



HOUSE OF LORDS

Select Committee on Communications and Digital

Corrected oral evidence: The Future of Journalism

Tuesday 3 March 2020

3.30 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Gilbert of Panteg (The Chair); Lord Allen of Kensington; Baroness Bull; Viscount Colville of Culross; Baroness Grender; Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall; Baroness Quin; Lord Storey; The Lord Bishop of Worcester.

Evidence Session No. 2

Heard in Public

Questions 12 - 24

Witnesses

I: Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, Director of Research Development and Environment, School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University; Dr Seth Lewis, Associate Professor, Shirley Papé Chair in Emerging Media, School of Journalism and Communication, University of Oregon.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witnesses

Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Dr Seth Lewis.

Q12 **The Chair:** Welcome, Professor Wahl-Jorgensen and Dr Lewis. Our witnesses today in our inquiry into the future of journalism are two academics who are going to lend us their experience. We are very grateful to you for coming along. The session today will be broadcast online and a transcript will be taken for the record.

We are very grateful to you for coming along to give evidence to the Committee. Please start by briefly introducing yourselves and saying a bit about your background and experience. Then in your opening spiel, as it were, please give us a brief overview of what you think are the most important changes now facing media organisations in the consumption and production of news, and, given your international perspectives, how that compares internationally—what the UK looks like compared to other jurisdictions.

Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen: I am a professor at the School of Journalism, Media and Culture at Cardiff University. I am director of research development and environment at the school and director of research for the Centre for Community Journalism at Cardiff University. I have been studying journalism for some 25 years now, including questions on the future of journalism.

Dr Seth Lewis: I am an associate professor and hold the Shirley Papé Chair in Emerging Media at the School of Journalism and Communication at the University of Oregon. I am in the UK this year as a visiting fellow with the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, which is at Oxford. I have some background as a journalist prior to getting my PhD, and I now have about a decade of experience studying journalism and its transformation in all its various facets.

Q13 **The Chair:** Professor, would you like to start by telling us what changes in the consumption and production of news are affecting the industry? Are there any international dimensions or comparisons that you see?

Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen: First, over the past 20 years or so we have seen dramatic changes in both the production and the consumption of news associated with the digital era, as news production and consumption have now moved online. Particularly over the last 10 years we have seen the rise of social media, which now provide platforms for incidental news consumption, so you just come across bits of news in between images of a cute cat and perhaps a song by Lewis Capaldi as you scroll through your social media timeline, as opposed to the activity of proactively seeking out the news.

Especially over the past decade, we have seen a rapid increase in mobile news consumption. In the US, we now see 60% of audience members accessing news on mobile devices, while the UK is not far behind and is moving in that direction. What has resulted from the move to online platforms is a collapse in the business model particularly of print

journalism, simply because, while the audiences are interested in news, they no longer want to part with their hard-earned cash to actually pay for it. Much of the advertising revenue that has traditionally supported the industry has instead gone to big internet players such as Facebook and Google. What interests me in particular about this question is how that has resulted in a steep decline in the fortunes of print newspapers. That is something I am happy to go into in more detail later on.

Dr Seth Lewis: I agree with everything that has just been said. That is a good way to describe the overall landscape and how we got to this place. I would add a few thoughts that might also focus on a few aspects that are particularly interesting. One of those is the ongoing, truly disruptive and massive shift in the way people engage with media, away from older channels of communication toward digital, mobile and social progressively—in the sense that we are spending more time with digital, and more of that digital time is with mobile, particularly with apps, platforms and services such as Facebook, Instagram, Google and so forth.

This has fundamentally changed the game for news publishers, primarily in flattening the news landscape. Historically, publishers have controlled the means of production and defined their role as publishers, but now their work is mostly found through these distributed channels of information. On Facebook, for example, a link from the *Telegraph*, the *New York Times* or another news outlet functionally looks roughly the same as a link from almost any news site. So there is a flattening effect that then not only disintermediates the news media in their relationship as publishers reaching audiences but creates all kinds of interesting questions with regard to trust in authority and credibility. It raises important questions about why people should trust journalists, given that online, the extent to which news can be so easily shared and flattened across the landscape really has changed the game.

Second is the extent to which news must compete in this flattened landscape in a very fragmented environment where it has to compete with everything interesting online. Functionally, news has to compete with bingeable shows on Netflix and every other thing that someone might want to spend their time doing on digital, on mobile and on social. Certainly, there will be news junkies and the well-educated elite who continue to get news, but we are seeing that this type of fragmented environment raises some interesting challenges for attention.

