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WHAT IS NEWS?

‘The news’ is an integral part of life in the 21st century. Once a discrete category available only in certain formats at certain times, news is now available around the clock on radio, television, the Internet, sent via text to your phone, as well as in its traditional paper form. What is surprising is that despite the proliferation of news outlets, and the advances in technology that have altered the way it is gathered, processed and received, the product itself has barely changed since the emergence of a mass circulation popular press in the second half of the 19th century. Then, as now, different news outlets catered to different audiences and so gave greater or lesser prominence to different types of stories all under the heading of ‘the news’. And then, as now, cultural commentators criticised journalism for debasing cultural standards as ‘politics and opinion began to be supplemented, if not replaced, with material of a “human note”, crime, sexual violence and human oddities’ (Williams, 1998: 51).

A single definition for the news is problematic because so many different factors influence its selection and production. There are also many different approaches to analysing news selection whereby each views the news from a different theoretical perspective.¹ This chapter examines news as a product and discusses organisational influences on its production. It then examines how news is used by different media, and within each medium how it is used to target specific audiences.

Technology has played a major part in the way news is gathered and disseminated. Advances in printing technology towards the end of the 19th century allowed for cheaper newspapers to be produced; better systems of roads and rail allowed for mass circulation; and the invention of the telegraph opened the area able to be reported upon and the style in which it was written (cf. Allan, 1999; Williams, 1998). More recent technological advances have made communication across the world faster and easier, and for that reason the impact of technology on news, and global influences on news, will also be discussed. The

chapter ends with an examination of the news taken from newspapers, radio and television, which illustrates how and why different media use the news.

SELECTING THE NEWS

At its simplest, the news is the reporting of events to an audience, but as Stuart Hall comments, ‘Of the millions of events which occur every day in the world, only a tiny proportion ever become visible as “potential news stories”: and of this proportion only a small fraction are actually produced as the day’s news in the news media’ (Hall, 1981: 234).

Given that almost any event has the potential to be news – from a local mugging to a terrorist attack – it might be surprising that on any given day, the majority of stories reported in one news outlet are also covered by every other outlet, albeit to a greater or lesser extent, as the analysis at the end of this chapter shows. Journalistic myth would have us believe that this is because all journalists have an instinctive ‘nose for news’ that alerts them to newsworthy stories. However, an analysis of what actually becomes the news shows that there are certain factors that consistently influence whether or not an event is deemed newsworthy. This is not to suggest that every news story will have all, or even any, of these factors, or that journalists consciously select stories on this basis. However, research, most notably by Galtung and Ruge (1981), indicates that the following characteristics are consistently evident in most news stories:

- **Relevance:** For an event to be reported, it must be seen to affect, however indirectly, the lives of the audience. This accounts for one of the biggest differences between national and local news: a mugging in Manchester would most likely go unreported outside that area, unless it were linked to a series of attacks around the country.
- **Timeliness:** Stories tend to stress what is happening now rather than reflect past events. Events that take place at times when they can be easily monitored are favoured, hence the tendency for press conferences to take place at times that allow it to be reported in the main broadcast news bulletins, and in time for the next day’s national newspapers.
- **Simplification:** Stories that can be told in straightforward, unambiguous terms that are easy to understand. This is particularly important for broadcast news bulletins, which are constrained by time limitations.
- **Predictability:** Stories that deal with events known about in advance like anniversaries, the release of the latest unemployment figures, or state occasions (diary jobs).
- **Unexpectedness:** Something that is unusual or rarely happens, for example when Mars became visible from earth by the naked eye in the summer of 2003 for the first time in almost 700 years.

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- **Continuity:** Stories where the initial event has repercussions that affect people. These are stories when there is seen to be a need for regular updates, as in the coverage of major court stories, or, notably, the war in Iraq in 2003.
- **Composition:** News editors like to provide a range of different types of stories: serious political news as well as lighter, human interest stories.
- **Elite people:** A woman caught shop-lifting is unlikely to make the news. But if she is a well-known Hollywood star, the story is covered across the globe.
- **Elite nations:** Events in 'first world' countries, especially the USA and Europe, are favoured over those in developing nations.
- **Negativity:** 'Bad news' is generally deemed more interesting than 'good news', so stories about disasters, crime and scandal feature highly.

What eventually ends up as the news is further influenced by the way the news is gathered. Ultimately the news is a business and as such it is highly organised. The detailed structure of a news organisation may vary from one outlet to another, but to a large extent every news organisation uses the same sources to get the news. Editors cannot rely on events just happening in order to fill their paper or bulletin, so the vast majority of stories are not spontaneous but planned. As Paul Manning points out, 'The production of news each day, each week or on a rolling 24-hour basis, involves the routine gathering and assembling of certain constituent elements which are then fashioned to construct or fabricate an account of the particular news event' (Manning, 2001: 50). In other words, in order to satisfy the increasing demand for news, reporters tend to access similar sources that traditionally provide material.

This can be problematic, as Gay Tuchman (1975) has shown. She coined the phrase 'the news net' to describe the way news outlets organise their news gathering using reporters, freelancers ('stringers') and wire services (for example, Associated Press or Reuters) to create a 'news blanket' that will cover all potential news stories. However, in practice there is a huge amount of duplication. Stringers might tip off a newsroom that a celebrity is planning a remote Highland wedding, but it is likely the news organisation will then send their own staff to cover the event in order to make it 'their' story, and also because it is cheaper to send staff than to pay a freelance. Similarly, the wire services may cover an anti-war demonstration in London, but news organisations will send their own staff to develop a local angle on it. The resulting story would then combine the broader wire service coverage, for example reaction to the demonstration from abroad or from official Government spokesmen, with more specific reporting about families from their area and their experience of the demonstration. In this way, says Tuchman, 'Instead of blanketing the world by their joint efforts, the news media and the news services leave the same sort of holes justified by a professionally shared notion of news judgement' (1978: 295).

Rebecca West, the editor of the *Sun*, has defined journalism as 'an ability to meet the challenge of filling space',² and to be able to do that, journalists have

to order the world and make it manageable. What is interesting to note is how the 'ordering' of the world links to the characteristics researches have identified as common to most news stories, as discussed above.

One of the primary ways of organising news gathering is on a geographical basis, thereby making sure that stories are 'relevant' to particular audiences. National news media tend to cover stories within the UK, and often only within a particular area of the UK. Unless a big story breaks, like September 11th or the Bali bombing, international news is provided by freelancers based abroad, the wire services, and for larger organisations, foreign correspondents. Similarly, local and regional media have clearly defined geographical areas with news from outside the area provided from elsewhere.

