

ITN—written evidence (FON0053)

House of Lords Communications and Digital Select Committee inquiry: The future of news: impartiality, trust and technology

1. Introduction

ITN welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Future of News: Impartiality, Trust and Technology inquiry covering many topics that are highly relevant to the services provided by ITN.

Many of the issues raised by the inquiry have previously been examined by the committee, in a previous form, when it conducted its inquiry into the future of journalism in 2020.

ITN's commercial relationship with the public service broadcasters (ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5) is long-standing and revolves around our provision of their national news services through their linear channels. ITN's digital prowess and initiative also means that ITV News, Channel 4 News and 5 News content is available across a wide range of digital platforms.

Since ITN took part in the 2020 inquiry, our output on the broadcast channels has changed. Channel 4 News was the UK's original hour-long primetime news bulletin, but in March 2022, ITV News' Evening News became an hour long and in 2021 Channel 5 also decided to change its programme to a single hour-long bulletin.

These changes in the linear schedule have taken place against a broader backdrop of continued evolution in the media industry as audience viewing habits continue to change and the advertising market experiences a period of contraction.

Meanwhile, the relationship between large tech platforms and news providers continues to develop on a deeply uneven footing. For example, in 2020 newsrooms had a relationship with Facebook via referrals and other commercial arrangements, making it a viable platform on which newsrooms could distribute their content.

However, just a few years on from this Facebook has essentially removed itself from the news market. In the meantime, TikTok has emerged as a fast-growing platform where newsrooms are increasingly focusing resources and their activity.

As a result of these developments, the news industry has adopted a mindset of permanent reinvention in recent years. ITN's newsrooms are increasingly platform agnostic in their approach to ensuring that their content is available to audiences. However, despite being nimble and adapting to wider market conditions, questions persist about:

- retention and trust of audiences;
- targeting younger audiences;
- how to manage relationships with large tech platforms on subjects such as prominence of news;
- ensuring that journalism continues to be sustainably funded;
- the priority and protections for high-quality news services;
- tackling fake news online;
- and, increasingly, the potential impact generative AI will have on the industry.

These are recurring questions that continue to be raised by policymakers interested in the role of information and journalism in a healthy democracy. This is a conversation that relates to online safety, the operation/efficacy of digital markets, media plurality and the emergence of new technologies.

Many of these discussions have resulted in suggested ideas and solutions, but very little meaningful action. During a year of many elections, including in the UK, this is a crucial and opportune moment to focus minds and look to protect and enhance the role of UK news for the future.

2. **Executive summary**

- There is a gap between linear and online regulation of journalism that needs to be addressed.
- The imbalance in power between tech platforms and news organisations continues to grow. If that remains unaddressed the value of PSB news will be degraded.
- ITN is in favour of the regulation that applies to our broadcast news also being applied to our content online.
- ITN is in favour of exploration of an Ofcom kitemark that would give consumers and platforms the ability to recognise quality news and therefore seek it out and promote it.

Key questions

Trends over the next 12 months and 5 years

1. **What impacts (positive and negative) do large technology platforms and online news aggregators have on the UK's news environment, including media plurality? And how might this change?**

Large technology companies have fundamentally changed the business of news over the last 15 years and now act as the leading gateway to news, rather than consumers actively going to news sources directly.

From production to publication, the entire process of newsgathering has changed because of the power and influence of tech platforms over information distribution in the UK and around the world.

The UK's current news eco-system offers a range of journalism from tabloid newspapers and broadsheets to the highly-regarded broadcast news system which is underpinned by public policy to ensure that audiences are served impartial and accurate information.

The key questions for ITN relating to the relationships with platforms are:

- Can journalism continue to be sustainably funded in a market where traditional models that have supported a range of media content are being forced to rapidly adjust?
- How can audiences continue to find regulated, impartial and accurate content, mandated by the Communications Act and the Media Bill, in a disaggregated environment?
- How can ITN's newsrooms have more open discussions with tech platforms about their role in serving audiences content, including content of democratic importance, such as journalism?

The benefits of tech platforms to newsrooms have been the ability to innovate and extend the footprint of ITN's services, targeting harder to reach audiences such as young people.