Lastly, the point about attention leads us to the fortunes of news media; Karin has described those well already, but essentially, how do you create a model around which news can be provided, and how does it get subsidised and paid for in an environment where you get these challenges of flattening and fragmentation? We can talk more about those as we move along.

Q14 **The Chair:** We move on to the challenges and the way different media have responded to them. You have described changing media consumption. In your view, has that changed what journalism is? As a profession, has it changed significantly as a result of these changed

media consumptions?

Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen: For me, it has not changed the fundamentals of how we understand journalism. For me, journalism means trustworthy information about current events in the public interest, usually but not always produced by professionals. That definition highlights the importance of supporting journalism as a profession in a media environment where, on the one hand, we have an increasing choice of news providers but, on the other, we also have access to a lot of information that may not be as trustworthy, carefully vetted or verified by professionals as we would have in a traditional media system. In other words, for me it is important to maintain an understanding of journalism as an activity characterised by continuity.

Dr Seth Lewis: I agree. It might also be essential to think about separating out journalism as an occupation—a set of truth-telling ideals, a means of gathering, filtering and circulating information in the public interest done in a systematic and regularised fashion—from the news media industry on which most journalism has historically been based. We should care about both the news media industry and journalism but it is useful to recognise that they may not necessarily always coexist; perhaps there are ways in which journalism can be done effectively outside that context, and it is worth exploring that. It is also worth thinking about how the social functions that have historically been fulfilled by journalism—such as holding the powerful to account, keeping people apprised of public affairs and so forth—might also be engaged and executed outside of journalism and the news media as an industry. We should begin to pull apart these notions of journalism as an occupation and a social project from the news media industry as very much a business, one in which there are various forms of subsidy, and the economics of that.

Separate from all that are the outcomes here. What do we actually want for society? What do we most care about in terms of an informed public? What are the means by which those outcomes are achieved? Many of those means have been fulfilled and should continue to be fulfilled by journalism but there are other ways in which we might envision those sorts of outcomes and how we might generate them, so separating those out is useful.

To your question, it is changing in the sense that, if nothing else, we are no longer taking for granted things that perhaps we previously had. So this is a moment for reflection, re-evaluation and reinvention.

The Lord Bishop of Worcester: You have touched upon what I wanted to ask about the role of journalism in a civilised society and whether that is constant or changing. Could you elaborate a bit further? If you were talking to a critic of journalism who said that it fulfils no purpose, what would you say the essential core purpose of journalism should be in a civilised society? How would you defend it?

Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen: I would say that journalism is an essential institution in a democratic society because of its role as a watchdog on concentrations of power. Journalism is essential as a means

of holding the powerful to account as well as informing society about key developments. If you do not have a functioning news system, if you do not have functioning journalism, then you do not have a functioning democracy. In the context of local communities where local newspapers have closed down, for example, we see a link between newspaper closures and a corresponding decline in participation in local elections and other kinds of civic activities. There is a direct link between the health of democracy and the health of journalism.

Dr Seth Lewis: Well said. I would just add this about one of the defining features of journalism. Maybe we can step back and say that in this particular media moment there is no doubt that people can engage in what has been described as “acts of journalism”. They can post and share important, relevant and accurate information, and they can be a part of providing eyewitness testimony in the course of public affairs. However, at least one of the crucial distinctions between those activities, which have some characteristics of journalism, and what we consider as journalism as an essential part of our media and political environment, is the regular, consistent and systematic coverage of events. Journalists are committed in a particular time, place and topic; they provide the consistent and constant revisiting that allows for watchdog journalism to happen and for accountability reporting to occur. That requires time, resources, effort and training, so we need an institution that fosters the kind of enduring value and credibility that ultimately will yield, again, the kind of outcomes that we care about.

Q15 **Baroness Grender:** I feel that both your backgrounds are really useful to guide us as a Committee because we know that the decline of the industry is a given and is well-documented. We as a Committee therefore want to get to the heart of what future innovation looks like. You have alluded to that already but I would love to hear some specifics from both of you, particularly along those lines. The *Guardian's* stats are particularly fascinating at the moment: while its circulation is drifting downwards, its digital footprint is increasing in an interesting way, and there are one or two other examples of this. We would love to have an international comparison. Our vision for this report is that we look at what the future will look like for journalism, rather than documenting the demise of the past.

