

**REIMAGINING PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING NEWS FOR THE DIGITAL
AGE**

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Abstract

This dissertation compares and contrasts the development of the use of online technologies in the national newsrooms of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). It critically assesses the relationship that the implementation of these technologies has with each public service broadcaster's (PSB) respective mandate. It uncovers how the three online national news services have been framed in public discourse in relation to the mandates of the PSBs considered and explores how various structures, including legislative and regulatory ones, have enabled and constrained the development of online use for national news services at each of the PSBs. It further provides a comparative analysis that sheds light on the similarities and differences of online news at the BBC, CBC and ABC. This project relies on a content analysis of the homepages of the national news websites of each of the broadcasters considered, a critical document analysis of official documents pertaining to the development of online news services at each of the broadcasters, and a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the coverage of the development of online news services at the broadcasters considered, in the national daily press of the countries where each PSB operates.

This dissertation shows that the influence of market liberalism on newspaper coverage and on government media policies has placed commercial media organizations, including newspapers, in a position of power and privilege within media ecologies and has marginalized the PSBs. It found that PSB in Britain, Canada and Australia, to varying extents, needs to be reimagined not just through new initiatives by the PSBs themselves but also through new legislation and regulatory mechanisms that are designed specifically with the digital media environment in mind. Reimagining PSB for the digital media age is essential because failing to do so will result in the

continued and increasing marginalization of public broadcasters, which in turn will facilitate media systems in which access to quality, relevant news and information is unequal. This will leave some citizens without reasonable access to the news and information needed to participate meaningfully in the public sphere.

Dedication

To Aby, Dan, Jordan, Justine and Candice
for your unwavering support
and endless patience

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Chapter One: Introduction

Public service broadcasters (PSBs) are struggling to reinvent themselves to maintain relevance at a time when digital technology has been and continues to fundamentally reconfigure the broadcast industry. This is because the media environment is experiencing a major shift online and the Internet has changed how audiences consume content. According to Marc Raboy (2008), “[t]he only possible future for public service broadcasting is to reinvent itself” (p. 361). The changing media environment has caused both publicly and privately-owned media organizations to rethink their roles in society and their approaches to fulfilling those roles. PSBs have the added task of remaining relevant to citizens while providing a service that is distinct from what their privately-owned counterparts are offering and that stays true to their mandates. One of the ways that PSBs have been attempting to reinvent themselves is by moving beyond traditional broadcast methods and implementing an online component to their content delivery strategies.

With this in mind, my doctoral dissertation compares and contrasts the development of the use of online technologies in the national newsrooms of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), and critically assesses the relationship that the implementation of these technologies has with their respective mandates. Focusing on the national news departments of the three public broadcasters, this project seeks to understand the ways the development of an online presence has been enabled and constrained at each PSB. It considers the resources that the broadcasters have been allotted to fulfill their mandates in a media environment that is made up of new and changing technologies, which come with associated costs, as well as how the online operations of the broadcasters, as they relate to national news services, can and do add value to how the broadcasters fulfill their mandates.

Purpose and Research Questions

The central purpose of this project is to better understand the circumstances these broadcasters are operating under in an online environment, and the strategies they have been using to meet their respective government-mandated responsibilities. Based on this, my doctoral dissertation explores several research questions, focusing on national news, including:

1. How has the addition of an online component to the BBC, CBC and ABC's national news services been framed in relation to the mandates of the PSBs by policy makers, the PSBs themselves, and the national press in their respective countries?
2. How has the development of the BBC, CBC and ABC's online presence been enabled and constrained by competing perspectives of the role of PSBs in an online media environment?
3. What support has each of the broadcasters received throughout the development of their online operations?
4. Have the documents and/or the regulatory environment that contextualize each PSB been updated or changed to reflect online technologies? If so, how?
5. How has the national daily press in the countries in which these PSB's operate reacted to the BBC, CBC and ABC's online news initiatives? What, if any, concerns do they have in this regard? How do they compare between the different jurisdictions?

The answers to each of these questions is explored for each broadcaster individually at first, followed by a comparison to the other broadcasters.

By answering these questions, this dissertation strives to achieve three goals. The first goal is to uncover how online national news services have been framed in public discourse in relation to the mandates of the PSBs considered. The second goal is to understand how various structures, including legislative and regulatory ones, have enabled and constrained the development of online

use for national news services at each of the PSBs. The third goal is to tie everything together through a comparative analysis that will shed light on the similarities and differences of online news at each of the broadcasters, and as such also on any potential lessons learned (positive and/or negative) from one of the PSBs that could potentially apply to the others either as possible recommended courses of action, or caution against certain actions.

To achieve these ends, this dissertation provides a critical analysis of how policies and reports have guided each of the newsrooms through their online transitions and considers how different stakeholders have influenced the development of online services at each broadcaster. This analysis explores how policy and the broader social and political context have shaped the development of an online presence in the case of each PSB. It further critically considers the justification for including an online component to the PSBs' operations as well as discussing the value that online technology adds to fulfilling each mandate.

Assessing how online developments contribute to the newsrooms of the PSBs is essential as they each receive public funding, which is provided with the expectation that a set of mandated purposes will be fulfilled. As such, this dissertation keeps in mind that any component of the operations of a PSB must contribute to the broadcaster's government mandated purposes, and that each PSB operates within a specific set of political and economic conditions. Looking at three different countries will provide insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the approach each has taken to developing an online presence in relation to fulfilling their mandated purposes.

Public Service Broadcasting

Public service broadcasting can take many different forms. It can be thought of as an individual organization, part of a broadcasting system, or as the whole broadcasting system (Raboy, 1995a, p. 6). PSBs, like the BBC, CBC and ABC, as individual organizations are each

unique in many ways, but they also share common characteristics. Liora Salter (1988), highlights several general characteristics that public broadcasters encompass:

First, public broadcasting is operated on a not-for-profit basis, whether it is by companies or by societies. Second, public broadcasting is characterized by the fact that shareholders- if they exist- do not function in the same manner as conventional shareholders. Public broadcasting companies are neither legally nor financially responsible to their shareholders. Third, all public broadcasters are accountable to a public body- other than their shareholders – for decisions and for their funding. Finally, because they are publicly accountable, public broadcasters respond to a formal mandate, and have a number of objectives that are specified in advance of their operation. (pp. 234-235)

Beyond this, defining PSB is difficult because the circumstances under which PSBs operate and are mandated varies by location, depending on social and economic conditions. The BBC, for example, was created in the early 1920s as a response to the technical limitations of the radio spectrum (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 110; Michalis, 2016, p. 349). After the BBC was formed Sir John Reith, the BBC's General Manager and later its Managing Director, advocated for broadcasting in Britain to be operated as a public service, compelled to fulfill social goals such as the provision of universal access to broadcasting (Briggs, 1961; Crisell, 2002; Curran & Seaton, 2003). The BBC operated as a monopoly public service broadcaster until 1954, when Britain introduced a commercial television station into Britain's broadcasting system (Curran & Seaton, 2003). The commercial broadcaster was given a public service remit, which meant that the British broadcasting system continued to have a public service orientation (Curran & Seaton, 2003). The BBC was and continues to be funded by an annual licence fee (Curran & Seaton, 2003; DCMS, 2016c).

Neither the CBC nor the ABC copied the British tradition of broadcasting in its entirety, but each country did use it as a model. Canada first introduced national public broadcasting in 1932 when it created the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission (CRBC), the CBC's predecessor (Raboy, 1990). The CRBC was a national organization, created with a distinctly national purpose and to fulfill many similar public service goals as the BBC (Raboy, 1990; Peers, 1969; Weir, 1965). Unlike the BBC, however, the CRBC and later the CBC was permitted to air advertising to earn revenue to supplement the licence fee income it also received (Raboy, 1990). Also, unlike the BBC, the CRBC did not have a monopoly, rather the commercial broadcasters established before it were allowed to remain in operation after the CRBC was formed (Peers, 1969, p. 103). Because of this, Canada's broadcasting system "evolved as a hybrid of the British and American public service and commercial models" (Raboy, 1990, p. 48).

In Australia, a similar mixed broadcasting system developed. The Australian Broadcasting Company, a predecessor of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, began broadcasting in 1929 having been established out of concern about the commercial system that was already operating in the country (Inglis & Brazier, 1983; Breen, 1995). There was particular concern about a lack of access to radio programming in areas of the country that were not profitable enough for commercial broadcasters to serve (Petersen, 1993, p. 30). Because of this, the ABC was designed to complement the commercial sector (Martin, 2016, p. 337). The ABC, like the BBC, was funded by a licence fee and was not allowed to air advertising (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 11).

Not all PSBs developed from scratch or during the early days of radio broadcasting like the BBC, CBC and ABC. Many PSBs in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), for example, developed in stark contrast to this. PSBs in former communist and socialist countries in CEE often transitioned out of state broadcasters quickly, and as the media environments around them were

rapidly changing from being monopoly environments to being highly competitive ones (Broughton-Micova, 2011, pp. 132-133). This environment, within which the new PSBs developed, caused a lot of roadblocks. For example, they were technically independent from their country's governments, but many governments "were reluctant to dismantle old systems of control" (Broughton-Micova, 2011, p. 138). It was also common for them to be funded at least in part through a licence fee, but "the total potential for licence fee revenue depends on the size and respective wealth of the country", which meant that the reality of using the licence fee as a funding mechanism was often very different for CEE countries with small populations and/or low compliance rates for paying the fee than it was for Britain (Broughton-Micova, 2011, pp. 135-136).

China provides another example of how PSB develops and operates differently depending on social and economic conditions. A system of public broadcasting did not emerge in China until 2006 (Chin & Johnson, 2011, p. 149). When it did, it was created by the party-state government, which "defined state-owned broadcasters as public cultural institutions" (Chin & Johnson, 2011, p. 162). PSB in China was set up as "a new form of top-down public communications network with similarities to both Chinese and European precedents" (Chin & Johnson, 2011, p. 149). It is not genuinely independent, and potential political roles related to empowering citizens are ignored (Chin & Johnson, 2011, p. 162). Elements of more traditional PSBs, however, can still be found within the system (Chin & Johnson, 2011, p. 162). This is clearly demonstrated by the focus of PSB policy on equal access for all citizens to broadcasting (Chin & Johnson, 2011, p. 162).

These examples of public broadcasters show that the concept of public broadcasting can be and has been operationalized in very different ways depending on social and political contexts. How public broadcasting is understood and operationalized can also vary over the course of time

since PSB institutions and the documents that govern them are usually periodically reviewed and updated. Such changes reflect social, technical and political developments. For example, in the 1980s, there was a significant shift in attitude towards public policy in Britain, Canada and Australia (as well as other countries around the world) that resulted in market interests being prioritized over the public interest in public policy (Tracey, 1998; Raboy 1995b; Inglis, 2006). For all three countries, this shift in public policy thinking translated to a shift in broadcasting policy from being organized according to public interest rationales to economic ones (O'Malley, 2001; Raboy, 1990; Turner, 2001). In all three countries, these changes had implications for the structure and form of public service broadcasting. This included increasing commercial activities to generate more revenue themselves or having to adjust and get by with diminishing resources (Mjøs, 2011; Rowland, 2013; Inglis, 2006).

The History of News at the BBC, CBC and ABC

The broadcasters' news services have also changed over the years. In order to fulfill their public purposes, the BBC, CBC and ABC all have a long history of broadcasting news, but each broadcaster has a unique history when it comes to news provision and the development of their news divisions. The BBC aired news from its earliest days as the British Broadcasting Company, although it did not gather the news it broadcasted itself at first. This was because the BBC was only allowed to broadcast news that it had obtained from the British news agencies (Briggs, 1961, p. 133). In exchange for a half-hour summary of the news each day, the BBC signed an agreement with the news agencies in 1922 that meant it could only broadcast the summary between 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. (Briggs, 1961, p. 132). The BBC also agreed to pay a royalty for the news on the basis of a sliding scale (Briggs, 1961, p. 132). This continued for a few years, but in 1926 the BBC was finally allowed to gather its own news on a temporary basis during a General Strike (Crisell, 2002).

During the strike, the BBC proved it could be an important source of news for the country (Crisell, 2002). Because of this, the BBC's restrictions on gathering news were lifted from its licence and by 1934 it had set up its own news division (Petersen, 1993, p. 50; Crisell, 2002, p. 32).

In Canada, the CRBC did not gather its own news at first either, but unlike the BBC it received a selection of news for free from the Canadian Press (Purcell, 1969, p. 155). The agreement lasted from 1933 to 1940 (Purcell, 1969, p. 155). After this, the CBC, which unlike the BBC had never been restricted from gathering its own news, decided to start its own, independent news division (Weir, 1965, p. 234). The CBC's independent news service first aired in January 1941 (Weir, 1965, p. 234). The world, including Canada, was at war at this time, and so in the earliest days of the CBC's news division the CBC was less than independent, finding itself frequently acting as a propaganda tool for the government (Rowland, 2015, p. 118).

The ABC also began its news services by providing it as per an agreement with the Australian press (Inglis & Brazier, 1983; Johnson, 1987; Petersen, 1993). At first, the press only wanted the ABC to acknowledge where the news it was airing originated (Johnson, 1987, p. 62). This did not last. An agreement that the Australian Broadcasting Commission signed in 1932 restricted it to broadcasting news only after 7:50 p.m. and only for five bulletins of five minutes duration each per day (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 34). It paid £200 for the newspaper material it broadcast (Johnson, 1987, p. 63). Throughout the 1930s it fought for and made small steps towards establishing an independent news service, which finally went live in July of 1947 (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 130; Petersen, 1993; Johnson, 1987).

Political Economy of Communication

In order to further understand the concept of public service broadcasting and its development, it is useful to consider it in relation to the wider media ecologies in which public

broadcasters operate. Doing this enables a better understanding of how each of the PSBs' news divisions have evolved by taking into consideration outside factors that have played a role in the path that each corporation has taken. Because of this, it is beneficial to view this research through a critical political economy of communications lens.

Political economy, as described by Vincent Mosco (2009), is "*the study of social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources*" (p. 2). For Robert McChesney (2007), political economy of communications more specifically is made up of two main parts (p. 77). The first is that it critically addresses "how the media system interacted with and affected the overall disposition of power in society" (McChesney, 2007, p. 77). In doing so, it asks if "the media, on balance, serve as a progressive force to draw the masses into political debate as informed and effective participants, or did the media system as a whole tend to reinforce elite rule and inegalitarian social relations?" (McChesney, 2007, p. 77). The second is that it encompasses "an evaluation of how market structures, advertising support, labor relations, profit motivation, technologies, and government policies shape media industries, journalistic practices, occupational sociology, and the nature and content of the news and entertainment" (McChesney, 2007, p. 79). Political economists are further "interested in the critical implications for society as a whole" (McChesney, 2007, p. 79). This view of political economy of communications is in keeping with Mosco's (2009) definition of political economy more generally. Both McChesney (2007) and Mosco (2009) emphasize the role that power relations play in society and highlight the influence of power held by media systems. As such, for Mosco (2009) a political economy approach to communications research sees social action as taking "place within the constraints and the opportunities provided by the structures within which action happens" (Mosco, 2009, p. 16). For

David Skinner, Robert Hackett and Stuart R. Poyntz (2015), this means that social fields, which are made up of, among other things, institutions and social practices, “both enable and constrain the actions of actors operating within them” (pp. 87-88).

Political economy of communications provides a good theoretical framework for this dissertation as it requires a consideration of the power relations at play in the development of online national news services at the broadcasters considered. It is further beneficial because it pays attention to how the various media outlets in a news ecology interact with each other and with society more generally. Such a framework decentres the object of analysis to consider the broad set of social conditions that serve to influence news production, distribution and consumption. Political economy of communications is a valuable theoretical framework in that it specifically provides a way to understand how various factors such as support through the provision of resources and pushback from commercial media organizations, enable and constrain news content created by PSBs, and how actors influence the form that the structures that constitute the national news divisions take.

A political economy of communications framework is also useful for this dissertation as it provides a way of looking at public media in relation to private media. Mosco (2009) distinguishes between public and private media by stating that “[w]hat we call the public media is public, not because it occupies a separate space, relatively free from market considerations, but because it is constituted out of a particular patterning of processes that privilege the democratic over commodification” (Mosco, 2009, p. 154). He argues that “[t]o the extent that it does not, the expression *public media* diminishes in value (Mosco, 2009, p. 154). It is this distinction between public and private media that makes public broadcasting an indispensable part of a healthy democratic society.

It is important to emphasize that political economy is distinct from mainstream economics. Peter Golding & Graham Murdock (1991) outline four ways this is so. First of all, critical political economy is holistic (Golding & Murdock, 1991, p. 17). More specifically, it “is interested in the interplay between economic organization and political, social and cultural life” (Golding & Murdock, 1991, p. 18). Secondly, critical political economy is historical (Golding & Murdock, 1991, p. 17). Golding & Murdock (1991) outline “[f]our historical processes [that] are particularly central to a critical political economy of culture; the growth of the media; the extension of corporate reach; commodification; and the changing role of state and government intervention” (Golding & Murdock, 1991, p. 19). An essentialist approach, which critical political economy is distinct from, would, on the other hand, be “detached from the specifics of historical time and place” (Golding & Murdock, 1991, p. 17). Thirdly, Golding & Murdock (1991) state that critical political economy is “centrally concerned with the balance between capitalist enterprise and public intervention” (pp. 17-18). This can be seen in the fact that it “starts with sets of social relations and the plan of power” (Golding & Murdock, 1991, p. 18). Furthermore, critical political economy “is interested in seeing how the making and taking of meaning is shaped at every level by the structured asymmetries in social relations” (Golding & Murdock, 1991, p. 18). Lastly, critical political economy “goes beyond technical issues of efficiency to engage with basic moral questions of justice, equity and the public good” (Golding & Murdock, 1991, p. 18). Because of this, “[i]t is especially interested in the ways that communicative activity is structured by the unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources” (Golding & Murdock, 1991, p. 18).

Based on these principles, the perspective on critical political economy that Golding & Murdock (1991) outline “sets out to show how different ways of financing and organizing cultural production have traceable consequences for the range of discourses and representations in the

public domain and for audiences' access to them" (p. 15). This is something that is also acknowledged by Mosco (2009), who describes how political economy, generally speaking, considers the relationship between power and wealth and how they are "connected to cultural and social life" (p. 4). He further points out that political economy of communications more specifically has an interest in how these things "influence and are influenced by our systems of mass media, information, and entertainment" (Mosco, 2009, p. 4).

In Mosco's (2009) conceptualization of political economy, there are three processes that make up the starting point for research, which guide how political economy is applicable to communication: commodification, spatialization and structuration (pp. 1-2). Commodification is the process through which a good or service that is valued for its use transforms into a good or service that has an exchange value (Mosco, 2009, p. 129). Many Western public service broadcasters including the BBC, CBC and ABC were established with a specific use value in mind – their existence was predicated on solving technical and cultural issues not how much money they could earn. Through the process of commodification, however, this changed. By the 1980s, broadcasting was increasingly valued more for what it could bring in exchange (advertising revenue, sales revenue etc.), than for its usefulness. This can be seen in both the establishment of the commercial arms of the BBC (BBC Worldwide) and the ABC (ABC Enterprises) in 1994 and 1974 respectively, as well as in explicit and implicit directions from the British, Canadian and Australian governments for the PSBs to become more self-sufficient and to increase the amount of revenue they derive from commercial sources (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 1998, para. 4; Inglis, 2006; Mandate Review Committee, 1996, pp. 36-37; Mjøs, 2011, p. 183; Jolly, 2014; Smith, 2000, p. 8; etc). Increasing commodification of the PSBs further stems from pressure from the private sector and policy makers to make parts of PSB services and resources available

for use by commercial media companies for the purpose of bolstering such companies (Ofcom, 2008a, p. 9; Rowland, 2015, p. 48).

The second of Mosco's three entry points, spatialization, is the process whereby "mass media and communication technology overcome the constraints of geographical space" (Mosco, 2009, p. 128). In keeping with this, spatialization can be used to understand the use of broadcasting technology generally and public broadcasting specifically to unite countries and to help foster a sense of national identity by overcoming constraints caused by distance. For political economists of communication, spatialization also considers corporate power within the communications industry and the extension of such power, which can reach globally through the use of communications technologies (Mosco, 2009, p. 183). This provides a way of understanding media concentration and media power in the wider media ecologies within which PSBs operate, which is important for understanding how private media companies have influenced the development of PSBs and why they have been able to.

The third process that Mosco (2009) describes, which this dissertation focuses on, is structuration. Structuration is a "*process by which structures are constituted out of human agency, even as they provide the very "medium" of that constitution*" (Mosco, 2009, p. 185). This concept was presented by sociologist Anthony Giddens, who saw it "as an effort to bridge what he perceived to be a chasm between theoretical perspectives that foreground structure and those that emphasize action and agency" (Mosco, 2009, p. 185). For Giddens, this was a way to "consider structure as a duality including constraining rules and enabling resources" (Mosco, 2009, p. 186). Mosco (2009), argues that the problem with Giddens's theory, "from a political economy perspective is that it is disconnected from an understanding of power and more generally from a critical approach to society" (Mosco, 2009, p. 187). A political economy approach to structuration

therefore “gives greater weight to *power* and to the incorporation of structuration into a *critical* approach to social analysis” (Mosco, 2009, p. 187). For Golding & Murdock (1991), this means that it is important to analyze the limits of owners, advertisers and others who “operate within structures which constrain as well as facilitate imposing limits as well as offering opportunities” (p. 19). For McChesney (2007), this includes the acknowledgement of how “our communication system as a whole is not primarily the result of geniuses and free markets. It is the result of structures and markets created and shaped by policies and extraordinary public subsidies” (McChesney, 2007, p. xii). In terms of news specifically, it can mean addressing “the way news is structured by the prevailing relations between press proprietors and editors or journalists and their sources” (Golding & Murdock, 1991, p. 18).

Throughout this dissertation there is particular attention paid to how the social struggles surrounding financing public broadcasting enables and constrains the output of PSBs, and how political, economic and cultural considerations and structures shape the online news activities of the PSBs considered. Using Mosco (2009) and Golding & Murdock’s (1991) discussions of political economy of communications as a foundation, allows this dissertation to understand how the development and operation of PSBs’ online activities have been enabled and constrained by the structures and processes that give these organizations form and focus. It considers how these structures and processes are constituted, and the power relations that influence their constitution. It is a way that the effect of internal and external pressures on each broadcaster throughout its development can be considered. A critical political economy of communications framework acknowledges that the development of PSBs online presence has occurred at a particular moment in history, which has not been inconsequential. Through a political economy of communications lens, this dissertation understands the online news services of the PSBs as being contested spaces

that have been constituted according to actions taken by key stakeholders, which have in turn been affected by the larger socioeconomic structures and circumstances of the time. A specifically critical perspective is beneficial as it “assumes a realist conception of the phenomena it studies, in the simple sense that the theoretical constructs it works with exist in the real world, they are not merely phenomenal” (Golding & Murdock, 1991, p. 17).

Critiques of Political Economy of Communication

Despite being a useful theoretical framework, there are critiques of the use of political economy of communications in communications research. Nicholas Garnham (2011), for example, argues that political economy of communication “has remained stuck with a set of problems and terms of analysis that history has simply passed by” (pp. 41-42). Garnham is a political economist himself, having made contributions to the field through works such as “Towards a Political Economy of Culture” and “Contribution to a Political Economy of Mass-Communication” (Garnham, 1977; Garnham, 1979). In 2011, however, in a book chapter devoted to revisiting the theory, he argued that political economy “has become a euphemism for a vague, crude, and unself-questioning form of Marxism” (Garnham, 2011, p. 42). Christian Fuchs (2016), in response, argues that Garnham “fails to see the complexity and contradictions of both societal and theoretical developments” (p. 301). Because of this, he “overlooks that taking a Marxian position means to see history itself as dialectical” (Fuchs, 2016, p. 302). The reality according to Fuchs (2016), is that contemporary theorists have adapted Marxist theories to apply them to the reality of the day, and as such do not claim that the conditions of capitalism are the same in the 21st century as they were in the 19th (p. 302).

Another critique of political economy of communication is that it does not have a theory of production. Garnham (2011) argues that there has been “a tendency to regard the system of

production as a black box” (p. 51). He believes that in order to understand “the main drivers of cultural industry development” it is necessary to consider the production system “against the backdrop of the problems raised for capitalist reproduction and growth by the rise of immaterial labor and products and services” (Garnham, 2011, p. 60). Because of this, it is necessary “to take the problems of productivity and efficiency seriously” (Garnham, 2011, p. 60). Paul Dwyer (2015) agrees, stating that the strength of political economy of communications, which is that it can “enlighten by comparing the media to other industries” was “achieved at the expense of an ability to understand and explain the role of creativity and culture in media production” (p. 1000). Murdock and Golding (2016), in response, argue that they “have always insisted on the need to look for ways of integrating the general analysis of shifts in the organisation of capitalism and their consequences for the structure of cultural production with the results of detailed research into how shifting webs of pressure and opportunity impinge on the everyday business of crafting cultural goods in particular settings and working in specific cultural industries” (Murdock & Golding, 2016, p. 768). They point out that there is already a rich legacy of such work that can be built upon (Murdock & Golding, 2016, p. 768).

Production

Taking this into consideration, this dissertation draws on the work of scholars including Fenton (2010), Phillips (2010) and Lee-Wright (2010) to understand news media production. Such work focuses on the production of news media at a time when technological, economic and social forces are greatly influencing the media. It recognizes that over the past few decades, journalism practice has been in flux which has meant “massive changes to the way in which news is produced and journalism performed” (Fenton, 2010, p. 13). Research conducted in news production acknowledges that the working environment of journalists affects news production and that those

working environments are “shaped by economic, social, political and technological factors, all of which form a dense inter-meshing of commercial, ethical, regulatory and cultural components” (Fenton, 2010, p. 3).

There have been many changes in the media industry in the last few decades. The Internet has opened up the amount of space available for publishing the news, has also made it easier for news organizations to reach audiences around the world, and has enhanced the speed at which journalists can access information (Fenton, 2010, p. 7). Space and speed can also, however, be taken as “speed it up and spread it thin” (Fenton, 2010, p. 7). New technology has increased competition, which has led some news organizations, concerned about survival, to resort “to a more tried-and-tested response to uncertain conditions: saving money through cutting costs and increasing productivity” (Freedman, 2010, p. 41). As pressure in newsrooms builds due to economic, technical and social forces, there is pressure for journalists to produce more and more articles with less time, which “is claimed to have led to fewer journalists gathering information outside of the newsroom” (Fenton, 2010, p. 8). At the BBC, for example, “news reporters are expected to cover a growing number of outlets, across multiple platforms and bulletins, which inevitably reduces the amount of time for the original newsgathering” (Lee-Wright, 2010, p. 81). Furthermore, publicly available information online “is being ‘cannibalized’ and re-angled with minimal verification” (Phillips, 2010, p. 99). This is because journalists are being expected “simply to reorder copy or, in the case of large public reports, to look through and pull out the information which is most likely to ‘hit the political hot spot’ for their own newspaper” (Phillips, 2010, p. 99). The consequence of a sped-up process of news reporting has been that, “far from broadening and democratizing, the internet is actually narrowing the perspective of many reporters” (Phillips, 2010, p. 99).

None of this is necessarily an inevitable result of the development and proliferation of the Internet. Rather, such “technologies of production operate within the systemic constraints of media institutions” (Fenton, 2010, p. 15). At the BBC, for example, new technologies have led those who work in news to seek more input and content from the audience, “but there is little evidence of a transformed agenda” (Lee-Wright, 2010, p. 78). The constraints of media institutions can be further understood through research in organizational communication and sociology. Work in these areas “demonstrates that a substantial amount of organizational planning and preprocessing are used to gather, package, and distribute news and information on a routine basis” (Mosco, 2011, p. 360).

Journalism and Democracy

An understanding of news production specifically and of the news itself more generally is essential because of the role that media play in democratic societies. This role can be understood in terms of the German scholar Jürgen Habermas’s (1989) theory of the public sphere, which provides a way of thinking about and framing the role of both public broadcasting and the news media in democratic societies. The public sphere constitutes a space where citizens come together to debate issues of public importance (Habermas, 1989). The theory “is part of the tradition of Enlightenment liberal political philosophy” and “addresses questions about what makes democracy work” (Bustch, 2007, p. 2). There are several distinct characteristics of the public sphere that are important to note. First, citizens come together in this space as equals (Bustch, 2007, p. 4). Second, in the public sphere, people participate as citizens free of “private interests, such as monetary gain, and state interests in administration and order” (Breese, 2011, p. 131). It is because of these characteristics of the public sphere that “rational discussion and debate on questions of state policy and action” can happen (Bustch, 2007, p. 4).

Habermas's conceptualization of the public sphere has been critiqued extensively by scholars who have argued, for example, that there are multiple public spheres that should be taken into account despite the fact that Habermas only discusses the bourgeois public sphere (Fraser, 1990; Breese, 2011; Castells, 2008; Bohman, 2004). Despite critiques, it is still a useful theoretical foundation. Nancy Fraser (1990) makes this argument on the basis of the fact that the public sphere "permits us to keep in view the distinctions between state apparatuses, economic markets, and democratic associations, distinctions that are essential to democratic theory" (p. 57). In keeping with this, the theory of the public sphere also points to the value of media outlets that are free from political and economic ties. It more generally "stresses the importance for democratic politics" that there is a sphere that is "distinct from the economy and the state" (Garnham, 1986, p. 43). It provides a way of looking at the role of media in public life and highlights the importance of deliberation and of an informed citizenry in democratic societies.

It is important to recognize that the public sphere is not fixed. This is clear from the fact that Habermas (1989) argues that the public sphere, as it originally existed, has been destroyed. This is because, counterintuitively, the entry cost to the public sphere rose with the development of capitalism as it facilitated "an uneven distribution of wealth" (Garnham, 1986, p. 41). This ended up creating "unequal access to and control over that sphere" (Garnham, 1986, p. 41). Furthermore, the state entered the economy and came to share interests with private enterprise (Garnham, 1986, p. 41).

Just as the public sphere itself has changed, the role of the media within the public sphere has changed since its origins as well (Butsch, 2007; Bredin, 2013). When the public sphere first emerged in the eighteenth century, it encompassed a relatively small population that interacted face-to-face, whereas today, "large populations make media necessary to the public sphere"

(Butsch, 2007, p. 7). In other words, the media has shifted from being important, but “subsidiary to the public sphere”, to being “the primary focus and force for today’s public sphere” (Butsch, 2007, pp. 2-3). Because the media itself is essential to a contemporary understanding of the public sphere, so is an understanding of media policy and regulation in relation to the production of media content that contributes (or not) to democratic goals. The importance of this lies in the fact that “the institutions and processes of public communication are themselves a central part of the political structure and process” (Garnham, 1986, p. 37). Because of this, changes in media policy and structures are political questions as important as, for example, the question “of subsidies to political parties” (Garnham, 1986, pp. 37-38).

Many democratic governments have historically attempted to meet public interest goals through media policy and regulation. When radio first began operating on a general scale, as a mass medium, “states took responsibility for establishing media institutions to serve the public sphere” (Butsch, 2007, p. 7). Public broadcasters have been and continue to be used as instruments of implementing media policy and regulation. The shape PSBs take depend on the overall objectives of the media systems in the countries they operate in more generally. The BBC, CBC and ABC were all created with varying degrees of interest in the use of radio generally and public service broadcasting specifically to inform citizens (Briggs, 1961; Inglis & Brazier, 1983; Peers, 1969). The circumstances under which they have been enabled to inform citizens has changed over time as the BBC and ABC both, after being explicitly prohibited from gathering their own news, were later permitted to do so through policy and regulatory changes that were made because the British and Australian governments believed they could benefit from allowing the PSBs to do so (Crisell, 2002, pp. 24-25; Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 129).

There are a number of reasons why it could be advantageous for public service broadcasters like the BBC, CBC and ABC to be allowed or compelled to provide news services. Wade Rowland (2015) outlines a number of things that public service broadcasting news specifically can do within media systems. PSBs, for example, can work “to provide a benchmark for quality” and “provide a competent, independent, and reliable source of emergency regional or nation-wide communication when needed” (Rowland, 2015, p. 133). PSB news can also cover stories of national significance that are important, but that do not have the audience appeal to make them justifiable for commercial media organizations to cover (Rowland, 2015, p. 133). It can also “provide a consistent, reliable, cumulative historical record for the nation, from all regions of the country and from significant foreign locations” (Rowland, 2015, p. 33). These are important contributions to any media sphere in democratic countries because in democracies, decisions eventually have to be made “that affect to a greater or lesser extent all citizens” (Garnham, 2003, p. 195). Politics is then not about difference, but rather about what people of one nation unavoidably have in common (Garnham, 2003, p. 196). The hope is that decisions made within the framework of representative democracy that are taken are “informed by a widely accessible public debate” (Garnham, 2003, p. 196). Public service broadcasting can and has played an essential role in fostering national discourses and providing access to information and debate to everyone across a nation.

Commodification of the News

While in the 1920s governments regulated radio in a way that emphasized the public interest, in the 1980s, media policies changed, leading “to considerable growth of commercial media that is large and wealthy enough to compete with public media” (Butsch, 2007, p. 7). This growth was accelerated by deregulation (Butsch, 2007, p. 7). In the 1990s, concerns around the health of the public sphere resurfaced, in part because an English translation of Habermas’s thesis

was released, but also because there was an “increasing concern about the ‘dumbing down’ of public discourse, about concentration of media ownership and the formation of international conglomerates” (Butsch, 2007, p. 2). There was particular concern over the way that “[t]he large scale media of monopoly capitalism transforms what had been a political public sphere into a medium for commodity consumption” (Butsch, 2007, p. 4). When this happens, and media systems come to prioritize commercial forces, there are consequences for democracy. Access to the media, and therefore information and debate, becomes dependent on a person’s purchasing power and is controlled by those that hold property rights (Garnham, 1986, p. 47). Furthermore, political communication (through mass media that chase audiences) “becomes the politics of consumerism” (Garnham, 1986, pp. 47-48). Politicians advertise to voters, and politics becomes about image more than about the public good (Garnham, 1986, p. 48).

In *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, McChesney (1999) explores the paradox of a news environment where media organizations are profiting immensely, while simultaneously neglecting to provide democracy with the kind of news and journalism that it needs. He argues that the result of this is a public that “is regarded not as a democratic polity but simply as a mass of consumers” (McChesney, 1999, p. 77). Another concern that has stemmed from commodification is then that the mass media reduced citizens to passive audience members instead of treating them as active participants in democratic debate (Butsch, 2007, p. 8). The commodification of the news has several other consequences, including a privileging of official sources and a reliance on “hooks”, or events to justify the publication of a story (McChesney, 1999). It also limits freedom of the press because the notion “has been transmuted into the freedom of powerful media corporations to say and do whatever they like in pursuit of profit, and in the name of “the people”” (Fenton & Titley, 2015, p. 557).

The negative effects of commodification are enhanced in systems where media ownership is concentrated. This is because “concentration accentuates the core tendencies of a profit-driven, advertising-supported media system: hypercommercialism and denigration of journalism and public service” (McChesney, 1999, p. 2). Generally speaking, then, concentrated media systems tend to interfere with the news media’s ability to facilitate a healthy public sphere. “It is a poison pill for democracy” (McChesney, 1999, p. 2).

And yet, levels of concentration have continued to rise over the last couple of decades. In 2015, David Taras (2015) identified, in addition to the country’s national public broadcaster, only four main conglomerates in Canada: “Bell Media, Quebecor, Rogers, and Shaw” (p. 84). Canada has roughly twice the level of concentration in the United States (Winseck, 2016, p. 491). The levels of concentration of media ownership in Britain and Australia are of concern as well (Iosifidis, 2016; Papandrea & Tiffen, 2016). The United Kingdom has had a “reduction of the number of companies in several traditional media sectors, such as print and broadcasting” while simultaneously their media firms have increasingly become “owned by the same parent company” (Iosifidis, 2016, p. 425). In Australia, concentration of media ownership has been encouraged by a number of factors, including the fact that market characteristics have “always constrained market entrants” (Papandrea & Tiffen, 2016, p. 703). Throughout the country there are only “four major commercial media players, News Corp Australia, Fairfax Media, Seven West Media and APN News and Media” (Lidberg, 2019, p. 15).

David Skinner & Mike Gasher (2005) argue that this is a problem because of “the ways in which a small handful of corporations dominate the major markets for news and information” (p. 53). Furthermore, “[t]he rise of communications conglomerates adds a new element to the old

debate about potential abuses of owner power” (Golding & Murdock, 1991, p. 23). As Golding & Murdock (1991) state:

It is no longer a simple case of proprietors intervening in editorial decisions or firing key personnel who fall out of their political philosophies. Cultural production is also strongly influenced by commercial strategies built around ‘synergies’ which exploit the overlaps between the company’s different media interests. The company’s newspapers may give free publicity to their television stations or the record and book divisions may launch products related to a new movie released by the film division. This effect is to reduce the diversity of cultural goods in circulation. (p. 23)

Media moguls, far from only exercising power over their own companies, “also have considerable indirect power over smaller companies operating in their markets or seeking to break into them. They establish the rules by which the competitive game will be played” (Golding & Murdock, 1991, p. 24).

It is imperative then, that media ecologies are made up of diverse media organizations. According to Victor Pickard (2015) there needs to be “a structurally diverse system- nonprofits, public media, small for-profit ventures- that rescues journalism’s public service mission from the ravages of commercialism, and lets access journalism wither away” (p. 94). A structurally diverse system is desirable not least of all because the media is “a huge, nondemocratically organized force that has major power over politics, public discourse, and culture” (Baker, 2007, p. 3).

Financial, Technological and Policy/Regulatory Disruption

Issues around media ownership are important to consider especially at a time when journalism is in crisis, which scholars such as McChesney (2012) suggest is the case. McChesney (2012) argues that “[t]he bottom has come out of the cup of journalism over the past generation,

and has accelerated in the past decade” (p. 616). Journalism is facing both a deteriorating quality and a decline in quantity (McChesney, 2012, p. 616). The problem is bad enough that “[w]e are now rapidly approaching a point where there is nowhere near sufficient journalism for the constitutional system to succeed” (McChesney, 2012, p. 616). This is happening, at least in part, because journalism is facing financial, technical and policy and regulatory disruptions all at once.

Financial Disruption

There are a number of reasons for the financial aspect of the journalism crisis. A global recession that began in late 2007, a shift in advertising revenue online, and the rise of aggregators all contributed to the financial disruption in the news business.

One of the lasting impacts of the global recession on newspapers was that it led news organizations to implement cost cutting measures (Gorman, 2015, p. 14). This would mean that, when news organizations tried to get people to pay for news several years later by putting up paywalls, the content they were trying to sell was of a “severely limited value” (Gorman, 2015, p. 14). On top of this, two decades of acquisitions had contributed to significant debt accumulation, which made everything worse (Gorman, 2015, p. 16). Debt led news organizations to be short-sighted and more focused on their bottom lines, and as such, news organizations “consistently sacrificed technological innovation and quality of content for cost of production” (Gorman, 2015, pp. 16-17). Further complicating matters was the fact that advertising was being decoupled from news and, significantly for newspapers specifically, classified advertising “transferred to advertising-specific websites” (Fenton, 2011, p. 63). The Internet had “destroyed the traditional business model by giving advertisers far superior ways to reach their prospective consumers” (McChesney, 2012, pp. 616-617). Making matters worse, news organizations have also been losing revenue to aggregators. Aggregators such as Google take the work of news organizations and

'promote' it "through links to the original stories that they collect from the paper's websites" (Gorman, 2015, p. 105). Companies that aggregate content argue that they are helping news organizations through promotion, but statistics "suggest that aggregators steal revenue from newspapers by repurposing material the dailies paid to create, posting it online and sending flocks of useless fly-bys to the original site" (Gorman, 2015, p. 105). The aggregators themselves, meanwhile, "create the loyal audience the advertisers want, and they build it with the best material lifted from companies that pay to manufacture it" (Gorman, 2015, p. 105).

Technological Disruption

Financial disruption, while significant, should not be the only consideration in discussions of the journalism crisis. "Understanding the journalism crisis as a breakdown of market transactions risks naturalizing a commercial system that treats media like a standard economic "widget" governed by consumer behavior" (Pickard, 2015, p. 92). But the crisis is a lot more than that, and so technological disruption must be considered as well.

Taras (2015), uses the term "media shock" to describe the disruption of the media sphere. He lists ten characteristics of media shock, which paint the picture of a media system where individuals are able to customize their own media worlds, altering "the top-down flow of information", where social media "have created a new dynamic that has transformed the ways in which we conduct business, enjoy culture, socialize, and mobilize politically", and where "[g]overnments, political parties, and corporations now have the ability to gather vast amounts of information about people's tastes, habits, purchases, leisure activities, and political and religious views" (Taras, 2015, pp. 3-4). Taras (2015) argues that "[i]t's not only the acceleration of change in technology but also its scale and pervasiveness that are breathtaking. The advance of web-based media is massive, enveloping, and unstoppable" (p. 8). In this media world, "[e]very medium is

merging with every other medium, and every screen is converging with every other screen” (Taras, 2015, p. 3). This converging of media has been particularly damaging.

The problem of convergence more generally is difficult to define because just like with public service broadcasting, it has diverse definitions (Drucker & Gumpert, 2010, p. 2). “Some place technology in the foreground and still others emphasize organizational mergers” (Drucker & Gumpert, 2010, p. 2). When specifically applied to communication technologies, “convergence has been associated with collaboration, cooperation, combined content, changing consumption and integrated connection” (Drucker & Gumpert, 2010, p. 2).

Convergence was a popular strategy in the 1990s (Edge, 2011). “The notion that traditional media - print and broadcast - would in the future be delivered only online led media companies to scramble at the turn of the millennium to get in on the expected digital gold rush by diversifying into as many media as possible” (Edge, 2016, p. 96). Convergence was been seen “by some as an effective strategy to help conventional media adapt to a rapidly changing environment” (Brin & Soderlund, 2010, p. 576). It was also, however “feared by others as a threat to the diversity and quality of news” (Brin & Soderlund, 2010, p. 576). Canadian media owners were skeptical of “the business advantages of convergence” (Edge, 2016, p. 97). Elsewhere, it was widely seen as desirable. Because of this, media owners around the world “pushed for the reduction or even removal of national restrictions on the cross-ownership of newspapers and television stations” (Edge, 2016, p. 97). The reason why many media companies wanted to converge was the theory “that by delivering content across multiple media, companies could increase profits by sharing content across media, by selling advertising across multiple platforms, and through the “synergy” of having one journalist cover a story for multiple outlets” (Edge, 2016, p. 97). Research in Canada, however, has shown that despite the fact that media owners “may have dreamt of journalists being

able to work in different platforms, there appears to have been considerable reluctance on the part of journalists themselves to accommodate this dream” (Brin & Soderlund, 2010, p. 576). Marc Edge (2016), argues that media companies should have “paid attention to the lessons of history” as newspapers had tried multimedia ownership in the 1920s when they moved into radio broadcasting but could not make it work (p. 97). One of the problems with convergence in the 1990s “was that media companies had taken on high levels of debt in acquiring outlets in multiple media” (Edge, 2011, p. 1267). When advertising revenues later fell in the 2000s, “newly converged companies became hard pressed to pay the interest on this debt” (Edge, 2011, p. 1267). This was at least in part because a big component of the strategy for monetizing convergence had been selling advertising across media, which they found they could not do (Edge, 2011, p. 1267).

Policy and Regulatory Disruption

More than just negatively impacting media companies, convergence strategies have negatively impacted policy and regulation. “Technological and industry convergence have led to a regulatory nightmare” (Drucker & Gumpert, 2010, p. 4). There were two problems that emerged. The first was with jurisdiction. This was because new technologies, such as the Internet, “challenge old conceptualizations of jurisdiction” (Drucker & Gumpert, 2010, p. 9). The problem more specifically has been that “[r]egulatory power and jurisdiction, geographically/ territorially based terms, are undermined when borders become transparent, easily permeable, and often imperceptible” (Drucker & Gumpert, 2010, p. 9). There have, as such, been legal thinkers who have advocated “that cyberspace be conceptualized as a “place” rather than a medium” (Drucker & Gumpert, 2010, p. 9). There has also been a problem with the manner in which communication technologies had been regulated before convergence, which is to say they were individually conceptualized and as such “have historically been regulated based on the specific and unique

characteristics of a given medium” (Drucker & Gumpert, 2010, p. 5). This is a problem because technologies are no longer distinct and because convergence has therefore dissolved “the silos traditionally associated with media governance” (Drucker & Gumpert, 2010, p. 5).

Media policy and regulation, however, are not ubiquitously accepted as appropriate. An argument against government intervention in the media is that “if consumers of news media (or advertisers) do not pay enough for journalism to make it profitable, we should resign ourselves to its gradual decline” (Pickard, 2015, p. 92). Pickard (2015) argues that “[t]his logic enjoys wide currency, but ignores the fact that news media are public or merit goods that cannot be reduced to their commercial value” (p. 92). He goes on to state that additionally, “critics on the left and right often share a sense that legacy journalists are now getting their comeuppance after failing to embrace new technologies and taking for granted their monopoly status and cultural authority over captive audiences” (Pickard, 2015, p. 93). However, the assumption then is that there are solutions where the market is still the final arbiter, such as through charity or technology, that will provide democracy with the journalism it needs (Pickard, 2015, p. 93). Pickard (2015), argues that “these are not systemic solutions” and points out that they “dismiss society-level collective action such as policy interventions in the form of public subsidies” (Pickard, 2015, p. 93).

For McChesney (2012), policy solutions in the form of public subsidies are the only way forward for journalism. He states that “evidence points inexorably in one and only one direction: if the United States, or any nation, is serious about improving journalism, not to mention creating a real media utopia, the only way this can happen is with massive public subsidies” (McChesney, 2012, p. 619). This argument is based on the logic that “[t]he market is not getting it done, and there is no reason to think it is going to get it done” (McChesney, 2012, p. 619). Public subsidies are appropriate because “it is the first duty of the government to see that a free press actually exists

so there is something of value that cannot be censored” (McChesney, 2012, p. 621). Furthermore, press subsidies are nothing new. McChesney (2012) argues that rejecting public subsidies “ignores the actual history of massive democratic journalism subsidies in the United States” and “does grave injustice to the really existing track record of other democratic nations” (p. 621). He points out that *“the nations with the freest press systems are also the nations that make the greatest public investment in journalism, and therefor provide the basis for being strong democracies”* (McChesney, 2012, p. 623).

Journalism and PSBs in the Digital Age

Public broadcasting is one way the British, Canadian and Australian governments are already investing in journalism as the BBC, CBC and ABC each have strong mandates to, among other things, inform all citizens of their nations. However, as useful as they have been as tools for ensuring citizens have access to news and information, PSBs like commercial media organizations are facing a number of challenges. Many PSBs are currently coping with financial difficulties. This is because operating in the digital age means that public broadcasters have “increased needs for investment in new technological equipment” (Enli, 2008, p. 111). This affects some PSBs more than others because not all public funding arrangements have supported the adoption of new technology. The ABC, for example was established to deal specifically with radio and television, not online, a fact that has been reflected in their funding as it adopted new, digital technologies (Flew, 2011, p. 222). Similarly, in Canada, the CBC’s online activities have needed “to be either self-financing or cross subsidized from other activities” due to the fact that the “CBC’s mandate for which it received direct federal funding is to develop radio and television content” (O’Neill, 2006, p. 184). In Britain, the BBC received a licence fee settlement that took into account the fact that the BBC would be implementing new technologies but subsequent settlements were lower

than what the BBC had asked for and required it to find efficiencies within the Corporation which led to significant cutbacks (Culture, Media and Sport, 1998, para. 4; Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2006a, p. 8; BBC, 2007, p. 83; BBC Trust, 2011, p. 13).

The lack of additional funding for the development of new services through the adoption of new technologies is of no small consequence. This is because the implementation of a digital strategy is costly, which means that PSBs have had “to consider how they will fund that transition beyond traditional, but stagnating sources of public funding at a time of rising costs” (Steemers, 1999, p. 44). For the BBC, CBC and ABC this meant increasing commercial activities (Roberts, 1999, p. 34; Mandate Review Committee, 1996, pp. 36-37; Johns, 2000, p. 13). The problem with this was that by adopting commercialized forms of supplementary funding public broadcasters inevitably were falling “into conflict with commercial rivals who fear cross-subsidy from public funds and unfair competition, and who would prefer to see a more restricted form of public service provision” (Steemers, 1999, p. 44). Jeanette Steemers (1999), argues that regardless of what they do, public broadcasters will face criticism because if they aim to reach larger audiences they can be seen as abandoning “core public service principles,” but if they do not “they risk marginalization and cutting themselves adrift from public support and ultimately adequate funds” (Steemers, 1999, p. 57). Steemers (1999), further argues that “a balance therefore needs to be found between industrial and cultural priorities” (p. 62).

In addition to coping with funding issues, PSBs have needed to work to counter the narrative that suggests they are no longer necessary because of technological advancements – an argument that is undermining their work. Brevini (2013) succinctly states the problem as being that: “the traditional role of PSBs as guardians of the public sphere, their impartiality and the quality of their programming is increasingly being undermined by the proliferation of multi-

channel platforms, the progressive fragmentation of audiences and increased competition for revenues” (p. 4). On top of this, declining advertising revenue has “put the private media sector under aggravated strain around the world” (Brevini, 2013, p. 4). The consequence of this has been that private media have been “increasingly demanding that national authorities reduce regulatory control on private enterprises, while raising regulatory oversight on public initiatives and cutting new initiatives within the public sector (Brevini, 2013, p. 4).

What this demonstrates is that the changes in the media sphere have caused problems not just for private media organizations but for public service broadcasters as well. Despite this, the survival of public broadcasters is important.

Relationship to Existing Literature

There already is a significant line of scholarship that makes the case for the survival of public broadcasting (Andrejevic, 2013; Helm, 2013; Hargreaves Heap, Propper & Neary, 2005; Brevini, 2010; Miragliotta and Errington, 2012; Moe, 2008a; etc). This dissertation builds on existing research and examines and assesses how national online news services have developed at the BBC, CBC and ABC as a means of fulfilling their mandates.

Arguments made by various academics for the survival of PSBs include that they provide a counterbalance to commercial media (Golding & Murdock, 1991; Jakubowicz, 2010; Raboy, 2008; etc), that they can provide quality content (Rowland, 2013; Miragliotta & Errington, 2012; Andrejevic, 2013; etc) and that PSBs online can provide additional value by, for example, creating archives (Belanger, 2005) and potentially search engines and social networks that are free from commercial restraints and the consequences that follow (Andrejevic, 2013). In addition to these arguments, scholars such as Flew (2009), argue for reframing public service broadcasters as public service media organizations. Along these lines, Brevini (2013), puts forth a framework for PSB

2.0, which is “a normative framework for PSB online” (p. 30). She incorporates many of the arguments discussed above into “four normative criteria for PSB 2.0: citizenship, universality, quality and trust” (Brevini, 2013, p. 32).

The first criteria of Brevini’s (2013) framework for PSB 2.0, citizenship, considers “civil, political, social and communication rights” (p. 53). By doing so, it embraces a form of democracy that “requires that citizens are given the opportunity to fully participate in politics and therefore are able to renegotiate the common good, given the continuous establishment of different types of hegemonies in democratic societies” (Brevini, 2013, p. 42). Along these lines, Karol Jakubowicz (2010) argues that, “PSB will be more important than ever in the digital age in order to counterbalance the declining scope for broadcasting law and regulation so as to ensure that all society’s communication needs are met” (p. 11).

Universality in Brevini’s (2013) outline of PSB 2.0, means both “universality of content and services”, as well as “universality of access” (p. 44). The former refers to the provision of diverse content, which is produced “with attention to all types of minority interests, including high culture and educational programmes” (Brevini, 2013, p. 44). The latter, universality of access, includes four components: “access to networks, content, retrievability and media literacy” (Brevini, 2013, p. 44). The importance of this is reflected in the fact that public broadcasters are often mandated by governments to give access to and aid in the inclusion of marginalized populations whose voices often go unheard but need to be included in public debates in truly democratic societies (MacLennan, 2011; McDonnell, 1991; Murray, 2001).

Beyond being universal, in Brevini’s (2013) conceptualization of PSB 2.0, content should also be of quality. Brevini (2013) argues that quality can be taken to mean that PSBs should work as “a tool of resistance against the progressive commercialization of the Internet and become an

instrument to strengthen the role of citizens, rather than consumers” (p. 50). Quality, in this way, can be understood to encompass values that “originate from ideas of impartiality, accuracy, balance, fairness, objectivity, rigour, transparency, truth, originality and innovation” (Brevini, 2013, p. 53). Wade Rowland (2013), argues that PSBs should further aim “to provide a benchmark for quality” in the wider media ecology (p. 65). Considering news services specifically, he makes the assertion that PSBs should “compete strongly in conventional news coverage to encourage private broadcasters to be the best they can be” (Rowland, 2013, p. 65).

Brevini’s (2013), fourth and final normative criterion for PSB, trust, was included even though it is not traditionally considered a normative element of PSB because “there are many spaces of disinformation and misinformation” in the media world now (p. 50). Trust is an important addition because “there is even more of a need today to be guided through the mass of information available online” (Brevini, 2013, p. 51). A 2019 report commissioned by the Department of Communication, Media and Sport in Britain revealed that 53 per cent of British adults were “worried about being exposed to fake news on social media” while 24 per cent of the British public do not “know how to verify sources of information found online” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 24). Significantly, the BBC, CBC and ABC were all identified as highly trusted sources of news in their respective countries in Reuter’s 2019 Digital News Report (Reuters, 2019).

In addition to the scholars mentioned above who have made strong cases for the survival of PSB, there are also scholars who have studied the influence of Internet technologies on PSBs from a theoretical view (Thorsen, 2012; O’Neill, 2006; Brevini, 2010; Steemers, 1999; etc.), and the impact that the Internet has had on the media more generally (Hendy, 2000; Abramson, 2001; etc.). There has also been work done by academics that looks into and considers the experience of the BBC, CBC and ABC in the online world. This work traces the history of the development of

these PSBs online, considers how the Internet has changed how PSBs are gathering and presenting news content, and considers the impact of the Internet on news values and routines at the PSBs.

More specifically, in Britain, scholars such as Benedetta Brevini (2010) have described the early years of BBC Online, the logistics of how it evolved and how the Corporation viewed the potential of the Internet. Brevini (2010) compares the British experience with the experience in Spain and Italy. Brevini's (2010) article is policy oriented. Other scholars such as Jackie Harrison (2009), have explored the practices of the BBC's newsroom. Harrison (2009) more specifically explored how the BBC deals with user-generated content (UGC) in the article "User-Generated Content and Gatekeeping at the BBC Hub". The article argued that "UGC actually reinforces a tendency towards soft journalism and human interest, as exemplified by the rise of stories centred on crime, calamities and accidents" (Harrison, 2009, p. 255). During an observational study at the BBC, Harrison (2009) found that UGC was being "placed at the heart of the newsroom" (p. 255). She warned that, paradoxically, UGC may extend "reach and audience involvement, in the long run," but it may also diminish "the public service standards of BBC news through the spread of soft journalism" (Harrison, 2009, p. 255). Claire Wardle & Andrew Williams (2010) also conducted a study around UGC at the BBC. Their study used the BBC as a case study and considered "the attitudes of its news workers towards audience material" (Wardle & Williams, 2010, p. 781). The authors wanted to find out whether or not the use of UGC was changing the practice of journalism (Wardle & Williams, 2010, p. 782). Wardle & Williams (2010) ultimately found that BBC news journalists were "likely to think of it as a source of news material to be processed in the same way as other material flowing into the newsroom" (Wardle & Williams, 2010, p. 783). Peter Lee-Wright (2010), was part of an ethnographic study of the BBC News web team, which "found many frustrated journalists acting as no more than sub-editors reformatting

copy” while other reporters were “expected to cover a growing number of outlets, across multiple platforms and bulletins, which inevitably reduces the amount of time for the original newsgathering” (Lee-Wright, 2010, p. 81).

In terms of Canada and the CBC, Andrew S. Patrick, Alex Black, & Thomas E. Whalen (1996), wrote an article titled “CBC Radio on the Internet: An Experiment in Convergence”, which described the first uses of CBC audio content being used online. Patrick, Black & Whalen (1996) were scientists who approached the CBC to use its content to explore whether or not “there was any demand for regular radio programming distributed as digital audio files over the Internet” among other questions. The study found that the CBC’s audio content was popular online and so the CBC started developing its own website (Patrick, Black & Whalen, 1996). Brian O’Neill (2006) detailed the early days of CBC.ca and the CBC’s strategy for building its online presence. Gregory Taylor (2016), wrote an article titled “Dismantling the Public Airwaves: Shifting Canadian Public Broadcasting to an Online Service” in which he discusses the CBC’s 2014 strategy. The strategy was focused on turning the CBC towards becoming increasingly digital and reaching Canadians through mobile devices (Taylor, 2016, p. 350). While focusing on the new strategy, Taylor (2016) also outlines the CBC’s transition towards digital technology more generally, including providing a discussion of the CBC’s Hamilton experiment whereby the CBC attempted to implement a fully digital, local strategy in the Canadian city Hamilton (Taylor, 2016, pp. 359-361). Academics David Taras & Christopher Waddell (2020), have also explored the CBC’s digital strategy in their book *The End of the CBC?*. In the book Taras & Waddell (2020) describe a decline in resources at the CBC at a time when the Corporation was pushing digital development and discuss some of the ways the Internet, coupled with the decline in resources, has affected the production and distribution of CBC news content.

In Australia, scholars such as Maureen Burns (2000) and Fiona Martin (1999) detailed how the ABC got its start online and the difficulties it faced in terms of finding funding and the resources necessary to develop it. Scholar Gay Hawkins (2001) also wrote about the early days of ABC Online. He did so through an interview with Molly Reynolds, a previous TV Online Producer with the ABC for a 2001 edition of the academic journal *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy*. The interview highlighted that PSBs got involved with the Internet in part because it “was assumed to be a broadcasting medium - like radio and TV - and broadcasters such as the ABC believed their charter obliged them to explore and be prepared for the digital future, whatever it may be” (Hawkins, 2001, p. 95). Through the interview, the article describes the content used by ABC Online in its earliest years (at which point, because it was inexperienced with text-based content, it was reliant “on sources like radio wire copy” and transcripts of ABC radio and television news and current affairs programming) (Hawkins, 2001, p. 96).

While there has been a lot research done that looks into PSBs online generally, and into the BBC, CBC and ABC specifically, a comprehensive, comparative study of how the BBC, CBC and ABC newsrooms have developed online services, and the implications will be a unique contribution to the field. Furthermore, attention to the narrative around competition between the PSBs and newspapers in the national press and in policy and regulatory documents will also be a unique contribution to the field. This research provides an opportunity to compare the directions that each public broadcaster has taken with regards to integrating online technologies into the way they operationalize their mandates.

The BBC, CBC and ABC were chosen because they are similar in terms of language and structure, which makes for a useful comparison, and have also developed within the British

Parliamentary system. Furthermore, while the CBC and ABC were never given the monopoly that the BBC started out with, all three broadcasters were founded with similar values in mind. They are, however, also different in terms of political climate, the geographic circumstances in which they operate and their historical development, which will provide useful points of comparison in terms of the direction that each has taken with regards to implementing online technologies in their newsrooms. The focus of this project is on national news because of the public importance of news generally in creating an informed citizenry, and of PSB news specifically in ensuring access to all citizens and in providing an alternative voice in news ecologies that are dominated by a small number of privately-owned companies.

Methodology

This project is designed to be descriptive, analytical and, in the end, prescriptive. The methods used will be a content analysis of the homepages of the national news websites of each of the broadcasters considered, a critical document analysis of official documents pertaining to the development of online news services at each of the broadcasters, and a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the coverage of the development of online news services at the broadcasters considered, in the national daily press of the countries where each PSB operates. Each component of the project will have an element of comparing and contrasting the results from each country. Each of the methods chosen for this study work together to provide a thorough examination of the development of online use in the national news divisions of the BBC, CBC and ABC as a way to fulfill their mandates and remain relevant to citizens in the digital age.

To contextualize the information gathered from the content analysis, critical document analysis and the CDA, my research begins by providing historical context for each broadcaster. This includes examining the circumstances around how each broadcaster was established and how

they have evolved leading up to the implementation of their websites in the mid-90s (the BBC in 1997, the CBC in 1996 and the ABC in 1998). An overview of each of the broadcasters' websites will provide further context.

Content Analysis of the Websites

The content analysis will inform the overview of the websites. It focuses specifically on the homepages of the national news sections of each of the websites considered. Screenshots of the front pages of these sections will be saved for the analysis, as well as copies of each of the full versions of the articles that appear on the homepage. The purpose of this analysis is to, in conjunction with the document analysis, provide a general overview of how the national news websites of each of the broadcasters is currently being used. It will show how the PSBs are using, if at all, advertisements, multimedia, user generated content, and any interactive functions (for example, commenting). It will also provide an idea of how much video and audio content versus written content the PSBs are incorporating into the stories that are being promoted on their homepages are using. This is an important part of this project because it contributes to an understanding of some of the criticism of the PSBs' websites that touch on the types of content being posted.

The analysis will take place over a constructed week based on one year starting in August 2017. Each country will be analyzed on the same days, making up the same constructed week. To select the days, first, the weeks of the year were separated into seasons and each was assigned a number. From there, two weeks were selected from each season using Microsoft Excel's random number generator function. Next, the eight weeks that were chosen were written on individual slips of paper, folded, and then selected randomly and placed in order from Sunday to Saturday with the eighth slip of paper being left out. The final days used for the sample were:

- Wednesday September 20, 2017
- Sunday October 7, 2018¹
- Tuesday November 7, 2017
- Monday February 12, 2018
- Saturday April 7, 2018
- Thursday June 21, 2018
- Friday August 17, 2018

A constructed week was chosen as the sampling method because it is generally recognized in media studies as being the most efficient way to analyze news content over a period of time. “Researchers frequently use constructed week samples to approximate content for larger populations of textual data in content analysis projects” (Luke, Caburnay & Cohen, 2011, p. 76). Hester and Dougall (2007) cite a number of academic studies that argue that, “[s]tratifed sampling that yields constructed weeks has been the most convincing response to the problem of systematic content variation in the media” (p. 812).

Luke, Caburnay & Cohen (2011), state that “[c]onstructed week sampling is more advantageous to simple random sampling because it accounts for variation of news content over a seven-day news week” (p. 87). In addition to ensuring that the sample accounts for each day of the week, the days for the constructed week for this dissertation will be chosen in such a way that it ensures that at least one day is chosen from each season. This approach will be taken to account for potential seasonal variations in content. This is because “taking into account quarterly fluctuations may improve the representativeness of data, based on the cyclical nature of some kinds

¹ The original day that was selected was Sunday October 8th, 2017, however, due to an error, this day was redone the following year

of news events, especially those predictable events timed to legal requirements, such as disclosures of corporate earnings” (Connolly-Ahern, Ahern & Bortree, 2009, p. 865). Both of these considerations taken together will help to control for potential cyclical biases.

The limitation of choosing one constructed week over the period of a year is that it will not pick up on trends over an extended period of time. This method was chosen for this project nonetheless because the information gathered is being used to provide an overview of the websites and how they function in order to supplement and help provide a complete discussion of the data collected during the CDA and document analysis portions of this study. The information gathered from this part of the project is essential as the websites are one of the ways through which government policy around media is operationalized. It is a useful method in that it will help to determine how the websites are actually being used, and as such will provide context to discussions around the value the websites add to the fulfillment of the mandates of the PSBs considered.

Document Analysis

The next component of this research project is the critical document analysis. This part of the project will determine how online news services have been justified and have been framed in relation to the mandates of each PSB by the PSBs themselves and by policymakers and regulators. A particular emphasis will be placed on how online news is envisioned in the documents by key stakeholders in relation to the relevant mandates. This part of the project will also provide insight into the way that policy and regulation have enabled and constrained these broadcasters throughout the development of their online news services. The document analysis will be focused on those documents that were published after the establishment of each broadcaster’s website. Brief discussion of important documents that were published before this time will be included in the historical portion of this dissertation to provide context.

More specifically, this dissertation will consider a range of documents that fall under two general categories. The first consists of documents that are internal to each of the broadcasters and that pertain to their national news divisions' online operations. This category includes documents such as annual reports, social media policies, commenting policies and editorial policies. The second category includes documents external to the broadcasters that address their national news divisions' online operations (either directly or indirectly). This category focuses on government-initiated inquiries, parliamentary committee reports, independent reviews, legislation, and charter and licence reviews. Examples of documents that fall in this category include *The Broadcasting Act* (1991), the *Royal Charter for the Continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation* (DMCS, 2016b) and the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983* (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, 2019), Sir. David Clementi's (2016) report *A review of the governance and regulation of the BBC*, and the *ABC and SBS efficiency study* (Department of Communications, 2014).

Document analysis is a common method used in communications policy research. According to Karppinen & Moe (2012), "[m]ost studies in communication policy research employ documents as research material in one way or another" (p. 179). This dissertation is no different. Despite how common it is in communication policy research, "document analysis is not especially well explicated either in textbooks on the methodology of media and communication studies or in most actual research contributions" (Karppinen & Moe, 2012, p. 179). Karppinen & Moe (2012), state that "there are different ways in which documents can be used in communication policy studies" (p. 189). The authors describe documents as either primary sources or texts, two ways that communications researchers tend to use them. They state that, traditionally, "documents are usually considered primarily as sources" (Karppinen & Moe, 2012, p. 185). The authors point out

that “[w]hen considered in this way it is assumed that documents somehow reflect the interests or actions of their authors or in some other way represent the facts of the policy process they refer to” (Karppinen & Moe, 2012, p. 185). Documents looked at in this way “can have a simply descriptive function” (Karppinen & Moe, 2012, p. 185). They use the example of comparing legislation from different countries to illustrate how it is possible for the only task of a document analysis to be “to find relevant documents and provide an accurate description of their content” (Karppinen & Moe, 2012, p. 185). However, they “can also be considered important statements intended to communicate political actions” (Karppinen & Moe, 2012, p. 185). Karppinen & Moe (2012) argue that “[a]part from their use as sources, documents can be treated explicitly as texts or social products that have consequences in themselves, irrespective of their author’s intentions” (p. 186). Through this perspective, “it is assumed that the themes and discourses, as well as the framing of policy problems they convey, are somehow politically consequential irrespective of the traditional institutional explanations” (Karppinen & Moe, 2012, p. 186). Furthermore “[f]rom this perspective, policy documents can be analysed as discourse, much the same way as communication scholars analyse newspaper stories, for instance, with an interest in the narratives and metaphors used in the documents, or the way they portray some courses of action as commonsensical and others as nonsensical” (Karppinen & Moe, 2012, p. 187). This dissertation considers the documents it makes use of as both sources and as texts with an emphasis on the latter. This will help facilitate an understanding of how the documents have reflected the forces that have enabled and constrained online news development at each of the PSBs. It will also help to facilitate an understanding of the affect that the documents have had on the operations of the PSBs and in turn, the national press in their respective countries. This will ultimately help to shed light on the relationship between the PSBs and the national press in their respective countries.