While TV bulletins continue to have a role for some audiences, it is increasingly clear that future generations need to be reached through other mediums.

Channel 4 News has established its position as one of the UK's leading digital-first news sources, particularly for young viewers - the largest segment of its audience. For example, on YouTube, editorial coverage of Israel/Gaza has achieved a staggering 602 million minutes watched in October - the highest traffic month of the decade so far. Video explainers and day-by-day reviews, sometimes watched for over 11 minutes, have generated more than 12m views for a single piece of content.

Press Gazette now lists Channel 4 News as the 7th fastest-growing English news channel on YouTube in 2023.

Meanwhile, ITV News achieved 3.6bn views across all digital platforms in 2023 and has created dedicated social media services: The Rundown, aimed at 13-17 year olds, which has been viewed over 500m times since it launched nearly five years ago, and Here's the Story, targeted at 18-24 year olds which also continues to perform well.

These services and the strength of their performance demonstrate the creative freedom content creators have been offered because of the emergence of new platforms.

There are also benefits for audiences in the form of more choice and access to sources of information and opinions that may not have been given a platform in the past.

However, these benefits need to be considered in the context of how newsrooms are experiencing the impact of large technology platforms on their operations and output.

The issues that need to be considered are as follows:

- Newsrooms are having to rapidly adjust their output and production values to be able to serve audiences. This ability to shape-shift puts additional resource pressure on newsrooms. While the demand to work across multiple mediums offers creative freedoms, the practical effect is for more work to be done often with no extra resources available.
- There are important questions about who decides what news content is served to audiences and when. While audiences have a huge amount of choice, this also brings confusion about what is reliable and trustworthy and an increase in mis and dis-information. The emergence of generative AI could lead to more mis and dis-information and brand erosion as content is not credited correctly.
- Audiences are overwhelmed by content, and there is no guarantee that they are being offered news online. The current PSB system puts trusted, impartial news at the heart of the offering with scheduled daily bulletins. Without protections, the concept of PSB news will degrade as audiences move away from traditional bulletins towards social media platforms who are under no obligation to distribute impartial, regulated news.
- The commercial pressures that have emerged because of the power of tech platforms are changing how news organisations are offering their content. Text based outlets are increasingly adopting membership and subscription models in response to declining advertising revenue. In contrast, ITN's newsrooms are interpreting their PSB remit as seeking out audiences wherever they are. This could have a direct impact on the choices (i.e media plurality) that audiences have when seeking out trusted news. Research from the Reuters Institute for the Study of

Journalism¹ found that the UK is one of the least willing markets to pay for news, and with the shift to paid-for content meaning that consumer access could become depleted.

2. **How is generative AI affecting news media business models and how might this evolve?**

The emergence of large technology platforms has already disrupted the relationships news organisations and audiences had with one another.

The distinct identity of newspapers and broadcast outlets have been diluted in waves of content, curated by algorithms, that rarely distinguish between professionally-produced journalism and other types of factual information.

This situation has not only affected the business models of news organisations, but also the way that journalism is consumed and how audiences perceive and understand journalism – as outlined above.

The effect of generative AI could have a similarly dramatic effect on the industry. There are signs that these programmes and models will continue the trend of disruption that journalism has experienced due to the growing role of large tech platforms.

While much of ITN's content is video and image-based, the copyright principles that apply to text also apply to images. Over 67 years, ITN's journalists have produced content that is unique in its quality, accuracy and originality. ITN's commercial ambition is to be able to sustain these skills and expertise to continue delivering high-quality, eye-witness journalism. However, the advent of mass-market generative AI could have a significant impact on the business model.

Risks associated with generative AI

- **Copyright breaches** – While there are ongoing concerns about data and text being used within large language models (LLMs) without permission, consideration should also be given to copyright implications arising out of video material being transcribed and then used to train LLMs. Other models focussed on generating video content are also emerging and any inputs based on content available on YouTube, but originally created by ITN, would need to be declared. ITN supports the creation of a transparency obligation on genAi programmes to ensure that copyright laws are respected and sustained.
- **Lack of recognition for the value of news in these models** – As the genAi industry continues to develop, the need for verified content created by real people will continue to grow for the benefit of the market. There may be models which place extra weighting on news content because of its unique nature of being accurate from the outset.

