

Challenges and prospects of delivering a diversity of public service content online: A case study of Channel 4 News Online



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ABSTRACT: Britain is “super-diverse” and public service broadcasters (PSBs), as in many other European countries, are expected to reflect the duality of single identities and conflicted allegiance in the design and delivery of public service content. However, previous studies have consistently found that minority groups are under-represented and negatively stereotyped in the mainstream media. But the advent of new technology provides opportunities to expand programming to be more inclusive of the interests and tastes of minority groups. However, the introduction of new technology into the newsroom also presents challenges for journalists in their traditional role as gatekeepers and for the diversity of public service content online. Hence, this study collates data through an ethnographic study of the newsroom at Channel 4 News Online and in-depth interviews with the deputy News Editor, Programme Editor Online and presenters; and also conducts an analysis of the website for evidence of the diversity of public service content online. It found that the news team expands the range of information via blogs and special reports. And that they interact with users by moderating audience materials and incorporating audience comments in their news report. The implication of these on newsroom practice is that the gatekeeping and agenda setting roles are tempered with network journalism to enhance the diversity of public service content online.

KEYWORDS: public service broadcasters, diversity, Internet, gatekeeping, network journalism



INTRODUCTION

Scholars claim that Britain is “super-diverse” and that “people do not identify around single identities and feel conflicted allegiance” (Fanshawe & Sriskandarajah, 2010, p. 11). While public service broadcasters (PSBs) are expected to reflect this duality in the design and delivery of public service content, previous studies found that minority groups are under-represented and negatively stereotyped in the mainstream media (see Cottle, 2000; Sreberny, 1999). As a result, media for and by minority groups have proliferated to counter negative stereotypes and to articulate self-representation. The limited spectrum in the analogue system constrained

the PSB channels to be innovative in repurposing public service remits to project diversity of content and alternative perspectives. However, the advent of new technology provides opportunities to expand programming to be more inclusive of the interests and tastes of minority groups. But the new technology also presents challenges for journalists in their traditional role as gatekeepers and in reinterpreting public service remits to project diversity online. Hence, this study examines how Channel 4's news team reflects and retains the station's identity in the digital age.

Meanwhile, a febrile debate has been raging amongst media providers as some commercial broadcasters view the repurposing of public service remits to project diversity online as problematic. For example, James Murdoch, former chairman of News International, argued that "organisations like the BBC, funded by the licence fee, as well as Channel 4 and Ofcom, made it harder for other broadcasters to survive" (BBC, 2009). But in defense of PSBs, the Office of Communication (Ofcom), UK regulatory body, notes "that provision of online content by the main channels is seen to be important by half of the public, rising to 7 in 10 among those aged 16–24 and those with access to broadband" (Ofcom, 2009, p. 26). Scholars also argue that some "elements of public service ethics, ideals and principles were a perfect fit for World Wide Web services" (Burns & Brugger 2012, p. xvii).

There is growing evidence to suggest that the repurposing of public service remits online could enhance the inclusiveness of the interests and tastes of minority groups. This is because the Internet provides a platform for "new content and services that are more participative, social and interactive than traditional broadcast content" (Ofcom, 2009, p. 33). It also provides a platform for audiences to exercise a "greater flexibility in when and where they consume content; a greater ability to serve niche interests; and a greater opportunity for audiences to interact with, and participate in, new content and services" (Ofcom, 2009, p. 31). And it allows "... significant potential for commercial providers to offer services that can meet the needs of a particular audience very effectively. Lower costs of distribution enable significant potential for channels and services targeted at a particular community" (Ofcom, 2009, p. 33). For example, an Ofcom survey found that "most people (75%) think the Internet is a valuable source of information and learning, rising to 92% among Internet users. And audiences are already using the internet for public service content" (Ofcom, 2009, p. 26).

In response to changing Internet habits among audiences, the PSB channels perceive a link between public service remits and online content. For instance, Nguyen & Garcia's (2012) found that the "BBC was the first news organisation in the world to establish a separate editorial department, called the UGC Hub, to handle user-generated content, in 2005" (Nguyen & Garcia, 2012, pp. 7–8). This enhanced the station's ability to report the Indian Ocean Tsunami in December 2004 as "audio-visual material from citizens was used to illustrate BBC News online and in broadcast, whilst emails sent to the news website were read out on BBC News 24" (Thorsen, 2012, p. 21). Moreover, the station was better prepared to cover the

London terrorist attack on 7 July 2005 as it received “more than 1,000 photographs, 20 pieces of amateur video, 4,000 text messages, and 20,000 emails” (Sambrook, 2005, cited in Thorsen, 2012, p. 21).

