

Overview

Part 1

The UK media landscape is characterised by a strongly partisan mass circulation commercial national press and a system of public service broadcasting led by the BBC. A sharp distinction exists between the quality and tabloid national press and between the regimes that govern the print and broadcast media.

Although the press remains strong, readership and circulation of the printed national press has been steadily falling due to readers moving to digitally available news. Many legacy media organisations have embraced the Internet to make their content available online via dedicated sites or apps for mobile devices. The online readerships of some newspapers now greatly surpass printed circulation, yet newspapers are still struggling to find ways to make online readership profitable. A great deal of influence is attributed to the national press in the public sphere, particularly at election time. The suggestions of this influence is evidenced by the notorious British tabloid headline, 'It's the Sun wot won it' the day after the unexpected election of a Conservative government which the paper had supported in 1992. Research provides convincing evidence that the press agenda exerts a strong influence on the broadcasting agenda.

1. Read part 1 and answer the questions.

1. How can the media be divided?
2. What is the readership of the press in recent years?
3. What is the online versus printed circulation like?
4. What is the relationship between the press and the broadcasting agenda?

Part 2

A strong commercial press funded by advertising developed in the UK. The commercial basis allows the press to operate independently of government and party control. The UK case is an exception within Hallin and Mancini's Liberal model because the professional journalistic ethos to divide fact-based news from

opinion does not result in political neutrality as seen in the other countries in the Liberal model – the USA, Ireland and Canada. As Hallin and Mancini note, the concept of ‘press parallelism’ was developed in Britain and relates to the tendency of the British press to reflect divisions in political parties closely and to adopt distinct political orientations even though newspapers do not have official links with political parties. These political orientations are more clearly manifest in news reporting, particularly in tabloids, than in other countries. The strict division between fact-based objective reporting and opinion that characterises US papers is far more blurred in British papers, even in broadsheets which deploy a more subtle, interpretative style than the tabloids. The relatively strong press parallelism of the British press is also indicated by the high degree to which readers buy newspapers according to their political preferences.

Partisanship is largely fixed and based on traditional positions. However, the partisanship of some papers has been more fluid than others, with the Sun famously switching allegiances to Blair’s Labour party then back again to support Cameron’s Conservatives, and changes of ownership often lead to changes in party endorsement. Given the degree of political parallelism, many have observed with concern the disproportionate right-wing weighting in the political orientation of the UK press. Hallin and Mancini’s 2004 observation that this partisan imbalance may be shifting towards support for Labour and/or more pragmatic orientations has come full circle with a clear dominance of right-wing supporting papers in 2018. Only two papers and their sister Sunday publications (*The Guardian/The Observer* and *The Daily Mirror/Sunday Mirror*) supported the opposition Labour party in the 2017 election. A diversity of opinions in the British press relies on the degree of plurality of ownership and the degree to which newspapers owners choose to influence the partisanship of their papers. The strong connection between ownership and partisanship has led to concerns about plurality due to the high degree of concentration of newspaper ownership in the UK market.

2. Read part 2 and answer the questions.

1. Why can the press be independent economically?
2. What kind of concept was developed in the UK?
3. How are the British papers different from the American ones?
4. How can the partisanship of the press be described?
5. What does a diversity of opinions in the press depend on?
6. Is plurality in the press endangered?

Part 3

The UK's newspaper readership continues to be stratified by class and a left/right political divide. Readerships of quality/broadsheet newspapers are predominantly ABC1, with far fewer C2DE readers. Readerships of mid-market papers are more evenly split with relatively equal proportions of readers from each socio-economic background. Tabloids are read predominantly by C2DEs yet their high circulation means that despite low proportions of ABC1 readers they reach a relatively large section of this population. Mid market tabloids have taken more market share since Hallin and Mancini's observations when tabloids accounted for 54 percent of the market and mid-market tabloids held 27 percent. Based on ABC figures for 2018, tabloids now account for 48 percent, mid market tabloids 33 percent, and broadsheets 19 percent.

In comparison, public service broadcasting operates a system characterised by a strong tradition of political neutrality. Statutory regulation requires all news produced by broadcasters, television and radio, to remain impartial and to provide balanced coverage. These obligations are overseen by the regulatory body Ofcom. Ofcom also monitors and enforces special impartiality requirements and other legislation that must be applied at the time of elections and referendums. In addition, the BBC has its own set of editorial codes and guidelines to ensure neutrality and diversity in their reporting. Despite the existence of these policies and legislation some degree of controversy exists regarding BBC coverage which is variously accused of being biased towards both sides of the political spectrum.

Commercial broadcasting has traditionally played an important role alongside a strong public service broadcasting system. A drive towards opening up the UK market to the global industry led to increasing deregulation and a subsequent increase in non-UK ownership of broadcasters.

3. Read part 3 and answer the questions.

1. What does newspaper readership depend on?
2. What is the market share of the mid-market tabloids?
3. How is public service broadcasting different from the press?
4. Why do television and radio have to remain impartial?
5. Do they always stay neutral in their coverage?

Part 4

Although the press and broadcasting is predominantly organised at a national level, the importance of regional and local media should not be overlooked. In particular, media organised at the level of the devolved nations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland play an important role for the public in these areas.

Professional journalism is well developed in the UK with journalists considering that they enjoy significant autonomy and operating according to the values of providing a public service. However, two significant shifts in education and ethics have occurred since Hallin and Mancini's overview of the profession. First, the shift towards more journalists possessing university degrees has continued apace and is now the norm rather than the exception. Second, the 'phone hacking scandal' and the subsequent government inquiry led by Leveson in 2012 necessitated a major re-evaluation of journalistic ethics and practices (see 3.2). Leveson's recommendations also led to an as yet incomplete major shake up of the system for self regulation of the press.

Methods for accessing news in the UK continue to evolve towards the digital. 2017 marked the first year when the proportion of people using online platforms (74 percent) to access news overtook those using television (69 percent) and print (41 percent) according to the Reuters Digital report.

<https://medialandscapes.org/country/united-kingdom>

4. Read part 4 and answer the questions.

1. What do journalists enjoy and how do they operate?
2. What does journalism shift towards?
3. How did methods for accessing news change?

5. Match the words in column A with the words in column B to form collocations. All of them were used in text above.

| No. | A | B |
|-----|-----------|-------------|
| 1 | sharp | media |
| 2 | print | party |
| 3 | broadcast | endorsement |
| 4 | available | distinction |

| | | |
|----|---------------|-------------|
| 5 | political | service |
| 6 | objective | autonomy |
| 7 | allegiance to | media |
| 8 | party | reporting |
| 9 | professional | news |
| 10 | enjoy | preferences |
| 11 | provide | journalism |
| 12 | access | online |

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