¹ https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/Digital_News_Report_2023.pdf, p58

This should be recognised in any regulatory developments relating to the sustainable development of the AI market, based on established AI principles which acknowledge that models developed on synthetic information are prone to system collapse.

- **Brand dilution** - As AI becomes further integrated into people's everyday lives through search engines and chatbots, sources of information will become obscured and with it the ability to determine whether information is true or false. Audiences understand and can recognise ITN's brands. The concept of PSB news is currently being challenged due to the power and influence of tech platforms on consumer choices. The risk of ITN-produced content being served to audiences without attribution would cause further, potentially irreversible, damage to the system and undermine the objectives of a regulated PSB system.
 - **Mis-and dis-information** – AI generated content could have a negative impact on the information eco-system. ITN's news services are some of the most trusted in the country and that trust is a key component in the UK media landscape and wider democracy. There are numerous examples of fake AI-generated images and media being distributed in recent months – some directly relating to democratic processes. The wider information system needs to be protected so that journalism can continue to operate on its own terms. In recent weeks, [deepfakes featuring Robert Peston and Mary Nightingale](#) have emerged. There is a real risk of people trying to spread misinformation or create fake news by using the images, voices and reputation of those who are in the public eye, which in turn would be reputationally damaging for our news services.
 - **Impact on quality journalism** - The use of generative AI to create journalistic content could result in content that is increasingly homogenised, standardised and less distinctive. Media plurality could be compromised by the market being flooded with content that is cheap to make, but where little thought has been given to its distinctiveness and character.
3. **How are perceptions of due impartiality evolving and what challenges do news organisations face around impartial reporting?**

Due impartiality is a principle embedded in the culture and practices of ITN. Our newsrooms use the principle, which for the avoidance of doubt **does not** mean giving equal weight to arguments, as a guide for clearly and accurately explaining the news.

Recent subjects such as the conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza/Israel and domestic topics such as the XL Bully ban have been the focus of continuous debate which ITV News, Channel 4 News and 5 News have navigated confidently because of the statutory obligation to deliver news accurately and impartially.

ITN welcomes the statutory commitment to these principles. In the linear environment there is ongoing success, due to the prominence given to PSB channels and the scheduling of bulletins. However, a lack of impartiality requirements and prominence obligations online are changing perceptions around the concept.

However, audiences are increasingly receiving their news content through social media, which makes no distinction between impartial news over other types of information.

Large tech and social media platforms prioritise partisan, opinionated, noisy or controversial content through their algorithms, which in turn results in financial gain. While these platforms are under no obligation to offer impartial news content to audiences there is a risk that audiences will no longer recognise or value impartial or news if social media platforms continue to be the main gateway for access to content and fail to promote impartial, gold-standard news. The knock-on effect to society could be deep and wide-ranging.

Surveys such as those conducted by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism continue to find that audiences – even younger audiences who may not be familiar with linear bulletins – want news to be impartial, balanced and fair.

However, despite public policy objectives around the delivery of this type of content and recognition of the role it holds in creating a framework for constructive democratic discussions, no practical support has to date been implemented to promote this content in online environments.

ITN's newsrooms remain committed to delivering impartial news but represent a very small handful of organisations with the knowledge and expertise to do so.

For example, ITN applies the same standards relating to impartiality online as we do to our broadcast bulletins. Rather than responding to the incentive to deliver sensationalist stories that will go viral, the newsrooms continue to operate to the high standards that our audiences expect and rely on. The newsrooms will go to great lengths to ensure that their content remains impartial even when online.

Following the 7 October attacks in Israel, Channel 4 News saw audiences flocking to its coverage. The programme saw unprecedented demand for its digital services, with around 150 million VOD views across all platforms, and videos which were seen by several million young viewers on social platforms. To avoid the material being used out of context the team decided to upload longer packages to social media platforms in an attempt to stop the coverage being distorted and used in the highly-polarised discussion that continues to take place online.

However, there is no financial recognition of impartial news online and the value that it brings platforms, despite the extra resource and expertise required to deliver this unique category of content which continues to be a policy supported

by successive UK governments.

