedom primarily serves the business interest of media owners who use the “threat to press freedom” argument as a weapon against any form of regulation that restricts their ability to invade the privacy of public figures in search of scoops that will improve the sale and readership of their papers (Pickard 2015, p. 4), what Curran and Seaton (2010) described as a struggle to maintain “power without responsibility”.



While I agree that the press should be free from state control in order to serve as the watchdog of the powerful in society, I am also of the view that some level of statutory regulation can enhance rather than inhibit democracy (Cushion 2012, p. 198; Heywood 2017, p. 123). However, the focus of this book is not to advocate either social democratic or neoliberal perspectives but to contend that the media ought to serve as a democratic public sphere, a space where robust debates on diverse perspectives of media reform can hold. Such robust debates have the capacity to produce quality approaches to media reform. Neoliberal perspectives ought not to be hegemonic in debates about media policy.

However, this book documented that *Guardian* newspaper toed the social democratic line of argument, arguing that a little dab of statute to prevent the Royal Charter from being abrogated easily (the law establishing it cannot be repealed without a two-thirds majority from both Houses of Parliament) will not amount to a loss of press freedom. As I pointed in Chap. 5, the fact that *Guardian* newspaper challenged the neoliberal perspectives of the other newspapers demonstrates that there was some level of diversity in the coverage, but the level of diversity was minimal. Though it can be argued that *Guardian* had a high amount of coverage (323 out of 870 news articles) on the debate, it is important to note that all of its articles were read by only its print readership of 4.06 million between 2011 and 2012 (readership figures for April 2011 to March 2012, NRS PADD 2012). As stated earlier, even with its combined print and online readership of about nine million, the circulation of *Guardian* is much lower than the combined readership of the other five newspapers: 20.5 million print and 49.4 million combined print and online readership (readership figures for April 2011 to March 2012, NRS PADD 2012). This coverage reveals an imbalance in the potential power of influence between the neoliberal and the social democratic press. The danger this poses to democracy is that neoliberal perspective will dominate the public sphere producing a narrow spectrum of views. And as Cushion (2018) has shown, the influence of the print media goes beyond its readership because it sometimes serves as a secondary source of information to the British broadcast media. Therefore, such manner of coverage can result in popular support for policies that are based on only neoliberal views, even when those views are based on self-interest.

And, indeed, the promotion of self-interest was evident in the coverage. Arguments perceived as not being in the interests of the press were accorded a weak position in the hierarchy of importance in news narrative;

alternative views were blocked out and paradigm repair strategies were used to protect news paradigms. All these combined to keep quality options that could have provided effective checks on press power. What emerged was a zero-sum game of “statutory” or “no statutory” regulation. Several other options and alternative views were not explored. For example, despite its huge potential to do so, there was not much talk about how the public could help to reform the press.

The length the commercial press went to protect its neoliberal perception of press freedom is disturbing. The study of the coverage highlighted the enormous gatekeeping powers in the hands of the press and its ability to use them to its advantage to the detriment of any person or institution that dares to rise against it (Stiegler 2013, p. 137). There is obviously a need for such powers to come under check because they have the potential to give birth to autocracy and inequality in society (Rozell and Mayer 2008, p. 328). Steps need to be taken to ensure that the press serves as a democratic public sphere not only when it covers other institutions, but also when it covers debates about its policies.

This book recommends that measures to ensure a democratic public sphere should come from within and outside the press. From within, the press needs to make conscious efforts to ensure that it serves as a democratic public space during debates about its policies. That means the range of sources should be more diverse to represent all sections of society; the press should not take undue advantage of its position as the facilitator of the public sphere to dominate the discourse; key issues of concern in the debate should be given proportionate space in the news narrative; and the conceptualisation of “the stakeholders of the press” should be expanded to include more neutral voices outside celebrities and other victims of press abuse. Taking the position that the ownership structure was responsible for the emergence of two sub-interpretive spheres, I recommend that efforts to diversify news content should go beyond plurality of owners to plurality of business models.

