

**Analysing the impact of digital tools on
news production, identity and jurisdiction
at regional newspaper newsrooms
in the UK**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

In 2019 the UK government published its results and recommendations for a sustainable future for local news provision, The Cairncross Review (Cairncross, 2019a) was set up due to a crisis in local newspapers caused by digital convergence, falling sales and advertising revenues, job losses, newspaper closures and company mergers (Mediatique, 2018). The report's findings voiced particular concern about the decline in public interest journalism and the connected decrease in public engagement with local democracy. This thesis identifies exactly how the deterioration of public interest news provision has occurred within local newspaper news production in the UK.

The triangulated research project included content analysis of advertisements for journalism jobs at local newspapers placed from November to January every year from 2014 to 2017, observations and interviews conducted in the newsrooms of two daily newspapers owned by two of the major publishing companies in the UK and a survey of journalists working at local newspapers in the UK.

The findings of this research identified a divide within newsrooms, which was driven by company focus to increase audience analytics and online profit. This has resulted in marginalisation of traditional subject specialist reporters, whose output was overshadowed and diluted by a strongly increasing focus on popular online content. This has resulted in a spiral of declining public interest news production and an increasing focus on other types of online content. Company mergers, cross-title working and shared content have contributed to the effects of the decline further.

This research demonstrates how the digital divide within news-making processes has not only jeopardised publication of vital public interest journalism but has also compromised the identity and jurisdiction of local newspapers and their journalists.

Keywords: Local newspapers, Actor-network Theory, political economy, field theory, identity, jurisdiction, news production, audience.

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Glossary of terms, language and industry names

Major newspaper publishers

Johnston Press – publisher with around 200 weekly and daily newspaper titles and affiliated online platforms throughout the UK¹. The company went into administration in 2018 but was bought out by major shareholders and became JPI Media.

JPI Media – see above.

Local World – founded in 2013 as a merger of Northcliffe and Iliffe News titles. Included more than 100 newspapers and affiliated websites. Was sold to minor shareholder Trinity Mirror in 2015.

Newsquest – one of the UK's largest publishers with around 300 newspapers and affiliated websites. Owned by US company Gannett.

Trinity Mirror / Reach PLC – A publisher of more than 110 regional newspapers and more than 50 websites. Also publishes national newspaper and magazine titles. Trinity Mirror changed its name to Reach PLC in 2018.

Accrediting bodies and qualifications

NCTJ or The National Council of Training for Journalists – a national accrediting body for print journalism courses

NCTJ qualification – a qualification for trainee journalists, elements of which are often sought by editors employing trainee reporters. The core elements of the 'gold standard' qualification at the start of the research included 100 words per minute shorthand, media law, public affairs and news writing.

NCE – the National Certificate of Journalism. The senior level qualification which trainees can sit after 18 months or more working in a trainee position. This qualification was replaced by NQJ in 2013 but was still referred to by employers after that point.

NQJ – see above.

¹ As documented in November 2018 when Johnston Press went into administration

Thesis terms

News-trader – online user, known in industry as the ‘audience’.

External newsroom network – the actants making contact with the product of or labourers within the internal newsroom network.

Internal newsroom network – the network of actants employed as decision-makers and facilitators within the news production process for a specific newspaper title.

Actors – the digital tools and human labourers employed in the production of news within the internal newsroom network.

Actants – the term used when specifically identifying digital tools employed within the news production process.

Fieldwork terms

The Mitre and The Journal – the pseudonyms given to the two case-study newspapers where research took place for this thesis.

Specialist Reporter / Specialist Multimedia Reporter – the job title of the journalists who work on subject specialist news stories such as health, education, crime, court and investigative reporting. These reporters are managed by print-focused news editors at *The Mitre* and *The Journal*.

Digital Reporter / Online Reporter – the job title of journalists working with a solely online focus. These reporters are managed by digital editors/managers at *The Mitre* and *The Journal*.

Chapter 1

Introduction: The landscape of local newspapers in the UK

At the start of this research project, late in 2014, digital convergence and its impact on news was still relatively recent and the disruption it caused was keenly felt by those still working in local newspapers in the UK.

At this time, new start-ups were emerging and proving successful, *YouTube* and its vloggers were gaining traction and social media trends were emerging and developing or folding. Meanwhile, the future of local newspapers in the UK struggled to find its feet on the unstable ground caused by digital convergence.

The future of local news was one area which was still dismissed by laymen and some former industry sages as 'dead'. According to industry observers, print was neglected and dying and digital was unprofitable (Dyson, 2014; BBC, 2015). The comments sections on UK regional newspaper industry news websites such as *Press Gazette* and *Hold the Front Page* tended to read like an obituary column, scattered with doom-laden prophecies such as "The last one to leave JP², please turn out the lights" (Linford, 2014).

