



Communications and Digital Committee

Corrected oral evidence: The future of news: impartiality, trust and technology

Tuesday 5 March 2024

3.45 pm

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Members present: Baroness Stowell of Beeston (The Chair); Lord Dunlop; Lord Hall of Birkenhead; Baroness Harding of Winscombe; Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill; Lord Kamall; Lord Knight of Weymouth; The Lord Bishop of Leeds; Lord McNally.

Evidence Session No. 6

Heard in Public

Questions 64 - 70

Witnesses

I: Michael Jermey, Director of News, ITV; Louisa Compton, Head of News and Current Affairs, Channel 4; Guy Davies, Commissioning Editor of Factual, Channel 5.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

Examination of witnesses

Michael Jermey, Louisa Compton and Guy Davies.

Q64 **The Chair:** We are back now with the commercial public service broadcasters. May I ask our three witnesses to state their name, their role and the channel that they are here representing?

Michael Jermey: I am director of news and current affairs at ITV.

Louisa Compton: I have a slightly ridiculous title, which is head of news, current affairs, specialist factual and sport at Channel 4. For the purposes of today, I am here to represent news and current affairs.

Guy Davies: Thank you for inviting me today. I am the commissioning editor for news output on Channel 5. That includes the daily bulletin and all our other bulletins.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Similar to what we did before, we have four categories of questions. We will be talking about the role of the commercial PSBs, the economic conditions and the changes in the landscape in which you are all operating. We will then come on to trust and impartiality, and then finally we will wrap up with the role of PSBs, the regulator, the Government and that sort of thing in the context of the future of news.

I turn to Lord Hall to get us going.

Q65 **Lord Hall of Birkenhead:** Welcome. Could I ask each of you to try to bottom out for us this question about what the other parts of the PSB ecology are offering our audiences and users in terms of news? We talk a lot about how important the PSBs are in the broader context of the media that we use. It would be really helpful if each of you in turn could just describe how you see the role of your organisation in terms of news and the news agenda, as well as examples of what you are offering. In Ofcom language, we get into wide subject matters, et cetera, but that does not exactly mean stuff to people out there.

Michael Jermey, could you start off with ITV?

Michael Jermey: We are lucky in this country to have a very rich and diverse media landscape. ITV has been providing news to viewers since 1955, and what we do is distinct in the marketplace. On television, we produce some similar services to the BBC in terms of regional news, national news, and international news in television and now in digital, but we do it in a distinct way that connects with our audience very effectively.

ITV was born in the regions of Britain. Our strong regional offer still resonates with our viewers. We succeed in proportionately reaching audiences who some other media organisations do not reach. The further away you get from London, the more people consume ITV regional news. To use the terminology, we reach C2DE viewers more effectively than some others.

If you watch ITV one evening, alongside entertainment and drama programmes, you will see that more than a third of our schedule is news. If you watched last night, you would have seen very distinctive reporting from Egypt and Israel, but you would also have seen, in your local programme, distinctive reporting from local towns up and down the country. That connection with our viewers, our independence and the fact that we make different judgments from other media organisations add enormously to the plurality of the product and news available to viewers in Britain.

The BBC is an enormous organisation that does some really terrific work. It does terrific work internationally. We have been competing, if you like, with it domestically for 70 years, and over the decades we have carved out a distinct approach to news that resonates with an awful lot of our viewers.

Lord Hall of Birkenhead: Part of what you were saying was that the audiences for ITV news are different from the audiences the BBC tends to get. Is there evidence that you tend to get a unique set of people?

Michael Jermey: Yes, there is. They are not unique; they overlap. We both make news on really big channels. We both get really big audiences, but, in terms of the percentage breakdown, our audience are a bit more female than the BBC's, a bit more out of London, and a bit more C2DE.

There is a unique audience who only watch ITV news. They are a small audience, but I often think of those viewers. We are giving them an impartial, accurate reflection of the world in which they live. If we did not exist, the alternatives available to them would perhaps be pretty limited. That adds enormously to the value of plurality in British broadcasting and to the effectiveness of our democracy.

Lord Hall of Birkenhead: Louisa Compton, what is your sense of what Channel 4 is offering that is distinctive in the PSB news ecology?