However, digital inequality threatens the gains made towards audience engagement because, according to Ofcom “one third does not have access to the Internet, and these tend to be disproportionately older and less well off. Broadband take-up has also levelled off recently, at 60% of households. Some participants, particularly older people and those without access to multi-channel television or the Internet, have concerns about providing public service content on digital platforms” (Ofcom, 2009, pp. 26–27). Moreover, some extra-media factors threatening the consolidation of the relationship between media organizations and audiences include the “rapid technological changes, wavering political and declining financial support, concern about institutional mission, increasing media competition, and redefining the relation and meaning of audience and broadcaster” (Jankowski, 2012, p. xiv). While some internal factors threatening this relationship revolve around the tensions “between using the Web to formulate new content and audience engagement versus using the Web as an alternative distribution channel for existing content” (Thorsen, 2012, p. 18). For example, “broadcast scripts were not suitable for repurposing as text news stories. It became clear everything had to be written specifically for the Web” (Thorsen, 2012, p. 19) on the one hand; and “the relationship with the audiences also needed renewing — they won’t just be audiences anymore, but participants and partners” (Thompson, 2006, cited in Thorsen, 2012, p. 19) on the other. These impact on newsroom practice vis-à-vis sourcing routine, gatekeeping, news values and writing for Web. They also impact on journalists’ professional identity because previous studies found that “cross media workers really were a ‘new breed’ and consequently found themselves somewhat confused and isolated in their workplaces initially, in terms of their professional identity” (Dunn, 2012, p. 159). Hence, PSB channels have to carefully manage the transition to digital communication by equipping journalists with resources in their effort to diversify and enrich content provision to audiences.

This study employs ethnographic and in-depth interview methods to collate data using Channel 4 News Online as a case study. Both methods are appropriate in investigating “editorial habitus,” that is, “a conceptual tool for analysing how social agents have different positions in the social space, and how these serve as different dispositions for social action” (Willig, 2012, p. 7). For instance, an ethnographic method enables the researcher to observe newsroom practice, attend and contribute to discussions at the daily morning conference where all newsroom staff (I counted 30, including nine women) decide the news headlines, the running order, who will research what and write the story for television and Web. In-depth interviews enable the researcher to engage in conversations with staff regarding their reflection and perspectives on the impact of new technology on their practice.

Hence, the researcher made six visits to the newsroom of Channel 4 News Online at the ITN office in London in December 2011 as well as in January and February 2012 and interviewed eight staff, that is, the deputy News Editor, Programme Editor Online, Head of Output, Chief Correspondent, Sports Correspondent, two News Presenters and a Weather Presenter. They were selected based on their position and gatekeeping role. As a result, the researcher collated 378 minutes of interview data for transcription and analysis. Given such a large amount of data and a limited space, the researcher adopted grounded theory, that is, “cases are chosen as it becomes clear that they can contribute to theory generation” (Jupp, 2006, p. 132), to select and analyse data for this study. But in order to gain an insight into the diversity of public service content online, the researcher used textual analysis to assess the extent to which the interactive features project the six public service remits that C4 is obligated to deliver. The analysis was conducted in December 2011 in the newsroom during my first visit. The content of each interactive feature was subjected to a close textual analysis to identify the dominant associated remit leading to the emergence of a cluster of features. Further qualitative data was collated on each cluster through an in-depth interview with the deputy Editor to reflect on the categorization of the features and to obtain his perspective on their effectiveness in projecting public service content.

CHANNEL 4 NEWS ONLINE AND PUBLIC SERVICE OBLIGATIONS

Channel 4 News Online is still relatively small in comparison to other PSB channels such as the BBC. It was launched with two dedicated workers in 1998, but the workforce has grown to eight staff. Hence, the Programme Editor Online notes that “the Web operation is tiny and it is attached to the broadcast operation” (interview with Paul Brannan, Senior Programme Editor Online, 2011). The deputy Editor echoes this observation by stating that “we have, compared to some broadcasters, particularly the BBC, a relatively small online team. The bulk of our online content is created by the same team of reporters and correspondents and presenters who produce the news for the TV” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). However, he argues that “the website competes favourably with ITV, Sky and BBC in terms of the quantity of video content” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). This is because it “is convenient to use and it satisfies the demand for news, whenever it happens during the day, not just at 7 o’clock in the evening. One of the things we do is break news online and through social media” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2012). In this vein, this section reflects on C4’s organizational strategies for delivering public service content online and engaging with audiences because “the ability of public broadcasters to make a significant difference along these lines cannot be taken for granted in current conditions of diminished authority, tighter funding, and competition with private (national and international) rivals” (Blumler & Hoffmann-Riem, 1992, p. 24).