The news media are further organised on the basis of specific 'territories' that regularly provide stories, like government (both local and national), courts, the police and other emergency services. These news beats tend to be covered by specialist correspondents who build up a range of contacts who will readily speak to them, and sometimes provide stories to be followed up. Larger news organisations have further specialisations in areas like industrial relations, health, education and the environment. As Manning points out, the popularity of various specialist areas tends to reflect the wider political and economic environment: 'For example, during the last decade the fortunes of British financial, health and education correspondents have all prospered, while the labour and industrial beat enjoyed a "golden age" during the 1960s and 1970s but is now in almost terminal decline' (Manning, 2001: 74).

Areas that have specialist correspondents are those that regularly provide stories, and often they are running stories that require 'continuity'. This could be the passage of a controversial bill through Parliament, a high-profile court case, or the hunt for a missing teenager. By covering these stories with specialists who have not only built up a lot of knowledge about a particular area, but also have a range of contacts they can use, news media are able to convey the story more readily.

A further way that the news is organised is on the basis of topic. At its simplest this could be a division between news and sport, although, particularly in newspapers, there are often further divisions that provide 'variety' in the kind of stories covered. For example, many newspapers have a features department that does not deal with day-to-day news, but produces stories of general human interest from articles about school truancy, to reports on environmentally friendly homes. Further divisions can include business and financial news, fashion and lifestyle, and celebrity or entertainment news.

Of course, any newsroom's main source of stories should be its own staff. This is particularly true for regional and local newsrooms, where the staff live in the area that they are reporting about. Staff should be alert to the potential for any event to become a story, from noticing an unexpected school closure that turns out to have been caused by the discovery of dangerous wiring in the building, to hearing in the newsagents that local shops are closing because of the

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level of vandalism. Everyone is a potential contact for a reporter, and it is just as important for a general reporter to cultivate contacts as it is for the specialist who gets tipped off about Government corruption. These are the kind of stories that might easily slip through the news net, and to some extent it is the job of a reporter to make sure they get covered.

But with the best will in the world, it would be difficult to fill every newspaper and news bulletin with wholly original stories, and this is where the more routine aspects of reporting take over. These include newsroom diaries, press releases, the emergency services and other sources of news detailed in Chapter 2. But the stories chosen by news organisations are also influenced by the particular deadlines and requirements of each medium, as the following examination of newspapers, radio, television and online explores.

NEWSPAPERS

The majority of a daily newspaper's content is prepared in advance of the day's edition, with only the front page and a few inside pages filled as close to the deadline as possible. Newspapers cannot compete with electronic media in speed, so their approach has to be to find something different to tempt people to buy them. National tabloids tend to rely on brash headlines and large, dramatic pictures to hook their readers. They are written in simple and direct language to appeal to as wide a readership as possible, and beyond the front page, they tend to focus on human interest stories with a lot of celebrity gossip and show business news. By contrast, the front pages of broadsheets still tend to be dominated by 'serious' news from major institutions, although increasingly even more staid papers like the *Daily Telegraph* have a lighter item somewhere on the front page, and front page pictures are more prominent than in the past.

However, the definition of a tabloid may be changing. In September 2003 the broadsheet *Independent* launched a tabloid or 'compact' version of its paper in the London area, designed to appeal to commuters who found the broadsheet format difficult to handle. While the move to tabloid format was widely regarded as a last-ditch attempt to boost the paper's ailing circulation, it proved such a success that the tabloid edition went national four months later. By March 2004 the paper's circulation showed a 15 per cent increase, and two months later in May 2004 the paper went completely tabloid, ending two decades as a broadsheet newspaper.

Even before the increase in sales was established, *The Times* retaliated and launched its tabloid version in November 2003 in the London area, extending its availability over the country over the next four months. Newspaper analysts had a mixed reaction to the changes, with most fearing that the compact format would mean less in-depth reporting of serious news. The *Independent* carried all its broadsheet material in the tabloid version, but as analyst Roy Greenslade noted, this was not true for *The Times*, with many broadsheet versions of stories either truncated or omitted:

A detailed study comparing the broadsheet and compact editions reveals a pattern in which the editorial content of the former is vastly superior to that of the latter ... scores of stories were far shorter in the tabloid. Many stories were cut back to news-in-briefs. (*Guardian*, January 19 2004)

But despite a less positive reaction to the compact *Times* than to that of the *Independent* (which won the national Newspaper of the Year award at the British Press Awards in March 2004), *The Times* suddenly stopped production of its 216-year-old broadsheet at the end of October 2004. Although other broadsheets currently have no plans to go tabloid, the changes could mean that tabloid newspapers in the future are defined purely by their format rather than their content.

The move by the *Independent* and *The Times* to tabloid can be viewed as the latest reaction to a general decline in newspaper sales since the mid-1950s. Over the years, various tactics have been used in an attempt to reverse the trend. These range from changing the editorial stance, as the *Mirror* did for a short time post September 11th, to price-cutting wars, and even giving them away free to try to tempt a new readership to buy them in the future.

Newspapers, like all media except the BBC, depend on advertising for their survival. They use their content to attract a readership which is then 'sold' to advertisers, and this has had an effect on their content, as papers strive to target specific sections of society. The *Guardian*, for example, has a different supplement every day aimed at different professions, while the *Daily Mirror* in part attributed its return to sales over the 2 million mark in August 2003 to the introduction of a Saturday supplement, 'We Love Telly'.³ As Linda Christmas comments:

The feature content of all national daily and Sunday newspapers has increased in the last 15 years – much of it has been devoted to areas which attract advertising, like leisure activities and supplements listing what's on and where to go, plus health and fitness. There has also been a huge increase in human interest stories, tales of triumph over tragedy, and advice on how to handle relationships. (Christmas, 1997: 3)

The regional press is following a similar trend with local evening papers typically bulked out by supplements on property, motoring and sport on different days of the week. Despite this, regional dailies and evening papers are struggling to maintain their readers, although local weekly newspaper sales are increasing.

An examination of three national newspapers from November 13 2003 reveals how different newspapers use the news to appeal to different readerships. The *Sun* is the UK's biggest-selling daily newspaper, registering a circulation of 3,363,612 for August 2004 (source: Audit Bureau of Circulation). The paper has a populist approach to news, and tends to attract more male than female readers, not just because of its trademark 'page three girl', but also because it has very good sports coverage. In the first year of Rebekah Wade becoming editor in January 2003 with a promise to 'inject more fun into the *Sun*',⁴ the paper increased its show business and television coverage, launched attacks on asylum seekers urging readers to 'read this and get angry',⁵ and, in

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what could be seen as an attempt to woo more women readers, launched a campaign to highlight the victims of domestic abuse.

The *Daily Mail*, with a circulation of 2,310,532 for the same month, is the *Sun*'s nearest rival in terms of circulation, but it targets quite a different market. It regards itself as a 'quality tabloid', and its editor Paul Dacre says the secret of its success is knowing its audience. 'I think some newspapers and a lot of the radio and television media are now run by liberal, politically correct consensors who just talk to each other and forget that in the real world there are people who feel differently' (*Guardian*, July 7 2003). However, newspaper analyst Roy Greenslade says that under Paul Dacre, the paper has become a 'middle class bible', since by 'playing to the fears and narrow-mindedness of its audience, it magnifies their xenophobia and hypochondria, panders to their envy and, despite its vaunted image as a paper sympathetic to women, disparages feminism' (*Media Guardian*, September 2 2002).

