

What led to the introduction of its media essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

British broadcasting has come a long way in the past fifty years, from a monopoly held by the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) to the huge diversity of channels we now have, from not only terrestrial television, but also Sky and cable. The genres of the programmes on these channels are now so diverse that there is rarely a point in time when somebody cannot find something on television. From the birth of television in 1936 and up until 1955 the BBC had held the monopoly over broadcasting, at first, only showing 6 hours a day of programmes deemed 'suitable' by traditionalists, like Sir Lord Reith who at the time was the Director-General of the BBC, for the public. It was in 1955 that the first big change in broadcasting came about with the introduction of ITV which broke the monopoly and thus by the same token led to greater competition within the market. In this essay I will discuss what important factors and issues with the BBC led to the introduction of the commercial channel ITV and later, Channel 4; and how it caused unlikely alliances, disputes and controversy.

At the BBC's creation it was deemed appropriate that it should be a public service broadcaster, while this meant that it would be isolated from commercial pressures it also meant that it would need to have alternative funding; this came in the form of the television license fee which was basically a broadcast receiving tax. As the BBC was funded by the Government via a tax they had to provide an impartial service which had to conform to its Royal Charter of 1927; among other things it said that the BBC had to: Sustain citizenship and civil society, promote education and learning, stimulate creativity and cultural excellence and represent the UK, its nations, regions and communities [3].

After the WWII, the BBC's monopoly began to be questioned, this led to a growing aversion towards paternalism and a yearning for freedom of choice. Subsequently, after a change in power in late 1951, the Conservative party decided to publish its own ideas for the breaking of the BBC monopoly. They suggested: ' In the expanding field of television, provision should be made to permit some element of competition when the calls on capital resources at present needed for purposes of greater national importance makes this feasible.' In essence this was the first step in the creation of ITV. Unlike the BBC, ITV was to be funded via the sale of slots in its broadcasting timetable for advertisers (another option was to allow sponsorship; however, the regulator thought this was not appropriate). The nature and quality of the advertising was, however, stringently controlled by the regulators and no more than 6 minutes of adverts were to be shown within any given hour.

One of the main factors in the introduction of ITV was to increase consumer choice. Up until 1952 there was only one channel to watch and so you had either the option of watching the one programme that was on at the time or not watching television at all. This was at a time that the country was feeling more confident, workers' wages were increasing and the first whiff of prosperity was filtering across the country. Individual identity was starting to be questioned, one could argue that this was partly due to the American influence of TV and radio; whether it was the gritty US hero films, the songs of Buddy Holly and Johnny Cash or just the feeling that the US had everything bigger, better, richer and possibly, to use a more modern expression, more trendy. The introduction of ITV not only doubled the number of programmes people could choose from but also led to higher

quality programmes being directed. People liked this increased choice and freedom to make their own decisions; as Frederick Ogilvie, a former Director General of the BBC, stated “ Freedom is choice... And monopoly of broadcasting is inevitably the negation of freedom no matter how efficiently it is run” [2]

The reason for greater quality of programmes was the increased competition after the creation of ITV. For ITV to receive the maximum amount of revenue from its advertising it needed to have a high proportion of the public watching its channel. While this required a lot of initial investment to create the programmes in the long term it would provide more than enough advertising revenue to cover this cost. This also, although maybe subtly, influenced the BBC. While at first glance it may seem that the BBC and ITV have different revenue streams and are therefore not direct competitors, the BBC had to keep up with the increasing quality of the ITV programmes. This was not because, unlike ITV, they needed to increase revenue but because if they were not seen to have programmes of a similar or greater quality than ITV then soon the general public would start to question the television licence fee which could have led to the end of the BBC's funding and indeed the end of the company itself.

Another criticism of the BBC was that they only really catered for the population inside London which was exposed in the report of 1951. This report shocked many people as it was written by MP Sir William Beveridge. People expected him to side with the BBC as he upheld many traditional values, like Lord Reith. He suggested that it should set up ‘ national commissions’ for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland [1]. Beveridge,

<https://assignbuster.com/what-led-to-the-introduction-of-itv-media-essay/>

however, didn't agree with the introduction of commercial television, after seeing how the advertising worked in America he deemed it 'obtrusive and objectionable' ...Ironically it was the Beveridge report that spurred the conservative government in 1951 to move forward with plans of commercial television as his report encouraged, the conservative MP Lloyd Selwyn to do a follow up report, in which he agreed with many of Beveridge's points, he was for the introduction of commercial television. Selwyn along with many other business men saw the potential investments that could be made in commercial television; they believed that many benefits would come from advertising their products as it would reach millions. This self-profit idea didn't go unnoticed and caused some controversy, one even said "At what point are the MP's representing their constituencies and when are they speaking as directors?..."