With multiple elections taking place this year, these will act as an important stress test for impartiality rules and should be used to focus minds on how these rules operate online. The Ofcom Broadcasting Code highly regulates television and radio broadcasters when reporting elections to ensure accuracy, fairness and impartiality and so that a wide range of voices and opinions are heard to inform the electorate decisions. This is an important role in a democracy and supports the principle that at the ballot box choices will be made based on informed opinion.

This prescriptive approach to television contrasts markedly with the lack of regulation of elections in the online sphere. In the online world where there is blurring between television news and print news and fake news, more can and should be done to protect and highlight to the public impartial news.

4. What factors affect trust in news and how might this evolve?

Continued trust in the content created by ITN's newsrooms is something that all the services strive for. Despite being smaller than other rival services, ITV News and Channel 4 News are consistently ranked as the most trusted journalism services in the UK.

Last year ITV News, Channel 4 News and the BBC were ranked as the top three most trusted UK news brands in the Reuters Institute Digital News Report.² Earlier in the year, YouGov asked the public which media outlets they trusted most³³ and Channel 4 News and ITV News came second and third respectively, after the Financial Times. These findings are supported by Ofcom's news consumption survey which found that TV news continues to be highly rated by audiences for trust, accuracy and quality.

These powerful findings demonstrate that the newsrooms' determination to remain impartial and accurate, guided by clear regulation, continue to deliver positive outcomes for society.

However, these findings do not mean that the newsrooms are complacent about trust, which is deemed to be a crucial metric for success.

Understanding audiences

One of the factors relating to trust in news comes from knowing and understanding your audience and being able to deliver content that they can relate to. Each of the newsrooms have a specific remit, whether that's ITV News reaching mass audiences, particularly outside London, Channel 4 News and its focus on younger and underrepresented viewers or 5 News, which attracts a largely female audience in regions across the country, and from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, who may typically be characterised as likely to

² https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/Digital_News_Report_2023.pdf

³ <https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/45744-which-media-outlets-do-britons-trust-2023>

avoid the news.

As the media and political environment in which the newsrooms operate continues to evolve, they too are responding. The [New Statesman recently wrote about ITV News' evolution](#) describing its editorial decision making as "quiet radicalism" by choosing to focus on original journalism, which is more relevant to people's lives, rather than Westminster-focussed stories.

Journalists' ability to make those independent editorial decisions rather than being pushed to follow online trends and thinking about viral content is crucial to retaining trust. There is a virtuous circle of knowing audiences and being able to build relationships with them through content that they trust which feeds into the strength of the brand.

This circle could be strengthened through obligations on tech platforms to share data about audiences who are accessing public-service broadcasting style news on their platforms.

Reflecting audiences

There is also increasing awareness that the content produced by newsrooms and the people conveying the information need to reflect the audience directly. One of the consequences of more voices and choice online has been to demonstrate the importance of reflecting the audience in content. Newsrooms continue to work on their commitment to reflect every part of the UK and ensuring that representation is a priority in how they report on a story. For example, data is collected by each newsroom after every programme capturing onscreen diversity. This initiative is a tool in keeping this objective at the forefront of the minds of the newsrooms.

Transparency and accountability

Transparency and accountability are also important factors in retaining the trust of audiences. The current regulatory framework ensures that public service broadcast news is accountable to the independent regulator, Ofcom. The framework plays an important role in the relationship between audiences and news providers.

However, the newsrooms do not believe that falling back on regulatory decisions alone is an appropriate way of retaining trust. The newsrooms are open about their processes and willing to explain processes for editorial pieces, where appropriate.

White flag incident

At the end of January, an ITV cameraman filmed a Palestinian man being shot dead while holding a white flag. The footage sent shockwaves around the world and prompted a discussion about whether a war crime had been committed. The footage was raised in PMQs that week and international broadcasters including ABC and CNN used the material in reports of their own about the incident.

The high-profile piece provoked scrutiny of ITV News' newsgathering processes and the actual veracity of the footage. In response to this scrutiny the cameraman who filmed the footage was [interviewed](#) and ITV News also explained how the footage was verified in a broadcast package.

This incident demonstrates the newsrooms willingness to engage with questions about its journalism and consider what transparency mechanisms are most useful when navigating issues where trust and veracity are linked.