Meanwhile, social media, *Facebook* in particular, was gaining traction as the 'go-to' for local news. In contrast to this increasing number of social media community pages, which thrived on swapped gossip and titbits of fact swathed in speculation, the number of local newspapers and local newspaper journalists continued to decline (Mediatique, 2018; Whittington, 2018b). The seismic change rocking the industry made its future unpredictable (Franklin, 2008; Franklin, 2014).

This was a very different landscape to that of just a decade earlier, when I received a phone call offering a traineeship at the *Telegraph & Argus* in Bradford. Initially rejected as the only interviewee without NCTJ³ prelims, the job offer was unexpected. The *T&A* had reconsidered and had created a third job just for me and, even better than that, it would put me through my NCTJ training. The astonishing call was taken during a lunch break while I was on work experience at *The Ilkley Gazette* (in offices which have since been converted into a fashionable deli bar – the *Gazette* is now based 12 miles away in Bradford city centre). On returning to the office, cock-a-hoop at having been offered the job, the news was received by the chief reporter of the *Gazette* with

² Johnston Press

³ National Council for the Training of Journalists – the NCTJ qualification recognised as an industry standard. See glossary for more details.

a derisive snort. “You don’t want to work there, it’s a bloody sweatshop, it’ll kill you.” Never has a challenge been so readily received – that “sweatshop” was home for the following four years and in that time I was trained to write news and features, produce video packages for the web and more. It wasn’t unusual for the newsdesk to expect me to deliver a splash⁴, a spread⁵ and a video over the course of a working day. It was a “sweatshop” which paid for a six-month fast-track NCTJ training course and accommodation in Darlington, a week’s video training and accommodation in Preston and travel and accommodation for a week’s coverage of a high-profile court case in Newcastle. It was hard work and terrible pay. It was an opportunity which would not have been available even just five years later when trainees paid for their own NCTJ courses, video ‘training’ would be delivered in-house by colleagues and high-profile court cases in distant cities would be covered by a syndicated source.

The negative commentary on the outside of the industry started around this time. It was fuelled by a fury prompted by digital convergence, finding fault with both old and new methods of survival and predicting the unhappy end of local newspapers. However, the view from inside those very newsrooms was different. Notions of gatekeeping and editorial independence, autonomy and adverse rejections of advertising dressed as news remained strong and while journalistic jobs had considerably changed, the aim of many in the newsroom still seemed to be to find, verify and tell stories which mattered.

By 2014 I had worked in a variety of local newspapers in West Yorkshire. Roles had included journalist and video reporter, news editor, editor, with the final appointment being as Head of News at *Yorkshire Post Newspapers* in Leeds (a job title which had only just been invented). By this point, conversations with well-meaning family friends no longer involved interest in the world of journalism – instead they mainly focused on the demise of industry and how poor the quality of newspapers had become. It was a depressing viewpoint of a job in which 12-hour days still reigned and the machine of the news-making process was still akin to that of a “sweatshop”. The work being put in by the individuals within the newsroom was no longer admired or even acknowledged by those outside the newsroom doors. While everything was more difficult – pressures were more keenly felt, traineeships were scarcer – the role of the journalist; the ideals and identity, did not feel to me to have much changed from all those years earlier as a trainee at the *T&A*. It is with this perspective that this project began.

⁴ Front page story

⁵ A double-page news feature

1.1 The personal construct of this project

It is at this point that the positionality of this researcher must be acknowledged. As described, the digital impacts on local newspapers in the UK were well-known from a personal and professional perspective before this project began.

At the start of my ten-year journalism career, the internet and digital impacts, were considered by my bosses to be a mere distraction. Journalism training was print-focused and NCTJ qualifications did not acknowledge online journalism as anything of relevance.

My first newspaper was experimental with the internet in a way in which only a profitable company with no doubt about its continued success can be. The website was reasonably well attended to by a jovial management editor whose pet interest appeared to be treated as an indulgence and not something taken particularly seriously by other management or staff.

Completion of my NCE⁶ took three years. In that time the attention given to the internet increased, although it was still not clear how it might benefit the newspaper.

The internet audience was growing and, with money to spend, Newsquest sent journalists from across its newsrooms to train on producing video packages for the web. At this point, around 2006, there was no clear policy about how content would be chosen for online use. But there was at least one video produced per day, which would take significant time to shoot and edit and which was promoted in the paper, encouraging print readers to log-on and watch.