The *Guardian*, with a circulation of 338,323 for the same month, is at the opposite end of the political spectrum from the *Daily Mail*. A serious broadsheet newspaper, it is unique among British newspapers because it is owned by The Scott Trust, rather than a media tycoon or shareholders. It describes itself thus: 'Free from the influence of a proprietor, shareholders or any political allegiance, the *Guardian* is able to report on news stories unhindered and conduct serious investigative reporting in the public interest. The paper consistently breaks stories and sets the news agenda' (*Education Guardian*, April 29 2003). Among national broadsheet newspapers, it has a high proportion of 18–24 year old readers, particularly students, and this may contribute to its reputation as a haven for ineffectual left-wing liberals.

On the day being examined, the Soham murder trial⁶ dominated the news. Both tabloid papers devoted the whole of their front page to the latest in the trial. The *Sun* featured the headline 'The Panic' above pictures of the anguished faces of the mothers of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman. Inside the paper devoted six pages to the court case, going into detail about what each witness had said the previous day. The *Daily Mail* took a slightly different focus on the court case, with its front page featuring pictures of Ian Huntley, who was accused, and later found guilty, of the girls' murders, and Holly Wells's father Kevin. Between the photographs is the headline is a quote from Ian Huntley to Mr Wells: 'I am so sorry I didn't realise she was your daughter'. The story is continued on page two of the paper, with further coverage of the court case on four more pages. In contrast to the tabloid papers, the *Guardian* relegates the story to 300 words in the bottom right-hand corner of the front page. Its story, headlined 'Huntley comforted by Holly's father, court told', takes a similar line to the *Daily Mail*'s front page, but has no accompanying pictures. Inside the paper a half page is devoted to the previous day's court hearing.

That all the papers cover the trial of Ian Huntley is no surprise: the story had dominated the news ever since when the two 10 year old girls had gone missing in August 2002, to the time their bodies had been found two weeks later, the murder

investigation, and the subsequent arrest and trial of Ian Huntley and his girlfriend Maxine Carr. Neither is it surprising that each paper provided the same information, given that it all derived from the court case at the Old Bailey. But the way that each paper deals with the story shows the different market each targets.

By focusing on the anguish the mothers felt when they realised their daughters were missing, the *Sun* is appealing to the parents of every young child to empathise with them. The angle taken by the *Daily Mail*, however, tends to demonise Huntley (at this point still not found guilty), by portraying him as a callous hypocrite offering his condolences to the father of the girl he had murdered. By devoting just 300 words on the front page to the Soham trial, the *Guardian* acknowledges the importance of the story but places it within a global context. Its main front-page story was headlined 'We could lose this situation' and featured a picture of the devastation caused by suicide bombers in Nassiriya in Iraq, where 18 Italian soldiers had been killed the previous day. The other front-page story is about a £100,000 settlement being made by the Metropolitan Police Force to a police officer alleging racial discrimination in an employment tribunal. Neither of the tabloid papers ran this story, while the story of the suicide bombing was given half a page, with no pictures, on page 2 of the *Daily Mail*, and two columns, with two pictures, on page 22 of the *Sun*.

In order to get a clearer picture of the content of the newspapers under examination, their content has been broken down into various categories in Table 1.1. 'Celebrity reports' are those that are only there because they feature a celebrity. 'Business news' and 'Women's pages' are those tagged that way in the paper. 'Features' are stories that are topical but not news. 'Comment/columnist' pages are opinion pieces, not including celebrity or television topics. As can be seen, the broadsheet *Guardian* has the highest news content, with the *Sun* and the *Mail* roughly the same. Within that category, the only foreign news in the tabloid papers was a report on the Nassiriya bombing featured on the *Guardian's* front page, although the *Sun* gave a page to a report about orang-utans being used for boxing matches in Thailand. The *Guardian*, however, had five pages of international news. It should also be noted that although the *Guardian* has no features, women's pages or television in its main paper, all these categories are covered in its tabloid supplement 'G2', and on a Thursday it also has a 'Life' supplement which covers medical, science and environmental issues.

The *Mail* has the highest content of women's pages, and this reflects the fact that it has the highest number of female readers among national newspapers. Despite this, it regularly runs features that attack women, and in the issue examined there was a two-page feature about Britain's first female Law Lord, Dame Brenda Hale, headlined 'The Marriage Wrecker'. It detailed the 'controversial' views of Dame Brenda, as well as revealing how she had remarried nine days after her divorce.

Predictably, the *Sun* has the most celebrity and television news with just over 15 per cent of the paper devoted to those topics, compared to just over 7 per cent in the *Mail*.

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Table 1.1 Breakdown of newspaper content

| No. of pages on each topic | Sun | Mail | Guardian |
|----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|------------|
| Total pages | 72 | 96 | 36 |
| News | 18 (25%) | 23 (23.9%) | 17 (47.2%) |
| Celebrity reports | 6 | 3 | 0 |
| TV news and listings | 5 | 4 | 0 |
| Business news | 1 | 5 (inc. Career Mail) | 6 |
| Women's pages | 4 ('Health' pages) | 16 (Femail magazine) | 0 |
| Reviews | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Sport | 11 | 13 | 6 |
| Features | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Comment/columnists | Double column p. 8 | 4 | 2 |

RADIO NEWS

Radio journalists will argue that local radio news is *the* most important element of local radio – and that's because for the most part it is. For some smaller independent commercial stations it almost defines them ... and for some larger ones it is one of the main things that keeps them local. For many listeners, it is an essential part of their daily lives – they love knowing what's going on where they live. Whether it's unpleasant things like a fatal accident on a major road, a murder or a stabbing, or something lighter like a report on local fundraising or a pop concert, people will listen because they want to know about it. It's the most immediate form of broadcasting and when listeners tune in, they expect it to be there. That said, it's important to remember the role of news within the wider station. Particularly in a commercial market, news is one of the few departments that doesn't make a radio station any money because under current rules it's unable to attract things like sponsorship. Also, whilst listeners like getting their news, many don't want it all the time. So, you need things like music, weather, travel, showbiz, competitions, sports and features to be played around the ads to get people to listen to your station. The more people who listen the more money the station will make. If a commercial station didn't make money, then it simply wouldn't exist, meaning no news and ultimately no jobs.

Tim John⁷
Newsreader/Reporter
106 Century FM

The growth of radio in the UK can be traced to the 1990 Broadcasting Act, which allowed commercial radio to target a specific audience for the first time.