Ultimately, the document analysis component of the project will uncover information about how the public broadcasters should be operating and what they should be striving to achieve according to policy and regulation. It will also help establish how online technology and its value as a means of fulfilling the broadcasters' respective mandates, is envisioned in official documents from the perspective of the PSBs themselves, policymakers and regulators, and national news publishers. Further to this, it will shed light on how national news publishers have enabled and/or constrained the development of online news at each of the broadcasters considered. The document analysis will further uncover the support, if any, each of the PSBs has received throughout the development of their online news services, and determine how, if at all, the use of online technologies for their news services has been formalized as a required part of their operations.

Critical Discourse Analysis

The sample for the CDA is based on articles (general news coverage, op-eds, editorials, columns and other commentary written by journalists) published in the national newspapers in Britain, Canada and Australia that discuss online news at the BBC, CBC and ABC respectively. The British national dailies included are: *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Express*, *The Sun*, *The Daily Mirror*, and *The Daily Star*. The Canadian national dailies included are: *The Globe and Mail* and *The National Post*. The Australian national daily included is *The Australian*.

The CDA focuses on articles published between the start of the year that each of the broadcasters began publishing content on their websites (BBC in November 1997, CBC in July 1996 and ABC in March 1998) and April 1, 2019. The sample of articles was collected using Global Newstream and Factiva. Four search terms were used for each country:

- “BBC Online”

- “BBC” and “Online news”
- “BBC” and “Charter” and “Internet”
- “BBC” and “funding” and “Internet”
- “CBC Online”
- “CBC” and “Online news”
- “CBC” and “mandate” and “Internet”
- “CBC” and “funding” and “Internet”
- “ABC Online”
- “ABC” and “Online news”
- “ABC” and “Charter” and “Internet”
- “ABC” and “funding” and “Internet”

The total number of results found on Global Newsstream and Factiva before eliminating duplicates across databases and keywords are as follows: BBC 5,703; CBC 824; ABC 1,498.

The analysis focuses on articles that have a core component that addresses the online, national news services of the PSBs, whether in relation to the corporations’ mandates, financing their online activities, or in terms of competition with other media companies. Articles that spoke about online news directly were specifically sought out, but articles that talked about the corporations in general enough terms to include their online news operations were considered as well. After eliminating duplicate articles (within and across keyword results), letters to the editor and those that otherwise did not fit the requirements, there were a total of 430 for the BBC, 70 for the CBC and 187 for the ABC. Table 1 shows the breakdown by newspaper.

Table 1

Number of Articles in Final Sample by Newspaper

Newspaper	Total articles ²
<i>The Guardian</i>	153
<i>The Independent</i>	48
<i>The Times</i>	76
<i>The Daily Telegraph</i> ³	66
<i>The Daily Mail</i>	37
<i>The Daily Express</i>	24
<i>The Sun</i>	14
<i>The Daily Mirror</i>	9
<i>The Daily Star</i> ⁴	3
<i>The Globe and Mail</i>	39
<i>The National Post</i>	31
<i>The Australian</i>	187

The CDA serves three purposes. First, it will contribute to the overall description of the development of online usage that the previous two methods also contribute to. Second, it will enable an understanding of how dominant national news publishers, which publish news content in the same news ecologies at the PSBs, view the development of online national news at the public broadcasters. Third, building on the second purpose and in conjunction with the document analysis, this CDA will help to uncover the ways that the development of online news provision at the PSBs has been affected by competing perspectives of the role of PSBs in an online environment.

Coverage in the national press was chosen as the focus of the CDA because newspaper publishers have a vested interest in whether or not and how PSBs develop their news websites. They also have considerable power to persuade public opinion and politics, especially in media ecologies that are highly concentrated as they are in Britain, Canada and Australia. National

² A complete, detailed list of articles chosen for each PSB can be found in Appendix A

³ The Daily Telegraph was only available in abstract form on Global Newsstream prior to June 2, 2000. Articles from November 1997-June 2000 were therefore identified by their abstracts on Global Newsstream and the full articles were retrieved from an online archive system by the company Gale

⁴ The Daily Star was unavailable on both Global Newsstream and Factiva. The articles were gathered from UK Press Online, which had archival material beginning in 2000. The same keyword searches were used with this database as the others

newspapers were further chosen because newspaper publishers have argued and continue to argue that the news components of the PSBs' online activities create unfair competition for advertising revenue and/or audiences and present an obstacle for the success of paywalls (Cairncross, 2019; PPF, 2017; Kerr, 2018).

This dissertation adopts Norman Fairclough's (1995) framework for critical discourse analysis. Fairclough (1995) uses the term "'discourse' to refer to spoken or written language use" (p. 54). One thing that comes out of the "referring to language as discourse" is that it signals that it is to be investigated "as a form of social practice" (p. 54). This "implies that it is a mode of action" and "that language is a socially and historically situated mode of action, in a dialectical relationship with other facets of the social" (p. 54). The dialectical relationship Fairclough (1995) refers to is one that "is socially shaped, but it also socially shaping" (p. 55). CDA takes this into account and "explores the tension between these two sides of language use" (p. 55).

Fairclough (1993) refers to discourse analysis that is specifically critical in its approach as being:

discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony. (p. 135)

Such an approach to discourse analysis will help address the questions this dissertation asks in relation to structures and the influence of structures on PSB online development. More specifically, it can shed light on the impact of the structure of the news ecologies of the relevant countries on

PSB online development, and how it can work as an enabling and constraining force. Along these same lines, it can also help uncover the impact of the larger socioeconomic structures that the PSBs operate as part of.

Seeing language as discourse, Fairclough's (1995) framework consists of three components for the analysis of a communicative event: texts, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice (p. 59). Analysis of texts "covers traditional forms of linguistic analysis - analysis of vocabulary and semantics, the grammar of sentences and smaller units, and the sound system ('phonology') and writing system" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 57). It further considers how "sentences are connected together, as well as "the organization of turn-taking in interviews or the overall structure of a newspaper article" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 57). For Fairclough (1995), "[a]nalysis of texts is concerned with both their meaning and their form" (57). Next in the framework is discourse practice, which "involves various aspects of the processes of text production and text consumption" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 58). Fairclough (1995) highlights institutional processes and discourse processes, which fall under this category. Institutional processes include, for example, "routines such as editorial procedures involved in producing media texts", while discourse processes are narrower and discuss "the transformations which texts undergo in production and consumption" (p. 59). The final component of Fairclough's (1995) framework for discourse analysis, sociocultural practice, "may involve its more immediate situational context, the wider context of institutional practices the event is embedded within, or the yet wider frame of the society and the culture" (p. 62). Within this framework, Fairclough (1995) sees "discourse practice as mediating between the textual and the social and cultural, between text and sociocultural practice" (pp. 59-60).

This framework “is compatible with various emphases” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 62). As such, this dissertation focuses on text because its analysis is concerned with both meaning and form, and understands one as affecting the other. Form can be particularly telling in news discourse and as such worth emphasizing. News discourse is unique. “The topics of news discourse are not simply a list; rather, they form a hierarchical structure” (van Dijk, 1988, p. 41). Because of this, “the text is defined rather by relevance of the topics (first, main topics come first) than by some logical order of the topics” (van Dijk, 1988, p. 41). In the way news stories are typically formed, “[t]he lead gives the general macrostructure” (van Dijk, 1988, p. 47). According to the way news is structured, “for each topic, the most important information is presented first” (van Dijk, 1988, p. 43). This is “the result of a production strategy that considers relevance constraints and possible reading strategies, so that readers will get the important information first” (van Dijk, 1988, p. 44). This way of looking at news, in terms of its form, which consists of hierarchical structuring, is useful for this dissertation because the form of news provides valuable information on what is being conveyed as the most important information the readers need to know, which is in turn beneficial for understanding the perspective the article takes, and any bias that may be emphasized in it. The unique form of news is further useful because it conveys what information is seen as being of lesser importance. This knowledge, combined with attention to what is not literally included in the text, is also beneficial for understanding perspective and bias in news articles. This type of analysis will, as such, be helpful for understanding how the national daily press sees the development of PSBs online, and how that has been conveyed in public discourse.

Conclusion

Each method used for this dissertation will provide a key element needed to explore how the BBC, CBC and ABC, are using online technologies to fulfill their mandates and remain

relevant to citizens in the digital age. They will all work to achieve the three main goals of this dissertation which are: first, to uncover how online national news services have been framed in public discourse in relation to the mandates of the PSBs considered, second, to understand how structures such as legislative and regulatory ones have enabled and constrained the development of online use for national news services at each of the PSBs, and third, compare and contrast the findings for each PSB to shed light on the similarities and differences in online news at each of the broadcasters.

This dissertation uses a political economy of communication framework to contextualize PSB news in terms of how it operates in relation to the wider news media ecology, as well as in relation to wider social forces that influence its operations. It also uses Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere, which provides a way to understand the contributions of public broadcasting in societies that are faced with a high volume of content that lacks diversity, and more generally, a way to understand the responsibilities of public broadcasters in Western democratic nations. It is because of the responsibilities that PSBs have in facilitating a healthy public sphere and the potential that they must contribute meaningfully to the wider news ecology that it is important to consider how PSBs have been using online technologies to fulfill their mandates and to consider the most efficient way for new technology to be incorporated into how PSBs produce and distribute content.

Technology has changed considerably since the 1990s, which has not been without consequences for journalism. Notably, the emergence of new digital technologies led major commercial media organizations in the 1990s to adopt convergence strategies, which required them to expand into multiple media (Edge, 2011). The theory had been that diversifying into different media would give media companies the chance to increase their profits by sharing content

and selling advertising across their various media platforms (Edge, 2016, pp. 96-97). To implement this strategy, companies took on large amounts of debt (Edge, 2011, p. 1267). This ended up being a problem when a recession hit in the early 2000s and media companies came to face decreased levels of advertising revenue (Edge, 2011, p. 1267).

The adoption and then failure of convergence strategies by media organizations was enabled, in part, by the fact that policy and regulation had not kept up with media change. This was because media were typically regulated and conceptualized as individual and distinct from one another, but technological advancements dissolved traditional boundaries between separate media, placing them outside of traditional methods of regulation (Edge, 2011, p. 1267). This makes it difficult to, for example, regulate media ownership through regulations that limit ownership based on types of media. The issue with this is that media regulation has been used by some governments to regulate media in such a way that attempts to encourage diverse media ownership.

In the 1990s there had already been growing concerns about a lack of diversity of media ownership and its effect on media systems and on the public sphere (Butsch, 2007, pp. 2-4). The public sphere is supposed to be a place where people can come together to debate public issues free from political and economic considerations (Breese, 2011, p. 131). Large populations, however, have made media essential for facilitating debate in the public sphere (Butsch, 2007, p. 7). Media systems that are concentrated, however, tend to be commercialized and as such treat citizens as consumers (Butsch, 2007, p. 4; McChesney, 1999, p. 77). They also tend to prioritize profit over democratic obligations of informing a citizenry. Over time this has meant that journalists have been expected to churn out more and more content with less time, leading to fewer journalists reporting from outside of newsrooms (Fenton, 2010, p. 8). This has been enabled and

encouraged by convergence, which had led news organizations to attempt to create synergies by “having one journalist cover a story for multiple outlets” (Edge, 2016, p. 97).

A large part of the value of public service broadcasters is that they can counteract some of these negative effects of increasingly commercialized news on the public sphere (Golding & Murdock, 1991; Jakubowicz, 2010; Raboy, 2008; etc). PSBs have strong mandates that often include, as is the case in Britain, Canada and Australia, a strong mandate to inform all citizens of their nations. Given that the media is essential to facilitating a healthy public sphere in contemporary democracies, PSBs are important parts of democratic news ecologies because they are able to provide news and information that takes into account citizens rather than consumers, and to a space that is unencumbered by economic and political considerations. PSBs can make sure that access to news is universal and that citizens have the information they need to fully participate in public life (Brevini, 2013). They can also make sure that citizens have access to quality content that is accurate, fair and rigorous, among other things (Brevini, 2013, p. 53). This is perhaps, even more important at a time when audiences are faced with copious amounts of content online and as fears of fake news are growing. PSBs are seen in Britain, Canada and Australia as being trustworthy sources of news (Reuters, 2019). This suggests that an essential role for PSBs is to provide news and information citizens can trust is real.

It is clear that PSBs are important parts of democratic media ecologies because they can counteract some of the negative effects of commercial media organizations by providing citizens with the news and information they need to act as citizens, by providing universal access to news and information, by providing quality news, and by providing trustworthy news at a time when people are otherwise unsure of which news sources can be trusted.

Chapter Two: The History of Public Service Broadcasting in Britain, Canada and Australia

Broadcasting has a long history in Britain, Canada and Australia. This chapter discusses the early development of radio and then television broadcasting in each of these countries. It explores the rationale each country had for establishing a national public broadcaster and delves into how and why each of those broadcasters later developed news operations. This chapter also details the development of the national public broadcasters themselves, each of which has gone through name changes and mandate/charter changes. Within these discussions, a number of themes are explored, from the relationship that each country's national public broadcaster has had with the national press in their respective countries, to the impact of World War Two on their news services. This chapter also identifies and explores a shift in thinking about broadcasting policy in the late 1970s and 1980s in each of the countries and a subsequent decline in support and resources for each public broadcaster. This leads up to the mid 1990s when each of the national public broadcasters added a website to the list of services they offer.

Radio Broadcasting in Britain

Britain was the first of the three countries to create a public service broadcaster. The idea to do so had been formed out of technical necessity. The country's first regular radio broadcast had commenced in 1922 (Briggs, 1961, p. 20). There were almost 100 applications for broadcasting stations made that first year (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 110). This was a problem because radio broadcasting requires electromagnetic spectrum, which is "a natural but finite resource" (Michalis, 2016, p. 349). As a solution, rival radio manufacturers were persuaded "to invest jointly in one small and initially speculative broadcasting station: The British Broadcasting Company" (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 110).

The British Broadcasting Company

The British Broadcasting Company was originally organized as a business (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 110). The Company, run by radio manufacturers, was to broadcast programming, which would encourage more people to buy radio sets (Tracey, 1998, p. 99). The programming itself would be paid for with half of the revenue from a 10-shilling licence fee, which the Post Office⁵ charged to anyone with a BBC radio receiver (Tracey, 1998, p. 99). The manufacturers would also receive a royalty on each of the sets sold (Tracey, 1998, p. 99).

Once the Company was established, broadcasting expanded quickly and eventually the method of funding it proved inadequate (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 110). This was because of a loophole in the licence fee that allowed people to apply for experimental licences, which allowed them to avoid paying the full fee (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 110). The BBC expressed concern to the Post Office early in 1923 about the number of experimental licences it had issued and about the fact that the Post Office was not prosecuting those listeners who did not have any licence at all (Briggs, 1961, p. 147). To address these concerns, the Post Office made plans to introduce a third licence designed for listeners who wanted to put together their own sets from parts instead of buying the already-made BBC sets, and to have inspectors go out and find licence fee evaders (Briggs, 1961, p. 147). The BBC was not satisfied with either response (Briggs, 1961, p. 147).

This led the Post Office to set up the Sykes Committee in 1923 to look into the BBC's finances (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 111). The Committee ultimately recommended that, instead of having different types of licences, there be one 10-shilling licence fee, charged to every owner of a wireless receiver (Tracey, 1998, p. 99). The fee was implemented and did not change for 20 years (Tracey, 1998, p. 99). The Sykes Committee had considered other options for funding the

⁵ Before radio, the Post Office had been responsible for wired and wireless telegraphy and telephony and because of this, became the licensor of broadcasting stations in Britain (Crisell, 2002, p. 16).

Company, including advertising, but they were all rejected (Briggs, 1961, p. 164). The Committee was opposed to advertising specifically because it had come to the conclusion that it would lead to a lower standard of programming (Briggs, 1961, p. 165). In other words, it was concerned about the commodification of radio programming. Newspapers in the country were strongly opposed to allowing advertising on radio as well, but their reasoning was based more on self-interest than anything else as they were concerned that allowing advertising on the BBC would interfere with their own commercial interests (Briggs, 1961, p. 164). Ultimately, advertising would be banned for the entirety of the British Broadcasting Company's existence and would continue to be banned when only a few short years later, the Company became a Corporation.

The British Broadcasting Corporation

The formation of the British Broadcasting Corporation was based on recommendations made by a committee chaired by the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres (Briggs, 1961). The Crawford Committee, as it was known, "unquestioningly accepted the necessity of a broadcasting monopoly, and recommended that the private company be replaced by a public commission" (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 111). The Committee's report was released on March 5, 1926 (Tracey, 1998, p. 100). Later that same year, the British Broadcasting Corporation "was created for a period of ten years from 1 January 1927" (Briggs, 1961, p. 358). The BBC's structure was determined by a Charter and its activities by a Licence and Agreement (Crisell, 2002, p. 28). It was its Licence and Agreement of 1926 that officially barred direct advertising on the BBC although it did allow sponsored programs (Briggs, 1965, p. 8). The Corporation would continue to be funded by a licence fee, which the Post Office was responsible for collecting (Saerchinger, 1938, p. 358). The licence fee was "a dedicated source of revenue, whose yield was theoretically independent of

annual governmental scrutiny” and was thus used as a way to guarantee “its creative and political independence” (Tracey, 1998, pp. 100-101).

The BBC was to be run by a director general who was accountable to a board of governors (Crisell, 2002, p. 28). The BBC Board of Governors, as it was called, was responsible for ensuring that broadcasting was being conducted in the public interest (Prosser, 1992, p. 176). The governors appointed the director general, while they themselves were “appointed by the government for periods of 5 years” (Cave, 1996, p. 21). The government also set the amount to be charged for the licence fee and it granted the BBC’s Licence and Agreement, which regulated its activities (Crisell, 2002, p. 28). This set up would come to foster a “delicate and occasionally strained” relationship between the government and the Corporation (Crisell, 2002, p. 28).

The BBC was created “to inform, to educate, and to entertain” (Crisell, 2002, p. 28). The public service orientation of the Corporation can largely be attributed to Sir John Reith. Reith had been made the General Manager of the BBC in December 1922, and by November 1923 was offered the role of Managing Director (Briggs, 1961, p. 135). For Reith, broadcasting as a public service should have four main facets (Briggs, 1961, p. 235). The first was that it should not be “out to make money for the sake of making money”; second, was that it should provide national coverage; third, was that it should have ‘unified control’; and fourth, was that it should maintain high standards (Briggs, 1961, pp. 235-238). This conceptualization of public service broadcasting influenced the development of public broadcasters outside of Britain, in countries such as Canada and Australia.

BBC News

Within his vision of the BBC as a public service broadcaster, Reith saw the potential of broadcast news and advocated for its provision by the BBC (Petersen, 1993). He believed “that

the radio could adopt a more socially responsible stance than the press and offer the public ‘validated’ information” (Petersen, 1993, p. 44). In the early days of the BBC, however, there were strict restrictions in place when it came to broadcasting news, stemming from when the British Broadcasting Company was first established. The Postmaster-General at the time had maintained “that broadcasting should in no way alienate the press interest” (Briggs, 1961, p. 130). Newspapers were to be placed as the primary sources of the production and distribution of news in Britain. This intention is evident in the Company’s Licence, which was issued in January, 1923, and restricted its news services by including “a clause stating that the BBC should not broadcast any news or information except that obtained and paid for from the news agencies” (Briggs, 1961, p. 133). This gave the press power to set restrictions on the BBC’s news services because the BBC was dependent on the press if it wanted to broadcast any news at all. The first agreement made between the BBC and the press, which would be renegotiated periodically, was made on November 11, 1922 (Briggs, 1961, p. 132). It stated that the news agencies would provide the Company with a summary of the news each day for a half-hour broadcast between 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. (Briggs, 1961, p. 132). The Company would pay a royalty for the news that it received, as per a sliding scale, with the maximum being “5*d.* per licence on the first 200,000 wireless receiving licences, and the minimum one farthing on all licences over half a million” (Briggs, 1961, p. 132). This was a six-month agreement (Briggs, 1961, p. 132).

The BBC’s ban on gathering news lasted until 1926 when it was lifted during a General Strike in Britain. The strike had taken over Britain from May 3rd to 12th, 1926 (Briggs, 1961, p. 360). It had been called for by trade unions because of wage cuts (Crisell, 2002, p. 24). It affected the press, and so the Company was allowed to temporarily gather news (Crisell, 2002, p. 24). Because of this, the BBC set up its own news service, it aired statements from strikers and from

strike-breakers and developed “an ethic of political neutrality” (Curran & Seaton, 2003, pp. 118-119).

The Company’s performance during the strike had a lasting impact. It was following the strike that the BBC gained the right to set up its own news gathering operations (Petersen, 1993, p. 50). This right was first incorporated into the Charter that changed the BBC from a Company to a Corporation (Briggs, 1961, pp. 358-359). It was because of this change to the BBC’s Charter that the Corporation was able to begin to work towards establishing a news service that did not rely on the press for its content.

Change did not happen overnight. For the first few years after the strike, the BBC still operated under the terms of the consecutive agreements it had signed with the press. The Corporation did, however, manage to negotiate better terms. The BBC was restricted at this point to broadcasting news only after 7 p.m. (Briggs, 1965, p. 153). At the beginning of 1927, however, the BBC negotiated a new agreement and was allowed by “the press and the four main news agencies”⁶ to broadcast news starting at 6:30 p.m. (Briggs, 1965, p. 153). The new agreement also allowed the BBC to broadcast eye-witness reports, although they were strictly limited (Briggs, 1965, p. 153). This agreement was later replaced with one that allowed the BBC to broadcast its news bulletins beginning at 6 p.m. (Briggs, 1965, p. 154).

All issues pertaining to radio news, including these ones, first needed to be discussed by a joint committee of the press and the BBC (Briggs, 1965, p. 154). At one of the joint committee meetings in November 1932, “the BBC secured consent to put out at any time news of unforeseen events of special importance” (Briggs, 1965, p. 155). Power was beginning “to tilt in favour of the BBC” (Briggs, 1965, p. 155). By 1934, the BBC’s news staff had significantly increased, and the

⁶ the Newspaper Proprietors’ Association, the Newspaper Society, Reuters Ltd., the Press Association, the Exchange Telegraph Company, and the Central News (Briggs, 1965, p. 153).

Corporation had created its own news department (Briggs, 1965, pp. 155-156). Then, in 1938, the BBC entered into an agreement with “with the Newspaper Proprietors’ Association and the Newspaper Society” (Briggs, 1965, p. 159). This agreement was the first to leave out the press agencies (Briggs, 1965, p. 159). It also gave the BBC more freedom than ever before. As long as the BBC continued to ban paid advertising, restricted news broadcasts to between 6 p.m. and 2 a.m., and refrained from broadcasting betting news, “it was left free to do as it pleased” (Briggs, 1965, p. 159). This new freedom came just in time for the war, during which news would become the most important type of programming (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 139).

World War Two

Prior to the start of the World War Two, at the end of 1936, the BBC’s Charter was to expire and so the government created a committee to look into the future of the Corporation (Briggs, 1965, pp. 476-478). The Ullswater Committee, as it was referred to, published a report in March 1936 (Briggs, 1965, p. 505). When it reported, the Committee indicated that it did not believe any major constitutional changes were needed (Briggs, 1965, p. 4). The Committee recommended that the BBC’s Charter be extended by another 10 years (Briggs, 1965, p. 499).

Following this, the BBC’s Charter was officially renewed for 10 years and the Corporation entered into a period of rapid change. When World War Two broke out news became central to the BBC’s programming (Briggs, 1970, pp. 47-48). In the time leading up to the start of the war, it had become clear that broadcasting could give orders to and keep up the morale of the British audience, and it could “spread reliable news and views” to the rest of the world (Briggs, 1965, pp. 645-646).

It was essential at this time that the news was easily understood (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 142). Because of this, the news “scripts were scrutinized for difficult words and constructions”

(Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 142). At the same time, the war “made topicality the dominant news value”, and established speed and accuracy as important parts of the news process (Curran & Seaton, 2003, pp. 141-142). The BBC’s announcers were identified by name for the first time so as to avoid confusion if, in the event of an invasion, the enemy attempted to issue orders through radio (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 142).

Propelled by the war, the BBC’s news gathering strategies also changed considerably at this time. In 1939, the Corporation started “gathering material from an increasingly wide range of sources, including monitoring foreign broadcast sections” (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 141). As time went on, “[n]ews-gathering became much more systematic and efficient, and from 1944 the BBC began to appoint its own correspondents” (Crisell, 2002, p. 61). By the end of that year, broadcasters began “regularly accompanying British units both in France and the Far East” (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 141).

The Corporation came out of the war having had made great strides. Despite the many successes of the BBC during the war, once it was over, news audiences “dropped by half, and never returned to wartime levels” (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 147). There were 20 months left on the BBC’s Charter when the war ended, after which it was renewed for five years instead of 10 with no independent inquiry leading to its renewal (Briggs, 1979, p. 23).

Television

During the war, television broadcasting had stopped because of “fears that transmission masts would act as navigational aids to enemy aircraft - and, no doubt, the feeling that television was a dispensable luxury” (Crisell, 2002, p. 79). By 1946, however, it had resumed in Britain, “initially to about 15,000 households” (Crisell, 2002, p. 79). Television operated as a BBC

monopoly at first and was funded through a new £2 licence fee that covered radio and television (Crisell, 2002, p. 79).

Commercial Television

In 1949, a committee was appointed that was chaired by Lord Beveridge and referred to as the Beveridge Committee (Crisell, 2002, p. 82). The Committee's report "was in some respects critical of the corporation and sensitive to monopoly" (Crisell, 2002, p. 82). In the end, it found that renewing the BBC's Charter was preferable to allowing television to develop in the commercial style found in the United States (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 160). The Committee also recommended that the BBC continue to operate with a monopoly (Briggs, 1979, p. 381). A change in government, however, led to the Committee's recommendations ultimately being ignored (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 160).

The Beveridge Committee did, however, have a lasting impact on broadcasting, particularly with regards to the implementation of commercial broadcasting in Britain (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 160). Commercial television was introduced in Britain by the Television Act of 1954 (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 161). It was implemented through the licensing of a new television service, called Independent Television (ITV) (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 161). When it was first established, ITV was expected to comply with a public service remit, and it was given an advertising monopoly (Scannell, 1995, p. 28). ITV would be funded by spot adverts and would not be allowed to air sponsored programmes (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 160). This was because the Beveridge Committee believed that spot advertising would give "advertisers less control over programme content" than sponsored programming would (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 160). The Beveridge Committee also believed that broadcasting should operate on a regional basis (Curran

& Seaton, 2003, p. 160). ITV was, therefore, formed on the basis of a regional structure (Crisell, 2002, p. 82).

As it developed, ITV's news services were particularly significant. News on ITV "used journalists as news-readers, allowed them to write their own scripts, and showed them on the screen" (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 168). Independent Television News (ITN), as it was called, was a success, which "in turn provoked the BBC into improving its own news services" (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 168). The BBC's approach to news on television had been to simply feature the voice of a newscaster and still photographs (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 168). Essentially, the BBC's news was being presented on television "in a way which was much more appropriate to sound broadcasting" (Crisell, 2002, p. 98).

Cultural Changes

While commercial broadcasting was taking off in the 1950s, a major shift happened at the BBC. Previously, Reith had enforced a programming policy that "depended on an assumption of cultural homogeneity: not that everybody was the same, but that culture was single and undifferentiated" (Curran & Season, 2018, p. 300). He had believed that mediocrity would follow freedom of choice (Curran & Seaton, 2018, p. 300). Decades later, a new cultural mission at the BBC began to reflect the possibility of "a relationship with a diverse audience which enlightened, informed, amused, but did not patronize" (Tracey, 1998, p. 96). Based on this, in 1957, the BBC announced it would readjust its programming "to satisfy the multiplicity of tastes and values within the community" (Tracey, 1998, p. 66). Under this new philosophy, the audience had the chance to make choices about programming (Tracey, 1998, p. 97). In stark contrast to what broadcasting was like under Reith, what audiences wanted came to matter at the BBC (Tracey, 1998). The changes at the Corporation were provoked in part by a shift towards the dominance of television over radio,

which also meant a dominance of images over words, and because of the introduction of commercial television in Britain (Tracey, 1998, p. 96).

The Pilkington and Annan Committees

The performances of the BBC and ITV during this period of time were studied by a committee in 1960, chaired by Sir Harry Pilkington (Crisell, 2002, p. 109). The Committee's final report, published on June 17, 1962, praised public service values and questioned commercial ones (Tracey, 1998, p. 93). The report prompted the government "to raise the licence fee to a realistic level" (Crisell, 2002, p. 119). The Pilkington Committee had also recommended the BBC be given a third television channel, which the government allowed (Crisell, 2002, p. 120).

The BBC's Charter was extended, following the report, from 1964-1976 (Crisell, 2002, p. 117). It would be extended twice more after this, first until 1979 and then again until 1981 while the Annan Committee, which was undertaking the next inquiry into the future of British broadcasting, reported and while the report was later debated (Crisell, 2002, p. 201). Following the publication of the report, the BBC was granted a new Charter, which started in 1981 and ran until 1996 (Tracey, 1998, p. 107). There was also an increase in the licence fee for three years (Tracey, 1998, p. 107).

The Erosion of the Public Service Ideal in Broadcasting

Even with an increased licence fee, the Charter period starting in 1981 was difficult for the BBC. After 1979, there had been a shift in thinking about public policy that prioritized commercial ideas over public service ones (O'Malley, 2001, p. 33). The new way of thinking was "known as economic liberalism, or market liberalism" and has as its principal tenet, "a preference for private rather than public enterprise" (Inglis, 2006, p. 100). The British government firmly believed in this

new way of thinking about public policy, which included a strong element of support for privatization, while Margaret Thatcher was in power from 1979-1990 (Prosser, 1992, p. 181).

The impact of economic liberalism on broadcasting was that a new idea emerged that held “that consumer choice and cultural independence were best guaranteed by liberating the broadcast media from state regulation” (Golding & Murdock, 1991, p. 25). In keeping with this philosophy, the Thatcher government stimulated cable and satellite growth and prepared for the introduction of another television channel (Tracey, 1998, p. 45). Cable and satellite technology had been used sparsely in Britain since the 1950s and 1960s respectively (Crisell, 2002). By the 1980s, however, the technologies were beginning to be used on a much larger scale (Crisell, 2002). Because Thatcher was in power at this time, the development of both cable and satellite was influenced by the free market mentality of her government (Goodwin, 1997, p. 61). One of the consequences of this was that development of the new technologies would be seen “as being primarily the responsibility of the private sector” (Goodwin, 1997, p. 61).

In terms of the BBC, the Thatcher government “encouraged wholesale rethinking” of its “position and purpose” (Tracey, 1998, p. 45). As such, critics of the Corporation began making the argument that public broadcasting was no longer necessary because it had merely been “a pragmatic response in the early twentieth century to the problems of spectrum scarcity and of financing broadcast services” which were problems that no longer needed intervention (Scannell, 1995, p. 23).

The Peacock Committee

As the BBC’s purpose was being questioned, so was its method of financing. A report published in 1986 argued that the BBC should be funded by a subscription instead of a licence fee (Prosser, 1992, p. 183). The report was put together by the Committee on Financing the BBC, also

known as the Peacock Committee after its chair Sir Alan Peacock (O'Malley, 2001, p. 35). Its job was to examine the BBC's finances and to consider alternative ways of funding it (Prosser, 1992, p. 182). The Committee, however, produced a report that addressed the whole broadcasting system in Britain, placing "the idea of consumer sovereignty at the heart of its analysis" (Kuhn & Wheeler, 1994, p. 434). The recommendation to change the BBC's funding to a subscription model would, in keeping with this, give consumers the choice of whether or not they wanted to pay for and watch the BBC (Prosser, 1992, p. 183).

In response, the government released a White Paper⁷ that characterized current regulation as being inflexible and proposed a system that would give consumers more freedom of choice (Prosser, 1992, p. 183). The White Paper proposals "represented a major move away from the traditional system of discretionary regulation towards incorporating more market-led solutions" (Prosser, 1992, p. 185). For example, as per Peacock's vision of broadcasting, the White Paper "divided the previously unified public service broadcasting system into three", meaning that there would be full and partial public service broadcasters and broadcasters who were not part of the public service system at all (O'Malley, 2001, p. 36).

The 1990 Broadcasting Act

The proposals outlined in the White Paper were implemented, with a few amendments, in the Broadcasting Act of 1990 (Prosser, 1992, p. 186). The Act's "main concern was to usher in a new era of multi-channel broadcasting" (Crisell, 2002, p. 247). It formalized the separation of the broadcasting system into full public service broadcasters, partial public service broadcasters and broadcasters that were not part of the public service system (O'Malley, 2001, p. 36). The Act also

⁷ A white paper is a statement of policy made by the Government, which often proposes legislative changes (House of Commons, 2010).

articulated public service as being marginal in the system, while commercial competition was to be the driving force of expansion (O'Malley, 2001, p. 37).

Multi-channel Broadcasting and the BBC

While the BBC was still considered a full public service broadcaster under Britain's new broadcasting system, moving forward it would become more commercial. This is evident in the fact that the new broadcasting technologies that the BBC was beginning to adopt were used for commercial purposes only to start (Goodwin, 1997, p. 66). This was encouraged by the government, which, in July 1990, had "warned the BBC that it must look for new ways to supplement the licence fee and become more cost-efficient" (Tracey, 1998, p. 115). It was clear that the government was serious about this directive when the BBC moved to launch "a world television service to complement its world service radio" (Crisell, 2002, p. 252). The government had been funding the world radio service since the war but decided that it would not fund the world television service, leaving the BBC to rely on advertising to fund it when it launched in 1991 (Crisell, 2002, p. 252). Later, in 1992, the BBC entered a partnership deal with a commercial broadcaster, Thames Television, to create UK Gold, which was a satellite service that would draw on each broadcaster's archival material (Tracey, 1998, p. 115).

This was just beginning – more commercial activities were in the BBC's future. In 1994 a government White Paper "encouraged the BBC to increase its participation in commercial activities" (Mjøs, 2011, p. 183). The BBC complied. Its commercial arm, BBC Worldwide, was established that year and in 1996 it "was given permission to expand into international markets" (Mjøs, 2011, p. 183). The BBC had already, in 1995 and in partnership with the Pearson Group, launched BBC Prime, which consisted of "cable and satellite channels aimed at European audiences" (Crisell, 2002, p. 30).

An exception to the BBC's use of new technologies for commercial purposes came in 1992 when the BBC proposed a 24-hour news channel that would be "funded from the licence fee, and distributed via satellite and cable" (Goodwin, 1997, 66). The proposal did not receive much attention but reemerged in 1996 as part of the BBC's larger plan for securing its place in the digital age (Goodwin, 1997, 66). That year, through a new Broadcasting Act, the BBC was given "a part to play in digital television" (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 1999, para. 23). The BBC's strategy for this "was established based not on being an operator of digital transmission platforms, but on being a content provider for all platforms" (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 1999, para. 23). The BBC was given a funding settlement, set for five years "with the specific purpose of funding the BBC's digital development" (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 1999, para. 23).

The BBC's 24-hour news channel, *News 24*, "launched in November 1997", and, according to an independent review of the service five years later, "could hardly have got off to a worse start" largely because of technical problems (Lambert, 2002, p. 7). The issues were worked out eventually, and the new service ended up having a positive impact on BBC News more generally by improving "the BBC's whole approach to news gathering, making it quicker to respond to big stories as they happen" and by increasing "the BBC's overall editorial resources" (Lambert, 2002, p. 24). The same year as *News 24* launched, the BBC also launched *BBC News Online* ("How the BBC News website has changed", 2017). In this way, the end of 1997 marked an important point in the evolution of BBC News from a service that was only allowed to broadcast news it had received from the British press to a major national (and increasingly international), multi-platform, 24-hour news organization.

Significantly, all of these changes came at a time when the values of the British broadcasting system were increasingly centred around ideas related to the free market, and

increasingly away from the public service values established by Reith, which, in the early days of radio broadcasting other countries, including Canada, emulated.

Radio Broadcasting in Canada

Canadian broadcasting, while eventually adopting elements of the early British system, started out on a commercial basis. Licensing was handled by the Department of Marine and Fisheries, which began issuing “private, commercial broadcasting and receiving licenses” in 1922 (MacLennan, 2018, p. 13). Many of the first radio stations in the country were operated either by businesses that sold radio equipment or by newspapers that wanted to self-promote (Peers, 1969, p. 6).

Problems with Canadian radio broadcasting began to emerge early on. In 1923, the United States (U.S.) was dominating the airwaves, taking up “frequencies that Canada had regarded as its own” (Peers, 1969, p. 19). There was also a problem with interference from Mexico and the U.S., which was causing poor reception (Raboy, 1990, p. 21). Providing some relief, in October 1924, “the United States Department of Commerce agreed to regard six channels (out of ninety-five) as exclusive to Canada” (Peers, 1969, p. 19). By 1927 the frequency problem between Canada and the U.S. was somewhat resolved, but Canada wanted more frequencies (Peers, 1969, pp. 19-20). Canada tried to negotiate with the U.S. for those frequencies, but had no success (Peers, 1969, p. 20). The U.S. did not believe the country was “making the best use of the channels it had” (Peers, 1969, p. 20). The problem was that in 1928, “no businessman in broadcasting believed that the scattered Canadian population could make larger stations profitable; and broadcasting in Canada was not yet regarded as anything more than a business” (Peers, 1969, p. 20).

The government, for its part, was not particularly interested in radio at first (Raboy, 1990, p. 22). This changed in 1928 (Raboy, 1990, p. 22). At this time, broadcasting licences needed to

be renewed every year (Raboy, 1990, p. 22). In March 1928, there were “a number of stations with ties to the International Bible Students Association” that were not granted a renewal (Raboy, 1990, p. 22). This was following a number of complaints that had been made about the organization and its programming (MacLennan, 2018, p. 14). The reason for not renewing the licences that was given in the House of Commons was “that the government was dissatisfied with this *ad hoc* approach to broadcasting” and instead was considering adopting a policy, like in Britain, for national broadcasting (Raboy, 1990, p. 22). Looking to change the way broadcasting was operating, the government soon after allocated \$25,000 for a commission to inquire into broadcasting in the country (Raboy, 1990, p. 22).

The Aird Commission

The Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting was established on December 6, 1928 and was chaired by Sir John Aird (Peers, 1969, p. 37). The Aird Commission, as it was known, was established “to determine how radio broadcasting could be most effectively carried on in the interests of Canadian listeners and in the national interests of Canada” (Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting, 1929, p. 5).

Throughout the course of its study, the Aird Commission found a number of issues with the Canadian broadcasting system as it was operating at the time. For one, it found that a lack of revenue had led to too many advertisements being aired and to stations being crowded in urban centres, which meant that some areas of Canada had a duplication of services while others were being ineffectively served (Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting, 1929, p. 6). The Aird Commission also found that most of the programming for radio was coming from outside of Canada (Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting, 1929, p. 6). Canadians had more access to programming that originated in the U.S. than it did to Canadian programming since it was easier

and more cost-effective for commercial stations to air imported programs than it was for them to create their own quality ones (Raboy, 1990, p. 22; Peers, 1969). Despite this, it had heard from Canadians during its study and found that “Canadian radio listeners want Canadian broadcasting” (Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting, 1929, p. 6). It was emphasized to the Commission that reception of non-Canadian programming would tend to mould youths’ minds “to ideals and opinions that are not Canadian” (Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting, 1929, p. 6).

By the end of its study, the Aird Commission had come to believe that radio broadcasting had educational potential and that it would “become a great force in fostering a national spirit and interpreting national citizenship” (Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting, 1929, p. 6). The national purpose that the Aird Commission saw for broadcasting would become a defining characteristic of Canadian broadcasting policy (Raboy, 1990, p. 7).

Based on its findings, the Aird Commission concluded that Canadian broadcasting should “be operated on a basis of public service”, provided by one national company (Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting, 1929, p. 6). The system that the Commission proposed had elements of the British broadcasting system, infused with elements of the German broadcasting system (Raboy, 1990, p. 7). In the Canadian system, a single national company would own and operate all of the stations, while provincial authorities would have “full control over the programs of the station or stations in their respective areas” (Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting, 1929, pp. 6-7). A Bill was drafted based on the Aird Commission’s recommendations, but because the business community did not support the Commission’s proposals and because there was a federal election coming up, “the government let the matter fall” (Raboy, 1990, p. 30).

The principles of the Aird Commission’s report were not forgotten (Peers, 1969, p. 64). Rather, they were taken up by the Canadian Radio League. The League, created by Graham Spry

and Alan Plaunt in 1930, “prepared two pamphlets describing the Canadian Radio League and setting forth its objectives in some detail” (Peers, 1969, pp. 64-65). This included promoting “the general principle of the Aird report - broadcasting as public service - in order to create a model of educational and public purpose broadcasting distinct from the US model and separate from the US system” (Raboy, 1990, p. 31). This distinction from the U.S. was important because, as Gregory Taylor (2016) notes, “[a] large part of Canada’s historic search for identity is built upon distancing itself from the United States” (p. 353).

The Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission

Aird’s vision for broadcasting was officially revisited by a Parliamentary Special Committee on Radio Broadcasting, which made recommendations to the government for a technical scheme for broadcasting in Canada and its implementation (Weir, 1965, p. 111). In 1932, following the Committee’s report, the government passed the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Act (Raboy, 1990, p. 46). The Act established a public broadcaster – the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission (CRBC) (Raboy, 1990, p. 46). It kept private broadcasters as part of the new broadcasting system, but also made it possible for the CRBC to establish a monopoly in radio (Raboy, 1990, p. 9). This power remained in the 1936 Broadcasting Act, but “was never used” (Raboy, 1990, p. 9).

The CRBC would be funded through a \$2.00 licence fee and some commercial revenue (Peers, 1969, p. 227). It was to be run by a commission made up of three commissioners (Raboy, 1990, p. 46). Each province would have an assistant commissioner (Raboy, 1990, p. 46). The CRBC was designed not only to be a broadcaster itself, but also to regulate the broadcasting system as a whole, which included commercial broadcasters (Peers, 1969, p. 103). As such, it was “to determine the number, location and power of stations required in Canada; to recommend to the

minister the issuing, suspension, or cancellation of private broadcasting licences; and to allot channels to stations” (Peers, 1969, p. 103). The CRBC was also able to “determine the proportion of time that any station was to devote to national and local programs; it could prescribe periods to be reserved for national programs; and it was to determine the amount and character of advertising that was permitted” (Peers, 1969, p. 103).

The CRBC had considerable responsibility but because of the way it was designed, it was also vulnerable to political influence. The Act required that the CRBC get approval from Parliament for “the construction or acquisition of new stations” and for its annual budget, which “hampered the CRBC’s ability to plan and operate decisively and efficiently” (Armstrong, 2016, p. 29). Furthermore, the Department of Marine and Fisheries was responsible for licence fee collection, the amount of which was “allocated by way of an annual parliamentary vote or mentioned in budget estimates” (Vipond, 1995, p. 292). This meant that the licence fee as a method of funding it did not insulate the CRBC from political pressure – rather, this system of funding made the fee itself and the CRBC the subject of yearly debate and close scrutiny (Vipond, 1995, p. 292). Furthermore, the government had influence over the CRBC because it was in charge of appointing its commissioners (Raboy, 1990, p. 46).

The CRBC provided a decent national radio service (Peers, 1969, p. 163). It also, however, struggled. “It was underfunded, understaffed, and according to its critics, poorly led” (Raboy, 1990, p. 50). Ultimately, the 1932 Act placed a lot of responsibility on the CRBC, but the Commission was not provided with adequate resources to meet all of the expectations put on it (Peers, 1969, p. 105). Funding issues that the CRBC faced were at least partially because the CRBC neglected to develop a commercial policy for its network operations because it did not want to alienate the press, and because it did not want to “engage in an open battle with the larger private

stations which were not part of its basic network” (Peers, 1969, p. 227). Because of this, its commercial revenue was less than what it could have been (Peers, 1969, p. 227). The CRBC did not last long.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

A few years after the CRBC was created, another Parliamentary Committee was established, which recommended the current Broadcasting Act be repealed and that a new Act establish a public Corporation in place of the CRBC (Peers, 1969, pp. 183-184). The recommendation was taken, a new Act passed, and a national public corporation was formed in 1936 (Raboy, 1990, pp. 59-60). The Corporation, named the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, was given political autonomy and was placed in a position of privilege over the commercial stations that remained a part of the broadcasting system (Raboy, 1990, p. 60). The Corporation itself was to have a nine-member board of governors (Peers, 1969, p. 184). It was “responsible to parliament through a minister of the crown” (Hull, 1962, p. 117). The board would be “appointed by the governor in council” (Peers, 1969, p. 187).

Like the CRBC before it, the CBC had regulatory powers as well as being a broadcaster itself (Raboy, 1990, p. 60). Because of this, the private stations were not allowed to form networks without permission from the CBC, and they had to undergo a review each year by the CBC before their licences were renewed (Raboy, 1990, p. 60). The Department of Transport retained the power “to allocate radio spectrum and to license stations” (Armstrong, 2016, p. 30).

The CBC, like the CRBC, was funded through a combination of a licence fee and commercial revenue (Raboy, 1990). Because of this, the Corporation faced difficult decisions when it came to its programming policy. The Canadian mass audience was “built on American programming”, its tastes already formed by the time public broadcasting was established (Raboy,

1990, p. 61). This left the CBC with two choices – it could “produce programs for a discriminating minority or meet the mass audience on its own ground” (Raboy, 1990, p. 61). The CBC chose the latter, and in 1938 “began to acquire US and commercial programs”, a move opposed by private broadcasters (Raboy, 1990, p. 61). Early that year there were already “sixteen commercial evening programs on the national network”, six from Canada and 10 from the United States (Weir, 1965, p. 229).

The CBC’s new commercial policy came as a shock to newspapers and magazines (Weir, 1965, p. 229). Until this point, newspapers around the country were generally supportive of the system of broadcasting put in place by the Broadcasting Act, and of the CBC (Peers, 1969). Newspapers were supporters of the Canadian Radio League prior to the establishment of the CRBC, with Spry estimating “that 70 of the 80 Canadian newspapers gave editorial support” (Peers, 1969, p. 67). By the end of 1931, “[t]he press was predominantly in favour of a publicly owned broadcasting system, the chief exceptions being among newspapers that owned stations or those that had formed a close association with a station” (Peers, 1969, p. 75). The newspapers that had vested interests in radio that opposed the CRBC and later the CBC were in the minority (Peers, 1969, p. 449). This level of support for the CBC from newspapers did not continue after the changes it made to its programming policy in 1938. Some of the newspapers that had supported the League had assumed that the national public broadcaster would be funded almost entirely by the licence fee (Peers, 1969, p. 227). Several of them became critical of the CBC when it “did not reduce its commercial activities as much as had been hoped” (Peers, 1969, p. 449). Other newspapers would stop supporting the CBC after moving into broadcasting themselves, at which point they began to see public broadcasting as competition (Peers, 1969, p. 449).

CBC News

Despite changing opinions of public broadcasting by newspapers, Canadian broadcasting under the CBC had a decent start. “In the summer of 1939 Canadians were reasonably well satisfied with their broadcasting system” (Peers, 1969, p. 296). The CRBC and the CBC’s news services had been a particular success. The Canadian Press had provided the CRBC and then the CBC with news content free of charge from 1933 to 1940 (Purcell, 1969, p. 155). This enabled the public broadcaster to broadcast national English bulletins daily, as well as some French-language bulletins (Peers, 1969, p. 156). It was through the CRBC that Canadians first received nationally selected and edited news (Peers, 1969, p. 156). This was significant because newspapers at this time “had an excessive preoccupation with local affairs” (Peers, 1969, p. 156). The CRBC was also able to bring international coverage to Canadians through its “exchange arrangements with the BBC and the American networks” (Peers, 1969, p. 157). For the first several years of radio news, Canada’s national public broadcaster was clearly operating independently from the government (Peers, 1969, p. 296). This would change during the war.

World War Two

In 1940, the Department of National War Services was created, which, in conjunction with the War Measures Act, meant that the CBC became “officially attached to the government’s war effort as of 11 June 1941” (Raboy, 1990, pp. 67-68). While there were journalists who tried to remain independent and objective, the CBC “frequently operated as an arm of the government, and a propaganda tool” (Rowland, 2015, p. 118).

Nevertheless, the period of time during the war was important for the CBC’s news services. During the war, after a survey in 1940 showed that listeners in Ontario felt that news from stations in the United States was better than the news coming from Canadian stations, the CBC decided to put together a news department of its own that no longer relied on the Canadian Press for content

(Peers, 1969, p. 344). The service was inaugurated on January 1, 1941 (Weir, 1965, p. 234). The CBC's news department was successful early on, rapidly gaining a large audience (Peers, 1969, p. 344). The CBC had been spending 9.4 percent of airtime on news bulletins at the end of 1939, which increased to 20 per cent by fall, 1941 (Weir, 1965, p. 270). This was largely because of World War Two. There were 13 special bulletins on the day of the Pearl Harbor attacks, and the following week saw bulletins aired every hour (Weir, 1965, p. 270).

Television

A few years after the war ended, television became a major focal point for the CBC. The first step towards Canadian television policy came in March 1949 when the government put the CBC Board in charge of the direction of the new medium (Weir, 1965, p. 257).

The Massey Commission

That same year, the government appointed a Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences (Weir, 1965, p. 250). The Commission, known as the Massey Commission, held hearings across the country over the course of a year beginning in August 1949 (Raboy, 1990, p. 95). It published its findings on June 1, 1951 (Raboy, 1990, p. 103).

The report outlined several threatening trends that had been found during the Commission's study: "over-commercialization on the CBC as well as on private stations; inadequate revenue for the CBC from public funds; and a tendency for network sponsors to dictate the pattern of evening broadcasting" (Peers, 1969, p. 403). In light of its findings, the Committee recommended that the CBC be funded through a moderate licence fee and supplementary funds in the form of a statutory grant, set for five years "with Parliament making up any shortfall not met by licence and commercial revenue" (Raboy, 1990, pp. 106-107). The government ultimately decided to get rid of the licence fee for radio and to refrain from charging one from the outset for television (Weir,

1965, p. 263). The CBC had made it clear that should television be funded by a licence fee, that fee would need to be at least \$15 per set (Weir, 1965, p. 263). There was already dissatisfaction with the \$2.50 radio licence fee being charged at the time, which made the \$15 television licence fee seem unrealistic (Weir, 1965, p. 263). Instead, the government decided in 1953 to fund the CBC through a combination of advertising revenue and revenue derived from a 15 per cent excise tax “on radio and television sets and parts” (Weir, 1965, p. 263).

News on CBC television

Regular television broadcasting began in Canada in 1952 with the establishment of the CBC’s Montreal and Toronto stations on September 6 and 8 respectively (Peers, 1979, p. 3). Radio influenced television operations to a large extent in the earliest days of the new medium. This was because television news took on “established practices, policies, and program formats from radio” (Schwartz, 2013, p. 494). Furthermore, it was radio news personalities who “oversaw the introduction of television news” (Schwartz, 2013, p. 494). This was significant because they believed that “television was of less importance than radio – a bias reflected in content and resources” (Schwartz, 2013, p. 494). Audiences came to share the same sentiment. Television news was not taken seriously by them at first (Schwartz, 2013, p. 502). Because of this, and the fact that there was no daily television newscast, radio news remained dominant (Schwartz, 2013, p. 502).

The Fowler Commission and the 1958 Broadcasting Act

Three years after television broadcasting officially launched in Canada, in December 1955, it was announced that a Royal Commission on Broadcasting, chaired by Robert M. Fowler, would inquire into the state of Canadian television broadcasting (Raboy, 1990, pp. 117-118). The Fowler Commission, much like the Massey Commission before it, found “that the size of the Canadian population and economy will not support a national broadcasting system on commercial or

advertising revenues alone” (Royal Commission on Broadcasting, 1957, p. 173). It believed that it was important to make sure that the CBC operated as efficiently as possible because the vast distances and sparse population of the country made broadcasting an expensive endeavor (Royal Commission on Broadcasting, 1957, p. 160). Canada’s geographic considerations and the financial implications for broadcasters then made the publicly funded CBC particularly essential to addressing issues of spatialization in the country. As such, to ensure the CBC was operating efficiently, the Fowler Commission recommended that the CBC’s mission be clearly defined, a cost of executing it worked out, and the appropriate financial support provided for on certain terms (Royal Commission on Broadcasting, 1957, p. 160). Part of this financial support was still recommended to come from advertising revenue. The Fowler Commission’s final report expressed the belief that commercials on the CBC were valuable because they “make an important contribution to the support of radio and television and thus reduce the drain on the public treasury” (Royal Commission on Broadcasting, 1957, p. 174). Commercials were also seen by the Commission as being “worth-while in themselves” (Royal Commission on Broadcasting, 1957, p. 174).

The Fowler Commission further made recommendations regarding the regulation of broadcasting in Canada. More specifically, it recommended the establishment of a Board of Broadcast Governors (BBG) (Raboy, 1990, pp. 134-135). The Commission saw such a board “strengthening the public sector and maintaining the balance in a “single system”” (Raboy, 1990, p. 135). Its function was not to be anything inherently different from the previous system of regulation (Weir, 1965, pp. 305-306).

This recommendation was taken but twisted. The Bill that led to the 1958 Broadcasting Act designed the new board in such a way that it created a dual system of public and private

broadcasters on equal ground (Raboy, 1990, pp. 134-135). The BBG, as it was implemented through the new Broadcasting Act, “would regulate, separately, the activities of all Canadian broadcasters as well as the relationship between them – the CBC and the private stations would appear before it as equals” (Raboy, 1990, p. 134). It would have 15 members and would “ensure the efficient operation of national radio and television” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2003, p. 30). The BBG furthermore was given the responsibility of considering new station applications and making “licensing recommendations to the minister responsible” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2003, p. 30).

The 1958 Broadcasting Act fundamentally changed the Canadian broadcasting system. This was partly because of the way the BBG was set up. In creating the new body, the government had taken “the occasion to restructure the system in the interests of the private sector” (Raboy, 1990, p. 137). This was a significant difference from the system created by the 1932 Radio Broadcasting Act, which had provided for the elimination of private broadcasters. There were several other significant changes to Canadian broadcasting at this time. For one, the government changed the CBC’s funding structure so the revenue it received from the excise tax on radio and television sets and parts was replaced with a parliamentary appropriation, the amount of which was to be decided annually (Vipond, 1995, p. 297). This method of funding the CBC would put the Corporation “in the cross-hairs of governments that are never satisfied with its political coverage” (Taras, 2015, p. 232). For another, the government decided it would allow private television stations not affiliated with the CBC to be licenced for the first time (Vipond, 1995, p. 297). Commercial television began in some cities in 1960 (Raboy, 1990, p. 145).

The Fowler Committee (1965) and the 1968 Broadcasting Act

In 1964, a report published by a Committee on Broadcasting, also chaired by Robert Fowler, reintroduced the idea of the Canadian broadcasting system as a single system and the “idea of CBC supremacy” (Raboy, 1990, p. 162). To do this, the Fowler Committee recommended that the private broadcasters be given public functions (Raboy, 1990, p. 162). The 1968 Broadcasting Act that followed did attempt to do this, but by this point there was no stopping “the pendulum from continuing to swing in favour of the private sector” (Raboy, 1990, p. 180).

One thing the new Broadcasting Act did do for public broadcasting in Canada was provide the CBC with a clearer, more specific mandate. The 1965 Fowler Committee’s report pointed out that the 1958 Broadcasting Act only uses five words to articulate the CBC’s purpose, which was “operating a national broadcasting service” (Committee on Broadcasting, 1965, pp. 123-124). The 1968 Act, in contrast, mandated the CBC to “be a balanced service of information, enlightenment and entertainment for people of different ages, interests and tastes covering the whole range of programming in fair proportion” (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Board of Directors, 1983, p. 9). It was to “be extended to all parts of Canada, as public funds become available”, and to be in both official languages (CBC Board, 1983, p. 9). The Act also specified that the CBC was to “contribute to the development of national unity and provide for a continuing expression of Canadian identity” (CBC Board, 1983, p. 9). The CBC’s new mandate positioned it as an essential part of the Canadian public sphere by, for example, compelling it to extend across the whole country and to be in both official languages. The success of the CBC in this regard, however, was inevitably tied to its funding as per the caveat in the Broadcasting Act, which asked the CBC to extend across the country only as funding permitted.

The Erosion of the Public Service Ideal in Broadcasting

The success of the CBC would also come to be dependent on the decisions made by a new regulatory body. The 1968 Act had created the Canadian Radio-Television Commission (CRTC; later the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission), which took over from the BBG and was given regulatory and licensing powers (Task Force on Broadcasting Policy, 1986, p. 14). At the time, new technologies “introduced a whole new set of criteria on which broadcasting, and the question of the public in broadcasting, had to be considered” (Raboy, 1990, p. 13). Spectrum allocation was becoming “less and less central to regulatory policy” (Rowland, 2015, p. 23). On top of this, in 1971, the government announced that it would allow the CRTC to license provincial educational broadcasters, “structured as independent bodies like the CBC”, thereby extending Canada’s public broadcasting system (Raboy, 1990, p. 145). Now Canada’s broadcasting system would be made up of a national public broadcaster, provincial educational broadcasters and commercial broadcasters.

It was against this backdrop of a changing media landscape that the CRTC held its first public hearings for the renewal of the CBC’s licences. The Corporation was criticized during the hearings, but “the concept of public broadcasting had been broadly, and virtually unanimously, supported” (Raboy, 1990, p. 234). The CRTC ultimately renewed the CBC’s licences in 1974, but also took the opportunity to abolish radio advertising on the network (Raboy, 1990, pp. 233-234).

Six years later, a Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee published a report that “recommended the CBC be dismantled and turned into a program-commissioning agency for television, selling off its production facilities to private broadcasters, abandoning all local programming, and confining in-house programming to covering the news” (Rowland, 2015, pp. 47-48). Neither the government nor the general public received the report’s recommendations very

well (Rowland, 2015, p. 48). However, “the notion of directing CBC money to private-sector production houses survived” (Rowland, 2015, p. 48).

The Caplan and Sauvageau Report

In April 1985, a few years after the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee’s report was published, the government appointed a Task Force on Broadcasting Policy, chaired by Florian Sauvageau and Gerald Caplan (Raboy, 1995b, p. 458). The Task Force’s final report was submitted in June 1986 (Raboy, 1990, p. 306). The report found Canadian content generally was being diminished, placing the blame on the CRTC, which it saw as moving the system away from being predominantly Canadian, “in the name of the *Broadcasting Act*” (Task Force on Broadcasting Policy, 1986, p. 14). The CBC for its part, was noted to lack the resources to actually be “all things to all people” as it was attempting to be (Task Force on Broadcasting Policy, 1986, p. 14).

The report recognized the technological changes happening in broadcasting and so it ultimately recommended that a new Broadcasting Act be put in place (Task Force on Broadcasting Policy, 1986, p. 14). A Bill for a new Act was tabled in June 1988 (Raboy, 1995b, p. 461). The Senate ended up blocking it due to “a Liberal filibuster on the Free Trade Agreement, which lasted until Parliament was dissolved two days later for an election call” (Raboy, 1995b, p. 461).

The Broadcasting Act, 1991

The Bill was re-tabled in October 1989, passed in December 1990 and proclaimed in June 1991 (Raboy, 1995b, pp. 461-462). The Act maintained that the CBC “be predominantly and distinctively Canadian” (Broadcasting Act, 1991, p. 5). The CBC was also to continue to “be made available throughout Canada by the most appropriate and efficient means and as resources become available”, to be in both English and French, reflect and serve the country’s regions, and to contribute to cultural exchange (Broadcasting Act, 1991, p. 5). The Act extended the CBC’s

mandate to include that the CBC “reflect the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canada” and that it reflect the needs of the country’s official language communities and the needs of the country’s linguistic minorities (Broadcasting Act, 1991, p. 5). It also made several changes to existing clauses in the CBC’s mandate, including taking out the provision for fostering “national unity”, opting instead to mandate the CBC to “contribute to a shared national consciousness and identity” (Broadcasting Act, 1991, p. 5).

The added responsibility put into the CBC’s mandate was not met with additional funding, rather its funding levels “actually diminished continuously throughout the policy review period” (Raboy, 1995b, pp. 465-466). Just before the Act was implemented, in 1990, the Corporation’s budget was cut by \$108 million (Rowland, 2015, p. 1). The cuts in its budget were followed by cuts to its programming and services. CBC television had developed into a popular source of news for Canadians after its rocky start in the 1950s. Nevertheless, in response to its funding cuts the Corporation “shut down its television supper-hour news programs in several Canadian cities” (Manera, 1996, p. 57). It also “virtually eliminated its regional television services in December 1990, closing eleven stations in different parts of the country and reducing non-national programming to two daily newscasts in each province” (Raboy, 1995c, p. 112). Part of the reasoning for this move was that it would allow television and radio to serve separate functions. Television newscasts were reworked to be “be provincial rather than local” while radio would take responsibility for local newscasts, thereby creating separate but complementary roles for each medium (Manera, 1996, p. 58). The CRTC eventually endorsed these decisions (Raboy, 1995b, p. 467). This was despite significant public outcry, which included city councils seeking “injunctions to require the CBC to fulfill its legal mandate” (Raboy, 1995c, p. 112). The audiences the CBC’s local newsrooms had built up, “whose loyalty had taken years to capture fled in large numbers”,

never to be lured back again (Taras, 2015, p. 233). Another strategy the CBC used to combat its decreasing revenue was to dramatically increase its commercial revenues prior to a recession hitting (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, pp. 36-37).

The budget cuts did not stop. In 1995 the CBC's budget was cut again, this time by \$125 million (Rowland, 2015, p. 4). Altogether, from 1985-2010, the CBC's budget was reduced by almost two-thirds (Rowland, 2013, p. 1). Not unlike what was happening in Britain around this time, in Canada, from 1985-1991, debate about broadcasting policy was heavily influenced by economic concerns (Raboy, 1995b, p. 456). The Canadian government at this time, wanted "to reduce the role and responsibilities of the Canadian State" (Raboy, 1995b, p. 456). The consequence of this was that Canadian cultural policy rationales shifted from being political to economic (Raboy, 1990, p. 338). One of the ways this impacted broadcasting is that the CRTC facilitated the extension of private broadcasting in Canada "at the expense of the public" (Raboy, 1990, p. 234).

Multi-Channel Broadcasting in Canada

During "the 1980s, the number of channels and their utilization began to increase, resulting in a large number of channels" (Boardman & Vining, 1996, p. 58). This happened due to "increased access and capacity on cable and to technological changes that allowed more channels to be "squeezed" from over-the-air transmission" (Boardman & Vining, 1996, p. 58). Canada was an early adopter of new media technologies. It "was the first country to use satellites for domestic television and was a pioneer in cable technology, having one of the highest rates of cable use in the world" (Taras, 2015, p. 9). Cable technology had been used for broadcasting in Canada since the 1960s, but the explosion of new channels in the 1980s changed the country's media landscape and ultimately fragment audiences (Boardman & Vining, 1996, p. 57; Taras, 2015, p. 129).

The rush to adopt “cable and satellite received a strong push from the federal government and the CRTC” with the goal in mind of increasing the availability of Canadian content (Taras, 2015, p. 130). The problem with this for the CBC was that private broadcasters were being awarded lucrative new service licences while the CRTC refused to approve the CBC’s new licence requests (Taras, 2015, p. 134; Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2003, p. 91). A 2003 House of Commons Standing Committee report listed eight requests the CBC had made to the CRTC for licences for new services between 1989 and 1999 that were rejected (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2003, p. 597). The exception to this was Newsworld, which was granted a licence in 1987 and later its French equivalent, Réseau de l’information (RDI), which had its licence approved in 1994 (CRTC, 1987; Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2003, p. 722). These services, however, were not to be funded by the CBC’s parliamentary appropriation and would not be available freely to Canadians as the BBC’s 24-hour news channel was. Rather, Newsworld and RDI were both funded by subscriptions and compelled by the CRTC to keep separate accounts from the rest of the Corporation “to ensure that specialty services funded largely through subscriber fees, are not underwritten by the CBC’s parliamentary grants; tax dollars intended to fund the over-the-air radio and television services” (CRTC, 2000b, paras. 24-25). This could have been the case for other CBC services as well, had licences been granted. As the 2003 Standing Committee argued, not only were all of the rejected licence requests for services that would have suited the CBC’s mandate, “cable and satellite subscription fees would have supported all of these services; as such, the Corporation would not have required any increase in its parliamentary appropriation” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2003, p. 596). The denial of new service licences by the CRTC, on top of reductions to its budget, meant that the CBC would start off a new era of broadcasting characterized by change and choice, struggling and at a

distinct disadvantage in the Canadian media landscape. During this time, the CRTC and the Canadian government continued to adhere “to the prominent ideology of light-touch regulation, which insists market mechanisms function as the key regulatory tool” (Taylor, 2013, p. 4).

Radio Broadcasting in Australia

The ABC faced many similar struggles as the CBC did throughout its history as it also developed and has continued to operate within a system that includes a strong private-sector element. During the first phase of Australian broadcasting, broadcasters relied on subscription revenue (Breen, 1995, p. 121). At this time, receiving sets were sealed and only stations paid for by the listener could be accessed (Hull, 1962, p. 114). The 1905 Wireless Telegraphy Act had given the Postmaster General the power to licence broadcast stations (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 7). Along with licensing stations, the Postmaster General set the technical standards that radio stations would have to meet (Hull, 1962, p. 115).

After a year of the sealed-set system, Australia moved to an open broadcasting system “where all sets could receive transmissions from all stations” (Given, 2003, p. 26). Stations at this time were categorized as either A-class or B-class stations (Breen, 1995, p. 121). The A-class stations were funded by a licence fee, while the B-class stations funded themselves through advertising (Given, 2003, p. 26). The Australian broadcast system operated on this structure until the ‘A’ class station licences expired in 1929-30 (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 11).

The Australian Broadcasting Company

The system would change again after this because there were concerns about how radio was developing in Australia in the late 1920s. In 1927 a government-appointed Royal Commission heard complaints that broadcasting resources were too concentrated in cities and states with larger populations (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 11). It was later decided that after the A-class licences

expired, the government would offer them on a three-year basis “to a single nationwide company, which would be responsible for programmes” (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 11). The technical services would be provided by the Postmaster General (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 11). This set up was to allow for a wider dispersal of radio services in the country and presumably to address the problem of access to radio broadcasting in less populous locations across Australia.

The company, called the Australian Broadcasting Company, was made up of three Sydney-based businesses (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 12). The ‘B’ class stations remained an important part of the system (Inglis & Brazier, 1983). The ABC, unlike both the BBC and the CBC, was designed to complement this commercial radio sector by “providing market information, news and culture to areas of the continent not financially viable for fledgling private broadcasters” (Martin, 2016, p. 337). The Company would receive 12 shillings per licence fee that was paid and would not be allowed to air advertising (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 11). The Australian Broadcasting Company went to air in 1929, but like the CRBC it was short-lived (Inglis & Brazier, 1983). A central issue the Company faced was the fact that the Postmaster General had only built four of the 16 stations it had planned to, which meant that the ABC’s programming ultimately failed to reach many people outside of the cities, an issue it was supposed to help resolve (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 16).