Louisa Compton: Thank you very much for having me here. News and current affairs is at the very heart of Channel 4's schedule in peak time every weeknight. It is a key part of Channel 4's identity. It is what defines us.

Our remit at Channel 4 is to challenge with purpose, to represent the whole of the UK but particularly unheard voices, to champion diversity and to innovate. That remit for Channel 4 carries right through to Channel 4 News, where there is a clear mission statement to offer world-class analysis and to explain stories incredibly clearly. We have a passionate pursuit of the truth and holding power to account.

We are incredibly proud to be one of the most trusted broadcasters and news providers across the UK, just ever so slightly behind the BBC. We also have the youngest profile of all PSBs. Some 6% of our audience are 16 to 34 year-olds, who are incredibly hard to reach. We are also the most diverse of all PSBs. About 16% of our audience are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

We have been a digital-first newsroom for some time, and we focus a lot of our resources on reaching audiences on digital platforms. In 2023, we reached 1.2 billion views on our digital platforms alone, which is something we are incredibly proud of.

We also take great pride not just in our international coverage, with the first-class analysis, reporters and editors we have across the world, but in our UK audiences. We are the only broadcaster to co-present from Leeds most weekday evenings and we have put an awful lot of resource into our reporting across the UK.

Outside of news, in current affairs we are investing in journalism at a time when lots of our competitors are not. In the last 18 months, we have set up an investigation unit, which is in-house within Channel 4. The first story it broadcast was the *Russell Brand: In Plain Sight* investigation at the end of last year. Hopefully you will have seen or clocked the enormous reach that it has had.

We have also invested in a new current affairs strand, *Untold*, which is specifically for 16 to 34-year-old audiences and has proven that younger audiences are interested in news and the world around them. Finally, we are incredibly proud to be a regulated, duly impartial public service broadcaster. It is a badge of honour that we wear with pride.

Lord Hall of Birkenhead: You mentioned Leeds. Could I just ask you about that? Does being in Leeds a lot of the time mean that you tackle international and national stories with a different mindset, or is it that you cover more stories that are not about the south-east and the metropolitan area around London?

Louisa Compton: It is a bit of both. The Leeds newsroom has enabled us to have a great diversity of people working in that newsroom, and they bring together a different perception of those stories.

Lord Hall of Birkenhead: To Channel 5 and Guy Davies, you have a very different style. There is a lot of innovation going on at 5 News. Do you want to describe what you offer the public service environment?

Guy Davies: Yes, we are part of that PSB jigsaw. We see ourselves as a distinct part. We are not in competition. We are a 5 pm bulletin. We are the first of the day, although we are not driven by a "breaking the story of the day first" agenda.

We are very trusted by our viewers. We know our viewers. We know that our viewers are largely non-metropolitan. We think of ourselves as the hour news bulletin for what you might call everyday Britain. That is the way we look at ourselves.

We involve our audience. We say to our audience with our stories, "Why is this important to me? Why should I care about this?", whether that is the way we do politics or whether it is regional stories. We probably do eight big stories a day, of which three are regional. That is our usual tally.

We have a very positive feel to a lot of our stories. We have done some recent research, and we are keen to reach people who we have called

news flirts. These are people who are not committed to watching news every day or evening, but they want to be informed. They want to learn about the world. They want to know what is going on. We offer something for them at 5 pm, and they are a very different audience from people even at 6 pm, especially outside London, where people may have different timetables.

As Louisa said, we are very proud to be an Ofcom-regulated PSB. For us, that is very much a badge of quality and trust. That is something that is really important to us.

Lord Hall of Birkenhead: What have you learned from the interactivity that you have been doing with your audiences? How has that shaped an agenda?

Guy Davies: We have two things. We have the five things you need to know, which is a very simple way of headlining. We also have what we call the 5 Phone, which is a very interactive piece with our audience where people give their views.

I am sure I will come on to presenting a bit later, but Dan Walker, who came from the BBC, is our main presenter. That trust of Dan and his personality is important to our audience. For us, the way that he interacts with viewers is absolutely vital in getting the tone of Channel 5 News right.

Lord Hall of Birkenhead: It is incredible that you are all coming from one organisation but have very distinctive styles. Do you think broadcast news tends to agree too much, however, between you and the BBC about what is news? You all share a similar mindset.