Separately, Channel 4 News' FactCheck has established itself as an important service with a direct connection with audiences scrutinising policy decisions and how they are working in practice.

a) To what extent is trust linked to perceptions of impartiality, or to other trends in online news?

Algorithms have become the equivalent of the linear schedule, choosing what content people are exposed to with no appropriate public policy framework relating to news to ensure that users are being offered impartial news, which has previously held such an important role in society.

As mentioned previously, studies show that audiences across a broad range of demographics continue to value impartial news and, in an election year, ITN's expectation is that there will be demand for impartial and accurate news.

The current regulatory framework is designed to ensure that audiences have access to accurate news that reflects a range of views but is disproportionately focussed on linear delivery. This media policy objective is being damaged without a similar focus shifted online.

Audiences continue to seek out ITV News, Channel 4 News and 5 News content online – flocking to their services on TikTok, YouTube and other destinations - as trusted news organisations. The platforms themselves elevate the content online. For example, YouTube will often place Channel 4 News or ITV New content on its breaking news shelf.

However, there is a lack of consistency around this treatment of the new content. While some content is elevated to be given a prominent position, other content will be shadow-banned or age-restricted because a platform's global terms and conditions deem UK-regulated and Ofcom approved content as being harmful to users of the platform.

This example is a key illustration of the imbalance of power between impartial news services and platforms in conversations about how their content is treated. While ITV News, Channel 4 News and 5 News may continue to retain the trust of their audiences, they are competing in an unfair environment with almost no insight into why their content is treated in a particular way.

That is why ITN supports the introduction of the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill and its potential application to rebalance the relationship

between trusted news providers and large tech platforms.

Rather than news providers, that audiences seek out, being treated as no different to any other content provider negotiations conducted under the DMCC framework could achieve a number of important outcomes including:

- Fair and reasonable terms potentially including reasonable compensation for the use of content created by news organisations.
- Transparency around algorithms and fair warning about any changes to the algorithm.
- Sharing data about users engaging with ITN produced content.

b) What impact do concerns around disinformation have on trust in the information environment? (And to what extent does this differ between different sections of society?)

As mentioned previously, ITN is acutely aware that the mass of information audiences are exposed to can be overwhelming and creates difficulties in identifying what is true or false. The overall impact can be for audiences to fail to understand where their news is coming from and which providers are trustworthy, to news avoidance, and can even lead to news avoidance. Trends studies indicate there is a growing group that are actively avoiding the news. That is why ITN is in favour of a kitemark being created and applied by Ofcom to news that is only applied to regulated, impartial, public service news.

Evaluation

1. How well are news organisations responding to factors affecting their business models, and are any changes needed?

As an organisation that is part of the delicate PSB eco-system, ITN has innovated to ensure it can serve both linear and non-linear viewers, recognising that there will be a full transition from linear to digital delivery in the future.

All of the evening bulletins are now one-hour in length, meaning that audiences who want to watch news during 'peak time' on linear schedules now have access to high-quality news from 5-8pm.

As well as the change in scheduling the newsrooms have continued to evolve online, launching new services and growing their presence on multiple platforms.

Each of our clients are at different stages of their digital transformation – in many cases the news services are leading in this process with ITN working in collaboration with our clients on this agenda.

The newsrooms recognise the need to go out and find audiences as part of their

PSB mission. They are unashamedly seeking out younger audiences on social media platforms and continually diversifying the type of content that they are delivering. For example, rather than just making bulletins the range of content being made by ITV News, Channel 4 News and 5 News now covers: podcasts, articles, explainers for social media, programmes for new and emerging streaming platforms and more.

The launch of ITV's digital platform ITVX has given ITV News an opportunity to create bespoke news for a streaming service. ITV News was a significant part of the launch and received additional funding to support it.

- The site has rails of content, including one dedicated to news and the first window hosts a two min round-up of the headlines that is updated throughout the day. The other windows rotate content on the top stories of the day – many created especially for the platform, as well as some TV content, plus latest bulletins.
- ITV News has successfully experimented with content on ITVX such as the newly launched Talking Politics podcast for this election year, as well as live streaming big events and PMQs.
- In the first 12 months, ITV News generated 22m streams, and a documentary about the trial of Lucy Letby was one of the streaming service's most watched pieces of content in the first year of launch.