However, I acknowledge that drawing up a list of recommendations for the press to follow does not axiomatically translate into a cultural revolution of the press. It will require willingness on the part of the press to become a democratic public sphere before it can adopt any of these recommendations. This book recognises the challenge in asking the press to serve as a democratic public sphere during debates about themselves because bias is inevitable and every organisation or industry may exhibit some level of bias in its own favour (Elmessiri 2006, p. 49; Livermore

2011, p. 50). However, the fact that bias is inevitable does not mean action cannot be taken to check bias in self-coverage. That is why steps to make the press accountable should also come from outside the press. Many appear to have recognised this fact but have narrowed their gaze to the state as being the only custodian of the public interest (Heywood 2017, p. 123). It is high time the public took their place as major custodians of their own interest.

One media accountability system with huge potential to reform the press, yet is underexplored, is non-governmental public reformism. Public reformism seeks to improve the standard and viability of journalism through concerted action (Curran 2011, p. 31), such actions as could enhance the democratic performance of the media. Examples of such actions include strategies to promote a public interest culture among professional journalists, the public ownership and funding of leading broadcasting organisations, subsidising minority newspapers, public action to support independent news production and giving vouchers to citizens for annual donation to a news medium of their choice who has fulfilled some public interest function including offering free access to online news (ibid.).

In agreement with Curran's call for public reformism (ibid.), Pickard suggests that public media be strengthened to sustain the journalism that the commercial media no longer supports (Pickard 2015, pp. 228–231). Freedman (2014, pp. 104–106) also recognises the power of the public to reform the press and induce it to fulfil its role in the sustenance of democracy. According to Freedman, “developments like the internet have not only undermined the power of the traditional gatekeepers but have put in their place, a ‘public society’ to which there can be no meaningful resistance” (ibid.). Jarvis (2011) puts it this way:

Publicness is a sign of our empowerment at their expense. Dictators and politicians, media moguls and marketers try to tell us what to think and say. But now in a truly public society, they must listen to what we say. (Jarvis 2011, p. 11)

Despite the threat of oligopoly and manipulation of online platforms by corporate internet giants like Google and Facebook alongside other elite voices, the power of the public to serve as a force for media reform is still very tangible (Castells 2013). In his *The Contradictions of Media Power*, Freedman (2014, pp. 25–30) acknowledged the power of the public to

reform the press. One area of public reformism that has not been much explored is public reformism without government intervention. A major component of public reformism that is void of government intervention is “the willpower of the public”. Willpower is defined by McGonigal (2011, p. 8) as “the ability to control our attention, emotion, and desires”. Riley (2011, p. 3) views willpower as “the attitude of the mind which is directed with conscious attention to some action”. Willpower has often been analysed in terms of self-control: how to break bad habits such as overcoming addictions, eating less and sticking to your resolutions. Most of these are things that relate to the individual’s self-development. This is what I refer to as “willpower as an internal force for self-development”.

But willpower can also be used to change societies (Baumeister and Tierney 2012). That is what I refer to as “willpower as an external force for societal development”. In line with the argument of some psychologists (McGonigal 2011; Riley 2011, pp. 1–2; Taylor 2017) that willpower can be used to “create the life you want”, I argue that the public can direct their willpower to create the press they want. The saying “we get the press we deserve” (Gladstone et al. 2011; Boston 2015) makes sense when viewed under the lenses of willpower. It can therefore be argued that the public’s inaction and/or action have played a major role in the manner of press we have and can play a major role in what it becomes. The public has power to reform the press. That is not to say the public is the sole solution to all forms of degeneration in the public sphere. What it means is that the public can play a key role in ensuring an accountable press, the kind of press that can efficiently serve democracy. The public is not the helpless and powerless victim of press power as some have described them (Salter 2007). The problem is that the public is yet to fully grasp the enormous power it possesses, one which can be used to effectively reform the press. As Tom Baistow pointed out:

There is no shortage of ideas, as the evidence of the Royal Commission showed. Only the will is lacking. If we don’t generate that among both public and parliament we shall end up with the press we deserve, but the press no real democracy can afford. (Baistow 2015 [1970], p. 56)

Baistow observed that “it will take considerable time and a conscious, organized effort to educate” the public to use their willpower for press reform (ibid.). McGonigal (2011) found that the brain can be trained for greater willpower. Similarly, Baumeister and Tierney (2012, p. 1) show us

that willpower is like a muscle that can be strengthened with practice. All these go to show that with adequate enlightenment, orientation and sensitisation, the public can recognise their power to reform the press and use it effectively. The willpower of citizens can be used to purchase or not purchase newspapers; to visit or not to visit a news website; to boycott the patronage of a newspaper in diverse ways and so on. In fact, the 2019 *Guardian's* financial success was largely attributed to the public. Waterson (2018) wrote, “The *Guardian* and the *Observer* have broken even for the first time in recent history aided by record online traffic, reduced costs and increased financial contributions from readers”. The public can decide to fund public interest journalism through such contributions.