Prior to this, commercial radio stations were obliged to provide programming for everyone in their transmission area. This made radio stations less attractive to advertisers, who wanted to target specific demographics. Following the 1990 Act, radio stations began to tailor their output to attract specific audiences that could be delivered to advertisers. The most attractive audience for advertisers is the 24–35 year old woman, as they are regarded as having the largest disposable income, and tend to be responsible for the purchase of fast-moving consumer goods. Unsurprisingly, this was the audience that most commercial stations targeted, tailoring their programmes, including the news, to this sector. As more radio stations came on air, they began to target different audiences in order to attract a wider range of advertisers.

The success of radio in attracting advertisers is shown by the fact that in 1990 radio had a 2 per cent share of all advertising revenue, but by mid-2004 it had increased its share to 7 per cent (Radio Advertising Bureau). Moreover, as radio critic Maggie Brown has reported,⁸ local advertising on radio is growing twice as fast as national advertising. In commercial terms, this means that radio is a thriving industry, with fierce competition for the limited FM bandwidth. For example, the last franchise awarded by the Radio Authority before it became part of the super-regulator Ofcom, was for the Glasgow area. This attracted 13 different applications, each targeting a slightly different audience. Unlike television licences, radio franchises do not cost anything, but the Glasgow licence, finally awarded to Saga Radio, has the potential to be worth ‘upwards of £20m in advertising and commercial opportunities as it broadcasts across an area with an adult population of around 1.6 million’ (*Guardian*, November 6 2003).

Although the BBC does not compete for advertising in the way that commercial radio does, it does compete for audiences. Hence, within the BBC each station is aimed at a different audience in the hope that overall they can attract different audiences within the BBC ‘family’. For example, Radio 1 is obviously aimed at a young audience, typically 15–25 year olds, while the Radio 4 audience is typically older (40+) and attracts people interested in news and current affairs. The BBC’s most popular radio station, Radio 2, is aimed at the middle ground of people between 25 and 40, which is also the audience most commercial stations target. By contrast, BBC local radio aims at older audiences who share an interest in the community in which they live.

What this means is that in order to have a consistent brand identity, radio stations now tailor their news to the audience they are serving. They do this by making the news relevant to this audience, not only in the selection of stories, but also in the way they cover them. Hence, stations aimed at younger audiences tend to have short news bulletins read over a music bed so that the bulletins sound lively and in keeping with the pop music output of their programmes. By contrast, those aimed at an older audience tend to be longer bulletins delivered in a more serious and measured way.

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News is very important to an older audience – 40 plus – but I believe younger people are not so concerned about ‘news every hour’ and would be content with their favourite station producing news bulletins a few times a day rather than regularly. It’s crucial to target news to the audience. If every other aspect of a station’s output is targeting a specific demographic, it is pointless the newsroom having its own agenda. News must fit in with the programming style of the station.

Phil Dixon⁹
Managing Director
Saga 106.6 FM

The different way news is covered by particular stations can be seen from an examination of bulletins on two local radio stations on Thursday, November 13 2003. Trent FM, which is part of the GWR group, is a local commercial station covering Nottingham and Mansfield. Its target audience is the 25–34 year old, who is more likely to be a woman than a man, although the station is aware that it should not alienate men. According to the GWR brand document, the station’s listeners can be described as ‘everyday, up-for-it people, in touch with where they live’, with many of them having young families. BBC Radio Nottingham, in line with all BBC local radio stations, caters for a much older audience of around 50+. The station has a slightly wider transmission area than Trent FM, taking in the rural areas around Nottingham as well as the city and surrounding towns. Typically, its listeners will have strong ties with the local community, and know and care about its history and culture. Many of them will be retired. The different audiences of these two stations are reflected in the stories and style of stories, as seen in Table 1.2.

As can be seen, the BBC Radio Nottingham bulletin is twice as long as that of Trent FM, and consequently on average the BBC bulletin spends twice as long on each story. In the Trent FM bulletin, although the bulletin’s top story has no local connection, it is the sort of story that would appeal to the station’s 24–35 year old, mainly female, audience, many of whom have children of their own. The audio for this story would have been provided by IRN. The next two stories are relevant because they concern local people, and both are follow-up stories: the first providing the end of a previously reported court case, and the second referring to the previously reported fatal accident. The story about four men being charged in connection with the Birmingham New Year shootings,¹⁰ including the half-brother of one of the victims, is a follow-up of a high-profile national story. It can also be regarded as of interest to Nottingham listeners because of the city’s gun-crime problem. In light of its target audience, Trent FM does not routinely cover sport, but the station makes a point of linking itself to all local sports teams, and keeps its audience in touch with the main sports stories. The Paul Hart¹¹ story fits this category because even people who do not follow Nottingham Forest would want to know about any major changes at the club. Finally, the chocolate bar warning story, with audio again from IRN, is the

Table 1.2 Radio Bulletins 96 Trent FM: November 13 2003 – 5pm. Bulletin duration: 3.05”

| Story | Treatment |
|---|---|
| Weather headline. | Copy. |
| Hunt for missing teenager in Devon. | Clip from police officer. |
| Nottinghamshire head teacher cleared of indecent assault on pupil 15 years ago. | Copy. |
| Three Nottingham men charged in connection with hit and run fatal accident. | Copy. |
| Four charged with New Year shooting in Birmingham. | Copy. |
| Forest Manager Paul Hart favourite to take over at Leeds United. | Copy. |
| Cadbury's may put warning on chocolate-bars to avoid over-weight people suing them. | Clip from solicitor. |
| Traffic news. | Live report + phone update from listener. |
| Traffic hotline phone number. | Copy. |
| Weather in more detail. | Copy. |

sort of quirky tale the GWR group refer to as ‘water cooler gossip’: a light story that people tend to chat about socially.

In contrast, the BBC Radio Nottingham bulletin does not mention the missing teenager story, perhaps rationalising that it has no local relevance, and also aware that it is covered in national BBC bulletins. This also explains the emphasis on local stories in the Radio Nottingham bulletin: national and international news are provided in more depth by other BBC stations. The inclusion of the Soham court case and the latest developments in Iraq are justified because they are major news stories regarded as being of interest to everyone. Their top story has more relevance to their audience not only because it is local, but also because many of their listeners will be a similar age to the head teacher, and will empathise with his case. Other local stories in the bulletin reflect the station’s mission to cover the whole of its transmission area: those in rural areas, and also those in Mansfield. It is also most likely that the potato ring-rot story, which was covered nationally by the BBC, was the result of a local follow-up sparked by the national story being included in network news. Another example of Radio Nottingham aiming to include the whole of its transmission area comes in its sports coverage, which mentioned all three local football teams.

A striking difference between the bulletins is the amount of local audio they feature. The Trent FM bulletin has no local audio, while all the audio in the Radio Nottingham bulletin, with the exception of Soham and Iraq, comes from their own reporters. This reflects the size of the newsrooms. Because BBC local radio has a high speech content, including news magazine programmes, they need many more reporters and so are able to cover a wider range of stories. Most commercial radio newsrooms operate with a staff of three or four people, including newsreaders, making it difficult to get a wide range of local audio other than telephone interviews.