While previous studies have documented the history of Channel 4 (see for instance Lambert, 1982; Harvey, 1994; Born, 2003), it is pertinent to note that the station was established in 1982 as a publicly-owned, commercially funded broadcaster to strike a balance between public service and commercial contents. Its public service obligations were set out in the Broadcasting Acts of 1981, 1990 and 1996. But these obligations were amended under the Communication Act 2003, the Ofcom licence 2004 and, recently, under the Digital Economy Act 2010. They include demonstrate innovation, appeal to the tastes and interests of a culturally diverse society, produce programmes of an educational nature and exhibit a distinctive character. However, these obligations do not apply to other Channel 4's portfolios such as E4, More4, Film4 and 4Music and online activities such as channel4.com, Channel 4's bespoke video-on-demand service 4oD and standalone digital projects.

From an organizational perspective, Channel 4 aims to expand the range of inclusive programming by using the online service to enhance the "quality of viewers' experiences with exclusive online material, including videos, interviews, music and games" (Channel 4, 2010b, p. 51). The effect of this strategy is evident in Channel 4's tracking which indicates that some programmes have the highest conversion rate from TV audience to website visits. For example, the conversion rate in 2010 for some programmes in this category are "Skins" (40.1%), "Peep Show" (29.6%), "Misfits" (25.6%), "Gordon Ramsay's Cookalong USA" (21.1%), "Facejacket" (17.1%), "The IT Crowd" (14.8%), "The Morgana Show" (13.6%), "Ugly Betty" (13.5%), "Frankie Boyle's Tramadol Nights" (10.0%), "The Ricky Gervais Show" (9.7%) (Channel 4, 2010b, p. 73). The editorial significance is that "viewers could engage more actively with the news agenda and dig deeper into the issues they felt were most relevant to them" (Channel 4, 2010b, p. 54). As a result, the appeal of C4, especially among minority audiences, has increased as statistics show that "it was disproportionately popular amongst young and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) news viewers" (Channel 4, 2010b, p. 59).

Meanwhile, the newsroom at C4 News Online was re-launched in September 2010 to enable it to respond better to audiences' expectations. It has since developed into a hub for cross-media production which harnesses "the expertise and experience of the Channel 4 News team, particularly in the field of international affairs" (Channel 4, 2010b, p. 58). Moreover, the hub provides "special online reports and in-depth analysis of key issues, ... give the audiences a stronger, more personal relationship with the programme and its presenters through use of blogs and social media" (Channel 4, 2010b, p. 58). As a result, the editorial dividends include increased usage and connectivity. For example, it was estimated that "around 30,000 people follow the main Channel 4 News Twitter account and 'Factcheck' doubled its audience in 2010 as a result of its relaunch as a blog" (Channel 4, 2010b, p. 58). To put this statistic into context, C4 notes that "the average monthly visit to its websites in 2010 rose 56 percent up on last year" (Channel 4, 2010b, p. 58). For example, the factual programme, "Dispatches," "stimulated audience debate, generating nearly

10,000 comments on channel4.com across the year” (Channel 4, 2010b, p. 58). However, Channel 4 News Online is yet to attract a comparable level of audience interaction as other digital portfolios such as Channel4.com and E4.com. For example, Channel 4 News Blog received only 5,079 comments in 2010 compared to programmes such as “Big Brother” (433,497 comments), “Embarrassing Bodies” (33,394 comments), “Skins” (32,064 comments), “The Sex Education Show” (17,405 comments), “Seven Days” (14,200 comments), “Dispatches” (9,792 comments), “Hollyoaks” (6,299 comments), “One Born Every Minute” (6,103 comments), and “Come dine with me” (6,034 comments) (Channel 4, 2010b, p. 73). Despite this low level of audience interaction, the hub for cross-media production aims to “break down the wall between television and its audience, using social media to allow viewers to interact with, and influence, the programme’s real life participants” (Channel 4, 2010b, p. 75).