There have been other instances in the past where the public has used its willpower to challenge press excesses or perceived misconduct. An example is the reaction of the public to *The Sun* newspaper's coverage of the 1989 Hillsborough disaster in which 96 football fans died (Scraton 2005, pp. 62–74; 2016). In Liverpool, members of the public and non-governmental groups such as [anfieldroad.com](http://anfieldroad.com) and the Hillsborough Justice Campaign (HJC) staged boycotts against *The Sun* newspaper to protest the paper's publication of false information blaming Liverpool football fans for the Hillsborough disaster (Anfield Road 2007; *Contrast.org* 2017a, b; Conn 2017). Another instance is the public outcry against the *News of the World* for hacking into the voicemail of murdered school girl Milly Dowler, in addition to other acts of phone hacking (see Chap. 1). The public outrage and its publicity resulted in advertisers withdrawing patronage and the eventual closure of the newspaper in July 2011.

Non-governmental agencies can also choose to ban reporters of errant newspapers from covering their programmes especially where such programmes sell. An example is Everton Football Club who banned *The Sun* newspaper journalists from their football stadium, Goodison Park, and their Finch Farm training ground after one of *The Sun's* columnists, Kelvin MacKenzie (it so happened that this same person was the paper's editor at the time of the Hillsborough incident), likened one of their players, Ross Barkley, who is of mixed race, to a gorilla (Parveen 2017).

In all the examples, public outrage drew apologies from the newspapers involved and touched one of their soft spots—their readership (Cozens 2004). In the case of the *News of the World*, they paid the ultimate price—closure. It would, however, be stretching willpower too far if it is used indiscriminately to frustrate media organisations out of business. As Baumeister and Tierney (2012, p. 1) discovered, there can also be

excessive use of willpower. Effective discipline is one that leads to change not destruction. With the decline in the sales of newspapers (the circulation of UK national dailies plunged from 11.5 million daily copies in 2008 to 5.8 million in 2018), media reform needs to ensure that it averts rather than enhances the death of newspapers (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2019, pp. 25–26). Frequent closures of newspapers will not be beneficial to citizens, society, the economy, media owners and even democracy. That is because it could result in side effects including job losses, a consequent increase in the number of employment benefit recipients and reduced diversity in media platforms.

The need for adequate education on how willpower can be used by the public to reform the press cannot be overemphasised. Non-governmental charities for public interest journalism and journalism institutions can develop a curriculum on how to train members of the public to exercise their power to check press accountability in an informed and productive manner. Care needs to be taken to see that such powers are not hijacked and abused by groups with selfish motives. I do not claim that public reformism will completely eradicate press excesses. What I argue is that sustained and well-managed pragmatism on the part of the public can keep the press in check to a considerable degree. As Stiegler (2013, p. 139) puts it, “With a vocal public who willingly air their grievances, news media are more likely to adhere to ethical standards of journalism”. The public can also develop themselves to understand how the press cover themselves (*ibid.*, p. 138). This can enable them to recognise stories or arguments that are based on self-interest. An informed citizen can make a decision that can aid democracy just as ill-informed citizens can collectively work against democracy. Use of public willpower offers a method of press reform that excludes two potential self-interested parties (the press and the state). Public reformism is only one among several options that can emerge from a debate on media policy in a democratic public sphere. If well developed, taught and managed, non-governmental public reformism can emerge as one of the major ways of sustaining high-quality journalism.

While demanding good behaviour from a child considered to be a deviant [as with the press], it is important to listen to that child to know what he or she sees as impediments to good behaviour. The press has often attributed the increasing dumbing down of quality journalism in the UK to pressure to make ends meet due to loss of revenue caused by the exodus of readers and advertisers to social media who are not as stringently

regulated as the mainstream media. The Cairncross Review acknowledged this as a challenge and made recommendations that if well implemented may help, to some extent, in this regard. The Cairncross Review was set up by the British government in 2019 to investigate the challenges facing high-quality journalism in the UK and to come up with recommendations that can help to secure its future (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2019, p. 5).

