

Regulation of uk journalism and news - a history



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The ownership and editorship of multimedia, combined with the ever-looming regulation of the state has had a high impact on Journalism as an industry. The new forms of media production have overall created through a push and pull force for authority between both producers and regulators an industry which has been able to produce news which has altered to suit society. The somewhat flippant relationship between publisher and a centralised government has over time produced an unbalanced system where the power over the news and its influence within the politicised nation have determined the change in societal viewpoints. The competitive nature between the two powers has allowed the constant revival of news products produced throughout the history through new means. With new advancements in news reports, the introduction of new technology alongside the political strain of constant regulation, journalistic boundaries have been pushed towards a great change. Ownership ideas have been challenged by common concepts throughout history causing individuals to interpret the news in new ways by means of innovative news products. Through challenging the norm and historical changes to journalistic production newspaper publishers have been able to adapt to suit their audience because of the way they tackle the regulations set to suppress journalism. The owners of news companies have dominated the way newspapers are perceived through regulation. Regulation through ownership sets limits to freedom of writing for the greater good, to fit the common beliefs of the democratic society. The regulation of the media needs to be clear and convincing to withhold the attention of the audience. Although we can give general justifications for regulation that helps to reconcile it with the

principles of freedom and democracy there is not a singular or definitive answer to why the news needs to be regulated. There are two main types of regulation which have been used within the newspaper press, these are negative and reactive. The negative form is utilised to refute threats to press independence and overall diversity whilst the positive is used to enable the press to coexist with the general philosophies of the political nation.

According to Picard (1985), " Positive press freedom is intended to promote the free flow of diverse ideas and public debate by removing and guarding against barriers to that flow". Thus, the main aim of regulation should be the promotion of access, freedom to communicate, diversity and universal provision of the individual rights whilst secure communicative and cultural ends were chosen by the people.

A journalist was one part of the four estates (Habermas 1984-7), an upholder for the greater good and moralistic standards. Investigative journalism thrived on the notion of helping others, through challenging the way reports were carried out. This type of journalism is about trying to produce information that others, usually in a position of power, do not want to be made public. As the Press Baron William Randolph Hearst allegedly said (Perry, Manners & Smith 2006), " News is something somebody does not want to be printed; all else is advertising". Investigative journalism, therefore, involves using underhand and sometimes questionable methods of practice. It is then justified by the reader and the publisher, whether the article has been conducted ethically. Each individual case is weighed on its merits, then journalists and editors can make judgement calls. It is widely accepted that the conduct of these types of reports are justifiable, allowing

journalists to use underhand and illicit methods to pursue stories that are in the public interest. Levin (1997) stated that reporters should not necessarily be prosecuted for infringing the law, " because journalists do serve the public interest and that had to be preserved". This is evident within WT Stead's work.

A problem for many publishers was for the fact that the news products being produced could not interest a wide audience. With many papers failing to appeal to a varied audience due to the writers being elitist towards the common man, it was crucial for new news products to be developed and could be accessible to the public. Most papers wrote from an upper-class perspective. This meant that lower class individuals could not relate or understand the content being delivered. The lack of relatability meant that there was a fierce competition in the news market to gain interest from the collective society unless you could appeal to regular readers, a publication was likely to fail. The need for stories which could compel and captivate a reader to continue reading a full article became more evident. As papers were now being released from the constraints of regulation through the Taxes of Knowledge news publishers and the political interest of the working class increasing. , this was a definitive point for publishers to branch out through new means.

In the nineteenth century, WT Stead helped to produce tabloid journalism. 1885, saw Stead's Pall Mall Gazette being launched. Stead's personal belief was a government run by the press. Stead stressed that " the Press is directed by men with the instinct and capacity of government". Stead's journalistic investigation delved into child prostitution in London. His <https://assignbuster.com/regulation-of-uk-journalism-and-news-a-history/>

investigation was backed by the Social Purity Movement. He published a series of reports titled: 'The Violation of Virgins', 'Confessions of a Brothel-keeper' and 'A Girl of 13 Bought for £5'. The salacious style of Stead's reports caused a national uproar. When WH Smith refused to carry the 'obscene' paper on its newsstands, the Salvation Army members helped to sell it instead because of the importance of the paper. Stead's enquiry into child prostitution involved breaking the law through his investigative methods. He posed as a client in order to buy a 13-year old girl from her parents for a fiver. His reporting was recognised by a 'fake sheikh' through Stead acting as a pseudo-paedo. Through regulators, he was sentenced to three months in jail. The stories provoked a sense of anger which led parliament to raise the age of sexual consent to 16 through the Criminal Law Amendment Act in the same year. Stead knew that to survive he needed to create a loyal readership. He did this with his scandalous stories that caught the interest and echoed the concerns of the public overall. Through the positive press freedom, Stead benefitted the rights of the individual, highlighting the importance of journalists as a watchdog of justice through reactive press information. Here the journalists' power outweighed the power of the negative regulators allowing for the adaptation of news media being delivered in a more exciting way.