Moreover, the hub for cross-media production aims to develop “viewer relationship management using technology and analytical tools, with the ambition of making Channel 4 the UK’s most viewer-centric broadcaster” (Channel 4, 2010b, p. 94). It intends to do this by collating and archiving online material about a diversity of news events. For example, it began to collate audience material on Disability Sport and Disability when C4 won the bids in 2010 to become the official broadcaster of the London 2012 Paralympics Games. However, such innovative use of technology may be threatened by the migration of BAME audiences to their particularistic media and by strong competition from commercial broadcasters. Hence, the station warns that for 2012 it “could require additional funding of £60 to £100 million a year in order to continue to deliver its existing remit” (Ofcom, 2009, p. 40) and to continue to prioritise “the main Channel 4 News programme and investment in news online” (Ofcom, 2009, p. 11).

JOURNALISTS’ PERSPECTIVES ON DELIVERING A DIVERSITY OF PUBLIC SERVICE CONTENT ONLINE

Without doubt, the introduction of new technology into the newsroom has revolutionized production routines because “the Web offered the potential to add value to the broadcast output, not only through extending its life and availability, but also through adding images and text to audio, through appealing to a wider range of people within a local community, and extending direct audience participation previously limited to phone-in calls or letters to the station” (Dunn, 2012, p. 151). But while the former deputy Editor, Martin Fewell, argues that “the remits are still relevant online” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011), he concedes that repurposing of public service remits to project diversity online is challenging. This is compounded by the fact that Channel 4 continues to “aim to produce high-quality public service content with a broad appeal, while also catering to diverse groups within society” (Channel 4, 2010b, p. 68). The implication for the news team is to “reflect a whole

of Britain back to the British, from whatever ethnicity or demographic they come from” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011).

However, the news team faces the challenge of how to “reinterpret these remits in an age of fragmented audiences, who are possibly more connected with like-minded people from similar cultural backgrounds, but less connected to the wider social group” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). This is because “the notion of diversity has changed dramatically and the public and the media have fragmented significantly since the inception of Channel 4 in 1982” (Channel 4, 2010b, p. 68). In practice, it means that the news team must “balance a season of content on a particular migrant group without alienating other demographic groups” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2012). Moreover, the news team must try “to reflect all of these different interest groups from time to time. But... not by overdoing it so that we put off other people who feel they have been given something that is just a kaleidoscope of different interests” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2012).

Another challenge for the news team is how to capture the changing perception of Britishness. Therefore, the deputy Editor explains that “by Britain, I mean, anything that’s happening in Britain. By British, I mean anybody who is living in Britain at the moment. So I don’t necessarily mean indigenous, British people. You’ve got to have the UK passport. I mean anybody who’s here. But we’re not trying to target a particular niche. We don’t say, let’s make a series for our viewers of Indian origin. We say, let’s make a series that is either about India or it’s about issues that are of interest to the British Indian community. But let’s make it that so that anybody would want to watch it. That’s what I mean by reporting Britain to Britain” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2012). But reporting Britain to Britain has implications for newsroom investment and one of the consequences of a lack of resources is that most PSB channels are “...thus offering little more than content repurposed from traditional products” (Nguyen & Garcia, 2012, p. 4).

The repurposing of public service remits to project diversity online is driven by investment. While Channel 4 notes that “the online budget will fall slightly following 2010’s upgrade to the Channel 4 News website, using digital media to connect with audiences in new ways will remain a priority. This will include harnessing social media to enable viewers to shape and participate in the news agenda more directly and developing applications for converged devices such as the iPad” (Channel 4, 2010b, p. 68). For example, it launched “a new Convergent Formats Fund worth £2 million to invest in apps and creative concepts for converged platforms such as the IPTV service YouView” (Channel 4, 2010b, p. 89). Moreover, the station invests “in exclusive online content to enhance our programmes and provide a range of specialist sites tailored to the interests of our viewers” (Channel 4, 2010b, p. 72). The implication for the news team is that it enables “us to target our journalism more specifically online and to offer supporting material which may be more detailed and have more depth than the general television audience” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). For example, “we have got quite a sizable body of

work on Afghanistan and we have supplemented it with detailed reports on the number of fatalities and casualties” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). This may have enhanced the appeal of Channel 4’s digital portfolio as statistics show that “engagement online increased significantly in 2010 — with our websites attracting more than 30 million visits each month on average, equivalent to 360 million visits across the year; a 56 percent increase on 2009” (Channel 4, 2010b, p. 89).