Dr Seth Lewis: I saw the interest that you all have in this question about innovation and the future, and I have been thinking about it. It is a bit of a challenging question: on the one hand, we have the failure of various initiatives, and ways in which we are seeing this kind of decline; but on the other we have case studies of successes in some places, and it has been difficult to determine whether we can generalise from those. Cross-national studies of journalism—I am thinking, for example, of the yearly Reuters Institute report on digital news—illustrate that although there are some commonalities across countries in the ways that audiences access news and the way journalists do their work, there are crucial differences that we need to take into account. The difficulty is in determining when an innovation is something that should be modelled elsewhere, and how we learn from that.

To your question, one of the areas where we have been misled is that many news organisations, as one report described recently, have been chasing bright and shiny things at the expense of really trying to move beyond maybe a fascination with technology alone. In other words, we have had a lot of experimentation with virtual reality, with social media and all kinds of different technological forms that have emerged. These are what we might consider incremental innovations and some of them might help to an extent, but they are not what one observer recently described as “existential innovations”—that is, moving beyond the ordinary and really trying to address more existentially what I believe is the fundamental existential question of how we develop a kind of journalism that can reclaim value in people’s everyday lives. It is clear from many of the statistics about trust, and ways in which people are turning away from news and avoiding it, that we have a long way to go in understanding the value proposition of news. How can journalism be done in a way that would engender greater trust and become something that people actually valued enough to pay for, to make a more regular part of their daily activities and so forth? We are not there yet and we have a long way to go in trying to figure it out, but I feel as if there is some movement in that direction; this Committee can do a lot to help to push that forward.

Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen: The key question when it comes to the future of journalism is how it is going to survive, given these fundamental problems in its traditional business model. In that context, we have to move away from the belief that news is essentially a strongly profit-making activity and instead think about how to support news as a public good. There is a series of examples of large successful news organisations that have somehow managed to survive and actually make some money: it looks as if the *Daily Mail* is going to be profitable by next year and the *Guardian* has managed to create some profits.

However, there is a real crisis outside affluent areas and areas of high population density. For me, what stands out is, on the one hand, a particular crisis emerging in local journalism—something also noted in the Cairncross review—but, on the other hand, a series of opportunities arising in that area. Because these organisations tend to be quite small and agile, they tend to be very good at innovating. So what we are seeing now in the area of community, or what is sometimes called hyperlocal journalism, is a lot of innovation—different kinds of business models, whether that be by membership or collaboration with local businesses and agencies. We are seeing a great deal of experimentation and some of that is quite successful.

On local journalism, the BBC has worked to address local news deserts through its local democracy reporters project, which has created 150 new journalism jobs since 2017 to help to fill the gap in the reporting of local democracy issues across the UK. These local democracy reporters have been placed in regional news organisations but have been funded by the BBC. These reporters have filed 100,000 stories to date, made available to the BBC and to more than 950 outlets participating in the partnership. So I think there is a great deal of hope for the future, but

that hope is associated with the idea of journalism surviving as a public good rather than making a big bunch of money for the owners.

Baroness Grender: As they occur to you while we are doing this report, it would be lovely to have further examples from both of you, particularly any international examples. Thank you for that answer, particularly the point about funding, which I think is really interesting.

- Q16 **Baroness Quin:** First, I would like to ask something that follows on from the questions from the Bishop of Worcester and Baroness Grender. Dr Lewis, you talked about an informed public. Are we talking about a clear difference in quality between traditional offline journalism and online, or is it more complex than that? Baroness Grender mentioned that the *Guardian* is doing well online almost at the expense of offline, but presumably its standards of journalism are the same online as offline. I ask this because I think we sometimes worry that the demise of traditional journalism is going to mean a fall in standards. Is that necessarily true? Is that something we should worry about, or not?

Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen: One of the issues is that because of the decline in news organisations' revenues, there have been significant job cuts across different types of news organisations. That means that the reporters who remain in the newsroom have a lot more work to do but there are far fewer resources. That means, for instance, that they have to produce more stories; the online environment means that they have to produce more frequent updates and they have to be multiskilled so that they can produce content for different platforms. In terms of human resources, journalism is more stretched. We still see a significant amount of quality journalism across different types of news organisations in the UK, but the real challenge is that those journalists who remain have to work much harder.

Dr Seth Lewis: I agree. The *Guardian* is a good example in another respect too. My understanding is that they have cut down on the number of stories they have been producing. In other words, rather than trying to keep the hamster wheel going with continued output at the same level as when they had more people, it is about recognising that you need to ask how you can make best use of your resources with a smaller and diminished staff. I argue that, not just for the *Guardian* but for many news media, it is actually about doing far less news in terms of actual content but making it more substantial, more impactful, more investigative and research-driven and more data-oriented—in other words, harnessing the possibilities of digital as well as the new types of datasets to do new forms of storytelling, along with opportunities to involve the public as well. There is a chance here to do journalism in a different way that may not look exactly the same as we transition from print to digital, but that could very well be better than what we had before, if it takes full advantage of its opportunities and resources.