The contracts that ITN hold are currently based around linear delivery of content, but the influence of third-parties on the entire journalism industry means that the newsrooms have no choice but to make their content available through powerful platforms such as Google Search, YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok.

Ultimately, the newsrooms are constantly responding to factors affecting their business models, but with limited negotiating power with the organisations that control audiences' access to the news.

During that time, strategies have had to evolve to ensure that new commercial opportunities could be explored. The newsrooms have sought to establish relationships with key platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok.

In the case of Channel 4 News, the newsroom has: monetised its content on YouTube; been commissioned by Facebook to create bespoke content; negotiated a licensing deal for clips to be offered to audiences on the platform; and is currently in negotiations with other platforms about new commercial deals.

However, despite Channel 4 News' best efforts to secure new revenue streams on these platforms, that continue to affect the underlying funding model, there has been no consistency in these initiatives. For example, Meta which owns Facebook, was at one point commissioning original content directly from the newsroom. However, those contracts have expired and the overall policy

position of the platform has been to downgrade news so that referrals back to Channel 4 News have essentially died away.

This situation is not unique to the UK. Several markets around the world have tried to find ways of extracting revenue in recognition of the value that journalism brings to the large tech platforms and the disruption their business models are facing.

In Australia, a news bargaining code was implemented in 2021 and Canada is the latest jurisdiction to have implemented a news bargaining code at the end of 2023. The path to both pieces of legislation being created and enacted was difficult but has resulted in financial agreements between Google and news organisations.

However, during negotiations in Canada, Facebook walked away and pulled news from the platform and has never offered it since. At the same time, Facebook has downgraded news in the UK. There are currently no obligations for a service such as Facebook to offer impartial and accurate news to its consumers, despite the fact that it complies with online safety standards.

It is against this context that ITN welcomes the introduction of the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill as a potential tool for rebalancing the relationship between large tech platforms and news providers and as a vehicle for considering the impact that platforms have on media plurality and the audiences' access to news.

There are provisions in the Online Safety Act that could be relevant to ensuring greater consistency in how news is treated online. For example, the inclusion of an exemption for public service broadcasters under the 'recognised news publisher' definition within the Act is a vital safeguard for PSB content to not be taken down without due process and is an important recognition our content is already robustly regulated by Ofcom.

The gap between the Online Safety Act becoming law and implementation has left some uncertainty for news providers. Ofcom has an opportunity to consider whether the principles guiding PSB broadcasting regulation may be applied to the delivery of news online in the implementation of the Online Safety Act, as the global platforms terms and condition may not reflect the UK domestic law and public policy around PSB news delivery and freedom of expression.

2. How adequately are UK news organisations providing impartial and trusted news? What actions are needed to address any shortcomings?

As outlined above, ITN strives to continue providing impartial news whether through bulletins or online. It is a seamless transition from one format to another and ITN prides itself on only producing journalism of the highest standard, by whatever means it is ultimately delivered.

Actions needed include a kitemark, designed and administered by Ofcom, to help audiences navigate their way to gold-standard impartial and accurate

news in an increasingly complex media environment; a requirement for online aggregators to prioritise impartial, accurate, professional journalism; a requirement for tech platforms to acknowledge the value of news content and to pay fairly for its use; a commitment by tech platforms to improve transparency of audience data to show how our news services are performing and how we can best serve existing as well as new audiences.

a) **How should news organisations balance competing demands to provide content that aligns with particular values on the one hand, and provides trusted and impartial news on the other?**

While there is clearly a market for opinionated content and freedom of expression continues to be a principle that should be upheld, ITN believes that its policy of applying the same standards to linear and online content is a marker of distinction that has seen the continued success of our news services despite the seismic changes taking place around in content distribution.

Holding on to these principles means that audiences know what they are getting from ITN produced services and can therefore rely on them. Polling across multiple surveys suggests that this approach is successful and there are no plans to deviate away from the delivery of impartial and accurate news.