Michael Jermey: I am not sure that is right. If you watch the programmes on any given day across the BBC, Channel 5, Channel 4, ITV and some of the other players such as Sky, GB News and others, you see a pretty rich variety of story choices, prioritisation of stories and storytelling styles.

Then you layer on to that regional news programmes. ITV broadcasts 18 regional news programmes each evening. If you watched all that output, you would see a picture of a diverse nation with different priorities in different places. We still have a very strong pluralist media landscape in 2024.

Louisa Compton: I agree. If you look on any given day, our running orders will have different leads depending on our audience. Tomorrow, we will all, I am sure, be leading on the Budget, but we will have different takes on the Budget and will pull out different aspects of it based on our own unique audiences.

Guy Davies: I agree. There are two things here. One is the news agenda of the day, where there are certain stories that clearly will dominate. For us, it is all about our audience, so our audience will have an interest in certain stories. I do not edit the programme. Our skilful editor will decide which of those stories we will then put into our running order, which will have a different complexion, length and emphasis,

perhaps, for our audience. It is all driven by our audience, and we know our audience really well.

Lord Hall of Birkenhead: Part of the joy or skill of journalism is also to say, "Audience, you might not want to know about this, but we will now tell you about it".

Guy Davies: It is, of course. We have tried to build that with our audience. For example, we have quite a long-running series now about people in politics. We have done up to nine-minute, in-depth interviews with politicians. We are doing Lisa Nandy in the next few days. We try to give a background for our audience. Now, they may not naturally feel that they are Westminster watchers, but we are trying to present a popular way of looking at politics, cloaking it a little bit, if you like. We need to think about that when we come to our election coverage later in the year.

Q66 **Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill:** I presume you are all under quite a lot of pressure in terms of revenues and finances. I am just wondering how the changes to the media landscape have affected the way you provide news, and what priority you give to fragmenting audiences and growing competition with new outlets. Costs of both journalism and production are rising. You are losing advertising revenue. I would like to ask all of you individually how you are coping with that. May I start with ITV?

Michael Jermy: ITV News is in the privileged position of not directly competing for the revenue that supports us. We are part of a successful company at ITV. We spend a little bit above £130 million a year purely on news. We spend additional money on current affairs. That means that, somewhere in ITV, we need to make £130 million in profit to be able to fund that. We are proud to do that as a public service broadcaster, but it requires the ecology of public service broadcasting to allow us to continue to be successful as a broadcaster in the UK.

The Media Bill going through Parliament at the moment is a useful first step in ensuring that, for the next decade, the commercial PSBs are able to continue to operate on an even playing field against the big global platforms. You can be absolutely sure that, a decade from now, the big global players who have added a great deal to the TV ecology will be doing just fine and thriving.

A large part of the onus is on the commercial broadcasters, but some of it is on policymakers, regulators and Parliament, to ensure that there is that even playing field, and that UK-produced content for big UK audiences continues to thrive.

As I say, the Media Bill is a really good first step and we are fully supportive of it. It will require Ofcom to be pretty resolute over the next decade in ensuring that the powers it is given by what will be an Act are used as intended by Parliament to ensure that successful PSB continues.

Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill: Louisa, could you give us more information about the way you use social media? I know that is very

important to Channel 4.

Louisa Compton: We are very lucky at Channel 4 in that news and current affairs is broadly protected from those commercial pressures. The rest of Channel 4's content makes the money that effectively funds our news and current affairs journalism, so we do not feel that same commercial pressure that others may do. This means that we can choose the stories we cover and choose incredibly difficult and complex stories based on their importance, rather than whether it is going to make us money.

The explosion of the internet and competitors has meant huge fragmentation to our audiences. When Channel 4 was set up over 40 years ago by Margaret Thatcher's Government, for most people watching Channel 4 News it was probably their main source of news content at that point in the evening. Now, we know our audiences flick around, as we all do, and consume news on many different platforms, which is why being a digital-first newsroom is so important to us.

As I said, we put a lot of our resources into reaching those hard-to-reach audiences on platforms. YouTube and TikTok are particular drivers for us at the moment, but one of the challenges with that is the amount of power the tech platforms have. Our power is limited. They can change an algorithm on a whim. For example, Facebook deprioritising news led to 54% less traffic for us on Facebook last year, even though we have produced the same number of videos.

Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill: Channel 5, you have a different way of gaining more audience. Does that affect the editorial priorities?

Guy Davies: We are not as rooted in this social media revolution, in a way, because we find that our audience is a linear audience. Michael is right to point to the Media Bill. One of the things within that in terms of the prominence of the PSB is absolutely vital to our culture. If no one knows where we are, no one is going to come to us. It is really important that we are out there and prominent as a PSB and an impartial, trusted news provider. That is one of the ways we can get out to hard-to-reach audiences, which is what we do.

It may be a surprise, but we reach the audiences who are not generally drawn to news, as I mentioned a little bit earlier. Our 5 pm bulletin really helps with that. An important thing for us is to concentrate on that linear audience, where we are picking up those very hard-to-reach audiences. That said, our younger audiences increased dramatically last year. Year on year to December, for example, our audience is 44% up across the board.

We have been reaching them. Our popular style, the time of day and the lesser attention we pay to the TikTok generation probably firm up our existing audience.

Q67 **Baroness Harding of Winscombe:** One of the themes that we have been discussing through this inquiry has been the general decline in trust in news. It has been quite striking this afternoon that all of you have

been rightly proud of the trust that your viewers have in you. None the less, trust is in decline in all news.

I would like to hear from each of you. Why is trust in decline? What do you think is driving that and what is your response? What are you doing about it? Let us start with Mr Davies.

Guy Davies: On that issue of trust, a lot of it is to do with what appears on social media, the new technologies, AI and that kind of thing. That is clearly having an effect on what people are seeing online, and that is affecting viewer trust.

What we can do is to make sure that we present a service that we can get a loyal audience for. The heart of our news, for example, as I have said before, is Dan Walker, our presenter, who absolutely gives that trust to our audience. That is very important.

It is not about speed; it is about accuracy for us. We are very keen that, on news stories where there are elements that have perhaps appeared on social media or could possibly be challenged through AI, we have the right protocols in place through ITN to verify and to make sure that those stories are accurate.

It is incumbent on us to give the audience what they want to know about the world around them, but to be really clear, in the way we manage editorial, that we are a trusted source.

It is about the influence of these new platforms. To an extent, some of what you might call the new fringe, opinion-led channels are also providing people with a sounding board and an echo chamber to particular views. We have to stay in our lane, which is very much a trusted, classic news approach.

Louisa Compton: I have watched back lots of your evidence. I saw Charlie Beckett's answer to that question on trust, and I thought he made a good point about the cynical British public. Public trust across all institutions in Britain is fairly low. Of course, it is incredibly important that audiences trust news organisations.

Channel 4 is one of the most trusted public service broadcasters, and our trust has gone up by five points in the last year, so not all PSBs' trust is going down. We are now at the highest level of trust since Covid in 2020, and that partly shows that audiences want trusted, regulated, duly impartial, fact-checked, accurate news services.

In times of crisis, be it Gaza-Israel, Ukraine or Covid, audiences come to us. Independent Reuters research shows that around 76% of UK audiences want to have a range of views and duly impartial, trusted news.

Michael Jermy: It is a very interesting question. If I may, I will gently push back on the assertion or premise. It is true that, across the western world, a lot of institutions are less trusted than they were 30 years ago. That applies to media organisations, to Parliaments, certainly to newspapers and to others. As one of your previous witnesses has said, we do not necessarily have the best data on this. The suggestion that

Ofcom would conduct a long-term longitudinal inquiry or survey on trust, asking the same question at each juncture, could have real value.

If you ask, "Do you trust the news media?", I am not sure I would say yes to that question. It depends which bit of the news media you ask. In the most recent survey on ITV, 82% of people said yes when asked, "Are you satisfied with your regional news programme?" I see trust as a component part of that. We have to be slightly careful about what the question is.

What would I say the solution is to ensuring that there is a greater level of trust in sources of news? I would go back to my previous answer and say that it is important that PSBs, whether the BBC or commercial PSBs, are prominently available to all viewers. That is one of the most effective ways of ensuring trust. It is in our collective hands to ensure that that continues to be the case. Some of the undermining in trust has been misinformation in the media, as well as perhaps a healthy degree of scepticism about all sources of information.