The Chair: Is there then a danger that these organisations become less news organisations and more agenda-driven organisations—that they do not cover the whole range of news and produce new stories right across the piece, and that as they narrow in, they become a series of

organisations focused on specific agendas?

Dr Seth Lewis: To go back to the question about what has succeeded, where we are seeing the most economic success is with those organisations that tend to have a very narrow purchase. They focus on a particular topic or a niche area of concern. Unfortunately, many of those concerns tend to be more oriented to elite, well-educated and higher-income consumers, so we are seeing a movement away from what you might describe as the more generalist—maybe scattershot, to some extent—approach to covering all the various needs and affairs in a community.

The Chair: “Comprehensive” might be a better word.

Dr Seth Lewis: “Comprehensive” as opposed to “scattershot”; yes, that is a better way of putting it.

It is worth thinking about what is lost and perhaps what is gained in that process. What is lost is certainly types of reporting and journalism that we have been accustomed to, but this is a chance to ask: was a lot of value created in every bit and form of journalism that was done historically? Sometimes we do things just because we have always done them, without trying to figure out, “Is this what people care about? Is it what they needed to learn?”

The answer is complicated. Certainly, we are seeing outcomes that are oriented to more niche interests, and that carries real concerns about social inequality. On the other hand, that does not necessarily mean that there is lessened quality or that we are going to be less informed.

Q17 **Baroness Quin:** You have forestalled part of my question, which was about how digital technology has changed the production of journalism. I also wondered how effectively news providers made use of data analytics to understand their audience’s interests. Is there potential damage to audiences in this, in terms of the invasion of privacy and so forth?

Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen: There is a very uneven uptake of data analytics across newsrooms. A lot of resource-rich news organisations have made extensive use of data analytics—Seth will have more to say on this—to the extent that journalists, for instance, will frequently have targets for clicks per story, which might drive their reporting style. Conversely, in resource-poor organisations, such as the community news organisations that I study, there is actually very little use of such analytics. More than two-thirds of hyperlocal news sites have no knowledge of basic audience statistics for their site. This reflects broader inequalities in the uptake of the opportunities offered by such technologies.

Dr Seth Lewis: I think that is very true. I would just add that there is a lot of mixed evidence with regard to how analytics are used in newsrooms. There is no doubt that they are a growing feature. Ten years ago, if you asked a journalist how often someone had read their story online, they would not have been able to answer that question. Nowadays, most journalists most of the time are well aware of how

many people are accessing their stories and how many times they are being shared on social media. What has changed over the last several years is that journalists have been increasingly asked to participate in what we might call the marketing of the news; they are encouraged to be the ones sharing their stories, talking about them and trying to promote them online. That comes with its own set of issues and problems.

Nevertheless, what we are seeing is that news organisations are keenly aware that they need to drive traffic. This is happening a bit; there is a shift towards recognising that a page view in itself is not worth much, particularly as digital advertising becomes less and less of a feature, primarily because it is worth less and less every year.

There is now more emphasis on how much a particular story is driving the audience's intention to subscribe or donate. That is a more important metric for news organisations than the number of clicks, shares and likes. In some ways, that is a positive development but, again, it perhaps complicates journalists' role in thinking about what they do and write. Is it helping them to understand their community? Yes, to a certain extent. They now have a better understanding of their needs and interests. On the other hand, it is perhaps a superficial understanding. It provides one way of understanding one's community, but it is a rather thin connection, rather than one that is deep and rich in substance.

Q18 **Viscount Colville of Culross:** I declare an interest as a series producer at Raw TV, making content for CNN. I want to talk about citizen journalism. Dr Lewis, you were slightly dismissive of this, saying that it is good for one-off events, but you need the legacy of media professionals or whatever you want to call them for the regular coverage of events. We are seeing documentaries made up entirely of UGC. How well do you think professional journalists are interacting with citizen journalists? Can that role be expanded?

Dr Seth Lewis: Yes. I should say that I am definitely not dismissive of what people can contribute to the news media. This is a topic that I have been setting for more than a decade now. It has been interesting to see how it has evolved. One of the key differences is that, perhaps a decade ago, there was fear on the part of journalists that they might somehow be replaced by bloggers, let us say. On the other hand, there was a kind of questioning of why they would ever allow those people into the process. Perhaps what has changed is that today there is an understanding that things can be gained through collaboration.