Initially it was planned that ITV should be made up of three separate franchise regions: London, the Midlands and the North, each of which would be occupied by more than one contractor. This would lead to competition not only between the combined ITV force and the BBC but also between the different contractors. However, there was a failure on the government's behalf, due to not allocating enough frequencies, this was unable to happen. Instead to still keep competition high the ITA decided to split the franchises on a weekday/weekend basis.

People were fed up of the American commercial nature of ITV and how all of its shows strived for ratings rather than quality and so there was a committee set up to investigate the state of broadcasting in the 1960's. It was called the Pilkington report and its function was to clean up the vulgarity

of ITV. The report praised the BBC and allowed the introduction of a second channel, BBC2. In a way the Pilkington report was like going back in a way in broadcasting history, it took on the paternalistic role, that the public so hated about the BBC. Eventually people accepted ITV and the BBC working together and the competition grew much less fierce. People had decided what shows they did and didn't like and would pick and choose between the two, this was known as the 'golden age' of television which lasted nearly twenty years.

Between 1960 and 1962 The Pilkington Committee met to consider the future of broadcasting in Britain. This was at a time of increasing hostility towards the relatively newly formed commercial broadcaster, ITV. At the time the committee published their report it was unsurprising that ITV came under particular criticism. The committee found ITV broadcasted programmes of a trivial nature. This was most probably a not a reference to the actual subjects discussed but to the actual style and presentation of these subjects. This report led to the introduction of a second BBC channel, BBC2, in 1964.

In 1980 the Broadcasting Act was passed which commenced the process for the creation of a fourth channel, Channel 4, which began broadcasting on 2nd November 1982. While for some time there had been a belief that a second commercial broadcaster would be launched after ITV, it was expected that this would come sooner than it did. It is most likely that the biggest reason for the delay, for almost three decades, was politics. Summed up it was a clash of beliefs between the expansion of the commercial character of ITV and the public service approach of BBC.

I believe one of the main reasons for the introduction was because times were becoming more liberal and there were many creative directors and producers who wanted to make interesting cultural and controversial shows. These people, no matter how good their programmes were, were unable to get them shown on the BBC or ITV either because the content was too risky or it would not have pulled in a big enough audience to satisfy the advertisers. However, the market researchers at the time saw the need for a channel that would represent minorities and address 'hard hitting' topics; it was also believed that these programmes would help discourage racism and discrimination. The other thing that made the government back the introduction of Channel 4 was that all of the programmes were going to be independently made by different production companies all over the country, and that initially the existing commercial companies would fund them. Over time Channel 4 began commissioning the programmes itself. Also the Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher was incredibly supportive of the idea of entrepreneurship and so this was another reason Channel 4 was backed. It was however the Labour Government that finally got the channel up and running; they wanted the channel to tackle political issues without feeling the pressure from higher individuals to tone down.

In conclusion, the history of terrestrial television was a hard struggle. To reach the level of freedom of content that we see today, whether, it is scenes of a violent or sexual nature in programmes like BBC's 'The Tudors' or channel 4's dispatches series even the Question time with Nick Griffin, all of these broadcasts whether you agree with the content or not, are there for viewing with our own discretion, and a far cry from the 'paternal' monopoly

that the BBC held for so many years. Ultimately the reason for the introduction of these channels was to increase consumer choice which as a Democratic country was wanted by the people. It was this demand for consumer choice that brought us to the hundreds of channels that we see today. Out of this spawned the huge competition between channels that will be never-ending, with programmes such as ' Strictly Come Dancing' scheduled at the same time as the ' X Factor'.

Referances

[1]Kevin Williams ' Get me a Murder a Day! a history of mass communication in britan, Arnold 1998' chapter 8

[2] Quoted by Crisell An Introductory History of British Broadcasting, p77.

[3] a statement from the BBC's public service remit