The Australian Broadcasting Commission

The licence for the Company expired and the businesses that had run it did not seek to have it renewed, so the head of the Postmaster General took the opportunity to put in place a system closer to the one established in Britain (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, pp. 16-17). The new system was formalized through the Australian Broadcasting Commission Act, which became law on May 17, 1932 (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 18). The Act established the Australian Broadcasting Commission, which would be “responsible to Parliament through the postmaster-general” (Hull,

1962, p. 116). The government would appoint a five-member commission to control it (Inglis, 2006, p. 6). This detail of the ABC's set up influenced its independence because it meant that its governing body would come to function "as a conduit for political, rather than public interest" (Breen, 1995, p. 122).

The ABC was officially inaugurated on July 1st, 1932 (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 5). It was designed to be a national broadcaster that did not have a responsibility to contribute to nation-building but was instead designed to culturally uplift Australians (Petersen, 1993, p. 35). The Commission was financed, like the Company, by a 12-shilling share of the 24-shilling licence fee (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 18). It was originally supposed to be allowed to air sponsored programs because providing a national service was going to be expensive (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, pp. 18-19). The government, however, changed its mind after commercial broadcasters argued that allowing advertising on the ABC would lead to B-class station closures, and after newspaper proprietors argued that if the ABC received public subsidies it should not be allowed to accept advertising revenue as well (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 19).

ABC News

The Australian press was powerful (Petersen, 1993, p. 54). It exerted influence not just over the ABC's funding structure, but over the ABC's news activities as well. The relationship between the Australian press and the ABC therefore was less than amicable. This was because some newspapers had begun to operate B-class broadcasting stations when the Company was first formed (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 13). More to the point, however, the press saw that radio could rival them in news provision and so they wanted "to limit and downplay its informational role" (Petersen, 1993, p. 19).

One way they did this was by imposing restrictions on the ABC's news programming (Johnson, 1987, pp. 62-63). At first, the newspapers had only been concerned that they were acknowledged when their work was read on radio stations, but in "1929, newspapers and, in particular the Australian Newspaper Conference, an affiliation of newspapers including many of the major metropolitan dailies in the eastern States, were moving to restrict the length and timing of radio news" (Johnson, 1987, pp. 62-63).

The Australian Broadcasting Company did manage to do some of its own news gathering despite restrictions and pressure from the press, but when the Australian Broadcasting Commission was formed, the new ABC chose to comply with demands from newspaper proprietors (Petersen, 1993). The newly formed ABC "did not see news as being of sufficient high priority to warrant a dispute with the press" (Petersen, 1993, p. 51). It also lacked the necessary resources. The Bill that had led to the creation of the ABC required the ABC to carry news, but there was no requirement that it gather the news itself, and so it also was not provided with the resources needed to form a news-gathering operation (Johnson, 1987, p. 63). If it had been, there was no doubt that newspapers would have made complaints about competition (Johnson, 1987, p. 63). As it was, the press was able to impose severe restrictions on the ABC (Johnson, 1987, p. 63).

This is clear from the 1932 agreement that the Australian Broadcasting Commission negotiated and signed with the Australian Newspaper Conference (ANC) (Johnson, 1987, p. 63). The ABC paid £200 per year to the ANC for access to news content and was limited by the agreement to broadcasting only five news bulletins of five minutes each day (Johnson, 1987, p. 63). Within those five minutes of the news broadcast, the ABC needed "to acknowledge the source of their news" (Johnson, 1987, p. 63). The ABC was allowed to supplement the news it received from the newspapers but was limited to "sports programs and routine information such as weather

and market reports” (Johnson, 1987, p. 63). The ABC did attempt to negotiate terms that were less restrictive, but the newspaper proprietors were uncompromising (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 64). Sir Keith Murdoch was particularly unwilling to compromise, wanting instead to protect his newspaper interests as well as the B-class stations he had interests in (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 64). This led the ABC to consider setting up its own news-gathering service (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 64).

The ABC worked hard to break down the barriers it faced and made considerable gains over the next decade. In 1936, Frank Dixon was appointed federal news editor (Johnson, 1987, p. 63). From that point forward, news was to be written for broadcasting with “the newspaper items paraphrased rather than simply read” straight from the newspaper (Johnson, 1987, p. 63). That same year, with the ABC under new management, the Commission shifted “to a nationally organized ABC service” (Johnson, 1987, p. 63). A few years later, in May 1939, Warren Denning was appointed to cover the federal government as “the first staff correspondent of the ABC news service” (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 66). Prior to this, the Postmaster-General had informed the ABC’s general manager “that Cabinet wanted the ABC to appoint its own representative in Canberra rather than get news of government activities second hand” (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 66). The Prime Minister wanted fairer coverage of government than he believed it was getting from the press (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 66).

World War Two

The ABC’s news service made more progress in breaking down news-related barriers during World War Two. One of the immediate effects of war “was an increase in the proportion of time occupied by news bulletins” (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 82). In 1939, the ABC had a newly appointed full-time correspondent in London, and in 1940 and 1941 respectively, it began

receiving cables from New York and Singapore (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 82). During World War Two, the ABC placed considerable importance on speed, as its reputation had been enhanced by its ability to be the first to bring Australians the news (Petersen, 1993, p. 108). Prior to this, “[c]ommercial radio interests and newspaper proprietors were relieved that, on the evidence of the 1932 Act, the ABC appeared to pose no real threat in terms of status of profitability” (Petersen, 1993, p. 35). The press was now, however, alarmed by the ABC’s news strategy, and “saw that the ABC was bent on competing for news” (Petersen, 1993, p. 108).

The competition between the ABC and the press took a turn when Sir Keith Murdoch was appointed the Director-General of Information in 1940 (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 82). At this time, the ABC was responsible for putting together a federal news bulletin (Petersen, 1993). Responsibility for the bulletin had originally been given to the ABC by the federal government (Petersen, 1993, p. 168). The bulletin was “given priority over other news and relayed through every station in the nation” (Petersen, 1993, p. 168). In order to put it together, the ABC was allowed to break the agreement it had with the press (Petersen, 1993, p. 168). When Murdoch became Director-General of Information, however, he gave the bulletin to a team of journalists that he “had recruited to his department, inexperienced in writing for radio and instructed to lace the news with material helpful to the war effort” (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 83). It was not long before people began to complain (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 83). The bulletins were returned to the ABC after a month (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 83). This was not the end of the ABC and press rivalry. Rather, it was “the beginning of a new phase” (Petersen, 1993, p. 125).

Gibson Committee

This new phase of press rivalry coincided with hearings that were being held by a Joint Committee on Broadcasting (Petersen, 1993, p. 125). The Committee, known as the Gibson

Committee after its chair Senator W. G. Gibson, was appointed in July 1941 (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 105). At the time, tensions were increasing between the ABC and the press because “the agreements for the supply of news had not been formally extended and were continuing on a month-by-month basis” (Petersen, 1993, p. 125). The Gibson Committee, for its part, was scrutinizing “the whole question of ABC’s dependence on the newspapers” (Petersen, 1993, p. 125). It was aware that the government had weakened the agreements that the ABC and the press had made (Petersen, 1993, p. 168). The appointment of Denning to cover government first-hand was, after all, made after a request from Cabinet to do so. There was also the fact that the government had ruled “that any newspaper-imposed ban on the extension of ABC newsgathering did not extend to the reporting on the Federal Government” (Petersen, 1993, p. 168).

The press still had some power as it was “the only source of news outside the Federal Government for both the ABC and commercial stations” (Petersen, 1993, p. 168). This meant that the ABC still relied on the press for a considerable amount of news, including news about State parliaments (Petersen, 1993, p. 168). Throughout the Gibson Committee’s hearings, the press maintained that the only way the ABC should have access to this content should be with conditions imposed (Petersen, 1993, p. 148). The press wanted to place restrictions on where and when the ABC could gather its own news (not outside of Canberra and not on any day but Sundays), and wanted approval over when the ABC broadcast its news bulletins (Petersen, 1993, p. 148). Members of the public who gave evidence to the Committee were of a different opinion on this matter (Petersen, 1993, p. 173). They wanted more freedom for the ABC from the press, and more independence for it to gather its own news (Petersen, 1993, p. 173).

The 1942 Australian Broadcasting Act

The Gibson Committee's final report was tabled on March 25, 1942 (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 105). It recommended the current Act legislating the ABC be replaced by a new Act that covered the ABC as well as the commercial broadcasters (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 105). Until this point, the private broadcasters in Australia had been regulated through the Wireless Telegraphy Act of 1905 (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 105). A Bill for the new Act was introduced and passed by June (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 106).

The new Act gave the ABC new freedoms for political broadcasting, allowing the ABC to "determine what extent and in what manner political material was broadcast" (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 106). The ABC's news services continued to advance after this, and several years later, an amendment to the Act that would significantly change the structure of the ABC's news services was proposed, debated and eventually accepted. Both the 1932 and 1942 Acts had a provision "enabling the ABC to gather news as it thought fit" (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 130). This was replaced with "an obligation to secure news within the Commonwealth wholly by its own staff" (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 130). As had been apparent with Denning's posting in Canberra, the government did not trust the press (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 129). It was determined to use the ABC, which was publicly controlled, effectively (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 129). The ABC's "independent news service was officially pronounced alive in the 7 o'clock bulletin on 1 July 1947" (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 130).

That same month, a committee reviewed the ABC's finances and administration (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 131). It found that the ABC was not wasting money and so it either needed more funding or would need to decrease its activities (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 131). Following this, the licence fee was scrapped as the method of funding the ABC (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 131). In October 1948, a Bill was introduced that changed the Commission's funding from the licence

fee to a government grant (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, pp. 131- 132). After concerns were expressed about the impact of the changes on the ABC's autonomy, the Prime Minister agreed "to make a statement that the size of the grant would be assured three years in advance" (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 132). The composition of the ABC was also altered at this point, through the addition of representatives for the Postmaster General and the Treasury on the ABC's board (Hull, 1962, p. 116). This requirement would be taken away again in 1956 (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 195).

At this time the structure of Australian broadcasting was about to change through the introduction of a new board. Named the Australian Broadcasting Control Board (ABCB), it would among other functions, allot frequencies and "monitor standards of equipment and programmes" (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, pp. 131-132). It was to be made up of three members and had been designed "to relieve the postmaster-general's department of some of the burdens of broadcasting" (Hull, 1962, p. 116). The ABCB was a statutory authority and so the Minister for Posts and Telecommunications still had ultimate power over licensing decisions (Breen, 1995, p. 122). Its role in relation to the ABC was limited – the ABC needed "the Control Board's blessing with regard to technical matters" but did not need to "apply formally for a licence to open a new station" (Hull, 1962, p. 119).

Television

With these matters settled, television finally appeared on the public agenda. In June 1949 the government committed to introducing the new medium (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 193). Labor was in charge at the time and intended for television to be publicly owned, but it lost power six months after the announcement and the new government intended the television system to be mixed (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 193). The new government was not in much of a hurry to introduce television, so it would be another few years until it was seriously discussed again (Inglis

& Brazier, 1983, p. 194). A Royal Commission was eventually appointed in February 1953 (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 194). The Commission reported a year later, recommending “that the ABC have responsibility for the national service” without a monopoly (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 194). Instead, Sydney and Melbourne, which would get television first, would have two commercial and one ABC station each (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 194).

The Commission’s recommendations were accepted in September and the ABCB called for applications for the first commercial licences soon after that (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 195). With the commercial stations outnumbering ABC stations, Australia had developed a commercially oriented television system “where public interest was secondary, save only for the regulatory structures” (Breen, 1995, p. 123). To make matters worse for the ABC, the press had decided that it needed to be involved in television and so the early commercial television licences all went to firms with shareholders that had interests in newspapers (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 195).

The Broadcasting and Television Act

The ABC began television broadcasting on November 5, 1956 (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 193). Television in Australia was officially legislated under the Broadcasting and Television Act of 1956 (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 195). The 1956 Act would last for two decades before it was replaced. The central change brought on by the 1976 Act was the introduction of the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT), which was to replace the ABCB (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 401). The ABT had the power to make decisions about commercial licences, unlike the ABCB which was only able to advise the Minister (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 401). Two years later, Australia’s broadcasting system changed with the introduction of a second public broadcaster, Special

Broadcasting Service (SBS) (Inglis, 2006, p. 12). SBS was designed to be Australia's multicultural public service broadcaster (Inglis, 2006, p. 12).

The Erosion of the Public Service Ideal in Broadcasting

The following year, in May 1979, the ABC underwent an independent review (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 426). A Committee, referred to as the Dix Committee after its chair A. T. Dix, was put together to examine everything from the ABC's services, to its policies, to its performance (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 426).

This was the start of a particularly difficult period for the ABC. The new way of thinking about public policy that had hit Britain and Canada also appeared in Australia. This public policy approach, which emphasized private over public enterprise, was known "in Australia as economic rationalism" (Inglis, 2006, p. 100). The adoption of economic rationalism in Australia startled many citizens (Inglis, 2006, p. 100). For broadcasting it meant that there were arguments that emerged that made the case for cultural services being expected to find ways to raise some if not all of their own funding (Inglis, 2006, p. 100). For the ABC specifically, the rise of economic rationalism resulted in an effort "to swing the ABC towards commercial modes and standards, to erode its influence as an organ of social and political criticism, and to cast doubts on its usefulness in the cultural space" (Ashbolt, 1987, pp. 112-113). This compounded the fact that the commodification of ABC content had already begun with the formation of ABC Enterprises in 1974 (Jolly, 2014).

The 1983 Broadcasting Act

The Dix Committee's final report clearly reflected this perspective. The report, titled *The ABC in Review: National Broadcasting in the 1980s*, was submitted in May 1981 (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 429). Much of the report represented a move "away from concepts of public ownership

and public service towards commercialisation and capitalist entrepreneurialism” (Ashbolt, 1987, p. 114). The Dix Committee, for example, recommended that the ABC be run “more like a commercial enterprise” (Ashbolt, 1987, p. 113). Because of this, the Act that was passed after the Dix Committee’s report was published, changed the ABC from a Commission to a Corporation (Miller, 1997, p. 57). The term “Corporation” was used to signify that the ABC was to be run closer to a company with a board of directors moving forward, rather than by commissioners as it had been in the past (Inglis, 2006, p. 6). The board of directors would be made up of 5-7 members plus the managing director (Inglis, 2006, p. 6). Government would choose the board and the board would choose the managing director (Inglis, 2006, p. 6). The board would, among other things “ensure that the functions of the Corporation are performed efficiently and with the maximum benefit to the people of Australia”, as well as “ensure that the gathering and presentation by the Corporation of news and information is accurate and impartial according to the recognized standards of objective journalism” (Inglis, 2006, p. 7). The board “was required to report annually to parliament” (Inglis, 2006, p. 7).

Altogether, the Dix Committee’s report was received well in parliament (Inglis, 2006, p. 5). A Bill was created based on its recommendations (Inglis, 2006, p. 6). Besides changing the Commission to a Corporation, another significant change that the Bill made was that it created a Charter for the ABC for the first time (Inglis, 2006, p. 7). The Charter specified that the ABC should broadcast educational programs, it should promote performing arts and it should provide a balanced schedule of programs that had wide appeal and programs that were specialized (Inglis, 2006, p. 8). It also included a responsibility for the ABC to contribute to Australian national identity (Inglis, 2006, p. 8). The new Bill furthermore added an explicit commitment to cultural diversity to the ABC’s Charter (Inglis, 2006, p. 11). The Bill passed in 1983 and the Australian

Broadcasting Commission officially became the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on July 1 of that year (Inglis, 2006, p. 11; Miller, 1997, p. 57).

The ABC's news services were changed slightly by the new Act. The Dix Committee had found that people valued the ABC as a source of information more so than as a source for entertainment (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 432). Because of this, Dix made recommendations intended to strengthen the ABC's news services (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 432). This included that the ABC be allowed to use material from domestic news agencies, instead of being obliged to use only its own resources as it had been (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 440). The ABC was worried that such a change would lead to a reduction in its resources for news gathering (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 440). The government took the Committee's side but offered the ABC reassurance that it did not have to use agency material and that it would still be obligated to employ a staff of journalists (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 440).

Commercial Sector Gains

Later on, the Australian broadcasting system was essentially restructured (Turner, 2001, p. 48). Broadcasting was no longer as profitable as it had once been (Turner, 2001, p. 49). Because of this, many channels were sold and ended up "in the hands of a proprietor with no previous experience in the media who drove them further into debt or asset-stripped them to support other enterprises" (Turner, 2001, p. 49). In response to the situation, the government, under political pressure, began to release regulatory ties (Turner, 2001, p. 49). This included getting rid of some regulatory mechanisms such as public licence hearings, which were supposed to provide oversight (Turner, 2001, p. 49). After this change was made, the commercial stations, while licenced by the government, were "under minimal independent regulatory pressure to observe any of the public interest requirements which are both explicit and implicit in their licences" (Turner, 2001, p. 47).

On top of all of this, a decision was made “to finally legitimize the establishment of formal networks as a means of allowing the broadcasters access to the commercial benefits of rationalizing their operations on a national basis” (Turner, 2001, p. 49). Because of these measures, Australian commercial broadcasting networks were “returned to the hands of experienced media proprietors and were operating at a profit” by the early 1990s (Turner, 2001, p. 49). It was clear from the changes made to the system that the government believed that commercially viable broadcasters were more important than any previous assumption about the public service responsibilities of broadcasters (Turner, 2001, p. 49).

At the time, there was a new regulatory body overseeing Australian broadcasting. In 1992, the ABT was replaced with the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) (Inglis, 2006, p. 275). The ABA would have a lighter touch compared to the ABT (Inglis, 2006, p. 275). Unlike the ABT, the ABA did not have the power to limit advertising on air (Inglis, 2006, p. 277). Instead, broadcasters would decide how much advertising to would air, which would be indicated in a code of practice that was created by the broadcaster and registered with the ABA – the assumption being “that the amount of advertising could safely be left to the market to decide” (Inglis, 2006, p. 277).

Multi-Channel Broadcasting in Australia

Commercial broadcasting may have returned to a good place by the beginning of the 1990s, but the decade and time leading up to it was difficult for the ABC. While the private broadcasting industry was being deregulated, new regulations were placed on the ABC, which was now required to submit a code of practice to the ABA, and to have complaints against it scrutinized by the new regulatory body (Inglis, 2006, p. 277). Furthermore, decisions made around funding the ABC and around new media technologies that had been made in the 1980s had a significant impact on the ABC well into the 1990s. For example, the ABC had asked for a funding increase of \$84 million

in 1985-86, in part to pay for a second regional network for radio and for building projects, and in part “to meet the cost of using Aussat, a domestic satellite system” (Inglis, 2006, p. 105). For the ABC, satellite would be able to reach listeners who did not live in the cities with the new radio network “and it would enable 300,000 or so people in the far outback, until now beyond the range of radio and television, to become listeners and viewers” (Inglis, 2006, p. 106). It would allow the ABC to become more national (Inglis, 2006, p. 106). The ABC was only provided with an additional \$5 million for its planned projects though (Inglis, 2006, p. 108). This, coupled with an Australian dollar that had drastically fallen in value, meant that the ABC would have to make some difficult decisions including reducing “ambitions for the newly named network even before it went to air” and reassessing its plans for using Aussat (Inglis, 2006, p. 108). In 1986, the ABC was given another \$35 million in supplementary funding, but that funding was “given partly in recognition of the Australian dollar’s diminished value” and would therefore go towards things such as avoiding “a reduction in the purchase of imported programs which had suddenly become more expensive” (Inglis, 2006, p. 114). It was “unclear whether the supplementation helped the ABC pay for its use of Aussat”, but nevertheless, the ABC’s satellite service was inaugurated in July 1986 (Inglis, 2006, p. 114).

Six years later, in 1992, the ABC was given “a licence to operate two pay channels, a start-up grant of \$12.5 million, and authority both to seek ‘equity partners’ and to sell programs to commercial providers” (Inglis, 2006, p. 353). Government policy on pay television at the time “mandated that there would be digital satellite delivery of ten new channels, with two new owners having four each and the ABC being offered two” (Tiffen, 2007, p. 54). The ABC approved the two channels it had been allotted to be used for news programming and children's programming (Inglis, 2006, p. 353). For the news channel, the ABC partnered with John Fairfax holdings and

Cox Communications in a deal that meant that “[a]n ABC subsidiary would own 51 per cent of the venture and the commercial partners 49 per cent” (Inglis, 2006, p. 353). They called the venture Australian Information Media (AIM) (Inglis, 2006, p. 353). The partnership had been approved by the ABC Board in 1994, and AIM was granted a licence in December of that year (Inglis, 2006, p. 353). The intention had been for it to be funded through subscriptions at first, “supplemented by whatever it could make from sales to other operators” (Inglis, 2006, pp. 353-354). The government had banned advertising until 1997, but after that, AIM was to also generate funding through advertising (Inglis, 2006, p. 354).

The venture required another party to deliver the service (Inglis, 2006, p. 354). It was looking like Foxtel would sign a contract to do this, but in July 1995, Rupert Murdoch⁸, who was part owner of Foxtel, ordered the agreement not to be signed, which proved to be “fatal for AIM” (Inglis, 2006, p. 354; Tiffen, 2007, p. 55). Both Australis Media and Optus Vision, the other two companies in Australia offering pay television at the time, also dropped out because they felt the asking price for AIM’s programs was too high, which led to AIM closing down in September 1995 (Inglis, 2006, p. 354; Tiffen, 2007, p. 55).

The result of this was that for the first decade and a half of pay television in Australia, the only 24 hour news channel available to Australians was Sky News, which was launched in 1996 and was controlled by a joint venture between Publishing and Broadcasting Ltd, Seven Network and the Murdoch-owned BSkyB (Young, 2009, pp. 401-404). It also took the ABC out of pay television in Australia at the time, putting the Corporation at a disadvantage and meaning that the ABC would not have the 24-hour news channel it had planned for until 2010, when it launched ABC News 24 (ABC, 2010, p. 27).

⁸ Rupert Murdoch is the son of Sir Keith Murdoch and the owner of *The Times* and *The Sun*, in Britain and *The Australian* in Australia, among other media holdings (McKnight & McChesney, 2013).

This was not the only way the ABC came to be disadvantaged in the new media environment during the 1990s. Its place in the Australian media landscape was far from secure. In 1992, when a Broadcasting Services Act was being put together, the ABC Board had sought assurance that regardless of any new communications technologies, and regardless of any arguments from bureaucrats about the value of a level playing field, the ABC's place in Australia would be secure, it would be seen as an essential service (Inglis, 2006, pp. 278-279). The final Broadcasting Services Act, however, did not include any such guarantee (Inglis, 2006, p. 279). Then, in 1994, the ABC was not given any new funding from the government's Creative Nation policy, which had, among other things, allocated \$84 million over four years for the exploration of "the cultural potentialities of new media" (Inglis, 2006, pp. 328-329). And finally, to make matters worse, in 1996, despite a promise that its funding would be maintained, the ABC received a 10 per cent budget cut (Given, 2003, p. 194).

Conclusion

The BBC, CBC and ABC all have long histories as public service broadcasters and as purveyors of the news. Each broadcaster developed under distinct circumstances as each country had a particular vision for their overall broadcasting system and of what their PSB should contribute to it.

The BBC was originally created because radio spectrum could not accommodate all of the applications for licences for broadcast stations that had been made (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 110; Michalis, 2016, p. 349). Because of this, several radio manufacturers were persuaded to form the British Broadcasting Company in 1922 (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 110). The Company was run as a business that broadcast programming to stimulate radio set sales (Curran & Seaton, 2003, p. 110; Tracey, 1998, p. 99). The public service orientation of broadcasting that emerged in Britain

has been largely attributed to Sir John Reith, the British Broadcasting Company's Managing Director as of November 1923 (Briggs, 1961, p. 135). Importantly, the BBC under Reith saw Britain's broadcasting audience as a 'public', not a 'market' (Briggs, 1965, p. 8). The BBC was designed "to inform, to educate, and to entertain" (Crisell, 2002, p. 28). Public broadcasting as solidified by the BBC's Charter had been in effect for five years before Canada created the CRBC. The CRBC, the CBC's predecessor, was established through the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Act in 1932 (Raboy, 1990, p. 46). Public broadcasting in Canada was given a distinctly national purpose (Raboy, 1990, p. 7). It was created with the British system in mind, but with key differences including that it did not have a monopoly (Raboy, 1990). In contrast to both the BBC and the CBC, the ABC, which had been originally formed as the Australian Broadcasting Company in 1929, was designed to complement commercial radio (Petersen, 1993, p. 30; Martin, 2016, p. 337). In this way, the Australian broadcasting system was seen as being a dual system, which differed from Canada's "single system" and Britain's monopoly (Given, 2003, p. 27; Raboy, 1990, p. 9; Curran & Seaton, 2003).

In the earliest days of radio broadcasting, all three of the PSBs were funded through a licence fee. The British Broadcasting Company had received a share of a 10-shilling licence fee (Tracey, 1998, p. 99). This would continue to be the method of funding the BBC when it changed to a Corporation (Tracey, 1998, p. 99). The CRBC was funded through a \$2.00 licence fee (Peers, 1969, p. 227). The CBC was also funded by the licence fee at first, but when television emerged, the government decided that it would get rid of the licence fee and fund the CBC through an excise tax on radios, televisions and their parts (Weir, 1965, p. 263). In 1958, the method of funding the CBC changed again, which would mean that from that point on the CBC would be funded through a parliamentary appropriation (Vipond, 1995, p. 297). Throughout its history, the CBC has also

derived part of its revenues from advertising (Raboy, 1990; Weir, 1965). The Australian Broadcasting Company and the Australian Broadcasting Commission were both funded through a 12-shilling share of a 24-shilling licence fee (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 18). This changed in 1948 to a government grant (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, pp. 131- 132). Like the BBC, the ABC did not air advertisements. This was because commercial broadcasters and newspapers had argued against it being allowed to (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 19).

The press was powerful enough in both Britain and Australia to curtail the development of news services at the BBC and the ABC. The BBC had been restricted by its Licence and Agreement until 1926 to only broadcasting news purchased from the press (Briggs, 1961). The ABC, while being allowed to gather its own news did not have the resources to do so (Johnson, 1987, p. 63). Instead, it also signed an agreement with the press of its country and paid for access to the news it gathered (Johnson, 1987, p. 63). Because of the ABC's adversarial relationship with the press and because of the power that the press held, the ABC did not establish its own, fully independent news service until 1947 after a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Broadcasting had recommended that it be obliged to collect its own news (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 130). The BBC had been granted the right to gather news two decades before that, in 1926 (Briggs, 1961, pp. 358-359). The CBC, which had never been restricted from gathering news, had begun its independent news service in 1941, prior to which, it broadcast news through an agreement for free access to Canadian Press content (Purcell, 1969, p. 155; Weir, 1965, p. 234). The CBC's relationship with the country's press at the time was somewhat strained. While originally onboard with public broadcasting in Canada, the newspapers began to see the CBC differently when it increased the amount of commercial programming it aired and as newspapers began to establish broadcast stations themselves (Raboy, 1990. p. 61; Peers, 1969, Weir, 1965, p. 229).

On top of pressure from the press, each of the PSBs faced political pressure and had to deal with governments that held power over them in different ways despite being technically independent. The BBC was run by a director general who was appointed by and accountable to a government-appointed Board of Governors (Crisell, 2002, p. 28; Prosser, 1992, p. 176). The BBC's licence fee funding was set by the government, which also granted the BBC its Licence and Agreement, which regulated its activities (Crisell, 2002, p. 28). In these ways, the British government held considerable power over the BBC. The Canadian government held power over the CBC in similar ways. For one, the CRBC was run by commissioners who were appointed by the government, and the CBC was run by a board, also appointed by the government (Raboy, 1990, p. 46; Peers, 1969, p. 187). For another, the government had power over the CBC's funding. This is evident in the fact that it significantly changed the method of funding the CBC twice over the course of its history, and in the fact that the second time it was changed, it was changed to a parliamentary appropriation that would be determined annually (Vipond, 1995, p. 297). The ABC was not immune to political pressures either. The Australian Broadcasting Commission was run by a government-appointed commission consisting of five members (Inglis, 2006, p. 6). Later, the government would add two more members, one of which was to represent the Postmaster General and another to represent the Treasury (Hull, 1962, p. 116). This arrangement lasted for eight years (Hull, 1962, p. 116; Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 195). The Australian government also determined the amount and form of the ABC's budget (Inglis & Brazier, 1983).

As further evidence of the significant influence the governments have had over the structure and development of the public broadcasters, significant changes were made to broadcasting policy and regulation in the 1970s and 1980s. At the time, public policy was beginning to reflect a prioritization of markets over public interest and public service values

(O'Malley, 2001, p. 33). This was apparent in decisions being made about broadcasting policy in Britain, Canada and Australia (Inglis, 2006, p. 6; O'Malley, 2001, p. 29; Raboy, 1990, p. 338; Turner, 2001, p. 47)

At this point, all three broadcasters were increasingly expected to generate their own revenue to supplement what they received from public funds. The BBC established its commercial arm BBC Worldwide in 1994 in response to directives from the government to increase its commercial activities (Mjøs, 2011, p. 183). The CBC tried to increase its commercial income in the early 1990s in an attempt to deal with consistent budget cuts made by the Canadian government (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, pp. 36-37). The ABC, when it first started to develop a news channel for pay television, did so in partnership with two commercial organizations that would have owned 49 per cent of the venture if it had made it to air (Inglis, 2006, p. 353). The project would have generated some of its funding through advertising (Inglis, 2006, p. 354). These were challenging circumstances that were to be made even more challenging as the public broadcasters began to navigate the emergence of the Internet and incorporate this new technology into their services.

Chapter Three: BBC News Online

The BBC was an early adopter of the Internet, having had registered the url bbc.co.uk back in 1991 (Smith, 2005, pp. 20-21). Through an analysis of newspaper articles from the British national press⁹ and documents such as White Papers, service licences, and BBC annual reports, this chapter explores the establishment and the development of the BBC's online news services within the wider context of the development of BBC Online. It places an emphasis on the ways in which the British government and the British national press have influenced the shape and form of the BBC's online news service throughout the course of its development. This chapter demonstrates how a combination of the success of the BBC's online presence and the popularity of market liberalism that emerged in the 1980s and has endured past Margaret Thatcher's time as Prime Minister, has put the BBC in an increasingly precarious and unstable position in the British media sphere. This is evidenced by suggestions that the BBC commercialize its online services and by consistent calls for the BBC to become more efficient, for it to generate its own revenues, and for it to become more and more "distinctive". Calls for the BBC to be more distinct in particular have often come as a response to claims that the Corporation is "unfairly competing" with private news organizations. One top of this, questions of the viability of the licence fee as a method of funding the BBC have prompted discussions around abolishing the fee, while simultaneously, the struggles facing private broadcasters prompted discussions around the possibility of top slicing the licence fee so that it could be used to support Britain's wider broadcasting system. These issues and discussions were evident from the start of the development of BBC Online, but became more prevalent as audience habits changed, advertising declined and as news organizations in Britain

⁹ Newspapers include: *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Independent*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Express*, *The Sun*, and *The Daily Star*

came to find that sustaining journalism in the Internet age was extremely difficult and began to search for new ways to bring in revenue.

The BBC Goes Online

The exact impact the Internet would have on Britain's media ecology and on audience behaviour nearly two decades into the new millennium was unclear in the 1990s, but the BBC recognized the potential of the Internet early on. By 1994, the BBC had taken steps to bring online content to the general public. That year, BBC Education opened up the BBC Networking Club, which "was aimed at introducing viewers to the Internet: what it was, how it worked, and what it had to offer" (Smith, 2005, p. 21). The Club "was an Internet service provider, communication facilitator, information supplier, and Web publisher" (Smith, 2005, p. 21). It was designed to "supply back-up information to BBC programmes, allow interactive debates with BBC programme-makers and provide low-cost access" (BBC, 1994, p. 45). The project ended in 1996 because it "was not defined within the existing charter" (Moe, 2008b, p. 226). The same year the Networking Club was launched, work began on "a partnership with ICL-Fujitsu to create beeb.com as a commercially funded site under the subsidiary BBC Worldwide" (Moe, 2008b, p. 226). ICL-Fujitsu put up the money for the site, which would start out by carrying "text graphics and audio material" (Snoddy, 1996, p. 08). The site was closed after two years and later reopened in 2000, closing for good in 2002 (Moe, 2008b, p. 226). After that, BBC Worldwide began to run commercially funded sites including BBC Shop (Moe, 2008b, p. 226).

The BBC's Internet presence continued to expand from there. The Corporation's Director General in the mid-1990s, John Birt, had wanted to see an online public service develop as "the third arm of broadcasting for the BBC" because he "recognised the possibility of the Internet to open up new channels of communication with audiences and, indeed, a necessary development if

the BBC was to remain relevant in a fast evolving new media environment” (Graf, 2004, p. 18). In 1996, along with digital television, the Internet was more clearly incorporated into the BBC’s Charter as a possible platform for the distribution of the BBC’s public service content. The updated Charter stated that, with the Secretary of State’s approval, and within limits agreed to by the Secretary of State and the BBC, the Corporation could “provide, as public services, other services whether or not broadcasting or programme supply services” (Department of National Heritage, 1996, p. 2).

A significant step towards the BBC’s full Internet service came in 1997, after the new Charter had come into effect. The BBC had asked for and been granted approval for a trial period for a full online service, which was officially launched on December 15, 1997 (BBC, 1998, p. 27; Graf, 2004, p. 18). After a year-long pilot program and public consultation, the service was approved of, on a permanent basis (Graf, 2004, pp. 17-18). The approval established in 1998 that, through its online service, the BBC would be expected to do three main things. The first was to be “an essential resource offering wide ranging, unique content”; the second was to use the new technology “to forge a new relationship with licence fee payers and strengthen accountability”; and the third was to provide licence fee payers with a home online, and to be “a trusted guide to the new media environment” (Graf, 2004, p. 17).

The benefits of the Internet to the BBC were numerous. For the BBC, online was a way to extend “the benefits licence payers derive from other BBC services”, to engage with audiences, and to be more accountable through the feedback it received online (BBC, 1999, p. 29). It was also a way to ensure the provision of British content, which was important because the market was dominated by content from the United States (BBC, 1999, p. 29). Online also gave the BBC the chance to engage with a younger generation. This was an audience that in 1999, Alan Yentob, the

BBC Director of Television at the time, described as having reinforced “a fear that fragmentation of the audience could spell the death of public-service broadcasting as a unifying spirit in society” (Yentob, 1999). This was a generation that the BBC could already see was “losing touch” with the Corporation (Yentob, 1999). Through the benefits of the Internet, the BBC sought to facilitate an inclusive public sphere where audiences had the chance to engage with the Corporation, enabling them to be more active participants.

News was a very important part of the BBC’s online service from its earliest days. BBC News Online had been launched in November 1997, one month prior to the launch of BBC Online (“How the BBC News website has changed”, 2017). The BBC’s online services in the first few years were centred primarily around news content and programme support (Graf, 2004, p. 17). Prior to the official launch of BBC News Online, the BBC had put together several event-related sites that covered, for example, the 1995 Budget and the 1997 general election (“How the BBC News website has changed”, 2017). As of June 1998, the BBC “offered over 140,000 pages of content, of which 61,000 were devoted to news” (BBC, 1998, p. 27). The audience for BBC’s online news service grew quickly with page impressions increasing “from 21.6 million page impressions per month in December 1998 to 187.6 million in December 2002” (Graf, 2004, p. 19).

Funding BBC News Online

In 1998, the BBC spent £7.6m on its news website (Graf, 2004, p. 19). The approval that had been issued in 1998 for permanent status for BBC Online approved it as a core public service, which meant that the funding for it would be taken out of the licence fee (Graf, 2004, p. 88). At the time, the BBC was operating according to the terms of a licence fee settlement that had been agreed to in 1996, prior to the BBC’s online services being established on a permanent basis, which granted the BBC licence fee increases that were above the Retail Price Index for the financial years

1998-1999 and 1999-2000 (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 1998, para. 4). After this, in 2000-2001 and in 2001-2002, it was supposed to fall below the Retail Price Index (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 1998, para. 4). The BBC was also required to find efficiency savings over the course of the licence fee settlement (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 1998, para. 4). The settlement was designed taking into account the new digital services the BBC would begin to offer (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 1998, para. 4). A new government confirmed that it would stick to this arrangement in December 1997 (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 1998, para. 4). By July 1998, however, The *Daily Telegraph* had reported that the BBC was asking “for an increase which could see the fee rise from £97.50 to more than £110 by 2002” to pay for inflation costs (Boshoff, 1998, p. 4). In October that same year, it was reported that the BBC was in a pay dispute with its technicians and its journalists, which led the BBC unions to call for staff to stop working for three hours (Gibson, 1998, p. 007).

Reviewing the Licence Fee

The BBC got its chance to plead its case for more funding in 1999. It argued to an independent review panel that it was standing “at a cross-roads” where it would either receive more funding to compete in the new media age, or be “in effect consigned to a slow demise, trapped in a world of disappearing old technology” (Davies, 1999, p. 11).

The review panel, chaired by Gavin Davies, had been tasked by the government with reviewing the BBC’s funding arrangement (Davies, 1999). The panel’s terms of reference asked it “to assume the licence fee would remain as the main source of BBC funding until 2006, and to consider ways of extending funding for public service output from other sources” (Davies, 1999, p. 8). The panel reported in July 1999 (Davies, 1999). It concluded that the Corporation would “need to improve its overall provision of services on analogue and digital platforms somewhat

faster than it has during the 1990s” if it was going to “retain a central role in the provision of public service broadcasting in the early years of the digital age”, which the panel had decided it should be expected to do (Davies, 1999, p. 6). The panel’s final report stated that the BBC needed to be allowed “to develop its digital platform today” if Britain was going to continue to have even the option of it continuing to provide services in the new media environment (Davies, 1999, p. 17).

Based on this, the panel did believe that the BBC deserved additional revenue (Davies, 1999, p. 8). The committee ultimately recommended that additional revenue should be found through self-help measures first, and second, through “additional licence fee revenue” (Davies, 1999, p. 6). The panel saw the self-help measures potentially including “efficiency improvements or extra commercial revenue” (Davies, 1999, p. 8). It was suggested that this money could come from further development of BBC Worldwide’s beeb.com “including the possibility of taking some private capital into the venture” (Davies, 1999, p. 66). The panel also recommended that BBC Worldwide “should launch separately-branded non-UK websites (eg BBC Online America) aimed directly at overseas users of BBC Online” and that would be “run on a commercial basis, accepting both advertising and e-commerce revenues” (Davies, 1999, p. 66).

It was recommended that the additional licence fee revenue come from a supplemental digital licence fee that would eventually be phased out (Davies, 1999, p. 6). The digital licence fee was recommended because Davies felt that “it is unfair to charge analogue households for the development of digital services which they cannot receive” (Davies, 1999, p. 6). The fee would start out at £1.99 per month in April 2000 and would decrease until April 2006 when it would hit 99p per month (Davies, 1999, p. 22). It would be entirely gone by 2010 (Davies, 1999, p. 22). This recommendation, if accepted, “would fund around one third, or a little less, of the annual increase in spending that the BBC has proposed in the last few years of the Charter period, but would fund

a much higher proportion in the next few years” (Davies, 1999, p. 20). This would mean that the BBC would “have to prioritise its activities in the digital world” and would have to seek to make “faster gains in efficiency and commercial activities” (Davies, 1999, p. 20).

The reaction to the final report and the panel’s recommendations was largely critical. Commercial broadcasters were reportedly upset because they saw a digital levy as being “a tax on innovation” (McIntosh, 1999, p. 16). It would be “a powerful disincentive to digital uptake at a time when BSkyB, ONdigital and the cable operators are investing hundreds of millions of pounds in upgrading their systems and providing free set-top boxes to consumers” (McIntosh, 1999, p. 16). The national daily press had different concerns and so was largely critical of the BBC and of its request for more funding for its new services. The *Daily Telegraph* published two articles that both questioned whether or not the BBC had a good case for expansion (“Auntie must fly the standard”, 1999, p. 27; “The BBC and our money”, 1999, p. 25). One article, an editorial, suggested that the proposed clipping of the BBC in the report, which had recommended “that it should sell off BBC Resources and BBC Worldwide to varying extents” was too cautious (“The BBC and our money”, 1999, p. 25). The other article asked whether or not the BBC actually needs “to expand in proportion with the exploding digital universe, to be as ubiquitous in the digital age as it was in the analogue” (“Auntie must fly the standard”, 1999, p. 27). The *Independent* also questioned why the BBC needed “more channels to compete in the digital age” (“A wrong way to bump up the licence fee”, 1999, p. 3). The *Guardian* was more sympathetic to the BBC and its plight, having pointed out in an editorial that “the whole commercial sector”, including the Murdoch press, was “trying to stop the BBC getting its necessary increase” (“The future of the BBC”, 1999). The *Guardian*, however, also produced a poll that revealed that the British public was “opposed to any increase in the licence fee for digital television” and believed that if the BBC

needed extra funding, it “should come from advertising and sponsorship” (Ahmed, 1999, p. 1). The results, based on “a random sample of 1,204 adults by telephone”, more specifically showed that only 7 per cent of the people who were questioned for the poll “said they would be happy to pay” for the charges proposed by the Davies panel’s report (Ahmed, 1999, p. 1). The *Guardian* argued that the poll’s findings “question the very basis of publicly funded broadcasting” (Ahmed, 1999, p. 1).

Six months later, in December 1999, the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee (1999), published a report that also looked into the BBC’s finances. The Committee was critical of providing extra funding for the BBC for its digital plans. It argued that the BBC did not make a sufficient case for it to expand its role as much as it had proposed, and as such, had not made a sufficient case for the extra funding that would be needed for it to expand its role (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 1999, para. 52). The Committee’s report called the BBC’s proposal “sketchy at best” (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 1999, para. 52). Regarding the digital licence fee recommended by the Davies panel more specifically, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee (1999), recommended against its implementation, essentially siding with commercial media organizations by arguing that it would slow the rate at which people switched to digital television and would disproportionately affect those most disadvantaged (para. 83). The Committee further recommended that the licence fee settlement that had been arranged in 1996 should be maintained (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 1999, para. 89).

The Committee’s chair, Gerald Kaufman, defended his stance on the BBC’s funding in a December 1999 op-ed published in *The Independent*. He pointed out that the BBC had the opportunity to plan ahead because it was aware of the multi-year licence fee arrangement, but he argued that it had not taken the opportunity to do so (Kaufman, 1999, p. 10). The other part of

Kaufman's (1999) argument against the digital licence fee, or even a slight increase to the current licence fee, was that he believed the BBC had trailed behind other broadcasters in digital television (p. 10). Kaufman (1999) did, however, concede that BBC Online is "a top-class service while its commercial opponents are hardly even trying" (p. 10). He believed that the Corporation could "lead the world in Internet services if it changes its priorities", and that because of that, BBC Online has the potential to raise advertising revenues that could be used to fund BBC Online and contribute funding back into the BBC to help fund its other services (Kaufman, 1999, p. 10). Because of this, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, "recommended incorporating BBC Online into the Beeb's commercial arm, BBC Worldwide" (Kaufman, 1999, p. 10).

British media organizations preferred the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's recommendations to the ones made by the Davies panel. This is particularly so with regards to the digital licence fee that the Davies panel had proposed, and the Culture, Media and Sport Committee had recommended against. An editorial that appeared in *The Independent* argued that the rejection of the digital licence fee was "the most important part" of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's report ("The BBC needs a better way", 1999, p. 3). The editorial argued that the BBC's licence fee more generally was "increasingly anachronistic" and "may be one dinosaur that the BBC will have to walk a little less with" ("The BBC needs a better way", 1999, p. 3). Instead of the licence fee, *The Independent* believed that the Corporation should be allowed "to raise money in the capital markets, and to provide investors with a cash flow based on advertising and subscriptions" ("The BBC needs a better way", 1999, p. 3). David Elstein, the chief executive of Channel 5, wrote in *The Guardian* that "Kaufman's most effective argument against the digital licence fee is that the BBC's contribution to the digital proposition is too modest to justify a compulsory payment by digital households for its digital services" (Elstein, 2000, p. MEDIA5).

Murdoch's *BSkyB* went so far as to threaten "to take action in Brussels against the government if it pushes ahead with the introduction of a digital licence fee to augment BBC funding" (Teather, 2000, p. 1.29). The company had previously tried to have BBC News 24 shut down through the European Commission, but lost (Teather, 2000, p. 1.29). However, *BSkyB* believed a new case could be made "if new public money is raised specifically for digital services" (Teather, 2000, p. 1.29).

The digital licence fee did not end up being implemented but the television licence fee was reset in 2000 at an increase of the Retail Price Index plus 1.5 per cent annually (Select Committee on the BBC Charter Review, 2005, para. 120). This meant that not only was the national press competing more directly with the BBC than it had ever before, they were competing with a BBC that had guaranteed funding that would last at least until its Charter ran out in 2006.

The National Press and the BBC

That the BBC was online at all and that it was able to use its guaranteed funding to develop the service was a sore spot with the national newspapers. Many of the newspapers considered the Internet to be well served by commercial organizations, and therefore believed it did not need public intervention (BIPA, 1999, para. 4.1). The national newspapers had been moving online since 1994, when *The Daily Telegraph* launched its online news service *The Electronic Telegraph* (de Quetteville, 2019). In an editorial in 1999, *The Daily Telegraph* went so far as to accuse the BBC of being "an organisation bent on empire-building, rather than one exclusively concerned with the provision of public service broadcasting" ("The BBC and our money", 1999, p. 25). The editorial expressed "concern that the BBC can use licence fee payers' money to obtain a commercial advantage" and argued that it was inappropriate for the BBC to use the licence fee "to

dominate or even participate in markets that can just as successfully be supplied by private enterprise” (“The BBC and our money”, 1999, p. 25).

British Internet Publishers’ Alliance

Dissatisfied with the BBC’s online activities and how they were affecting their businesses, newspapers and other online publishers came together in 1998 to form a group known as the British Internet Publishers’ Alliance (BIPA). BIPA was made up of “a wide range of businesses with significant commitment to the development of the Internet by British commercial companies” (BIPA, 1999, para. 1). Members included the Telegraph Group, Guardian Unlimited, News International PLC, Independent Digital and Trinity Mirror New Media, which represented the ownership of *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Independent* and *The Daily Mirror* respectively (Joint Committee on the Draft Communications Bill, 2002).

In 1999 BIPA submitted a memorandum to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee that outlined their perspective on the BBC’s online expansion. A central part of BIPA’s argument against the BBC expanding online was that by doing so the BBC was competing with an advantage in areas where there were already plenty of commercial providers (BIPA, 1999). BIPA argued that the BBC was “crowding out commercial suppliers and daily building up a user-base to consolidate its dominating position” (BIPA, 1999, para. 8). More than that, the Alliance predicted that the BBC would “restrict market diversity, and inevitably limit the choices available to British consumers” (BIPA, 1999, para. 11.4). BIPA saw the BBC as having several advantages over its members including that the Corporation was benefitting from “cross-promotional advantages as a result of the use of its existing broadcast and print opportunities to promote its Internet services” (BIPA, 1999, para. 4.3). The Alliance also claimed it was unfair how the BBC was attempting “to distinguish between “public service” sites (BBC Online) and its commercial sites (Beeb.com)”

because the commercial-free sites were only a click away from the commercial ones (BIPA, 1999, para. 4.4).

BIPA further argued that some of the BBC's Internet activities were closer to publishing than to broadcasting and should be considered outside of the BBC's remit (BIPA, 1999, paras. 3-4.1). The Alliance claimed more generally that the Internet, as an open space in which diversity is a central benefit, "is inherently more akin to publishing than broadcasting" (BIPA, 1999, para. 11.2). BIPA argued that when the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) endorsed "the Internet as the "third arm of broadcasting" in November 1998", it opened the door to it being abused by the BBC (BIPA, 1999, para. 15). As such, it argued that in the "future it would be appropriate for new ventures and services to be submitted for approval on a case-by-case basis" (BIPA, 1999, para. 15).

Increasing Commercialization and Competition

Fears that the BBC was creeping further and further into what the newspapers saw as the domain of commercial operators increased at the end of 1999. In December 1999 the BBC and Vodafone had come to an agreement for the provision of BBC news headlines from BBC Online, which The *Daily Telegraph* argued was "as sign of its increasing commercialisation" (Roberts, 1999, p. 34). Later, in April 2000, the BBC went into talks with the Internet company Freeserve, to reach an arrangement on the provision of BBC Online content (Snoddy, 2000a, p. 27). Freeserve was seeking access to BBC content as "part of a drive to improve the quality of its offering", while the BBC was looking "to see Online, which is paid for by the licence fee, as widely available as possible" (Snoddy, 2000a, p. 27). This did not sit well with ITN. Stuart Purvis (2000), the chief executive of ITN wrote an op-ed for The *Guardian* that argued that "if the BBC continues to offer online news content "free-to-air" on these commercial platforms, all the other news providers who

have traditionally kept the BBC on its toes through vigorous competition will be crowded out of the market” (p. MEDIA5). The *Guardian* reported without attribution that “the BBC believes its commercial rivals are simply jealous of the success of its online services, which are widely regarded as market leaders” (Wells, 2000, p. 1.2).

Julie Kirkbride, the Conservative MP for Bromsgrove who sat on the Culture, Media and Sport Committee at the time, supported ITN’s position (Kirkbride, 2000, p. 8). She too wondered why the BBC was providing commercial companies with material paid for by the licence fee (Kirkbride, 2000, p. 8). In an op-ed published in *The Independent*, Kirkbride (2000) stated that it was “unacceptable that the BBC’s desire to expand its empire by effectively nationalising large tracts of new- media content should go unchecked” (p. 8). BBC News Director Tony Hall (2000) responded in *The Independent* arguing that the BBC’s Internet presence is not stopping others from making a living because the BBC is spending a lot less on its website than other media companies and because the BBC is not giving its online content away on an exclusive basis, thereby not putting anyone at a disadvantage (p. 2). For Internet publishers the problem was less what the organizations were all putting onto their websites and more about what they were all getting out of them. As was written in *The Guardian*, Internet publishers were struggling “to raise finance and discover the so-far elusive revenue streams” (McIntosh, 2000, p. ONLINE2). The BBC’s website, however, was funded by the licence fee and “does not carry advertising or sponsorship” (McIntosh, 2000, p. ONLINE2). Commercial publishers therefore saw the BBC as “using licence-fee money to snatch traffic away” and accused it of “steamrolling into areas already well served by the private sector” (McIntosh, 2000, p. ONLINE2). This made “it difficult for private sites to secure that oxygen of online business, venture capital” (McIntosh, 2000, p. ONLINE2). The issue of unfair competition only heightened as time went on and the dot.com bubble burst and “advertising

revenues plunged, and the promise of huge future profits receded”, leaving commercial media companies no choice but “to slash their online spending” (Robinson, 2002, p. 18). Commercial media companies again complained “that BBC tanks are over-running every corner of the worldwide web, distorting the market and squeezing out competition” (Robinson, 2002, p. 18).

Building the BBC’s Presence Online

Even as the BBC received a lot of criticism about its calls for more funding, its increasing commercialization, and its expansion into areas that commercial companies believed were not its place, there was a general consensus that BBC Online was successful, especially in terms of its news provision. The *Daily Mirror* called BBC Online “a massive hit” because of its coverage during the Scottish election in 1999 (Tempest, 1999, p. 4). The *Independent* reported that “[t]he industry is talking about BBC News Online as a working example of the journalism of the future” (Robins, 1999, p. 14). There was even a column in Rupert Murdoch’s newspaper The *Times* that, while critical of the BBC’s digital services, conceded that the BBC’s online services were “a widely acknowledged success story” (Snoddy, 2002, p. 20).

And so, despite the pushback it was getting from Britain’s national press, the BBC continued to work on developing its online services. By October 2000 the BBC had appointed a Director for New Media and Technology (Graf, 2004, p. 18). This was seen as “an important milestone in the consolidation of the online service’s operation and corporate strategy” (Graf, 2004, p. 18). That same year the BBC issued a new guideline for BBC programme-makers, which said “that nothing should be put on the internet which the BBC would not broadcast” (Lister, 2000, p. 9). In 2001, the Corporation launched a search engine that was “initially in partnership with Google”, but it would later switch to be a partnership with Inktomi (Graf, 2004, p. 18). The

redesigned website had “established a common tool bar that incorporated a search tool across all areas of the site” (Graf, 2004, p. 24).

Independent Online Review

A review of BBC Online started in 2003 and a final report was published in 2004 (Graf, 2004). It was conducted after an announcement in 2000 confirmed that new BBC services would undergo independent reviews (Graf, 2004, p. 3). The government appointed Philip Graf, a previous chief executive of Trinity Mirror, the owner of The *Daily Mirror*, to conduct the investigation (Merrell, 2003, p. 21). The review was to consider whether or not the BBC was “acting in accordance with the facts and assurances on the basis of which approval to proceed with the service was given” (Graf, 2004, p. 3). It was also to do a market impact assessment of the service and to consider “what the role of BBC Online should be within the BBC’s overall service” (Graf, 2004, p. 3). The public and various stakeholders were invited to have their say (Graf, 2004, p. 4).

Newspapers such as The *Times* claimed credit for the review taking place. An article in The *Times* that ran with the headline “Angry Rivals May Force Cut in BBC Net Services” on the day the review was launched, reported that popular BBC “online services may be axed” (Bennett, 2003, p. 13). The article further claimed that the Culture Secretary had been “forced to act after complaints from other online news, game and educational service providers that the BBC was using licence fee money to subsidise and promote products that were available elsewhere on the web” (Bennett, 2003, p. 13). The same sentiment led to an article in The *Independent*, which noted that the review followed “complaints that the corporation’s massive expenditure in this area is undermining commercial rivals, especially in the supply of news services” (Shah, 2003, p. 16).

Both before and after the report was released, the national press was particularly concerned with the part of the review that was to address the BBC’s market impact. As it was put in The

Guardian, the timing of the review came not “a moment too soon for some of the BBC’s commercial rivals, which have been complaining for years” about the Corporation’s online presence and arguing that it was unfairly dominating Britain’s online publishing scene (Gibson, 2003a, p. MEDIA34). The *Daily Telegraph* asserted that the report would “be eagerly awaited by commercial internet companies” that had campaigned to restrict the funding the BBC was able to put into projects like its website (Goodley, 2003, p. 25). In what can perhaps be seen as wishful thinking, in 2003, The *Guardian* reported that the BBC axed eight per cent of its new media work force, and argued that it was “perhaps one of the first signs that the corporation has realised that it needs to check its expansionist tendencies before someone else does the job for it” (Gibson, 2003b, p. MEDIA38).

The review’s final report ultimately came to the conclusion that “the analysis of the market impact of BBC Online does not “prove” or “disprove” the hypothesis that BBC Online has had adverse market impact” (Graf, 2004, p. 58). It did find that it was possible for the BBC Online to adversely impact competition, but also noted that “it seems unlikely that BBC Online has eliminated effective competition across any large areas of online content” (Graf, 2004, p. 58). The report found “there are factors that suggest that there is effective competition in many online content markets supplied by BBC Online” (Graf, 2004, p. 58). It emphasized that “BBC Online must be distinctive in its provision of a public service, not just simply in its differentiation from market alternatives” (Graf, 2004, p. 10). The report noted that there were some sites that seemed “hard to justify in terms of the BBC’s remit or wider public purposes” including its fantasy football site (Graf, 2004, p. 10). The review, however, also found that the original remit for BBC Online “was widely drawn, and widely interpreted, but in the terms in which it was stated, has largely been fulfilled” (Graf, 2004, p. 9). It recommended that the BBC should “prioritise news, current

affairs, information of value to the citizen, and education” in its online offerings (Graf, 2004, p. 11).

The coverage of the review’s report was much harsher towards the BBC than the report itself had been. The *Daily Mail* ran an article titled “How the BBC is Wasting Millions on its Websites; Corporation Forced to Scrap Some Internet Services After Damning Report” (Conlan, 2004a, p. 25). The article stated that the Corporation was “accused of wasting millions of pounds of licence- payers’ money on its mushrooming Internet empire” (Conlan, 2004a, p. 25). An editorial in *The Times* led with what it considered the “welcome conclusions” of the report, which included that: “Five websites, deemed to tread on others’ commercial toes, have been slated for the chop” (“Off-key online”, 2004, p. 19). The *Daily Telegraph* also published an article that led with the fact that the Corporation “was ordered by the Government to rethink its online services yesterday after an independent review of its 20,000 websites concluded that many did not match its public service remit and should be closed” (Leonard, 2004, p. 05). The article went on to state that the BBC, “whose governors had ignored similar claims by commercial rivals for six years, immediately announced it was shutting down five of its most contentious internet ventures” (Leonard, 2004, p. 05). The *Guardian* reported that the Graf “report was welcomed by BBC rivals” (Wells, 2004. p. 19). Reports by *The Guardian* and *The Independent* were generally less harsh towards the BBC than other national newspapers. *The Independent*, for example, noted that while the report identified some of the BBC’s sites as being insufficiently distinct from competing sites, there were also “words of encouragement for the BBC” in the report (Byrne, 2004, p. 39). The article pointed out that Graf “found no evidence to prove or disprove that BBC Online has had an adverse impact on the internet market in the UK but said there were indications that it had deterred competition” (Byrne, 2004, p. 39).

When Graf (2004) reported, the BBC's Charter had two years left on it, and so the government was considering its renewal and was taking into account the conclusions that Graf had come to. Because of the timing of the report the BBC had an opportunity to take action in response to it before its Charter was officially renewed. As such, the BBC announced that it would close a bunch of websites that the Graf report had identified "as not being sufficiently distinctive from its commercial competitors" (Byrne, 2004, p. 39). Sites to be closed included a surfing site and a portal for soap operas (Gibson, 2004, p. 12). The announcement of the cuts was met with speculation in *The Daily Mail* that thousands of jobs may be cut (Conlan, 2004b, p. 20). By December, *The Daily Express* was reporting that the BBC was getting rid of 2,900 jobs in what the article called "a desperate bid to hold on to the licence fee" (Walker, 2004, p. 9).

The BBC's Vision for its Future

The BBC's goal for the next ten-year Charter period was to adapt to the digital world while maintaining ideals set by the BBC's founders (BBC, 2004a, p. 3). The BBC's plans and intentions were spelled out in a document published in 2004 titled *Building Public Value*. The Corporation was anticipating a "second phase of the digital revolution" (BBC, 2004a, p. 50). The first phase, which had begun "in the mid-1990s", was largely "about expanded consumer choice" (BBC 2004, p. 50). The BBC predicted that the second phase would be "likely to have a far greater impact on people's lives, with scope for substantial public as well as private value" (BBC, 2004a, p. 50). The BBC also predicted that the broadcasting landscape would face dramatic changes over the course of the next Charter period (BBC, 2004a, p. 48). Because of this, the BBC committed to investing "in digital infrastructure, content, services and promotion to help bring the benefits of the new digital technologies to everyone" (BBC, 2004a, p. 61).

In *Building Public Value*, the BBC contended that it must help lead the challenge of establishing “a fully digital Britain” where “no one is excluded” (BBC, 2004a, p. 5). For the BBC, an important part of its role in the digital age would be ensuring universal provision (BBC, 2004a, p. 10). One of the things the BBC stated it would work on, with universal provision and the goal of maintaining a 90 per cent audience reach in mind, was engaging young audiences (BBC, 2004a, p. 96). Beyond this, the BBC believed that one of its “most important contributions to public value is to provide trusted, independent and impartial news and information for everyone, with a strong commitment to context-setting and analysis” (BBC, 2004a, p. 30). According to the BBC, the contribution of BBC News Online has been to extend the reach of the Corporation’s news services “to people who prefer to catch the headlines as they develop, or at their convenience” (BBC, 2004a, p. 31).

The Charter Review

Building Public Value was the BBC’s major contribution to the process of its Charter review. The Charter review process had officially begun in 2003. Towards the end of that year, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2005) “launched a consultation to ask viewers and listeners what they want from the BBC” (p. 16). The DCMS (2005) also conducted survey research and independent reviews of new services, including the review of BBC Online by Philip Graf (p. 16). This resulted in a Green Paper¹⁰ published in 2005.

Prior to the Green Paper being published, the House of Common’s Culture, Media and Sport Committee, reported on the BBC’s Charter renewal. In December of 2004 the Committee reported and acknowledged that the Corporation had “a long, and deserved, reputation for driving and responding to technological change” (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2004, para. 47).

¹⁰ A Green Paper lays out proposals that are in their early stages and are up for discussion (House of Commons, 2010)

It called the BBC's online news "innovative" and "comprehensive", stating that the Corporation's "primary status as a content provider will become ever more important with the growth in consumer demand for material tailored to different platforms: from mobile devices to wide-screen televisions" (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2004, para. 47). Among its key recommendations was "that the governance of the BBC should be separated into its two component parts; meaning corporate governance on the one hand, and regulation and maintaining the independence of the BBC, on the other, by formally reconstituting the BBC Board of Governors as an independent body" (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2004, para. 183).

The Green Paper had also announced that the government had decided that the BBC would continue to be funded by the licence fee throughout the course of the next Charter period, which would last for the customary 10 years (DCMS, 2005, p. 3). It included a sharpened remit for the BBC as well. The government described the BBC's current Royal Charter as being too broad and argued that the "mission - to 'inform, educate and entertain' through a wide range of subjects targeted at a wide range of audiences - is essentially unchanged from the original remit given to the BBC in the 1920s" (DCMS, 2005, p. 22). The government found the mission to be valid, but "no longer sufficient" (DCMS, 2005, p. 22). Because of this, the government decided that the mission to inform, educate and entertain would continue to be the BBC's mission statement, but that the BBC would have new, explicitly put public purposes in the new Charter (DCMS, 2005, p. 23). The public purposes were designed based on research and reporting by the BBC and Ofcom, the country's communications regulator since 2003, as well as on public consultations conducted by the Culture, Media and Sport Committee (DCMS, 2005, p. 23). Five were settled on:

1. "sustaining citizenship and civil society";
2. "promoting education and learning";

3. “stimulating creativity and cultural excellence”;
4. “representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities”;
5. “bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK” (DCMS, 2005, p. 5).

Additionally, the Green Paper stated that a sixth purpose would be included for the next Charter period: “building digital Britain” (DCMS, 2005, p. 5). The sixth purpose called on the BBC to, as a condition of a new licence fee settlement, “play a leading role in the process of switching Britain over fully from analogue to digital television” (DCMS, 2005, p. 5). This reinforced the BBC’s role as educator and facilitator of technological change in Britain. The government’s White Paper, *A public service for all: The BBC in the digital age*, confirmed these new public purposes would be included in the BBC’s new Charter (DCMS, 2006a, p. 12).

The first five purposes were incorporated into a new remit for BBC Online, which emphasized “distinctive and original content” (BBC, 2005, p. 16). The goal for the new remit was “to provide stronger direction and tighter boundaries and to ensure a clearer focus on delivering the BBC’s public purposes” (BBC, 2005, p. 38). As such, the new remit stated that:

bbc.co.uk aims to serve the BBC’s five public purposes, with an emphasis on democratic and educational value, through the provision of innovative and distinctive content, available to all. As a starting point, on the internet and guide to the medium, bbc.co.uk promotes internet use to develop a deeper relationship with licence fee payers and to strengthen BBC accountability. (BBC, 2005, p. 39)

The BBC Trust

In the 2005 Green Paper, the Government also announced that the Board of Governors would be abolished, and a new body called the BBC Trust would take its place (DCMS, 2005, p. 3). The new model was confirmed in the government’s White Paper the following year (DCMS,

2006a, p. 3). In the new set up, a BBC Executive Board would be in charge of “delivering the BBC’s services”, while the BBC Trust would be responsible “for holding it to account, and consulting widely and regularly with licence fee payers and industry” (DCMS, 2006a, p. 3). The BBC’s Executive Board would be “accountable to the Trust for the delivery of the BBC’s services” (DCMS, 2005, p. 3). The BBC’s Charter and Agreement were established based on the terms outlined in the White Paper and came into force in January 2007 (DCMS, 2006b; DCMS, 2006c).

The Trust was officially set up to be “the sovereign body in relation to the BBC and have ultimate responsibility for the licence fee” (DCMS, 2005, p. 72). The Trust was also to “be responsible for setting the BBC’s performance framework and assessing performance against it; approving strategies and high level budgets; and holding the Executive Board to account for delivery” (DCMS, 2005, p. 72). The BBC Trust and the Executive Board were designed to operate separately but were both responsible for the BBC. This system was created “to strengthen the BBC’s independence from Government” (DCMS, 2006a, p. 47).

Ofcom would continue to have some regulatory powers in relation to the BBC, as had been the case since it was established in 2003 (DCMS, 2006a, p. 52). This meant that the BBC was expected “to comply with Ofcom’s fairness code and much of its cross-industry programme standards code” (DCMS, 2006a, p. 52). Furthermore, Ofcom approval was needed for some of the BBC’s programming quotas (DCMS, 2006a, p. 52).

The License Fee

The BBC’s online budget was to come out of the latest licence fee settlement. The 2006 White Paper had stipulated that the BBC would continue to be funded by the licence fee over the next ten years (DCMS, 2006a, p. 4). The BBC was also supposed to “continue to relieve pressure

on the licence fee by generating commercial income” while at the same time avoiding distortion of the market (DCMS, 2006a, p. 7).

The national press had weighed in on the subject of the licence fee throughout the process of the BBC’s Charter being reviewed and as attention turned to the matter of setting the licence fee rate. The newspapers brought up a lot of the same concerns as had been raised in 1999 when the BBC’s funding was being reviewed. The *Daily Star* complained about how the BBC’s digital expansion was being funded, arguing that increasing the license fee was “a slap in the face for the millions who don’t have access to the whole output” (“Fee boob by Beeb”, 2003, p. 6). In an editorial, The *Daily Telegraph* raised the issue of there still being “serious questions about the BBC’s ongoing expansion away from its original Reithian public service remit into areas that are more sensibly served by the commercial sector” (“Feather-bedded Auntie”, 2006, p. 002). The editorial argued that “the dominance of the BBC website is a direct result of generous funding in the years after 2000 when the rest of the internet sector was reeling from the bursting of the dot.com bubble and struggling simply to survive” (“Feather-bedded Auntie”, 2006, p. 002). It pointed out that there was the potential of more money for the BBC leading to less choice for audiences (“Feather-bedded Auntie”, 2006, p. 002). The *Sun* published an article that claimed that there were “fears the BBC is giving away too much content on the internet free of charge - deterring rivals from investing in digital services which need to be supported by advertising” (King, 2006, p. 20). The article led with reference to an ITV report, which The *Sun* article said, “savaged the BBC’s proposals to raise the TV licence fee” (King, 2006, p. 20). In September 2006, The *Daily Express* reported that the government revealed that the licence fee would likely “rise by around £30 to £162 a year,” although the final decision was not expected to be made until November (Jagasia, 2006, p. 12). The *Daily Express* stated that audiences “would be happy to pay that amount to fund the

BBC, according to research commissioned by the Government”, but went on to report that “critics said such an enormous increase would be unjustified and unfair” (Jagasia, 2006, p. 12). Emily Bell (2006) of *The Guardian* put it plainly when she wrote that the licence fee “settlement will not be as high as the corporation would like - or as low as its competitors demand” (p. 1).