Baroness Harding of Winscombe: If I was to paraphrase that back, maybe slightly unfairly, I have heard, "Nothing to see here. There is no problem. Don't worry about it". Is that fair?

Michael Jermey: That would be unfair. There are clearly issues around trust. They are not all bad. A degree of scepticism from viewers is a healthy thing. In a pluralistic media, you will get some media outlets that you can trust and some that you should not trust.

I would hope that we are one that you should be able to trust. We engage with our viewers on a daily basis and we listen to our viewers. We are humble and accept that we do not always get everything right, but right through the DNA of our organisation is a desire to tell the truth, to give accurate facts and to be duly impartial.

Baroness Harding of Winscombe: This is to all three of you. Do you think that the spread of PSB provision means that there is genuinely something for everyone in the country? Are there any audiences who you do not believe are being served for news at the moment?

Guy Davies: Across all the PSB services, there is a wide range of audiences. Different broadcasters perhaps have difficulty reaching certain areas of the audience. That is maybe what it comes to in the end.

We are not reaching everybody at Channel 5, but we are reaching an audience who traditionally are news-lite and not so keen on watching a daily bulletin in the evening at peak time. As I say, we really concentrate on that "all of Britain" feel. That is what we can do to interest new audiences.

One example is the sad case of Nicola Bulley. What we were doing with that story, which we opened out in a programme in itself, was to counter some of the misinformation that was online. There were conspiracy theories and all sorts of theories about what happened. With a big exclusive interview with her partner, which was really heartfelt, we managed to tell that story and to give somebody a voice. The whole

general audience wanted to hear that interview, which was then reflected in the coverage of that story the next day on the front pages.

We can take stories in Channel 5 News in a very popular way where there is misinformation, or where we feel that the story is being unfairly worked through in some areas of the media. As a PSB, we can work with that to present an impartial take on the story.

Baroness Harding of Winscombe: Ms Compton, with Channel 4's mission to serve the more unheard groups in society, do you think that PSBs are genuinely offering something to everyone?

Louisa Compton: I would hope so. The combined reach of all PSBs is 94% of the British public, so collectively we reach the vast majority of the UK audience.

To go back to your question about whether there is "nothing to see here", it is worth talking about solutions and how we address the decline in trust. Transparency with our audiences is at the heart of that. Channel 4 News was the first British broadcaster to launch its fact-check service ahead of the election in 2015. That is about showing our workings to our audience, clearly explaining the story from as many angles as we can, and that has been one of our big, successful brands over the last decade.

Another thing I would like to touch on is the idea of a kitemark for our online content. At the moment, our online content sits with equal weight against one-man band news providers or people spewing fake news and disinformation. There is nothing that sets it apart. It is worth exploring whether public service broadcasters should have a kitemark on their digital content, which is for the audience's benefit, to allow them to say, "Look, this has been fact-checked. It has due accuracy and is a duly impartial, trusted source".

Baroness Harding of Winscombe: How do you think we should respond to concerns about growing news avoidance? I am the mother of two teenage girls, and they definitely avoid the news. Is that something we should be concerned about as a committee? What should we all be doing about it?

Louisa Compton: Yes, it is something we work incredibly hard on. I am sure your teenage daughters are on social media platforms, and perhaps they are on TikTok or other platforms if you allow them to be. We work incredibly hard to reach those news avoiders on social platforms.

Some research I saw recently shows that 27% of our young audience on linear came to us via those social platforms, so there is evidence that reaching people on social does translate them into our linear audience.

We are incredibly proud of our digital content, because we are not serving skateboarding dogs on TikTok, for example. Our Channel 4 News brand of high-quality analysis and serious storytelling translates on to TikTok. On TikTok, you will find Channel 4 News reporters and correspondents clearly trying to explain Israel-Gaza, and ditto on YouTube, where we have seen 220 million views since 7 October.

Michael Jermey: News avoiders and young people who have never discovered the news is an issue. A few years ago, we decided to launch a news product aimed squarely at teenagers. We went out and asked teenagers what they wanted. They said of the ITV News brand that they trusted it, but that it was for their parents and it felt a bit old.

What they described, none of which would be a surprise, is something shortform and available on the platforms they are using anyway. We created a news bulletin called "The Rundown", which has been very successful in reaching that target audience. It looks and feels very different from ITV News, but it still has the values of being impartial and accurate, and reporting news that will be of interest to a specific audience, while introducing subjects that they may not be familiar with.