But the repurposing of public service remits online has wider ramifications for newsroom practices. According to the deputy Editor, the news team has to adapt “their workflow, that is, the way in which they produce news stories for the TV, to incorporate what they are doing for our website and for social media as well. But clearly that doesn’t easily make it possible for them to go off and do something completely different online” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). However, he argues that multiplatform creates “an attitude of challenge rather than technical or resources. It’s recognising that journalism has moved from being the collected wisdom of a newsroom handed down to the public via a television programme or a newspaper or a website which the audience feast upon. And that the news is now much more an interactive process with a more engaged audience who are consuming news all the time” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). Hence, multiplatform impacts on journalists’ role as gatekeepers because “audiences don’t rely upon us to do a lot of the work for them in terms of guiding them to the most important developments, but we no longer have a monopoly of knowledge and a monopoly of information. Therefore, we have an audience that is better informed than it has ever been before” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011).

Moreover, multiplatform has shifted the mind-set of most journalists because a decade ago “social media was very limited. Facebook didn’t exist, Twitter didn’t exist. So at that stage, the relationship was largely conducted via e-mail and websites” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). But multiplatform enables journalists to develop “ideas to engage in dialogue with the audience and that enables us to get a wider range of perspectives from stories by drawing our viewers and users into the process as well.” For example, “for me, I think one of the earliest defining moments was when this country had the “Foot and Mouth” outbreak in 2001. A big problem with cattle and to such an extent the general election that year was delayed. And the government decided to slaughter animals en mass to try and eradicate the disease. And that was a very interesting moment for engaging with our audience” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011).

At an interaction level, the repurposing of public service remits online impacts on the relationship between journalists and audiences. This is because most users do not possess the professional skills required to be innovative and creative online. Hence, “network journalism or citizen journalism works best where people see events in front of their eyes and can film and report back on that” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). But journalism skills are needed to take it further because “investigating what is the truth about the government’s new work experience scheme, by and large, doesn’t work without us leading and coordinating the investigation” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). Hence, digital communication impacts on the newsroom

Table 1 (*continued*)

World and UK	Provide a broad range of high quality and diverse programmes
Special Reports	Appeal to the tastes and interests of a culturally diverse society
Channel 4 News team	Exhibit a distinctive character
Browse, About, Network, Elsewhere, Snow-mail and Policy documents	Provide content of an educative value
Channel 4 Weather and Video clips	Support and stimulate well-informed debate on a wide range of issues

Source: author.

The data in Table 1 shows that a cluster of hyperlink features is used by the news team to project public service content. At the top of the Table is a hyperlink feature which connects users to a range of digital portfolios such as Film4, More4, E4, 4Music, 4oD and the Paralympics. This feature also directs users to tracking information such as “sign in,” register,” “why register,” and “cookies.” Significantly, this feature encompasses blogs and “Channel 4 News Catch Up” which the news team uses to foster interaction with users. Hence, this hyperlink feature resonates with the remit to demonstrate innovation and creativity online. The deputy Editor reflected on its editorial benefit by stating that “blogs are essentially for us, a way of delivering our specialist journalistic expertise to people. We try to focus our blogs around expert commentary and an opportunity to people to hear from and engage with a specialist journalist. So, we will extend our number of blogs across all of our specialisms as resource allows” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). Moreover, he argued that blogs are a vital newsroom tool because they offer “an opportunity for people to engage with our journalists and presenters. To challenge them, if necessary, to question their motives, to question the accuracy of their reporting, to debate the issues raised. And we can do that by engaging people in social media, allowing them to comment on our journalism” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). While there is no tracking data on the comments generated by Channel 4 News Online, statistics on the other digital portfolio indicate that users wrote “652, 000 comments on channel4.com and E4.com” in 2010 (Channel 4, 2010b, p. 89). But audience material is valued because, according to deputy Editor, “practitioners are able to incorporate their comments and opinions into either our television programming or indeed to our future online coverage as well” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011).