### SUSTAINABLE JOURNALISM AND THE CAIRNCROSS REVIEW

The Cairncross Review, which was commissioned by the UK government and led by Dame Frances Cairncross, aimed to find out as well as recommend ways of ensuring a sustainable future for high-quality journalism in the UK. To do this, the Review examined the state of “the news media market, the threats to the financial sustainability of publishers, the impact of search engines and social media platforms, and the role of digital advertising” (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2019, p. 5). The Review received evidence from stakeholders of the media industry including journalists, academics, entrepreneurs and representatives of the media industry. Based on the evidence gathered, it concluded that “the news publishing business is undergoing an extraordinary period of contraction in both of its main traditional sources of revenue: advertising and circulation” (*ibid.*).

Elaborating on the seriousness of the threat to the continued existence of the printed press, the Cairncross Review pointed out that print sales of national and local newspapers have fallen by about 50 per cent in the last decade, between 2007 and 2017, and have continued to drop. The national newspaper daily circulation fell from 11.5 million in 2008 to 5.8 million in 2018. The local newspaper weekly circulation fell from 63.4 million in 2007 to 31.4 million in 2017 while print advertising which was a major source of revenue fell by 69 per cent within the period. The Review pointed out that the proportion of UK adults who read print news each week has fallen from 59 per cent of the adult population in 2013 to 36 per cent in 2018. Majority of people now get news entirely or mostly online. Most online news is available for free and provided by “aggregators such as Google News or Apple News” or “posted on Facebook’s news feed”. As the Review emphasised:

They are much less likely to see the mixed bundle of politics, finance, entertainment and sport that constitutes many papers, and more likely to see an individual story, chosen by a computer program and not necessarily clearly labelled with the name of a particular publisher. (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2019, p. 6)

This manner of news consumption, it argues, has implications for the visibility of public interest news and for trust in news.

Despite the fact that public trust for newspapers was more than that for social media (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2019, p. 5), in 2018, 74 per cent of adults and 91 per cent of 18- to 24-year-olds in the UK searched for news online every week, (Reuters cited in Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2019, p. 6). The Review acknowledged that some mergers are as a result of dwindling revenues in the printed press industry. Dwindling revenue has also resulted in reduced staffing (from 23,000, in 2007 to 17,000 in 2019), closed local offices and lack of funds to invest in the transformations that are needed to stay relevant in the digital age (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2019). As the Review noted, one person in ten in the UK now reads a regional or local printed paper each week (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2019).

In sum, the Cairncross Review sought to find out if the market in which publishers operate is fair, considering the rapid growth of the big online platforms such as Google and Facebook and because traditional news media complained that these online platforms affect the market in such a way that warrants government intervention. As stated earlier, they had complained that online platforms take a large share of the market for advertising and provide the routes that many people use to find news online. The Cairncross Review was, therefore, expected to offer recommendations intended to create a better balance between publishers and platforms, and to persuade the online platforms to use their position in more accountable ways (*ibid.*).

The Cairncross Review recommends that online platforms (Google and Facebook, and possibly Apple) should be required to create codes of conduct that will govern their commercial arrangements with news publishers (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2019, p. 10). A regulator which should have powers to insist on compliance will oversee the setting up of the code of conduct (*ibid.*). This regulator will include members with skills in economics and digital technology. Negotiations between



publishers and online platforms can then be guided by this code. The Cairncross Review advised that “if the powers of the regulator proved insufficient, government should implement stronger measures” (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2019, p. 10). The Review also recommends that the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) should investigate the online advertising market to ensure fair competition (*ibid.*). Through a close examination of “the position of different players, their roles, costs and profitability, the CMA will be able to identify how efficiently the online advertising market is working, and what remedies, if any, are needed” (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2019, p. 10).