Much happened during this time in Bradford. Enough to write a book in terms of approaches to journalism, managerial and publishing company influence and attitudes, news selection and production processes, hierarchies and influencers and competition and perception of professional role and product. Had this book been written prior to this project starting, it would have been a useful comparison text to this thesis.

Such a book might also have been useful to focus my mind on where I had come from and what I was bringing with me to this research project. My position both within and, later, outside of local newspaper journalism is one of benefit for a variety of reasons; it provides a perspective of understanding in terms of the context of local newspapers in the UK over the ten years that digital convergence crept up on the industry and grabbed it by the throat. It also provides a living understanding of journalistic identity and news production;

⁶ A senior journalism qualification as set by the NCTJ. See glossary for more details.

including the often unspoken rituals, perceptions and reasons behind decision-making and news processes (Bourdieu, 1993, reprinted from 1968).

However, the world in which I worked all those years ago is no longer my world. I am now a spectator looking in. I can apply my knowledge and previous expertise, but through the lens of the observer. This might be criticised by some as bringing bias into my research; and it cannot be denied that, as with all of us, I carry preconceived ideas and perceptions shaped by my experience (Latour, 2005). But this is why the processes undergone since that point in time have been so important. The book about my early career would be very different if written in 2020; through the processes of reading and understanding the research of others and the challenging task of reading and applying theoretical lenses, critical analysis, reflexivity and comprehending my positionality within the project, my perspectives have broadened and deepened.

This research project was inspired and its design informed by my history; but understanding this perspective has helped to galvanise and execute the research design and implementation within the frame of that understanding. Applying an auto-ethnographical perspective allows elicitation of practice and theory as one, allowing for a retrieval of deeper evidence and a more meaningful interpretation of research findings (Bisset et al., 2017). My position within this research project offers personal knowledge and understanding of news production and journalistic identity within local newspapers, which offers a reflexive response to not only research development, but the interpretation of the results (Elliott, 2014). However, my positionality within this project and the requirement for me to move from journalist to academic researcher (Singer, 2009) has been taken into account from the start.

Critics of journalists returning to newsrooms as researchers would suggest prior practice clouds research choices and interpretation (Paterson and Zoellner, 2010). I would argue against this claim and, instead, would suggest practice offers context and a greater depth of interpretation and understanding (Bourdieu, 1993, reprinted from 1968). The findings of this research could not have been discovered by me as a journalist, they were only revealed to me as a researcher and could only be evidenced by systematic analysis of the research data. In this work, I feel justified in the claiming title of academic researcher using the requirements outlined by Singer (2009) and, in the knowledge, the interpretation of the research findings were shaped by both my positionality as journalist and as research academic.

Except for this section and footnotes which will, at times, bring in a personal point, perspective or influence, this thesis will be written in the third person

throughout. This is partly because it is a writing style which sits more comfortably when telling a story, which is essentially what this document is; it is the story of local newspapers in the UK and, within that story, it is the story of a moment in time and the influence of digital tools on news production, identity and jurisdiction within newsrooms of local newspapers in the UK.

A third-person writing style is also an important part of the process in terms of my own perspective. By writing in this style I am stepping back from the object under scrutiny and giving it space. This allows me to acknowledge my own experiences and the bias they might bring. It allows distance to decide if those experiences should be taken into account and it also allows me room to see and acknowledge how those experiences might colour my perception.

My own identity is interwoven throughout this thesis. However, in the years between the start of this work and its conclusion, much has changed the landscape of local newspapers in the UK, not least the progression of digital developments, but also for a raft of other reasons (Klies Nielson, 2015, pp2). While my experiences certainly shape this project, the external factors affecting the industry have had arguably more significant impact on the actors and environments under scrutiny.

In the five years taken for this research project, local newspapers have not 'died'. They have changed, reshaped, merged, been rebranded. Some have closed and others have opened (and then some of those have closed again). Publishing companies have sold out, been made insolvent, been bought out and some have thrived, grown and established an oligopoly in the UK local press market (Mediatique, 2018).

As suggested by Curran in his paper about the future of journalism (2010), local newspapers have not done what the naysayers said they would do. They have not all faltered and failed. Some have fed off the opportunities of digital convergence and they have developed and grown.

However, the impact of digital convergence is not only felt in terms of existence and failure, resource and aptitude. In local newspapers, not only is the product's mobile online presence consumed far more widely than its printed version (YouGov, 2019), but that product itself has morphed and changed in terms of offering and aim.

1.2 Setting the scene

In order to be able to interrogate the impacts of digital tools on local newspaper journalism now, it is important to provide a context of the industry, its origins and its current place within UK society.