The BBC was first created as a private company by manufacturers to encourage radio sales to the general public, through a dependable foundation. The government, as a regulator, intervened in this change, until 1926. Then the Crawford Committee decided that the BBC would turn into a public organisation. Whilst the BBC was regulated by the government

through being financed by tariffs and license fees. The vision of the BBC being a public service, designed to serve the whole of the UK as an impartial broadcaster, transmitting an independent public service across the world was the new aim of the corporation. The British Broadcasting Company would be based on citizenship, rather than private consumption whilst being funded accordingly by the license fees as a tax. The regulation at hand was used to (Hoffmann-Riem, 1996; and Feintuck, 1999) “ ensure universal availability to the general population of the country of broadcast services, to ensure a wide range of services and access opportunities, according to the needs of society – meaning diversity in social, political, cultural and local/regional terms and to promote high quality of content provided as far as possible according to locally decided values and standards, with particular reference to information, education, advertising, culture, taste and decency.” With the adaptations of television and the start of commercial competition through digital technology, the BBC intended, through its management by Reith. To keep its core concept of being a cultural force serving the whole of society.

With the advancements in technology altering broadcasting, listeners through the company’s new ethos had the ability to personalise their own sets with lower priced mechanisms from foreign companies and countries and applying for new licenses, which in theory should have given the company more profits for expansion, yet this was not the case. The BBC did not support this and manufacturers were aggravated because the production of news bulletins and transmissions were not proving to be as lucrative as it should have been, because of this the Sykes Committee was established.

The committee suggested that the private company should be swapped with, as Curran describes, “ Public Commission operating in the National Interest”. The BBC was regulated as the government could not allow an organisation to appear like it had no rules, so the limited space in the frequency spectrum, allowed for the government to step in through technological constraints.

As Thatcher came into power in 1979, the Conservative Party won the General Election, taking over from James Callaghan. The Conservatives went on to win again in the 1983 election by an overwhelming majority. “ Her government followed a radical program of privatisation and deregulation, reform of the trade unions” (UK Gov). Her capitalist ideals crafted a strategy to diminish the power of the journalist and the trade union which aided them. Her long-term strategy for privatising the BBC took heed through the Peacock Commission offered by Mrs Thatcher in 1986. The plan was that ‘ subscription should replace the license fee’ and cover much of the BBC’s output. Here the BBC would be commercialised and would then favour those subdivisions of the population, who were most willing to pay for it as consumers. However, the BBC was against this notion as it would lose the company, its credibility as a public service. The Public Service Broadcasting Council was to be set up to support Radios 3 and 4 and to allocate funds to competing for television broadcasters who wanted to gain more public interest. Thatcher’s attempt to make the BBC conform to her ideals (Hoffmann-Riem, 1996; and Feintuck, 1999) “ To allocate frequencies and broadcasting concessions in an equitable and orderly manner and supervise conformity to the rules laid down and to look after the basic interests of the state in matters of security and good order, as locally interpreted” only

caused the BBC to outweigh her rule with their own power. The government was suppressed on this occasion by the journalist safeguarding their own beliefs for the greater good.

Yet, threats to press freedom can root from the government itself, but other threats to the press are likely to stem from powerful economic or political forces to suppress the press's freedom of speech. Often the surface reasons given is used as a blanket to conceal the prioritised purpose for the article being published like for the interests of the state. Threats to press freedom can root from the same government, but other threats to the press are likely to stem from powerful economic or political forces to suppress the press's freedom of speech. Often the surface reasons given is used as a blanket to conceal the prioritised purpose for the article being published like for the interests of the state, this can be seen in the Battle of Wapping. The Wapping dispute marked the beginning of the end of Fleet Street newspaper production. The first newspaper to be published in the eighteenth century was Times dates in 1785 and the News of the World, which combined Newszak and serious news. This first appeared in 1843. By the early twentieth century, Fleet Street was at equal power with national newspapers. It was depicted as a " highly commercialised, a competitive industry whose owners enjoyed political clout and social prestige" by the national worker's story.