3. **How adequately are news media organisations ensuring that efforts to provide trusted information and tackle disinformation do not alienate some sections of society in the process?**

The strong connections ITN's news services and the public broadcasters have with their audiences are key to ensuring that they continue to trust the information produced by the newsrooms.

For example, 5 News is sometimes overlooked as a news service that has managed to grow its audience during 2023, while offering high-quality, regulated news, through accessible editorial angles.

The programme's editorial agenda, focussed on domestic stories and its commitment to approaching stories in a more accessible manner, means it has a broader range of viewers than many other news programmes. It is also the only programme to invite viewers to participate in the national conversation, via the 5 Phone. This feature is a useful mechanism to reflect a wide range of views right across Britain, and particularly in the North and Scotland.

In recent months the programme has launched a whole new strand fronted by Dan Walker, aimed at making politics more accessible. Dan has been visiting MPs in their constituencies trying to understand their motivations for being involved in politics and more about them as people.

The programme is also increasing its presence on social media in recognition that audiences are consuming their news from this source. Since Dan Walker joined the show in June 2022, the programme gained 73,000 followers on Facebook, making the total 597,000 – this platform continues to have 5 News' biggest following.

In 2023, 5 News saw the biggest subscriber increase on YouTube compared to our other platforms, gaining 15,000, and is now at 158,000 subscribers. The programme has also been focussing on TikTok as a new platform for activities.

Meanwhile, Channel 4 News' Leeds base has been in operation for almost a year now, making it the first national evening news programme to co-present from two locations. The launch of the brand new studio last year reflects the programme's commitment to - and investment in - regional production, as Channel 4 News increases the scope and ambition of its news coverage from across the UK.

These are just a few examples of how the newsrooms across ITN are striving to maintain relationships with audiences as they navigate questions about trustworthy content.

4. How well is regulatory oversight working? Are any changes needed, for example:

Regulatory oversight continues to be highly effective for the type of content produced by ITN.

It's crucial that the same standards are applied online and consistently - particularly in regard to the services that are expected to be duly impartial in a linear environment.

Ofcom's remit in regulating the BBC news online has been extended as part of the charter renewal discussions, ITN would suggest that the natural progression of that would be for other PSB new services to be treated in the same way.

ITN would welcome Ofcom's oversight online, in line with its regulation of TV news particularly if it could lead to a situation where a kite-mark relating to trusted news could be applied to obligate third party social media and streaming services to offer Ofcom-regulated news to audiences.

a) In the way Ofcom oversees due impartiality and the extent of its remit?

The danger as it stands is the high regard in which television news itself has traditionally been held in by the UK audience - and has been evidenced by many Ofcom reports down the years - will be diluted by loosening the controls and application of due impartiality on television news and television news channels. It underlines the need to take action to protect gold standard news that is impartial and high quality and prevent against a democratic deficit filled by misinformation and fake news and partial opinion.

b) In the way Ofcom oversees media plurality?

5. **Are there any actions the Government should take to address concerns around due impartiality, trust, and the influence of technology platforms?**

a) **Are changes needed to the Media Bill?**

ITN believes that the Media Bill presents an opportunity to cement the role of the UK's unique broadcast news content as trustworthy, must-watch content for future generations who could be overwhelmed by mis- and disinformation.

Swift progress of the Bill is needed to ensure that the goals of the Bill and the health of the PSB- ecology remains in place.

While linear obligations will remain in place for designated PSBs, online provisions have been left to Ofcom to monitor and consider. ITN believes that there may be a need to explicitly outline what PSB news provision online should look like in a future without scheduled TV bulletins.

Consideration should be given to how news is given prominence online. In the linear regime, news is clearly signposted by being given a prime-time slot and PSBs being obligated to deliver a certain number of hours each year.

The same level of detail has not been outlined in the Media Bill and ITN is keen to understand how Ofcom will consider the questions of prominence online.

Channel 4, ITV and Channel 5 continue to enshrine news provision at the heart of their agenda on linear. This concept should now be widened to streaming platforms and social platforms who are benefitting from a range of content including news.

b) **Are changes needed to the way the Government addresses mis- and dis-information?**

As outlined above a kite-marking tool maybe a useful tool for addressing mis- and dis-information.

February 2024