1.2.1 UK newspaper and local news history

Local news started in the UK in the same manner as national news – that being ‘word-of-mouth’. Before mechanised printing became available, literacy and writing were elitist skills which allowed those in power to monitor, manipulate and control official sources of news, such as town criers (Temple, 2017). All documented communication was produced by hand and even when the printing press was invented in 1476 the governing elite ensured there was strict control over publication of all literature (Clarke, 2004; Temple, 2017).

As literacy increased the demand for reading materials, including news from London, also grew. As noted by Temple (2017, pp3) there was an appetite for news which included salacious details of scandals, violence and murder but which also covered conflict, business and politics “similar to much of today’s newspapers”.

During the English Civil War of 1642-1649 the appetite for information increased further and news of events began to be documented and circulated by ‘journalists’, despite the strict rules governing printed publications (Temple, 2017). By the late 1600s newspapers started to emerge and by the 1700s the institution of the British Press was well established.

Within newspapers there was formal reportage of royal and political events and speeches, there was messages from the elite and concerns over morals and behaviours. There was crime, fashion, mystery and intrigue. And there was entertainment, all of which was further enhanced by the inclusion of illustrated pictures – a fashion which gained momentum in the 1800s (Clarke, 2004). Fleet Street and the London press developed and grew into the landscape of national publications, many of which we see today in mutated form.

However, this was the national press scene. Newspapers started to be printed in geographic regions outside of the capital in the 1600s and by the mid-18th century they were plentiful – with more than 130 being published by 1850. But the content of such newspapers was London-centric (Matthews, 2017), with the focus only turning to local events and happenings in full force later on (Temple, 2017).

Provincial newspapers started to establish their local ties and identities with the publication of local sports reporting and inclusion of community-produced sport content (Walker, 2006). A range of content was sought by newspaper publishers, with a focus on entertainment seeming to be almost as important as the dissemination of information and the inclusion of user-generated-content in the form of readers' letters (Matthews, 2017).

New publications continued to emerge and by the start of the 20th century, some larger localities had several newspapers produced on the patch. At the same time there was the emergence of publishing companies which oversaw the production of multiple titles across various localities. A monopoly war broke out and by the mid-1900s an "informal agreement" had been reached which meant most towns and cities had only one morning and one evening newspaper and only a handful had more than one of each to choose from (Temple, 2017).

The remainder of the 20th century witnessed mergers, new publications, closures and the emergence of freesheet local newspapers, which were sustained by advertising revenue alone (Temple, 2017). Therefore, the local newspaper industry was no stranger to change when the influence of the internet, smartphones and social media started to be felt in the early 2000s, at the time when this researcher started as a trainee reporter in Bradford.

The impact of digital convergence on the newspaper industry is a topic which has preoccupied researchers, industry commentators and the journalism industry itself over the past two decades. In north and south America, Australia and Europe the detrimental impacts of convergence from 2000 have decimated newspaper sales, slashed advertising revenues and resulted in job losses and closures (Curran, 2010). The impacts on local newspapers in the UK have been no different; newspapers have closed, publishing companies folded or merged and advertising, circulation newspaper sales have plummeted (Klies Nielsen, 2015; Mediatique, 2018). The quality of local journalism has been affected (BBC, 2015) and the number of journalism jobs in local newspapers have been slashed (MacGregor, 2014; Graham, 2010). Despite all of this, there continue to be many more weekly and daily newspaper titles in the UK than local television and radio stations and their national equivalents (Mediatique, 2018).

1.2.2 Convergence to the Cairncross Review

In spite of their prevalence, local and regional newspapers in the UK are a vastly underrated source of news and information. The local newspapers' role as a lynchpin of history, community, democracy and communication has often

been overlooked by academics and media commentators in favour of bigger brands and sources (Klies Nielson, 2015, pp2).

As wryly observed by Rasmus Klies Nielsen, local journalism “is not a sexy topic” (2015, pp xi) and it is an area neglected by academic interrogation (Walker, 2006; Firmstone, 2018; Matthews, 2017). In fact, it is a topic which is rarely given its dues in terms of the positive and cohesive impact it can have on a geographic area until it is lost through merger, relocation or closure.

From January 2012 to February 2017 it is estimated 136 local newspapers ceased to exist (Mediatique, 2018, pp55). Areas which had once been served by a local newspaper found themselves without a verified and reliable source of news, without a champion to shout about their needs and campaign on their behalf, without a watchdog holding power to account about housing, bus times, hospitals, parking, schools and local services. And in many areas which had a local paper left, there were issues with centralisation and a withdrawal from local communities which, combined with stretched resources, meant real local reporting was often not ‘local’ at all (Harte et al., 2019; Howells, 2015; Whittington, 2018b).