That sort of thing, and the sort of thing that Channel 4 refers to, is a way of reaching audiences who may not actively be news rejecters, but who may just not have discovered it. When our generation was growing up, you were introduced to the news because there were only two or three channels available. Now it is possible to consume hours and hours of content and not bump into the news. If we can find ways of drawing young people in, that is a key role for commercial PSBs to play.

Guy Davies: News avoiders are not all young. One of the things we are really interested in is the power of positive news. Quite often, we have found in research that we have done that people do not like watching news at the moment because they find it really depressing and hard to watch. Obviously, we will be covering the news stories, but we have been looking at medical breakthroughs recently, for example. Those are not the "and finally" stories. The positive stories are not just the funnies at the end of the show.

There is news around that we can work with, and it is important that we do not forget that when we are talking about people who are perhaps beginning to actively avoid the news. It is really important for us to try to think about a broader definition of news within our bulletin.

We used to have two half-hour bulletins, one of which was a repeat. Since Ofcom has given us the hour bulletin at 5 pm, we have managed to broaden out into this sort of storytelling. That is important for people who are feeling that the news is not for them. On Channel 5, we want the news to be for as many people as we can interest at that time of day. It is really important to note that not all news-avoiding people are young.

Louisa Compton: Our challenge on that is to find ways of engaging that youth audience. I used to work at the BBC. I was the editor of BBC Radio 1 "Newsbeat", which is specifically reaching young audiences there, and I was always incredibly frustrated with that assumption that young people are not interested in news. This generation is one of the most interested in news of any generation, because they have the world at their fingertips. They are talking to people in gaming forums across the world. They are interested in what is happening around them. It is just about how we tell those stories.

I mentioned that at Channel 4 we have launched Untold, which is our digital-first youth platform for 16 to 34 year-olds. We have been really encouraged by the kind of young audiences coming to us on our streaming platforms and on YouTube. We have given them serious undercover stories and investigations into fast fashion and the housing crisis, and there is an appetite for it when it is about stories that affect them and are relevant to their lives.

Q68 The Chair: I have a couple of questions on this area, before we move on to Lord Dunlop, going back to the question of trust and the relationship between audience trust in broadcasters and the corresponding action of certain demographic groups moving away from mainstream media. The evidence that we have received shows that that applies to the PSBs as well as to the BBC, although it is probably more pronounced with the BBC.

I wondered whether each of you has any research or data that you can share with us subsequent to today in written evidence that shows a breakdown in how different demographics trust you as a news provider. It would be interesting to see how that breaks down. I recognise, of course, that some of you are targeting specific audiences anyway, but that would be helpful.

There was another thing I just wanted to ask, particularly to Mr Jermey from ITV. I heard what you said earlier about how your audience tends to be more C2DE or more female than the BBC's. You are none the less a mainstream channel that is there to serve everybody. How does ITV News look at what is being done on Channel 5, say, for a particular demographic? I noticed in the evidence we have had that Channel 5's audience is going up. Is there anything that you learn from Channel 5's approach and its relationship with its audience that you are seeking to adopt to serve your audience better on your channel?

It is the same question I put to Deborah Turness, which is about the role of a channel such as yours in making sure that the whole perspective on an issue is seen and heard by the audience, not just the perspective that the vast majority might see but that the audience group who are more attracted to Channel 5 might not.

I am particularly keen to ask this because, while you are all distinctive and different channels, you are all provided by ITN, so there is a common interest there.

Michael Jermey: It is an interesting question. First of all, I am a great admirer of Channel 5 News. Channel 5 has done a great job in seeking to serve its specific audience.

That is a slight misunderstanding about our relationship with ITN. ITV News is a combination of our national news provided by ITN, with ITV being the biggest shareholder and by far the biggest customer, and our own ITV plc-employed regional newsrooms. More of the journalists at ITV News as a whole are directly employed by ITV plc than our service through ITN.

We operate across those company ownership lines as what we call one ITV News, and we ensure that there is a neat flow from our regional news programmes into our national news programme. Our regional news correspondents who live outside London in the communities they report for regionally often appear in our national news. We have doubled the length of our 6.30 pm news in the last couple of years. Almost all the investment we put in to increase the size of that programme was spent outside London, employing more correspondents outside London.