The Changing Media Environment

The licence fee was eventually set for a period of six years and the BBC continued on with its “programme to save £355 million each year through greater efficiency” (BBC, 2007, p. 83). The settlement was ultimately “capped at below inflation” (Jenkins, 2007, p. 42). There had been plenty of speculation about the future of the licence fee both before and after it was announced. There were questions being raised about whether or not the licence fee would continue to be a realistic way of funding the BBC. Attendees of the Edinburgh Television Festival in 2007 believed that television was in crisis (Jackie, 2007, p. 27). The *Times* reported that the Corporation was facing “losing hundreds of thousands of pounds in licence fees because of a legal loophole that allows viewers to watch television on the internet for free” (Judge, 2005, p. 36). During the 2004 Olympics, the BBC broadcasted its coverage online and “promised to put further broadcasts on the internet” (Judge, 2005, p. 36). Broadcasting television programming online, however, raised the question of whether or not someone needed a television licence to watch programming on a computer (Judge, 2005, p. 36). As the technology to do so was first emerging, there was little clarity on whether or not a licence was required to watch it (Sabbagh, 2005, p. 62). Licensing authorities said a licence was necessary (Hewlett, 2006, p. 6; Judge, 2005, p. 36). But it was also reported that “Ofcom, the communications regulator, and the Department for Culture question that claim” (Judge, 2005, p. 36). The *Times* reported that uncertainty around the licence fee was leaving “the BBC open to the threat of thousands of households avoiding the licence fee by watching

television on their computer” (Judge, 2005, p. 36). An op-ed written by David Elstein (2008), the chairman of an organization called DCD Media, that was published in *The Times*, suggested that voluntary subscriptions were becoming an increasingly attractive option (p. 15). Commentary in *The Guardian* predicted that the BBC’s 2007 licence fee settlement would be its last (Bell, 2006, p. 1).

Whether or not television and the licence fee were dying was up for debate but it was undeniable that the media environment was changing fast. The changes “brought in their wake audience fragmentation, intensified competition, an increasingly complex media landscape and heightened audience expectations” (BBC Trust, 2007, p. 15). The BBC pointed out that the new media environment was “almost unrecognisable from the old era of limited choice” because of forces including globalization and “the erosion of old regulatory certainties” (BBC, 2008b, p. 5).

The BBC’s response to these changes was to develop new services including “digital channels on television and radio and extensive online services” (BBC Trust, 2007, p. 15). In the mid-2000s, the BBC worked on growing its on demand services (BBC, 2007, p. 28). Its “interactive TV service BBCi grew more than 30% to reach 14 million ‘red button’¹¹ pressers a month, and our mobile content is among the most accessed in the UK with a 29% reach” (BBC, 2007, p. 28). The Corporation also “pledged to work more closely with technology giants such as Microsoft and Apple as part of a plan to overhaul its website and prepare for a world where programmes will increasingly be watched on demand over the internet” (Gibson, 2006, p. 4). Other projects the BBC worked on in the mid-2000s included putting clips on Youtube and “preparing for the BBC Trust’s go-ahead to launch services which include an archive trial and the BBC

¹¹ Televisions with access to this feature have a red button on their remote controls – clicking the red button provides access to content that enhances “the value of the BBC’s television proposition to all digital audiences through video, audio, pictures and text” (BBC, 2004b, p. 41).

iPlayer, and the imminent overhaul of much of our web offering under the banner of ‘bbc 2.0’” (BBC, 2007, p. 28). The launch of the BBC iPlayer was significant for the Corporation. It was launched around Christmas time in 2007, making programs available for a week after they had aired on linear television (BBC, 2008a, p. 31). The introduction of the iPlayer revived concerns regarding the future of the licence fee. The *Daily Express* alone published three articles on November 24, 2008 about the licence fee and how people were choosing not to pay it and instead watching television on the Corporation’s iPlayer, which it reported did not require a licence to view (“Online viewers threat to licence”, 2008, p. 15; “We are the TV licence fee rebels”, 2008, pp. 28-29; “Threat’ of the iPlayer”, 2008, p. 7).

Having been dealt a licence fee settlement that was less than what it had hoped for, and in light of the changing media environment, the BBC’s strategy for adapting to the new media environment also involved cutting its costs. In October 2007 it was reported that approximately 2,000 jobs would be cut, with anywhere from 500 to 600 coming from the news department (Byrne, 2007, p. 6; “Questioning the BBC’s role in the digital age”, 2007, p. 021; Glover, 2007, p. 1). News was “expected to be one of the worst-hit departments” (Byrne, 2007, p. 6). At the time, the department was going through a major overhaul “to better meet changes in audience needs” (BBC, 2008a, p. 45). This was done through the creation of a Multimedia newsroom which would work “closely with the new Multi Media Programmes department which brings together key BBC investigative and long-form programmes” (BBC, 2008a, p. 45). The changes were designed to bring together radio, television and online news in order “to minimise duplication and optimise the impact of original BBC journalism”, as well as “help deliver efficiency savings” (BBC, 2008a, p. 45). The new integrated newsroom was to mean “the core BBC news operation will achieve savings of 25 per cent, while specialist news-gathering will save 15 per cent” (Byrne, 2007, p. 6).

Following the announcement there was talk of a strike (Byrne, 2007, p. 6; Pierce & Martin, 2007, p. 001; Glover, 2007, p. 1). It was reported that journalists at the BBC were “growing increasingly concerned that huge costs cuts will affect the quality of the corporation’s news output” (Byrne, 2007, p. 6). The BBC Trust approved the BBC’s plans anyway, and “agreed with BBC management that the radical and accelerating change in technology, markets and audience expectations should lead to a greater emphasis on the BBC’s online and on-demand offerings, which would be at the expense of investment in linear broadcast services in some areas” (BBC Trust, 2008, p. 72).

Online Service Review (2008)

A significant responsibility allocated to the Trust under the new system of regulating the BBC was putting together Service Licences (DCMS, 2006a, p. 6). The new Service Licences would “set out what the key characteristics of the service should be, how it helps meet the BBC’s purposes and what the public can expect from it” (DCMS, 2006a, p. 3). The Trust’s first Service Licence for BBC Online was published in December 2006 and went into effect the following month (BBC Trust, 2006, p. 1). It specified that the service’s remit was “to serve the BBC’s public purposes through the provision of innovative and distinctive online content, and through distinctive propositions that reflect and extend the range of the BBC’s broadcast services, available to all” (BBC Trust, 2006, p. 1). It was to prioritize “citizenship and educational purposes” (BBC Trust, 2006, p. 2). BBC Online was also to serve the purpose of enabling the Corporation “to develop a deeper relationship with licence fee payers and strengthen accountability” and to act as “a trusted guide” for the British public on the Internet (BBC Trust, 2006, p. 1). While doing this, it was supposed to “balance the potential for creating public value against the risk of negative market impact” (BBC Trust, 2006, p. 1). The budget set out in the licence was £72 million for 2006-2007 (BBC Trust, 2006, p. 1).

Just under a year and a half later, BBC Online's Service Licence was reviewed (BBC Trust, 2008). The BBC Trust saw growth online as being essential to the future of the BBC, stating that "without investment in content and such areas as improved search and navigation, personalisation and audience participation, the service will lose its appeal and thereby be hampered in its ability to promote the public purposes" (BBC Trust, 2008, p. 15). It found that BBC Online was "especially strong in promoting the Citizenship and civil society, Nations and regions, Education and learning, and Global purposes" (BBC Trust, 2008, p. 12). Through its audience research, the BBC Trust found that BBC Online "was praised for its accuracy, impartiality, range and ease of use" (BBC Trust, 2008, p. 29). Audience research also showed that audiences see the BBC's services as distinctive "based on its range, depth and breadth of content, lack of commercial agenda, UK focus and BBC journalistic values" (BBC Trust, 2008, p. 40). The BBC Trust, however, believed that the BBC could be doing more to ensure that BBC Online was distinctive (BBC Trust, 2008, p. 40). The Trust had found that there was no "evidence of a consistent approach being applied by BBC management to ensure that all areas of bbc.co.uk fulfil the commitment to be distinctive" (BBC Trust, 2008, p. 41).

The biggest issue the service review found was with regards to how much money was being spent on BBC Online and the transparency of how it was being reported. The BBC Trust "found that financial oversight has not been sufficiently effective, such that the true level of spending on the service has only become known as a result of this review and, at £110million, is much higher than the upper level of spend permitted in its Service Licence of £81.6million" (BBC Trust, 2008, p. 14). During the course of the review it had been discovered that the BBC had initially reported that it would be eight per cent over the baseline budget, which was an amount that did not need approval from the BBC Trust (BBC Trust, 2008, p. 60). It was later discovered, however, that

another £13.8 million was spent on costs that should have been allocated within the BBC Online budget, but because of “increasingly blurred definitions of spend on publishing online content and site maintenance and that required to develop new technology applications and upgrade the BBC’s infrastructure” were not (BBC Trust, 2008, p. 60). The BBC Trust stated that this was a “serious breach of the Service Licence” (BBC Trust, 2008, p. 62). In response, the BBC Trust decided to restructure BBC Online’s Service Licence “in order to allow the Trust to use it to govern the BBC’s online activities with greater transparency” (BBC Trust, 2008, p. 66). The baseline budget for the service was to be “revised to £114.4 million for 2008/09” (BBC Trust, 2008, p. 16).

Coverage of the review in the national press was focused on and was critical of the overspending on BBC Online that the Trust had identified (Midgley, 2008, p. 26; Conlan & Sweeney, 2008, p. 4; “National: FAQ: The web operation”, 2008, p. 4). The publication of the review’s findings was also, however, taken as an opportunity for the press to restate how the BBC was competing unfairly with newspaper websites. An article in *The Daily Mail* stated that the BBC Trust was “accused of ignoring widespread concerns that the corporation’s internet activities are distorting the market” (Revoir, 2008, p. 12). An editorial in the same paper indicated that even though the public saw BBC Online as being of good value, “it definitely isn’t in the public interest for the BBC online to become so dominant that it damages commercial competitors” (“The NHS and its great white elephant”, 2008, p. 14). It expressed frustration at the fact that “the Trust’s review hasn’t even considered if this is happening” (“The NHS and its great white elephant”, 2008, p. 14). A column in *The Daily Telegraph* suggested that the BBC’s “seeming willingness to spray public money incontinently around in unfair competition with its commercial rivals” was even more serious than the issue of overspending on BBC Online (Midgley, 2008, p. 26).

Paywalls

Claims that the BBC was competing unfairly with the national press were nothing new by this time, and they were not going to cease any time soon. Newspapers were struggling to adapt their business models for the digital age – a time when print newspaper circulation was declining as was advertising revenue (Cairncross, 2019). Making matters worse, a global financial crisis that started in late 2007 damaged many newspapers by necessitating cost-cutting measures, which ultimately reduced the quality of content they were producing (Gorman, 2015, p. 14). Newspapers needed to find a sustainable new way to monetize their online content. This was clear when “models for online charging” unexpectedly became a key topic of discussion at the Edinburgh International Television Festival (Bell, 2009, p. 3). During the festival, James Murdoch, Rupert Murdoch’s son, gave a much talked about lecture (Robinson, 2009, p. 1; Bell, 2009, p. 3; Brooker, 2009, p. 52; etc.). The central theme of the lecture was “the difficulty of making money from news journalism in the UK” (Bell, 2009, p. 3). In it, Murdoch accused the BBC of “throttling” the news market and “preventing its competitors from launching or expanding their own services, particularly online” (Robinson, 2009, p. 1). He claimed, “that Britain was the most difficult place in the world to sell paid-for news because of the BBC’s dominance” (Andrews, 2009, p. 1). It was reported that “Murdoch’s speech was a call for the BBC’s online news service to be curbed, scaled back, deleted, depleted, dragged to the wastebasket, and so on” (Brooker, 2009, p. 52).

James Murdoch’s lecture had happened to coincide “with Rupert Murdoch’s worldwide campaign to encourage other hard-pressed news publishers to put their online news behind paywalls” (Bell, 2009, p. 3). In the next few years, several of Britain’s national newspapers would end up doing just that. The *Times* implemented its paywall in 2010 (“Times and Sunday Times websites to charge from June”, 2010). To start, it would charge £1 per day or £2 per week (“Times and Sunday Times websites to charge from June”, 2010). The *Daily Telegraph* implemented a

metered paywall in 2013 (Mayhew, 2019). It allowed users to access 20 articles for free each month before they had to buy a subscription (Ponsford, 2016). The *Sun* created Sun+ in 2013, “which cost £7.99 per month” (Owen, 2015). The *Guardian* did not put up a paywall, but it did announce in 2011 that it was going “to become a digital-first organisation” because of the fast pace of technological change and because of financial challenges (Guardian Media Group, 2015, para. 2). The *Daily Mirror* also remained free, hoping to capitalize on offering free content while its competitors charged (Sweney, 2013).

Top Slicing the Licence Fee

Newspapers were not the only media organizations struggling to adapt to the new media environment at this time. Britain’s advertising-funded public broadcasters were facing “greater competition than ever before” while at the same time, television advertising growth was “stalled as investment moves to the internet” (Ofcom, 2009, p. 3). Because of this, it was unclear how the whole of Britain’s public service broadcast system would be funded in the future, not just the BBC. Ofcom conducted a review of the public broadcasting system in Britain in 2008 and proposed as a remedy for this, among other possibilities, top slicing the BBC’s licence fee (Ofcom, 2008a, p. 9). Ofcom suggested three ways this could happen: money could come from what Ofcom referred to as “excess licence fee funding currently ring-fenced for the Digital Switchover Help Scheme and Digital UK’s market costs”, it could come from the “core licence fee”, or it come from the BBC’s assets (such as Worldwide) (Ofcom, 2008a, p. 9).

In response, the BBC told Ofcom that the part of the licence fee allocated for the digital switchover, which Ofcom states will become “excess” funding, is not recognized as being excess by the BBC because “this income is fully allocated to the BBC’s sixth purpose, the current focus of which is television switchover” (BBC, 2008b, p. 15). The BBC further argued that top slicing

the licence fee would mean that “audiences would not know which programmes were licence-fee funded and which were commercially funded” (BBC, 2008b, p. 68). It also “risks the long-term future of the BBC” (BBC, 2008b, p. 71). In July 2008, in Ofcom’s summary of the consultation into public broadcasting that it had conducted, it conceded that using “licence fee monies currently reserved for BBC services to fund non-BBC services was opposed by a wide range of stakeholders” (Ofcom, 2008b, p. 11). Ofcom (2009) recognized that there were concerns, but still called on the government to consider “the possible switchover surplus from 2013 – and any surplus arising between now and 2013 in the current funding of digital switchover – as a means of supporting public service content outside the BBC” (p. 51).

The government took up the discussion of possibly top slicing the BBC’s licence fee in the report *Digital Britain*. *Digital Britain* was put together by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (DBIS) and DCMS (DBIS & DCMS, 2009). The report laid out Britain’s plan for building a digital future (DBIS & DCMS, 2009). One element of this was ensuring the provision of public service content in a new media environment. The report noted that the government was of the belief that, particularly for news, “the market alone will not provide plurality in the ownership, commissioning, editorial and production of public service content that remains essential” (DCMS & DBIS, 2009, p. 141). The question left was whether or not the BBC should be “in one ‘public service’ corner and all other media and platform entities in another corner and what that would mean for consumers and citizens” (DCMS & DBIS, 2009, p. 137). If the answer is that there should be a plurality of services “that the market unaided will not provide, we need also to decide how to fund it” (DCMS & DBIS, 2009, p. 137). The report left open the possibility of using part of the licence fee as contestable funding mostly for the provision of news (DBIS & DCMS, 2009, p. 143).

The consideration of top slicing its licence fee to help other British public broadcasters turned out to be the least of the BBC problems. In 2010, the BBC unexpectedly came to an agreement with the government for a new licence fee settlement, even though it was only half-way through the previous six-year arrangement that began in 2007 (BBC, 2007, p. 83; BBC Trust, 2011, p. 24). According to the BBC Trust, the new agreement had been “prompted by the government’s spending review” (BBC Trust, 2011, p. 24). Under the new agreement, the licence fee would “be frozen for the duration of the settlement, which means a decline in real terms each year” (BBC Trust, 2011, p. 24). In addition to this, the agreement meant the BBC would take on funding BBC World Service in 2014 and BBC Monitoring in 2013 as well as providing “some funding for new local television services” (BBC Trust, 2011, p. 24). The BBC would also be obligated to use part of the licence fee “for spending on broadband roll-out” because one of its purposes specified that it should “help deliver the benefits of new technology to the public” (BBC Trust, 2011, p. 24). Licence fee payers were not included in the discussion or negotiations (BBC Trust, 2011, p. 24).

Putting Quality First

Prior to the licence fee settlement, in March 2010, the BBC proposed a plan that would refocus the Corporation’s activities. Called *Putting Quality First*, the plan emphasized that the BBC would focus on several editorial priorities: “do fewer things better; guarantee access to all; make the licence fee work harder; and set itself new boundaries” (BBC, 2010, p. 47). The plan was approved by the BBC after the new licence fee settlement was reached, in December 2010 (BBC Trust, 2011, p. 7). Later, in January 2011, the BBC Trust also “approved the BBC’s new online strategy”, which consisted of “a budget reduction of 25%, clearer editorial boundaries around more distinctive content areas, and better navigation and linking” (BBC Trust, 2011, p. 13). The strategy

also meant moving to centre BBC Online “around ten products – News, Sport, Weather, Homepage, Search, Knowledge & Learning, TV & iPlayer, Audio & Music, CBBC and CBeebies – from the previous figure of around 60; in addition, the number of ‘top level domains’ (i.e. bbc.co.uk/xxx) decreased from around 400 to 200” (BBC Trust, 2013, p. 19).

The proposals for *Putting Quality First*, were leaked in February 2010 (Sweney & Busfield, 2010, p. 8). After the plan leaked, listeners and presenters protested the planned cuts involved in the strategy (Sweney & Busfield, 2010, p. 8). After the plan had been officially announced, commentary in *The Independent* pointed out that some of the sites slated to be closed were already defunct, and argued that the BBC needed to bring its “empire building” to an end right away (“This is not the revolution that the BBC needs”, 2010, p. 34). Several months later, after the BBC Trust endorsed the cuts to the BBC’s website, *The Times* coverage noted that the plan would “be welcomed by competitors”, with the “icing on the cake” for newspapers being the BBC’s “promise to provide links on the website to external organizations covering the same issue online” (Mostrous, 2010, p. 31). In January 2011, it was reported that along with scaling back its website, the BBC would cut 360 jobs (“BBC to axe 360 jobs”, 2011, p. 8; Barnett, 2011, p. 26).

Despite the BBC’s *Putting Quality First* initiative, the national press continued to push for the BBC to be reined in. Even during the Leveson inquiry, which looked into newspaper ethics in light of phone hacking revelations, the BBC and its dominance were discussed (Leveson, 2012; Brown, 2012, p. 10). During his testimony, Rupert Murdoch predicted “that the newsprint era would be over within 20 years” and claimed that the BBC “was threatening the future of Britain’s national and regional press” (Brown, 2012, p. 10). Murdoch further claimed that the BBC’s online news service “was one of the reasons for the decline in newspaper circulations” (Brown, 2012, p. 10).

Online Service Review (2013)

A year after Murdoch's testimony to the Leveson inquiry, the BBC's online Service Licence came up for review again. The conclusions of the review were largely complimentary of the BBC's online services with the BBC Trust noting that "BBC Online is an extremely important part of the BBC's portfolio and is performing well" (BBC Trust, 2013, p. 3). The Trust also stated that BBC Online "is a trusted source of news and information and plays a vital role in delivering the BBC's public purposes" (BBC Trust, 2013, p. 3). The review found that a majority of the audience was "satisfied with the comprehensiveness of BBC News" (BBC Trust, 2013, p. 27). In terms of improvements, the Trust found that BBC Online navigation needed to be improved and that more features for personalisation were needed (BBC Trust, 2013, p. 3). The review also found that the BBC was not meeting its agreement on providing click-throughs to other sites, and so needed to come up with a strategy to increase those numbers (BBC Trust, 2013, p. 10). This had been brought up in the 2008 service review as well. The 2008 review found that, while the BBC had committed to making improvements to its external linking strategy, its external linking was not leading to a sufficient level of click-throughs (BBC Trust, 2008, p. 51). Because of this, the BBC Trust asked the BBC to find more effective ways of generating click-throughs, linking to external sites (BBC Trust, 2008, p. 52).

For some newspapers, the review was not critical enough of BBC Online. A column published online by The *Daily Telegraph* ran with the headline "BBC Trust Tells BBC Website: Carry on Trampling" (Midgley, 2013). The column was critical of the fact that "the BBC Trust says that the BBC website is jolly good indeed - but ignores how bad it is for its competitors" (Midgley, 2013). The *Times* reporting had the same sentiment, having argued that multiple media organizations "complained to the BBC Trust that [the BBC] does too little to help people to find

other sites, potentially undermining their businesses as well as media plurality” (Webster, 2013, p. 19).

The BBC’s Vision

The media environment would only become more challenging, not only for private companies but for the BBC as well. The Corporation knew that over the course of the next decade it would have to serve “those who have adopted the internet, while at the same time making sure that those who want to carry on watching and listening to traditional channels continue to be properly served too” (BBC, 2015a, p. 6). In 2015, the BBC outlined its plans, goals and ambitions more specifically for the next decade in several documents including *British, Bold, Creative: The BBC's Programmes and Services in the Next Charter*, *Future of News*, and its annual report for 2014-2015.

For the BBC, its central purpose was not, nor had it ever been, “rooted in a technology” (BBC, 2015b, p. 58). Rather, the BBC has always been defined by its mission, which has remained throughout its history as being “to inform, educate and entertain” (BBC, 2015b, p. 58). The Corporation conceded that a lot of the innovation it had undertaken had been in distribution rather than content but committed to changing that, noting that instead of commissioning content for a specific medium, it would make content that worked across platforms or only those that would best meet audience needs (BBC, 2015a, p. 41). While doing this, the BBC would strive to be a Corporation that is “truly British, bold and creative” (BBC, 2015a, p. 41).

The BBC saw itself playing several important roles in terms of its news services in Britain in light of technological advancements. For instance, as media technology develops and as audiences become more fragmented, the BBC sees itself as “the place where the UK comes together in a shared conversation” (BBC, 2015b, p. 58). In this way, the BBC strives “not only to

enhance individual lives but also to enhance our collective and national life” (BBC, 2015b, p. 58). Because of this, the BBC also strives to be universal. For the BBC, its news service is “defined by its requirement to serve everybody” (BBC, 2015c, p. 43). Part of how the BBC aims to serve everyone is by becoming more open (BBC, 2015c, p. 42). This means being “open to providing access to our news content on other media platforms”, as well as looking to “open up to the active participation of our audiences” (BBC, 2015c, p. 42).

New media technology has also seen increased use of aggregators and social media platforms as destinations for audiences to consume news, although online, “the distinction between fact and rumour blurs” (BBC, 2015b, p. 58). Because of this, the BBC also believed it could and should contribute to Britain’s news ecology effectively by being a source of trusted news – an organization that “gets its facts right” (BBC, 2015b, p. 58). This is something that Tony Hall (2015a), the BBC’s Director General at the time, reiterated in an op-ed published in *The Times*. He emphasized in the article that, while some may argue “that in the internet age, the case of public service broadcasting will wither away”, the BBC is needed “to sort the truth from the noise” (p. 22). In the online world the Corporation saw itself as being able to produce quality journalism that is impartial and distinct, “but in better, more convenient, more immersive ways” (BBC, 2015a, p. 36). For the BBC, its reputation for quality journalism has been built on “an uncompromising commitment to accuracy, impartiality, diversity of opinion and fair treatment of people in the news” (BBC, 2015a, p. 62).

Charter Renewal

The BBC’s strategy was conveyed as part of the process for reviewing the Corporation’s Charter as it was due to expire at the end of 2016. Beyond discussion of the BBC’s vision for the future, several main topics were discussed throughout the review process: the governance and

regulation of the Corporation, the length of the next Charter period, the licence fee, and the ways in which and to what extent the BBC competes with commercial media organizations.

The DCMS's Culture, Media and Sport Committee (2015) found that the BBC Trust was largely seen by the government to have failed to live up to the expectations put on it (p. 4). When conducting hearings for a report on the future of the BBC, the Committee "heard that a fundamental flaw of the BBC Trust, like the BBC Board of Governors which preceded it, is essentially that it is impossible for the Trust to be the BBC's defender and champion whilst also providing independent regulation and scrutiny" (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2015, p. 93). The Committee itself also saw the BBC Trust as being too close to the Corporation's Executive Board, arguing that the Trust was too protective of the BBC while it needed to objectively regulate it (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2015, p. 98). The Committee recommended in a 2015 report "that the BBC Trust should be abolished and new arrangements made for both the regulation of the BBC and its governance, clarifying lines of accountability" (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2015, p. 4).

In 2016, another Culture, Media and Sport Committee made up of different members than those who wrote the 2015 report, recommended that in place of the Trust, a new, separate section of Ofcom be given the responsibility of regulating the BBC (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2016, p. 11). This view was shared by Sir David Clementi, who conducted an independent review of the governance and regulation of the BBC for the government in 2016 (Clementi, 2016). Clementi (2016) argued that Ofcom was in a good position to take on the task because as Britain's communications regulator, it could "look at the BBC in the context of the market as a whole" (p. 25). He argued that this was necessary because the BBC would inevitably come "into greater contact/competition with commercial companies, ranging now beyond the traditional network

broadcasters to include platform operators, on-line media players, broadband networks and others” (Clementi, 2016, p. 25). Partnerships between the BBC and others makes it more complicated, making it pertinent that the BBC’s regulator have “a wide knowledge of the industry, rather than one with a narrow focus” (Clementi, 2016, p. 25).

With regards to the Charter itself, the 2016 Culture, Media and Sport Committee recommended that it be renewed for a period “of eleven or twelve years” (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2016, p. 45). A House of Lords Select Committee on Communications (2016) made the same recommendation (p. 58). Changing the length of the Charter would “allow for full consultation and dialogue” (Select Committee on Communications, 2016, p. 4). As it was, the review process was unable to properly begin until an election “established which party will be in government” (Select Committee on Communications, 2016, p. 57). That leaves 18 months for the review to take place until the Charter’s expiry (Select Committee on Communications, 2016, p. 57).

The issue that gained the most attention and discussion in the press was the licence fee. The iPlayer had increasingly called attention to the fact that the way people are consuming media is changing, which meant that the licence fee may become unsustainable. Newspapers around this time and in the years following published general news reports and commentary on the reassessment of the BBC’s funding, often highlighting voluntary subscriptions as the most desirable alternative (Chapman, 2014, p. 7; “Funding the BBC”, 2015, p. 21; Heath, 2017, p. 16; Rifkind, 2014, p. 27; “The BBC licence fee cannot be sustained”, 2014, p. 19; etc).

It was announced in the Government’s Green Paper for this Charter review that it was committing “to bringing forward legislation in the next year to modernise the licence fee in order to cover Public Service Broadcast catch-up TV” (DCMS, 2015, p. 6). The Committee anticipated

“that a degree of subscription could be a possibility in the future if the BBC moved to a more personalised service but as a minimum the licence fee must be amended to cover catch-up television as soon as possible” (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2015, p. 3). It recommended that the BBC “look at the practicality of introducing controls for authorising access to the iPlayer” (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2015, p. 3). Other possibilities for funding the licence fee, as identified by the Committee were “advertising and sponsorship, subscription, and general taxation, or a mix of some or all of these” (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2015, p. 70). The Committee preferred implementing a broadcasting levy (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2015, p. 82).

Funding the BBC was becoming a significant issue not only because of new technologies but also because of the government’s desire to cut back on funding for it. The licence fee settlement that was reached in 2010 would end up costing the BBC £345 million by the 2014-2015 fiscal year (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2016, p. 5). Later, after the 2015 general election, “the BBC was given a matter of days to agree to assume, from the Department for Work and Pensions, the future funding of” licences for citizens over 75 years old (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2016, p. 5). “Though other elements of the deal will soften the net effect, the estimated cost of absorbing this—£630 million, rising to £750 million by 2020—represents a significant proportion of the BBC’s income from other licence fee payers” (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2016, p. 5). Cuts to the BBC’s budget over the years were somewhat made up for with money generated from BBC Worldwide, which transfers part of what it makes over to the BBC to use for its public services. At this point, the amount of money transferred to the BBC for its public services from BBC Worldwide had increased significantly from the late 1990s when the BBC first established its online services. In 1998, BBC Worldwide transferred £75 million, while in the 2015/2016 fiscal

year, that amount had increased to £222 million (BBC, 2001, p. 24; BBC 2016a, p. 105). When adjusted for inflation¹², this amounted to BBC Worldwide transferring over £100 million more to the BBC's public services in 2016 compared to 1998. Even with the funding coming in from Worldwide, however, the 2015 deal between the Corporation and the government reportedly led the BBC to have make plans to cut 1,000 jobs, £5 million from the budget of BBC News and £12 million from BBC Online (Furness, 2015, p. 10; Jackson, 2015; Burrell, 2015, p. 14; Holmwood, 2015, p. 30).

Setting the BBC Up for the Future

Not long after, several significant changes happened for the BBC. To start, it had been decided that the BBC's next Charter period would be for eleven years, which meant that the next review would be decoupled from Britain's general election cycle (DCMS, 2016c, p. 3; Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2016, p. 4). The BBC's public purposes were also changed. The Government decided to "retain the approach of public purposes but will reform them to incorporate some constructive improvements that were raised through the government's and the BBC Trust's consultations, reflecting the key areas of reform that the public, the BBC, and other stakeholders have called for" (DCMS, 2016a, p. 30). In 2006, the BBC's Charter stated its first public purpose was "sustaining citizenship and civil society" (DCMS, 2006b, p. 2). This was now changed to being: "To provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them" (DCMS, 2016b, para. 6.1). The Charter elaborated on this, stating that the Corporation "should provide duly accurate and impartial news, current affairs and factual programming to build people's understanding of all parts of the United Kingdom and of the wider world" (DCMS, 2016b, para. 6.1). It also expressed an expectation that the BBC would:

¹² Inflation was calculated using The Bank of England's inflation calculator, available at <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>

offer a range and depth of analysis and content not widely available from other United Kingdom news providers, using the highest calibre presenters and journalists, and championing freedom of expression, so that all audiences can engage fully with major local regional, national, United Kingdom and global issues and participate in the democratic process, at all levels, as active and informed citizens. (DCMS, 2016b, para. 6.1)

The Charter outlined four other public purposes: “To support learning for people of all ages”; “To show the most creative, highest quality and distinctive output and services”; “To reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all the United Kingdom’s nations and regions and, in doing so, support the creative economy across the United Kingdom”; “To reflect the United Kingdom, its culture and values to the world” (DCMS, 2016b, paras. 6.2-6.5).

After the Charter was renewed, the regulation of the BBC was officially passed on to Ofcom (DCMS, 2016b, para. 44.1). A 2016 White Paper outlined that Ofcom would “be responsible for assessing the performance of the BBC board in meeting its Charter obligations” (DCMS, 2016a, p. 52). This meant that, for the first time, the BBC would be regulated entirely “by an external regulatory body” (DCMS, 2016a, p. 52).

The Journalism Crisis

As the BBC’s Charter was being renewed and its future secured for another eleven years, owners of the national newspapers were continuing to contend with a much-changed media environment, which was negatively impacting its bottom line. The problem was studied and succinctly laid out in a 2019 report published by the DCMS. The government had asked for journalism in Britain to be reviewed by Dame Frances Cairncross and an advisory panel (Cairncross, 2019). They were “asked to consider the sustainability of the production and

distribution of high-quality journalism, and especially the future of the press, in this dramatically changing market” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 5).

Audience habits were changing quickly. The Review noted that most people and, “in the case of young people, a huge majority - now reads the news entirely or mostly online” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 6). There was also increasingly widespread mistrust of legacy publications. The Cairncross Review found that “many national news publishers are viewed by the public with some mistrust (although mistrust for social media is much greater)” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 5). There were some “members of the public who argued that the Review should not recommend giving money to news publishers” and some who “claimed that newspapers merely purveyed political propaganda for their wealthy owners” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 15).

The Review found that one of the most significant problems that the press had to contend with was a reduction in revenue caused by a decline in print circulation and a decline in print advertising revenue. The Cairncross report outlined that the estimated revenue derived from sales in 2017 dropped from £2.2 billion to £1.7 billion between 2007 and 2017 (Cairncross, 2019, p. 40). Between 2008-2018, the circulation of weekday national newspapers in Britain fell anywhere from 30 per cent to 62 per cent (Cairncross, 2019, p. 26). A list of the drops each newspaper faced showed that The *Times* experienced the lowest drop at 30 per cent, while The *Daily Mirror* experienced the highest at 62 per cent (Cairncross, 2019, p. 26). The *Independent*, was not even included on the list because it had decided to stop publishing its print edition and went completely online in 2016, three years before the Cairncross report was published (“Independent to cease as print edition”, 2016). It had been reported that the paper, which was losing money, was bought by a Russian billionaire in 2010 for £1 (“Independent to cease as print edition”, 2016). The decline in print advertising had an even greater impact. Print advertising had, for a long time, carried a lot

“of the cost of producing news” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 6). While news publishers had expected advertisers would “shift their spending from print to online”, they were unable “to generate substantial revenue from digital advertising” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 42). The Cairncross Report noted, however, that by 2017 “the share of advertising appearing in the printed press had fallen from 40% to 12%, and generated £1.4 billion in expenditure – a fall of 70% compared to 2007” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 40).

The Cairncross Review found that news publishers were attempting to tackle the problem of decreased advertising revenue caused by the shift of advertiser spending from print to online by trying “to maximize the number of clicks on their content, and/or to attempt to increase the value of advertising space on their website” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 42). The strategy of maximizing clicks was argued by some who made submissions to the Review, to have “affected the content produced by news publishers” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 42). There was, for instance, pressure to dramatize stories to get more clicks, which did not always mean that journalists were trying to get attention for stories that were of justifiable interest to readers (Cairncross, 2019, p. 42). Rather, the Review pointed out that there was “a fine line between presenting readers with news items that justifiably interest them, and showing them titillating headlines and vacuous stories” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 42). Having a focus on clicks has meant that most “of the UK’s national news publishers reach far larger audiences than they have ever done before, and consequently design their content for a more international audience”, but that reach has not been turned into a sustainable funding model that ensures “long-term financial success” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 43). This is because “[n]ot only are clicks not worth much to publishers, but the use of ad-blockers means that not every click generates revenue” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 43). Another way the national press was trying to monetize their online presence was through subscriptions. In this way, the newspapers moved to directly

commodify their online news content in reaction to declining advertising revenue and print circulation. This worked for some papers but not others. For example, The *Sun* implemented a paywall in 2013, but had to abandon it in 2015 after its readership fell (Cairncross, 2019, p. 48). Newspapers like The *Times* and The *Daily Telegraph* on the other hand kept their paywalls and have been charging £312 and £104 annually for access to their content (Cairncross, 2019, p. 48).

Local news was especially struggling. The BBC's 2015 report, *Future of News* argued "that one of the biggest market failures in news in the last decade is local journalism" (BBC, 2015b, p. 20). Because of declines in the regional press, the BBC decided that it would "do more to provide local news that properly serves all parts of the UK" (BBC, 2015b, p. 4). In keeping with this, in 2016 the BBC "announced the creation of a new partnership with local news providers, to strengthen and enhance local journalism, and the crucial role it plays in holding local authorities to account, while maintaining the healthy competition between different news sources which is so important in a democracy" (BBC, 2016a, p. 66). Even still, a few years later the Cairncross (2019) report found that local publishers were struggling and recommended that the Corporation "should do more to share its technical and digital expertise for the benefit of local publishers" (p. 90).

The BBC was technically outside of the scope of what the Cairncross Review was looking at, however, news publishers brought up issues they were having with the BBC in their submissions to the Review. These included complaints that the BBC was engaging in mission creep (in other words, that it was providing services it should not be) and complaints that the playing field was not level because of the BBC's public funding. As such, in its final report, the Review did note that several "publishers told the Review that the BBC is distorting the market, and that curtailing the BBC's offering would help to increase subscriptions" (Cairncross, 2019, p. 53). There were concerns more specifically that because the BBC offered news that "is free at the

point of use online, and does not require a reader to enter licence fee validation, it may dissuade people from paying for newspaper content online” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 52). Even News UK, owner of The *Times*, which was “the only general newspaper group in the UK with a successful subscription scheme”, made a submission to the Review that “argued that the BBC’s online coverage should be severely reduced, because its wide range, and the fact that it appears to be free, make it a serious threat to the success of commercial providers” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 53). This was the same argument the national press and particularly Murdoch had been making for decades.

The Review, however, pointed out that “there are several studies that do not support this conclusion” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 53). For example, a study done for DCMS suggested “that the BBC does not diminish readers’ willingness to pay for online news content” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 52). The study pointed out that “publishers’ ability or inability to charge visitors for mediated traffic to be largely unrelated to the BBC” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 52). Rather than being the BBC, it was implied that the issue for the newspapers was “a lack of long term, loyal customers” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 52). The Review found that, in sum, “making money from online content, whether through advertising or direct payments, is likely to continue to pose a significant challenge to news publishers” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 52). The research done by the Review “suggest that the presence of a strong public service broadcaster is not incompatible with people paying for online news” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 52).

Another issue brought up to the Cairncross Review by News UK regarding the BBC was “the production of so called “soft content” (such as reporting about Love Island) on BBC Online News” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 53). It was argued that this type of content “should not be within its remit, as it does not qualify as news in the public interest” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 53). This had been a topic of consideration in the government’s 2016 White Paper on the future of the BBC. The

White Paper had noted that “in respect of the BBC's online provision, some stakeholders have raised concerns that the BBC provides ‘soft news’ and ‘magazine’ style content that replicates what is provided elsewhere and which contributes little to its public service mission” (DCMS, 2016a, p. 36). The market impact report that was conducted for the Government for the BBC’s Charter review at the time had “reflected these concerns, saying that, while the provision of soft news is relatively small, the BBC’s online offering would benefit from being more distinctive, particularly given the size of its readership” (DCMS, 2016a, p. 36). The Government noted that it was important that the BBC Online become more distinctive, and that the market impact report had suggested that to do this the BBC would have to shift its online news service away from soft news (DCMS, 2016a, p. 36).

After the government’s White Paper was released, the BBC published an Online Creative Review, which outlined its plans to move towards “a more focused and distinctive service” (BBC, 2016b, p. 4). It would do this by cutting back and delivering “a total saving of more than £15 million, or 15% of the service’s editorial spend” (BBC, 2016b, p. 4). One of the sites that was earmarked to be closed was the Corporation’s food website (BBC, 2016b, p. 14). The content already on it would be archived, but it would be difficult to find (Martinson, 2016, p. 1). While newspapers had been complaining about the BBC’s online presence, particularly in relation to soft news such as lifestyle content, the public did not react well to the news the BBC Food website would be shut down and so thousands of people reportedly signed a petition to save the site (Patterson, 2016, p. 33; Rainbird, 2016, p. 12; Sweney, 2016; Wright, 2016, p. 7; etc). The BBC then decided to backtrack on its decision and leave the existing recipes online on BBC Good Food, which is part of BBC Worldwide (Lambert & Creighton, 2016, p. 8; Patterson, 2016, p. 33). The press accused the BBC of having made the announcement to close down the site as a “tactic” or a

“stunt” to provoke a public outcry (Lambert & Creighton, 2016, p. 8). As another article put it, it was as though the message from the BBC was: “If the government wanted cuts, [...] it would get them: salami-sliced, spiralised or julienned” (Patterson, 2016, p. 33).

When the topic of soft news came up again a few years later, the Cairncross Review came to the conclusion that “curtailing the BBC’s news offering would be counter-productive” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 54). This was because “the BBC is the biggest single way that people in the UK have access to news. And the BBC offers the very thing that this Review aims to encourage: a source of reliable and high-quality news, with a focus on objectivity and impartiality, and independent from government” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 54). Therefore, the Review argued that it would “make little sense to curtail the BBC without strong evidence that this would lead to something better” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 54). The Review did, however, state that it believed “that the BBC could do more and think more carefully about how its news provision can act as a complement, rather than a substitute, for private news provision” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 54). The Review recommended that Ofcom “assess whether BBC News Online is striking the right balance between aiming for the widest reach for its own content on the one hand and driving traffic from its online site to commercial publishers (particularly local ones) on the other” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 90). The Review further recommended that Ofcom “review to what extent BBC online content acts as a substitute for, rather than a complement to, the offerings of commercial news providers, and what measures might reasonably be required of the BBC to reduce substitution” and look at whether or not the BBC has gone beyond its core while trying to pursue younger audiences (Cairncross, 2019, p. 96). The Review had found that the evidence was unclear on “the extent to which the BBC crowds other competitors out of the news market” and said that research would

suggest “that the majority of news consumers use multiple sources, and that the BBC is a large – but not the only– player in an increasingly crowded news market” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 26).

Despite the fact that the Cairncross Report had noted that the BBC was outside of the review’s remit, and despite the fact that the report’s conclusions as such were limited, the national newspapers included the BBC in their coverage in an overstated way. The *Daily Telegraph*, for example, published an article online with the headline “BBC, Facebook and Google Face New Curbs on Their Power Over News to Safeguard Quality Journalism” (Hope & Williams, 2019). The article claimed that the report had “suggested limits on the BBC website to stop it competing with commercial outlets on “soft” stories which are not clearly in the public interest” (Hope & Williams, 2019). The *Independent* likewise emphasized the BBC’s place in the report, leading an article on the review by stating: “The BBC needs to think more carefully about how its news provision is impacting the commercial news industry, a wide-ranging review looking into the future of journalism has said” (Khan, 2019, p. 16). The *Sun* published an op-ed that claimed that the review had “confronted” the BBC’s role “in helping to undermine the major source of “news of high quality” - national and local newspapers, in print and online” (Hume, 2019, p. 10). Other articles published in The *Daily Express*, The *Times* and The *Sun* following the report claimed that the BBC was about to be “investigated” on its use of “clickbait” because of the review’s findings (Lister, 2019, p. 10; Moore, 2019a, p. 17; Moore. 2019b, p. 15; “Probe on ‘clickbait’”, 2019, p. 17).

Conclusion

It is clear from documents and news articles published between the time BBC Online was launched in 1997 and 2019 that the media environment the BBC was operating in had starkly changed from the media environment of the mid 1920s. The BBC itself has changed drastically in

that time. Once a monolithic British cultural institution that held a monopoly in radio and later television, the BBC is now called on to be distinct from and mindful of the many private media organizations that now exist. This change can largely be attributed to the influence of market liberalism on public policy. The influence of market liberalism has also meant that, while once fully funded by a licence fee, throughout the development of its online services the BBC has been called on to generate more of its own funding and to find efficiency savings. One of the consequences of this has been that the BBC's public services have had to rely on commercial revenue generated from BBC Worldwide to an increasing extent. Despite this, BBC Online generally and its online news services specifically have been hugely successful. This has prompted many complaints from the national press, which from the earliest days of BBC Online has lobbied to have restrictions put in place to keep the BBC from competing with them. These complaints from the press have not stopped – if anything, they have intensified as the press has attempted to find new ways to monetize their content as advertising revenues and circulation declined. The combination of the influence of market liberalism on public policy and the success of the BBC's online services, which has in turn led to considerable pushback from the national press, has placed the BBC in an increasingly precarious position in Britain's media sphere. This is particularly troubling when viewed in light of the fact that the BBC's licence fee is only guaranteed for set periods of time, which means that it is possible for the fee to be abolished once the settlement is revisited, which would significantly change the structure of the BBC and could drastically change how it serves the British public.

Chapter Four: CBC News Online

The establishment and development of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's online services happened under considerably different circumstances than the BBC's. This was largely because the CBC did not face similar restrictions or accountability measures that the BBC did. Rather, the CBC's online services were established and developed with no guidelines in place other than the mandate that all of its services adhere to. No one scrutinized the CBC's online spending as the BBC Trust scrutinized the BBC's online spending. No one banned the CBC from incorporating advertising on its website.

This chapter, like the previous chapter on the BBC, analyzes newspaper coverage from the country's two national newspapers, *The Globe and Mail* and *The National Post*, as well as documents such as CBC annual reports, strategic plans and government policies to explore the establishment and development of the CBC's online news services. The articles and documents cover the period of time from the mid-1990s, which the CBC first established its website, to 2019. Through a discussion of these articles and documents, this chapter demonstrates how the fact that the CBC's online services have developed outside of the regulatory framework that its television and radio services exist within has, in a number of ways, left it vulnerable to criticism and struggling financially. This chapter further discusses the way the CBC is positioned in relation to the national press by various government standing committees as well as in the national press itself, and how these things have ultimately affected the structure of the CBC's online news services.

The CBC Goes Online

The beginnings of the CBC's online services can be traced back to the early 1990s. The Broadcasting Act (1991), made provisions for a Canadian broadcasting system that was relatively

technologically neutral by calling on the system, in section 3(1)(d)(iv), to “be readily adaptable to scientific and technological change” (p. 4). This opened the door to the possibility of the CBC developing an Internet service. And so, when the CBC was asked to make some of its content available online it took the opportunity. The request had come from Andrew Patrick, an Ottawa scientist working for the Communications Research Council (Gorbould, 2016). He wanted to put CBC audio on the Internet on a trial basis (Gorbould, 2016). The CBC agreed and so starting in December 1993, samples of CBC radio programs “were made available via FTP, Gopher, and World Wide Web (WWW) using standard Internet server software” (Patrick, Black & Whalen, 1996, para. 10). Several of the CBC’s programs were involved including Quirks & Quarks and Sunday Morning (Patrick, Black & Whalen, 1996, para. 12). The programs could be accessed on demand (Patrick, Black & Whalen, 1996, para. 13). The service was popular, particularly when it came to news programming. In fact, there was such a big audience for twice daily newscasts “it was necessary to limit the number of simultaneous downloads from the server in order to maintain a functional bandwidth for the research campus” (Patrick, Black & Whalen, 1996, para. 26).

Following the trial, the CBC decided to offer the Internet audio service on a permanent basis (Patrick, Black & Whalen, 1996, para. 47). The Corporation bought an Internet connection, “installed a new server computer” and began to retrain staff “on the development and operation of this new Internet service” (Patrick, Black & Whalen, 1996, para. 47). CBC.ca and Radio-Canada.ca, the Corporation’s homepages, were later launched in 1995 (O’Neill, 2006, p. 183). CBC.ca acted “as a jumping off point for CBC information and services already on the Internet” as well as the new services that the CBC was continually adding (CBC, 1995, p. 76).

At the same time as the CBC was experimenting with online technology, the Canadian Government was considering and strategizing around the development of what it referred to as the

“Information Highway” (Information Highway Advisory Council, 1996, p. 4). The government’s strategy for the Information Highway was articulated in a 1996 document put together by the Information Highway Advisory Council (IHAC) and released by the Minister of Industry Canada, titled *Building the Information Society: Moving Canada into the 21st Century*. IHAC had been formed in 1994 to advise the government on its strategy for developing the Information Highway. *Building the Information Society* described the Information Highway as encompassing the Internet and the World Wide Web as well as the Canadian telecommunications networks and the country’s broadcasting system (IHAC, 1996, p. 1). In this way, much like in Britain, the Internet was seen as an extension of the telecommunications and broadcasting systems that Canada already had in place.

The strategy laid out in *Building the Information Society* had three central objectives (IHAC, 1996, p. 4). The first was to create jobs, the second was to reinforce “Canadian sovereignty and investment in Canada” and the third was to reinsure “universal access at a reasonable cost” (IHAC, 1996, p. 4). The 1996 strategy for the development of the Information Highway in Canada did have a large focus on building the economy, but it also clearly stated the importance of creating space for the development of Canadian content, which would help to facilitate cultural dialogue throughout the country while also contributing back to the economy. To the government, Canadian content was important for the Information Highway “both to create jobs and to intensify the ongoing cultural dialogue that makes us Canadians” (IHAC, 1996, p. 2). The challenge with the strategy was that it did not spend much time contemplating who would be creating and funding the Canadian content needed to see IHAC’s vision of the Information Highway come to life.

The question of who would provide the content for Canada’s Information Highway was not lost on a government-appointed, independent committee that had been asked in 1995 to

consider, among other things, the CBC's mandate and funding in a multi-channel, increasingly digital world. The committee, chaired by Pierre Juneau and referred to as The Mandate Review Committee, published its report in 1996 (Mandate Review Committee, 1996). The report pointed out that Canada still had to grapple with the question of where the content on the Information Highway would realistically come from (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 23). This was because the country's "small and fragmented audience bordering the world's largest entertainment market" continued, even in a multi-channel, digital universe, to make it difficult for commercial organizations to provide the levels of Canadian content the country needed (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 22). This was not a new problem. The CBC had been formed decades ago "to give Canadians a stronger voice in their own country", a purpose that remains even in a significantly changed media world (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 21). Because of this, the Committee argued that if "audiences are spending more and more time in front of their computers, then this trend should be reflected in how the CBC and its sister organizations attempt to make contact with their audiences" (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 276). The Mandate Review Committee saw new media as offering "pathways to the audience that complement and enhance the existing infrastructure" (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 275).

The Mandate Review Committee's vision of the CBC in the multi-channel, digital world was one where content was what mattered most. As such, the Committee argued "that mandates and government policy should be permissive, not restrictive, when it comes to determining *how* domestic cultural products get to Canadian audiences" (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, pp. 275-276). This is acknowledged in the *Broadcasting Act* as it "makes technological neutrality one of the underpinnings of the broadcasting policy for Canada" (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 276). There were concerns that had been expressed to the Committee, however, that the

technological neutrality present in the *Broadcasting Act* did not extend to the CBC's mandate (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 123). This was because the CBC was legislated by the *Broadcasting Act* to distribute programming specifically on radio and television, which, if "read restrictively, this wording could limit the CBC's ability to reach audiences through the emerging new media" (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 123). Seeing how important new media was becoming, the Committee recommended the government update the *Broadcasting Act* to explicitly allow the CBC to incorporate "new and emerging media" into its services (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 123).

A year after the Mandate Review Committee reported, IHAC published another report which, also made a case for the CBC providing content online (IHAC, 1997). IHAC reiterated that the market had "never provided fully for Canada's unique needs – not because Canadians are uninterested in their own stories, debates and heritage – but simply because there are not enough Canadians to form a viable market, particularly for higher-cost forms of content" (IHAC, 1997, p. 57). IHAC, while not providing specific recommendations for the potential role that the CBC could play, did recommend that the government utilize the CBC and other national cultural institutions as it continued to aim to foster a Canadian presence on the Information Highway (IHAC, 1997, p. 68).

The CBC for its part also saw itself playing a strong role in the development of the Canadian Information Highway. In 1999, the Corporation announced a decision to invest two per cent of its budget towards building up its Internet offerings, with the goals of creating "a strong Internet beachhead in both official languages" and of staking out a space "for Canada in a medium where Canadian voices risk being submerged" (CBC, 1999a). This was specified in the CBC's 1999 strategy for development, titled *Unique, essential, connected: Our commitment to*

Canadians. The document outlined the CBC's mission, which it saw as being "to tell stories about Canada; to provide Canada's premier news and information service; to support arts and culture; and to build bridges between communities" (CBC, 1999a). The CBC emphasized its "unique ability to connect Canadians with each other, and to help Canadians discover each other" (CBC, 1999a). The CBC's online services were well received by Canadians, with over two million having turned to the CBC's websites in 1999-2000 "to keep them informed, educated and entertained" (CBC, 2000, p. 37). It was undeniable that the CBC's Internet services were becoming an increasingly important part of its operations. The CBC claimed that it was "a leading Canadian provider of News and information online, with an average of over two million visitors (at home users only, aged 2+) per month to CBC.ca and radio-canada.ca" (CBC, 2003, p. 9).

By this time the CRTC had decided that new media undertakings (later, in 2012, referred to as digital media broadcasting undertakings) would be exempt from its regulation, meaning that the CBC's digital services were not licensed by the CRTC as its television and radio services were (CRTC, 1999, para. 8; CRTC, 2012; CRTC, 2013, para. 303). This meant, among other things, that the CRTC did not make decisions about whether or not CBC Online carried advertising and if so, how much and on what content, as it did with the CBC's radio and television stations.

In terms of programming, for the CBC, news was its "hallmark" (CBC, 1999a). The Mandate Review Committee had placed its news and current affairs services at the heart of its purpose (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 73). The CBC's news services were seen by the Committee as being important to Canadian democratic life because of its high level of professionalism and therefore credibility, and because of the level of trust that the public places in CBC News compared to other broadcast networks across North America (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 73). The CBC was "the largest journalistic organization in the country" and

so the Committee believed it had “an added responsibility to abide by the general ethical rules of democratic journalism” (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 46). The CBC’s vision for the future of its news services took this to heart. The vision included fostering a news and information division that “*will be acclaimed for the highest possible standards of excellence, professionalism, credibility and accountability*” (CBC, 1999a). The CBC would prioritize its news and information services to “set the standard for Canadian journalism” (CBC, 1999a). These goals would be achieved across different platforms (CBC, 1999a).

News had been very popular during the 1993 online trial the CBC had taken part in, so it made sense for the Corporation to work towards providing Canadians with an online news service. And so, on July 3, 1996, the CBC launched *Newsworld Online*, a dedicated news site and “Canada’s first television news service with real-time video on the Internet” (CBC, 1997, p. 22). The new site published “the weekday and weekend block schedules plus a resumé of daily news items” (CBC, 1996, p. 43). *Newsworld Online*’s first major event coverage was of the 1997 Federal Budget (CBC, 1997, p. 22). Its coverage registered more than 200,000 hits in 24 hours (CBC, 1997, p. 22). The site did not just provide coverage of Canadian news, it also provided “a medium for Canadians to discuss the news of the day” (CBC, 1997, p. 32). This was a clear benefit of the Internet for the CBC early on. The Internet provided the CBC with a space to encourage Canadians to interact, “sharing thoughts, ideas and opinions”, and a new way for the audience to contact the CBC and provide feedback on programming (CBC, 1997, p. 33). Like the BBC, the CBC saw the potential of the Internet to enable it to facilitate a more inclusive public sphere.

Funding CBC News Online

While the vision of and goals for a CBC that was not only broadcasting on radio and television but also publishing content online sounded exciting and innovative at the time, it is

impossible to ignore the fact that the CBC was developing these new services at a particularly difficult time in the broadcaster's history. The CBC was by no means being properly resourced to develop new services since not only was there no new revenue to support the development of new services, the CBC's already existing Parliamentary appropriation was significantly decreasing at the same time as the Corporation was investing in developing its online presence. This is in stark contrast to the situation at the BBC, which had been provided additional funding through its licence fee that took into account costs associated with developing new services using new technologies.

The cuts being made in the CBC's budget were significant. In 1995, \$125 million was cut (Rowland, 2015, p. 4). Prior to this, the CBC's president Tony Manera had been had "been given a clear mandate and the promise of stable funding" (Manera, 1996, p. 2). Like prior promises of stable funding for the CBC though, this one was not kept. The 1995 budget cuts led "Manera to resign in protest" (Rowland, 2015, p. 4). In reaction to declining revenues leading up to the 1995 cuts, the CBC had already dramatically increased its commercial revenues until a recession hit and "advertising revenues levelled off" (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, pp. 36-37). In 1995 it had become clear that the Corporation's "more ambitious commercial strategy was not going to be a viable way of offsetting the major reductions in its Parliamentary appropriations" (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 94). Net advertising revenue in 1994-1995 had been \$307.9 million (CBC, 1995, p. 86). By 1996-1997 this had dropped to \$250.5 million (CBC, 1997, p. 55). Not only did the CBC's commercial strategy fail to help offset the reductions to its Parliamentary appropriations, "it seriously distorted the CBC's program priorities" and "heightened the sense among private broadcasters that the CBC was a direct competitor; not only for programming and audiences, but also for commercial revenues – revenues that were of growing importance to private broadcasters facing an increasingly fragmented and competitive marketplace" (Mandate Review

Committee, 1996, p. 95). As a further blow to the Corporation, it eliminated 1,091 jobs in 1995-1996 (CBC, 1996, p. 12).

The Mandate Review Committee had recommended that the government provide the CBC with stable, long-term funding in 1996 (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 143). The Committee had found that fluctuations in the CBC's funding had imposed pressure on the Corporation (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 36). The Committee believed that because of the CBC's funding circumstances, it could not achieve its mandate (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 42). Far from deciding to allocate stable, long-term funding for the CBC, the government decided to drop the CBC's Parliamentary appropriation even further in 1997-1998 and again in 1998-1999 (CBC, 1998, p. 10; CBC, 1999b, p. 63). Between the 1994-1995 fiscal year and the 1997-1998 fiscal year, the CBC "had to meet a financial shortfall of more than \$400 million resulting largely from the gradual reduction of its Parliamentary appropriation" (CBC, 1998, p. 10).

Despite all of this, the CBC pressed forward with the development of new services. At the end of 1998, the CBC launched *CBC News Online*, an improved news website (Evans, 1998, p. D2; CBC, 1999b, p. 42). By the time the new site had launched, however, it was clear that any expansion of the CBC was happening and would continue to happen at the expense of its staff. This had a slew of consequences. In February 1999 CBC technicians went on strike for seven weeks (Kelly, 1999). The strike meant the CBC had "to run a shortened version of its flagship nightly newscast, cancel much of its local programming, stop production on many of its most popular shows and program reruns instead of live programming on the all-news channel Newsworld" (Kelly, 1999). While the technicians were on strike, in March 1999, a strike of "CBC journalists, hosts and editors" was narrowly avoided just after their union had voted to strike as

well (Nesbitt-Larking, 2009, p. 168). The president of the Canadian Media Guild, which represents the CBC employees “who make the programs on radio and television outside Quebec”, wrote an op-ed for *The Globe and Mail*, which explained that the CBC had “40 per cent fewer staff” in 1999 than it did in 1990 when the government began to cut the CBC’s Parliamentary appropriation (Lareau, 1999, p. A15). There was dissatisfaction amongst staff then because while the government was cutting the CBC’s funding, and the CBC was cutting jobs in reaction to its decreased funding, the CBC was expanding and wanted to continue to expand “into the Internet, another television channel and perhaps a third radio network, all with the same year-to-year funding” (Lareau, 1999, p. A15). The message the union received was: “Expansion will come at the expense of staff” (Lareau, 1999, p. A15). The message to CBC staff was: “Get better. Spend less. Do more things. Be more distinctive. Maintain existing operations. Use fewer people” (Saunders, 1999a, p. C1). Doug Saunders (1999a) interviewed CBC staff and reported in *The Globe and Mail* that “contradictory commands have been shouted from the deck of the CBC over and over in recent years, aimed at every division of the company, as senior managers were ordered by Ottawa to cut a third of the corporation’s staff and budget while maintaining all its operations” (p. C1). The CBC staff had enough to handle without also adding new services to the list of things that needed funding and attention.

Despite its precarious financial situation, the CBC wanted to reduce advertising¹³ on its websites (Evans, 2000, p. D2). *The Globe and Mail* reported that the CBC had decided the sections of its website including news and children’s programming would no longer accept advertising

¹³ It is not possible to track the CBC’s advertising revenue from its online services specifically because the CBC does not include these numbers separately in its financial reporting. Furthermore, the CBC was, at this point, reporting its advertising revenue in conjunction with its program sales instead of separately. This was done from 1998 until 2008. Inconsistent and opaque data presents challenges for the collection of longitudinal data, which, if available, would provide valuable information about the CBC’s advertising practices.

(Evans, 2000, p. D2). The decision followed a redesign of the website that was “part of a strategy to become the country’s leading information source on the Web” (Evans, 2000, p. D2). It also came around the same time as the Corporation announced “that 173 employees will be laid off - 28 from CBC radio and 145 from English television” (Evans, 2000, p. D2). Later, towards the end of April 2000, it was reported that the CBC would reduce advertising on the Corporation’s services generally, as much as it was possible (Gherson, 2000, p. A1). The first step towards this was “eliminating ads during news programming” (Gherson, 2000, p. A1). This mentality towards advertising-free content did not last. For a while the CBC only accepted advertising on 15 per cent of its website, but it was reported that this would be increased to 80 per cent in 2005 (Waldie, 2005, p. B3). And so, while the CBC’s advertising and program sale dropped for three years in a row after 2001, they would increase again in 2005 – from \$283,059,000 in 2004 to \$321,670,000 in 2005 (CBC, 2001, p. 46; CBC, 2002, p. 54; CBC, 2003, p. 93; CBC, 2005, p. 51).

While trying to reduce advertising on its services, the CBC also sought to add advertising on radio, which it had not been allowed to do since 1974. In 1999, when the CBC’s licences came up for renewal with the CRTC, the CBC requested the CRTC “amend the existing condition of licence prohibiting it from broadcasting advertising on English-language radio” (CRTC, 2000a, para. 84). The request was later modified to be a request for “a condition allowing it to broadcast brief sponsorship messages identifying parties who contributed financially to a program or cultural event broadcast by it” (CRTC, 2000a, para. 84). Sponsorships on news and public affairs programming would not be allowed (CRTC, 2000a, para. 84). The CRTC still denied the final request (CRTC, 2000a, para. 89). It did, however, allow the CBC “to increase *Newsworld’s* maximum monthly wholesale rate” (CRTC, 2000b).

Providing some much-needed relief, in 2001, the CBC was allotted “an additional \$60 million of funding for 2001- 2002” (CBC, 2002, p. 14). This was provided as one-time funding. The CBC announced that the money would be put towards programming “to deliver greater value to Canadians” (CBC, 2002, p. 14). Of the \$60 million, it was reported that \$3 million was earmarked for new media (Scofield, 2001, p. R3). Robert Rabinovitch, President and Chief Executive Officer of the CBC at the time, indicated that the money was not enough though, and called on the federal government to increase the CBC’s budget permanently by a minimum of \$60 million each year (Scofield, 2001, p. R3). It was clear that, even with the additional \$60 million in 2001-2002, the CBC was struggling to cope with the series of budget cuts that had hit the Corporation in the 1990s.

The National Press and the CBC

The country’s national press was less than sympathetic to the CBC’s plight. The general sentiment expressed in both of the country’s national newspapers, *The Globe and Mail* and *The National Post*, about the CBC’s plans for developing its online presence was that it should stop putting resources into it. Coverage in both papers labeled the CBC’s expansion plans as “ambitious” (Whyte, 1999, p. B9; Fraser, 1999, p. A8). It also called into question why the CBC was expanding at all given the fact that its funding was going through a series of cuts at the time. Mark Evans (1998), a technology writer for *The Globe and Mail*, argued in the paper that “[t]he idea of a full-featured Web site is great, but it’s an expensive proposition” (p. D2). He further questioned “why the CBC plans to spend so heavily on new media - most of that likely on the Web site - at a time when the rest of the corporation is crying out for funding and making do with fewer resources and people” (Evans, 1998, p. D2). Similarly, in *The National Post*, Murray Whyte (1999) pointed out that the Corporation was building a New Media Division despite the fact that it was in

a period of uncertainty “following a crippling strike, with no firm long-term funding guarantees from the federal government, and layoffs earlier this month in Halifax and Calgary despite a promise during the strike to the contrary” (p. B9). Whyte (1999) vaguely cited “[r]umours from inside the CBC” to show that there were CBC staff “who see the venture as a frivolous allocation of all-too-sparse funding” (p. B9). Without specific attribution, he also suggested that “some believe that, with the CBC on unstable ground, this is not the time for experiments in unproven media” (Whyte, 1999, p. B9).

During the first several years of the development of CBC Online, there was minimal discussion of the CBC’s online service being in competition with private media companies. In this way, unlike in Britain, the newspapers somewhat distanced themselves from criticizing the CBC’s Internet strategy in a way that directly suggested that they were concerned about unfair competition from the CBC. Even as a *National Post* article described the CBC’s online services as “essentially print-based” (Shannon, 2000, p. B5), neither paper mentioned much if anything about the CBC as their direct competitors for online news or news generally in their coverage of the early development of *Newsworld Online* and *CBC News Online*. The newspapers did, however, compare the CBC’s online news services to the services of other broadcasters, with articles in *The National Post* and *The Globe and Mail* tending to situate the CBC’s Internet services as competitive with CTV and Global, nationally (Evans, 1998, p. D2; Saunders, 1999b, p. A4; Whyte, 1999, p. B9). In a manner that drew further skepticism about the CBC’s online activities, Whyte (1999) pointed out that the CBC’s competitors for broadcast news were not investing in online like the CBC was. He wrote that: “Competitors have generally backed off the medium because the prospect of revenue is less than assured” (Whyte, 1999, p. B9). Evans (1998) questioned the wisdom of the CBC’s goal “to make CBC Online the leading source for Canadian news and information” because

it had “competition from rivals such as Sun Media Corp.’s Canoe Web site and Southam Inc.’s Canada.com” (p. D2). A *Globe and Mail* technology reporter, Simon Tuck (1999), while reporting the recommendations of a Subcommittee, described the CBC as having “yet to make a big impact in the burgeoning world of on-line content” and as trailing “market leaders such as www.canada.com and www.canoe.ca” (p. B5).