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Table 1.3 BBC Radio Nottingham: November 13 2003 – 5 pm Bulletin duration 6.10”

| Story | Treatment |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Nottinghamshire head teacher cleared of sexual assault on pupil 15 years ago. | Voice piece. |
| Soham murder trial update. | Voice piece. |
| Nottingham solicitor found guilty of stealing cash from clients. | Voice piece. |
| President Bush wants a fast hand-over to Iraqis. | Clip from George Bush. |
| Nottingham police search for 59 year old missing for six weeks. | Copy. |
| Notts farmers meet to discuss discovery of potato ring rot. | Clip from National Farmers’ Union. |
| Notts MP moves to save wildlife charity in Mansfield faced with closure. | Clip from man who runs the charity. |
| Sport: | Copy read by sports reporter. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Derby mid-fielder may go to Notts County. • Mansfield Town reject offer from Rotherham. • David O’Leary denies interest in Leeds job – Forest manager now the favourite. • Steven Gerrard out of England squad with injury. | |
| Weather. | Copy. |

Finally, the style of the bulletins is quite different. The Trent FM bulletin is read at a much faster pace than that of Radio Nottingham, with the stories brief and direct. This reflects the perceived lifestyle of their audience, who have neither the time nor the interest to listen to detail, but want to be kept up to date with major stories and what might affect them. Radio Nottingham listeners are perceived as having more interest in the news in general, and local news in particular, so their bulletins provide more detail and tend to be read at a more measured pace.

Just because bulletins are different it doesn’t make them either better or worse than each other – they merely reflect their audience. As the take-up of digital radio increases, and more stations find different niche audiences to cater to, it is increasingly likely that radio news will continue to refine itself to reflect those audiences. Detractors claim this is dumbing-down news, but those in the business feel differently, as Tim John of 106 century FM, makes clear:

I feel that writing the news to suit your target audience isn’t dumbing down. In fact, it can often have the reverse effect. A well-written story can actually hook the listener in, keeping them with something that they would have ignored otherwise. I would also reject the argument that for lighter stories, the selection process means that news is automatically dumbed down. Breaking stories tend to be run, but for diary items, in

every newsroom that I've worked in, we usually discuss as a team or at least with the editor what we're going to run and the angle we're going to take. There seems to be a perception that radio journalists often argue the case for not running a story – in fact most would run far more if time allowed. That said, there is still that basic journalistic instinct to be challenging and uncover the truth behind a story (despite what some press officers would prefer you to believe), and as long as that continues, I fail to see how you can actively dumb a story down.

TELEVISION NEWS

I would always say the most important thing for television news is good pictures because that's what plays to television's unique selling point. This is perhaps less true than it was ten years ago because of the advent of so many 'lives', nevertheless, it's still important. The other big element we look for more and more these days is an emotional element. It's considered important that the audience feel involved in the story and care about what they're seeing, whether it's because it's something that affects them personally or because they sympathise with the people involved.

Nick Kehoe
Journalist
Central News East

Television news is important not only because it is the medium through which most people get their news, but also because it can enhance the reputation of television companies by showing them providing a public service through their provision of accurate and up-to-the-minute reports. The emphasis for news on television, as Nick Kehoe notes, is for moving pictures that bring the story to life, and live reports that stress its immediacy. But television news programmes are not open-ended: they have a slot in the schedules that dictates when they start and when they end, unless there are exceptional circumstances when programmes are extended to cover events. This means that generally, television news creates the illusion of being spontaneous while all the time following a carefully planned and timed script. This can be seen in Table 1.4, which examines the BBC's *News at Six* and ITV's *Evening News* at 6.25 pm for November 13 2003.

What is interesting about both programmes is the number of live reports. The BBC particularly emphasises this by showing two of their correspondents on location and waiting to give their reports at the top of the programme. The effect is that this news organisation has correspondents across the world with the very latest news. But as Table 1.5 shows, the reality is that most of the reports, although linked into live by a reporter at the scene, are in fact pre-recorded. Although live links can add drama to a story, there is a widespread belief among television reporters that often they are done just because they *can* be done, and to justify expensive satellite trucks, as Nick Kehoe explains:

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Table 1.4 Television news programmes. BBC News at Six – November 13 2003: 6 pm

| Story | Treatment | Duration |
|--|---|----------|
| Headlines: | | 0.18" |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More troops to Iraq. • Four charged with New Year shooting in Birmingham. • Potato 'foot and mouth' in UK. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shots of troops in Iraq. • Still picture of dead girls. • Shots of potato harvest. | |
| What's coming up: | | 0.18" |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live report from Washington. • Live report from Wales. • Fears of new ice age for Britain. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video wall shot of Washington reporter. • Video wall shot of reporter in Wales. • Shots of ice breaker in the Arctic. | |
| East Midland's headlines: | Presenter in front of video screen: | 0.14" |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mum's campaign to clean up estate. • Kerb crawlers to be phoned at home. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shots of mothers on patrol. • Shots of warning poster and map. | |
| More troops to be sent to Iraq. | Report with night vision raid on Iraq homes/ clips from US ambassador and George Bush | 1.56" |
| Nassiriya bombing of Italian soldiers. | Report on previous day's bombing and implications for the security of soldiers. | 2.15" |
| Live report from Washington on Jack Straw's visit. | Two-way with reporter in Washington. | 1.18" |
| Four charged with New Year shooting in Birmingham. | Report on court appearance of four charged with murder/some background to the case. | 1.50" |
| Other stories: | Presenter voice over pictures: | 0.42" |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Royal mail back in profit. • Fears for missing student. • Woman charged under official secret's act. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shots of mail workers. • Still of missing girl. • Shots of GCHQ. | |
| Soham trial. | Report including graphic reconstruction of court/library footage of Huntley and Carr. | 2.00" |
| Ken Livingstone to rejoin Labour Party. | Live two-way with reporter outside 10 Downing Street. | 1.44" |
| Potato rot found on Welsh farm. | Live link to reporter in Wales who links into recorded report with interviews with farmers and NFU official. | 2.43" |
| Reminder of top story: More troops to Iraq. Tease for ambulance death story. | Shots of UK troops. Clip from family's news conference. | 0.26" |
| East Midland's teases: | East Midland's presenters: | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cancer girl says thanks. • Meet the oldest driver in the region. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shots of girl. • Shots of OAP driver. | |
| Special report on Italian reaction to suicide bombing in Iraq that killed 18 Italian soldiers. | Report from Italy showing those pro and anti war and tributes to the dead. | 2.46" |
| 16 year old dies after falling out of the back of ambulance taking her to hospital. | Report with clips from family news conference/shots of ambulance route/shots of girl's school and family. | 1.30" |