Over time there were efforts made to plug the gaps being left by the retreat of local newspapers; including the BBC’s local democracy scheme (Whittington, 2018b; BBC, 2019). But in many cases, the push to save or offer an alternative to the function of a local newspaper has been “too little, too late” (Whittington, 2018a).

And so, on June 14, 2017, when Grenfell Tower in North Kensington set on fire, killing 72 people, one of the fingers of blame in the aftermath was pointed at a dysfunctional, distant and disinterested local press (Preston, 2017).

Not long afterwards, in March 2018, it was announced there would be a government review of the press market, including an in-depth look at local and regional newspapers and the threats facing the industry (Department for Culture, 2018). The Cairncross Review was set up with the aim of “protecting the future of high-quality journalism” (Department for Culture, 2018).

The same year saw a raft of changes for the local newspaper industry in the same manner as previous years, which had witnessed mergers, closures, news start-ups and innovative projects within the sector. But this time the industry was under the spotlight and some of the changes were, perhaps, more monumental; the most significant in terms of the number of people and communities affected being the liquidation of Johnston Press, which owned more than 200 daily and weekly newspaper titles across the UK when it went into administration in November 2018 (Faull, 2018).

The company, which blamed algorithms controlling its presence on Facebook and Google as one of the main reasons for its collapse (Varghese and Awasthi, 2018), subsequently came off the stock market and recreated itself as JPI Media (Faull, 2018).

It is within this landscape in which this thesis is founded. The topic of local newspapers may have become 'sexier' in the past couple of years, but it is still a poorly interrogated arena, despite the fact that regional newspapers are the starting source for many news stories produced by the national press and local and national broadcasters.

The physical changes within local news, of closures, mergers, job losses and relocations, along with the continuing decline of newspaper sales and evidence of increasing interest in digital publishing (Canter, 2013a; MacGregor, 2014) will undoubtedly have impacted on the aim of the product and the professional identities of the journalists producing the local news.

But while some research has been conducted into the ongoing impact of digital convergence in local newspapers in the UK (For example, Williams and Franklin, 2007; MacGregor, 2014; Singer, 2011; Canter, 2013a; Canter, 2013b; Canter, 2013c), far less has been conducted since the emergence of "green shoots" from the rubble caused by the earthquake of convergence (Curran, 2010, pp469).

It has not been identified how digital convergence has specifically impacted on local newspaper news production processes or, even, how digital convergence has changed local newspaper journalism in term of skills, tools and identities of product and journalist.

It is these points which raise the following research questions:

1. What skills and tools are valued within regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK?

How are those skills and tools valued?

2. How do digital tools impact on news production in terms of:

- a. News agendas?
- b. Production processes?

3. How do digital tools impact on:

- a. The identity of the individual journalist?
- b. The identity of the news product?

4. How do digital tools impact on the jurisdiction of the news product?

- a. The jurisdiction of the individual journalist?
- b. The jurisdiction of the news product?

This thesis will go on to interrogate and attempt to answer these questions.

The next chapter (Chapter 2) will look in depth at literature and research conducted into digital convergence and its impacts, with particular focus on local newspapers in the UK, but also looking at research conducted in North America, Northern Europe and Australia. It will specifically examine work around news production processes, identities and jurisdiction within digitally converged newspaper newsrooms. It will also introduce Latour's application of Actor-network Theory, Bourdieu's Field Theory and include perspectives from political economists, all of which will be applied throughout this project to frame, analyse and explain the research findings.

The research methods will be introduced in the following chapter (Chapter 3). Quantitative and qualitative methodologies have been applied in a triangulated research design with the intention of producing robust findings. Methods include longitudinal collection and content analysis of journalism job advertisements, six weeks of observations and interviews at two local newspaper daily newsrooms in the UK and a survey of journalists working within local newspapers.

The execution and outcomes of these research elements are written in three separate consecutive chapters, with the job advertisement study (Chapter 4) setting the scene for the following newsroom case study research (Chapters 5 and 6) and the survey (Chapter 7) being used to check the findings from both.

The document ends with a final chapter (Chapter 8) drawing together the emerging themes and clarifying the overall thesis emerging in this research. The final chapter includes positioning of the relevance of this thesis, the potential impacts, limitations and possible research development and, finally demonstration of why the findings are an important contribution to the knowledge within this academic field.

Chapter 2

Literature review: 'Emerging from the rubble'

2.1 Finding the local news needles in the haystack of journalism research

While casual spectators have watched and commented on the impacts of digital convergence on the local newspaper industry in the UK, this is an area which has been neglected in the main by academic research (Singer, 2010; MacGregor, 2014) – which instead has focused on national newspaper and broadcaster impacts or has turned its view onto nations other than the UK.