This coverage of the CBC’s early forays online in the national press is perhaps unsurprising given the fact that both newspapers were also developing their own news sites and figuring out how and where the Internet fit into their operations. The *Globe and Mail*, which was owned by Thompson Corp., had been around since 1844 and started its website in 1995 (Craig, 2000; “About us”, 2019; Stackhouse, 2015, p. 40). Thompson Corp. had invested \$10 million into a venture called Globe Information Services (GIS) (Stackhouse, 2015, p. 65). It was supposed “to find ways to make money from the newspaper’s trove of data” (Stackhouse, 2015, p. 65). GIS was later, in 2000, renamed Globe Interactive (McArthur, 2000). Globe Interactive “operated a number of news and information sites such as globeandmail.com” (Johnson, 2001). The year before GIS was renamed, Ed Greenspon, who was the website’s editorial manager, “successfully lobbied for a dedicated staff of digital journalists to change globeandmail.com from a fairly static presentation of daily content to a vibrant, breaking news site” (Stackhouse, 2015, p. 65). The *National Post* had a later start online than The *Globe and Mail* as even the print edition of the paper did not exist until 1998 (“Southam to launch new national newspaper”, 1998). Conrad Black, the chairman of Hollinger Inc. had come up with the plan to start the new national paper (“Southam to launch new national newspaper”, 1998). The paper was to be launched by Southam Inc, which Hollinger Inc. controlled at the time and which already had “a hold on 41 per cent of Canadian newspaper readers” (“Southam to launch new national newspaper”, 1998). In 1998, Southam was operating

Canada.com, which would later be sold in 2001 to CanWest, along with *The National Post* and other Hollinger Inc. newspapers (Damsell & McFarland, 2000; Evans, 1998, p. D2; Scott, 2005, p. 103). CanWest also owned Global Television at the time (Edge, 2016, p. 28). The company wanted to integrate all of its news properties into *Canada.com*, which would become “a single news web site” that “would exist in multiple permutations to serve every constituency in the country” (Scott, 2005, p. 103). The *Globe and Mail*, meanwhile had also come under the ownership of a new company in 2001, called Bell Globemedia (“Bell Globemedia launched”, 2001). Bell Canada Enterprises (BCE) was the majority owner of the company, and Thomson Corporation and The Woolbridge Company Limited were part-owners (“Bell Globemedia launched”, 2001). The deal brought together CTV (a major Canadian private broadcaster), *The Globe and Mail*, Globe Interactive and Sympatico (an Internet portal) (“Bell Globemedia launched”, 2001). Each property would be grown “through continued investment in content for new and traditional media, thus creating a strong, competitive multi-media company” (“Bell Globemedia launched”, 2001). It was clear in 2001 that the new owners of *The Globe and Mail* and *The National Post* had high hopes for the multi-platform futures of their companies generally and for the national newspapers specifically. The new owners also believed that convergence would be a winning strategy because it would allow them to marry “content providers to delivery systems”, which was believed “would lead to the birth of big profits” (Gorman, 2015, p. 46).

As such, one complaint both of the newspapers had about the CBC was regarding an alliance it had formed in 2001 with *The Toronto Star*. At this time, *The Toronto Star* and CBC News had teamed up and produced a report on retirement and the issues surrounding it (“Star out of alignment”, 2001, p. A15). *The Toronto Star* “also listed much of the CBC’s daily programming schedule” while the CBC’s website welcomed its audience to “the CBC News and The Toronto

Star as we focus the ‘Big Picture’ on retirement” (“Star out of alignment”, 2001, p. A15). The *National Post*’s editorial argued that while The *Toronto Star* was private company and could do as it pleased, “the CBC is a government- owned company that receives almost \$1-billion in subsidies from Ottawa each year” (“Star out of alignment”, 2001, p. A15). The *National Post* believed it was unfair that “the CBC will be applying part of its nearly \$1- billion in annual government subsidies to a partnership that will benefit just one paper” (“Star out of alignment”, 2001, p. A15). This event convinced The *National Post* that not only was the Corporation already using “its subsidy to compete against private broadcasters for advertising” it was also seemingly trying to “skew the newspaper business” (“Star out of alignment”, 2001, p. A15). The *Globe and Mail* was less concerned about direct competition than The *National Post*, but The *Globe and Mail*’s editorial did express concern that there were a lot of unanswered questions regarding the alliance (“The CBC’s new friend”, 2001, p. A14). It wanted to know if it was the partnership was simply a marketing scheme based on cross-promotion or if the two media companies would “share access to exclusive stories, hold joint editorial meetings, share reporters and undertake joint Internet ventures” (“The CBC’s new friend”, 2001, p. A14).

Building the CBC’s Presence Online

At this point, regardless of any stance expressed on whether or not the CBC should be publishing news content online, the CBC was pushing forward with the development of its online news services. New technologies were allowing the CBC “to achieve savings and create and deliver a larger number and range of high-quality News stories” (CBC, 2005, p. 35). A key part of this was increasing collaboration between the CBC’s various services and departments. The CBC had implemented a CBC News integration project in the early 2000s, which aimed “to enhance the quality and quantity of national, regional and international News coverage through the sharing of

information, ideas and resources across CBC Radio, CBC Television, CBC Newsworld, and *CBC.ca*, while preserving the editorial integrity and identity of each one” (CBC, 2005, p. 16).

In 2003, Tony Burman, the Editor in Chief of CBC’s English-language news services told a hearing held by the Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications that “a renewal process is transforming it into a more integrated, streamlined, and decentralized organization” (Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications, 2003). He noted that the CBC had “been integrating our news gathering efforts — in both radio and our Internet service — in a way that means that individual programs, while they will remain as distinct and separate as they are now, will have access to the vastness of the CBC bureau system across the country and around the world to supplement their own efforts” (Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications, 2003). Without homogenizing content, the goal was “to avoid situations whereby a radio reporter makes a report on the morning news show without being aware that a colleague in television news down the hall had information about the story that could have helped the listener better understand it” (Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications, 2003). The emphasis by Burman was on the fact that the news department was not trying to downsize, rather it was implementing measures that would create efficiencies (Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications, 2003). He told the Committee that:

We have discovered that as we develop more platforms to transmit our news, that we were not organized in a way that we could actually handle it all. We realized there were certain areas where we truly were duplicating. For example, in the planning of stories, we were duplicating some of the research for stories. However, rarely did we feel that reporters’

stories were duplicated. (Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications, 2003)

It was his belief that in the future the CBC would look back see the integration “eliminated a lot of duplication that made no sense and took funding that should have been spent on more journalism” (Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications, 2003).

Five years later, in 2008 the CBC announced that it was going to further streamline its “news-gathering and delivery across the public broadcaster’s radio, television and online divisions” (Shecter, 2008, p. B1). This was met with criticism from the CBC’s staff. The *National Post* reported that there were CBC staff members who were critical of the CBC’s decision to further streamline newsgathering , while The *Globe and Mail* reported the following year that the CBC’s structural reorganization was “seen as a major shift away from the culture within CBC News of gearing primarily toward The National, CBC News at Six and other major shows, and instead broadcasting the news on whatever platform on which they can get it out fastest” (Dixon, 2009, p. R1; Shecter, 2008, p. B1).

The Changing Media Environment

Even as the CBC developed its Internet services over the course of several years the questions of where digital fit in its mandate and of the CBC’s funding moving forward and in light of the CBC’s adoption of new technologies remained largely unsettled. In addition to this, there were questions about where the CBC fit in relation to private media companies in the new media environment that were unanswered. The CBC’s relationship to the private broadcasters in the country was clearly articulated in the *Broadcasting Act* but the Corporation’s relationship with and responsibility, if any, to the country’s newspapers was not. New media had made it a relevant consideration though.

From 2000-2015 it was clear that the CBC's new media services could not be ignored and that not only was the CBC struggling to deal with cuts to its budget, Canada's private media were struggling to gain footing in a rapidly changing media environment. During those years there were four Standing Committee reports published that addressed the Canadian media environment generally and the CBC's role in the new media environment to different degrees. Each committee referenced the changing media environment and the CBC's place in the country's wider media ecology. Each committee also ultimately recommended changes either to how the CBC was legislated, how it was financed, or both.

The first Standing Committee to report on Canadian media in the new millennium was the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. The study had been announced in May 2001 (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2003, p. 3). The Committee had been asked to study the Canadian broadcasting system and to report on and make recommendations based on its findings (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2003, p. iv). It was supposed "to determine whether the ideals and objectives set out in the *Broadcasting Act* of 1991 were being met and whether the Act itself was in need of reform" (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2003, p. 3). Chaired by Clifford Lincoln, the Committee produced a thorough report on the entire Canadian broadcasting system that was published in 2003 (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2003). It was evident when the Committee assembled its report that Canadian broadcasting institutions were "struggling to meet the challenges of new technology, globalization, corporate convergence, and the high expectations of Canadians" (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2003, p. 4). Public service broadcasters were not exempt. The 2003 Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage had been gravely concerned about Canadian public broadcasting (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2003, p. 4). The concern was based on the fact that it

felt the CBC had spent a decade spending “much of its talent and energy searching for the right formula, the right approach, to ensure its place in Canadian life. The search has been painful and frustrating and the goal distant and elusive” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2003, p. 4). In terms of the CBC’s new media activities specifically, the Committee acknowledged the important role that new technologies played in the CBC’s operations by recommending that the *Broadcasting Act*, which still had not been updated to incorporate new media into the CBC’s responsibilities, “be amended to recognize the value of new media services as a complementary element of the CBC’s overall programming strategy” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2003, p. 218). The Committee also reaffirmed “the importance of public broadcasting as an essential instrument for promoting, preserving and sustaining Canadian culture and recommends that the government direct the CRTC to interpret the *Broadcasting Act* accordingly” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2003, p. 220).

While the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage was reporting, the Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications started hearings for a “report on the current state of Canadian media industries” (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006, p. ii). The Committee, chaired by The Honourable Lise Bacon, published its final report in 2006 (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006). It found that technological developments fragmented news media markets, “triggering a widespread struggle for economic viability among Canada’s major media firms” (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006, p. 3). It also found that, for news producers “one of the most disruptive effects of online news sources has been the diversion of advertising revenues”, particularly classified advertising revenue, which accounted for a significant “portion of the total revenue of most newspapers” (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006, p. 4). The 2006

Standing Senate Committee concluded that in light “of media concentration and cross-media ownership the importance of the CBC as an alternate source of news and information programming is greater than ever” (p. 33). It argued that although criticizing the CBC may be a “favourite Canadian pastime”, the CBC’s news programming “is of a high calibre”, and as such it “should be strengthened, not diminished” (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006, p. 33). The 2006 Standing Senate Committee heard concerns from observers who believed that “the breadth of the CBC’s mandate has led to unnecessary competition with the private sector” (p. 20). The Committee was of the belief that “the CBC should complement the efforts of private broadcasters, not compete with them” (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006, p. 36). This was because, it noted, “it is vital to be realistic about budget realities and to focus effort on the most important elements of the CBC mandate, such as covering the news and serving regions that are outside of Canada’s major metropolitan areas” (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006, p. 36). The Committee also recommended “the CBC develop a plan to focus on its core mandate and that the Government of Canada enter into a review process with the CBC to develop an agreement on the budget required to provide distinctive and complementary services to Canadians” (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006, p. 35). After this, it was stated, “the government should make a commitment to provide the realistic and stable funding on a long-term basis” that allows the CBC to stop airing television advertising (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006, p. 35).

Another Standing Committee report was published two years later in 2008 and was, like the one from 2003, produced by the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. This time chaired by Gary Schellenberger, the Committee argued that “[d]igital media have changed the traditional way of thinking about broadcasting. It is now conceived of as content delivery” (Standing

Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2008, p. 47). The Committee pointed out that, regardless of delivery means, “content is still the imperative that will determine relevance to audiences” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2008, p. 47). The 2008 Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage reaffirmed that the country’s need for the CBC “to make qualitatively different Canadian cultural content is more important than ever, since it is through this lens that it may offer something to set it apart from purely commercial programming” (p. 47). The Committee recognized that Canadians needed online public space and so it recommended that the CBC continue developing its Internet services (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2008, p. 48). Further to this, “the Committee heard from a number of witnesses that CBC/Radio-Canada should be doing more to exploit the opportunities presented by digital media, particularly to engage Canadians and enable a truly interactive online public space where their views can be heard” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2008, p. 46). Witnesses were also concerned with the funding of the CBC, which “was consistently identified as an impediment to the cultivation of a Canadian online public space overseen by CBC/Radio- Canada” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2008, p. 47). Even still, “the Committee heard support for the Corporation’s new media endeavors to date, including staking out a Canadian Internet presence and enabling access to Canadian content online” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2008, p. 47). The Committee also heard questions “about the clarity of the *Broadcasting Act* in this context, since it makes no specific reference to new media as a means of fulfilling the Corporation’s public policy goals” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2008, p. 58). As such, this Committee, like the 2003 Standing Committee, recommended that the *Broadcasting Act* be amended in such a way that formally recognized the CBC’s responsibility to use new technologies to achieve its mandate (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2008, p. 63). The Committee expressed a belief that

it was essential for the CBC to be innovative and to use new media to stay relevant (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2008, p. 64). The government did not end up amending the *Broadcasting Act* but it did, in 2010, publish a consultation paper titled *Improving Canada's Digital Advantage*, which stated that the government expected “the CBC/Radio-Canada and the NFB to maximize their presence on all digital platforms” thereby supporting the idea that the CBC should be continuing to develop its digital services, including its online services (Government of Canada, 2010, p. 28).

After the 2010 paper was published, the media environment continued to change and so, in 2015, the Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications, this time chaired by Dennis Dawson, was asked to look in to the challenges that the CBC was facing due to changes happening in the wider media environment and to report on its findings (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2015, p. 1). The Committee came to the conclusion that the CBC, as one part of the Canadian broadcasting system, “should allocate its funds to complement what is currently offered to Canadians through other sources” (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2015, p. 61). With this in mind, the Committee’s final report included a number of recommendations that would see the CBC’s positioning in Canada’s broadcasting system diminished. This included that the CBC have a “focus on showing high-quality programs that are unlikely to be offered by commercial broadcasters” and, in keeping with this, that it “invest in and offer services in those areas where the Canadian public’s needs are underserved by the private sector” (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2015, p. xii). This means that the CBC should use its resources to, instead of providing a comprehensive service that connects all of Canada, as the 1991 *Act* proscribes, the CBC should “use its resources to complement what is offered to Canadians through other sources” (Standing Committee on Transport and

Communications, 2015, p. xii). The Committee also recommended that the CBC take part of its funding and put it towards a “superfund” that would help finance external productions to later be broadcast on the CBC (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2015, p. xii). The Committee further suggested that, while “Canadians certainly benefit as citizens from having high-quality news”, such news is not necessarily essential, but a luxury (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2015, p. 19). Because of this the Committee stated that “the CBC/Radio-Canada must determine what to sacrifice to improve the news – or any other type of programming – above what would be offered by private broadcasters” (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2015, p. 19). This report deliberately framed the CBC as being supplementary to private broadcasters, not as a centerpiece of the Canadian broadcasting system, as it was intended. This vision of the CBC neglects the goal of universal access and does not account for the fact that the private sector it proscribes dominance to is not necessarily universally accessible and not necessarily free at the point of use – two important services the CBC provides Canadians as a comprehensive rather than market failure broadcaster. The 2006 Standing Committee on Transport and Communication had framed the CBC in similar terms.

For better and for worse, despite four Standing Committee reports being published over the course of more than a decade, there was very little done to fund the CBC’s online initiatives, to clarify the role of the CBC Online, or to update the current legislation to specify, at the very least, that the CBC should be distributing its content on media beyond simply radio and television.

The CBC’s Vision

The CBC for its part believed its role was still central within the Canadian broadcasting system, its digital services necessary, and its survival essential. Its plan for survival had been articulated by Richard Stursberg, the Executive Vice-President of English Television during the

hearings for the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage that reported in 2008. Stursberg noted during the hearings that the Corporation was “exploring how CBC news would evolve in the changing media world” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2006). He placed the CBC’s news as “the cornerstone of the service” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2006). He also told the Committee that the CBC needed to see itself now as “a content producer and distributor”, not only a television broadcaster, and as such, it needed to provide Canadians with content “via the medium of their choice” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2006). This perspective on the CBC and new media is clearly articulated in the CBC’s 5-year strategic plan *Everyone. Every way*, which was published in 2011. In it, the CBC states that its “function need no longer be limited to broadcasting what we make to viewers and listeners”, rather, the Corporation “can now genuinely aspire to interact with, to engage with, Canadians in new ways and to provide a publicly owned, publicly minded space where Canadians can meet and exchange with each other and with the country” (CBC, 2011a, p. 1). The CBC emphasizes the importance of content and states its mission as being “to be the recognised leader in expressing Canadian culture and enriching the democratic life of all Canadians” (CBC, 2011a, p. 6). The plan commits the CBC to “maintaining a leading competitive position in the digital media environment”; to enhancing the CBC’s digital services through new partnerships; and to increasing its “digital investment to at least five per cent of programming budget by 2015” (CBC, 2011a, p. 4). The CBC’s strategy includes completing its news renewal, which includes “multimedia extension and integration” (CBC, 2011a, p. 3). There is an acknowledgement that the CBC will require funding for its plan, and so the 2015 strategy indicates that the CBC will attempt to increase its “commercial revenues faster than the overall market” and “to pursue efficiencies” (CBC, 2011a, p. 5).

Funding the CBC

Funding was a significant, ongoing challenge for the CBC. The 2003 Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage noted that “the CBC has been struggling to stay afloat financially for some time” (p. 215). The Committee maintained that stable funding is needed for the CBC, adding “that the Corporation may need more than an assurance of stable funding in order to meet its longer-term needs” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2003, p. 215). Three years later, at the hearings for the 2006 Standing Senate Committee, concerns were expressed again about “[i]nadequate funding, an unclear role and mandate, and the Corporation’s reduced coverage of local and regional news” (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006, p. 6). There were several consequences. As Tony Burman, the Editor in Chief of CBC’s English-language news services told the Committee:

The department for which I am responsible, including not only reporters, but also producers and production staff — currently has about 1,900 staff across Canada and around the world. Ten years ago, we had approximately 2,500 staff. So there has been a reduction of about 500, and much of that has been in television — not radio — news and current affairs. (Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications, 2003)

Despite this, the government did not implement any of the 2003 Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage’s recommendations around the CBC’s funding or around amending the CBC’s mandate to include new media (Government of Canada, 2005). It did, however, provide the CBC with an additional \$60 million for the 2005-2006 financial year (Government of Canada, 2005, p. 8). This was not exactly new funding though. The \$60 million had first been allocated in 2001, and while not guaranteed on an ongoing basis, was renewed every year until 2012, after which it

was reduced to \$32.2 million for 2013, and then taken away in 2014 (CBC, 2011b; CBC 2012; CBC, 2013; CBC; 2014a).

Even with the additional \$60 million in funding the CBC struggled. This was partly because the funding was never guaranteed, which made planning for the future difficult. The Corporation also struggled because it was expected to do a lot with only a little. The 2006 Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communication's final report noted that it "recognizes that the CBC's current mandate far exceeds what the annual appropriation from Parliament covers" (p. 33). The Committee further noted that despite this, the Corporation had been doing "its best to maintain its services, even though some comparable services are available from private broadcasters or could be provided by private broadcasters" (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006, p. 33). It argued that the challenge then would be to find and "to use a workable method to refine the CBC's mandate so that it reflects current realities and is linked to the budget" (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006, p. 34). Because of this, the Committee recommended that the government work towards establishing "a more coherent system for refining the mandate of the CBC", one that included a "commitment to a long-term planning horizon, a ten-year licence renewal and a long-term budget that provides appropriate stable funding" (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006, p. 35).

National Press Coverage

The national press had remained largely quiet about CBC's online initiatives in the first decade of the new millennium other than a piece of commentary published in *The National Post* that argued that there was no role for the CBC in the multichannel universe (Weissenberger & Koch, 2004, p. A16). The following five years did not inspire much more discussion about the CBC's online activities. There were a few general news articles and opinion pieces that were

published at this time that questioned the CBC's role in the media environment given that Canadians had ample options of private organizations to go to for their news. One such article reported on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage that would report in 2008. The journalist claimed that "you still hear off-hand, off-the-record murmurs from competing media companies about whether the CBC as a broadcaster has a mandate to beef up its online services. Others argue, though, that these murmurs blur CBC mandate issues with private media companies' competitive interests" (Dixon, 2007, p. R4).

Both national newspapers, while otherwise quiet on the question of the CBC's online activities during the 2003, 2006 and 2008 Standing Committee hearings, did publish a few articles over the course of the first decade of the new millennium that looked to and considered the future of the CBC. An opinion article, published in *The National Post* in 2009, argued that the CBC would be better off if it was online-only and got rid of its traditional broadcasting services (Cosh, 2009, p. A12). Colby Cosh, the journalist who wrote the article for *The National Post*, argued that the CBC, "surviving as an aggregator, a producer and a brand, could become a partner of other media companies instead of a competitor" (Cosh, 2009, p. A12). In 2011, a *Globe and Mail* arts critic was a little more sympathetic towards the CBC. Kate Taylor (2011a) made the point that

bold visions of multi-platform access to programming paid for with tax dollars often bump up against the CBC's financial realities: 18 per cent of its overall budget is raised by placing ads on its television networks. Like a commercial broadcaster, it can't afford to give its programming away for free or to let its online offerings cannibalize its TV audience. (p. A6)

She argues "that as commercial choices and international choices proliferate, a public broadcaster of Canadian programming becomes more distinctive and more relevant, not less" (Taylor, 2011a,

p. A6). In another article for *The Globe and Mail*, Taylor (2011b) considered what the CBC's future should look like and argued that "its key role in the future is as a route into Canadian digital content that will seep into audiences' lives across multiple media, rather than uniting them around a single show - let alone a single image of Canada" (p. A3).

Paywalls

Coverage of the CBC's online services in the national press from 2013-2014 can be seen as both a reaction to the CBC's increased online activities, particularly as the Corporation tried to increase the revenue it was generating from its online content, as well as a reaction to their own struggles to monetize their online content. At this time, coverage of the CBC's online news services in the national press became critical of the CBC overtly competing with the newspapers themselves. An increase in commentary in the national press that focused on the CBC as a competitor of newspapers began as both *The National Post* and *The Globe and Mail* moved to implement paywalls on their respective websites. *The Globe and Mail* was first to put up a paywall around its content in 2012, with *The National Post* following soon after and putting one up in 2013 (Gorman, 2015). Like the British national press, the Canadian national press was moving to directly commodify its online content.

One of the criticisms expressed in the press was that the CBC was generating revenue through licensing its content to other websites, including Yahoo and Huffington Post (Houpt, 2013a, p. B5). A *Globe and Mail* columnist, Simon Houpt (2013a), pointed out that the CBC was selling its content to websites when, at the same time, "all of the major legacy Canadian publishers - including the Toronto Star, Postmedia Network Inc., and, yes, the Globe and Mail - are rushing to erect paywalls around content" (p. B5). He argued that as the CBC has rushed to distribute its content on different platforms and channels it has resulted in "criticism about so-called "mission

creep”” (Haupt, 2013a, p. B5). Haupt (2013a) described a media environment that required newspapers to charge for their content so that the businesses could keep running, where “freely distributed news stories already present enough competition” (p. B5). Under these circumstances, Haupt (2013a) asserted that, “[f]rom the perspective of those legacy publishers, having taxpayers subsidize the competition just seems needlessly cruel” (p. B5). Haupt (2013b) had another column published in *The Globe and Mail* around the same time that criticized the CBC for pulling advertisements paid for by Postmedia Network Inc.¹⁴ to promote the company’s new paywall (p. B5). This raised the question of, if the CBC’s “websites - which are free to use - fear competition from for-pay services, does the CBC really believe there’s much difference between itself and the private companies, beyond the economic models? (And, if not, why are we funding it?)” (Haupt, 2013b, p. B5). Part of the criticism of the CBC when it came to advertising Postmedia’s paywall was that by refusing to air the advertisements, the CBC was passing on \$15,000, at a time when the Corporation was once again asking the CRTC for permission to air advertising on two of its radio stations (Kline, 2013, p. A13). Another issue that emerged was that after Postmedia put its paywall up, “CBC Calgary employees began tagging their tweets with #nopaywall” (Kline, 2013, p. A13). The tweets inferred that the Calgarians should turn to the CBC’s online news service “over that of the Calgary Herald or the National Post, because it’s available for “free”” (Kline, 2013, p. A13).

The CBC was accused of unfair competition by the national newspapers, whose coverage expressed a belief that the CBC was duplicating services that were already widely available in the marketplace and that it was undercutting the existing market by providing their services for free.

¹⁴ As an indication of the failure of CanWest’s convergence strategy, Postmedia, backed by U.S. investors, bought *The National Post* and other newspaper titles from the company in 2010 (Gorman, 2015, p. 120). Meanwhile, Shaw Communications bought the company’s television division that same year (Edge, 2016, p. 105).

The *National Post*, for example, published an article by journalist Jesse Kline that accused the CBC of double-dipping (Kline, 2013, p. A13). Kline's (2013) problem with the CBC, as stated in the article, was that most of the services the CBC was providing with its government subsidy were competing with private organizations at "an unfair advantage" (p. A13). Kline (2013) admitted that "[n]ews organizations, including this one, are struggling to find a business model that allows them to fund high-quality journalism", and clearly took issue with the CBC's methods of generating revenue, stating that the CBC's solution to funding journalism is to "[m]ooch off the taxpayer, while also selling advertising to support content on television, radio and the Internet" (p. A13). Another article in *The National Post* argued that the CBC should get out of online news because it competes with private organizations in that arena (Stinson, 2013, p. A1). This line of reasoning implies that the CBC's role is as a market failure broadcaster that only provides services the private sector does not.

Nevertheless, the CBC published another five-year strategy in 2014, which emphasized the CBC's digital strategy even further than its last plan, *Everyone, every way*. The strategy, titled *A space for us all*, aimed to modernize the CBC (CBC, 2014b, p. 2). A significant part of the strategy was increasing investment in mobile content and distribution. For national news specifically, the CBC planned to maintain the same level of investment on the web moving forward, while also increasing its investment in mobile (CBC, 2014b, p. 13). One of the strategy's key objectives was to double the Corporation's digital reach by 2020 (CBC, 2014b, p. 2). This plan meant that the CBC would prioritize spending on digital technologies, including on the web and for mobile, over conventional radio and television, which until this point had still been seen as the Corporation's primary focus (CBC, 2014b, p. 13). Both *The Globe and Mail* and *The National Post* published articles criticizing *A space for us all*. *The Globe and Mail* published an op-ed by York University

professor Wade Rowland, who argued that “[w]hat CBC management has delivered is not a public broadcasting strategy but a business plan, one that further distances the corporation from its public service mandate” (Rowland, 2014, p. A11). He argued that “[o]ne of the reasons CBC is anxious to accelerate its shift to online services is because that’s where advertising revenue is moving” (Rowland, 2014, p. A11). The CBC should, however, be focused on providing a public service instead (Rowland, 2014, p. A11). The *National Post* published an article that criticized the CBC’s strategy to prioritize digital and mobile because taking that route would mean the CBC was following “a path that is already littered with private competitors”, which calls into question the “point in having a public broadcaster operating there” (Stinson, 2014, p. A1).

The CBC was not dissuaded from pushing forward with its strategy intact. A couple of years into its implementation, in clear support of the strategy’s objectives, the CBC redesigned its evening news program *The National*, to move forward “as both a flagship evening newscast and a digital and social enterprise” (CBC, 2018, p. 31). In November 2017 the new format officially launched, putting to air what a *Globe and Mail* columnist called “the most radical remake of its flagship English-language prime-time television newscast in a generation” (Haupt, 2017). The show was completely reoriented for a digitally driven media age. Jennifer McGuire, the CBC News’s General Manager and Editor-in-Chief at the time, told *Media in Canada* “that the revamped show will be more digitally focused and updated throughout the evening and across time zones until 2 a.m. ET” (Maloney, 2017). The show would take into account a continuous news environment by considering what audiences, after a day of following the news on their smartphones, would want to see in a nightly newscast, which is context (Maloney, 2017). McGuire told *Media in Canada* that the new version *The National* would “be a show that isn’t a recap of the day’s events, but one that explains the news and drives the stories forward” (Maloney, 2017).

The plan was to have “original digital storytelling through the day that will feed into the nightly newscast” and for the show to have a greater online presence (Maloney, 2017).

The Journalism Crisis

While the CBC was busy implementing its digitally focused strategy with the increased funding allotted to it in 2016, Canada’s news environment more generally was suffering. In the years after *The Globe and Mail* and *The National Post* put up their paywalls it became increasingly clear that there were no clear-cut solutions for Canada’s news problems. Even after the national newspapers began charging for their online content, staff numbers continued to be significantly reduced (Public Policy Forum, 2017). Fewer Canadians were paying for newspapers, television audiences were aging and becoming less interesting to advertisers, and less than 10 per cent of Canadians were paying for online news (PPF, 2017; Reuters, 2017). Some of the blame continued to be placed on the CBC. Commentary published in *The National Post* complained that “Canada’s subsidized broadcaster” was an impediment to the development a news service that can be charged for because it provides news “that appears to be free”, which distorts the market (Doughart, 2016, p. FP9).

Adding fuel to the fire, the CBC had its Parliamentary appropriation increased in 2016, when the government announced that it would “invest \$675 million into the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation/Radio-Canada to disseminate and support world-class Canadian content and to provide Canadians with better access to programs and services in the digital era” (Morneau, 2016, p. 185). This was part of a plan to invest \$1.9 billion in the Canadian cultural sector over five years (Morneau, 2016, p. 184).

As well as providing the Canadian cultural sector with \$1.9 billion, the Department of Canadian Heritage produced a report that outlined a strategy for growing and supporting Canada’s

creative economy (Canadian Heritage, 2017, pp. 5-6). The policy followed “the largest and most transparent consultation process ever undertaken by the Department of Canadian Heritage” (Canadian Heritage, 2017, p. 6). The resulting policy document, *Creative Canada*, presented “a new vision and approach to creative industries and to growing the creative economy by the Government of Canada” (Canadian Heritage, 2017, p. 5). It was built on three pillars: investing in creators and entrepreneurs; promoting the discovery of Canadian content nationally and internationally; and strengthening Canadian “public broadcasting” and supporting local news (Canadian Heritage, 2017, p. 6).

During the consultations, contributors expressed that the CBC’s mandate should be clarified in a way that directed the CBC to complement and not compete with private broadcasters (Ipsos, 2017, p. 31). The report stated that there was a general agreement “that the CBC/Radio-Canada should not be competing with private sector broadcasters, specifically for content and advertising revenues” (Ipsos, 2017, p. 31). As Canadian Heritage conducted its consultations, the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, chaired by the Honourable Hedy Fry, was conducting hearings into the state of local and regional news in Canada (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017). The report found that print advertising was migrating online, which hit daily newspapers particularly hard, but it also affected community newspapers and magazines (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017, p. 11). The result has been newspaper closures, layoffs and cutbacks on the number of days newspapers publish each week (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017, pp. 14-16). The Committee believed that the CBC should be responsible for ensuring “access to a diversity of voices through a range of media, including access to local and regional information” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017, p. 48). As such, it

recommended that the CBC prioritize local news (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017, p. 49).

The CBC, for its part, told that Committee it was planning on increasing “its local presence across the country” but that it was planning on doing so “primarily through digital services” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017, pp. 46-47). In the 1990s the CBC made drastic cuts to its local news services, but the development of digital technologies renewed the CBC’s interest in local news because it could operate digital services locally for much less than it cost to operate local television stations. This is evident in the CBC’s strategy *Everyone, every way*, which, in 2011 committed the CBC to introducing “new local websites and mobile services” (CBC, 2011a, p. 4). In 2014, in the CBC’s strategy *A space for us all*, the emphasis on local content via digital distribution methods was even more pronounced, with the CBC highlighting that it would “be even more local, but at a reduced cost” (CBC, 2014b, p. 2). This commitment to local was reaffirmed in an updated version of *A space for us all*, which said that the CBC was “putting information back into communities, using digital to make it affordable and more effective” (CBC, 2016a, p. 3). The CBC saw the Internet as a tool to help it address issues of spatialization both in terms of overcoming spatial constraints brought on by Canada’s unique geography, as well as in terms of overcoming the constraints of commercial journalism, which led to high levels of corporate concentration and a reduction of local and regional news in the country.

The focus on increasing local news, primarily through digital technology was met with some pushback from the witnesses the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage heard from, but the biggest criticism the Committee heard about the CBC was regarding “its competitive relationship with other media companies” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017, p.

47). While the Committee focused on local news there was talk about the CBC's news services and the impact it was having on newspapers generally, including on the national newspapers.

Organizations that spoke about the impact of the CBC on newspapers at the hearing included "The Toronto Star, iPolitics, Postmedia and the Canadian Newspaper Association" (Leblanc, 2016, p. A3). The publisher of *The Globe and Mail*, Phillip Crawley, also spoke at the hearings. He told the Committee that:

You won't find Woodbridge asking for government handouts or subsidies, but we do like to play on a level playing field. It's not level if taxpayer dollars directed to the public broadcaster make the competition for digital ad dollars more difficult. The CBC is the *Globe's* largest competitor in the digital ad space amongst Canadian-based media. My colleagues and I in the industry do not support the notion that handing out more money to the CBC helps local or national newspapers. (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2016)

He was also critical of the CBC's new opinion vertical. The vertical, which was to be "a space devoted exclusively to commentary and analysis of the day's news", had been announced in the fall of 2016 (Berry, 2016, p. WP3). In response, Crawley told the Standing Committee that:

Reporting on news is not enough, they want to have columnists, which again runs into territory that traditionally has been what newspapers do. We have something like 16 columnists on *The Globe and Mail* as full-time columnists, quite apart from freelance. We think people want diversity of opinion, they want to see different opinions, and that's what we feel is part of our forum. CBC now feels it's part of its remit too. I just wonder, like you, where that's heading. (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2016)

David Berry, The *National Post*'s features editor, was also critical of CBC News for getting into online commentary, arguing that “[i]t may once have been a relevant defence that it could give a platform to voices we might not otherwise hear. But it’s hard to credibly make that case when there are not only social media platforms and blogs but also functioning organizations” (Berry, 2016, p. WP3). Berry (2016) wrote that, “[a]s with almost anything the CBC tries, this shift has already drawn criticism. The most consistent has come from media circles, a variation on a common theme against most of CBC's digital properties - that they have an unfair advantage over their competitors” (p. WP3). Another article in The *National Post* called the CBC out for being “predatory” as the opinion section of its website, among other content that is similar to that provided by private media organizations “has the predictable effect of kneecapping CBC’s non-subsidized competitors” (Hopper, 2016, p. A11).

Coverage of the hearings more generally in The *Globe and Mail* stated that the Corporation was “increasingly described as a great disruptor of the media landscape, with its recent budget increase of \$675-million over five years coming as losses are growing and newsrooms are closing in the private sector” (Leblanc, 2016, p. A3). A *National Post* article on the same topic noted that “[t]he publisher of the *Globe and Mail* and a pugnacious media upstart took turns ripping into the CBC in testimony Tuesday to the Commons Heritage committee” (“*Globe* publisher, Rebel Media rip CBC over digital ads”, 2016).

The CBC was aware of the criticisms against it. And so, in its submission to the Creative Canada consultations, it brought forth the idea of an advertising-free CBC. The submission noted that “[f]or our Canadian audience, in an age of information overload, where content and marketing can become intertwined, we also see great value in the opportunity to create an advertising-free environment for our journalism and to strengthen the public trust in our independence and

impartiality” (CBC, 2016b, pp. 29-30). In order for an advertising-free CBC to be possible, the CBC asked for \$318 million to replace its advertising funding (CBC, 2016b, p. 31). Per person, the total amount the CBC was asking for was an increase of \$12, from \$34 to \$46 (CBC, 2016b, p. 32). An article in *The Globe and Mail* noted that “CBC/RadioCanada insisted it was only responding to Heritage Minister Mélanie Joly, who said last spring that “everything was on the table” in a massive review of the country’s \$48-billion broadcasting, media and cultural industries” (Haupt & Krashinsky, 2016, p. B1).

A third report was being compiled around the same time as Creative Canada and the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage reports. It was not executed by the government, but it was sponsored by Canadian Heritage. The report, put together by the Public Policy Forum (PPF), was designed to assess “the situation and make recommendations on what, if anything, should be done” (PPF, 2017, p. 6). It’s “object was not to defend any more of news delivery, but to evaluate the risk to democracy” (PPF, 2017, p. 6). The PPF, like Canadian Heritage and the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, heard “strong language from private competitors, large and small, that CBC is unfairly privileged because it uses public money to build a digital operation that then competes with them for revenue” (PPF, 2017, p. 75). The final report, however, noted that “[t]his may reflect the CBC’s digital success” because even though its ratings trailed in television news, the CBC had the largest news site in Canada “by far with more than 15 million unique visitors a month” (PPF, 2017, p. 75).

Taking everything into account, the PPF and the 2017 Standing Committee reports both acknowledged the importance of journalism for democracy and had found that something needed to be done to support Canada’s news organizations, including the CBC, to ensure that Canadians would continue to have access to the news and information they needed moving forward. The PPF,

for example, called for the ‘inform’ part of the CBC’s mandate to be bolstered to put more “emphasis on the news and information aspects of CBC operations to address the serious decline in original civic-function news” (PPF, 2017, p. 92). This would instruct the CBC to pay “particular attention to civic-function news, which may not attract the biggest audiences but must be a public broadcaster’s *raison d’être* in a digital age” (PPF, 2017, p. 92). The PPF (2017) also recommended that the CBC’s content be published online under a Creative Commons licence, which would allow the CBC’s news content to be republished by other news organizations (p. 94). The PPF (2017) argued that this would “increase the impact of” the CBC’s journalism (p. 93). Both the PPF and the 2017 Standing Committee recommended that the CBC stop selling digital advertising (PPF, 2017, p. 93; Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017, p. 49). The PPF (2017) believed that this would free the CBC from a “clickbait mentality that devalues serious journalism” (p. 93). After the report was published, Ed Greenspon of the PPF called on the CBC “to be part of the solution” in an op-ed published in *The Globe and Mail* and emphasized that the recommendation that the CBC get out of digital advertising was not made with the belief in mind that the advertising revenue that was going to the CBC would then move to newspapers (Greenspon, 2017, p. B4).

The PPF and the Standing Committee report both also made several recommendations designed to help Canada’s media system that were not CBC-related. A common recommendation was that the government enhance the Income Tax Act so that Canadian advertisers would be incentivized to buy online advertisements on Canadian sites, thereby helping to increase the revenues of Canadian organizations (PPF, 2017, p. 83; Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017, p. 34). The 2017 Standing Committee’s report also recommended that there be “start-up funding for new digital media companies” to help facilitate more voices in the Canadian news sphere (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017, p. 69). The PPF (2017) called for the

government to discard obstacles that were in place for philanthropic funding for news organizations, which would require the government to amend “charity laws and regulations to allow non-profit news organizations producing civic-function journalism to qualify as recipients for support from philanthropic foundations and, in some specific cases, become charities themselves” (p. 86).

Subsidies Versus Reigning in the CBC

The PPF’s report was published in January 2017, followed by the Standing Committee’s report in June 2017 and the Creative Canada policy in September 2017. As these reports were coming out a serious discussion emerged about the provision of subsidies by the government for Canadian news organizations. Several Canadian newspaper columnists reacted with outrage, claiming that the more obvious solution to the problems that newspapers were facing would be to “reign in” or “fix” the CBC. Discussion around subsidizing Canadian journalism, and around the CBC’s additional funding from the government that had been announced in 2016, as well as the Corporation’s digital strategy were all fodder for a number of columns and commentary published in both *The Globe and Mail* and *The National Post*, calling for the government to stop subsidizing the Corporation that they now saw as a serious competitor of theirs.

A lot of the resentment expressed on the pages of both *The Globe and Mail* and *The National Post* stemmed from the government increasing the CBC’s Parliamentary appropriation in 2016 in support of the CBC’s digital strategy. One *Globe and Mail* columnist argued that by doing so, the government endorsed “the Canadian Broadcasting Corp.’s aggressive and expensive “digital shift,” which has put the CBC into direct competition with the country’s besieged newspapers for online readers and advertising” (McKenna, 2017). The same columnist, in 2019, complained that, while the additional funding from the government allowed the CBC the

opportunity to make choices, it decided that it was going to use that funding to prioritize news including by “investing heavily in online news, where its free content competes directly with that of newspapers, including *The Globe*, which increasingly relies on subscriptions to survive” (McKenna, 2019, p. B4). In *The National Post*, columnist Christie Blatchford was likewise unimpressed with the direction the CBC was taking with the additional funding it received because “Canadian newspapers directly compete against the CBC website”, which, she claimed, is “richly subsidized by the taxpayers” (Blatchford, 2018, p. A4). In a similar vein, another *Globe and Mail* columnist, Konrad Yakabuski (2018), expressed frustration at the fact that it seemed the CBC’s intention was to continue to provide the same news services that “made the CBC increasingly indistinct from private-sector offerings but increasingly valuable to producers of dramatic content, who have been the main beneficiaries of the Trudeau government’s move to increase the public broadcaster’s budget by \$150-million annually” (p. A11).

Several columnists from both newspapers were not supportive of the idea of subsidies for newspapers and would rather have seen the CBC’s funding cut off than to see the paper they wrote for receive government funding (Selley, 2017, p. A10; Blatchford, 2018, p. A4; Hopper; 2018). Columnists such as Andrew Coyne (2017) called for the CBC’s public funding to be reassessed and changed to a subscription fee. Nevertheless, the government announced in Budget 2018 that there would be “\$50 million over five years to support local journalism in under-served communities, helping to ensure that Canadians continue to have access to informed and reliable civic journalism” (Department of Finance, 2018, p. 40). Budget 2018 also indicated that the government would explore other ways of providing journalism with financial support in a way that was “arms-length and independent of the Government” and was “focused on the creation of original news content” (Department of Finance, 2018, p. 40). Following this, in the government’s

Fall Economic Statement, it announced three more initiatives for supporting journalism including tax credits for subscribers (Department of Finance, 2018, pp. 40-41). The initiatives the government announced amounted to \$595 million over five years, in addition to the \$50 million that had already been announced to support local news (Department of Finance, 2018, pp. 40-41).

In a column published on *The National Post Online*, Tristan Hopper claimed that the plan amounted to the government “throwing money at the problem” (Hopper, 2018). The easier solution, according to Hopper (2018), would be to “[s]top subsidizing a competitor that is viciously undercutting independent print media”. The column referred to the CBC as “the country’s largest newspaper”, as it posts content online that more than compliments its radio and television services and steps into the territory normally occupied by newspapers, providing “opinion columns, reprinted wire content and stories specifically reported for print” (Hopper, 2018). Hopper (2018) claimed that the CBC’s website was different from newspapers though because it “is free and it has bottomless resources”. He also called attention to the fact that “[d]espite having most of their bills paid by the public treasury, CBC.ca still sells online ads as a fun extra revenue stream - rather than as the existential bid for survival that it is for their competitors” (Hopper, 2018). However, even though the CBC did not get out of advertising entirely, its advertising revenue had decreased significantly from \$317,230,000 in 2008 before being adjusted for inflation, to \$249,915,000 in 2016, when it received the increase to its government funding (CBC, 2009, p. 46; CBC, 2017, p. 65). Furthermore, despite the increase to its government funding, the CBC was operating by 2019 with less funding than it had in 1995. When adjusted for inflation¹⁵, the CBC operated with \$1,665,154.99 in 1995 compared to 1,222,083 in 2018 (CBC, 1996, p. 64; CBC, 2019c, p. 121).

The Broadcasting and Telecommunications Legislative Review

¹⁵ Inflation was calculated using the Bank of Canada’s inflation calculator, available at <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/rates/related/inflation-calculator/>

The struggle between the CBC and newspapers continued to play out after the newspapers received subsidies and as the CBC's mandate was being reviewed by the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Legislative Review (BTLR) Panel. The Review was announced in 2018 by Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED). A panel was put together to conduct the review, which was supposed to "look to examine issues such as telecommunications and content creation in the digital age, net neutrality, cultural diversity, and how to strengthen the future of Canadian media and content creation" (ISED, 2018, p. 1). The terms of reference of the review placed the CBC from the start, in a position of being "a leading partner among Canada's cultural and news organizations" (ISED, 2018, p. 12). The questions the review sought to answer in relation to the CBC included, among others: how could the CBC's mandate be updated, how could the CBC's independence be strengthened and how could the CBC play a leadership role among other organizations involved in culture and news? (ISED, 2018, pp. 12-13). A major part of the significance of the BTLR for the CBC is that it can frame the role of the CBC moving forward as either a comprehensive media organization or as a market-failure media organization, confined to only providing services that the market does not.

The CBC's submission to the review welcomed "the government's initiative to modernize Canadian cultural policy" (CBC, 2019a, p. 4). The CBC acknowledged that there were many changes happening in the media environment, and that some of those changes have meant that the business models of private media have been affected, which had undermined the services Canadians receive because "[a]s Canadian companies adapt they have consolidated and cut services" (CBC, 2019a, p. 3). It is because of this that the CBC sees itself playing a role that is "more important than ever" (CBC, 2019a, p. 3). The CBC clarified that it was not competing with private media organizations, rather it "exists to serve Canadians" (CBC, 2019a, p. 3). Nevertheless,

The *Globe and Mail*'s submission to the review argued that the CBC should “focus its news efforts on filling the news gaps in underserved communities in Canada” (Globe and Mail, 2019, p. 6). In line with this, the paper recommended the Corporation’s mandate “include an obligation for CBC news services to be provided in a manner that strengthens and promotes a diversity of voices in the Canadian news ecosystem to ensure appropriate consideration is given to the potential impact of its activities on private Canadian news producers” (Globe and Mail, 2019, p. 6). The *National Post* did not make a submission to the BTLR Panel, but it did publish an article that discussed the CBC’s submission to the panel, which somewhat subtly questioned the way the CBC defended being online even as it was being criticized by “private media players who argue the public broadcaster shouldn’t be allowed to compete against them for advertising dollars given its federal funding advantage” (Jackson, 2018, p. FP2).

Conclusion

Changes in Canada’s media ecology, brought on by technological developments including the Internet, have brought the CBC’s role in the country into question. The CBC itself sees its online services as an invaluable way to extend its services and fulfill more of its mandate at a reduced cost while the national press in the country see its online services as competing unfairly with their own websites. The government, for its part, has suggested that the CBC should be providing Canadians with online services, but has not gone so far as to update its mandate to incorporate explicit instructions for it to provide such services. On top of this, the CRTC made the decision not to regulate new media services, which exempted the CBC’s website from regulations like those imposed on its radio and television services. This chapter has shown that, largely as a result of the failure of Canadian media policy and regulation to keep up with technological changes, the CBC was left alone to make decisions about establishing and developing its online

services, and to figure out how to fund them. One of the consequences of this has been that there is no real understanding or agreement about where the CBC fits in relation to the wider media ecology, which extends much further than it did in 1991, when the Broadcasting Act was passed. This has left the CBC vulnerable to criticisms that suggest it should be focused on providing services that the private sector (newspapers included) do not already provide, despite the fact that the Broadcasting Act made the CBC the centerpiece of the Canadian broadcasting system. Another consequence of this has been that the CBC has been free to make decisions about advertising online – how much to sell and on what content to sell it – without a method for public consultation or review. Despite this, or perhaps because of this, the topic of advertising has been heavily considered in the national press. This is because the emergence of new technologies has also had a significant negative impact on the country’s national newspapers, which in turn has shone a light on the CBC’s decision to sell advertising on its website, and to keep selling advertising even after it received an increase to its government funding in 2016. Unlike the BBC, the CBC has always generated part of its funding from advertising. This practice in relation to the CBC’s website has been contentious particularly as newspapers found themselves struggling to monetize their own online content.

Chapter Five: ABC News Online

In the first decade and a half of the ABC being online, much like the CBC, it was largely left to itself to make decisions about its online presence. This meant that the ABC was also left to figure out how to fund the new service because there was no new money provided for its development.

Similarly, to the previous chapters on the BBC and the CBC, this chapter explores the development of the ABC's online news services through an analysis of articles published in *The Australian*, Australia's only national newspaper, and through documents including ABC annual reports, senate inquiries and other government reports. This chapter demonstrates that a combination of the early success of ABC's online news service, the fact that it was not provided with new funding for the new service, and the fact that the new service was not explicitly accorded status as a core ABC service in the ABC Act, left the ABC's services vulnerable to commercialism. Because of this, in the early years of ABC Online, there was considerable concern over the potential commodification of the ABC's content. Later, concerns about commercialism at the ABC would manifest as concern about the ABC using its popular online service to compete with private news organizations. With these things in mind, this chapter focuses on the influence of external factors including government funding and national press coverage on the development of the ABC's online news service through discussions of, for example, the official inquiries into the service, and the coverage of them in *The Australian*.

The ABC Goes Online

While the CBC's online services started off as a partnership with a scientist, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's website, ABC Online, had its roots in a trial program launched by Microsoft in partnership with Telstra, an Australian telecommunications company that was, at the

time, government-owned (Burns, 2000; Martin, 1999; Ashcroft, 1995). The trial program was part of Microsoft and Telstra's *On Australia* venture, which aimed to get people online through Microsoft Network (MSN) (Burns, 2000, p. 96; Ashcroft, 1995). The ABC, for its part, was asked "for non-exclusive usage of Radio National content" on a six-month trial basis (Burns, 2000, p. 95). In February 1995, the ABC Board approved Radio National's participation in *On Australia*, but only for a trial period because there were concerns about the ABC's "involvement in commercial negotiations" (Burns, 2000, p. 96). The ABC's partnership in the project was abandoned after Microsoft and Telstra went their separate ways in 1996 (Martin, 1999, p. 106).

At the same time as the ABC Board approved Radio National's involvement with *On Australia*, it also approved a proposal for the establishment of "a dedicated ABC online service" (Burns, 2000, p. 96). The service, called ABC Online, was launched in August 1995 (Burns, 2000, p. 91). Brian Johns, the Managing Director of the ABC at the time, had announced its launch "during a speech to the Melbourne Press Club on 14 August 1995", the same day the service officially went online (Inglis, 2006, p. 349). In the first four months of operation, the "site was visited more than a million times" (Inglis, 2006, p. 350). ABC Online was created "under the direction of ABC Multimedia which was established in July of the same year to co-ordinate the ABC's involvement in multimedia activities" (Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee, 2000, p. 4). This included "the main 'portal' website, ABC Online, and its many subsidiary websites, along with projects in CD-ROM, datacasting, broadband and other 'convergent' media" (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 4).

Online became more and more central to the ABC's activities. This is clear in the new structure the ABC took on in 1996. The new structure was outlined in a paper written by Johns,

titled *One ABC: Re-shaping the Corporation* (Inglis, 2006, p. 390). The paper articulated a strategic plan to move the Corporation forward into a multi-media world (Inglis, 2006, p. 390). The idea at the centre of the *One ABC* plan was a restructure that would see the ABC's various services coordinated into, literally, one ABC. For News and Current Affairs, this meant that radio and television newsrooms were physically brought together (ABC, 1997, p. 17). The *One ABC* structure more generally was designed to "bring creative renewal, not only removing the wall between the two established media but co-ordinating television, radio and online services, using digital technology which would revolutionize both production and programs - or rather, *content*, Johns' preferred word now" (Inglis, 2006, p. 390). The ABC Board endorsed the plan in August 1996, allowing the ABC to move forward with its implementation (Inglis, 2006, p. 390). By December 1996, the ABC Board had announced it was "replacing media-based divisions with National Networks, Regional Services, News and Current Affairs, Program Production and three support portfolios" (ABC, 1997, p. 3). This plan was cost-effective and would allow the ABC to cut sixty executive positions (Inglis, 2006, p. 391).

While the ABC was creating and developing ABC Online, an ABC radio news editor along with "staff who had been recruited for BNA" (Broadcast News Australia) developed and implemented an internal wire service that would give ABC staff who were not in news and current affairs "access to news and current affairs information" (Burns, 2000, p. 100). Later, the ABC created a project that saw news produced for ABC Online in the lead up to the 1996 Federal election (Burns, 2000, p. 100). The project was successful, which led the ABC to establish a news text service for ABC Online called Newslink (Burns, 2000, p. 100).

The ABC continued to develop its online news services and in March of 1998, it officially launched a new, 24-hour online news service, which would deliver "an integrated Internet news

service linking the city and the country” (ABC, 1998, p. 19). It was to contribute to the ABC News and Current Affairs goal of being “Australia’s most authoritative, comprehensive and accessible provider of news and current affairs” (ABC, 1999, p. 6). The new service was fast, continually updated and it incorporated “international, national, State and local news” (ABC, 1998, p. 19). The site, according to the ABC, “demonstrates the capacity and strength of the ABC in the digital age, utilizing existing skills and facilities to provide a rich, interactive site combining text, audio, pictures and graphics” (ABC, 1998, p. 19). News was now being formatted specifically for online, with the website incorporating not only text, but also audio and visual elements (ABC, 1998, p. 19; Amjadali, 1998). The introduction of the new site saw online news increase in importance at the ABC. Colin Griffith, network manager for ABC Multimedia, told *The Australian* that the ABC “used to delay the online news service by half an hour whereas now it is on an equal footing with the radio and television news” (Amjadali, 1998). At this point, News Online was being “run primarily out of Queensland by a team of 10 online journalists who cover 24 hours a day, seven days a week” (Amjadali, 1998).

News Online was popular right away. By September 1998, it was recording “more than one million accesses in a week” (ABC, 1999, p. 2). It was also continually evolving and so in the first couple of years of operating, News Online’s operations began to offer “video from ABC Television News and audio from Radio Current Affairs as well as specialist pages for business, international affairs and sport” (ABC, 1999, p. 30). The ABC further expanded the service so that it included “sites for each current affairs program, access to international, national, State/Territory and local news and special sites” as well as an email news service that people could subscribe to (ABC, 1999, p. 64). In 2001 the ABC moved on to developed online forums, which “proved to be a valuable and growing method of communication between the ABC and its audiences” (ABC,

2001, p. 21). The way it worked was individual programs would be “regularly followed by an online forum in which program makers are able to talk directly with their audiences and introduce other experts and commentators into an expanded discussion of the topic dealt with in the program itself” (ABC, 2001, p. 21). Furthermore, in 2001, the ABC introduced a broadband news service (ABC, 2001, p. 3). The service offered “people with a high-speed cable modem the ability to watch studio editions of ABC news on their computers at any time of the day or night” (Fagan, Lyall, Lehmann & Dore, 2001a, p. 13). It allowed audiences “to download videos and listen to sound”, and “facilitates faster connection” (Bryden-Brown, 2001a, p. M09). The ABC was creating bulletins, “sourced from either the ABC newsroom or wire services” that would be posted to “the ABC’s website four times a day -- 8am, 11am, 4pm and 8pm -- five days a week” (Bryden-Brown, 2001a, p. M09). The news bulletins were designed to “reflect the synergies between television news and online” (ABC, 2001, p. 79). By 2004, the ABC was launching broadband special editions of popular news programs that were “produced to complement some of the major investigative reports aired in the Four Corners television series” (ABC, 2005, p. 6). They were designed to provide additional material such as extra “video footage, extended interviews, detailed chronologies, documentary evidence, interactive maps and program transcripts” (ABC, 2005, p. 6).

Funding ABC News Online

Despite the early success of ABC Online, and particularly ABC News Online, the Australian government was not interested in funding it, nor was it interested in increasing the ABC’s budget to deal with the technological transformation broadcasting was more broadly undergoing at the time. While the ABC was developing its online services, instead of seeing its budget increase, its budget was reduced as the CBC’s had been. In 1997-98, the ABC “faced a loss

of \$55 million in government funding, the largest cut in ABC history” (ABC, 1998, p. 55). In the financial year 2000-01, which was the start of a new funding triennium, it was announced that the ABC’s funding would be “effectively maintained in real terms” (ABC, 2000, p. 14). The government did provide some funding for the ABC’s second phase of its conversion to digital broadcasting, but it only “committed to find 50 percent” of it (ABC, 2000, p. 14). This, coupled with the fact that the ABC’s budget had seen significant cuts in the 1990s, made it difficult for the ABC to maintain its current services while it was adding new ones. The ABC had asked “for additional funding of \$194 million over three years to support a range of new initiatives”, which included “providing additional online material and establishing digital services”, but did not receive it and was now finding itself in the position of having to make difficult decisions about what to keep and what to cut (ABC, 2000, p. 20).

ABC Online, as such, was not well funded in its early years. The ABC Board had approved only \$750,000 for its development (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 5). The ABC had recently tried and failed to develop other services outside of its core radio and television services, and so it “was incapable of (and presumably would be very wary of) investing a large sum in multimedia” (Burns, 2000, p. 97). Because of this, “the Multimedia Unit had to rely on pre-existing content” (Burns, 2000, p. 97). It also had to figure out “how to provide this content to a new medium without taking funds from programming- a dilemma which had been raised in many of the commercial ventures into new technology” (Burns, 2000, p. 97). The websites, limited by budget constraints, often consisted only of text, graphics and “a static reproduction of existing broadcast material” (Martin, 1999, p. 107). The content they were able to put online included things such as transcripts, promotional material and schedules (Martin, 1999, p. 107).

The ABC pushed forward, and in 2000, it established a New Media division “with the goal of accelerating ABC’s growth online and developing new audiences via new and emerging platforms” (ABC, 2002, p. 61). In 2002, “ABC New Media became ABC New Media and Digital Services to reflect the Division’s role in driving digital strategy for the Corporation” (ABC, 2003, p. 2). The ABC’s commitment to its online services was evident in the fact that, despite barriers, ABC Online would grow to encompass fifteen content gateways, including ABC News Online, by the mid-2000s (ABC, 2003, p. 66).

The Case for Privatising ABC Online

Throughout the early years of ABC Online’s development, funding continued to be an issue and a central topic of debate. In July 1996, the federal government appointed Bob Mansfield to review the ABC’s roles and its functions (Brown, 2001, p. 109). The report was finished by January 1997 (Brown, 2001, p. 109). A significant topic of the report was the ABC’s funding. Recognizing that the ABC was not particularly well funded, Mansfield suggested four ways the ABC should accommodate its budget constraints: “more outsourcing, less property, no ‘non-core’ activities, and better management” (Inglis, 2006, p. 396). Significantly, Mansfield saw the ABC’s core activities as Australian, free-to-air broadcasting (Inglis, 2006, p. 396). This excluded international broadcasting, for example (Inglis, 2006, pp. 396-397). This also excluded ABC Online. The recommendations made in Mansfield’s report were not adopted, but “by according ABC Multimedia and ABC Online ‘non-core’ status, he set the scene for the government’s support of their part-privatisation” (Martin, 1999, p. 110).

The idea to partially privatize ABC Online came up in 1999 when an ABC board member, Michael Kroger, suggested it (McGregor, 1999a, p. 1). The *Australian* reported that Kroger had told an ABC Board meeting that “the sale of 49 per cent of ABC Online could raise up to \$250

million, with the corporation retaining majority control” (McGregor, 1999a, p. 1). The Federal government was receptive to the idea of the ABC making money off of ABC Online, stating that it “welcomed any ABC efforts to make money from its Internet sites” (McGregor, 1999b, p. 5). The proposal was not otherwise well received. The Opposition condemned it, concerned about the implications of privatizing even part of the public broadcaster (McGregor, 1999b, p. 5). The *Australian* published several columns and editorials that were highly critical of the prospect, calling it “a deeply flawed concept” (Manktelow, 1999, p. 5) and claiming that the value that Kroger had placed on 49 per cent of ABC Online had “nothing to do with reality” (Fist, 1999a, p. 60). The ABC itself did not go for the idea. By April 1999, it had been reported that the ABC had rejected the plan to privatize part of ABC Online (McGregor, 1999c, p. 2). It was reported that the Board was worried that doing so would damage the public’s confidence in ABC News (McGregor, 1999c, p. 2).

Licensing ABC Online Content

Conversation around the commercialization of ABC Online content came to dominate discussions of the service as the millennium was coming to a close. This was because in 1999, the ABC began to licence its online, mostly news, content to commercial companies (Johns, 2000, p. 13). The licensing deals were non-exclusive, which made it possible for the ABC to continue to develop its own website “while also licensing its content to other Internet service providers and portals” (Johns, 2000, p. 13). The income that this generated went towards program production (Johns, 2000, p. 13). The licences were all designed to preserve “the integrity and independence of the ABC” and to protect the ABC’s editorial policies (Johns, 2000, p. 13). The decision to licence ABC Online content was made not only to generate income, but also to ensure that ABC content “would be as widely available as possible to as many Internet users as possible” (Johns,

2000, p. 13). Johns wrote that “the ABC considers it a great opportunity to make its online content available through a range of new outlets, while being paid a market-based licence fee. This additional income will enable the ABC to build and expand its content” (Johns, 2000, p. 13). This would help ensure that, as media converged, it had “an Australian, not an American, accent” (Johns, 2000, p. 13). As of early 2000 there were 10 companies that were licensing ABC Online content and another 12 were either in talks or trials (Johns, 2000, p. 13).

One of those companies was Telstra Corporation. By this time, Telstra had been privatised through the *Telstra (Dilution of Public Ownership) Act 1996*, which had received Royal Assent in December 1996 (O’Leary, 2003). The ABC began negotiating with the company in August 1999 for “a five-year deal to supply online content and co-operate in marketing and datacasting development” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 10). Of all the licensing agreements that the ABC signed or had hoped to sign at this time, it was this proposed agreement with Telstra that stirred up the most discussion about the ABC’s online content, whether or not it should be licensed to commercial providers, and if so, on what terms. Stephen Smith, the Federal Opposition spokesman on Communications, wrote an op-ed that was published in *The Australian* that argued that the content deal with Telstra stemmed “from the Government’s cuts to the ABC budget in recent years and its refusal to adequately resource the ABC for the digital future” (Smith, 2000, p. 8). Smith wrote that the proposed deal with Telstra, which had yet to be approved by the ABC Board at the time, “is said to be all about the entry of the ABC into the new digital era, but it is all about a lack of adequate resources” (Smith, 2000, p. 8). He pointed out that it was significant that “the amount of the Telstra deal roughly reflects the Government’s ABC budget cuts” (Smith, 2000, p. 8). Smith’s issue with the deal was not that the ABC was selling news and information but with

the possibility of the ABC's independence being compromised and affecting its news output (Smith, 2000, p. 8).

In an editorial published in *The Australian* the day after Smith's op-ed, the newspaper advocated for the Australian public's right to have a say in the deal ("Public owed say", 2000, p. 12). The editorial claimed that "ABC listeners and viewers are confused and concerned by where the public broadcaster is heading", and that those "concerns deserve serious consideration" ("Public owed say", 2000, p. 12). The real issue, according to *The Australian* "is not funding, it is whether Australians still value public broadcasting" ("Public owed say", 2000, p. 12). On February 9, 2000, the day after the editorial was published, *The Australian* reported that the ABC/Telstra deal would potentially become the subject of a parliamentary inquiry later that year (Gilchrist, 2000a, p. 5). It was soon decided that the inquiry would indeed take place despite the fact that just before its announcement the Australian Democrats, who were in power at the time, "declined to fully support Labor's call for a broad inquiry" (Gilchrist, 2000b, p. 3). The Labor Party, pushed for the inquiry though, and in the end, it was given the go-ahead (Gilchrist, 2000c, p. 5). While the ABC/Telstra deal had been in the works since August 1999, the discussion around and the decision to hold a Parliamentary inquiry into the deal was not sparked until a newspaper article in *The Weekend Australian*¹⁶ in early February 2000 reported on the deal (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 10; Gilchrist, 2000d, p. 1).

The Senate Inquiry

The inquiry into ABC Online was to be held by the Senate's Environment, Communications Information Technology and the Arts (ECITA) References Committee. The Committee was aware that there were "concerns about secrecy and haste throughout the ABC"

¹⁶ The *Weekend Australian*, like *The Australian*, was owned at this time by News Limited.

regarding the deal (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 13). Up until the Senate Committee began to look into the proposed deal between ABC and Telstra, the actual contents of the deal were not public. ABC management had not informed even the ABC board of the discussions with Telstra “until the basic architecture of the proposed agreement” was already in place in an attempt “to protect the commercial sensitivity of the discussions” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 13). The secrecy of the ABC’s agreements for its online content was one of the motivating concerns that led to the creation of the Senate Inquiry (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 3). Other concerns to be addressed by the committee that had been sparked by the ABC-Telstra negotiations, included concerns “both within and outside the ABC, that the sale of online content would have implications for the preservation of the ABC’s fundamental values of independence and integrity”, as well as concerns about its editorial independence and advertising policy (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 3). In other words, there was concern about the possibility of the ABC’s content being commodified as a result of the licensing agreements.

The Senate Committee’s interim report revealed a great deal about the ABC’s licensing of its online content. At the time, the Corporation had “agreements with fifteen Internet portals for the supply of content” in addition to being “in ongoing discussions with Reuters, Fairfax, and News Corporation” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 8). Most of the arrangements the ABC had already made were for ABC Online news feeds, which were “supplied to third party websites on a non-exclusive basis, on the condition that ABC editorial independence and integrity are respected and that stories are not changed or altered in any way” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 8). The presentation of the content on the third-party websites needed to be approved by the ABC before being posted (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 8).

Advertising that was not for ABC products and services was not allowed on pages with ABC news content, although the third parties were allowed to advertise on their “home pages and on news index pages containing headlines or brief summaries” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 8).

The deal that the ABC was working on with Telstra specifically, was to be “a five-year deal to supply online content and co-operate in marketing and datacasting development” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 10). The arrangement was that Telstra would pay “a basic fee of \$13.5 million per year for 5 years, with an additional fee of at least \$2.5 million (or a percentage of e-commerce and advertising revenues received by Telstra on traffic which originates from a Telstra page containing ABC content, if greater)” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 10). The minimum fee was set at \$70 million (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 10). Of that money, the ABC was “to devote 25 per cent of the basic fee, and 45 per cent of the additional fees, to the production and repurposing of online content for Telstra” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, pp. 10-11). Like the other agreements for online content that the ABC had already signed, the deal with Telstra was to be non-exclusive (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 11). Also, similarly to other agreements, in the Telstra agreement, “ABC editorial policies and applicable ABC Board guidelines will apply to all content provided by the ABC to Telstra” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 14). The Telstra deal, unlike the others, however, included a provision that “insists that in all areas of the agreement, each party must treat the other on a ‘most favoured nation’ basis. That is, Telstra must not favour another party over the ABC and vice versa” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 11). The Telstra agreement also provided “for Telstra and the ABC to co-produce new content using

existing or future ABC online content on an *exclusive* basis” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 11).

Witnesses who participated in the inquiry had two main concerns (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 14). “The first was that the editorial guidelines could be quietly circumvented by subtle self-censorship in order to please a client” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 14). The second was “that the wide scope of the deal, resembling a strategic alliance, created a general atmosphere in which the ABC’s integrity would be more likely to be compromised” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 14).

The Interim Report

In the Senate ECITA References Committee’s interim report, the Australian Democrats expressed that the party had “no in-principle objection to the sale of ABC Online content to third party websites” as long as the agreements made required “the strict application of ABC editorial policies and guidelines” and as long as “advertising (other than for the ABC’s own products and services) is not placed around or otherwise associated with ABC material” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 30). The party expressed at the same time, however, “substantial reservations about the conclusion of the proposed agreement with Telstra in its current form” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 30). As such, the Australian Democrats made a number of recommendations for an alternative agreement that it believed the ABC Board should pursue. This included that the new arrangement should be “solely for the sale and repurposing of ABC online content, subject to the strict application of ABC editorial policies and guidelines and a contractual undertaking by Telstra that ABC content is not to be materially altered” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 1). Because the Australian Democrats were concerned about what the ABC/Telstra deal would mean for advertising around ABC content, they also

recommended “that all reference in the proposed agreement with Telstra to future advertising revenues be removed, and that the ABC Board policy decision prohibiting advertising on ABC online and around ABC content sold to third parties be maintained” at least for the time being, while the Committee was still putting together its final report (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 1). It was further recommended that “the ABC seek to improve its monitoring of third-party purchasers of ABC online content to ensure their fidelity to ABC editorial policies and guidelines” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 1). Technological solutions were to be explored when available (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 1).