In a sense, that is the root of what ITV News is historically. It grew up in the regions. ITV was once referred to as the people's channel, and an awful lot of that DNA is still there. We employ more journalists outside London than we do in London. Over 80% of our non-ITN employees are outside London. That is very much something that we do.

Louisa Compton: Just to explain on the ITN point that you made, although ITN supplies all our news, they are completely separate newsrooms. The Channel 4 newsroom is completely separate from Channel 5, with its own editor in place.

The Chair: If you were not aware, we are going to ITN. We are going to Grays Inn Road next week. We will learn more about the corporate relationships when we get there.

Q69 **Lord Dunlop:** You have all set out very clearly how you see your role as PSBs and the issues that you face in delivering high-quality, trusted news.

Mr Jermey, you mentioned the importance of a level playing field and the Media Bill as a useful first step. Looking to the future, what more in policy terms do you think will be needed to underpin the sustainability of trusted public service broadcasting?

Michael Jermey: It is hard to be sure because the media landscape evolves very quickly. First of all, it is incumbent on us to run successful businesses. The success of ITV plc is, at root, what underpins the success of ITV News.

The first step has been taken with the Media Bill. It is absolutely vital that Ofcom uses the powers the Bill will give it robustly to ensure that PSBs can act effectively. There may be things that will help over time through the digital markets provisions. It is undoubtedly the case in digital that the big platforms benefit from news consumption in the UK. That may be another source of revenue for all news providers, whether PSBs or not. That is an interesting debate. I suspect it would be sensible at some point if the PSBs that supply news could run as much advertising as all the channels that do not necessarily run news, or indeed as much advertising as Sky News is permitted to run.

Those are a few things that may be looked at in the years ahead, but it is also important that Parliament, policymakers and regulators remain vigilant over the next decade. In some senses, we have had an unusually stable period in PSB in the last 10 years. There was a lot of change in the first decade of the century, but less so since the digital switchover.

There has been a reasonably stable period in the provision of PSB. It will come under more challenge in the next 10 years. At what speed, I am not sure. How effective the Media Bill is, I am not sure. It is a conversation that should continue. Your committee and others interested in this subject should work with the broadcasters to ensure that the sort of news you have heard about this afternoon can continue to be provided well into the future.

Louisa Compton: I would echo a lot of what Michael says. I have already spoken about the concept of a kitemark for public service broadcasters, which will set aside trusted, regulated, duly impartial PSBs from other content online. I would welcome your committee looking into that.

Obviously, the Media Bill is going to help in terms of the prominence of public service broadcasters. That is a growing concern. I would like to see tech companies be more transparent about their data and algorithms, both how they work and when they change. As Michael mentioned, we will watch the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill with interest. That might help create a more competitive playing field for public service broadcasters.

Guy Davies: Continued strong regulation is important through Ofcom. We are very happy with the regulation regime, and we fully support Ofcom. I would like to see that strong regulation continue.

There needs to be Ofcom attention paid to the new forms of media and the new types of technology that are coming into news and news reporting, if not in the news then as sources. That needs to be looked at. I hear what Louisa says about watermarking.

In the end, everything revolves around the idea of trust. I believe very firmly that prominence is really important. As I said before, if we do not know where the PSBs are, people will not watch them. It is important to have that prominence so that we know where our trusted news services are and we can continue to develop them. Again, it is about that vigilance.

Lord Dunlop: Just on that point about prominence, a previous witness suggested that tech platforms needed to subscribe to a code of conduct requiring them to give a degree of prominence to public interest news. What do you think of that idea?

Guy Davies: We are not really involved in the debate about tech platforms, so we do not have a particularly strong view on that, but I understand it. We do not license our service to any of the tech providers, so Channel 4 is more involved in that than us.

Louisa Compton: I would welcome that concept. Public service journalism needs to be protected, and we need to be able to provide sustainable journalism.

One other thing I did not mention on my list of tech wants would be the issue of age gating. It is an issue we have been really struck by on YouTube. I have talked already about our immense global reach, but we

have no influence on YouTube's policies and it tends to take a one-size-fits-all policy approach.