The Review advised that online platforms’ efforts at improving their users’ news experience should be placed under regulatory supervision to ensure good quality news provision. The regulator will ensure that online platforms continue and expand the initiatives they have developed to help users identify reliability and trustworthiness of sources. The Cairncross Review recommends that the government should work with Ofcom, the online platforms, news publishers, broadcasters, voluntary organisations and academics to develop a media literacy strategy that would identify gaps in provision and opportunities for more collaborative work (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2019, p. 10). Although the Review was not asked to comment on the BBC, it advised that Ofcom should explore the BBC’s market impact. It wants the BBC to do more to help local publishers, for example, using its technical and digital expertise to direct traffic from its online site to local publishers. The Review recommends that the government launch a fund to help news publishers meet the current need for innovations and transformations in print journalism in the digital era. This new fund will focus on innovations (new approaches and tools) aimed at improving the supply of public interest news. The fund would be managed by Nesta at the start, and in due course by the Institute for Public Interest News which the Review recommends (see later in this chapter).

The Cairncross Review advised the government to introduce two forms of tax relief “aimed at encouraging (1) payments for online news content and (2) the provision of local and investigative journalism” (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2019, p. 10). Under this proposal, the zero-rating of VAT which already exists for the printed news formats will be extended to digital newspapers and magazines, including digital-only news publications. The Review also recommends the creation of a

form of tax relief, under the Charities Act, “but if necessary along the lines of the Creative Sector reliefs, to support public-interest journalism” (ibid.). Simply put, this tax relief involves “extending charitable status to non-profit publishers, who could then enjoy the significant tax advantages” (Townsend 2019, n.p.). This form of tax relief was first proposed by the Lords Communications Committee in 2012 (ibid.).

Direct funding for local public interest news was another recommendation made by the Review. This would entail the modification and expansion of the Local Democracy Reporting Service currently managed by the BBC. As of 2019, the BBC-managed Local Democracy Reporting Service sponsored 144 reporter contracts with local publishers but there have been complaints that only big regional publishers benefitted from the scheme. The Review advised that in due course, management of the service should be passed to, or shared with, the proposed Institute for Public Interest News. One of the key recommendations of the Cairncross Review was its call for the establishment of an Institute for Public Interest News. In collaboration with news publishers, the online platforms, Nesta, Ofcom, the BBC and academic institutions, this body will have the responsibility of promoting efforts aimed at ensuring the future sustainability of public interest news. Here, priority attention would be given to measures which incentivise the provision and consumption of public interest news. Funds for such incentives should emanate from a source that is free from direct government control.

It would be interesting to investigate the execution and outcome of these proposals in future research. How much of these recommendations would be implemented? Where implemented, to what extent did the implementation result in the sustainability of high-quality journalism? Media scholars such as Petley (2018) have called for more clarity in the Review’s definition of high-quality journalism. Based on past and current outcomes from government’s efforts on media policy, there are fears that the funding would end up as a boost to the mainstream printed press to the detriment of local publishers. As (Townsend 2019, n.p.) noted:

Ultimately, the usefulness of this review will stand or fall on whether the government is willing to face down a press lobby which is accustomed to flexing its muscles and—as the Leveson enquiry graphically demonstrated—has successfully bullied successive UK governments for decades.

The sustenance of quality journalism is a top concern of stakeholders of media policy. The sustainability of high-quality journalism in the UK would require on the part of the press the facilitation of a democratic public sphere during their coverage of media policy debates; on the part of the public, knowledge of how to consume journalistic metadiscourse on media policy and more pragmatic participation in efforts at reforming the press; on the part of academics, developing innovative frameworks for non-governmental public reformism; and on the part of the government, a commitment to implementing recommendations in such a way as to achieve their purpose.

Considering the wide readership of news from online platforms, possible research for future studies would be to investigate how online news platforms covered the debate. A comparative analysis between this mainstream coverage and the online coverage of the debate would be useful. Similarly, an empirical study of how the broadcast media covered the media policy debate would help to reveal the differences and similarities between the printed press and broadcast media coverage of media policy debates. The findings can be analysed against the backdrop of Cushion et al.'s (2018) study which revealed the enduring influence of the press agenda over the television news agenda. It would be helpful to find out if that is the case in media policy debates. This is significant because of the wide reach of a combination of the press and broadcast media in the UK. Having shown strategies adopted by the media in self-coverage, a study of how the public consumes journalistic metadiscourse would also provide an interesting area for further study. And finally, future research can also evaluate the implementation of the Leveson Report and the Cairncross Review to reveal the extent to which they fulfilled their purpose.

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