Three members of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), argued that it was the ABC’s funding that was the “particularly pertinent issue in the present technological environment where the ABC requires significant resources to facilitate digitalisation and expansion into new areas of the changing market” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 50). They further stated that: “It is unconscionable for a government to impose digitalisation demands upon a public broadcaster without simultaneously providing certainty with respect to funding for the process” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 50). They believed that the ABC had been placed in its current position of needing to licence its content “by the Government’s refusal to decide on the ABC’s triennial funding submission, the ABC is undoubtedly under pressure to ensure its continued financial security” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 50). With regards to the Telstra deal specifically, the ALP senators suggested that if “the ABC approached the matter openly from the outset, the adverse public reaction that has resulted for the ABC could have been avoided” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 54). The ALP senators took it as evidence of the importance of the public having a say that the ABC amended the ABC/Telstra deal after public debate on it finally happened (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 54).

The interim report also contained a report by Government Senators J. Tierney and R. Lightfoot of the Liberal Party of Australia (LP). The LP senators rejected the findings laid out in the reports of the Senate Committee, on the basis of the findings having been “compiled from an inquiry that is an unprecedented encroachment on the independence of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation by the Australian Labor Party and the Australian Democrats” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 56). The Senators expressed the belief that it was the ABC management and board’s right and responsibility to make decisions about the ABC’s activities “in a way that preserves the ABC’s commercial and editorial interests” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 56). The Senators called the recommendations of the interim report “an unwelcome interference in the discretion of the ABC Board” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 56). They “support the ABC’s desire to become a strong player in the emerging online context, to seek new audiences and to adapt itself to a circumstance in which the lines between broadcasting, online and other media are becoming increasingly blurred” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 56). Furthermore, they stated that: “The ABC must be allowed to participate in the online environment without the fear of constant interference from politicians trying to manage the day-to-day activities of the Corporation” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 59).

How Does ABC Online Fit into the ABC?

Outside of interrogating the ABC-Telstra deal, there were two other important discussions about ABC Online that came out of the Senate Committee’s work, which are evident in the inquiry’s final report. The first considered whether or not the ABC’s Online services were a core part of their services, and the second, following from that, was whether or not the *ABC Act* should be amended to incorporate digital, particularly online technologies. This was an important

consideration for Australia, because inherent in the decision of whether or not to amend the *ABC Act* was the decision on whether or not to give the ABC the power to decide whether or not it would sell advertising online.

On the question of whether or not ABC Online was a core ABC service, the Committee heard from the ABC in its submission to the proceedings that it had received legal advice that maintained the ABC did have the power through the *ABC Act* “to establish and maintain its internet site” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2001, p. 5). The ABC expressed to the Committee the belief that its online operations were “at the heart and core of the activities of the ABC” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 6). The Committee endorsed the Corporation’s view “that ABC Online is a core element of their operations and will be crucial to maintaining a strong media presence in a convergent media environment” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 6).

While endorsing the ABC’s position on online being a core part of the ABC’s operation, the Committee ultimately recommended that “at this point in time, any extension to legislation to ensure that the ABC is able to effectively provide an independent, innovative and comprehensive service in the online delivery environment, is not warranted” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2001, p. 1). The reasoning given was because in the period between the interim and final reports, “the ABC has been the subject of comprehensive questioning at four rounds of estimates hearings and numerous Senate debates, relating to its delivery of online services” and that was enough for the time being (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2001, p. 1).

A minority report written by Labor senators disagreed, stating that amendments should be made to the ABC’s Charter. The report pointed out that in 2001, a *Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Bill* was put before the Senate (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2001, p. 5). The amendments included in the Bill “would have expanded the ABC Act to incorporate new

activities and services that have already become available” and would become available (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2001, p. 5). The Act, as it was, did not extend to those activities at that time (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2001, p. 5). The amendments were not passed (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2001, p. 6). They would have officially made online a core function of the ABC and addressed “public concerns that the future commercialisation or even privatisation of these ABC services is being contemplated and is possible under the existing legislation” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2001, p. 5). The amendments would have also “extended the ban on advertising on ABC broadcasts to the ABC’s online and datacasting services” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2001, p. 6). This was a missed opportunity because, as the Labor Senators saw it, it was “the only way to maintain the integrity, independence and freedom from commercialisation of the organisation as a whole” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2001, p. 4).

The Australian Democrats also took issue with the possibility of advertising being allowed on ABC Online content. In an appendix in the final report it was stated that they strongly disputed the assertion by the ABC that it was “a matter of Board discretion as to whether to allow advertising on ABC Online” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 24). The party believed that it was “simply a matter of historical accident, that the technologies and services which make up ABC Online were simply not foreseen when the ABC Act was first drafted” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 24). The party believed it was essential for the ABC to remain free of advertising not only on radio and television but also online, and did not believe that the ABC Board should have the power to decide to allow ABC Online to start generating advertising revenue (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 24). A section containing additional comments from Senator Vicki Bourne, an Australian Democrat, further stated that “the issue of amending the

ABC Act to prohibit advertising on ABC Online” had come up “during debate on the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Bill”, at which time the Australian Democrats took the “view that the ABC Act should be amended to fully reflect the Board’s current policy that this prohibition be extended” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2001, p. 9). An amendment of this nature “would preserve the ABC’s independence and integrity in an online environment” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2001, p. 9). The statement also indicated that the party intended to “table a Private Senator’s Bill to reflect the concerns raised in the Senate Committee in relation to the prohibition on advertising and sponsorship on ABC online services” (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2001, p. 9). The Bill would “amend section 31 of the ABC Act in accordance with the wishes of those who made submissions” to the Committee (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2001, p. 9).

Advertising and E-Commerce

After the inquiry published its final report, no changes were made to the ABC’s Charter. Senator Bourne did indeed submit a private member Bill, *ABC Amendment (Online and Multichannelling Services) Bill 2001*, but it did not pass (Parliament of Australia, 2001). So, the questions and fears remained around whether or not the ABC would start putting advertisements on its website, and if so, what would that do to its independence and integrity? Was the ABC to become increasingly commercial and, stemming from this, would its online content in be commodified? As the attempt to privatize part of the ABC had shown, the value of the ABC’s content was seen to be its non-commercial nature. The appointment of a new Managing Director to the Corporation, who was to start in the days leading up to the publication of the Senate’s interim report, did nothing to calm fears. Johnathan Shier was to be “Managing Director for a five year term from 17 March 2000” (ABC, 2000, p. 16). Shier had a background in marketing and

commercial/pay television and in digital technology (Millard, 1999, p. 13). He came to the ABC from a position as the “director of Scandinavia’s largest commercial network” (Millard, 1999, p. 13). His appointment, as such, was met with skepticism. An op-ed published in *The Australian* even before Shier began his term, written by John Millard, an ABC TV journalist-producer, argued that Shier’s “marketing experience and commercial enthusiasm is not what this public broadcaster needs when fighting to preserve its diminishing independence in the face of government funding cuts” (Millard, 1999, p. 13).

Not long after Shier became Managing Director he dropped the deal with Telstra that had been the catalyst for the senate inquiry into ABC Online. The deal was dropped because Shier believed “it undervalued the ABC’s program content” (Meade, 2000a, p. 2). It was reported that “Telstra announced its withdrawal on June 9, saying the ABC had tried to load on new conditions in the final days” (Fagan, Lyall, Lehmann & Dore, 2001b, p. 13). Meanwhile, “Shier declared the death of the Telstra deal 12 hours before the deadline he had set in early June” 2000 (Fagan, Lyall, Lehmann & Dore, 2001b, p. 13). Later, in 2001, *The Australian* formed a team it called “the Dossier team”, which investigated the ABC and its “first faltering moves into e-commerce” (Fagan, Lyall, Lehmann & Dore, 2001b, p. 13). The team reported that “it was Shier’s reservations that finally killed it” (Fagan, Lyall, Lehmann & Dore, 2001b, p. 13). Not long after, the dot.com crash hit and “ensured that the same deal now would be worth nowhere near what Telstra was willing to pay a year ago” (Fagan, Lyall, Lehmann & Dore, 2001b, p. 13).

The ABC’s finances at this time were in a near constant state of crisis. The Corporation’s funding had declined significantly since the mid-1980s. According to the ABC’s 2000-2001 annual report, “a longitudinal analysis of Appropriation Funding over more than 15 years”, undertaken by the ABC, showed that its “operational funding peaked, in real terms, in the 1985–86 Financial

Year — based on CPI index levels applied at December 2000” (ABC, 2001, p. 94). The report noted that it had “since declined by 29.5 per cent” (ABC, 2001, p. 94). The ABC had sought “additional operational funding of \$194 million over three years” (ABC, 2001, p. 18). The funding was for “Corporate Plan objectives of expanded Australian content, services to local communities, provision of additional online content and establishment of digital services” (ABC, 2001, p. 19). The ABC had not received the funding it requested in the government’s budget announcement, but the ABC still needed additional funding, and so in December, the Board “approved a new submission to Government seeking additional funding for programming and content initiatives of national significance” (ABC, 2001, p. 19). The government ended up approving \$17.8 million in additional funding for the ABC’s National Interest Initiatives for the 2001-2002 financial year (ABC, 2001, p. 94).

Even with the extra funding, the ABC still needed more revenue, and so a number of initiatives were explored in 2000-2001 that would generate revenue from ABC Online. ABC Online was explored as a potential money-making venture for the ABC for two reasons. First, it was very successful – in 2000, *The Australian* reported that the ABC was “attracting 6.5 million hits a day” (Meade, 2000b). Weekly accesses for News Online specifically for 1999-2000 were at 814,297 (ABC, 2000, p. 4). Second, it was not, unlike the ABC’s television and radio services, explicitly prohibited by the *ABC Act* from generating advertising or other revenue.

As such, the ABC saw itself as being free to explore and exploit the commercial potential of ABC Online. One of the ideas that had come up was that the ABC could implement a web portal that would see ABC content sitting “happily alongside online banking, online shopping and links to commercial sites” (Meade, 2000a, p. 2). The ABC would make money when ABC audience members clicked through from the ABC portal to a commercial site and made a purchase (Meade,

2000a, p. 2). Another idea suggested that the ABC could generate revenue off of its “streaming content -- particularly its vast video archives” (Cresswell & Poljak, 2001).

The ABC also went back and forth on the question of whether or not it would put advertisements on ABC Online. In 1999, before Shier was Managing Director, there had already been reports in *The Australian* that Shier was suggesting that the ABC could sell advertising online (Dodd, 1999). The following year it was reported that he had taken this idea to the ABC’s managers, along with a plan to make some of its other services available on a pay-per-view basis (Meade, 2000b). *The Australian* continued to discuss the prospect of advertising on ABC Online into 2001. In March of that year it was reported that there were some senators from the Australian Labor Party and the Australian Democrats who had expressed opposition to the possibility of advertising on ABC Online (Gilchrist 2001, p. 2). A few months later, in September 2001, *The Australian* reported that the ABC’s director of New Media, Lynley Marshall, stated that: “There is no imperative for us to become commercialised or self- funding and there is no suggestion we are heading down any path to commercialisation on ABC Online” (Bryden-Brown, 2001b, p. 3). Marshall did not, however, rule out the possibility of posting links on the ABC’s sites that led to other sites, nor did she see a problem with the ABC licensing its online content to other sites (Bryden-Brown, 2001b, p. 3).

Following this, the conversation in the national press around the ABC selling advertising online died down significantly, as did coverage of ABC Online in the national press generally, but the topic of advertising did not fully disappear, nor did the topic of funding ABC Online more generally. This was because the ABC was expanding at a time when its resources were being reduced. James Spigelman, who was the chair of the ABC Board in 2013, stated in a book chapter he wrote that “the ABC significantly expanded the services it provides” between 1987 and 2013,

“with fewer staff and less funding” (Spigelman, 2013, p. 46). In that time, while the ABC was expanding dramatically, the ABC’s budget went from \$967 million in 1987-1988 to \$840 million in 2012-2013 when adjusted for inflation, and its staff numbers went from 6,400 to 4,600 full-time equivalent staff in the same time period (Spigelman, 2013, pp. 46-47). The expansion of the ABC, because it came at a time of funding reductions and because there was no additional funding allocated to the ABC for the delivery of online services, was largely “funded by internal efficiencies, as well as reallocation of resources” (Spigelman, 2013, p. 47).

The National Press and the ABC

Even though ABC Online had struggled financially from its start, reporting in *The Australian* acknowledged that the service was being well received by Australians. After the election in October 1998, for example, *The Australian* reported that coverage online by newspapers “was unable to compete with ABC journalists, despite providing articles and updates during the evening” (Manktelow, 1998a, p. 11). An article earlier that year described ABC Online as having “set the pace for Internet news delivery in Australia, reminding media players that there is more to technology convergence than the brawl over digital TV rights” (Manktelow, 1998b, p. 45). *The Australian* referred to ABC Online as “unique and valuable - a complement to Australian print, radio and TV that, as the Internet audience grows, will become equally important” (Manktelow, 1999, p. 5). A columnist argued that Australia needed the ABC “more than ever” (Fist, 1999b, p. 60).

The bulk of reporting on ABC Online in its early years in *The Australian* was focused on the potential ABC/Telstra deal and the Senate inquiry into it. In one article, it was reported that “[i]n evidence to a Senate estimates hearing, the ABC also revealed it was in talks with other media players, including Rupert Murdoch’s News Limited, publisher of *The Australian*” (Hughes, 2000,

p. 63). Potentially because of this, the coverage in *The Australian*, while skewing towards being critical of the ABC/Telstra deal, was relatively mixed. On the one hand, an op-ed written by ABC Managing Director, Brian Johns and another one written by Jeremy Horey, a senior consultant with Com tech Online emphasized the benefits of the deal, maintaining that the ABC's content would not be negatively affected by the partnership (Johns, 2000, p. 13; Horey, 2000). On the other hand, several columns that were published were highly critical of the potential impact the deal would have on the ABC's content. For example, Stuart Fist (2000) argued that the deal "opens the door for Telstra to surround ABC news pages with ads, insert ads into news index pages, and slot ads into streaming media - which could make an ABC program online indistinguishable from Channel 9", one of Australia's commercial networks (p. 60). Along similar lines, general news stories on this topic leading up to the Parliamentary inquiry as well as the articles that had previously discussed privatizing the ABC led with headlines such as "ABC to Sell Itself 'Again and Again'" and "ABC Plans to Net \$85m for Content", which draw attention to the commercial nature of the proposals, which is in contrast to the understood role of the ABC as a non-commercial broadcaster (Gilchrist, 2000d, p. 1; Hughes, 2000, p. 63). Two editorials published in the paper took a more neutral tone towards the ABC/Telstra deal itself, but strongly advocated for the Parliamentary inquiry so that the public could have its say on the matter and so that more information and debate could be heard, which, it was argued, the ABC should welcome ("Public owed say", 2000, p. 12; "ABC inquiry opportunity for debate", 2000, p. 10).

Building the ABC's Presence Online

Once the senate inquiry was behind it, and the Telstra deal confirmed not to go ahead, the focus of the ABC turned to adapting to the changing media environment. Broadcasting was becoming more digital and Internet penetration was growing (Department of Broadband,

Communications and the Digital Economy, 2008, p. 33). In the first several years of the new millennium, Australians were “spending increasing amounts of time online, while audiences for free-to-air television are slowly but surely declining” (Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, 2008, p. 34).

Because of the scope of change in the Australian media environment, in 2005, the government established the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) as a new, converged regulator to replace both the ABA and the Australian Communications Authority (Department of Communications and the Arts, 2016, p. 4). The role of the ACMA in relation to the ABC was much the same as the ABA’s, and as such was limited. The ACMA, like the ABA, would review matters relating to complaints about the ABC for complainants who were “dissatisfied with the ABC’s response or the handling of their complaint” (ABC, 2006, p. 60). The ABC was also expected to take into account standards set by the ACMA, as it had with the ABA (ABC, 2006, p. 240).

Restructure

The developments at the ABC in the first decade and a half of the new millennium were as dramatic as the developments happening in the media environment itself. The ABC’s News Division took over the management of ABC News Online from the New Media and Digital Services Division (ABC, 2007, p. 80). Part of what this meant was that online producers would be “appointed in every capital city” (ABC, 2007, p. 80). Additionally, broadband content production would be centralised in Sydney (ABC, 2007, p. 80). This change meant that the ABC saw “the growing importance of online media” and so wanted to “fully integrating online production across the Division’s operations, while retaining a significant presence in Brisbane” (ABC, 2007, p. 80). More changes were still in the planning stages as the decision to centralise broadband content was

“part of a larger plan to develop a continuous news desk to deliver content to all platforms—radio, television and online— throughout the day” (ABC, 2007, p. 80). By this time, contemporary audiences expected broadband content, podcasts, vodcasts and other types of new media content on top of content delivered via traditional broadcasting formats (ABC, 2007, p. 19).

Another part of ABC’s restructure was the establishment of an Innovation Division (ABC, 2007, p. 84). The new department was given the responsibility of the ABC Online homepage and was to “manage online projects and portals that are not primarily based on the output of other divisions” (ABC, 2007, p. 84). It was to redevelop the homepage in order “to improve access to the rich multimedia content that the Corporation has to offer” (ABC, 2007, p. 86). The ABC wanted to strengthen its relationship with its audience and encourage more people to contribute content and engage with the ABC’s content (ABC, 2007, p. 86). The new homepage was launched in early 2008 (ABC, 2008a, p. 90). The Innovation Division was otherwise created to meet two main goals: first, “to drive strategic development throughout the ABC in the creation and distribution of ABC content on new platforms and in cross- media production”, and second, “to enrich ABC Online and ensure its continued growth by providing editorial and technical leadership and overseeing standards in presentation and design” (ABC, 2007, p. 84).

ABC News Online Developments

In 2007, the ABC also launched a completely made over ABC News Online (ABC, 2007, p. 35). The redesign allowed for “significantly more audio, video and text content to be added to the site every day, as well as an increase in the amount of local content provided by journalists around the country” (ABC, 2007, p. 80). It also allowed audiences to “tailor the content as they want it: they can focus on news from their local area or on particular subjects they are interested

in and choose the audio and video they want to play in the order they want to play it” (ABC, 2007, p. 80).

The following year, the ABC began to implement a Continuous News Centre (CNC). This included “a purpose-built newsroom at Ultimo, Sydney” designed for continuous news (ABC, 2008a, p. 86). This transformed the ABC’s newsrooms across the country (ABC, 2008a, p. 28). The CNC was designed to “provide continuous streams of news, 24-hours- a-day, to every outlet of the ABC— ABC1, ABC2, ABC Online, Australia Network and across ABC Radio” (ABC, 2008a, p. 28). The CNC started out with 12 staff who were transferred from ABC News Online (ABC, 2008a, p. 86). The ABC intended “to expand on its already significant contribution to the diversity of news and current affairs in Australia” (ABC, 2009, p. 24).

Another expansion came to ABC News Online in December 2009 in the form of a site called The Drum. The Drum was designed to be “a thought-provoking compendium of analysis, comment and opinion from inside and outside the ABC” (ABC, 2010, p. 55). The site would be “interactive, allowing readers to post comments and interact with Twitter and Facebook as well as submit video comment” (Meade, 2009, p. 31).

The Changing Media Environment

By 2009 media organizations could publish content on their own websites and on social media. They could stream audio and video along with posting photographs and written content regardless of whether they were broadcasters or newspapers when they first formed. There had been a convergence of media that were once separate and distinct. This meant that “old boundaries have become blurred: newspapers publish online and in doing so sometimes draw on television footage” (Finkelstein, 2012, p. 157). Broadcasters may also “sometimes republish newspaper content” online (Finkelstein, 2012, p. 157). Audiences were more involved, wanting “to participate

and contribute” (ABC, 2010, p. 16). The ABC Board noted in 2010 that the Corporation’s relationship to its audiences had shifted, with audiences now expecting the Corporation’s services “will fit more easily into their lives and be available in many diverse ways” (ABC, 2010, p. 16). Audiences also had access to a lot more content and therefore choice than they ever had before. ABC Chairman James Spigelman likened accumulating information in the digital world to “trying to drink from a fire hose” (Spigelman, 2013, p. 44).

Because of the way media was changing, in September 2011, the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy announced that there would be “an inquiry into certain aspects of the media and media regulation” (Finkelstein, 2012, p. 13). Among the things the Inquiry was asked to consider was the impact that technological change was having “on the business model that has supported the investment by traditional media organisations in quality journalism and the production of news, and how such activities can be supported, and diversity enhanced, in the changed media environment” (Finkelstein, 2012, p. 13). In its final report, the inquiry expressed “moderate concern about the ability of Australian newspapers to adjust to the changed market environment” (Finkelstein, 2012, p. 307). The Inquiry had found that the financial status of newspapers was under pressure, but was not desperate (Finkelstein, 2012, p. 307). The final report was optimistic and stated a belief “that newspapers are well placed to adjust their operations in response to the evolving digital environment provided they are prepared to develop and adopt appropriate strategies to manage the necessary changes” (Finkelstein, 2012, p. 307). That being said, in 2009 there was “a substantial drop in advertising revenue”, which “was followed by a modest increase in 2010”, and then a softening of the advertising market again in 2011 (Finkelstein, 2012, p. 302). There was reason then for newspapers to seek other ways of generating revenue to fill in the gap that was created by advertising.

Paywalls

One way *The Australian* was attempting to generate revenue outside of selling advertising was through a paywall on its website. In the same way as the national press in Britain and Canada, *The Australian* sought to directly commodify its online news content. The paywall was implemented in October 2011 (Jackson, 2011, p. 32). When it was launched, the newspaper “became the first general newspaper in the country to launch subscriptions for its digital content” (Jackson, 2011, p. 32). The paywall was not terribly significant in terms of its earnings right away. In 2012, the paper’s digital subscriptions raised 0.67 per cent of its publishing income (Myllylahti, 2014, p. 188).

While not executed until 2011, *The Australian* had been discussing putting up a paywall since 2009 (Freudenstein, 2009, p. 32). That was the same year that Rupert Murdoch campaigned to get other newspaper publishers to put up paywalls (Bell, 2009, p. 3). It was around this time that the coverage of ABC News Online in the national newspaper changed. Up to this point, the coverage of ABC News Online largely centered around the ABC’s funding, and the question of how the ABC was going to monetize its Internet content, if at all. In 2009, the question of whether or not the ABC was going to put advertising online was largely quelled. Moving forward, two related themes began to emerge and would come to dominate *The Australian*’s coverage of ABC Online – competition and the ABC’s Charter.

The first theme, competition, became particularly prevalent after *The Australian* announced it was thinking about implementing a paywall. After it was announced, Mark Scott, the ABC’s Managing Director at the time, criticized the move while giving the A.N. Smith Memorial Lecture (Scott, 2009). In the lecture he pointed out that, “[u]nless everyone, everywhere decides they will charge – then so much content will be available free” (Scott, 2009). Scott implied that

The *Australian* would have a difficult time convincing people to pay a fee for access to its content when there would still be plenty of free content available from organizations including the ABC and when the paper's content is relatively generic compared to those publications with pricing power such as *The Financial Times* (Scott, 2009). The reaction to this lecture in *The Australian* was highly critical of Scott and his statements. One article argued that Scott was assuming "that the Murdoch plan is simply to put a pay wall around some of his newspapers' most valuable content" when that was not necessarily the case (Day, 2009, p. 31). In a more direct response to the comments, Richard Freudenstein, the Chief Executive Officer of News Digital Media, which is part of News Corporation, addressed the lecture in an article he wrote for *The Australian*. The article called Scott's claims "laughably inaccurate" (Freudenstein, 2009, p. 32). Freudenstein (2009) pointed out that Australians must pay for the ABC whether they like it or not, while "commercial operators such as News live or die by the value of their content" (p. 32). Furthermore, he claimed that "[c]harging for a product, even when there is a free alternative, is not a radical or outrageous proposition" (Freudenstein, 2009, p. 32). He argued that "[i]f your content has real value, and you deliver it in the time, place and manner people want, then it is not unreasonable to ask them to pay for it" (Freudenstein, 2009, p. 32).

The second theme, the ABC's Charter, emerged as a significant topic of discussion after the ABC launched its opinion website *The Drum* in 2009. Coverage of *The Drum* in particular was skewed heavily towards posing questions around what the Corporation was and was not allowed to do in terms of online news. When the site was first launched, *The Australian* reported on it, referring to it as the "pet project of the ABC's entrepreneurial managing director, Mark Scott, himself a Tweeter, who has said the ABC's expansion online is imperative if the public broadcaster is to remain relevant" (Boland, 2009, p. 31). In the coverage of the launch, it was pointed out in

The *Australian* that the ABC should not be competitive with other media companies as the ABC's Charter "implies it should not seek to duplicate them" (Boland, 2009, p. 31). This article suggests that the ABC should not be moving into the provision of online commentary because there are already "established media organisations and some other new media companies are sources of excellent online news and analysis" (Boland, 2009, p. 31). Another article in *The Australian* the same day remarked that the launch of the website meant that the ABC would now be in direct competition with *The Punch*, which was owned by News Limited, the owner of *The Australian* (Meade, 2009, p. 31).

The ABC's Vision

In 2009 the ABC's Charter still had not been amended to incorporate new media. Because of this, its role online was largely up for interpretation. The ABC saw itself playing a similar role online, in the multi-channel, digital age, to the one it played in Australia's broadcasting system in its earlier years.

The ABC saw itself as playing an important role in Australian democracy because, through its news services, it aimed to treat its audiences as citizens and provided trustworthy news and information. This view of its role is apparent in a 2013 chapter that James Spigelman, the ABC Chairman at the time, contributed to a book on public service broadcasting based on a conference called RIPE. The chapter, titled "Defining Public Value in the Age of Information Abundance", highlighted that one "defining characteristic of public broadcasting should be that it treats its audiences as citizens and not as consumers" (Spigelman, 2013, p. 48). The distinction is important because "[c]onsumers have desires or needs" while "[c]itizens have rights and duties" (Spigelman, 2013, p. 48). For Spigelman (2013), the role of public broadcasters providing such a service is important because, as the media environment fragments audiences, it is important that countries

have a way of promoting social cohesion and that they have “a forum for debate for a democratic polity as a whole - not just those who can penetrate pay walls” (p. 45). In 2008, the ABC wrote a submission to the Australia 2020 Summit, a gathering of Australians to discuss the future of the country, that explained that “[e]ffective democracy depends on informed public debate about key issues affecting society and the nation” (ABC, 2008b, p. 9). This is not particularly well served by media markets that are overly concentrated and so “there is a clear role for public broadcasters, which not only increase the number of news and information services, but also are legislatively obliged to provide independent news and information services” (ABC, 2008b, p. 9). In a similar vein, the ABC also sees its role as being to ensure that high quality news and information are accessible across the nation (ABC, 2010, p. 17).

The ABC, in providing news for citizens and for the benefit of Australian democracy, also believes it is important that it remain “a credible source of information in which people can confidently place their trust” (ABC, 2010, p. 17). The ABC noted in 2008 that, looking to its future, it would be “an essential guarantee that a comprehensive range of quality Australian content continues to be seen and heard by all Australians” (ABC, 2008b, p. 11). The Corporation emphasized that it would continue to “stand for Australian stories, reliable news and information and diverse, innovative and quality content for audiences everywhere” (ABC, 2008b, p. 11).

In the digital age, the ABC also saw itself as being more than just a broadcaster that provides content when there is a failure of the market to provide it. While the ABC does fill gaps, it is also obligated by its Charter to provide a comprehensive service (ABC, 2013, p. 16). The ABC interprets this to mean that the Corporation “must ensure that *all* Australians have access to quality media services, perhaps particularly access to reliable news and information about international, national, regional and local matters” (ABC, 2013, p. 16). The ABC further points out that its

obligations include “serving additional public values such as accessibility, openness, fairness, inclusion, impartiality, accountability, legitimacy, participation and honesty” (ABC, 2013, p. 16). In this way, the ABC positioned itself as an essential part of the Australian public sphere.

Another role the ABC sees as its responsibility is the role of innovator. The ABC’s Charter calls on it specifically to be innovative (ABC, 2011a, p. 2). The ABC has done this by being “in the forefront of experimentation in the Australian media with the digital revolution” (ABC, 2013, p. 17). In 2009, the Corporation received a funding increase, which prepared it “to pursue its strategic vision as a media innovator delivering services to all Australians” (ABC, 2009, p. 24).

The Convergence Review

This vision that the ABC had of itself can also be seen in the way the Convergence Review Committee discussed the ABC’s role in the digital age. The Review Committee had been announced in 2010 by the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (Convergence Review Committee, 2012, p. 111). It had been “initiated to examine the policy and regulatory frameworks that apply to the communications and media landscape in Australia, and to propose an alternative structure that would encourage continued innovation and protect citizens’ interests in an age of convergent communication” (Convergence Review Committee, 2012, p. 111).

The final report of the Convergence Review Committee indicated that one of the key objectives of the ABC was “to provide all Australians with broadcasting services, regardless of where they live” (Convergence Review Committee, 2012, p. 84). Access to content was highlighted as an important role for the ABC. The Committee further indicated that, while the ABC’s Charter requires that it “take into account the services offered by other broadcasters”, the Charter also indicates that there are objectives for the ABC “that can be seen as targeting all

Australians, not just niche audiences” (Convergence Review Committee, 2012, p. 85). Because of this, the Review Committee suggested that there may be value in the ABC providing popular entertainment if it attracts audiences that stay “with the broadcaster and views or listens to other valuable content, such as news and current affairs” (Convergence Review Committee, 2012, p. 85). Like the ABC, the Convergence Review Committee saw the Corporation as being innovative. It pointed out that the ABC was a leader “in the development of innovative online and digital content” (Convergence Review Committee, 2012, p. 85). The final report indicated that even though the ABC’s Charter does not explicitly direct it to provide services on new media platforms, the fact that the ABC has been innovative “has led to the development of a range of new services that have extended the reach and impact of publicly funded programming” (Convergence Review Committee, 2012, p. xv). Because of this, the Review Committee recommended that the ABC’s Charter be updated “to expressly reflect the range of existing services, including online activities, currently provided” (Convergence Review Committee, 2012, p. xv).

The ABC’s (Very Short-Lived) Good Fortune

This recommendation by the Convergence Review Committee was significant not because it had never been recommended before – it had been several times – but because the government actually followed through on it this time. As such, as of 2013, the ABC’s Charter officially included “digital media services” as one of the Corporation’s core functions (ABC, 2013, p. 17).

In 2013, the Government had also announced additional funding for the ABC (Parliament of Australia, 2013, p. 74). This included \$30 million over three years to maintain and improve its online services, as well as \$69.4 million over four years “to enhance its news delivery services” (Parliament of Australia, 2013, p. 74). The funding allowed the ABC to do a number of things including establish an Interactive Digital Storytelling Team in 2014 (ABC, 2015, p. 54). It also

allowed it to “extend the seasons of its flagship current affairs programs and create more cross-platform news content for audiences” (ABC, 2013, p. 22). The ABC prioritized investment in online “in 2014–15, adapting to evolving audience expectations and creating innovative ways to connect with new audiences via online and mobile engagement” (ABC, 2015, p. 30). It announced in 2013 that it was going to “undertake several pilot projects to explore and respond to the porous nature of online news media and the ways in which audiences use it” (ABC, 2013, p. 22). This included developing “a linking service for its websites, modelled on the BBC’s successful Newstracker, that provides links to relevant stories on other news services from the Corporation’s own stories” (ABC, 2013, p. 22).

The ABC’s good fortune did not last though. In 2013, a Coalition party, made up of the Australian Liberals and the National Party, won a federal election and took over from the ALP, which had been in power for six years (“Federal election 2013”, 2013; Siegel, 2013). The new government wanted the Department of Communications to “undertake a study into the efficiency of the operations of the ABC and SBS” (Department of Communications, 2014, p. 6). The study was announced in January 2014 (Department of Communications, 2014, p. 6). It would “examine costs for the day-to-day operations that deliver ABC and SBS programs, products and services, and propose options to increase efficiency” (Department of Communications, 2014, p. 6). The study ultimately identified several areas where it believed the ABC and SBS could find operational efficiencies, which it was noted both organizations had already been actively looking for (Department of Communications, 2014, p. 7). This included the suggestions that the ABC and SBS work together more, that they search for additional opportunities to earn revenue and that they allocate their resources better (Department of Communications, 2014, p. 7).

The Efficiency Study released a draft report in April 2014. One month later, the May 2014 federal budget cut the ABC's funding and foreshadowed further cuts that were eventually announced in November (ABC, 2014a, p. 22; ABC, 2015, p. 15). The Corporation's Parliamentary appropriation was to be "reduced by \$207 million over the five year period from 2014–15 to 2018–19" (ABC, 2015, p. 15). Later, in 2016, the funding the ABC had been receiving as part of the enhanced news gathering program announced in the 2013 budget was reduced as well (Hunter, 2019). This was despite the fact that the funding had been promised for four years.

The *Australian's* coverage of ABC Online remained critical of the ABC's role online and of the relationship between the ABC's online activities and its Charter, despite the fact that in 2013 digital media was officially added to its responsibilities. One of the paper's associate editors, Chris Kenny, maintained in 2014 that the Corporation's "expansion into digital is one of many grey areas in its charter" (Kenny, 2014, p. 2). Kenny (2014) points out that Australia "never had a proper public debate about whether this expansion was necessary or wise" (p. 2). He also notes that the news of the amendment was somehow missed by the press (Kenny, 2014, p. 2). Kenny (2014) argues that there should be a discussion about what the direction of the ABC is because the Corporation had been expanding into the digital space, as evidenced by the introduction of *The Drum*, which he suggests "is where the national broadcaster is unambiguously putting itself into competition with newspapers, something that was never envisaged when it was established as a radio service and then expanded into TV" (p. 2). This was something that coverage of ABC Online in *The Australian* clearly took issue with. In 2014, for example, an editorial in the paper accused ABC Managing Director Mark Scott of using a demand for the ABC to find efficiencies "as cover to expand his digital empire" ("The national broadcaster's digital rush to nowhere", 2014, p. 15). The editorial went on to argue that the ABC's Charter "clearly needs a rewrite, to rein in the

excesses of such digital mission creep and to refocus the board on the role of a modern public broadcaster” (“The national broadcaster’s digital rush to nowhere”, 2014, p. 15).

In October 2014, *The Australian* published an article accusing the ABC of “[w]asting taxpayers’ money to damage its commercial rivals” (“ABC pays to white-ant its rivals”, 2014, p. 23). This was because it had been reported that the ABC was “spending tens of thousands of dollars to damage its commercial media rivals by buying Google rankings that lure internet users to stories on its own news website” (Markson, 2014, p. 6). An editorial in the paper a couple of weeks later stated that while the newspaper loves the ABC, the ABC was “squeezing out its commercial rivals”, which includes *The Australian* itself (“Aunty should concentrate on areas of market failure”, 2014, p. 15). The editorial called on the ABC to focus on areas of market failure (“Aunty should concentrate on areas of market failure”, 2014, p. 15). Yet another editorial had suggested that “[t]he ABC managing director and chairman are out of touch” (“Scott and Spigelman on an ‘end of empire’ adventure”, 2014, p. 13). The article argued that the ABC had “retreated from the core functions of a public broadcaster” in order to “compete with private broadcasters” (“Scott and Spigelman on an ‘end of empire’ adventure”, 2014, p. 13). Negative coverage of the ABC’s digital activities carried on into 2015. *The Australian*’s reporting and commentary kept on questioning why Australia needed the ABC and continued to call for the ABC’s Charter to be reviewed and revised (Cater, 2015, p. 12; Day, 2015, p. 24; Kenny, 2015, p. 24; etc). More editorial space was used to express horror at the fact that the ABC was moving further into what newspapers considered to be their own territory. One article stated that the ABC was providing “online written-word journalism that covers news, special interest topics such as the environment, feature articles, political commentary and even comedy”, which meant that the ABC was essentially “moving into every area of written word publishing” with only the restriction of not needing “to go through the

expensive process of printing and distributing a product” (Kenny, 2015, p. 24). Another editorial argued more plainly that “[r]eplicating commercial online news services is not its role” (“The ABC needs better direction”, 2015, p. 13). Some coverage of the ABC went so far as to suggest its public funding needed to be reassessed (“ABC pays to white-ant”, 2014, p. 23; “The ABC needs better direction”, 2015, p. 13; van Onselen & Weisser, 2013, p. 16; etc).

The Journalism Crisis

Accusations in *The Australian* that the ABC was unfairly competing with it continued for several years after 2015, and eventually, the government initiated an Inquiry into the Competitive Neutrality of the National Broadcasters. The inquiry was conducted by an expert panel and was chaired by Robert Kerr. It published its final report in September 2018. The Inquiry was to be specifically “about whether the National Broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, are competing fairly with the private sector” (Kerr, 2018, p. 13). The same year the Competitive Neutrality Inquiry took place, a Senate Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism reported. The Committee had held hearings in 2017 and published its final report in February 2018 (Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2018). The Committee had been established “to look into the current state of public interest journalism in Australia and globally, to consider what the role government should play in assisting the sector in meeting the challenges and capitalising on the opportunities of the digital age” (Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2018, p. 1).

Both inquiries essentially stemmed from concerns about the state of Australian journalism. The Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism had received evidence from media organizations, the most common theme of which “was the struggle to adapt to new businesses models, including the implications of the move away from a reliance on revenue from

advertising and newspaper sales, toward monetising the publication of material on masthead sites, and through the aggregators” (Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2018, p. 25). Media companies responded “by engaging in corporate restructures, including cost-cutting, rounds of redundancies, streamlining of positions and the increasing use of contract workers”, which has led to fewer journalists and has “depleted the capacity of the media sector to produce quality public interest journalism, not only due to fewer working journalists being employed, but also due to the loss of expertise from redundancies” (Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2018, p. 29). It had been estimated that there were approximately 3000-3200 journalism jobs lost between 2012 and 2017 (Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2018, p. 29). On top of this, both of the country’s public broadcasters had faced a number of cuts to their budgets, which affected their provision of public interest journalism (Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2018, p. 31). The Committee noted that the cuts the ABC faced to its budget since 2014 have led to a reduced “capacity across the board, including in current affairs, investigative journalism and in providing local news across Australia” (Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2018, p. 111). This was happening at a point when Australians needed “access to reliable news more than ever before” (Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2018, p. 111). The Select Committee furthermore found that “Australians trust the ABC more than any other media organisation to accurately and fairly reflect the news they need to know” (Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2018, p. 111). As such, it reaffirmed the ABC’s importance to the Australian media system and recommended that it be given adequate funding to meet its Charter obligations (Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2018, pp. 111-112).

News Corp's submission to the Competitive Neutrality Inquiry outlined a different outlook on the ABC and its role in the Australian media ecology. The submission argued that there was "a lack of a level playing field for the distribution of news content online. Public broadcasters – who are now news publishers – are advantaged on this field due to their taxpayer funding models and the out-of-date Charters that require holistic review in the digital context" (News Corp., 2018, p. 1). News Corp argued that the public broadcasters, ABC and SBS should not be allowed to enter "arrangements that would constitute providing news content in a commercial environment. This is particularly the case (but not the only case) when the arrangement would lead to public broadcasting news content being commercialised" (News Corp., 2018, p. 8). Another issue that came up in News Corp's submission to the Inquiry was ABC's marketing practices. News Corp took issue with the money the ABC was spending on Google AdWords (News Corp., 2018, p. 4). The submission indicated that the use of AdWords was for the sole purpose of boosting the results, because even without using it, the ABC's content still would have come up in searches, just not necessarily on the top of the rankings (News Corp., 2018, p. 5). It pointed out that a story in *The Australian* had reported that "the ABC was outbidding commercial news organisations in ad auctions operated by Google AdWords" (News Corp., 2018, p. 5). News Corp argued that this was the ABC competing with private media organizations unnecessarily, and that it was evidence of a "lack of a level playing field for the distribution of online news content" (News Corp., 2018, p. 5).

The findings of the Inquiry into the Competitive Neutrality of the National Broadcasters, however, did not support News Corp's claims that the ABC was unfairly competing. The Inquiry did state that the ABC and SBS's free services were "having some competitive impact" (Kerr, 2018, p. 17). But the expert panel had ultimately come to the conclusion "that in relation to the provision of online news services, the ABC and SBS are behaving in accordance with their

Charters” (Kerr, 2018, p. 23). It further concluded that “[o]verall, and balancing competition with other factors, the Panel considers the National Broadcasters are not causing significant distortions to the competitive process beyond the public interest” (Kerr, 2018, p. 18). The report pointed out that “the National Broadcasters are established and funded to provide free services. This includes digital services. So long as they operate in line with their Charters they are operating in the public interest as defined by their statutes” (Kerr, 2018, p. 18). On the question of the ABC’s marketing practices, the inquiry noted that the ABC and SBS were allowed “to promote their services online” as they have promoted their other services (Kerr, 2018, p. 24). Based on this, the panel concluded that “normal competitive interactions are occurring, and there are no concerns for competitive neutrality principles” (Kerr, 2018, p. 24).

Conclusion

The emergence of the Internet at the ABC drew a lot of attention to the Corporation’s funding and the ABC Act. Similarly, to the situation in Canada, because the Internet was not explicitly included in the ABC Act, the ABC was left to find the funding for its new media endeavors in its existing budget. It was also largely left to make decisions about whether or not and how to earn revenue from its online services since it was not technically barred from advertising like the ABC’s television and radio were. As such, the ABC explored more commercial methods of generating revenue such as advertising and made the decision to licence out its news content to third parties. This led to concerns voiced in *The Australian* and by Australian government officials, that there was a significant risk of the ABC’s content being commodified. The ABC, however, had been left with little choice other than to explore ways of generating revenue from its online services because it developed them at a time when it was vulnerable due to cuts from its government funding. Like the CBC, the ABC was trying to do more with less.

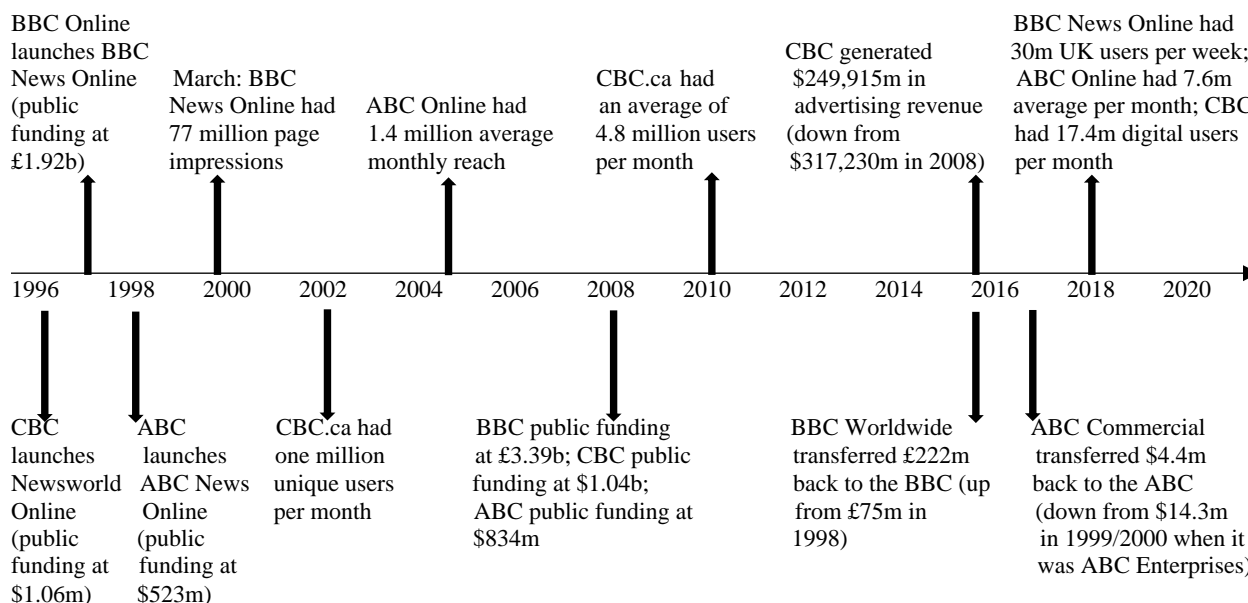
Complicating matters, the popularity of the Internet meant that it became integral to the continued relevance of the ABC. Despite this, the ABC's role in Australia's media ecology has been consistently called into question because there was little clarity on whether or not it was allowed to be online, and because of discussions about how, if at all, it should monetize online content to compensate for the fact that the government did not provide adequate funding for the uptake of new technologies. Even after the Internet was officially incorporated into the ABC Act in 2013, *The Australian* continued to question whether or not ABC Online was legitimate because there was not real public consultation on whether or not it should be included in the ABC Act. This, plus considerable discussion in *The Australian* accusing the ABC of competing unfairly with newspapers at a time when many private media organizations were struggling to adapt to a significantly changed media environment, culminated in an official inquiry in 2018 that considered whether or not the ABC (and the SBS) were competing unfairly with newspapers. Both public broadcasters were ultimately found to be operating fairly despite the insistence of News Corp that they have considerable advantages over its publications.

Chapter Six: Comparisons Across Public Service Broadcasters

The BBC, CBC and ABC have many similarities given that they were each influenced by a Reithian¹⁷ vision of public broadcasting. They each, however, have developed under unique political, geographic and social circumstances which have ultimately influenced their shape and form generally and their online national news services specifically. With this in mind, this chapter provides a comparison of the BBC, CBC and ABC's online national news services. It discusses changes to the PSBs over time in relation to things such as funding levels and web traffic as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

*Timeline*¹⁸



Ultimately, this chapter serves to highlight how various structures including governments and the private sector have, in different ways, influenced the shape and form of the BBC, CBC

¹⁷ This refers to a particular vision of PSB set out by Sir John Reith (discussed in Chapter Two). It is often associated with the mission “to inform, to educate and to entertain” and encompasses values such as universal provision and high standards (Briggs, 1961, pp. 235-238; Crisell, 2002).

¹⁸ Information gathered from the BBC, CBC and ABC's Annual Reports

and ABC's online national news. It focuses on the organizational mandates and the structure of each corporation; the funding each has received during the establishment and throughout the development of their websites; the political pressures that they have faced; the commercialization of each of the Corporations and; how pressures on the private news sectors in each country have in turn affected the PSBs generally and the output on their national news homepages specifically.

The output of the PSBs is examined through a content analysis of the national news homepages for the BBC, CBC and ABC¹⁹, as well as relevant internal documents such as policies on user generated content (UGC). This analysis of the output of the PSBs focuses on the national news homepages of each of the PSBs and on the articles that were featured on the homepages. To use a newspaper analogy, the articles that were focused on from the websites appeared on the front page, "above the fold". This led to a total of 42 articles gathered from a constructed week on the BBC's national news homepage, 40 from the CBC's and 42 from the ABC's²⁰. The constructed week was randomly selected starting in August 2017. Seven days, one for each day of the week, were chosen. The final days included in the sample of articles are:

- Wednesday September 20, 2017
- Sunday October 7, 2018
- Tuesday November 7, 2017
- Monday February 12, 2018
- Saturday April 7, 2018
- Thursday June 21, 2018
- Friday August 17, 2018

¹⁹ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk; www.cbc.ca/news/canada; www.abc.net.au/news/australia

²⁰ A complete list of articles for each PSB can be found in Appendix B

Organizational Mandates and the Structure of the PSBs

The shape and form of the BBC, CBC and ABC is significantly influenced by their organizational mandates. The Acts that constitute the CBC and the ABC (the Broadcasting Act and the ABC Act respectively) have been reviewed and updated several times throughout their histories, however they are not periodically reviewed and updated according to predetermined timelines as the BBC's Charter and Agreement are. The timing of the BBC's Charter and Agreement's expiration, enabled the documents to be updated in 1996 to allow the BBC to adopt new media technologies. The CBC and ABC, however, both moved online based on interpretations of their responsibilities rather than by explicit direction or approval to do so. The CBC's mandate has yet to be updated to include online services, but the ABC Act was amended in 2013 to include them (ABC, 2013, p. 17).

Online Regulation

Another significant difference in the structure of BBC Online compared to the structures of CBC Online and ABC Online was that the BBC had to meet specific expectations for the service based on an approval that had been issued to it when it established the service in the first place (Graf, 2004, pp. 17-18). The expectations of BBC Online would later be updated and outlined in the form of an Online Service Licence. The original Service Licence provided a specific remit for BBC Online, outlined the scope of the service and specified a budget (BBC Trust, 2006, p. 1). When the Service Licence was reviewed, the BBC's regulator, the BBC Trust examined how well the BBC met the obligations set forth in the previous licence. The reviews provided an opportunity to, for example, better understand how much money the BBC was spending on its online services and to increase the transparency of how the BBC reported on its activities (BBC Trust, 2008). Neither the CBC nor the ABC have similar licences or review processes in place for their online

services. The ABC's television and radio services do not have licences or any form of regulation comparable to what the BBC Trust provides the BBC, but the CBC's radio and television services are licensed through an external regulator – the CRTC. When the CRTC decided not to regulate new media services in 1999, it exempted the CBC's online services from the same licensing system that its radio and television services adhere to (CRTC, 1999; CRTC 2012; CRTC, 2013). This, along with the fact that the CBC's annual reports do not contain separate numbers for spending or revenue for CBC Online, has meant that the service is considerably less transparent than some of the CBC's other services. It is also considerably less transparent than the BBC's online services. Instead, the CBC's online services have largely been left to be developed outside of any formal regulations except for its mandate, which is broad. It further means that there is no real system for guaranteed public debate on how the CBC's online services should function and for what purpose. This is true of ABC Online as well, which lacks such a regulatory system more generally.

Content Requirements, Organizational Goals and News Values

The BBC, CBC and ABC, regardless of their different structures, specified technological parameters, and accountability mechanisms, all have a set of expectations that all of their content, including their online content is supposed to meet. The BBC is required as per its 2016 Charter “to act in the public interest, serving all audiences through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output and services which inform, educate and entertain” (DCMS, 2016b). The BBC further has five public purposes it must fulfill, including that it is “[t]o provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them” (DCMS, 2016b). The news the BBC provides is required to be “duly accurate and impartial” and “should be provided to the highest editorial standards” (DCMS, 2016b). It should further “offer a range and depth of analysis and content not widely available from other United Kingdom news providers,

using the highest calibre presenters and journalists” (DCMS, 2016b). The BBC is to provide news that reflects “major local, regional, national, United Kingdom and global issues” (DCMS, 2016b). While doing all of these things, the BBC is also expected to “have particular regard to the effects of its activities on competition in the United Kingdom” and “seek to avoid adverse impacts on competition which are not necessary” to fulfill its mission and meet its public purposes (DCMS, 2016b).

The CBC’s mandate is not as specific as the BBC’s, especially when it comes to the expectations of its news services. The CBC’s mandate, as established in section 3(1)(l) of the Broadcasting Act (1991), requires it to “provide radio and television services that informs, enlightens and entertains” (p. 5). Section 3(1)(m) of the Act further specifies that the CBC should, among other things, “reflect Canada and its regions to national and regional audiences, while serving the special needs of those regions” and that it should “be made available throughout Canada by the most appropriate and efficient means and as resources become available for the purpose” (p. 5). Section 3(1)(n) of the Broadcasting Act (1991) specifies that any conflict between the national public broadcaster and the commercial broadcasting sector will “be resolved in the public interest” and, if the public interest could be equally served by either, the conflict would be resolved in favour of the national public broadcaster’s objectives (p. 5). This positions the public interest and the CBC as a centerpiece of the Canadian Broadcasting System.

The ABC has a less central role than that which was prescribed to the CBC. As per the ABC Act, it was designed “to provide within Australia innovative and comprehensive broadcasting services of a high standard as part of the Australian broadcasting system” (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, 2019, p. 6). Among other things, its programming is supposed to “contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and

entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community” (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, 2019, p. 6). While doing this, the ABC is responsible for taking account of “the broadcasting services provided by the commercial and community sectors of the Australian broadcasting system” (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, 2019, p. 7). This expectation that the ABC is to take account of the country’s commercial and community broadcasters differs both from the CBC’s directions in relation to commercial broadcasters, as the Broadcasting Act has placed the CBC in a position of privilege over them, and it differs from the BBC’s directions, which asks it to avoid adversely impacting competition in the country generally, not just in relation to the country’s commercial broadcasting sector.

The PSBs all ultimately all strive to provide a service that acts in “the public interest” (ABC, 2018b, p. 36; BBC, 2020a; CBC, n.d.). To do this, they emphasize values such as accuracy, impartiality and trust (ABC, 2014b; BBC, 2020a; CBC, n.d.). The provision of accurate, impartial, and trustworthy news stories that provide information on topics such as politics, and government, is an important part of how the PSBs serve the public interest by providing citizens with relevant news and information necessary to their participation in public life. They all provide information that citizens need, for example, to be informed voters and to participate in debate in the national public sphere. Furthermore, the news and information the PSBs provide online is provided free at the point of use, which is particularly important in Canada and Australia where all of the national newspapers have paywalls around their content. A central benefit of PSBs providing news services in democratic countries is their ability to ensure that all citizens have access to news and information that addresses them as citizens and not as consumers. This is essential because concentrated media systems in Britain, Canada and Australia have helped foster media ecologies

that are overly commercialized (Butsch, 2007; Iosifidis, 2016; McChesney, 1999; Papandrea & Tiffen, 2016; Rowland, 2015; Winseck, 2016; etc). Commercial pressure on news organizations can be damaging to the public sphere as it leads “to a softening of standards such that stories about sex scandals and celebrities have become more legitimate, because they make commercial sense: they are inexpensive to cover, attract audiences and give the illusion of controversy without ever threatening anyone in power” (McChesney, 2012, p. 616).

The sample of articles gathered over the constructed week from each of the national news homepages considered shows support for the notion that the PSBs are using their online platforms to provide a service that operates in the public interest. As Table 2 shows, the content analysis determined that for the BBC and the CBC, the most common topics of articles they post that are featured on their national news homepages are about death, crime and politics/government. Stories about crime often provided more information than simple details of the crime – they provided context and information on, for example, court procedures. For the ABC, operating within a nation referred to by ABC Chairman James Spigelman (2013) as “sports-mad”, the main topics featured are sports, politics/government and business.

Table 2

Common Topics Featured on BBC, CBC and ABC’s National News Homepages

	BBC	CBC	ABC
Death	16	8	1
Crime	15	7	4
Politics/Government	13	15	9
Sports	1	2	17
Entertainment	3	4	1
Business	3	4	7
Technology	2	3	6

The ABC, along with posting more sports stories, also posts a significantly larger number of stories than the BBC and the CBC that, while nationally relevant or even nationally focused,

include an international component to them. In the sample of articles from the national news homepages, the ABC had 22 stories that had an international angle, while the BBC had only 6 and the CBC had 12. The fact that the ABC has posted more stories that incorporated an international angle is largely because it published articles about international sporting events such as the Commonwealth Games and the Olympics.

The BBC and the CBC, on the other hand, published more local/regional articles that were deemed to be nationally relevant than the ABC did. For the BBC, which had 20 such articles in its sample, this can largely be attributed to the high number of articles that discuss death and/or crime, which tend to be local/regionally oriented topics. The CBC, which had 14 local/regional news stories in its sample, also published several crime/death related stories, but the volume of local/regional news it publishes can also be attributed to the fact that it posted more human-interest focused stories than the other two PSBs. This includes an article about a robber returning to a bank he once robbed that had since been turned into a restaurant (Pritchard, 2018). The ABC, in contrast to the BBC and the CBC, only had three local/regionally oriented stories in its sample of articles.

Coverage of politics and government varied in terms of geography and topics across all three PSBs. The BBC's coverage was mostly nationally oriented, but it covered a range of topics including Brexit, foreign affairs, and online terrorism content. The CBC's coverage of politics and government was also mostly nationally oriented, but six of the articles had an international angle to them as well. Three of the 15 articles on the topic of politics/government in the CBC sample were local/regional in nature, compared to only one of the BBC's 13. A significant difference in the CBC's coverage of government and politics from the BBC and ABC is that two thirds of such articles published by the CBC involves a call to action from the government. For example, in an article published on November 7, 2017, a British-Canadian couple was asking the government to

help their son out of a northern Syrian prison (O'Neill-Yates, 2017). Another article, published on June 21, 2018, covered an Inuk leader's call for Quebec's health minister to resign over racist comments he made (Hendry, 2018). The ABC, which had the fewest articles about politics and government in its sample, covered a variety of mostly nationally oriented topics including immigration, aged care and a parliamentary committee on orphanage tourism.

Hard News Versus Soft News; Good News Versus Bad News

Despite all differences in the articles each of the PSBs published, all three published more hard news stories than soft news stories. This categorization of the articles was done by using Curran, Iyengar, Lund & Salovaara-Moring's (2009) definitions of hard and soft news. Based on this, articles that were categorized as being hard news included news "about politics, public administration, the economy, science, technology and related topics", while soft news included news "about celebrities, human interest, sport and other entertainment-centred stories" (p. 9). Crime stories were considered hard news stories if they provided context for the story and linked "the issue to the public good", but they were considered soft news stories if "the main focus of the report was the crime itself" (Curran, Iyengar, Lund & Salovaara-Moring, 2009, p. 10). Taking these definitions into consideration, there were 9 soft news articles and 33 hard news articles in the BBC sample, 11 soft news and 26 hard news articles in the CBC sample and 17 soft news and 25 hard news articles in the ABC sample. While all of the PSBs had more than half hard news articles, the ABC's site had considerably more soft news stories as the BBC and CBC's sites did, suggesting it has different editorial priorities that put a greater emphasis on Australian culture (particularly sports). The emphasis on hard news stories can be interpreted as an important way in which the PSBs provide a service that is in the public interest because such stories provide citizens with important information relevant to their participation in the public sphere. It is especially

relevant that PSBs continue to emphasize hard news stories because “[i]n most parts of the world, the news media are becoming more market oriented and entertainment centred” (Curran, Iyengar, Lund & Salovaara-Moring, 2009, p. 6).

The content analysis also revealed that the majority of the stories in the total sample were framed as bad news or negative news stories. This aligns with traditional ideas of newsworthiness in democracies. According to academic Pamela Shoemaker (2006): “Whoever said “no news is good news” got it right - so much news is bad news that the absence of news is itself perceived as good news” (p. 106). This is because the news media in democratic societies have a responsibility “to spotlight and draw public attention to problems and situations that need solutions and repair” (Shoemaker, 2006, p. 108). The news is made up of few stories that convey positive or routine events because “if things are okay, there is no need to highlight them” (Shoemaker, 2006, p. 108). In keeping with this, the three most popular topics on the BBC and CBC websites were death, crime and politics/government. The BBC sample of articles in particular had an emphasis on stories related to death and crime with 16 articles involving deaths and 14 involving crimes – double the amount in the CBC sample of articles. Even in the politics/government category, most stories were framed as bad/negative news stories. This negative framing holds true for hard news and soft news topics. For the BBC, while it only posted three non-sport related entertainment stories, two of those were stories that involved deaths. The CBC, meanwhile, only posted two sports stories and one of them involved a death. The ABC sample of articles did skew towards more good news stories than the BBC and CBC sample, but this again can largely be attributed to the number of sports articles in the sample.

How the Wider Media Environment Influences the PSBs

The PSBs are not only influenced by their own organizational goals, they are also susceptible to changes in the wider media environment. Their activities have been influenced by commercial companies, such as Facebook, Twitter and other social networking sites, which they promote on their websites by providing links for the audience to share news stories on social media. All three of the PSBs also promote their social media pages (although the ABC does this to a lesser extent than the BBC and the CBC), encouraging people to follow them on sites such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. This is reflective of the fact that social media has become a popular source of news for many (Reuters, 2017). Mobile devices are also increasingly being used to consume news (Reuters, 2017). In Canada over 70 per cent of the traffic to CBC Online came from mobile devices in 2017 (Baril, 2017). This had a direct impact on its news website, which was redesigned in 2018 to be responsive to mobile use and used low levels of data (Baril, 2017). This redesign was in keeping with the CBC's strategy, *A space for us all*, which emphasized mobile reach (CBC, 2014b, p. 2). Adapting to new technologies in these ways is important for the PSBs, which all strive to ensure that their content is easily accessible to as many people as possible (ABC, 2018a, p. 16; CBC, 2016b, p. 8; Ofcom, 2017, p. 6).

Another way the wider media environment has influence the PSBs is by enabling media organizations to provide more personalized experiences. All three PSBs saw personalization as important to their futures and to their relationships with their audiences (BBC, 2013, p. 63; BBC, 2014, p. 63; CBC, 2020d; ABC, 2018a, pp. 16-17).

The BBC has been strongly encouraged by the BBC Trust to invest more and more into the personalization of its online services (BBC Trust, 2008, p. 15; BBC Trust, 2013, p. 3). Personalization, enabled through creating and signing into a BBC account, would make it easier for audiences "to get the programmes, News and Sport" that interests them (BBC, 2013, p. 63).

Personalisation was also enabled by the myBBC program, which “began with the relaunch of News app’s ‘my News’ section, allowing users to follow updates on over 42,000 topics” (BBC, 2015b, p. 75). Through the program, audiences would sign into an account, which would let the BBC and its partners “know what they have liked in the past” which meant the BBC could then “provide bespoke recommendations of what they might try next” (BBC, 2015a, p. 61). The BBC’s Director-General at the time, Tony Hall, called it “the myBBC revolution” – the reinvention of “public service broadcasting through data” (Hall, 2015b). He emphasized that the BBC would not be “telling you what consumers like you bought, but what citizens like you would love to watch and need to know” (Hall, 2015b). Allowing users to sign up for BBC accounts has enabled the BBC to collect more data on individual users than it otherwise would have been able to. This includes demographic information, such as the ages of its audience members who have signed up for an account (BBC, 2019a, p. 6). When people read articles that are posted on the BBC’s website, the BBC collects information about what they like to read (BBC, 2019a, p. 7). The BBC uses the information it collects to, among other things, deliver its services, to provide information on its services, to deal with complaints or requests, to make recommendations, and to aid in innovation at the BBC (BBC, 2019a, pp. 10-11). Information collected is also used for advertising purposes (BBC, 2019a, p. 11). While BBC Online does not feature advertising that does not promote BBC services and content it does still collect data on users, even those using its publicly funded site, for a number of advertising-related purposes. This includes collecting information for purposes such as showing people advertising on non-BBC sites, and for showing advertising on the BBC when users are accessing the site from outside of Britain (BBC, 2019a, p. 11). The BBC does not sell personal information but will sometimes share it as, for example, the BBC reserves the right to share information “with companies in the BBC family” (BBC, 2019a, pp. 14-15).

The CBC also collects information on those who sign up for accounts and those who visit its website more generally. When users sign up for an account with the CBC, they must provide their real name as the CBC does not allow anyone except for children to use pseudonyms (CBC, 2020b). Other information the CBC collects besides names includes information on which CBC sites have been visited, by who, how often and what content was consumed and clicked on (CBC, 2020c). The information it collects allows the CBC to do things such as provide targeted alerts and send email newsletters when someone signs up for them and enables the CBC to provide a more tailored experience for individual users (CBC, 2020d; CBC, 2020e). The CBC specifies, however, that the algorithms used to create customized online experiences do not skew “representation of particular views” (CBC, 2020f). This is because there are still people within the CBC who edit story line-ups, while algorithms put together things such as “Most Popular” lists (CBC, 2020f). This suggests that, while the CBC does personalize its websites, it does so to a limited extent and in conjunction with, not instead of, a more universal approach to posting stories. CBC Digital Labs, a CBC-affiliated blog on the website *Medium*, featured an article by Jason Cornell, a CBC Product Manager that outlined the CBC’s approach to personalization and recommendations (Cornell, 2018). The CBC adopted a “session-based recommendation system” (Cornell, 2018). Such a system considers “what the user might do next” – the rationale being that “this may help prevent filter bubbles because it focuses on what the user is interested in now, rather than placing the user in a fixed category” (Cornell, 2018). The CBC also uses a Data Management Platform (DMP) (Preuss, 2018). Julio Preuss, another Product Manager at the CBC, wrote on the Digital Labs blog that the CBC was using a DMP to increase its advertising revenue “to fund more quality content for Canadians” (Preuss, 2018). The idea is that the DMP collects data about the Corporation’s audience, which allows them “to improve content and ad targeting capabilities”

(Preuss, 2018). It aids with personalization by helping the CBC's "systems make more informed decisions" (Preuss, 2018). The example Preuss (2018) gives is: "If the DMP knows you like to read Arts stories after lunch, for instance, the site could start displaying them more prominently in the afternoon".

The ABC, like the CBC and the BBC, personalizes its online services and collects user information. It collects such information through a system started in 2014, called ABC ID (ABC, 2014a, p. 30). It "enables the ABC to recognise an individual audience member across ABC online services and on multiple devices, in order to deliver a more personalised and relevant experience" (ABC, 2014a, p. 30). Data is collected in a number of ways. By signing up for an account, for example, users provide their email address. When users are on the ABC's website, the ABC also collects information about how they are using the service (ABC, 2019a). This data is used for a number of purposes beyond personalizing content including to show users promotional material "on third party digital services as well as ABC digital services", and to aggregate information from users to improve ABC products and services (ABC, 2019a). The ABC additionally tracks and controls how many times a user is shown specific promotional information, which helps determine "how effective the campaign has been" (ABC, 2019a).

Public Funding

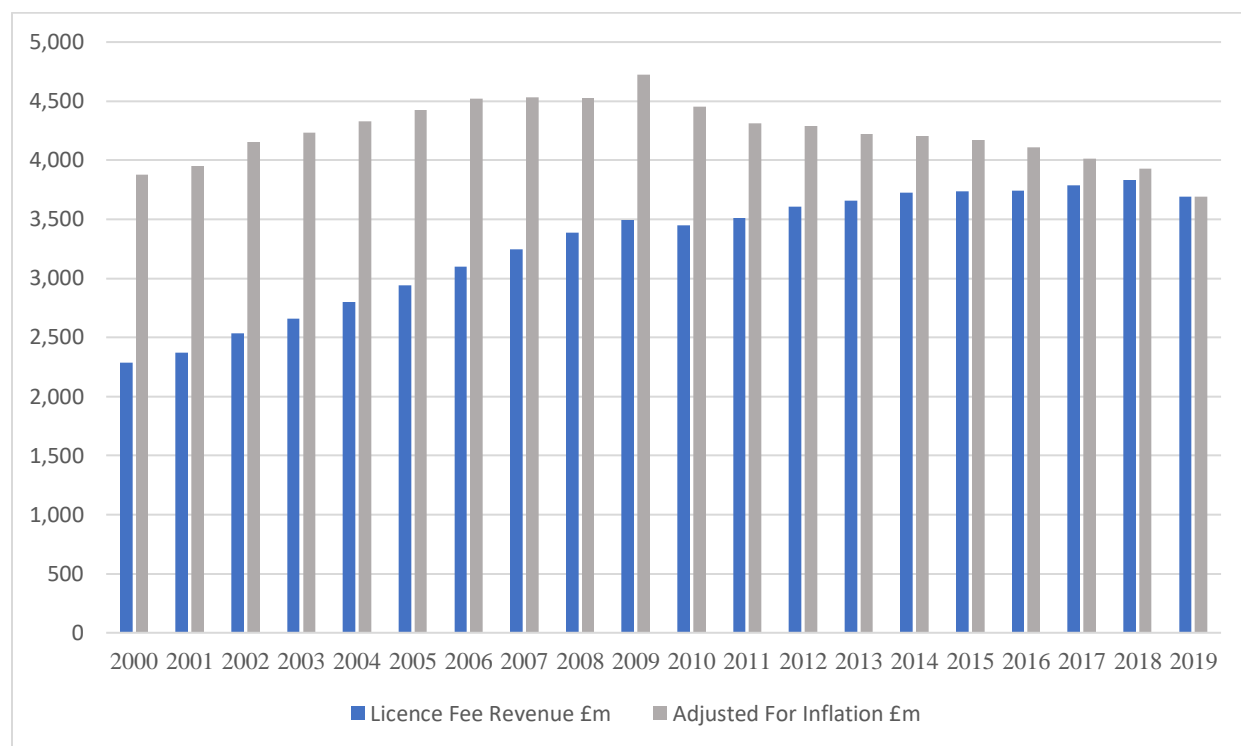
The BBC, CBC and ABC's websites and their capacity to do things like personalize user experiences, are all affected by their public funding. When they started developing their websites, each of the PSBs was being funded differently, although all of them benefited from a mix of funding allocated by their governments and commercial income. The BBC was mainly funded by a licence fee, and also benefited from revenues from its commercial arm, BBC Worldwide, the CBC through a Parliamentary appropriation and advertising revenue, and the ABC through a

government grant and some commercial revenue derived from its commercial arm, ABC Commercial (formerly ABC Enterprises). In the case of all three PSBs, the bulk of funding for their public service output comes from their public funding.