In fact, 41 of our reports have been affected since 7 October. I would love to send you examples of those reports, which are Ofcom compliant and have been broadcast on Channel 4 at 7 pm to a pre-watershed audience by our international editor, Lindsey Hilsum, who is one of the leading and most respected journalists in her field. Although those reports were fine to broadcast at 7 pm, they have been age gated by YouTube¹ arbitrarily without clear explanation. That obviously has a huge impact on our reach. It is something I know Ofcom is looking at.

The Chair: Please send us that, if you want to send us some further evidence.

Louisa Compton: I will. I would love to send you some of those videos as examples.

Q70 **Lord Dunlop:** I just wanted to ask you about Ofcom. Clearly, Ofcom's powers to regulate the BBC's online content have been extended. Given the importance of online content, should Ofcom's regulatory oversight be extended to all PSB online content and, if not, why not?

Louisa Compton: In short, I personally think that the answer is yes. At Channel 4 News, we have chosen for the last decade to voluntarily apply all our digital content as though it is Ofcom compliant, so we ensure that all our digital content is duly impartial and has due accuracy. We apply those same Ofcom standards on a voluntary basis, but I would welcome that to be extended across all PSBs.

Michael Jermey: We act in the same way. We ensure that all our news content is Ofcom compliant, whether it is overseen by Ofcom or not, and I would be entirely relaxed about the regime being extended.

Guy Davies: I would agree with that.

Lord Dunlop: Finally, you have all mentioned the commercial power of tech platforms. They are clearly vital to you for the visibility of your content.

One of our previous witnesses highlighted that a social media clip of Channel 4 News is perhaps seen by 2 million people, whereas the actual programme is seen by 200,000 people.

Louisa Compton: Can I just correct you on that? I did see that evidence, and I am glad to have the opportunity to correct it. Our average audience for Channel 4 News is around 600,000, not 200,000.

Lord Dunlop: Thank you very much for correcting that. I am sure everybody will note that.

Can you just say a little more about the nature of your relationship with tech platforms? Does anything need to change in that relationship?

¹ Amended by witness: Intention to say 'often arbitrarily'.

Louisa Compton: First of all, let us talk about the positives. Tech platforms enable us to reach a wide audience, especially those news avoiders we have talked about, those hard-to-reach audiences and younger audiences. That is great, and we really welcome that.

The negatives are what I have referenced already, in that we have minimal control about how our content is surfaced. It sits equally among other content, which can be full of disinformation and misinformation, which is why the kitemark is important.

The algorithms, as we know, prioritise clickbait content and do not particularly serve fact-checked impartial news. That is something that I would welcome being changed.

Michael Jermey: The social platforms have added some positives in the world of news. News reaches wider audiences. As a consumer, it is easier than it once was to find a plethora of news sources from across the world. But our relationship with the tech platforms is an unequal one and not a properly commercial one.

We have had one or two smallish deals with some of the social platforms. The executives who we have dealt with in the UK have all been pleasant and professional, but you get the sense that they have very little influence on the global policy of the tech platforms.

You do not know what the algorithm does. You do not know what value is being extracted from your content. You remain unconvinced when a California-based tech platform says news does not matter to it, yet the Ofcom digital survey suggests that consumers think it is the third most important platform for news in the UK.

It is a relationship that is unequal, where a lot of the value creation is coming from the PSBs and other UK news providers, but the value is not flowing back to them. Whatever can be done in the decade ahead to create a fair platform in which the content creators can get some value for their content and the platforms can continue to generate traffic, but share the profits of that traffic more equitably, would be desirable.

Guy Davies: The reality is that we do not have relationships with the tech platforms in terms of news. Right now, we are dedicated to building and strengthening our audience, which is that news-avoiding, news-flirting, as we have called it, linear audience, where we are seeing growth. That is our priority right now.

The Chair: Thank you. I will draw it to a close. I am very grateful to all three of you for your evidence this afternoon.

We will look forward to receiving the research that I asked for earlier in terms of a breakdown of demographics and views on the relationship they have with you in terms of trust. If you want to add in impartiality, that would be helpful.

Ms Compton, you are going to send us some more information on YouTube. If any of you wants to supplement your answers today with any further written evidence, you are very welcome to do that at the same time. Thank you very much indeed.