Citizens obviously come with a whole range of experiences and forms of expertise when it comes to media production. Some people may not really know how to use their smartphones for journalism in particularly productive ways, but others, as you said, may be able to produce documentaries practically on their own. Therefore, it behoves journalists to better harness the resources, expertise and talents that exist in a given community.

The difficulty is perhaps about how to work with audiences effectively and in good faith. One of the things I have been studying recently is the online harassment of journalists and the extent to which they, among other public figures online, experience a great degree of hostility and abuse. It is only getting worse. In some respects, this has challenged the ability of journalists to define and develop a truly relational, mutually beneficial, reciprocal relationship with their audience. In many cases, they have a hostile experience online, but there is no doubt that we and they ought to be looking for ways to develop a more productive form of engagement. I think we will see that occur, but it will happen in fits and starts; it is uneven.

Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen: Many of us who have been studying citizen journalism for a number of years originally viewed the emergence of the practice with a great deal of excitement, because this was a way of providing an opportunity for ordinary citizens to be involved in the making of news. Certainly, when I did my first study on the use of user-generated content at the BBC and how audiences respond to it, my colleagues and I found that audiences really appreciate user-generated content because it is viewed as being more authentic and engaging than more traditional journalistic content.

One of the ways in which the inclusion of user-generated content has been particularly valuable is in what scholars have called accidental journalism or “witnessing”. This is when you have a breaking news event—let us say, the Asian tsunami or the London bombings in 2005—and no journalist is on the scene, but there is an ordinary citizen with a camera or a smartphone who is able to record it. That has been really transformational in providing information about breaking news events as they occur, without a journalist on the scene.

For the most part, citizen journalism can provide invaluable footage and imagery when there are no journalists on the ground. However, at the same time, there is also a growing recognition among journalism scholars and practitioners that it is not necessarily a substitute for the work of professional journalists.

- Q19 **Viscount Colville of Culross:** You talked earlier of the crisis in local journalism. Would it not be possible, particularly for hyperlocal journalism, to train people who are obviously interested in user-generated content, so that they can be more directed in the way they support those local websites? We are endlessly looking for new models to try to replace the disappearing local newspapers. Is it possible to channel in some way this incredible enthusiasm that people seem to have to put their lives and the events that they witness online, to support local news and journalism?

Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen: I am glad that you raised that because that is indeed the model for a lot of hyperlocal news organisations. They tend to have one person working on the publication full-time, usually someone with a journalism background and some kind of qualification in journalism. They are then supported by local volunteers who work part-time, for anything between a couple of hours a

week to 20 hours a week, helping to provide content for the site. Hyperlocal sites very much rely on what you might describe as citizen journalists, in the absence of having paid journalists on their staff. That is definitely a model that is increasingly gaining purchase.

Dr Seth Lewis: I would add that this is an area where we need innovation and effort on both sides. In other words, where we have news deserts, places that are increasingly being abandoned when it comes to news coverage, there ought to be public support. In the US, there is now a movement afoot to at least talk about a greater effort to provide public support, which has been anathema for a very long time. They are talking about how news coverage might be supported at a local level in places where it no longer exists.

On the other hand, as you pointed out, there are also opportunities to invest in the training and enabling of communities to report about themselves. Journalists are beginning to re-evaluate their role as that of a community manager, one who helps to manage, facilitate and coordinate the flows of information that occur within a community. It does not mean that we no longer need journalists. Rather, it resituates them and their role, so that their role is less talking to the public but talking with them—facilitating the conversations they are already having and steering them in positive and productive ways.

Viscount Colville of Culross: Does that need to be publicly funded to make it work, or could you do that with voluntary contributions?

Dr Seth Lewis: I think it would be highly contextual. I will use the US as an example, although it has limited application here. In the US, we have a lot of philanthropic or non-profit funding flowing into media and journalism. The problem is that it primarily serves large, metropolitan areas and well-educated, higher-income news consumers. Philanthropy does not meet the need that exists in many rural communities so, because of market failure, public and government support probably need to step in.

Q20 Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: I am not sure that I know how to frame this question. It feels to me as though we are not mentioning some shadowy figures who are what I am beginning to think of as the “controlling minds” in the creation and dissemination of news. Historically, we would have called them the editors or owners of newspapers and, historically, they have provided what the Chairman described earlier as an agenda—a filter.