A benefit for the BBC compared to the CBC and the ABC was that, because it had specific approval to establish and develop BBC Online, the budget for doing so came directly from the BBC's licence fee.

Figure 2²¹

BBC Licence Fee Revenue From 2000-2019



The BBC's funding increased, as demonstrated above in Figure 2, from 2000 until 2010.

After 2010, the BBC's budget, when adjusted for inflation²², fell steadily over the next nine years.

²¹ Information for Figure 2 comes from the BBC's Annual Reports (BBC, 2000; BBC, 2001; BBC, 2002; BBC, 2003; BBC, 2004b; BBC, 2005; BBC, 2006; BBC, 2007; BBC, 2008a; BBC, 2009; BBC, 2010; BBC, 2011; BBC, 2012; BBC, 2013; BBC, 2014; BBC, 2015b; BBC, 2016a; BBC, 2017; BBC, 2018, BBC, 2019b).

²² Inflation was calculated using the Bank of England's inflation calculator, available at <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>

This started because in 2010, halfway through an already existing licence fee settlement, the BBC and the government unexpectedly reached a new agreement whereby the BBC's licence fee would "be frozen for the duration of the settlement, which means a decline in real terms each year" (BBC Trust, 2011, p. 24). By 2019, the BBC's funding had dropped to £3.7 billion from £3.9 billion (adjusted for inflation) in 2000. A further blow to the Corporation was that on top of reduced funding, it was forced to take over the funding of BBC Monitoring in 2013 and BBC World Service the following year (BBC Trust, 2011, p. 24).

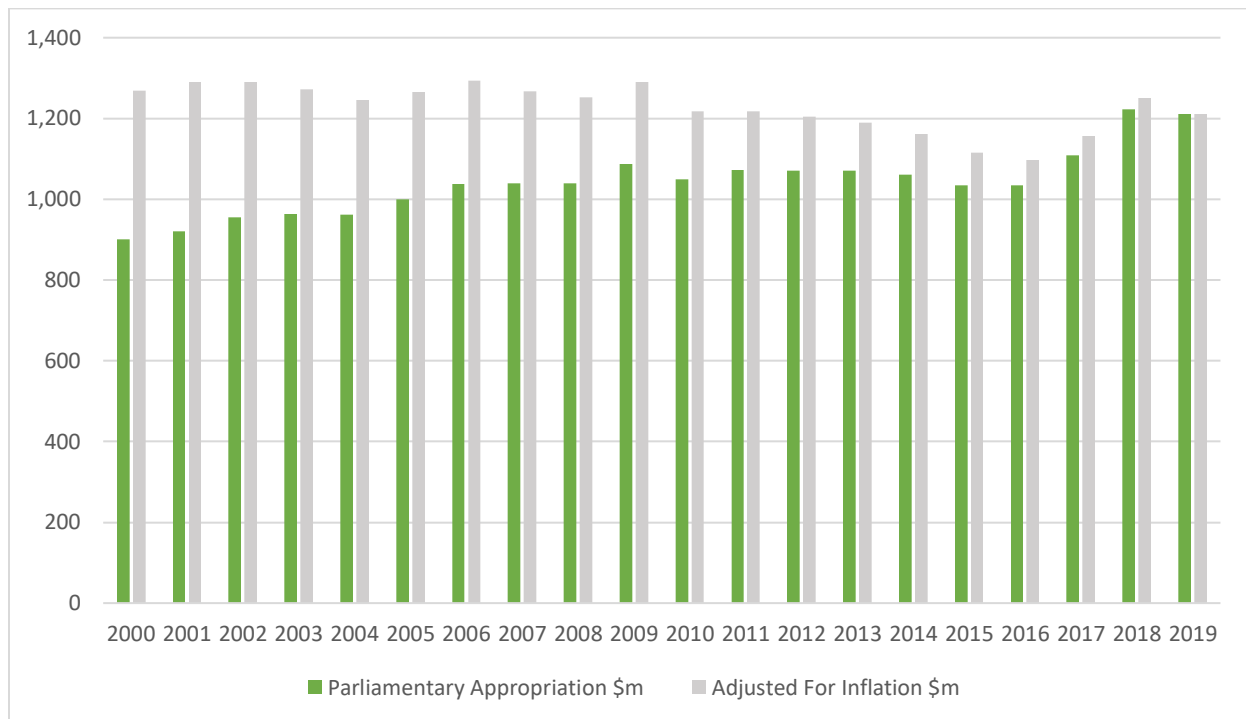
The situation in Canada and Australia was much different. The fact that policy and regulation in Canada and Australia had not kept up with technological change in the 1990s and early 2000s had consequences for the CBC and the ABC, especially in terms of their funding arrangements. Online services were not technically part of services the PSBs were expected to deliver, which meant there was no new funding provided directly for their establishment or early development. Instead, both the CBC and ABC's government funding faced a series of cuts in the 1990s (ABC, 1998, p. 55; Given, 2003, p. 194; Rowland, 2013; Rowland, 2015). This meant that if they wanted to be online, both PSBs had to figure out how to fund the additional services on top of continuing to provide their radio and television services with less public funding.

Part of the difficulty in doing this for the CBC was that its public funding was guaranteed only on a year-by-year basis, which made it difficult to plan for the future. In addition to the instability of its funding, the CBC has had to contend with the fact that its mandate is wide in scope, but the government has refused to provide it with the funding and resources needed to actually meet the demands of its mandate (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006, p. 33). This problem intensified when the CBC developed its website without any new dedicated funding for it because it meant that the CBC was attempting to provide

Canadians with more services despite unstable, declining funding, which was already being stretched thin.

Figure 3²³

CBC Parliamentary Appropriation From 2000-2019



The CBC's funding has ultimately, when adjusted for inflation²⁴, fluctuated over the years, reaching a low point in 2016. After the Federal Liberal Party came into power in Canada that year, the CBC's Parliamentary appropriation was increased and reached \$1.21 billion by 2019. As shown above in Figure 3, this was still less than the funding it received in 2000, which in 2019 dollars amounted to \$1.27 billion. It is also still lower than the \$1.42 billion (\$918 million before being adjusted for inflation) that the CBC received in 1996, the year it launched Newsworld Online

²³ Information for Figure 3 comes from the CBC's Annual Reports (CBC, 2000; CBC, 2001; CBC, 2002; CBC, 2003; CBC, 2004; CBC, 2005; CBC, 2006; CBC, 2007; CBC, 2008; CBC, 2009; CBC, 2010; CBC, 2011b; CBC, 2012; CBC, 2013; CBC, 2014a; CBC, 2015; CBC, 2016c; CBC, 2017; CBC, 2018; CBC, 2019c).

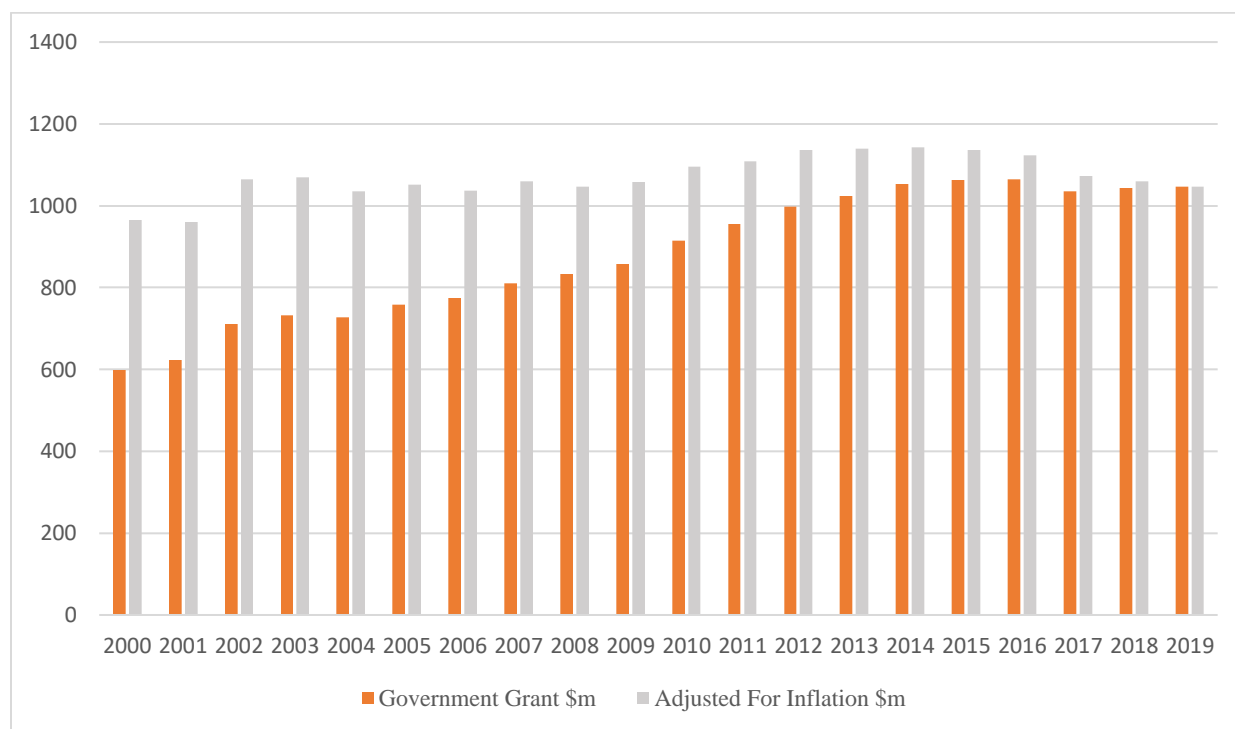
²⁴ Inflation was calculated using the Bank of Canada's inflation calculator available at <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/rates/related/inflation-calculator/>

amidst criticism in the national press that it was not well funded enough to justify developing online services.

The ABC, like the CBC, faced funding issues when it first developed its website. Between 1997 and 1998 (when it launched ABC News Online), its funding decreased from \$588 million in 1997 to \$523 million. After this, the ABC's funding fluctuated but ultimately grew from 2000 to 2019, as illustrated below in Figure 4.

Figure 4²⁵

ABC Government Grant From 2000-2019



The ABC's public funding has, however, been decreasing in the years since 2015, after a new government came in and decided that instead of honoring the funding increases the ABC had been promised in 2013, it would reduce its funding (ABC, 2014a, p. 22; ABC, 2015, p. 15;

²⁵ Information for Figure 4 comes from the ABC's Annual Reports (ABC, 2000; ABC, 2001; ABC, 2002; ABC, 2003; ABC, 2004; ABC, 2005; ABC, 2006; ABC, 2007; ABC, 2008a; ABC, 2009; ABC, 2010; ABC, 2011b; ABC, 2012; ABC, 2013; ABC 2014a; ABC, 2015; ABC, 2016; ABC 2017b; ABC, 2018b; ABC, 2019b).

Parliament of Australia, 2013, p. 74). As illustrated above in Figure 4, this took the ABC's funding from a high point of \$1.14 billion in 2014 (when adjusted for inflation²⁶) to \$1.05 billion in 2019. Ultimately, all three PSBs are facing difficult financial situations as of 2019. The BBC and the CBC both have less public funding, when adjusted for inflation, than they did in 2000. The BBC and the ABC have seen their public funding decreasing in the years leading up to and including 2019. The ABC's funding has been decreasing since 2015, while the BBC's has been decreasing since 2010. All three of the PSBs have found themselves needing to navigate funding more services with decreased and/or declining, unstable public funding. Decreasing and unstable funding can influence the content the PSBs post online because it leaves the PSBs to make difficult choices about what it can and cannot realistically provide. This is evident, for example, in the decisions made around multimedia use, interactive journalism and sources of information at each of the PSBs.

Multimedia Use

Multimedia can be labour-intensive and costly (Thurman & Lupton, 2008). All three PSBs did use some multimedia in their articles but it was generally limited. Overall, the articles from each PSB made significant use of photography and the written word to convey news and information rather than multimedia such as audio and visual media. From this it is clear that the broadcasters are publishing, at least in terms of their national news services, a significant amount of content that is closer to what is seen traditionally as newspaper content rather than broadcast content.

In terms of photography specifically, almost all of the articles looked at from the sample of articles contained at least one photograph. Photography adds a visual element to the stories

²⁶ Inflation was calculated using the Reserve Bank of Australia's inflation calculator available at <https://www.rba.gov.au/calculator/>

themselves, which otherwise tend to contain a lot of written text, as well as to the homepage. This is important for catching readers' eyes and drawing them in (Huang, 2003). Beyond incorporating photographs, however, the use of multimedia on each of the PSB's national news sites was limited. Fewer than half of the articles in the sample for all three PSBs included video and/or audio content. There was some use of video by each of the PSBs, including the occasional live stream of a news event. The CBC and the ABC each had three articles in the sample that incorporated either live video content or live blogging. The BBC articles within the sample did not contain any live content. Other forms of content that were used include embedded social media posts, mostly from Twitter and the occasional audio clip. There were some maps and graphs that were also used to help convey information in a number of stories. As Table 3 shows, all three used multimedia but they did so sparingly.

Table 3

Articles That Used Photos, Audio, Video, Social Media and/or Maps and Graphs

	BBC	CBC	ABC
Photos	40	38	37
Audio	1	1	1
Video	13	13	5
Social media posts	4	6	6
Maps/graphs	4	5	8

Interactive journalism was also used sparingly by the PSBs. Interactive journalism is defined “as a visual presentation of storytelling through code for multilayered, tactile user control for the purpose of news and information” (Usher, 2016, p. 18). It can present itself in many forms, including “multimedia, immersive storytelling, data visualization, data driven stories, explanatory graphics, or interactive features that combine some or all of these components” (Usher, 2016, p. 3). It can also touch on various subjects “from the serious - income inequality or campaign finance - to the fun - March madness brackets, maps for bar crawls and drink specials, or even Oscar

ballots” (Usher, 2016, p. 3). The creation of such journalism, while innovative, can be “expensive and time-consuming to create, requiring expertise that is not readily available” (Thurman & Lupton, 2008, p. 452).

The sample of CBC articles did not contain any interactive journalism (although the CBC does have a history of producing some interactive journalism such as Vote Compass, a quiz that tells users where they fell on the political spectrum in Canada), and the BBC and ABC have incorporated it very minimally even though both have teams in their newsrooms devoted specifically to creating interactive and other forms of multimedia journalism. The BBC produces interactive journalism through a team called the BBC News Visual and Data Journalism Team. The team produces visual and data-based journalism and has worked on interactive projects such as mapping out rent affordability in Britain (BBC Visual and Data Journalism, 2019). The ABC has an Interactive Digital Storytelling Team, which was funded by additional revenue the ABC received from the government in 2013, which was later reduced (ABC, 2015, p. 54; Hunter, 2019). The team has worked on a number of projects including using “the first data released from the 2016 Australian Census to tell an innovative digital story about the state of the nation” (ABC, 2017a, p. 53). It has also worked on things such as interactive data visualizations and policy explainers (ABC, 2017a, p. 53). In 2017, the ABC established a Digital Storytelling Innovation team, which “brought together a blend of employees with specialist skills, with a mandate to innovate digital storytelling content and form” (ABC, 2018a, p. 31). The team was part of a strategy to transition ABC News “to a platform-agnostic, story-based approach to delivering news and current affairs” (Porteous, 2017).

The fact that interactive journalism was only used very minimally in the articles considered for this dissertation suggests that while the PSBs value interactive journalism, it has not been

integrated into their everyday news routines in the same way that photography has been. Given the effort by the BBC and ABC to put together teams dedicated to creating interactive journalism, it is likely that the barrier to its further use is funding rather than lack of institutional support from within the Corporations.

Sources of Information

Another way that funding can be seen to have influenced the content on the national news websites of the PSBs is related to the sources of information they use. This is because decreasing funding tends to lead to fewer journalists, and fewer journalists means less time for original reporting. According to the minimal data available, this seems to be the case at the three PSBs.

Table 4

Number of News staff at the ABC from 2010-2018²⁷

Year ²⁸	Number of News Staff
2010	947
2011	963
2012	965
2013	1009
2014	1052
2015	1434
2016	1367
2017	1333
2018	1334 ²⁹

The ABC, the only one of the three PSBs that consistently reports the number of employees in its news division in its Annual Reports, increased its staff numbers throughout the 1990s and 2000s, but the number of staff in the news department, as shown above in Table 4, started to fall after

²⁷ Numbers in this table comes from the ABC's Annual Reports

²⁸ Numbers are recorded as of June each year

²⁹ This number represents the number of staff categorized as "News, analysis and investigations" unlike the other numbers in this chart which represent the number of staff categorized as "News" staff. It is unclear whether or not this change in category title corresponds with a change in which types of staff members are counted in each category.

2015 as the ABC's public funding also began to decrease (ABC, 1998, p. 96; ABC, 1999, p. 99; ABC 2015, p. 218; ABC 2018b, p. 227; etc). As of 2018, the total number was reported to be 1334.15 full time-equivalent staff (ABC 2018b, p. 227). The limitation of the way the ABC reports its staff numbers is that it is unclear how many of the jobs that have been lost in the department are specifically reporting jobs.

The CBC does not similarly provide consistently reported numbers of its news department staff let alone for the number of journalists it employs, but it was revealed in testimony to a Senate committee that in 2003 it had a news staff of 1,900 down from 2,500 ten years prior to that (Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications, 2003). At the BBC in 2008, according to an academic study published in 2010, the BBC cut the jobs of 300 or so of its 3,400 journalists (Lee-Wright, 2010, p. 80).

This ultimately influences reporting in a number of ways. For example, there was minimal investigative journalism included in the article samples. The CBC was the only one of the three PSBs to include reporting based on studies or investigative work it had indicated it had done itself. This includes an article that looked into Canadians who were fatally shot by police, based on an analysis of inquests, media reports and other documents (Nicholson, 2018). Similar investigative work is not apparent in any of the BBC or ABC articles. All three PSBs published articles heavily influenced by secondary sources. A few articles in the sample were largely based off of Twitter content, for example. Other articles used content from other programs and journalists from within the Corporations. This was the case for 14 BBC articles, 8 CBC articles and 8 ABC articles. Stories based largely on secondary sources such as social media posts and reporting from various programs within the Corporation increases the volume of output without taking up too much time to create.

Another common type of secondary source used by all three PSBs is stock photos and wire service content. Such content enables the PSBs to increase the volume of content they are producing for their websites, without needing to send journalists outside of the newsroom to report. Of the articles considered, there were 20 BBC articles, 4 CBC articles and 2 ABC articles that contained stock photos. There were also 12 BBC articles, 17 CBC articles and 21 ABC articles contained some form of content attributed to a wire service. Photography was the most common content used from the wire services. The BBC did not attribute any other form of content to a wire service, while there was only a small number of articles posted on the CBC and ABC's sites where either some or all of the article's written content was attributed to either the Canadian Press or Australian Associated Press wire services. The majority of the CBC and ABC's articles had a byline, which made it clear who wrote the article, which is especially relevant if it is a wire service. The BBC, however, left most of its articles unattributed, making the origin of the story less clear than those articles on the CBC and ABC website. Only four of the BBC articles in the sample did have a byline. A further seven articles had a small section towards the bottom that was attributed to a journalist, usually contributing a section on analysis to the article. Two more articles had sections part way through that contained the name of a journalist "at the scene" who contributed further reporting to the story. If all stories that contain reporting from the scene of the story specify that, as the two articles that do seem to suggest, the vast majority of stories the BBC writes for online are compiled in the newsroom. This is entirely plausible given that in 2010 a "limited ethnographic study among the BBC News web team found many frustrated journalists acting as no more than sub-editors reformatting copy" (Lee-Wright, 2010, p. 81). The high use of stock photography and wire service photography at the BBC also suggest that it is likely that a significant portion of its online articles are generated in the newsroom rather than out in the field.

The PSBs have also all used UGC. UGC, in addition to providing the PSBs with content, has also allowed them to engage with audiences and to facilitate public discussion online. UGC is a broad term, and different scholars have come up with different ways of categorizing types of UGC (Harrison, 2009; Williams, Wardle & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011; Wardle & Williams, 2010). For the purposes of this chapter the focus is more simply on content (such as a submitted photo or comment in a comment section) that was used in the articles considered, that was attributed to a citizen or audience member (and not a wire service or journalist). UGC, like multimedia and interactive journalism, can be costly (Kemble, 2017; Williams, Wardle & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011).

The most common form of UGC that any of the PSBs use is commenting. Even still, use of commenting was limited at all three PSBs – only five articles from the BBC, 12 from the CBC and 2 from the ABC allowed people to post comments on them. The ones that did allow comments were sport, entertainment and political stories, but not all stories on similar topics allowed comments. The PSBs each have different rules around commenting and different ways of moderating their comment sections. The comments left on BBC articles are all moderated either before or after they are posted. Comment sections that are pre-moderated contain only comments that the BBC checked before they were posted (BBC, 2020b). Most comments, however, are subject to reactive moderation, which means that while they are not checked at first, they will be later if a problem is flagged by either another person or a filter (BBC, 2020b). At the CBC, there are four types of moderation used for comment sections: manual moderation, which is done by a person; automated moderation, which is done by a machine, proactive moderation, which can happen before or after a comment is posted; and reactive moderation, which applies only to submissions that have been reported by another user (CBC, 2019b). The CBC's editorial staff ultimately make decisions about what articles can be commented on based on considerations such

as the resources that will be needed to moderate the space and any legal issues (CBC, 2020a). The ABC did not allow comments on any of its articles for part of the time during which the sample of articles for this dissertation was collected, which accounts for the fact that it had the fewest articles that allowed comments of the three PSBs. It has had a complicated history in terms of its commenting policies. ABC News Social Media Lead Gary Kemble (2017) referred to the ABC's relationship with comments as being "on-again, off-again", or in other words: "It's like that whole Ross and Rachel thing"³⁰. He pointed out that moderating comments requires resources, leaving the question of "[h]ow do you pay for it?" (Kemble, 2017). In a study focused on the BBC, Williams, Wardle & Wahl-Jorgensen (2011) found moderation to be costly and so the BBC needed to outsource comments moderation to third parties (p. 90). This was a barrier for the ABC. Kemble (2017) notes that at one point, ABC News made the decision not to allow comments because it "didn't have technology to moderate comments efficiently". In 2017, however, the ABC decided it would try allowing online comments again, this time using new a new software program called Livefyre (Kemble, 2017). After a three-month trial period, the ABC decided to turn comments off again (Kemble, 2017; Kemble, 2018). Despite using software to help moderate commenting, the ABC found that moderation was "still labour intensive" (Kemble, 2018). Instead, the Corporation decided to explore different "ways of engaging our audiences" (Kemble, 2018).

The lack of UGC on all three PSBs, particularly in terms of audience comments, is striking because the BBC, CBC and ABC all claim that the Internet has allowed them to engage more with audiences and to better facilitate national conversation. The BBC, for example, has claimed that it is "the place where the UK comes together in a shared conversation" (BBC, 2015b, p. 58). The CBC has portrayed itself as aspiring "to provide a publicly owned, publicly minded space where

³⁰ Kemble (2017) was referring to a storyline on the popular 1990s sitcom *Friends*

Canadians can meet and exchange with each other and with the country” (CBC, 2011a, p. 1). ABC Chairman James Spigelman (2013) has argued that the role of PSBs in “providing a forum for debate for a democratic polity as a whole” is critical (p. 45). Allowing commenting on news stories is surely one of the more effective ways of operationalizing these ambitions, which all ultimately see the PSBs as a space for the very thing commenting allows: national discussion.

Political Pressure

The BBC, CBC and ABC’s public funding arrangements, which affect their output, are indicative of the influence the British, Canadian and Australian governments have over their respective PSBs. The BBC’s licence fee, the CBC’s Parliamentary appropriation and the ABC’s government grant were each set by their respective governments, which had the power not only to determine the amount of government funding the PSBs received, but also to determine the length of time for which that funding would be guaranteed. This is significant because the longer the term of guaranteed funding, the more independent from government the PSBs are able to be. All three PSBs differ in this respect. As previously discussed, the CBC’s funding has been provided on an annual basis for decades. This has been at the expense of the CBC being able to effectively fulfill its mandate (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 42; Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2003, pp. 215-216). The BBC’s funding was typically guaranteed for longer periods of time (in 1996, for example, its funding arrangement was designed to last until the end of the end of the 2001-2002 financial year), while the ABC’s government funding was typically guaranteed for three years at a time (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 1998; Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 132). As was seen in the previous discussion about the levels of public funding each of the PSBs has received over time, even when funding was guaranteed for multiple years to the BBC and the ABC it is possible for that funding to be reduced before the funding period is up.

Another way the governments have influenced the activities of the PSBs is by requiring them to become more self-sufficient and to find efficiency savings. For the BBC, this direction was explicit (Culture, Media and Sport, 1998, para. 4; Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2006a, BBC, 2007; BBC Trust, 2011, p. 13). For the CBC and the ABC, the direction to find efficiencies and become more self-sufficient has been implied through decreased budgets that were never matched with realistic expectations of what that money could provide in terms of their organizational mandates.

Regulation

The British, Canadian and Australian governments have all exercised power over the PSBs in other ways, outside of their funding arrangements. For example, the British government changed the BBC's regulatory structure twice in the span of a decade. The first time, the BBC Board of Governors was replaced with the BBC Trust. By doing this, the government separated the BBC Board of Governors into two: the first part was the BBC Trust, which had regulatory powers and would be accountable to licence fee payers and the second part was the BBC Executive Board, which would be accountable to the BBC Trust (DCMS, 2005, p. 3; DCMS, 2006a, p. 3). The second time the BBC's regulatory structure was changed, the BBC Trust was replaced with Ofcom, an industry regulator that was given the additional task of regulating the BBC (DMCS, 2016a, p. 52). This meant that, moving forward, the BBC's performance would be assessed by a regulator entirely external to it for the first time (DMCS, 2016a, p. 52). The two changes in regulatory structures moved the BBC progressively away from the system of internal regulation it had operated with since the 1920s. In contrast the situation in Britain, the Canadian government influenced the CBC's online services by not providing for or insisting on a regulatory system for

its websites. This, as has been discussed, has in some ways allowed the CBC to be less transparent with regards to its online services than it is with regards to its television and radio services.

Government Inquiries

Another example of the way governments can influence the PSBs is by establishing inquiries into their activities. For example, in 2000, the Australian government initiated an inquiry into the ABC that would compel the ABC to release commercial information that had not previously been made public. The inquiry looked into a licensing deal that the ABC was negotiating with Telstra. Prior to the inquiry, there was not a lot of information that was publicly available about the potential deal between the ABC and Telstra or the negotiations (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 13). The inquiry, however, forced details about what was going on to be made public (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000). Two senators who wrote a dissenting report, appended to the interim report of the inquiry, were critical of the inquiry's motivations. They called the inquiry "an unprecedented encroachment on the independence of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation" (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 56). Significantly, the inquiry was something that *The Australian* had called for in an editorial that went so far as to argue that a public debate on the matter was "essential" ("Public owed say", 2000, p. 2). Given that it was reported a few days later that News Limited, the publisher of *The Australian* was also in talks with the ABC for a licensing deal, it is entirely possible the newspaper was pushing for a public inquiry out of self-interest rather than out of concern for the public's ability to have a say in what happens at their national public broadcaster, as the editorial suggested (Hughes, 2000, p. 63; "Public owed say", 2000, p. 2). If the inquiry was a direct result of lobbying from News Limited, it was never explicitly stated. However, it is clear that government power to initiate inquiries into ABC activities has not been inconsequential to the relationship between the

ABC and News Limited as decades later complaints from *The Australian* about the ABC would lead the government to set up another inquiry – the *Inquiry into Competitive Neutrality of the National Broadcasters*. As public corporations the PSBs should all be subject to transparency and accountability measures including public inquiries. However, there is a difference between an inquiry that is set up out of motives related to the public interest and ones set up to serve commercial interests and that interferes with the independence of the PSBs. When all public inquiries that fall under the scope of this dissertation and that have a specific focus on either the BBC, CBC or ABC (as opposed to entire media systems) are taken to account, as Table 5 below shows, the ABC is the only one of the PSBs that was subjected to inquiries that were motivated more so by private than public interests.

Table 5

Public Inquiries From 2000-2019 Motivated By Public Versus Private Interests

	Public Interest	Private Interest
BBC	5	0
CBC	2	0
ABC	0	2

Commercialization

Along with political pressure, the BBC, CBC and ABC have all faced commercial pressures as well. Calls for the PSBs to be more commercial started around the 1980s. At that time, as discussed in Chapter Two, there was a shift in public policy thinking that prioritized private enterprises and commercial ideas over public ones (Inglis, 2006, p. 100; O'Malley, 2001, p. 33). This impacted the PSBs well into the development of their websites as evidenced by their online commercial activities.

Both the BBC and the ABC had, for example, early forays into the Internet that were made possible by commercial partnerships (Ashcroft, 1995; Burns, 2000; Martin, 1999; Moe, 2008b, p.

226). The CBC's early online activities were not aided by similar partnerships, but the CBC, unlike the BBC and ABC, did make the choice to sell advertising on its website. The CBC's commercial activities have been a frequent topic of discussion in the newspapers because the fact that the CBC was allowed to sell advertisements at all has long been criticized by Canadian newspapers (Kline, 2013, p. A13; Krashinsky, 2019, p. B3; etc). Another commercial activity all three of the PSBs were involved in was licensing content to commercial providers.

The websites of the PSBs were all more susceptible to commercialization than their other services for a number of reasons. First of all, they were undeniably popular. The national press in all three countries acknowledged this in their early coverage of the services (Evans, 2000, p. A5; Manktelow, 1998a, p. 11; Robins, 1999, p. 14; Snoddy, 2002, p. 20; etc). Growth in web traffic³¹ as shown in Figure 1 suggests they have remained popular. BBC News Online, for example, has increased its web traffic from 77 million page impressions in March 2000 to 30 million UK users per week in 2018 (or, approximately 120 million monthly users) (BBC, 2000, p. 50; BBC, 2018, p. 9). The CBC went from having around one million cbc.ca unique users per month in 2002, to having 17.4 million unique users per month in 2018/2019 for its digital offering (CBC, 2002, p. 9; CBC, 2019c, p. 28). ABC Online, meanwhile, had an average reach of 1.4 million users per month in 2004, and an average reach of 7.6 million users monthly in 2017/2018 (ABC, 2004, p. 4; ABC, 2018b, p. 74). Additionally, in 2018, Reuters listed all three of the PSBs as having the highest percentage of weekly use for online news in their respective countries (Reuters, 2018). Second, for the ABC specifically, its online content existed outside of its legislation until 2013. As such, while

³¹ While ideally the growth in web traffic would be shown yearly over a period of several years, the PSBs have not reported consistently enough for this to be possible. One of the problems is that as the Internet has evolved, new ways of measuring and tracking success in terms of users have emerged. This has meant that, while, for example, the BBC at one point measured its online audience in terms of page impressions, in 2018 it measured it in terms of users, which are not comparable measurements.

the ABC interpreted the ABC Act as allowing it to be online, it also interpreted the fact that the service was not explicitly prohibited from commercial activities as meaning that it could make decisions about the commercialization of its online services without restriction (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000, p. 24). Thirdly, as the Canadian and Australian governments had decided not to fund their online services, the Corporations needed to find alternative ways for specifically funding those services.

Pressure on the Private Sector

Commercial pressures and how the PSBs have dealt with them throughout the course of the development of their websites have in turn helped to foster a largely adversarial relationship between the PSBs and the press in their respective countries. In Britain, newspapers lobbied against the BBC, arguing that the BBC was occupying space that already had a lot of commercial providers and that it would distort the online market and therefore limit choice online (BIPA, 1999). There were questions raised by the press around why the BBC was expanding its services, whether or not it was necessary for it to do so, and whether or not it should receive extra funding to do so (“Auntie must fly the standard”, 1999, p. 27; “The BBC and our money”, 1999, p. 25; “A wrong way to bump up the licence fee”, 1999, p. 3; etc.). In Canada, where the CBC was not as well funded as Britain, the two national newspapers argued that the CBC’s diminishing resources made it difficult for the Corporation to keep the services it already offered afloat, and so it should not be adding more services to the mix (Whyte, 1999, p. B9; Fraser, 1999, p. A8; Evans, 1998, p. D2; Saunders, 1999b, p. A4). In other words, while the question for the BBC had been why it was being provided with extra funding to expand, for the CBC, the question was why it was expanding when it was not given extra funding to do so. Furthermore, because new media services were not officially part of the CBC’s mandate in the Broadcasting Act, the CBC’s online services were

labeled by the country's national press as being "ambitious", and "frivolous" (Fraser, 1999, p. A8; Whyte, 1999, p. B9). In Australia, like in Canada, funding was a central focus of discussion in terms of the ABC moving online. There was a preoccupation in 2000, for example, with the ABC licensing its online content to generate revenue to help fund its expansion into new media (Gilchrist, 2000a, p. 3; "Public owed say", 2000, p. 12; Smith, 2000, p. 8; etc). The *Australian* used the deal to raise questions about "creeping commercialism" at the ABC, and about whether or not "Australians still value public broadcasting" ("Public owed say", 2000, p. 12).

Criticism of each of the PSBs only grew as time went on. News organizations in general were struggling to adapt to financial disruption precipitated by a global recession, advertising revenue shifting online and the rise of aggregators, as well as technological disruption, which enabled convergence, a strategy that led media companies to take on debt to purchase outlets across multiple media in the hopes of producing profitable synergies (Edge, 2016; Fenton, 2011; Gorman, 2015; McChesney, 2012; etc). The strategy largely failed (Edge, 2011, p. 1267). Rupert Murdoch, owner of *The Australian*, *The Times*, and *The Sun* was not unaccustomed to financing unprofitable newspapers with the other businesses in his empire. Rather, "News Corporation has spent hundreds of millions of dollars propping up loss-making newspapers that advance Murdoch's personal political beliefs and influence" (McKnight & McChesney, 2013, p. 19). The losses he was willing to absorb were not small. It has been reported that *The Times* had an annual loss of \$89 million in U.S. dollars in 2004 (McKnight & McChesney, 2013, p. 19). The situation is similar with *The Australian* in Australia (McNair, Flew, Harrington & Swift, 2017). Its losses were at one point "estimated at \$25 million a year" in U.S. dollars (McKnight & McChesney, 2013, p. 213). Murdoch's loss-making newspapers served an important purpose for him though – "they help set an agenda not only for their audiences, but also for political parties and other news organisations"

(McKnight & McChesney, 2013, p. 27). His agenda has included attacks on both the BBC and the ABC (McKnight & McChesney, 2013, p. 32). It is unsurprising then that in 2009, as newspapers began to consider putting up paywalls as a way to generate revenue from their online content, News Corporation took the occasion to attack the BBC for supposedly being a great barrier to newspapers making profits from their websites (Andrews, 2009, p. 1; Bell, 2009, p. 3; Robinson, 2009, p. 1).

By 2019, audience habits had changed to the point where a lot of people were mostly reading the news online (Cairncross, 2019, p. 6). The business models that newspapers relied on did not adapt well to this change. Newspaper circulation and advertising revenue had continued to decline and not all paywalls proved workable (Cairncross, 2019; PPF, 2017; Reuters, 2017; Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2018). Furthermore, in Britain, major technology companies including Facebook and Google were understood as having a significant negative impact on the national press as they have “captured the majority of online advertising revenue” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 8). These companies are having a similar effect on newspapers in Canada and Australia (Kerr, 2018; PPF, 2017). In Canada, newspapers trying to adapt to the new media environment also had to contend with the CBC’s online advertising sales.

Policy and regulation, which are often used to help facilitate healthy media spheres, have not kept up with technological advancements in a way that would mitigate the main problems facing newspapers. This has left newspapers, which have a history of intervening in PSB affairs out of self-interest when they feel threatened, to lobby against the PSBs, to call into question their purpose and to accuse them of unfair competition.

Soft News

Attacks on the PSBs from the newspapers were not inconsequential. One of the outcomes of press lobbying against the BBC in Britain was that the BBC was asked to shift its online news service away from soft news. Soft news content was argued by critics of the BBC to replicate services provided elsewhere and as such made the BBC's online services less distinct than they were supposed to be (DCMS, 2016a, p. 36). In 2016, the British Government recommended the BBC move away from soft news to make its services more distinct (DCMS, 2016a, p. 36). The CBC and ABC faced similar criticism with regards to the opinion sites each of them launched (Boland, 2009, p. 31; Hopper, 2016, p. A11; Meade, 2009, p. 31; Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2016). The ABC ultimately decided to close down its opinion site (ABC, 2018c, p. 44). The ABC also controversially used Google Adwords to increase its reach. AdWords allows organizations to pay money to appear higher on Google's search lists, which News Corp. Australia (formally News Limited) argued, was an inappropriate use of the ABC's funding because it was outbidding commercial organizations in Google advertising auctions (News Corp. Australia, 2018, pp. 4-5).

In these ways, the commodification of online commercial news has influenced the BBC, CBC and ABC because of calls (several of which have been successful) to have the PSBs restricted from providing certain content. In other words, because commercial news providers have needed to monetize their online content, and because they have struggled to do so, they have fought to prevent the PSBs from posting the types of content they see as being the most profitable thereby lessening the competition they face.

Linking to Other News Media

Another issue between the press and the PSBs was in relation to linking practices. The BBC was the only PSB to attribute information in the sample of articles to another news media

company and to provide a link to the story where the information came from. The BBC is compelled by its service licence to meet a certain level of click-throughs to other sites. A total of five articles referenced and linked either to *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, Sky News or Sky Sports (“Brexit: SNP would back ‘People’s Vote’ calls, says Sturgeon”; 2018; “London violence: Mayor urges ‘targeted’ stop and search”, 2018; McNulty, 2018; “Oxfam Haiti sex claims: Charity to meet government”, 2018; “Theresa May to warn tech firms over terror content”, 2017). Neither the ABC nor the CBC referenced information from other news media companies, and neither is obliged to do so.

The BBC and the CBC have received criticism for their linking practices. For the BBC, the problem has been that its external links were not leading to enough click-throughs, which meant that not enough people were using the BBC’s external links to actually go see the content the BBC was linking to. A 2008 review of the Online Service Licence found that the BBC was not generating enough click-throughs and required the BBC to find new ways of generating click-throughs (BBC Trust, 2008, p. 51). A 2013 review later found that the BBC still was not meeting its targets (BBC Trust, 2013, p. 10). An article in *The Times* argued that by not doing enough to help its audiences find other sources of information online, it was possible that the BBC was undermining media plurality (Webster, 2013, p. 19). In 2019, after Ofcom had taken over the regulation of the BBC, the BBC’s linking strategy was still seen as being inadequate (Ofcom, 2019, p. 5).

The issue was different at the CBC, which is not compelled to generate click-throughs on its website. The CBC was instead criticized by *Canadaland*, an alternative media organization, which published an article online that reported widespread criticism within the Canadian journalism community of the CBC’s attribution practices (Gordon, 2018). The report claimed,

“that the CBC often appears to go out of its way to avoid crediting others’ scoops – by independently verifying information from another outlet, the CBC frequently sidesteps acknowledgment of the original source” (Gordon, 2018). *Canadaland* came to this conclusion after conducting “online searches and interviews with journalists at other outlets” (Gordon, 2018).

Frustration with citation and linking practices at the BBC and the CBC are undoubtedly compounded by the fact that limited use of audio and video on all three PSBs shows how far the PSBs have expanded into providing a service outside of their traditional formats. Adversarial relationships between the PSBs and the press are not new – rather, they stretch back to the very beginnings of public broadcasting in Britain, Canada and Australia (Briggs, 1961, p. 164; Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 19; Peers, 1969; Weir, 1965, p. 229). The emergence of the Internet in many ways reignited old rivalries that had somewhat died down over the years after policies around advertising and news provision on the PSBs became more or less settled and as newspapers were not yet struggling to generate revenue as they would come to less than a decade into the new millennium.

Conclusion

While providing a comparison of the BBC, CBC and ABC’s online national news services, this chapter has highlighted how different structures have influenced their establishment and development. Governments, for example, make decisions about how much public funding the PSBs receive and for how long. Because of decisions made by their respective governments, all three of the PSBs have had to cope with instability in their funding arrangements. While the CBC’s funding has always been relatively unstable because it is ultimately decided on annually, the BBC and the ABC, while technically are provided with guaranteed funding for a set amount of time, have both faced situations where funding that was promised to them was later decreased (ABC,

2014a, p. 22; ABC, 2015, p. 15; BBC Trust, 2011, p. 24). Funding issues in turn have influenced the content that the PSBs produce in a number of ways including by leading to minimal use the ability of the Internet to help foster national dialogue through commenting on audiences. This is especially evident at the ABC, which has allowed commenting on the news posts on its website on an off and on basis (Kemble, 2017). Funding issues have also meant that all three of the PSBs have had to make decisions about what kind of content they provide online. This has undoubtedly led to decisions made, for example, by the BBC to rely heavily on stock photography and wire service photography, and by all three of the PSBs to incorporate interactive journalism only minimally.

The national press in all three countries, which have faced their own issues in terms of funding online news, has also been able to influence the output of the PSBs. This is evident in the fact that the BBC was asked to make its online services more distinct and, more specifically, away from soft news provision following complaints from the press (DCMS, 2016a, p. 36). It is also evident in the ABC's decision to close down its opinion news site after complaints from the press (ABC, 2018c, p. 44).

Ultimately, while the format of the content the PSBs produce has changed the content still follows their mandates to provide news as a public service. This is reflected in the fact that, for example, the PSBs albeit to varying degrees, feature predominantly hard news articles with a clear public interest element to them. All three of the PSBs also strive to provide news that is impartial, accurate and trustworthy.

Chapter Seven: Undermining Public Service Broadcasting in the National Press

This chapter and the next use critical discourse analysis (CDA) to explore discussions around public service broadcasting in the digital age. Both chapters focus on the period of time starting in 2009, at which point paywalls as a means of generating revenue for struggling newspapers became a serious possibility and then a reality at several of the national newspapers considered in this dissertation. Along with this development came a series of complaints from the national press that the online news services of the PSBs were hindering the ability of newspapers to implement successful paywall strategies because they are free at the point of use, and in Canada, complaints that the CBC was unfairly competing for online advertising dollars. As described in Chapter 1, these two chapters rely on Norman Fairclough's framework for CDA. Fairclough (1993), "in referring to language use as discourse" signals a desire to investigate language "in a social-theoretically informed way, as a form of social practice" (p. 134). Language viewed as social practice "is socially shaped, but it is also socially shaping" (Fairclough, 1993, p. 134). CDA explores "the tension between these two sides of language use" (Fairclough, 1993, p. 134). Fairclough's (1995) framework for CDA is made up of three components of analysis: text, discourse practice and sociocultural practice (p. 59). Text refers to "spoken or written language" and discourse practice refers to "the production and interpretation of text" (Fairclough, 1993, p. 136). Sociocultural practice refers to the wider context within which the text exists (Fairclough, 1995, p. 62). Within this framework, "[t]he connection between text and social practice is seen as being mediated by discourse practice" (Fairclough, 1993, p. 136). This means that, "on the one hand, processes of text production and interpretation are shaped by (and help shape) the nature of social practice, and on the other hand the production process shapes (and leaves 'traces' in) the text, and the interpretative process operates upon 'cues' in the text" (Fairclough, 1993, p. 136).

This chapter focuses on a CDA of newspaper articles published in the British, Canadian and Australian national press as well as submissions and other contributions made by the newspapers and their parent companies to government inquiries and reviews into the PSBs. It demonstrates that, as the national press in all three countries have come to see the PSBs as an increasing threat, they have sought to undermine the national PSBs by calling into question the value and at times the legitimacy of the PSBs providing online news services. They have done this by advancing, in numerous ways and to varying degrees in each country, four key (related) arguments:

1. The PSBs are overreaching (“mission creep”) – they are providing services that they, as public service broadcasters, should not.
2. The PSBs are unfairly competing with the private sector (the newspapers call for a “level playing field”).
3. The PSBs should only be providing services that commercial media organizations do not/will not.
4. The PSBs are wasting public funding, and so given the new media environment, their public funding should be reassessed and changed to subscription fees or advertising revenue.

This chapter discusses each of these arguments in turn and demonstrates how, particularly when taken together, they serve a more general agenda of undermining the PSBs for private gain rather than being critical of the PSBs and holding them to account because they receive public funding and are supposed to fulfill public policy goals.

Mission Creep

The argument that the PSBs are engaging in “mission creep” calls attention to the fact that the broadcasters were established to provide radio and later television *broadcasting* services but have nevertheless moved into the online space. As implied and/or explicitly stated in the national press, the PSBs did this without a legitimate reason to do so and have continued to provide online news services to the detriment of newspapers. This argument appears in one form or another in articles published in the national press in Britain, Canada and Australia despite the fact that the BBC, CBC and ABC all have different, explicitly stated instructions about their use of technology.

The BBC’s Charter has allowed it, since 1996, to “provide, as public services, other services whether or not broadcasting or programme supply services” (Department of National Heritage, 1996, p. 2). Nevertheless, there has been pushback from the national press on the point of the BBC’s use of technology even two decades later. One instance of this appears in an article published in *The Times*, which reads:

The BBC is a broadcaster. It was not conceived as a one-stop information ziggurat, and has not been redefined as such by those who fund it. It has no remit as a publisher, yet it throws money at a sprawling multi-platform online news operation because it can, helping to drive local newspapers out of business in the process. Like its commercial rivals, the BBC needs to be forced to adapt to a transformed environment not by doing everything but by doing what it does best, more efficiently. (Tame the Gorilla, 2015)

The text, which falls under the genre of newspaper editorial, states unequivocally that the BBC is a broadcaster. The grammatical mood, as such, is declarative. The article moves on to define what it was not conceived to do, what it does anyways and what the consequences are. In doing so, the editorial commits itself to a particular narrative about the BBC – that it is not a publisher and should not be engaging in publishing activities. There are significant absences in this article. It

lacks clear representations of relevant elements of intertextuality. Intertextuality brings “other ‘voices’ into a text” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 41). In this case, the writer could have brought in the Government (through the BBC’s Charter) and/or the BBC Trust as the BBC’s regulator (through the BBC’s Online Service Licence). Had these other texts been included and accurately represented, attention would have been drawn to the fact that the BBC is technically conceived of as a media entity that is allowed to provide services including but also beyond broadcast services. By not making direct reference to what the BBC’s Charter says on the matter (in the above paragraph or anywhere else in the article), or to the BBC’s Online Service Licence, the text frames what it is stating as being an undisputed statement of fact when in reality it is at best an opinion based on the interests of the newspaper and at worst a deliberate misrepresentation of the BBC’s role and purpose.

The situation for the CBC is different from the BBC’s situation because the CBC’s mandate was put together in 1991, which was years before the CBC began to develop its online services. The *Globe and Mail* and *The National Post* both consider the CBC’s online services as being outside of its remit because there is no explicit acknowledgement of such technologies in the Broadcasting Act (1991). An article in *The Globe and Mail*, which incorporates a quote from the CBC’s Annual Report, hits on this point, stating that:

The CBC is now among Canada’s largest news websites, offering national, regional and local news in the same markets served by the main Canadian newspapers. And it wants to become even more dominant online.

“Our digital shift allows us to extend our reach even further and position ourselves as the public space for all Canadians,” CBC president and chief executive Hubert Lacroix says in the Crown corporation’s most recent annual report.

Talk about mission creep. Under the Broadcasting Act, the CBC's mandate is to "provide radio and television services incorporating a wide range of programming that informs, enlightens and entertains." (McKenna, 2017)

By selectively representing one line of a larger text and using it to come to the conclusion that the CBC is engaging in "mission creep", the logic of the argument rests on the propositional assumption that this one line provides a definitive picture of the way the Act directs the CBC in relation to technology. The article intertextually incorporates texts relevant to the topic (the Annual Report, the Broadcasting Act), but the manner in which they are incorporated (direct quotes, chosen selectively) prevents the article from accurately portraying the texts it uses to make its argument. Despite the accuracy of the direct quote taken from it and used to represent it, the Broadcasting Act (1991) has more generally been read as being technologically neutral while the CBC's mandate also requires it to "be made available throughout Canada by the most appropriate and efficient means and as resources become available for the purpose" (p. 5). Based on these parts of the Act, there have been different interpretations of what it actually means in terms of the CBC's use of new media (Mandate Review Committee, 1996; Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2003; etc). The article in *The Globe and Mail*, which was published in 2017, however, does not account for such difference in interpretation, nor does it acknowledge that the Canadian Government has periodically affirmed through policy statements and in the 2016 budget, that the CBC should provide Canadians with digital services (Canadian Heritage, 2003, p. 5; Government of Canada, 2010, p. 28; Morneau, 2016; etc). By doing so, the Government itself has given legitimacy to a less stringent approach to reading the Broadcasting Act than a focus on one line about radio and television services enables. Instead of addressing this through intertextuality, the

text makes the argument that, based on the Broadcasting Act, the CBC is in fact expanding past its intended role.

The *National Post* has also published an article that reflects an inflexible idea about the technological parameters the CBC is expected to work within. The article, published in 2018, read:

Over the last few years - fueled in part by a \$675 million boost to its funding by the Liberal government - CBC has pursued an aggressive policy of expanding its online news site.

This site is not a complement to its radio and television arms. Rather, it functions as a standalone news site, with opinion columns, reprinted wire content and stories specifically reported for print. (Hopper, 2018)

This article puts forth as a statement of fact that the CBC's online services are limited to complementing its radio and television arms. There is a significant absence of direct reference to important texts to support the grounds for this claim. The article does not refer to any text that directs the CBC to limit its online services in the way the article implies. Both of these articles that talk about the CBC and its use of technology made assertions about the what the CBC is and is not allowed to do, but absent of context or evidence, have presented a distorted sense of reality that frames the CBC's online services negatively.

The ABC, unlike the CBC, did eventually see the ABC Act amended to incorporate digital services. Even still, the year after the ABC Act was officially amended to incorporate online services, The *Australian* was still calling into question whether or not the ABC should be online by creating skepticism around the motive for the change and the process by which the change happened. An article, written by the newspaper's associate editor Chris Kenny (2014), led with the line: "The ABC's expansion into digital is one of the many grey areas in its charter" (p. 2). The word "grey" in this statement suggests that whether or not the ABC should be expanding into

digital is still unclear, compelling the reader to question the legitimacy of the ABC's digital expansion. The article later states:

Commercial media competitors and ABC critics publicly questioned where the expansion of platforms and products would end, and the corporation realised its efforts were not explicitly covered by its charter, which referred to "broadcasting" but not podcasting, publishing or streaming.

So, in a development that was barely noticed last year (we were all distracted by Labor's attempted media regulation and yet another leadership spill) a seemingly minor update to the ABC Charter — conceived and suggested by the ABC — was passed by parliament.

It authorised the national broadcaster to "provide digital media services" and was welcomed by both sides of politics who argued such activity might legally be allowed under "broadcasting" anyway and that it "merely recognised" what the ABC was already doing. (Kenny, 2014, p. 2)

These paragraphs, while acknowledging that the ABC's Charter had been updated to include digital media, still convey a sense of uncertainty around the legitimacy of such services by creating doubt and skepticism around how the change was enacted by asserting that it was the ABC itself that had conceived of and suggested it (the implication being that it was motivated by self-interest). The article conveys a specific chain of events – the public questioning of the ABC, the suggestion by the ABC to update its charter (and the idea's conception), and the authorization of the ABC's digital services. The text provides limited context through which to understand each component of the chain of events. It uses vaguely attributed intertextuality, which obscures the details of the chain of events. The text makes it seem as though the idea to amend the ABC Act came out of thin air one day, after the ABC suddenly realized that the ABC Act only covered broadcasting services,

and then was enacted. The reality, however, is that the question of whether or not the ABC's Charter should be amended had been a topic of debate by government since at least 2000 when the Australian Senate inquired into the ABC's Online services, and the change was brought about in 2013 after the Convergence Review Committee assessed whether or not doing so would be desirable and ultimately recommended that it be done (Convergence Review Committee, 2012, pp. 84-86; Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000; Senate ECITA References Committee, 2001).

These excerpts from articles in the national press in Britain, Canada and Australia each demonstrate how the national press in each country has sought to undermine the BBC, CBC and ABC's online services by calling into question the legitimacy of the services and by suggesting that the services qualify as "mission creep". Through significant absences of intertextual discussions, such texts neglect to acknowledge possible difference in interpretations of the texts (that there are other legitimate ways of understanding and interpreting the role and responsibilities of the PSBs in relation to technology) and instead either present opinion as truth or overly simplify complex matters through the exclusion of a nuanced discussion of relevant documents and/or by taking them out of context.

A Level Playing Field

The argument that the PSBs are competing unfairly and therefore that the governments and/or regulators should do something to "level the playing field" serves to undermine the PSBs by placing blame on them for the fact that other media organizations are struggling to adapt to a new media environment and by framing the PSBs as using their public funding to damage commercial companies rather than to meet public service goals.

This is evident in an article published in *The Daily Telegraph* in 2013, which provides an analysis of a review of the BBC's Online Service Licence conducted by the BBC Trust. The article begins by stating: "The BBC news website, as its millions of dedicated users would agree, is breathtakingly comprehensive and pretty damn good. But that dominance comes at a price in the wider market: it is very difficult for commercial news organisations to compete" (Midgley, 2013). The first sentence provides an evaluation of BBC Online, acknowledging that it is "pretty damn good". The second sentence provides a caveat, which suggests that a good BBC Online is not necessarily a good thing, thereby fostering uncertainty about the value of BBC Online. In other words, the semantic relations between the two sentences suggest that the article is making a value assumption that a good BBC is not actually desirable. The article moves on to state:

[...] BBC Online costs over £100million a year. In 2008, the Trust found that it had overspent by a staggering £35million - a fact which, conveniently, didn't find its way into today's report. Apparently "financial oversight" has improved since then, as well it should. These are eye-popping figures to anyone involved in commercially-funded news, and show the sheer scale of the beast with which we have to compete. (Midgley, 2013)

This section of the article evaluates the funding the BBC puts into BBC Online. It assesses the cost of BBC Online as "eye-popping" to those "involved in commercially-funded news" and uses that as evidence (even though both phrases are very vague) of "the sheer scale of the beast with which we have to compete" (Midgley, 2013). The article uses vaguely attributed statements ("anyone involved in commercially-funded news") in an attempt to legitimize the propositional assumption that the spending on BBC Online is in fact "eye-popping". This discussion of the costs of BBC Online implies that the BBC's website and the website of newspapers are comparable (or should be comparable) in scope. The costs of BBC Online, however, cannot be compared to a newspaper

website's costs as newspapers have a smaller, much more focused set of activities they partake in than the BBC, which provides universal access to impartial news and information, entertainment and educational programming as a public service rather than for profit. By not acknowledging the difference between BBC Online and newspaper websites the article implies that the BBC is spending public funding extravagantly on a service that the private sector must find a way to compete with. The article ultimately states that "it would at least be nice for the supervisory body [the BBC Trust] to acknowledge, in a report like this, that our concerns about the scale and scope of the BBC website – and its effects on commercial competitors – are real and urgent" (Midgley, 2013). This statement rests on two of assumptions. First, it makes a value assumption – that the BBC's behaviour is neither good nor desirable. Second, it makes a propositional assumption – that the concerns about the BBC's scale and scope are in fact "real and urgent", as it states. As a whole, the text can be seen as a call not just to acknowledge a problem but to take action by limiting the BBC's scope and scale in a manner that would serve to level the playing field for private companies. In doing so, it places value on prioritizing private over public enterprise without consideration of the public value BBC Online is designed to provide. The absence of discussion in the text about the public service purpose of the BBC (which was discussed in the BBC Trust report that the article comments on) in relation to its news services helps to foster a value assumption that a level playing field is desirable in the first place.

Similar strategies that ultimately promote the desirability of a level playing field can be seen in the coverage of the report *A sustainable future for journalism*, which was commissioned by the Government and put together by the Cairncross Review panel in 2019. The BBC was technically outside of the Cairncross Review's scope, but the final report did address some of the issues that were brought to the attention of the Review by national newspaper publishers. In its

reporting on the Review's report, The *Daily Telegraph* published an article by the newspaper's Chief Political Correspondent, Christopher Hope, and the paper's Deputy Business Editor, Christopher Williams that ran with the headline "BBC, Facebook and Google Face New Curbs on Their Power Over News to Safeguard Quality Journalism" and led with the statement that: "The BBC, Facebook and Google face new curbs on their power over news online following a landmark review to safeguard quality journalism" (Hope & Williams, 2019). This article implies that the BBC had a significant place in the Review's findings by virtue of the fact that it is placed as the first of three organizations, and in a position of prominence in the overall article itself (it appears in both in the headline and in the lead). The importance placed on the BBC is made clear because of genre conventions that are unique to news stories. In news discourse, topics are not simply listed, "they form a hierarchical structure" (van Dijk, 1988, p. 41). Based on this, "the most important information is presented first" (van Dijk, 1988, p. 41). In the case of the coverage of the Cairncross Review, the headline and the lead in The *Daily Telegraph* article signal that the most important information about the Review's report is that online news at the BBC is facing new curbs "to safeguard quality journalism" (Hope & Williams, 2019). Later in the article, the writers state that:

She [Dame Francis] highlighted concerns that "the production of so-called 'soft content' such as reporting about [ITV's] Love Island on BBC Online News should not be within its remit, as it does not qualify as news in the public interest". However the BBC argued that "'soft content' stories may attract users who might then click onwards to a public-interest story".

While "curtailing the BBC's news offering would be counter-productive", Dame Frances said there was evidence that the BBC News "brand... may dissuade people from paying

for newspaper content online” because “it is free at the point of use online”. (Hope & Williams, 2019)

The article uses phrases such as “She highlighted concerns” and “Dame Frances said there was evidence” without also incorporating the analysis or actual position of Dame Frances that follows the statements used in The *Daily Telegraph* article, that appear in the actual report. It recontextualizes the report by selectively quoting it and failing to incorporate the context in which the quotes were placed in the report. Doing so has served to misrepresent Dame Francis and the Review’s report as having agreed with the statements included in the coverage of the report, when that was not actually the case. For example, while The *Daily Telegraph* states that “Dame Francis said there was evidence that the BBC News “brand... may dissuade people from paying for newspaper content online”, it does not explain what the report said about the evidence it received thereby implying by omission that the evidence was something that was found to be accurate (Hope & Williams, 2019). In reality, the actual report goes on to make the point: “But popular and free public service news provision does not necessarily mean fewer subscriptions for private providers” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 52). From there, the report provides evidence to support its stance (Cairncross, 2019, p. 52). The journalists who wrote the article in The *Daily Telegraph*, despite using direct quotes from the report itself, misrepresented the findings of the report, first by giving prominence to the BBC in its coverage of the report, and second by taking the direct quotes out of context so that instead of conveying an accurate representation of the Cairncross Review, the Review is represented as supporting claims made by newspapers that the BBC should be curtailed in favour of the private sector, ostensibly as a way of helping to level out the playing field.

In Canada, the argument for a level playing field differs from the one in Britain because the CBC sells digital advertising. The call for a level playing field in Canada, therefore, centres

around restricting the CBC from selling advertising because it also receives public funding, rather than around the idea that its public funding in and of itself distorts the online media market. This argument has been made by the publisher of *The Globe and Mail*, which is owned by Woodbridge, who stated that:

You won't find Woodbridge asking for government handouts or subsidies, but we do like to play on a level playing field. It's not level if taxpayer dollars directed to the public broadcaster make the competition for digital ad dollars more difficult. The CBC is the *Globe's* largest competitor in the digital ad space amongst Canadian-based media. My colleagues and I in the industry do not support the notion that handing out more money to the CBC helps local or national newspapers. (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2016)

This text, while published in written form, falls under the genre of testimony because it was originally presented orally to a Standing Senate Committee gathering testimony on the Canadian media system. Phillip Crawly, the speaker, was only given five minutes to speak about a number of things including but not limited to the CBC. The speech, possibly because of this, makes a number of assumptions. First, as the other articles have, it makes a value assumption that a "level playing field" is desirable, and second, it makes a propositional assumption that to have a level playing field, the CBC needs to be restricted from selling advertising. Based on these assumptions, there is value seen in curbing public enterprise in favour of private enterprise. This is further emphasized by situating the CBC as a competitor of *The Globe and Mail* without discussing or even hinting at its unique public service objectives as outlined in the Broadcasting Act. This implies, through a bracketing of difference, that the only difference between the two organizations is that the CBC receives public funding.

News Corp Australia has likewise expressed a desire to curb the ABC in a manner that prioritizes private enterprise over public policy goals in the name of a “level playing field”. The submission it made to the Inquiry into the Competitive Neutrality of the National Broadcasters in 2018 stated:

[...] there is now a lack of level playing field for the distribution of news content online. Public broadcasters - who are now news publishers - are advantaged on this field due to their taxpayer funding models and the out-of-date Charters that require holistic review in the digital context. (News Corp. Australia, 2018, p. 1)

This submission makes the assertion that the ABC’s funding and Charter “require” review in the digital context. By doing so it calls into question whether or not the ABC’s funding, Charter and the ABC itself are still useful contributors to the media field, which it is stated the ABC is advantaged within. Again, as was seen with the BBC and the CBC, the claim that the ABC is advantaged within the media sphere is made without discussion of the public service goals it is designed and compelled to meet. It is implied that the ABC and newspapers are on equal ground except for the ABC’s public funding. It further makes the value assumption that the notion of a level playing field is the worthy objective.

The argument that the PSBs are competing unfairly and as such, that governments and/or regulators need to “level the playing field” is generally grounded in an ideological belief based on market liberalism that private interests should be prioritized over any notions of the public interest that are found in public broadcasting policies and that have provided the rationale for the existence of public service broadcasting more generally.

Market Failure

The argument that the national press in Britain, Canada and Australia have advanced in terms of market failure asserts that the public broadcasters should only be providing services and content that the private sector will not provide. In doing so, this argument also prioritizes the needs of private enterprise (to restrict PSB activities thereby lessening competition) over public enterprise and the public interest (in, for example, universal access to quality news and information with the goal of providing equal opportunity to participate in the public sphere regardless of being able to pay to get past a paywall). It has the effect of undermining the PSBs by placing them firmly on the periphery of media provision instead of as a central contributor to or feature of the media ecologies they serve within.

In Britain, this argument has been articulated in relation to soft news provision. It can be seen in the response of the Guardian Media Group, the publisher of The *Guardian* newspaper, to a House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport inquiry in 2015, which reads:

In the area of “soft news” or magazine content, which is so critical to enabling commercial news brands such as the Guardian to attract advertising and sponsorship to their digital propositions, the BBC has increasingly sought to become a major competitor with the commercial press. As outlined in GMG’s 2009 submission to the CMS Select Committee, this move into the creation of “soft news” is an example of the BBC creeping beyond the boundaries of its intended remit onto territory already well catered for by the commercial sector. (Guardian Media Group, 2015, para. 38)

This response to the 2015 inquiry, which was looking into the BBC’s Charter as part of a larger review being undertaken leading up to the expiry of the Charter and Agreement that was in force at the time, suggests that the BBC’s provision of soft news is inherently outside of “the boundaries of its intended remit” by virtue of the fact that the commercial sector provides soft news as well.

It makes a propositional assumption that the BBC should not be providing soft news because commercial news organizations already do so. By making reference to the BBC's "intended remit", the text is alluding to the BBC's Charter, but does not directly quote or summarize it. This vague form of intertextuality is used in an attempt by The *Guardian* to legitimize its complaint that the BBC is providing news content it should not. However, in doing so, it presents the boundaries as absolute and not something that The *Guardian* (and others) have interpreted in their favour. This makes it appear as though the question of soft news on the BBC is settled when in fact it was still being debated and contested (as evidenced by the discussion of it in the DCMS's (2016a) White Paper).

The CBC faced more general criticism than the BBC did in terms of its provision of services. The argument that the CBC should focus on areas where there is market failure is articulated in The *Globe and Mail's* submission to the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Legislative Review panel, which was reviewing Canada's broadcasting and telecommunications legislation. Its submission read:

The CBC has worked to distinguish its broadcast services from those of Canadian commercial broadcasters. We believe the CBC should likewise focus its news efforts on filling the news gaps in underserved communities in Canada. The CBC's mandate should include an obligation for CBC news services to be provided in a manner that strengthens and promotes a diversity of voices in the Canadian news ecosystem to ensure appropriate consideration is given to the potential impact of its activities on private Canadian news producers. (The *Globe and Mail*, 2019, p. 6)

This is the only section of The *Globe and Mail's* submission that refers to the CBC. There are a number of modalized statements in this paragraph. These include forms of deontic modality, or

modalized demand statements, such as the statements that “the CBC should [...] focus its news efforts on filling the news gaps” and its mandate “should include an obligation for CBC news services to be provided in a manner that strengthens and promotes a diversity of voices” (The *Globe and Mail*, 2019, p. 6). Modality for Fairclough (2003), is “seen in terms of what authors *commit* themselves to, with respect to what is true and necessary” (p. 164). The statements in The *Globe and Mail*’s BTLR submission convey a high level of commitment through the word “should”, to the statements the newspaper is making about the future of the CBC. These statements rely on a value assumption that the value of the CBC is in it focusing on filling market gaps. Based on this, The *Globe and Mail* recommends that the CBC do so while also being obliged to consider its impact on private news organizations in the country. The semantic relations between the first two sentences signals that this is desirable and realistic because they imply that the CBC already does this with non-news broadcasting. In doing this and through the significant absence of direct reference to the CBC’s role as prescribed in the Broadcasting Act (1991), and lack of intertextuality more generally, the text does not make clear that its recommendations would place the CBC in a significantly changed role compared to the one it presently holds. The CBC was conceptualized as a public broadcaster with a distinctly national purpose, one that remains as part of its mandate to this day (Raboy, 1990; Broadcasting Act, 1991, p. 5). Compelling the CBC to focus on underserved communities would diminish its role and presence in the country.