The feature for linking to World and UK news resonates with the remit to provide a broad range of high quality and diverse programmes. This feature directs users to selected news features and eight most read news items of the day. Its editorial significance as a newsroom tool is that it offers “more creative depth and

analysis than other television programmes but we do so with ‘a more distinctive set of values’ (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). For example, “the features offer the opportunity to target your journalism more specifically online and to offer supporting material which may be more detailed and have more depth than the general television audience” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). However, limited newsroom investment may hamper the ability of the news team to achieve the public service remit of informing viewers’ understanding of the world. Hence, Ofcom (2009) warns that “without new funding, Channel 4 might reduce its commitment to investigative and international current affairs and its budget for news, both of which audiences value highly” (Ofcom, 2009, p. 41).

The feature for linking to Special Reports resonates with the remit to appeal to the tastes and interests of a culturally diverse society. The news team describes this feature as “in-depth guides to the news you need to know more about; latest expert analysis, videos and reporting from the Channel 4 News team” (Channel 4 website). However, the deputy Editor argues that “while we had stayed true to this remit since 1982, the concept of diversity has changed dramatically in that period and the public has fragmented significantly and certainly the media has fragmented” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). But it is editorially significant because it enables the news team to provide niche programmes and “some of those niches are about ethnicity, but they are also about sport, and drama, gambling, religion, a whole range of different demographic groups” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). Hence, this diversity of PSC is a response to the changing perception of Britishness and to the findings of Ofcom’s survey that “audiences believe that UK news, current affairs, specialist factual, and nations/regions news are seen to be the most important programme areas to be shown on more than one of the main public service channels. The only areas where a majority of the audience did not mind if programming were not available on more than one public service channel were religious programmes, schools programming and arts and classical music” (Ofcom, 2009, p. 24).

Moreover, this feature is editorially significant because it “champions minority or dissident views to ensure those are fully heard and explored” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). This resonates with Ofcom’s finding that “audiences believe Channel 4 offers a distinctive alternative to the BBC. It has historically delivered innovative and risky programming” (Ofcom, 2009, p. 42). However, the sustainability of projecting a distinctive alternative could be hampered by limited newsroom resources as Ofcom warns that “cuts in its programme budget are likely to lead to a reduction in these areas. Particular elements of the audience are likely to be disproportionately affected by these cuts. As one example, Channel 4 is more effective at reaching minority ethnic groups than the BBC” (Ofcom, 2009, p. 42). The implication is that Channel 4 News may lose its appeal to minority groups and perpetuate the alienation of the group it was set up to include. However, the deputy editor argues that “no public service broadcaster can honestly and accurately appeal to all the diversity of groups in the audience. But it’s not to say it’s not an ambition, it’s just to recognise the fact

that the country is more culturally diverse and that because of digital media, people expect a new service or content that speaks directly to them in their community. So, in a multichannel television environment, our viewers can now watch the news, French news, and not just American news” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011).

The feature for linking to the biography of Channel 4 News team resonates with the remit to exhibit a distinctive character. Hence, the deputy Editor argues that “the set of values is personified by our presenters, by Jon Snow, in particular. His characteristics are the personal embodiment of what the programme stands for, but the audience relates to him and through him they relate to our values” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). For example, the online biography of Jon Snow informs users that he “brings you insights, revelations and perspectives. Join Jon for a ringside seat to follow the news” (Channel 4 website). This feature is editorially significant, especially, in enhancing conversion rate from online to television. However, the gender composition of the online biography of the news team reveals that women are underrepresented with only three out of nine presenters. The women are designated the role of presenter, international editor and social affairs editor. Surely, gender diversity in the newsroom could enrich C4’s provision of PSC. But the deputy Editor argued that “the financial reality of journalism and the demands of working in a full-time journalist job are very time consuming. They require enormous commitment from reporters and involve the ability to travel. Sometimes, a little notice and some of our jobs are very difficult to combine with bringing up a family, actually for men or women” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011).

The hyperlink feature such as “Browse,” “About,” “Network,” “Elsewhere,” “Snowmail” and policy documents resonates with the remit to provide content of an educative value. The news team believes that “the remit to inform people is often very close to that, and that is a part of a remit that we take very seriously. We do want to inform people about the world in an orderly sense, yes that is an educational remit as well. We want to bring people stories from parts of the world that they are unfamiliar with or stories they are not familiar with. But we also want to do that with aspects of British life that they may not have heard about as well” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). The editorial significance of this feature is that it empowers users to choose information that satisfies their interest and tastes. For example, Ofcom’s (2009) study found that “most people (75%) think that the internet is a valuable source of information and learning. This rises to 92% among internet users. 62% of Internet users claim they have used the internet to access content matching a definition provided of ‘public service content’” (Ofcom, 2009, p. 32). However, limited newsroom resources may hamper the ability of Channel 4 News to stimulate knowledge and learning as Ofcom warns that “ITV1, Channel 4 and Five are likely to cut back on originated serious factual programming including documentaries, arts, religion, science and history” (Ofcom, 2009, p. 41).