In 1969 Murdoch obtained the News of the World, his first British newspaper, after a battle with rival publisher owner Robert Maxwell. In the same year, he bought The Sun, and through The Sun's publishers, Murdoch acquired the Daily Mirror. To help secure the sale, the print unions at The Sun agreed

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Murdoch's demand of lowering the staffing levels to be more cost effective as well as forming a joint paper partnership with the News of the World. Murdoch and his editors transformed The Sun from a pro-Labour paper to a conservative ruled paper. It became a commercial success, but this was highly controversial because of the papers centralised fixation on Newszak topics in addition to its support of Margaret Thatcher, the new Tory Prime Minister who was elected in May 1979. Murdoch's sudden alliance to the new PM introduced her policies for transitioning the government. Her policies of monetarism, privatisation, and self-help were despised by the old labour government followers. Stan Cohen (Folk Devils and Moral Panics) stated that "condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests." Her capitalist views aligned both Murdoch and herself together to become a force against the traditional press barons giving the ammunition for Murdoch to regulate news media. Thatcher helped Rupert Murdoch break the dominating power of trade print unions at the Battle of Wapping, laying the way for new broadcasters like the Independent and bigger, multi-section newspapers to be formed. This loophole allowed monopolies to be explored and News products to be exploited. Without the battle of Wapping being ended, the flat print would have inhibited the development of news media products and the production of the media. Through destroying the flat press Murdoch regulation allowed for cheaper productions and cheaper products to be sold, benefiting news companies subsequently increasing their revenue for developers.

News ownership regulations affected the ability of news media organisations like the BBC and Sky from growing their businesses. The regulation also

prevention news outlets from being able to adapt to the changes in the economic climate and the wider media ranges. The set regulations affect the ability of news media publishers from acquiring new titles, and from expanding their news provision services across other platforms such as television and radio. Thatcher's loophole also broke the TV duopoly of ITV and the BBC through the launch of News channels such as Channel 4. Thatcher was successful in privatising the TV transmitter networks, allowing ITV licenses to be sold to the highest bidder. Here Murdoch could create Sky. Murdoch's domination over exclusive football rights was all achieved through Thatcher government's support. The advancement in technology aided the quality of British television and broadcasting by increasing its diversity. The 1980s saw the appearance of Sky British television was revolutionary with its focus on Newszak programmes and stories. The focus on more trivial subjects allowed for the company to reach out to a wider audience making the news outlet vastly popular.

As Sky emerged Murdoch waged war against the BBC, through its privately funded style and the need for broadcasting domination. Against the other terrestrial broadcasters and the BBC, Murdoch attempted to undermine their public service ethos. In the case of the two commercial terrestrial broadcasters, ITN and Channel 4, they also lost advertising revenue as viewers were drawn off to Sky because of its possession of exclusive football rights and supporting reports. To try to preserve their audience share the terrestrial broadcasters some of their advertising revenue the BBC and the other terrestrial broadcasters were forced into rating wars with Sky in which Sky had an immense built-in advantage because of its possession of the

exclusive football rights. The quality of terrestrial broadcasters suffered due to their lack of sporting coverage, losing them a favour against Murdoch's creation. Yet the popularity of news increased because of this influx of competitiveness between news outlets.

With Sky News concentrating on Newszak culture the media product being produced in a simpler and more audience friendly manner allowed for a wider audience to be reached. Allan (2004) describes the Push and pull factors between what news sources people could choose. This choice can fluctuate as forms of media develop and in response to audience needs. Some people felt that they were better informed than in past because of the change to how news was being delivered as the many felt that this type of journalism confirmed their worldview, causing them to engage more with the news. With the differing News outlets competing against each other both the BBC and Sky could reach different target audiences allowing people to make a choice on how they wanted to be informed, allowing news media to be catered for a specific audience.

Ultimately, the ownership of multimedia has determined the direction that journalism has followed. With the political constraints of regulation through government rule and societal concepts, journalism has fought through suppression to benefit the general public. Regulation through ownership has throughout history set limits to the freedom of writing for the greater good to try and fit the common beliefs of the democratic society. The owners of publishers have been a key factor in creation and production of news products. Owners have been able to transform their news outlets through harnessing new technologies, engaging in debates about popular politics

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whilst directing the focus of their publications. Ownership combined with both negative and active regulations have over time determined the way in which news is produced.

Whilst the negative form of regulation has been adopted to refute threats to the press independence in aims to prevent radical change, the positive form has been used to enable the press to coexist with the general philosophies to gain favour with either the government or the targeted audience. With new advancements in investigative journalism, the creation of the British Broadcasting Company and the addition of Sky News being created journalism has continually updated itself through the political strain of regulation. The push towards specific regulation types allowed news production to alter, creating outlets for certain audiences to engage with. Thus, the government's continual interjections within journalists news production through schemes such as the Peacock Commission offered by Mrs Thatcher in 1986, pushed the towards better production and quality of a more representative news product overall.

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