The ABC faced similar calls to focus on market failure as the CBC. In an article published in The *Australian*, it was argued that:

The ABC should limit itself to areas of market failure. Its charter requires it to contribute to “a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community.” Sure, that includes hipsters and double macchiato cyclists,

but not to the exclusion of suburban, regional and remote audiences. The ABC must provide thorough coverage of local councils, courts and bush sport. There is no value in replicating on regional websites the work of country newspapers. (“Aunty should concentrate on areas of market failure”, 2014)

The modal markers “should” and “must” in this paragraph convey a high level of commitment to what the writer sees as the necessity of the ABC limiting itself to market failure services and focusing on providing certain types of coverage. In this way, this article argues that the ABC’s value is in its provision of content where commercial media organizations do not already provide services. This is based on the propositional assumption that its provision of content in areas already served would amount to a replication of services (instead of an addition to them). The argument being made in the article is also based on a particular representation and interpretation of the ABC’s Charter that gives prominence not to the ABC’s role as a comprehensive broadcaster but to its role of reflecting “the cultural diversity of the Australian community”. On this basis, the article claims the ABC is not fulfilling its responsibilities. The article, more specifically, states that:

Instead of solving problems, filling gaps, offering value for money and setting the news agenda, Scott’s ABC is mercilessly and willfully destroying commercial outlets; not so much a market-failure player, but an all-media terminator (“Aunty should concentrate on areas of market failure”, 2014)

It makes a strong assertion that the ABC is purposefully destroying private media organizations, thereby undermining the ABC’s public service role not only by barely mentioning one exists, but by stating that instead of fulfilling public service goals, the ABC was choosing not to offer “value for money”, opting instead to use its funding to destroy other outlets.

The argument in Britain, Canada and Australia that the PSBs should only be providing services that the market will not provide is based on the assumption that all content is created equally, or that what the PSBs provide and what the newspapers provide are comparable services. This undermines the role of the PSBs and their services by implying that they are just like other news providers and by neglecting the fact that the PSBs have specific public interest goals that they are designed to meet such as universal access to relevant, quality news and information necessary for participation in the public sphere, through the provision of comprehensive services.

Reassessment of Public Funding

Newspaper articles in all three countries are influenced by market liberal ideology to emphasize the importance of private enterprise over the public service broadcasters. This has been seen in the previous examples used this chapter, but it is particularly evident in the columns and editorials published in the national press that have called for the public funding the PSBs receive to be reassessed and replaced with either subscriptions (the argument being that if the PSB provides value, then people will choose to pay for it) or through advertisements (if the services offered are good the market will support them). This argument relies on the propositional assumption that technology has changed since the PSBs were first established, and that as such the PSBs are now essentially obsolete. This is the core premise of an argument put forth in *The Daily Telegraph*. The editorial argued:

In a digital age, no one entertainment provider enjoys a monopoly on our viewing habits worthy of a mandatory subsidy, and nor should it be used to finance online news content that undermines newspapers. If viewers want to watch and listen to the output of a broadcaster committed to “inform, educate and entertain”, then they will pay for it, and

that includes funny new sitcoms” (“The BBC licence fee cannot be sustained”, 2014, p. 19).

The article makes the assertion that viewers will pay for a service they want, therefore implying that if the BBC provides a service that is valued by viewers, it will survive without the licence fee. This makes two propositional assumptions – first, that audiences will be able to pay for a subscription-based BBC and second, that audiences will choose to pay for it if they want access to its content. The article further focuses on one aspect of the public service goals the BBC has been designed to meet to the exclusion of others. By doing so it makes another propositional assumption. This time, the assumption is that the mere existence of news content is enough and therefore it does not need to be further considered what kind of news content and news services are in the public interest and will help to facilitate a healthy public sphere. This places the private interests of providing news in an environment without a public service broadcaster over the public interest of having a non-commercial news service provided by a publicly funded organization.

Similarly, an article discussing the CBC states that new technologies “make it easier than ever to deliver information to people living in remote communities” (Kline, 2013, p. A13). It moves on to argue that:

There’s no shortage of private companies offering news and entertainment programming over radio, TV and the Internet.

To say that the CBC needs \$1-billion in public subsidies to support Canadian content, or to provide local programming in Nunavut, no longer makes sense. If the Harper government is not going to privatize the CBC or starve it of funding, it should at least find a way to make the Crown corporation work co-operatively with other media companies, to

offer quality content to all Canadians, instead of finding new ways to put them out of business (Kline, 2013, p. A13).

Again, the argument being made is that the CBC is no longer needed because of new technology. This text places private sector needs as being more important than publicly funding the CBC based on the idea that technology has solved the problem that the CBC was designed to solve. It is grounded in the propositional assumption that the CBC has until this point existed because of technological limitations. It is evident that this argument is made on the basis of private interests because the only alternative to taking away the CBC's funding that is presented is that the CBC be used to bolster private media organizations. In other words, the argument is that the CBC should either be privatized, or it should be used to support the private sector. The modal verb "should" suggests a high level of commitment to the necessity of the alternative to privatization being supporting commercial media companies.

The ABC has also faced calls to take away its public funding. An article in *The Australian* argued that:

[...] if the ABC is so determined to undermine the business prospects of commercial media, the government should review its funding model and make it compete in the open market for advertising revenue, against the commercial news outlets it evidently despises. As well as relieving some of the Abbott's government's budgetary pressures, such reform might foster more realistic news judgements within the ABC, which would be forced to take more notice of the interests and values of its audiences. ("ABC pays to white-ant", 2014, p. 23)

The text is part of a chain of events, which includes the ABC paying Google to promote its content, a front-page report in *The Australian* revealing that it was happening, and the text quoted above, a newspaper editorial. More specifically, the chain as it is depicted begins with the ABC spending

money on outbidding commercial media organizations to acquire a higher ranking for its content on Google when people search for specific things. The article later states that:

A strong case exists for subsidising the ABC to provide radio and television news services in regional and rural areas where commercial services would not be viable and audiences would otherwise miss out. Given the vast array of news services online, however, there is no justification in forcing taxpayers to fund the corporation to operate an online service, especially one intent on wasting money to erode the profitability of other news sites (“ABC pays to white-ant”, 2014, p. 23)

This article argues that if the ABC is not willing to stop what it sees as the PSB undermining private media organizations, it should have its public funding taken away and be forced to compete for advertising revenue. It makes a declarative statement that implies that the ABC’s public funding keeps the PSB from noticing “the interests and values of its audiences” and later asserts that its online services are an unjustifiable use of taxpayer money because of the existence of other online news services. The use of the word “taxpayer” draws attention to the ABC’s public funding, while the rest of the text serves to frame the ABC as wasteful and thereby undeserving of money from taxpayers. The argument is based on the propositional assumption that spending tax dollars on PSB is only justifiable when the services provided are not provided by commercial media organizations. Market liberal discourse, which is the dominant discourse used in the article, is evident in the semantic relations between the clauses of the last sentence in the above paragraph. By adding that it was “especially” the case that there was no justification for using taxpayer dollars to fund ABC Online when doing so serves “to erode the profitability of other news sites”, the article is implying there is value in prioritizing the profitability of commercial news sites over public service.

The argument that the PSBs should have their funding reassessed often begins with the assumption that technological developments have solved the problem(s) that the PSBs were designed and funded to solve. It waters down such a conversation to being about whether or not people have access to news and information rather than whether or not all citizens of a country have access to relevant, quality news and information that enables them to act as citizens through voting and other things such as informed participation in public debate. The question of whether or not people have access to news and information in this argument furthermore is focused on whether or not the market makes it available and not about whether or not it is affordable or whether or not people have the tools (an internet connection, for example) to access the content.

Conclusion

The national press in Britain, Canada and Australia have all worked to undermine the BBC, CBC and ABC through articles and comments submitted to inquiries and other reviews that call into question the legitimacy of the funding arrangements and goals of the PSBs. It is essential that these arguments are understood in relation to developments in the wider media environment, which was facing financial and technological disruption at the time. In response to difficulties associated with monetizing online news and adapting to the technological shift online, several of the national newspapers in Britain and all of the national newspapers in Canada and Australia put up paywalls around their content as was seen in Chapters 3-5. Many of the newspapers still struggled, and have placed significant blame on the BBC, CBC and ABC.

Four of the arguments the newspapers have since made to undermine the PSBs have been: that the PSBs are engaging in “mission creep”; that the PSBs are preventing a level playing field; that the PSBs should be focusing on providing services in cases of market failure; and that the PSBs should have their funding reassessed and replaced. In order to make these arguments, the

newspapers have used propositional assumptions, opaque representations of social events and minimal intertextual use of important texts thereby neglecting other relevant voices within the narratives being presented. More specifically, the newspapers have often refrained from discussing specific aspects of the organizational mandates of the PSBs, and when they do refer to them, they tend to take passages and place them outside of the larger context they exist within. The newspapers also present a narrow instead of comprehensive view of the role of the PSBs, often neglecting to discuss the ways the PSBs are different from private news providers and therefore neglecting to discuss the value in the PSBs as more than just market failure broadcasters. They have further made assertions about the effect of PSBs on newspapers that they have not supported with evidence (or have supported with evidence that was taken out of context as with the coverage of the Cairncross Review).

Through the absence of nuanced discussion of the public service goals and the purposes of the PSBs, and by failing to meaningfully address the difference in the goals of PSBs and the newspapers themselves, the PSBs are framed as being unnecessary in an age of media plenty. The ultimate goal of such discourse around public broadcasting is to undermine the PSBs, which newspapers see as competitors, instead of to critique publicly funded organizations in order to hold them to account, in the public interest. Private interests are dominant and public interests secondary when acknowledged at all.

It is important to remember that, when these arguments are laid out as fact in a newspaper, the newspaper has the power to decide whether or not to provide space for the PSBs to respond to any inaccuracies in coverage or to provide further context, and even when they allow a response to be published there is no guarantee that the rebuttal will be seen by the same audience. This is relevant because the arguments published in newspapers about the PSBs can have an impact on

the PSBs themselves. Newspaper views inevitably help shape societal understanding of and public discourse around public broadcasting more generally, while the arguments made by the newspapers are themselves shaped by wider societal circumstances such as the impact of the financial and technological disruption in the media industry, which has had a tendency to skew coverage in favour of newspaper interests in attempting to limit the scale and scope of the PSBs.

Chapter Eight: Perspectives on the Role of the BBC, CBC and ABC in the Digital Age

This chapter, like the one before it, focuses on the period of time beginning in 2009. Through a CDA of documents published by the BBC, CBC and ABC, as well as documents published by government officials (government policies, committee reports, etc), this chapter explores the influence of market liberalism on discussions about the continued development and existence of public service broadcasting. Market liberalism, as was seen in Chapter Two, emerged as a new way of thinking about public policy in the 1980s. It is an ideology that “holds ‘that government is best which governs least’” (Hackett, 2013, p. 16). It has an “emphasis on private consumption rather than public virtue” (Hackett, 2013, p. 16). It emphasizes “individual liberties and restrictions on government power” (Hackett, 2013, p. 19). Problems in the field of journalism under this belief system are often attributed to “the influence of the state” through things such as ownership regulations and public service broadcasters – the argument being that government intervention “distorts the marketplace, undermines media’s ability to give consumers what they want, and risks State authoritarianism” (Hackett, 2013, p. 17).

The difficulty for PSBs is that “the value they bring cannot be reduced to economics” (Cwynar, 2017, p. 145). Discussions of value, especially online, have nevertheless relied heavily on economic considerations. This chapter demonstrates how the influence of market liberalism in discussions about public service broadcasting has served to help push the BBC, CBC and ABC towards the margins of the media systems in their respective countries. This is because the popularity of market liberalism has created a situation whereby the PSBs are often positioned in discussions in relation to the private sector: what the PSBs do that the private sector does not, what the PSBs should do because the private sector does not and what the PSBs should not do because the private sector already does it. These discussions come at the expense of considerations of the

public interest and the public good, which were a focal point of discussions about PSB in the 1920s and 1930s when the PSBs were first being established in Britain, Canada and Australia. This shift in focus to situating the PSBs in relation to private news organizations instead of in relation to their public service goals has influenced the development of the online news services of the PSBs and contributed to the shape and form their online news services have taken.

Britain and the BBC

In Britain, the BBC's online content is explicitly expected to be distinctive. There is an emphasis on this point in its Online Service Licences (BBC Trust, 2006; BBC Trust, 2008; BBC Trust, 2013; Ofcom, 2017). The requirement for the BBC to be distinctive was also incorporated directly into its 2016 Charter, which states that the BBC's mission is: "to act in the public interest, serving all audiences through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output and services which inform, educate and entertain" (DCMS, 2016b). It is because of this directive to be distinctive, that the BBC's online services, while designed to contribute to its public purposes, are also increasingly expected to refrain from providing certain types of content because the private sector already does so and to focus on content that the market does not.

Soft news online is an example of a type of content that the Government has asked the BBC to stay away from providing because it believes that it makes the service less distinct. The Government encouraged the BBC to do this in the White Paper "A BBC for the future: A broadcaster of distinction". The policy document reads:

[...] in respect of the BBC's online provision, some stakeholders have raised concerns that the BBC provides 'soft news' and 'magazine' style content that replicates what is provided elsewhere and which contributes little to its public service mission. It is difficult to quantify the extent of this issue given the lack of data in this area, and the potential for blurred lines

between what constitutes ‘news’ as opposed to ‘soft news’. But the market impact report for government also reflected these concerns, saying that, while the provision of soft news is relatively small, the BBC’s online offering would benefit from being more distinctive, particularly given the size of its readership. (DCMS, 2016a, p. 36)

This paragraph is followed by a statement in which the Government welcomed a plan the BBC had put forward to reduce its soft news provision and noted that because online content is difficult to set quotas for, the BBC’s level of soft news provision would “need to be kept under review” (DCMS, 2016a, p. 36).

Concerns about the provision of soft news (which is never defined in the paper) on BBC Online is first attributed to “stakeholders” in the White Paper, after which the Government validated the concern through reference to a market impact report. The text uses vaguely attributed intertextuality through reference to the concerns of “stakeholders”. This term could encompass any number of people and groups. Its use hides whether or not and if so, to what extent, the public rather than newspapers and other media organizations are part of this group. It is likely newspapers are at least part of this catchall term because these are concerns that were being expressed in newspapers around this time (Sweney, 2016; Rainbird, 2016; Patterson, 2016; etc). This is relevant because the conclusion the Government drew to support a reduction of soft news on BBC Online and to further monitor the situation was represented as being based off of stakeholders expressing concerns and the market impact report. What is absent from the decision-making process based on the description provided in the White Paper is a clear understanding of the voice of the public, who ultimately fund the BBC, as distinct from the voice of commercial media organizations. Furthermore, the BBC’s public service mission is mentioned only in passing. The absence of discussion about the BBC’s public service mission in this section of the White Paper, a marker of

the influence of market liberalism on policy, in conjunction with the presence of stakeholder concerns and the market impact report, suggests that the priority when deciding to ask the BBC to stay away from the provision of soft news was private interests rather than public ones. When its public service mission was at least mentioned, it was only to state that soft news does not contribute to it. There is no acknowledgement of different perspectives of this, or the rationale behind categorizing it as such. It is stated in absolute terms that soft news does not contribute to the BBC's public service mission. In this section of the White Paper, the BBC is represented as a relatively passive social agent in that it is subject to the Government's actions. The BBC has elsewhere, however, actively defended its soft news provision, by stating "that a diverse spread of material is essential in order to serve all audiences, especially the young, and may indeed lure readers to public-interest news, which might not be their first priority" (Cairncross, 2019, p. 96). The Cairncross Review, in 2019, furthermore saw merit in such an argument, suggesting that the provision of soft news and its relationship to the BBC's public service mission is more complex than assumed in the White Paper (Cairncross, 2019, p. 96).

The BBC, in addition to being expected to stay away from providing content that the commercial sector already does, is expected to provide services that the market either will not or cannot provide and to support struggling sectors. In 2016, the Government stated that it "expects the BBC to use its privileged position to support the provision of news and information and specifically we expect to see a positive partnership with the local news sector" (DCMS, 2016a, p. 74). The BBC is represented here as a passive social agent as well. The Government makes demands (the Government "expects" the BBC to support news provision) and the BBC is expected to act in accordance with the demand being made. The above statement, and the section of the report it is from more generally, use market liberal discourse to justify the demand being made of

the BBC. The Government started the section of the report by outlining the problem the private sector faces in terms of declining local news provision, after which point the BBC is framed as being useful for helping private media organizations through challenging times. This is based on the propositional assumption that the BBC is in fact in a position of privilege that can be used to support news provision by commercial organizations and on the value assumption that it should be used for such purposes. The Government sees the BBC's value as being in relation to the private sector with regards to local news specifically, but it is also apparent more generally. This is evident, for example, in the Government's 2009 White Paper, *Digital Britain*, which announced a plan to conduct a consultation into the idea of reallocating part of the BBC's licence fee funding as contestable funding that could be used by other organizations primarily for the provision of news (DCMS & DBIS, 2009, p. 143). Such a plan, which was legitimately being considered at the time, would have seen some of the BBC's public funding redirected to private companies.

It ultimately did not happen, but the BBC did take on the responsibility towards local news previously mentioned and has used it to justify its value. This is clear from the BBC's investment in local news, which increased as local commercial organizations began to close down. The plan to do so is articulated in its 2015 Future of News report. In it, the BBC stated that: "Devolution and the decline of the regional press are creating a real need for local news coverage: the BBC is going to have to do more to provide local news that properly serves all parts of the UK" (BBC, 2015c, p. 4). The report further stated that:

[...] it is also true that one of the biggest market failures in news in the last decade is local journalism. More and more newspaper groups are opting to close titles in favour of an online-only model while others are leaving the daily newspaper model to publish just one edition a week. In December 2014 Trinity Mirror closed 7 local titles including the Reading

Post, Surrey Herald and Surrey Times - replacing them with an online-only service and closing 50 jobs across its operation. (BBC, 2015c, p. 20)

This is followed by more examples of daily production ceasing, and then a story about the importance of local news:

Today in Scarborough there is a small commercial radio station, no daily newspaper and perhaps surprisingly, very little local or community blogging about the news. Considering the town hit the national headlines earlier this month as its hospital declared a major incident, there were very few news boots on the ground to hold those responsible to account. Where did local people go to find out what was happening at their hospital? If the media fails to invest in local journalism will this become the case in many more towns across England? (BBC, 2015c, p. 20)

The story of Scarborough is used to explain the essential nature of local news. The story conveys a prediction that failure to invest in local news will result in more situations like Scarborough. Using the prediction and the narrative story more generally, the BBC has sought to legitimize and explain its investment in local news. Its investment in local news is reactive to what is happening to private media. The value of local news provision by the BBC, as described by the Corporation itself, is in the fact that commercial organizations are no longer providing it in some areas and are no longer providing it at the levels they once did in other areas. The usefulness of the BBC is explained not as being because it can provide universal access to non-commercial news or because of any of its other public service goals, but because it can provide a service that the private sector does not. This indicates a propositional assumption that if the commercial sector was providing local news at sufficient levels, it would not be necessary for the BBC to engage in local news provision at all. Its value when framed this way is inherently tied to what the commercial

organizations decide to do or not do. If this is true then, by extension, it is plausible to make the argument that because there are commercial organizations that provide national news, the BBC does not need to provide it as well (an argument already being advanced about soft news of all types).

These examples suggest that while the BBC is still a national public broadcaster and is expected to provide a public service, the way that its value is framed is often in relation to private organizations both by the government and by the BBC itself. It is clear that government framing of the BBC as being valuable when it is distinctive and as being useful when it helps to bolster or support private interests, has influenced the BBC's decisions. This can be seen particularly in terms of decisions made around decreasing soft news and increasing local news provision.

Canada and the CBC

In Canada, the CBC has also increased its focus on local news in light of changes happening in the country's media ecology. The Corporation's 2020 strategic plan, *A space for us all*, emphasized local news provision, which it would expand in a cost-effective way online (CBC, 2014b; Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017). When the plan was reviewed and updated in 2016, the new document stated that:

Canadians will tell you they want to know more about what's happening in their community. Yet over the past decade, their local news has been in decline. Small newspapers have folded or been merged with national chains; some television stations have closed, the rest continue to cut staff; local radio has less local news, more syndicated programs. In the face of all this, CBC/Radio-Canada's instantly recognizable radio services have remained stronger than ever. This fall, CBC Radio One and CBC Radio 2 recorded their highest audience shares ever. Fifteen out of 26 local morning CBC radio shows were

the most-listened to in their respective markets, and 25 out of 26 were in the top three. ICI Radio-Canada Première and ICI Musique reached a record, combined audience share of 22%. (CBC, 2016a, p. 3)

In this section of the strategic plan, the commercial local news organizations are represented as passive agents in their decline (the decline is happening to them) and the CBC as an active agent (the CBC has taken action to maintain strong local news services). This serves to help explain and emphasize the CBC's value – the CBC is providing a service the private sector is not, therefore it is valuable. The document went on to state that at the CBC they “recognize the importance of being deeply rooted in communities” and highlights how despite financial challenges the CBC protected its local footprint (CBC, 2016a, p. 3). It says that the CBC is also:

[...] putting more information back into communities, using digital to make it affordable and more effective. We have shifted our focus, so that we deliver our local content through mobile and web platforms first, then radio, then television. We are getting more local information to Canadians more often, and on more screens, all day long. (CBC, 2016a, p. 3)

In this section of its strategic plan update, the CBC provides a positive evaluation of its local news provision because it claims that Canadians want local news and because it says local news provision has otherwise been declining. The text uses vague attribution (“Canadians will tell you”) to help explain the value of its local news services. Because of this, while the public is technically included in the CBC's statement, it is not included in a particularly meaningful way. The value the CBC is placing on its local news services is more so in the fact that local news is otherwise becoming scarce – suggesting that without the CBC “putting more information back into communities” Canadians would not have access to a service they want access to. Within this text

there is a value assumption that it is desirable in the first place to take a market failure approach to making decisions about the CBC's services and what it is able to do by prioritizing digital technologies. It also lends legitimacy to similar arguments being made by other stakeholders who are advancing market-failure arguments as a way to constrain the CBC (which has limited resources and a large mandate) to only providing services that the private sector does not find profitable enough to provide itself.

This market failure perspective of the value of the CBC, which is based on market liberal ideology in that it suggests that the market exists in a position of power and privilege over a public institution, is also apparent in the CBC's submission to the BTLR panel in 2019. The CBC's submission pointed out that the global village, a product of globalization, is "increasingly dominated by a handful of US-owned digital companies" that are taking money out of the Canadian market but not reinvesting it into Canadian content (CBC, 2019a, p. 3). From there, the submission stated:

Digital is also changing the business model for private media companies. It is undermining service to Canadians and financial support for culture. As Canadian companies adapt they have consolidated and cut services. This will likely continue as they search for ways to remain profitable for their shareholders. This makes the role of a public broadcaster more important than ever. To be clear, we are not their competitors. CBC/Radio-Canada exists to serve Canadians. (CBC, 2019a, p. 3)

The submission claimed that "there is an over-abundance of news and information" in the world now, and that the world is now one "where there is more content from everywhere except the place you call home" (CBC, 2019a, p. 3). Based on this, the CBC stated that it:

[...] exists to ensure Canadians have a place that is theirs, a trustworthy place dedicated to connecting and engaging all of our local communities. And while all of the Canadian players contribute significantly to our cultural experience – the public broadcaster has this unique role to play at the local level throughout the country. (CBC, 2019a, p. 3)

After illustrating how the media environment is changing and the implications, the CBC emphasizes the role it can play on a local level. While the report goes on to later discuss the CBC's other contributions to Canadian media, it singles out its local role at the beginning of its submission, highlighting it as its "unique role" in the country. This, taken with the statement about local news in *A space for us all*, makes it clear that the CBC is explaining its value and essentially justifying its existence, in relation to services the private sector is not sufficiently providing, instead of in relation to its mandate, which makes reference to regional programming but not local (Broadcasting Act, 1991, p. 5). In terms of sociocultural practice, it is important to consider that the CBC's submission to the BTLR panel came at a time when newspapers were struggling and the CBC received an increase to its own budget, leaving the CBC to have to justify its activities as strong criticisms of it came from the press and drew attention to the fact that the press believes the CBC is engaging in mission creep, as well as the fact that the CBC benefits from tax dollars while also selling advertising. As such, the framing of the CBC's services in relation to market failure can be interpreted as a response to the criticisms it has faced in other texts.

It is possible that, overall, this approach by the CBC is more about survival than anything else because various government Standing Committees, on top of the negative newspaper coverage, have also framed the CBC's value in terms of private media generally and in terms of market failure specifically. For example, in 2015, the Standing Committee on Transport and Communication stated that "[t]he rationale for today's CBC/Radio-Canada is based on the need to

fill market gaps, especially in serving remote areas and providing merit goods” (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2015, p. 14). Later in its report, the Committee suggested that the provision of high-quality news could be considered to be a “luxury” and as such does not necessarily meet the criteria for services the CBC should be providing (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2015, p. 19). The Committee more specifically stated:

Canadians certainly benefit as citizens from having high-quality news, but it is difficult to draw the line between high-quality news as a merit good and as a luxury. Some may, of course, bridle at the suggestion that high-quality news is a luxury, but in a world of scarce resources and competing merit goods, the CBC/Radio-Canada must determine what to sacrifice to improve the news – or any other type of programming – above what would be offered by private broadcasters. (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2015, p. 19)

The report defines a merit good as “a good that has a social value above the value the market places on it” (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2015, p. 13). It suggests that if high-quality news does not fall under this definition of a merit good, it is a luxury that the CBC does not need to provide. This section of the report has several modalized clauses. For example, “Canadians certainly benefit” signals the use of modality in a way that conveys a high level of commitment to the truth of the statement that Canadians benefit from high-quality news. Later in the paragraph, it is stated that “the CBC/Radio-Canada must determine”, with the modal verb “must” signaling a high level of commitment to the need for the CBC to make determinations about sacrifices to improve programming, including news. At the same time, the report never actually commits to defining high-quality news a luxury. Instead, the Standing Committee report

asks readers to stop and consider that it might be a luxury. This paragraph is written in such a way that suggests it is merely asking the question of whether or not the CBC should provide high-quality news, but the intention can be seen as being to create skepticism about the value of the CBC's news services.

Two years later, in 2017, another Standing Committee decided that there was value in having the CBC provide news services, although it too focused on framing this in terms of market failure. The Standing Committee report is part of a genre chain that includes things such as written briefs and meetings with stakeholders. The final report is a representation of the parts of the genre chain that came before it. It is intertextual in that it is based off of a number of written texts and oral testimony from witnesses given at the meetings held. In its final report, the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage recommended that the CBC “prioritize the production and dissemination of locally reflective news and programming by expanding its local and regional coverage, including unserved areas across all of its platforms” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017, p. 49). The Standing Committee also recommended that the CBC “eliminate advertising from its digital news platforms” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017, p. 49). This recommendation was ostensibly made because the main criticism the Committee heard about the CBC “relates to its competitive relationship with other media companies (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017, p. 47). The Committee did not recommend that the CBC's funding be increased to compensate for the loss of advertising revenues. Taking this into consideration, the report essentially serves to guide the CBC forward in a manner that will benefit Canada's private news media, but which does not take into account a more comprehensive understanding of the CBC's public service role in relation to its funding. The text makes a value assumption that a market failure public broadcaster in Canada is desirable. If the CBC is to expand

its local services and get rid of its digital advertising without being compensated with more public funding, the report is asking the CBC to focus on local news (because private news organizations are providing less of it) at the expense of other services. The use of market liberal discourse throughout this section of the report indicates that this is seen as a desirable role for the CBC.

In Canada, the perspective of the CBC as a useful solution to market failure, combined with the desire to see the CBC stop selling online advertising without providing it with compensation for doing so, is indicative of the influence of market liberal ideology on discussions about media policy in Canada. The problem then is not that the CBC should not be providing local news, it is that the expectation that it will fill in the gaps left by the market with less revenue sources becomes a slippery slope. Given that historically the CBC has had unstable and inadequate funding to the detriment of its ability to fulfill all areas of its mandate, it is possible and potentially inevitable that the slippery slope will lead to a national public broadcaster that only provides services in areas the market will not serve. This will ultimately leave a significant amount of the population in danger of having to rely only on commercial providers for geographically relevant news, despite the fact that it is generally acknowledged amongst media scholars that a diversity of ownership is desirable for healthy democracies (Baker, 2007; Pickard, 2015). Furthermore, because of the emergence of paywalls in the country, some citizens will have no access to news that is free at the point of use, which will mean that only those who can afford to pay for news in those areas will be adequately informed.

Australia and the ABC

The ABC is the only one of the three PSBs that was originally seen as a solution to market failure. It was designed with market failure in mind due to the fact that commercial providers were mainly focused on providing services in areas of the country with large populations, leaving many

regional and rural areas without access to broadcasting (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 16; Martin, 2016, p. 337). This is no longer the only justification seen for it – the 1983 ABC Act calls on the ABC to be a comprehensive broadcaster and permits it to engage in non-broadcasting activities (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, 2019, pp. 6-7). As the ABC itself states: “the Charter requires the Corporation to be ‘innovative and comprehensive’ and to provide a balance between broadcasting programs of wide appeal and specialized broadcasting programs” (ABC, 2011a, p. 2). Because of these circumstances, the ABC has had to do more to prove that it is not only a market-failure broadcaster. It has the difficult job of needing to convey its value as a comprehensive broadcaster at a time when the popularity of market liberal ideology has made it difficult to do so. One way the ABC has attempted to do this is by positioning itself as providing a different service from private organizations altogether. In doing so, it emphasizes its public service functions and its non-commercial nature. For example, in its submission to the Inquiry into the Competitive Neutrality of the National Broadcasters stated:

The ABC aims to provide a news service that all Australians find relevant and can trust. Content created within the News Division is used for radio, television and online delivery thus ensuring that content that is created for a public purpose is shared efficiently with Australians and is available to them on their platform of choice. It does not seek to be a populist news service that pursues a large audience for the sake of it. The ABC News Division does not look at the activities of commercial providers and compete directly by copying popular formats or styles which attract large numbers of viewers. Instead, it provides a comprehensive service of national and international news and current affairs of a quality and breadth that is not offered by the commercial free-to-air broadcasting sector. (ABC, 2018c, p. 41)

The intension of this paragraph is to clearly distinguish the ABC from private media organizations. In it, the ABC accentuates difference by emphasizing how its public service role is different from the role that commercial media providers play in the Australian media ecosystem. The submission further asserts that: “ABC’s news service is not motivated by commercial considerations. Its investigative journalism aims to be distinctive and in the public interest. The result is that the ABC delivers a news service that Australians can trust” (ABC, 2018c, p. 41). Again, the ABC is positioning itself as providing a different service than commercial media do, but unlike the CBC, its emphasis is on the value it derives by virtue of being a PSB (it is publicly funded so it does not have to take into account commercial considerations, which in turn means that it can provide trustworthy news and investigative journalism “in the public interest”) and not because it can fill in market gaps (a worthy purpose but not one that a national public broadcaster should be restricted to).

The Australian Government also discusses the ABC in relation to commercial media by accentuating difference. This is nothing new. The Australian Government has historically been especially supportive of the ABC when it is unhappy with commercial news providers. This is evident in the appointment of Warren Denning in 1939 as the first ABC staff member to cover the federal government because the Prime Minister at the time had wanted the government to receive fairer coverage than he believed the press was giving it (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 66). Many years later, in 2013, soon-to-be Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull recognized similar value in the ABC. He stated in a speech:

I am very pleased to see the way the ABC is putting more effort into news and information.

The ABC, however, is in a very different position relative to the public than the commercial broadcasters, let alone commercial publishers. The ABC is a taxpayer funded entity, a

chartered entity, and it has an obligation to the public, not simply as consumers but, as Jim Spigelman, its chairman, has said, as citizens, and it has a statutory obligation in the presentation of its news and information to be accurate and impartial, according to the recognised standards of objective journalism. It has that very clear obligation. (Turnbull, 2013)

He goes on to (vaguely) mention a controversy involving the Australian newspaper the *Daily Telegraph*, which he said was “free to be as biased as it likes” (Turnbull, 2013). In the speech, which discussed the ABC and SBS (Australia’s multicultural PSB), he further states:

Its readers can decide not to read it, they can be appalled by it, they can cancel their subscription, they can throw it in the bin or do whatever they like, but it is free to do that. The ABC is not, any more than the SBS is free to do that. These are critically important institutions and they have to maintain the very high standards of objectivity, impartiality, fairness and balance. No doubt, journalists at the ABC will look at what their colleagues and friends are doing in the commercial media and say, ‘Why can’t I be as outrageous as that?’ Well, they cannot be. They are being held to a higher standard and that is a function of their very important public status. (Turnbull, 2013)

In this speech, Turnbull, who would go from being a Member of Parliament to the Minister of Communications, to the Prime Minister over the next three years (Parliament of Australia, n.d.), positions the ABC in opposition to commercial news organization. He emphasizes the characteristics of the ABC that make it different from other news providers, clearly positioning its value in relation to the private sector. The value of the ABC then is based on a value assumption that it is desirable to have a public broadcaster that, unlike the private sector, is obligated to be impartial and unbiased and therefore cannot choose to cause controversy by deliberately

distributing biased reporting as the private sector can. Turnbull uses a vaguely stated narrative story to accentuate difference between the ABC and private media as a way of seeking to legitimize his statements about the ABC.

The ABC has, in addition to this, been seen by the Government as being important because commercial media in Australia are struggling. The Prime Minister has stated:

The ABC is more important than ever. Our public broadcasters are more important than ever. The great foundations of journalism are under real threat. I spoke earlier about the threats to the newspaper industry. The big daily newspapers were the greatest foundations of journalism and they are threatened. One thing we can be sure of is that there will not be as many of those big newspapers in five or 10 years time as there are today. There are new sources, there are new online publications, and that is to be welcomed. There is in every respect a greater variety of news services available to us, but I fear that the sheer mass, thoroughness and comprehensiveness of the big daily newspapers will not be there in the future given the threat to the business model. (Turnbull, 2013)

In this speech, Turnbull positions the ABC as being “more important than ever” because private media organizations are struggling. The context of the speech, or the aspects of the text related to sociocultural practice, is important. The speech was given at a time when the government in power was open to building up the ABC so that it was able to provide more services (including enhanced news services online). The speech itself was given when the Bill that ultimately amended the ABC Act to include digital services was being considered. This was a time during which, as discussed in Chapter Five, not only would the ABC see its digital services legitimized, it would receive an increase to its budget (ABC, 2013, p. 17; Parliament of Australia, 2013, p. 74). Not long after this speech was given, a new government came into power and made cuts to the ABC’s budget (Select

Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2018, p. 111). When Turnbull became Prime Minister two short years later in 2015, his perspective on the ABC changed, and he cut the ABC's funding even further (Davidson, 2016; Hunter, 2019). By 2018 there were concerns expressed to a Select Committee that those cuts "had led to the ABC being strained to provide coverage in regional and rural locations, including where all commercial networks had withdrawn from local production" (Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2018, p. 98). The Committee recommended the ABC receive adequate funding, to which the Government responded that it "agrees in principle" but made the case that the ABC already had adequate funding (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, and Communications, 2018, p. 1; Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2018, p. 112).

This shift in perspective of the ABC that happened through a government change in 2013, has put the ABC in a situation where it is facing declining resources at the same time as it is trying to counter discourse in the national press that it should be focusing on areas of market failure. In the new media age, the ABC is, on the one hand, seen as valuable because it is seen as a solution to a problem in the market (dwindling provision of news), and on the other hand, it is seen as valuable because its news services are different from those that are provided by the private media organizations. Without proper resources, however, it is possible it will eventually no longer be able to provide either of these things.

Conclusion

While the governments in Britain, Canada and Australia have somewhat attempted to balance public values and private interests in the media systems the PSBs operate in, policies and inquiry reports have framed the PSBs in a way that suggests that their positions in the British, Canadian and Australian media systems are or should be subsidiary to private organizations. This

is reflective of the strong influence of market liberalism on media policy in each of the three countries. What is missing then tends to be a more holistic, historically contextualized view of public service broadcasting that is not overshadowed by market liberal ideology, which places at the fore the needs and wants of private enterprise at the expense of public enterprise.

The PSBs themselves have been emphasizing ideas of public service and value, which justify government spending on public service broadcasting, but they have simultaneously positioned themselves and their online services in relation to the private sector, which in turn positions the value of their services as being in their provision of types of content that private organizations do not provide. This has the potential effect of helping to validate arguments made by other stakeholders (such as the national newspapers, as seen in Chapter Seven), that the PSBs should only be focusing on providing services that the market will not. Such a perspective on public service broadcasting helps to push the PSBs to the margins of the media systems that they were once centrally placed within to ensure that public policy goals such as universal access were met. What each country is left with is a media system in which public service broadcasting is increasingly seen as first and foremost a way to correct market failure. This means that if funding for PSB is precarious, and the PSBs are expected to fill market gaps that are increasing in local news, it will come at the expense of the national orientation and purpose of the PSBs, and likely at the expense of national news. This is already somewhat apparent in Britain and Canada based on the fact that, as identified in Chapter Six, the BBC and CBC's national news homepages make relatively significant use of news stories that are locally oriented.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

Journalism is in crisis. Commercial and public media organizations are struggling to reinvent themselves at a time when technology is rapidly changing. All at once, news media of all forms are facing financial, technological and policy/regulatory disruption. As this happens, and as media ecologies undergo significant changes, it is essential to consider where PSB fits and how it can best serve Western democracies.

As we have seen, a number of things have contributed to the financial disruption commercial news media are facing. This includes a global recession, a shift in advertising revenue online where it is not worth as much as print advertising, and the rise of aggregators (Fenton, 2011, Gorman, 2015, McChesney, 2012, etc). For the BBC, CBC and ABC, the problem has been that their respective governments have been more inclined to reduce their funding rather than increase it or even keep up with inflation. This has created a situation where the PSBs have simultaneously been expected to fulfill their public service purposes, often with precarious funding arrangements, while also being more commercial, more self-sufficient and more distinct from the private media sector.

Technological disruption has affected news providers as much as financial disruption has. News media are now competing in a media environment that has significantly and rapidly changed. Taras (2015) calls the disruption facing the media “media shock”. Media shock is characterized by things such as “[t]he rapidity and suddenness of media change” and how now, “[e]very medium is merging with every other medium, and every screen is converging with every other screen” (Taras, 2015, p. 3). This was exciting for commercial media companies until it became clear that convergence strategies media organizations thought would be profitable, were not (Edge, 2011, p. 1267; Edge, 2016).

Policy and regulation have not kept up with changes in the media sphere, causing policy/regulatory disruption. New technology has created problems in, for example, jurisdiction. Technology such as the Internet “challenge old conceptualization of jurisdiction” because media regulation is grounded in geographical/territorial terms (Drucker & Gumpert, 2010, p. 9). Furthermore, media have typically been regulated on the basis of medium, which, because of convergence, is no longer practical (Drucker & Gumpert, 2010, p. 9). The problem with this is evident, for example, in the way the Broadcasting Act and the ABC Act position the CBC and ABC in relation to other media organizations. Both Acts consider, albeit vaguely, what the PSBs should or should not be doing in relation to other broadcasters, but neither Act considers the fact that, because of convergence, there are now questions about their relationship and responsibilities to other news media organizations such as newspapers.

All three forms of disruption combined have significantly affected news provisions in Britain, Canada and Australia. In Britain, the Cairncross Review panel, found over the course of a decade starting in 2008, that weekday national newspaper circulation fell considerably (Cairncross, 2019, p. 26). The *Daily Mirror* had the highest drop at 62 per cent (Cairncross, 2019, p. 26). Print advertising revenue had also dropped considerably in the country, while online advertising proved unable to compensate for it (Cairncross, 2019, pp. 40-42). The *Independent* was in such rough shape it was sold for £1 (“Independent to cease as print edition”, 2016). News publishers tried to address these problems by attempting “to maximize the number of clicks on their content, and/or to attempt to increase the value of advertising space on their websites” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 42). In other words, newspaper content has become more commodified in an attempt to compensate for revenues lost in the shift from print dominance to online dominance in news readership. The Cairncross Review, however, found “making money from online content, whether through

advertising or direct payments, is likely to continue to pose a significant challenge to news publishers” (Cairncross, 2019, p. 52). In Canada, the situation is just as bad. Print advertising has migrated online, resulting in newspaper closures and layoffs (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017). Both of the country’s national newspapers put up paywalls around their content, but a 2017 Reuters Digital News Report found that less than 10 per cent of Canadians were paying for online news. In Australia, the 2018 Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism found that media organizations in the country, like those in Britain and Canada, were struggling “to adapt to new business models, including the implications of the move away from a reliance on revenue from advertising and newspaper sales, toward monetising the publication of material on masthead sites, and through the aggregators” (p. 25). This led to “cost-cutting, rounds of redundancies, streamlining of positions and the increasing use of contract workers” (Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2018, p. 29).

As was seen in Chapters Three to Six, the BBC, CBC and ABC, while not facing the same problems as commercial news providers, have struggled as well. Taking inflation into account, the BBC’s public funding dropped from £3.9 billion in 2000 to £3.7 billion in 2019. At the same time the services it was expected to fund increased (BBC Trust, 2011, p. 24). Furthermore, the BBC’s licence fee funding was reduced halfway through an already exiting agreement, which added an element of precariousness to public funding that was supposed to be secure (BBC Trust, 2011, p. 24). In Canada, the CBC’s funding has fallen from \$1.42 billion in 1996 (after being adjusted for inflation) to \$1.21 billion in 2019. The ABC’s funding has fallen from \$1.14 billion in 2014 (when adjusted for inflation) to \$1.05 billion in 2019. Funding arrangements affect what services the PSBs provide because decreasing and unstable public funding forces the PSBs to make difficult decisions about what content and services they can reasonably provide.

Finding a path forward is imperative. Media play an important role in contemporary public spheres (Butsch, 2007, p. 7). As was discussed in Chapter One, the public sphere is a space where citizens come together as equals to participate in rational discussion about issues of public importance (Butsch, 2007; Habermas, 1989). This is a space that is free of private and official state interests (Breese, 2011, p. 131). Media are essential to contemporary public spheres because large populations make face-to-face interaction amongst the whole population untenable (Butsch, 2007). Even before the Internet emerged, there had been concern, however, about the effects of commercialization of the news media and concentration of ownership on the public sphere (Butsch, 2007; Garnham, 1986; McChesney, 1999; etc). Since the emergence of the Internet, financial, technological and policy disruption have accelerated the pace at which media organizations are facing new challenges thereby contributing to a situation where serious questions are being asked about the continued viability of commercial news provision. At the same time, PSBs are in precarious positions as questions are being asked about what their value is in a digital age that is characterized by an overabundance of choice.

There is no agreement on the solution or the path forward. This is partly because there has been disagreement about what the problem is. As we have seen commercial news providers, including the national newspapers in Britain, Canada and Australia, have placed blame on the BBC, CBC and ABC. They have claimed that the online news services of the PSBs have made it difficult and sometimes impossible for the newspapers to monetize their online news services (“ABC pays to white-ant”, 2014, p. 23; Hopper, 2018; Robinson, 2009, p. 1; etc). Government-commissioned inquiries into the state of the media systems in Britain, Canada and Australia, however, have generally found that large technology companies such as Facebook and Google are

the problem (Cairncross, 2019; Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017; Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism; etc).

Proposed steps forward have ranged from subsidies for private media organizations to refocusing the PSBs or providing them with better funding (Cairncross, 2019; PPF, 2017, Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017; Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism; etc). All solutions look to the future of news provisions in the countries and as such consider what the media system of each country should look like. An important question that comes out of this is: what role should PSBs play in it, if any? Public service broadcasting has been one way that governments have traditionally sought to solve problems within the public sphere including issues of equal access. As was seen in Chapter Two, since the 1980s, however, a rise in the popularity of market liberalism as an approach to public policy has seen private enterprise become a central priority when decisions are made about media policy and public service broadcasting.

Questions about how media policy should be used within media systems, and consideration about what those media systems will look like, are inherently concerned with power. Newspapers have historically been involved in the decision-making processes around news provision by the PSBs. For example, as discussed in Chapter Two, enabled by the Postmaster General in Britain, the press forced control mechanisms on the BBC's early news services – it was only when the government saw, through necessity, its value was the BBC allowed to gather and distribute its own news and not merely relay news from the newspapers over radio (Briggs, 1961). The press in Australia was also able to restrict the ABC's early news services (Petersen, 1993). It was only when the Prime Minister sought to have coverage of government that did not come from the press (which he believed was biased) that the ABC was compelled to begin to gather some of its own

news (Inglis & Brazier, 1983, p. 66). In Canada, the newspapers mostly supported the CBC, but this changed when the CBC's commercial strategy, which involved a large amount of commercial programming, became clear (Peers, 1969; Weir, 1965). Had newspapers been more concerned about this earlier, it is possible they would have sought to influence the makeup of the CBC when it was still in the process of being set up.

It is clear that commercial newspapers have continued to have an effect on the PSBs. More generally, competing perspectives, including newspaper perspectives, of whether or not the PSBs should be online and if so, what they should be doing, affected each of the PSBs in different ways. In Britain, the fact that the documents that formally constitute and regulate the BBC are updated much more often than comparable documents in Canada and Australia has meant that the British Government has, out of necessity, reviewed the BBC's Charter and Agreement more frequently than the Canadian and Australian governments, allowing it to better reflect current perspectives on the BBC. This allowed for the BBC's Charter, which was in the process of being reviewed and renewed because it had reached the end of its term, to be changed in 1996 to incorporate non-broadcasting specific technologies (Department of National Heritage, 1996). It also allowed for the BBC to be called on more and more as the years progressed to provide services that are distinct from those provided by commercial media organizations. This is evident in the emphasis on the BBC's provision of "distinctive online content" in its 2006 Service Licence and in the addition of the word "distinct" as part of the BBC's overall mission in its 2016 Charter (BBC Trust, 2006, p. 1; DCMS, 2016c, para. 5). More specifically, while the BBC's 2006 Charter instructed the BBC to promote "its Public Purposes through the provision of output which consists of information, education and entertainment", ten years later this was changed to specify that the BBC's mission was to serve "all audiences through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output

and services which inform, educate and entertain” (DCMS, 2006b, p. 3; DCMS, 2016c, para. 5). This, in conjunction with the view of the national press that the BBC should be restricted in the types of content it is allowed to offer, has had an effect on the content the BBC provides. This is clear from the fact that in 2016 a discussion about the amount of soft news the Corporation was producing resulted in the BBC indicating, with the government’s support, that it would reduce soft news, particularly “magazine-style content” (DCMS, 2016s, p. 36).

In Canada, the CBC was mandated to provide radio and television services specifically. It was, however, enabled to develop its online services by the Broadcasting Act (1991), which was written in a way that made Canada’s broadcasting system more generally, technologically neutral (pp. 3-4). It was further enabled to develop its online services by the fact that in the 1990s, the government was very interested in the potential of the Internet and in ensuring that there was a Canadian space on it, as well as by the government seeing the Internet as an extension of the broadcasting and telecommunication systems in the country (IHAC, 1996; IHAC, 1997). There was a desire at this time to reduce the CBC’s budget, however, which meant that while the CBC’s website was allowed to exist it was not provided with financial support. Furthermore, a lack of clarity around whether or not the CBC was technically allowed to develop an online service based on its mandate in the Broadcasting Act and the rhetoric in the national press around the impact publishers believe the CBC was having on their businesses, resulted in calls from several Standing Committees, for the CBC’s role in Canada to be as a market-failure broadcaster that focuses on filling in gaps left by the market and not as a comprehensive broadcaster as prescribed by the Broadcasting Act (Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006, p. 36; Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2015, p. xii). The full impact of this one way or

the other will be clear if and when the Canadian government decides to update the Broadcasting Act and the CBC's mandate within it.

In Australia, an ABC Board decision enabled the ABC to begin development of ABC Online, while inaction on the part of the government allowed it to continue to develop its online services. An inquiry into the ABC's online licensing arrangements made it clear that the government, while refraining to update the ABC Act, saw the ABC's online services as being important (Senate ECITA References Committee, 2000). Like the Canadian government, however, the Australian government did not provide the ABC with funding for the development of ABC Online (ABC, 2000, p. 20). It was not until 2013 that the ABC Act was updated to incorporate ABC Online, although by that time, the perspective of the ABC expressed in the country's only national newspaper, maintained that the service was still only questionably a part of the ABC's remit (Kenny, 2014, p. 2). The perspective of *The Australian* mattered significantly if only because its coverage and lobbying have resulted in government inquiries such as the Inquiry into Competitive Neutrality of the National Broadcasters.

The national newspapers in Britain, Canada and Australia have all been concerned with the development of the BBC, CBC and ABC on the Internet, especially after many of the newspapers started to implement paywall strategies. Newspaper coverage of the PSBs has generally made the claims that: the PSBs are engaging in "mission creep"; the PSBs are preventing a level playing field; the PSBs should be focusing on providing services in cases of market failure; and that the PSBs should have their funding reassessed and replaced. Solutions to these problems, however, have tended to ask the PSBs to modify their behaviour with the intention of bolstering the newspapers, which see the PSBs as competition. There has been little discussion about the public interest in doing things such as restricting the PSBs from providing certain types of content or

compelling them to focus on areas of market failure at the expense of other services, when these arguments are made. Power within the media sphere in these discussions and in consideration of possible solutions is concentrated in the private sector rather than in the public broadcaster specifically or public interest more generally.

Power can also be seen tilting in favour of private interests in government documents, as was seen in Chapter Eight. The way that language is used in such documents places power and privilege within the media ecologies with private media companies by marginalizing the PSBs, and, through broad assumptions and a lack of intertextuality, by implying that this is the natural position of PSB in Western democracies. In Canada, for example, the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage (2015) emphasized in a report about the CBC, that the rationale for its existence “is based on the need to fill market gaps” (p. 14). The White Paper on the BBC’s future emphasizes the fact that the BBC needs to be distinctive from private media organizations (DCMS, 2016b). The ABC is supposed to take into account the services provided by commercial broadcasters (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, 2019, p. 7). In addition to this, the governments have more often than not been unwilling to commit to stable funding or to funding the PSBs at the same levels as they were in the 1990s and early 2000s. Funding circumstances, in combination with an increasing expectation that the PSBs fill in market gaps, leaves a question of what types of content the PSBs will have to sacrifice in order to meet expectations. If market failure is seen as being mostly in local news, it is possible and perhaps inevitable that online national news will be sacrificed (especially if newspapers continue to lobby against the BBC, CBC and ABC’s online news services).

It is clear that the PSBs need to be reimagined. They have already, to varying extents, done this by moving on to new platforms and rethinking how they are delivering their content to

audiences. The PSBs, however, also need to be reimagined through new legislation that enables them to operate in the public interest with a clear set of realistic goals that have been conceptualized specifically for the digital age and that the public have had a chance to have a say in. They further need to be reimagined through new regulatory mechanisms that increase the transparency and accountability of the PSBs around what they are doing, how and why.

The urgency of reimagining PSB for the changed media environment is because failing to do so risks serious repercussions. It is unlikely that the privatization of any of the PSBs, or their complete disappearance, will happen suddenly. Rather, the risk is allowing them to be slowly relegated to the margins of their media ecologies and eventually, seeing them descend into irrelevance and possibly, ultimately, quietly disappearing completely. This would facilitate media systems characterized by unequal access to quality, relevant news and information. In turn, this would be detrimental to democracy because it would mean that some citizens will not have reasonable access to the news and information they need to participate meaningfully in the public sphere and act as citizens. This is essential to consider because democracy depends on informed debate (Garnham, 2003, p. 196).

While this dissertation focused on national news, it is also important to remember that this is just one of several functions the BBC, CBC and ABC are expected to provide. PSB is not just about informing in Britain, Canada and Australia, it is also a vehicle through which citizens can be educated and entertained and through which all citizens have access to geographically relevant content.

Possible Areas for Reform

Decisions that are made over the next decade will affect the BBC, CBC and ABC significantly. Given the findings of this dissertation, there are several areas that can be highlighted

as potential areas for reform. This includes implementing systems of licensing in Canada and Australia that are similar to the one that exists in Britain, ensuring a system of public debate that allows citizens to have a say in the development of their public broadcasters, providing realistic, long-term, stable funding for all three PSBs and ensuring greater independence from government for each of the PSBs.

First and foremost, it is important that each of the PSBs generate better systems for reporting key data about their online news services and about their finances. There should be a requirement for each of them to publish transparent, consistent data that will enable the PSBs themselves, governments, scholars and members of the public to see trends in their spending, staffing, revenue and audience measurements over time for specific divisions within the Corporations. The fact that there has been little transparent and consistently reported data at each of the PSBs was a barrier to the ability of this dissertation to show and discuss changes at the PSBs over an extended period of time. Data that would be useful to see reported more transparently includes: online spending, online advertising revenue, online news traffic (reported consistently), number of journalists employed each year (and their locations), and online engagement numbers (how often are audiences engaging with the PSBs online through things such as commenting and sharing). Major decisions will be made at the PSBs in the next few years. The CBC is going through the process of having its television and radio licenses renewed with the CRTC and waiting to see if the Canadian Government acts on the recommendations that were made by the BTLR panel, and the BBC is coming up to the end of its license fee settlement and will see its current Charter and Agreement expire before the end of the decade. Furthermore, Britain, Canada and Australia are all considering and making decisions about how best to move forward and about how to help to foster a healthy media system (Cairncross, 2019; Standing Committee on Canadian

Heritage, 2017; Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism; etc). As each of the governments move to implement new media policies, it is essential that quality data is available to help make good decisions.

Transparency from the PSBs is important to setting them up for a productive future. One of the benefits of the system of licensing BBC Online is that it increases the transparency around what the BBC is expected to do, how much it is expected to spend doing it and whether or not it met the expectations set for it. Implementing a similar system in Canada and Australia could significantly improve the transparency of the online services, and provide them with clearer, medium-specific remits that take into account the wider public service obligations of the PSBs. A licensing system would also provide a mechanism through which the online services of the PSBs specifically can become more accountable. It would be relatively simple to implement such a system in Canada because there is already a system for licensing radio and television in place. In Australia, the logistics would be more complicated because it would require implementing an entirely new system.

Another benefit of a licensing system would be that it could provide an opportunity for the public to periodically have a formal say in the development of the online services at the PSBs when the licenses are renewed. This would be valuable in light of the backlash that the PSBs have gotten over the years when important decisions have been made without the input of the public. In Australia, for example, as was seen in Chapter Five, *The Australian* was critical of the fact that there was no specific public debate on the question of updating the Corporation's Charter to include digital services (Kenny, 2014, p. 2). As such, the newspaper decided that digital was a "grey" area in the ABC's Charter. Having public consultations can be beneficial when considerations are being made, for example, regarding having designated areas for commenting or

other forms of user-generated content. Public debate could help to decide the value of having a distinctly national, non-commercial space online where citizens could come together to debate topics of public interest. If the Internet is seen as being valuable in this way, it could be beneficial for a Service Licence to then specify that as an expectation of the PSBs. This would eliminate the cycle of allowing comments and then not, and then allowing them again as has been happening at the ABC. As it is, all three PSBs make determinations about whether or not they allow commenting on news stories and if so, on which articles. Giving the public a formal chance to have their opinions on the matter heard could change what decisions are made. Another example of where public discussion could have been valuable is regarding the decision made by the CBC, as discussed in Chapter Six, to insist that people use their real names in order to be able to participate in discussions online. The CBC further reserves the right to restrict people from participating on CBC Online if they are found to be using a pseudonym (CBC, 2020b). Only children are exempt from this rule (CBC, 2020b).

However, there are people other than children who should be allowed to participate in CBC discussions and allowed to have a voice who may not feel safe being identified by their real names. A Service License could provide carefully considered guidelines that are the product of wide-ranging, public discussion and debate. At the very least, it will make the decision-making process more transparent and accessible. Another instance when public discussion and debate could be beneficial is around considerations about how data is collected and for what purposes. With the rate at which technology is developing, periodic reviews and public hearings and/or forums could ensure that as new concerns emerge, there is a clear and formal way for the public to have a say in what happens at their public broadcaster.

One of the problems with increasing the transparency of the CBC in particular is that it relies on advertising sales to supplement its government funding so that it can deliver on as much of its mandate as possible. This makes at least some of its information legitimately commercially sensitive. A possible solution for this would be for the CBC to stop selling advertising, or at least to significantly reduce its dependence on it, by providing it with stable, long-term funding that takes into account how much it would realistically cost for the CBC to deliver on its mandate. This is not a new suggestion. As was seen in Chapter Four, consecutive committees and panels have called on the Canadian Government to do this since the mid-1990s (Mandate Review Committee, 1996, p. 143; Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2003, p. 215; Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006, p. 35; etc.).

All three PSBs would benefit from realistic, long-term, stable funding as it would help to increase their independence from government and help them plan and prepare for the future. In the case of the BBC, which has typically been afforded such funding arrangements, there is evidence that there should also be clear protection against governments renegotiating agreements before they are due to expire because the government has considerable power in negotiations with the BBC since the BBC relies on it to set its funding, its Charter, which expires at the end of a specific term, and its License and Agreements.

The PSBs would further benefit from setting clear expectations around where the PSBs fit in the media ecology regarding competition. Competition is discussed throughout this dissertation. The BBC is expected to “have particular regard to the effects of its activities on competition in the United Kingdom” (DCMS, 2016b). In doing this, it must “seek to avoid adverse impacts on competition which are not necessary for the effective fulfillment of the Mission and the promotion of the Public Purposes” (DCMS, 2016b). The CBC is placed in the Broadcasting Act (1991) as

being central to the country's broadcasting system. When conflict arises between commercial and public objectives as laid out in the Act, it is resolved in the public interest, with priority given to the fulfillment of the public interest by the national public broadcaster (p. 5). The ABC is expected to take into account "the broadcasting services provided by the commercial and community sectors of the Australian Broadcasting system" (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, 2019, p. 7). Part of the problem with the way competition is dealt with in the BBC's Charter, the Broadcasting Act and the ABC Act is that it is mentioned in legislation only through reference to broadcasters for the CBC and the ABC and it is very vaguely stated for all three PSBs, leaving such clauses open to a considerable amount of interpretation. This puts the PSBs at risk of being interfered with by governments that want to diminish public service broadcasting and restrict the types of services that such broadcasters can provide, in a way that helps elevate private media at the expense of public media (by, for example, legitimizing the role of PSBs as only market failure broadcasters). The consequences of this would include reduced access to news for marginal populations.

The national news services of the PSBs should be explicitly stated as a necessary service provided by the PSBs. The PSBs should be further enabled (beyond doubt) to provide national news online. The intention would be to ensure that the PSBs are compelled to provide their countries with quality, national news and to highlight the importance of the provision of such content by public service broadcasters specifically. In Canada and Australia this is especially pertinent because the national newspapers all have paywalls around their online news content. Ensuring that the BBC, CBC and ABC all continue to provide national news services will protect them from being forced to focus on areas of market failure (often in local journalism), and

guarantee that all citizens of each country have access to non-commercial, nationally relevant news that is free at the point of use. This will contribute to a health public sphere in each country.

These possible areas for reform serve to highlight some of the ways in which the PSBs can become stronger, more transparent and more accountable. Transparency, accountability and independence created particularly through stable, long-term funding arrangements and a clearer set of medium-specific expectations could help mitigate some of the negative effects of competition with other news organizations including calls for the PSBs to be confined to operate only in areas of clear market-failure. At the very least, greater measures for transparency and accountability will help to increase the public's understanding of the PSBs and their value in a multimedia age when there are continuous arguments being made that question their relevance and frame them as being predators within the British, Canadian and Australian media ecologies. Greater understanding of the PSBs in turn can help guard against the rhetorical arguments being made by newspapers that the online news services of the PSBs are the reason why newspapers have been struggling to make their businesses work in the digital media age, or at least add more nuance to the conversation.

Areas for Future Research

One of the limitations of this dissertation has been that the description of the content on the three websites considered was not extensive. As such, future research could take a deeper look into the types of content that the PSBs are posting. This would be valuable for a number of reasons. First, it could shed further light on trends in how the PSBs are using UGC and multimedia. Second, it could provide a look at the amount and quality of original, investigative work being done at the PSBs for their websites. And third, it could provide a better understanding of what drives story production at the PSBs.

Further research could also consider the findings of a more extensive look at the websites in contrast to the websites of the national newspapers to see how much, if any, overlap there is in the content that is being posted online. Along similar lines, further research could also interrogate further where the information in the stories being posted originated. This would be beneficial because it would show the extent to which journalists at the PSBs are doing original journalism versus reproducing public relations statements, or regurgitating content that originated at another media organization. Research along these lines could also include an ethnography of the newsrooms, which would shed light on the process that journalists go through to decide on a story idea, research it, and then write it. Ethnographic research of the newsrooms would also provide valuable information about newsroom cultures, which would provide an interesting point of comparison for the BBC, CBC and ABC.

Another possible area for future research could look at the social media presence of the PSBs, particularly in relation to their main news homepages. Such research could shed light on how the PSBs are using social media sites to promote the content on their websites, how the PSBs are using social media sites to produce and distribute content created for specific social media sites, and how the PSBs are using social media sites to connect and engage with audiences.

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Appendix A: Articles in the British, Canadian and Australian National Press

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- Davidson, D. (2017, May 15). ABC stands by Google ad tie-up. *The Australian*, 23.
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- Day, M. (2010, March 1). ABC's role as niche provider needs to be redefined. *The Australian*, 31.
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- Francis, A. (2017, May 14). EXCLUSIVE; ABC stands by Google ad tie-up. *The Australian*.
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- Garrett, K. (2000, October 25). Cuts put ABC's integrity at risk. *The Australian*, 11.
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- Gilchrist, M. (2000, February 17). Wider delivery for the same old voices. *The Australian*, 11.

- Gilchrist, M. (2000, February 18). Inquiry puts ABC out of line. *The Australian*, 6.
- Gilchrist, M. (2000, February 19). ABC vision sends more TV to the bush. *The Australian*, 1.
- Gilchrist, M. (2000, February 28). Defiant Johns claims a vital, energetic legacy. *The Australian*, 2.
- Gilchrist, M. (2000, February 28). Johns leaves Aunty with no apologies, no regrets. *The Australian*, 2.
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- Gilchrist, M. (2000, March 15). ABC's online web to spread. *The Australian*, 5.
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- Gilchrist, M. (2000, May 25). ABC fires warning shot- new chief criticises Coalition's funding. *The Australian*, 1.
- Gilchrist, M. (2000, November 2). Alston cuts Shier's cloth. *The Australian*, 1.
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- Gilchrist, M. (2000, October 31). Bush tour to put Shier in picture. *The Australian*, 2.
- Gilchrist, M. (2001, March 29). ALP, Democrats oppose ads on Aunty's websites. *The Australian*, 2.

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- Meade, A. (2007, February 8). ABC to create digital earner. *The Australian*, 13.
- Meade, A. (2009, December 7). Star recruit gets The Drum website rolling. *The Australian*, 31.
- Meade, A. (2009, October 19). ABC chief's paid-content claims 'laughable'. *The Australian*, 7.
- Meade, A. (2009, October 19). Scott's net charge claims 'laughable'. *The Australian*, 3.
- Meade, A. (2009, September 7). Aunty heralds its digital appointee. *The Australian*, 32.
- Meade, A. (2010, August 9). Dear old aunty put out to grass to make room for tweeters, surfers and shoppers. *The Australian*, 32.
- Meade, A. (2011, December 12). Pride and regret as ABC chairman heads for the exit. *The Australian*, 1.
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- Meade, A. (2012, February 23). ABC looks to Brits to cast critical eye over news. *The Australian*, 3.
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- Meade, A. (2012, May 1). ABC, SBS told to update online -NEW MEDIA LANDSCAPE. *The Australian*, 4.
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- Mitchell, C. (2017, August 21). Keating's diversity guarantee outdated. *The Australian*, 24.

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NEO-CON FANTASY LAND. *The Australian*, 12.

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Scott, M. (2008, March 20). Aunty will meet 24/7 news demands. *The Australian*, 16.

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- Simper, E. (1999, March 20). THAT WOULDN'T BE THE ABC. *The Australian*, 31.
- Simper, E. (2000, April 13). Online deal seen as possible threat to ABC independence. *The Australian*, 2.
- Simper, E. (2000, April 20). Telstra deal ripe for a re-evaluation. *The Australian*.
- Simper, E. (2009, April 6). When bad mistakes are made by good people. *The Australian*, 36.
- Simper, E. (2014, December 1). ABC CUTS AN EPIC FAILURE. *The Australian*, 29.
- Simper, E.. (2007, April 12). Keep Aunty safe from the murky world of commerce. *The Australian*, 18.
- Simper, E.. (2007, February 15). Let no one soil Aunty's domain with commerce. *The Australian*, 18.
- Sinclair, L. (2014, December 1). Restructure to centralise digital development. *The Australian*, 28.
- Sinclair, L. (2015, July 12). ABC spends up big on Google. *The Australian*, 23.
- Sinclair, L. (2015, July 13). ABC Google buys 'outside its charter'. *The Australian*, 23.
- Sinclair, L. (2015, March 26). Aunty promises to bring digital into sharper focus. *The Australian*, 3.
- Sloan, J. (2010, October 2). Aunty suddenly fills the air, and it's a real shame. *The Australian*, 13.
- Smith, S. (2000, February 8). Telstra link caused by starvation diet. *The Australian*, 8.
- The ABC needs better direction. (2015, December 17). *The Australian*, 13.
- The national broadcaster's digital rush to nowhere. (2014, November 25). *The Australian*, 15.
- van Onselen, P . (2014, November 25). Turnbull wears the blame for Scott's cuts. *The Australian*, 7.

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Appendix B: Articles on the BBC, CBC and ABC's Online National News Homepages**BBC content analysis articles**

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Boris Johnson sorry if Zaghari-Ratcliffe remarks 'caused anxiety'. (2017, November 7). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-41902883>

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<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-45212444>

Elsie Scully-Hicks: Dad jailed for life for murder. (2017, November 7). *BBC News*.

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<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-45777689>

Firework fire in Birmingham home: Man dies five days after attack. (2017, November 7). *BBC*

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Gosport hospital deaths: Hampshire police to 'step back'. (2018, June 21). *BBC News*.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hampshire-44568421>

Hospital double death crash driver, 90, spared jail. (2017, November 7). *BBC News*.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-41900744>

House of Fraser cancels all online orders. (2018, August 17). *BBC News*.

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Jeffrey Barry: Brutal murder of Kamil Ahmad was 'avoidable'. (2018, June 21). *BBC News*.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-44560171>

Kelion, L. (2017, September 20). Manchester police still relies on Windows XP. *BBC News*.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-41306321>

Life-extending lung cancer drug approved. (2017, September 20). *BBC News*.

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