Of course, there are some academics who have scrutinised local newspapers in the UK in the past decade; Julie Firmstone, Bob Franklin, Andy Williams, Lily Canter, Jane Singer, Rasmus Klies Nielsen, Rachel Howells and Phil MacGregor. Their work has been a bedrock for this project.

Research which takes a wider look at the impacts of digital tools on news production, identity and jurisdiction in the past decade will also be drawn upon to define the context within which this research project sits. This will help to draw out how the questions posed at the end of the introductory chapter have been in some way answered through academic interrogation.

However, the literature looking at convergence globally and from the past 20 years is vast. Therefore, this chapter will draw upon research which reflects a UK landscape and which, eventually, brings into focus the meaningfulness of the literature when applied to local newspapers.

At points, some international work will be drawn upon because of its application or relevance to this thesis, but in the main only UK-based projects will be referenced because, as noted by Klies Neilsen, the differences between local journalism in different countries is “pronounced” (2015, pp4). The history of local newspapers in the UK through to digital convergence and the Cairncross Review has framed the context of this thesis. However, research into specific areas such as identity, news production and jurisdiction will mainly draw upon work conducted in the past decade, due to the fast-changing nature of the subject.

The chapter will examine the concept of news, journalism and its function – particularly at a local level. From there it will examine the deficit of research into local newspapers in the UK.

It will then examine news processes and discuss how network theory, technology and human qualities play a major role in the production and dissemination of news.

This will lead into examination of journalistic and product identity and analyse the research into the influence of the audience and the publishing company on the individual journalist, the newsroom team and the outcomes of their work.

Finally, newspaper jurisdiction – online and in print – will be considered with particular focus on boundaries, audience identity and dissemination.

All areas will be considered from the wider perspective before narrowing the focus onto the UK local newspaper industry.

Firstly, however, Political Economy will be discussed as a framework to scrutinise and contextualise discussion at various points in this thesis.

2.2 Political economy as a lens

The decline of local newspapers in the UK, the takeovers, mergers and closures of some titles and publishers and the growth in terms of portfolio and reach of others is all about money, or a lack of it. Job losses, new job opportunities, restructures, innovations and developments, depleted original and independent news coverage in localities, office relocations and centralisation of production, wrap-around advertising on print editions, pop-up and video advertising online, syndicated content and cover-price rises can all be traced back to decisions about money and capitalist structures.

The capitalist system upon which the major newspaper publishing companies founded their emerging dominance via acquisition and establishing jurisdictional power over localities in the 20th century (Temple, 2017) mirror the emergence of capitalist industry identified by Marx (1973, reprinted from original text c.1844). It is these same systems which Garnham (2000) and Smythe (2009, reprinted from the original text of 1989) applied to cultural industries as the influence of the internet began to strengthen

Political economy establishes that capitalist money, profit and development are linked to primary definers within societies (Garnham, 2000). For a capitalist model to continue upon its pathway, there must be investment from other major sources which supports the use of the individual consumer. In newspapers, this major investment comes via advertising, which allows the cost of the newspaper itself to be low, making it available to individual consumption (Garnham, 2000). The changes within companies as a result of this model, such as production increase, adoption of new production processes, innovation and efficiency can

only continue to sustain and progress on its pathway, driven by advertiser and consumer demand. To attempt to retrace its steps would result in “unacceptable consequences” (Garnham, 2000, pp42).

So to gaze upon local newspaper journalism; its production, identity and jurisdiction both internally within the newsroom and externally, outside the newsroom, is to follow a series of scholars in looking at how primary definers and capitalist structures shape decision-making and processes within newsmaking (see Thomas, 2019; Lewis et al., 2008; Garnham, 2012, reproduced from first publication in 1986; Herman and Chomsky, 2012, reproduced from original of 1988).

While political economy identifies the capitalist intentions of primary definers within society as the driving force for progression within industry, the position of the audience or consumer must also be considered a commodity (Smythe, 2009, reprinted from the original text of 1989). Newspapers forge the link between external capitalist companies and the consumer via their inclusion of advertising. The reliance of printed newspapers on advertising revenue has become starkly drawn as digital convergence has occurred and both the advertisers and the audience have turned their ‘spend’ – the advertisers in terms of financial and the audience in terms of attention and time and occasional monetary investment – online. It is this move away by investors from the printed ‘middle-man’ which has pushed up the cost of the newspaper to the remaining consumers, with the rise in cover prices further exacerbating the decline of newspaper sales and the withdrawal of advertising spend (Curran, 2010).