Table 1.4 (Continued)

| Story | Treatment | Duration |
|---|--|----------|
| Police apologise six years after shooting dead unarmed man. | Report with interviews with dead man's family/police chief constable/shots of crime scene. | 2.04" |
| Britain may face a new ice age. | Reporter in front of video wall showing extreme weather. Promo for <i>Horizon</i> programme later that night. | 2.45" |
| Latest on Rio Ferdinand row with FA over failure to take drug test. | Live two-way with reporter at Old Trafford/clips of Ferdinand training. | 1.16" |
| Severe floods in Southern California. | Presenter voice over pictures of flooding. | 0.27" |
| Weather. | Weather girl in front of maps. | 1.25" |

In my opinion, the use of so many live links is a policy that comes down to us from head of news level and above. Since the emergence of *Sky News*, there's a received wisdom in the industry, wrong in my view, that live news is automatically more exciting news. Most news programmes now have their own satellite truck. They're very expensive and consequently there's a pressure to use them every day. As there are very few genuine, late-breaking stories, live top and tails or Q&As (reporter two-ways) are bolted on to perfectly good, self-contained packages.

The most obvious difference between the two programmes is that the BBC's top story is about the latest news from Iraq, while ITV lead on the latest from the Soham murder trial. This illustrates a key difference between the stations. The BBC prides itself on its extensive network of correspondents and places a lot of emphasis on international news and political news. ITV, while covering international news and political stories, prefers to emphasise home news, particularly high-profile stories that they know will interest their audience. Another difference between the programmes, at the time in question, is that the BBC national news advertises the regional news that it is sandwiched around, while ITV regional news programmes are quite separate and not acknowledged in their programme. In linking the regional programmes to the national news, the BBC is showing viewers that they can provide all the news anyone would need at national, international and regional levels: there is no need to change to another channel.¹²

Despite these differences, the reports from both stations on the main stories are very similar. Both feature dramatic night-vision footage of American soldiers raiding homes in Iraq – footage that would have been supplied from pooled war sources, also used on *Sky News* that night. Moreover, both have live correspondents in Washington covering Jack Straw's visit and his announcement that more British troops will be sent to Iraq. The difference in the reports comes in the BBC's emphasis on *international* news, with its report from Italy on the previous day's suicide bombing which killed 18 Italian soldiers, and ITV's emphasis on *home* news, with a report on a Scottish regiment preparing to go to Iraq. And although the various aspects of the Iraq story are broken into short reports to provide pace to the programme, both stations devote a similar

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Table 1.5 ITV News, November 13 2003: 6.25 pm

| Story | Treatment | Duration |
|--|--|----------|
| Headlines: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soham murder trial. • Girl dies after falling from ambulance. • Why we'll be spending less this Christmas. • <i>Love Actually</i> – another hit? | ITV 'gongs'. Presenters' voices over: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library shots of Ian Huntley. • Still of dead girl. Clip of father from news conference. • Christmas shopping scenes. • Clip from the film. | 0.30" |
| Soham murder trial. | Presenter in front of video screen with pictures of Holly and Jessica, then Ian Huntley. Link to live report from outside the Old Bailey. Reporter links into recorded report on day's events, using graphics of the court, the area in Soham, shots of people leaving court. Link back to the studio. | 4.56" |
| 16 year old girl dies after falling out of the back of an ambulance. | Report on news conference called by father and brothers of dead girl/shots of where the accident happened and picture of the victim. | 2.15" |
| War in Iraq: Americans step up their search for Saddam sympathisers. | Report from Iraq of night raids by American troops following suicide bombing yesterday. | 2.24" |
| Jack Straw says more UK troops could go to Iraq. | Live report from reporter in Washington who links into recorded report on Straw in the US, then link between studio and Washington reporter. | 1.42" |
| Among troops going from UK is company from Royal Scots Regiment. | Live report from Edinburgh where troops are leaving. Link into recorded report showing them preparing to go. | 2.15" |
| Teases into break: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will there be less spending this Christmas? • <i>Love Actually</i> set to be a smash hit. | Presenters in vision. Voice-over: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woman in toy shop. • Clip from the film. | 0.15" |
| Four men charged with shooting in Birmingham at New Year. | Live report from Birmingham – link into recorded report on background to the case and day's events in court. | 2.08" |
| Survey says we'll spend less this Christmas. | Live report from Regent Street in London where Christmas lights about to be switched on. Link into recorded package about consumer spending this Christmas. | 2.50" |
| Rugby World Cup. | Report on how the Australians are baiting the English rugby team prior to their match against France at the weekend. | 2.16" |
| Headlines: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soham trial. • Ambulance death. • More soldiers to Iraq. | Presenter voice over pictures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still photograph of Ian Huntley. • Photograph of victim. • Shots of soldiers leaving. | 0.26" |
| And finally – preview of latest Richard Curtis film released this weekend. | Report with interviews with Curtis and stars of new film. | 2.16" |
| Promo for ITV news channel and News at Ten. | | |

amount of time to it: the BBC's three reports take up 5.29" with a further 2.46" on the special report from Italy, while ITV's three reports take 6.21".

The reports on the Soham murder trial are also similar. Court reporting on television can be problematic because cameras are not allowed into the courtroom, so pictures tend to be restricted to people arriving at or leaving court. To get around this, television news now uses three-dimensional graphics to recreate the courtroom and convey some of the drama of the day's events. Both the BBC and ITV used courtroom graphics for their reports, and ITV emphasised the timeliness of their report with a live link to a reporter outside the Old Bailey, who then linked into a pre-recorded package.

Just as interesting as the stories both programmes covered, are those that were only covered by one of them. Although both programmes are around 25 minutes long, the BBC had 12 news stories and one feature story (the ice age in Britain), while ITV covered six news stories and one feature story (the opening of *Love Actually*). Feature stories are useful in television news programmes because they can be done well in advance of broadcast. In general, the BBC's reports were all shorter than ITV's, and it also used 'OOVS', which are stories read by the out-of-vision presenter over relevant pictures. In this way they were able to cover three stories in 42". The only story exclusive to the BBC was the discovery of potato ring-rot on a farm in Wales: other stories not covered by ITN were covered by Sky News that night. This story was covered with a live link to a reporter who linked into a report about the disease and what it could mean for farmers. Meanwhile the only story exclusive to ITN was a report based on a consumer survey that predicted lower spending over Christmas. This too was done by a live link to a reporter waiting for the Christmas lights to be switched on in London, who linked into a pre-recorded package. The different exclusives again show the different approach to news by each programme: the BBC reflecting its public service remit to cater to as wide a section of society as possible by reporting on rural matters, and ITV reflecting its more populist approach by reporting on consumer issues that they feel directly affect their audience.

ONLINE NEWS

The way the Internet is evolving means the quality and speed of watching video or listening to audio have vastly improved. Sound, images and video can add features to your story that you just wouldn't get in print, but they're not essential. The news story is the essential part of the activity of an online journalist. However, as interactivity is the new buzzword across online, there is more of a demand for audio and video.