We are talking about all these journalists at the moment as though they are just a bunch of individuals collecting up the information and putting it out there, and working with citizen journalists or whatever. Most of their work is filtered through a controlling mind of some kind, such as an editor or some other kind of mediator. In the world you are describing, who are those people? Are they the same people? What about the ownership of the news? There is evidence on this—for example, the information about how the brands we are familiar with have changed their practice. Does journalism still work that way, even when it is being

filtered differently by being produced largely online? I am just interested in that ownership issue and how you see it now.

The Chair: Could we take Lord Allen's question along with that one?

Q21 **Lord Allen of Kensington:** I was taken by your point earlier that 60% of news comes through our mobile phones. Going back to that filtering point, when you look at Apple News, it says "chosen by the Apple News editors". My worry is that there is a filter and a filter; there is level upon level of editing. I would find it fascinating to understand their motivation for prioritising that news. What is the model that drives that? Can you help us with that? There is the filtering bit, but this is also about the motivation driving that. I am using the example of Apple because it is one of the most obvious.

Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen: Traditionally, the media have tended to play an agenda-setting role in public debate. A newspaper editor, let us say, would meet with the editorial team and decide what the front page of a newspaper looks like, what the most important issues are, what is most newsworthy and what takes priority. Now, with the shift in both the production and consumption of journalism, all news is filtered through the algorithms of social media and search engines. That means that the media to some extent lose that ability because of the intermediary role of social media and search engines.

Having said that, the news media still have a role in signalling what is most important, and that influences how the news is ranked in the algorithms. The social media algorithms are based in part on judgments of news value but also on who we follow on social media, whose posts we look at the most and so on. So there is a kind of shadowy world to do with what goes on with social media algorithms. A lot of that information is very difficult to get hold of but we know that decisions on the design of algorithms are primarily based not on public interest but rather, on making money for Facebook, Google and so on.

Dr Seth Lewis: There are a number of interesting things to talk about here. In some sense, you are talking about where their capture is. Is it corporate capture in a corporate environment, or state capture, when government funding is involved, and so on? We ought to be wary of any thought of capture. Journalists certainly try to preserve their autonomy.

It is perhaps useful to recognise that one of the things that defines journalism as an institution is that a journalist who moves from one news organisation to another can generally slot into that role without a tremendous degree of training, because there are shared ideas about what constitutes good journalism. It is one of the essential features of the profession. That means that it is not necessarily the case that a single editor or publisher could overwhelm the individual autonomy of a journalist, but they can no doubt set a certain tone from the top and that can be problematic.

What we have just heard is that, in many ways, it is really the platforms that are the primary concern. We have been talking about communities and how they have conversations with one another. Where is that

occurring? It is occurring on platforms. Some 10 or 15 years ago, it was occurring on proprietary news sites or dedicated sites that were controlled locally. Now, these platforms for conversation are increasingly controlled by corporations that are no longer local and that have their own set of interests that may not align with the public interest values we have with regard to news.

There is a kind of secondary gatekeeping or extended filtering that occurs not only in the way the news is framed and presented but in the way it is talked about and shared; I am thinking about the types of signals that Facebook uses to determine which conversations get more attention than others. All of that comes into play but much of it is out of our control. There is deep frustration on the part of journalists and publishers at the moment about how to deal with this challenge.

Lord Allen of Kensington: Lord Chairman, for the record, I should have declared my interest as chairman of Global Media & Entertainment, which manages LBC and LBC News.

The Chair: What you have said is very interesting and it is clear that we will need a session on the whole issue of gatekeeping and intermediation as part of the inquiry. That is a very interesting explanation of the issues. Thank you. We will move on to Baroness Bull.

Q22 **Baroness Bull:** Thank you. My question has two parts. Last week, we heard from Ofcom and Dr Kleis Nielsen about demographic differences in news consumption. From Ofcom's data, we can see a really worrying correlation between socioeconomic status and media literacy. We heard about a lack of trust from C2DE classes, people in the north and leave voters. We heard about differences of consumption between older and younger generations and about the importance of authenticity as opposed to trust. Given that landscape, what do news providers need to do to better engage with the vast range of different communities?

Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen: One of the things that is quite important is to support existing local media, whether corporate or independent, in building up trust in journalism. As we have already discussed, local news is in a precarious position and very much endangered but it is also widely trusted. Three-quarters of those polled by YouGov in 2018 said they trust local newspapers; local commercial TV and radio stations were not very far behind, with 73% of audience members trusting them. However, they are very undervalued financially and are very much at risk. Supporting existing local media is part of the puzzle.