Within this system, the audience member takes a role as labourer within the capitalist structure; working to make choices about online investments of time or money (Smythe, 2009, reprinted from the original text of 1989). Upon applying this to the news consumer, the rapid growth of online content and news has pushed up competition between news providers for the digital audience ‘spend’ (Kerrigan and Graham, 2010). The result of this, as identified in a report looking specifically at the future of British news media, journalism models of business in the UK have been and continue to be threatened in their ideology and ability to produce trustworthy and factual news because of financial constraints imposed by “the digital revolution” (Currah, 2009b, pp5).

As this chapter and the following chapters unfold, the influence of capitalist structures and primary definers will be applied to understand and unpick the reasons behind the findings of this research.

2.3 Concepts of news and journalism

2.3.1 What is news?

The question of ‘what is news’ has long been picked up, puzzled over, played with and put back down – a little like a Rubik’s Cube in that the patterns and place of the individual cubes might change, but the basic colours, the basic building blocks of the concept, remain the same.

In industry, practitioners might suggest news is defined by an inherent sense, an unspoken “instinct” in which is difficult to determine (O’Neill and Harcup, 2005; Bourdieu, 1993, reprinted from the original of 1986), while academics take a view that news is based upon a “strait jacket” of processes and functions (Gieber, 1956, pp432), a stringent set of ideologies determined by societal rules and national identity (Gans, 2012) and a strict set of news values (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Harcup and O’Neill, 2001).

2.3.1.1 News values

Through history it is clear news has been made up of more than simply important information or government propaganda. From the earliest national and provincial publications in the UK, there was a mix of reportage about politics, events, crimes, scandals, sport and with a sprinkling of entertainment and reader contribution thrown into the mix (Clarke, 2004; Matthews, 2017; Walker, 2006).

But the actual question ‘what is news?’ is acknowledged by academics and journalists alike to be a difficult conundrum to fully answer (Pape and Featherstone, 2005).

The concept of news is influenced by myriad situations and circumstances; the publishing company, the production processes, the newsroom hierarchies and structures, the individuals within the newsmaking machine - from source to storyteller, from editors to consumers. Resource, availability, opportunity and technology and ability to use it all come into play. These areas will be considered in more depth later in this chapter. But at this moment, the bare bones of ‘what is news’ in terms of print and digital perhaps comes down to the concept of what makes something worthy of publication; the news values and the reasons a story is selected for use.

In 1965 a dozen news values were marked as the primary ‘checkpoints’ a journalist would apply when identifying a news story (Galtung and Ruge). These definers have been used as a foundation to defining news selection processes

in Western society since publication; with a number of scholars using the list as a foundation for their own research.

The 12-point list identified characteristics of a story which would elevate its 'news value' in the eyes of journalists and editors and make it more likely to be selected for broadcast or print. The list was as follows:

1. Frequency
2. Threshold (absolute intensity and intensity increase)⁷
3. Unambiguity
4. Meaningfulness (cultural proximity and relevance)
5. Consonance (predictability and demand)
6. Unexpectedness (unpredictability and scarcity)
7. Continuity
8. Composition
9. Reference to elite nations
10. Reference to elite people
11. Reference to persons
12. Reference to something negative

Galtung and Ruge also suggested the more values a story encompassed, the more likely it would be selected and pushed higher up the agenda. Once selected, the story would have those news values amplified or 'distorted' by the selector and again by the reader (Galtung and Ruge, 1965).

The news values framework set out by Galtung and Ruge had a focus on the reportage of foreign and international news, but in 2001, just before the power and potential of the internet started being significantly felt in UK regional newsrooms, their news values were tested at a domestic level by Harcup and O'Neill.

With a different methodology, Harcup and O'Neill assessed the main stories on the pages of three national newspapers. They found subjectivity was a defining element of the application of the news values they were testing and they found application of each of the 12 news factors became "problematic" (Harcup and O'Neill, 2001, pp268). The study also defined alternative news factors which were not covered by the Norwegian study. These additional factors included entertainment, which encompassed pictures/imagery, reference to sex, reference to animals, humour, showbiz/TV. They also identified reference to

⁷ Galtung and Ruge (1965) example a murder in defining threshold and suggest the amplitude of the story reflects the significance of the news value. Eg. The more violent the murder the higher the news value.

something positive, reference to elite institutions/organisations and agendas, promotions and campaigns.

Alongside this, the study also identified the influence of PR and the internet on the frequency and newness of stories meant those news values would no longer be significant to journalists curating the news.

2.3.1.2 News values now

As noted decades earlier, “If newspapers were published every minute the perspective [on news values] could possibly be changed” (Galtung and Ruge, 1965, pp66); this prophetic observation was tested when Harcup and O’Neill returned to the subject of ‘what is news’ in 2017 to test their 2001 findings against newspaper journalism in the digital era (Harcup and O’Neill, 2017).