Sometimes you can utilise the audio and video to give a story more of an edge or the pictures do this for you. For example, if you're covering something like the Soham murders, the Beslan Siege,¹³ or a Radio 1 campaign on mental health, just the sound of someone's voice or the moving images taken live as the news unfolds can give your audience more of a sense of involvement in the news. As

(Continued)

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(Continued)

people logged on to the Beslan story on September 3 2004, the moving images of children and panic were immediate. They were almost instantly on the web as videophones and other technology allow instant uploads to the net.

Terri Sweeney
Interactive Content Producer
BBC Radio 2/BBC 6 Music

News on the Internet combines print with audio and video as well as offering links to as much detail on stories as the user requires through in-depth background reports, related reports, and, in some cases, even links to source material such as Government reports. Most media outlets have a web presence. In some cases, such as radio stations, this takes the form of 'added value', providing information about presenters, merchandise, what's on in your area, and live streaming of programmes. Indeed, radio listening has increased as the popularity of the Internet has grown because it can be listened to, either through a computer, or in the more conventional way, while online.

The same is not true for all media, and just as newspapers suffered a decline in sales with the advent of television, there is some evidence that the same is happening as more people turn to the Internet for their news. Media analyst Roy Greenslade noted in November 2004 that:

A study of recent declining circulation figures and the statistics which show the increasing use of newspaper websites suggests that the switch from print to screen is happening more swiftly than even many web missionaries might have predicted. ... Just as worrying is the fact that many people get their news from net sources unconnected to newspapers, especially the BBC. (Greenslade, 2004)

The most popular UK website for news is the BBC (www.bbc.co.uk). As early as 2000 it was ranked the most trusted site in the UK, and was the ninth most popular of all UK sites (McIntosh, 2000). Since then it has gone from strength to strength and in October 2004 it was rated the top news website in the UK with 3,527 unique users (Gibson, 2004). Its success is easy to understand because it uses its vast news-gathering operation to service its online presence, combining text and pictures with audio and video supplied by radio and television journalists, and in-depth reports from correspondents across the world.

At times the amount of information offered by the BBC online can be overwhelming, but not all news web sites have the same approach. The website of the Press Association (www.pressassociation.co.uk), for example, which is one of the UK's leading news agencies and supplies services to every national and regional daily newspaper, major broadcasters, online publishers and a wide range of commercial organisations, is much simpler. Its website reflects its background as a news wire service, and would appeal to those who simply want the latest news of the day without extra reports. Nonetheless, both web sites

follow what is now regarded as a conventional approach to news web sites. The 'front page' of each site gives a brief paragraph about various stories under different categories such as news, sport and business, and clicking on any particular story takes you into more detail. An examination of these two web sites for Thursday, November 13 2003, shows the different approach taken by each.

The BBC news front page online is designed as a shop window advertising all the wares available inside. As well as a ticker-tape providing the latest headlines, a panel on the left side provides access to different categories from World News to Entertainment News, as well as links to other related BBC web sites. The main body of the page gives the top stories illustrated with a photograph and a sentence describing the story. This is no more than an extended headline to tempt users to click for more details. The right-hand side has a column listing other 'top stories' in a text headline form, as well as two lighter stories illustrated with a picture and a line of text. A link to BBC Sport online is also provided.

To break the page up, a bar about halfway down the page gives links to feature articles, all illustrated with pictures. Although presented as news, these links actually take users to different sections of BBC online. For example, a feature about whether to have public or private health and education links to the BBC Magazine online, and the third 'feature' is an invitation to 'have your say' by nominating the UK's worst eyesore. These links to other parts of the BBC online are continued in the bottom third of the page, where users can access news around the world and further news categories like business news, political news and entertainment news, as well as the latest BBC radio and television news bulletins.

In line with the BBC national news for this day, the top story online was about Iraq – but this time about Japan's decision not to send their troops there. The headline 'Japan postpones Iraq deployment' was illustrated with a picture of an Italian soldier guarding the site of a suicide bomb attack in Nassiriya the previous day which killed 18 soldiers. Two smaller links take users to stories on the reaction in Italy to the previous day's suicide bombing, and a story about preparations to hand over the governing of Iraq to an interim government. The two second lead stories were about the arrest of a fifth suspect in the Birmingham New Year shooting, and the latest on the Soham murder trial.

Going behind any of the three top stories provides an exhaustive amount of information, including video reports and links to related articles and web sites. For example, the page behind the top story not only gives full details of Japan's decision not to send troops to Iraq, including a map of the occupation zones in Iraq, it also features a video report from the BBC's Jonathan Head about Japan being one of the USA's closest military allies. Below that there is a panel headed 'The Struggle for Iraq' which contains 'in-depth' reports on five key stories about Iraq, and a further panel called 'Features and Background' which offers another five related stories.

To a certain extent, all the information presented on this news site is available elsewhere in newspapers and on television and radio – but not in one place. But the biggest difference that the online news site offers is that users can take part in an online discussion about the Iraq situation by clicking on 'Have Your Say' to see what other people think about the Falluja offensive, and post their

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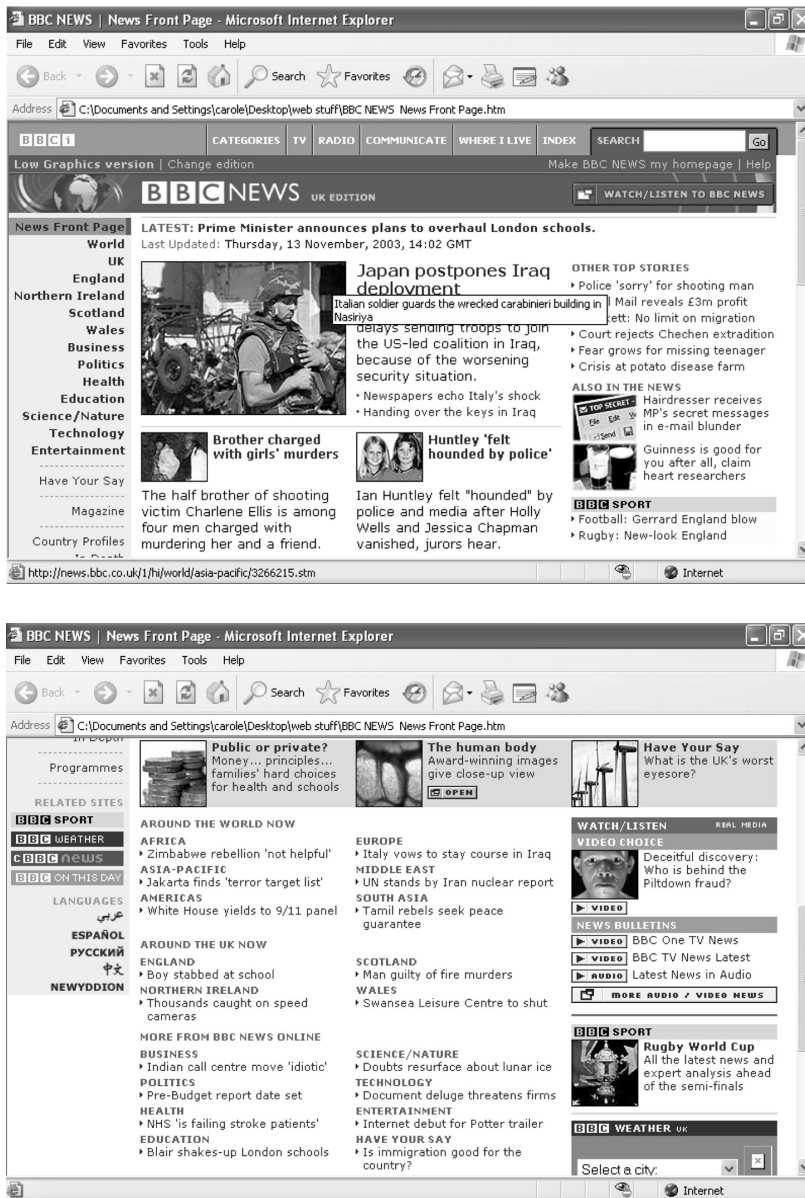