We also have to think about how consumption patterns are changing and how younger people in particular are no longer consuming news in the same way. That would also involve experimenting with new formats. A lot of that kind of experimentation is already happening and is quite successful. That could mean drawing on anything from short videos to virtual reality, podcasts, data visualisation and so on, taking advantage of all the exciting new technologies around and trying to bolster the reach of news products.

Baroness Bull: On that, whose job is it to support local media?

Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen: This is a contentious point, but I think it is very difficult for that to happen without any support from either foundation or government sources. One of the recommendations of the Cairncross review was to support both local and investigative journalism. A similar decision has been made in the Welsh Government, and community news funds have subsequently been initiated to try to support the industry. I would say that the BBC local democracy reporting initiative is part of the same picture.

It is unlikely that local news will thrive financially or survive without any kind of support. There is therefore an inherent need to recognise that this is a public good, just like water or wi-fi.

Dr Seth Lewis: You asked what news organisations can do. One of the challenging things is that they need to do research, but unfortunately they do not have the resources to do it. They need to partner with universities, institutions and other organisations that can help them do what I think is some crucial research to understand what people need and want from news.

For too long, there has been this assumption on the part of journalists that they know what people want or that they are giving them what they should have. However, the fact that trust continues to decline and that we are seeing more alienation, with people avoiding the news, tells us that something fundamental has disconnected there. Journalists, news organisations and the entities that support them probably need to put in more effort at a basic, qualitative level to understand what types of news audiences find valuable. To what extent is news relevant? How could it be made more relevant, interesting and valuable in their lives? That would go a long way towards really trying to listen and make sense of the lived experience that people have with media.

Q23 **Baroness Bull:** That relates to the second part of my question, which is about representation. In June last year, the Sutton Trust and the Social Mobility Commission reported that, of the 100 most influential news editors and broadcasters, 43% went to private schools. They also reported that 44% of newspaper columnists went to private schools and 33% went to private schools and Oxbridge. We have a workforce which is not representative of those broader communities. How much does that matter and what can we do about it?

Dr Seth Lewis: It matters a lot. It is incumbent on those in that social grade and situation to figure out how to more effectively pay attention and be responsive to the needs and interests of the poor and working class and others who may feel left out of news.

One of the most striking research findings in recent years has been that the consumption of print media used to be more broadly shared among rich and poor. Since we moved to online, there have been greater disparities and gaps between social classes in the consumption of online news. This is part of a broader issue. In the online environment, the rich get better news, perhaps because they pay for it and also because the

news organisations that have resources are serving them, while poorer people simply get poor information. There is a lot to be done to understand those dynamics and figure out how to work on them, not in a paternalistic way but with a sense of trying to understand what is going on and how it can be addressed.

Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen: I want to add to that quickly. Perhaps one reason why journalism as a profession is so dominated by educational and sociodemographic elites is that it is quite an inaccessible profession, because of the cultural capital you have to show to become a journalist but also because, to get a decent full-time job, you are likely first to have to go through a series of unpaid internships in London, one of the most expensive cities in the world. Realistically, that kind of preparation is outside the reach of people from less privileged backgrounds. I know that there are initiatives to support students from less privileged communities to enter journalism, but there needs to be a more systematic effort to get a journalism profession that represents the population as a whole, given those dynamics.

Lord Storey: I want to explore this a bit further. As you rightly say, the surveys show that print journalists are probably regarded below politicians these days, while broadcast journalists are right up there. That is not surprising, is it? You do not have to do much research to know that the culture of newspapers in particular has to change; there is the doorstepping, the "I'd sell my grandmother for a good story" ethos, and the way that editors behave. The general public watched nightly the Leveson inquiry on phone hacking, so it is little wonder that print journalists are held in such low esteem. This is about changing the culture of newspapers, but not necessarily changing the individuals themselves. I would like your thoughts on that.

I would also like to come back to one thing that worries me a little. You highlighted the importance of the BBC paying for local democracy reporters. At a time when the BBC is having to cut jobs in its newsroom and when local newspapers are cutting jobs, it is a bit bizarre that the BBC's licence fee payers are paying for these local journalists—mainly to PLCs that want a 20% return for their shareholders. Again, I do not think this plays very well with the public's perception of journalism. I agree that we should look at the American model of philanthropy, to see money being put in to local newspapers properly.

The Chair: We are a bit short of time. There were two questions there, one about the culture of newsrooms, and a second about BBC funding and the funding of journalism. Professor, could you respond to those reasonably briefly?

Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen: I agree that we cannot necessarily expect the BBC to solve all the problems of local journalism. There have to be more systematic efforts. In the UK, there is not as much of a culture of foundations and charitable funding supporting the kind of journalism that we would like to see. We are moving more and more in the direction of those kind of initiatives, but we do not have the same

baseline tradition of charitable giving as they do in the US. In that sense, it is not really a model to which we can easily compare ourselves.

It is very positive that broadcast journalists are so trusted in the UK. It points to the importance of traditional, impartial journalism which we see in broadcast journalism. There are indeed some more fundamental issues to do with tabloid journalism, which I am happy to go into in more detail in the evidence.

Dr Seth Lewis: I have nothing to add on that. That describes it well.

The Chair: It is still true, though, is it not, that more people distrust the BBC than trust it? It is not a completely rosy picture.

Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen: I think it is still true that more people trust the BBC. I am pretty sure that, when I last checked, more people trusted the BBC than did not trust it.

Lord Storey: More people trust ITV than trust the BBC, if truth be told. For news, that is.

Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen: Yes, ITV is also greatly trusted as a news provider.

Dr Seth Lewis: The BBC is by far the most trusted news source in the UK; that we know. It is also true that it can be polarising. There are probably people on either end of that spectrum. If this is a scale, there are people at both ends of the spectrum in terms of how they regard it. However, on balance, it is the most trusted. That is an important thing to keep in mind and foster at a time when it is under such pressure.

The Chair: We now come on to our last question as we are coming to the end of our time.

Q24 **The Lord Bishop of Worcester:** You have already said something about major gaps in the evidence base on the production and consumption of journalism; you may want to say a bit more on that. Could you also help us in thinking about which emerging trends and potential future developments we might focus on?

Dr Seth Lewis: I will mention a couple. I have to say that I think this is a great opportunity for the Committee to point policymakers and others in the right direction here. We have talked about social inequalities and I want to reinforce that I think that is a real area of concern. We ought to care more about understanding these issues. As news becomes a more digitally oriented phenomenon, we need to consider the extent to which we are seeing growing disparities and gaps between those of higher and lower social grades and the implications of that. That is the first issue.

The second is these questions of subsidy. I think what we have essentially argued today is that journalism is important and it can be done by communities, but it generally needs to be guided, oriented and driven by well-trained professionals who have the resources, expertise and training to do so. The question then is: who pays for them?

We have talked today about the question of subsidy. I would encourage the Committee to continue exploring that. What is the right mix of pay

models to support the journalism that we need in the future? I suspect that it will be more varied, complicated, contextually oriented and contingent than what we have seen in the past. You could argue that the last 10 years have been an experimentation with technology in journalism and that we are now on the cusp of an era of experimentation with funding models. There are definitely some examples in the US that could be mimicked but, by and large, this needs to be oriented around the context here in the UK.

Finally, I would say that we need more attention, research and orientation on the role of what we might call authoritarian tendencies, which can exist among politicians as well as among everyday people. These are tendencies to try to squelch the press or position it as an enemy of the people. Of course, we have seen a lot of this in the US, but we have also seen some creeping encroachment of that type of tendency here in the UK and elsewhere in Europe. Broadly speaking, we should be concerned about the future of the press at a moment when it becomes a means of political attack. That puts the press in an awkward position and ultimately undermines its ability to fulfil its role.

As I mentioned, we are doing research on how journalists are experiencing harassment online. Of course, they are not the only people experiencing that, but the degree to which they are experiencing this from individuals—as well as broader attacks on the institution—warrants greater concern and attention.

The Chair: Professor, what are your final thoughts?

Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen: I will mention three things that are broadly in line with Seth's observations. First, any consideration of the future of journalism has to be informed by the insight that news production can no longer be driven purely by profit motives; it also has to be informed by the idea of journalism as a public good. So the big question going forward is how to put in place business models which are sustainable in the context of a very exciting moment of great experimentation and innovation with news business models. We have to ask how journalism can survive.

The second, closely related question concerns how we can serve the varied and diverse communities in the UK. How can we deliver quality news not just to the wealthiest and most privileged in London and other big cities, but to rural and/or economically marginalised communities?

Finally, echoing Seth's point, in a very contentious, divided and polarised society in which journalism is frequently under attack—sometimes for very good reason, but sometimes less so—how can we rebuild trust in journalism?

The Chair: Thank you very much to both our witnesses. Thank you also for agreeing to send us your observations and thoughts throughout the inquiry; that would be very welcome. I think you said you would come back to us on one or two specifics, but thank you for your time today.