The news team believes that “FactCheck” under the “Network” hyperlink provides educative value because it is “a very specific tool for viewers who have a certain depth

of interest in particular subjects and want to be able to cross check what they have been told” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). At a corporate level, the “FactCheck” has been recognised as an effective tool to be given additional funding to develop into “a more multimedia tool that works for our television audience as well as for an online audience” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). Moreover, the news team believes that “Facebook” under the “Elsewhere” hyperlink enables them to foster relationship with users and viewers and provides “more opportunities to get our content to be watched and engaged with by people” (interview with Martin Fewell, 2011). While the function of the “Snowmail” hyperlink is to provide a “free daily newsletter written by Channel4 correspondents in your inbox by 6pm every day” (Channel 4 website). Notably, this cluster of interactive features enhances the diversity of public service content online and resonates with Ofcom’s finding that the “delivery of public service content is driven by the ongoing needs of audiences” (Ofcom, 2009, p. 20).

The hyperlink feature such as Channel 4 Weather and video clips resonates with the remit “to support and stimulate well-informed debate on a wide range of issues, including by providing access to information and views from around the world and by challenging established views” (Channel 4’s remit). This is evident in the range of issues on the eight video clips available to users during the period of analysis. These include “British Somalis going back for a future,” “Queen thanks nation for ‘humbling’ jubilee,” “Euro 2012 kick off — your handy guide,” “Football vs finance,” “Interactive map — your stories from the Olympic torch relay as it travels across the UK,” “Job seekers felt ‘abused’ after Jubilee stewarding,” and “Sri-Lankan asylum seekers are returned to Colombo in a UK government-chartered plane” (Channel 4 website). This is editorially significant in expanding the scope and range of information for diverse audience online. However, the constant changes in “apps” may hinder the drive towards content management online. For instance, Paul Brannan, Senior Programme Editor Online, explains that “every time Apple or Android puts through a new version of their software, we have to adapt perhaps to take account of that. It could happen two or three times a year, so we are constantly having to go back to something we have already done and remodel it” (interview with Paul Brannan, 2012). The editorial response is to adopt “responsive design which moves away from the world of apps” (interview with Paul Brannan, 2012). This is because “in the next two or three years, we will probably see a shift away from apps into a HDMI-5 which is the protocol behind responsive design” (interview with Paul Brannan, 2012). In summary, the news team seems prepared to overcome the challenges of using online features to project a diversity of public service content but there is a need for commensurate financial support to consolidate the gains and take advantage of new opportunities to connect with audiences.

CONCLUSIONS

The interviews with the Editors and presenters at C4 News Online reveal that some of the challenges of delivering public service content online include a technical,

professional attitude and resources. For instance, the technical challenge revolves around coping with the rapid changes in software. But the Programme Online Editor is hoping that the advent of the HDMI-5 protocol will enhance the quality and the durability of their public service content (PSC) online. It also revolves around time constraints to monitor news on and write for the web, as there is a consensus among the news team that social media erodes the binary division between the private and public spheres. Seen from a journalistic perspective, the professional attitude revolves around coping with their perception of roles as gatekeepers and agenda setters on the one hand; and coping with the expectations to incorporate users' comments in stories to provide a wider range of perspectives on the other. But the resource challenge revolves around shrinking newsroom investment as journalists are concerned that more demands are made on them to multitask and maintain standards regardless of manpower. This impacts on their ability to network outside the office and to build an unmediated relationship with audiences.

However, the interview data reveals that the delivery of public service content online has some prospects. For instance, journalists have embraced interactive features as another newsroom tool to engage with audiences. Hence, all presenters and correspondents have a blog which is used to provide background information on stories and to generate comments from users. Seen from an editorial perspective, the interactive features enable journalists to practice precision journalism, that is, target journalism more specifically to a niche group. This is particularly important to C4 in meeting its public service remits and to provide information of relevance to diverse groups. Most significantly, there is a general sense of responsibility among the news team to use technology innovatively to provide a diversity of PSC, to enrich the experiences of audiences and to foster an inclusive public sphere. These will nurture a sense of belonging among the mainstream and the Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) audiences.

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