Figure 1.1 BBC Online: November 13 2003

own views. There are also two links to other web sites: one for the Coalition Provisional Authority site, and another for the US Central Command site.

The Press Association news site could not be more different.¹⁴ Its layout is that of a conventional web news page, with a ticker-tape showing the latest news headlines, and a left-hand panel for PA products and services – from news, sport and television listings, to event guides and archive services. The

right-hand panel gives contact details for the Press Association and links to the Scottish PA, other PA services, and the PA publicity picture service. The central panel of the page gives the day's news, but unlike the BBC, there are no pictures to illustrate the stories. Instead the news is divided into seven boxed categories. The top box is 'Live News' and the top story is headlined 'Relative Charged Over New Year Deaths', followed by a short sentence. Links to two other stories – the Soham trial and the Iraq suicide bombing – are also given. Further boxes labelled Football News and Sports News, each have a headline story and two other stories, while boxes labelled Showbiz, Health, Technology and City each have a simple headline.

The biggest difference, however, comes behind the front page. Where the BBC provide extensive background to their stories, the Press Association merely provide a few paragraphs on each story. There are no video, audio, background features, or links to other web pages. The main reason for this is that the PA site is mainly a corporate site, designed to advertise the various services offered by the Press Association. These range from news, sport, business news, photographic services and audio and video that can be bought by news outlets for their own use, therefore are not freely available on their site.

What is interesting about each of the Internet news sites above is that despite being new media, they use the same tactics as traditional media in tailoring the news to their target audience and promoting their brand image. The BBC news site showcases the extensive network of BBC correspondents, and reinforces the Corporation's image as a conveyor of trustworthy, professional news on both the national and international fronts. The site is globally acknowledged as reliable and balanced, and gives the BBC a way to reach audiences unable to access the corporation on radio or television, further enhancing the BBC brand.

The Press Association site, by contrast, is the no-frills version of the news with its focus on UK national news rather than international events. This is in keeping with its image. The Press Association describes itself as 'the national news agency of the UK and Ireland', and its core business is providing news and pictures to newspapers. According to its website, 'a network of news journalists produce 150,000 words of copy and over 100 photographs each day setting the news agenda minute by minute'. In other words, its key audience is news professionals who are already up to speed with what is happening, and who just want the care latest developments in their simplest form without having to negotiate through various pages. Its simple layout may lack the flashiness of other sites, but it's easy to negotiate and quick to deliver the information.

It is also interesting to note that the PA site does not provide links to other web sites. This is in keeping with the practice adopted by most web sites to try to keep users on their own site for as long as possible. To a large extent the BBC adopts the same philosophy. Most of its links are to other BBC sites, and the outside links offered are usually to official sites, like those of the Government or other official agencies, which are generally less interesting to the casual browser.

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CONCLUSION

What this examination of various news outlets shows is a remarkable consistency between the stories covered by each one. It also shows how each outlet adapts its coverage of stories to emphasise the unique features of its medium, and to appeal to its target audience. But while each medium has a different approach to news, the basic craft of finding a story, researching it, and making sure that it is accurate and balanced, is the same for all reporters, as we shall examine in the next chapter.

NOTES

1 Michael Schudson (1996) usefully identifies the three most common approaches to news analysis in 'The Sociology of News Revisited' in *Mass Media and Society*, 2nd edn, pp. 141–59. See also 'Media Routines and Political Crises' in *The Whole World is Watching* by Todd Gitlin, pp. 249–82 for another approach to news selection.

2 Cited in Boyd, 2001, p. 29.

3 *Media Guardian*, 'Mirror back above 2 million' by Ciar Byrne, September 5 2003, accessed at www.mediaguardian.co.uk.

4 Quoted in *The Guardian*, January 13 2004.

5 *Ibid.*

6 In August 2002 two 10 year old girls, Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman, went missing from their home in Soham Cambridgeshire, sparking a massive police hunt that lasted 13 days, and dominated the news. The girls had been pupils at Soham school where the caretaker was Ian Huntley, who lived with his girlfriend, Maxine Carr, a teaching assistant known to the girls. During the hunt for the girls, Huntley was interviewed by the media, and appeared to be concerned and helpful. Finally, he was arrested for the girls' murders, just before their bodies were found. Maxine Carr was charged with perverting the course of justice by withholding information about Huntley from the police. It was November 2003 before Huntley came to trial.

7 All quotes from Tim John are taken from author interview, January 2005.

8 *Media Guardian*, January 3 2005.

9 All quotes from Phil Dixon are taken from author interview, January 2005.

10 On New Year's Eve 2002, two girls, Letisha Shakespeare, aged 17, and Charlene Ellis, aged 18, were shot dead in a drive-by shooting outside a party in Aston, Birmingham. Two other girls with them were also wounded. The shooting was part of a battle between two Birmingham drug gangs in a turf war. The shooting of the innocent girls shocked the whole country, and added fuel to calls for a crack-down on the 'gun culture' that was seen to be encouraged by rap music.

11 Paul Hart was the manager of Nottingham Forest FC at the time.

12 Interestingly, a few months after the period being examined here, ITV national news adopted a similar approach to the regions as the BBC, and regional programmes are now integrated with the national news programmes.

13 On September 1 2004, over a thousand children and adults were taken hostage in a Russian primary school in Beslan by 30 armed Chechyan separatists. The siege lasted two days and ended in chaos when explosions were heard inside the school. Russian troops stormed the building and over 330 of the hostages – mainly children – died.

14 In spring 2005 the Press Association website was redesigned. It is now a corporate website that advertises the services available from the Press Association.