The research was again based upon the printed product and with a national newspaper focus, but the pool of newspapers scrutinised was widened and, unlike in the previous two studies, the role of the audience was also a factor; Consequently, the most popular stories shared on Facebook and Twitter in 2014 were also assessed for the news values defined by the researchers in 2001 (Harcup and O’Neill, 2017, pp.1476).

They found that in the printed editions, bad news significantly outweighed the good news stories and that surprise and entertainment were also highly prominent factors. Multiple news values were applied to many stories and conflict was re-identified as warranting a separate category. Strong images, photographs and visuals, were also key factors in the stories – a category which had not been particularly acknowledged by the researchers until this point (Harcup and O’Neill, 2017, pp.1479).

The social media element of the study found bad news was still a strong value, but that entertainment was the primary news value in the stories being widely shared. It also found elite people not to be as important online as it appeared to be in print. It found Twitter users to favour harder, more serious news and Facebook users tended to share more entertaining, light-hearted content (Harcup and O’Neill, 2017, pp.1481).

The overall study also defined exclusivity as an important news value, which included stories generated through interactive audience feedback, and online “sharability” (Harcup and O’Neill, 2017, pp.1481).

As acknowledged by the researchers, these findings were applied to stories which had been chosen for publication and so consideration of decision-making

news-making factors such as time, resource, availability, newsroom structures and the target audience could not be taken into account. These factors will be assessed in more detail later in this chapter.

2.3.1.3 News values with a local focus

While Harcup and O'Neill's work (2005; 2017) has, been used as a stepping stone to defining news values, they fall short of defining those values at a local level.

As asserted by Hetherington (1989, pp6), a major point of difference raised within regional newspapers to their national counterparts is the political neutrality of most⁸ titles. He went on to suggest news included in regional titles was not vastly different to national content but suggested the significant factor of geographical closeness was important. Later in this chapter this concept of geography and its importance to local newspapers online and online audiences will be interrogated in greater depth. However, it is worth acknowledging at this point, that geographical focus on a locality is of high importance when it comes to news values within local news from both the journalistic and the audience perspective (Schautd and Carpenter, 2009; Klies Nielson, 2015; Engan, 2015; Hess and Waller, 2014).

Before the rise of multimedia technology local daily and weekly newspapers in the UK "provided local 'civic' news and features based on information" from sources such as local authorities, the local emergency services, the courthouse and Coroner's Office, schools, churches, clubs and associations and local businesses (Franklin and Murphy, 1998, pp8).

So while the news values of a local newspaper, might not have been vastly different to those in the nationals (Hetherington, 1989, pp8), it could be suggested the news selection processes at such titles took an amplified view on a section of the UK (Singer, 2010). Because of the limitation on the geographical coverage of a title, there was a greater reason for and expectation of a more microscopic view of events⁹. While the close focus on a limited area

⁸ Not all regional titles are politically neutral. *The Yorkshire Post*, published by JPI Media, is known to be a Conservative-leaning newspaper which was traditionally aimed at business, industry and farming in the region and which proclaims itself to be 'Yorkshire's national newspaper' on its masthead. Similarly, *The National* was founded in Scotland in 2014 by Newsquest with the aim of supporting an independent Scotland

⁹ For example, the results of a local flower show would not be covered in the nationals, and neither would the flower show participant and organisers expect this to be the case, but there would be an expectation of this level of coverage within a local newspaper.

would amplify the expectation of coverage of ‘smaller’ or less valued events at a national level, the more limited number of journalists and tighter resources on a local newspaper also amplified the use of the same sources and meant narrower perspectives were represented in the pages of the papers (Lewis et al., 2008; O’Neill and O’Connor, 2008).

But, perhaps ultimately, it is the idea of adding value to a locality which sets local news aside from its national counterpart.

The Cairncross Review (Cairncross, 2019b, pp14), which set out to interrogate declining news provision at both a local and national level in the UK, identified investigative journalism and democracy reporting as “the two forms of journalism which are both most worthy and most under threat.” It goes on to cite “public-interest news” as being that which matters most to a “healthy democracy”, defining that news as investigative and campaigning journalism which holds power to account and reporting on the activities and decision-making of institutions such as local authorities and courts (Cairncross, 2019b, pp17).

But what Cairncross fails to acknowledge within the assessment of local news provision, particularly that of local newspapers and their online counterparts, is the value, or the “social importance” (Morrison and Svennevig, 2007) of grassroots news reporting to the communities being reported upon. While campaigning, reporting and having the capacity and resource to rigorously challenge those in power at a local level is clearly of societal importance, so is the reporting of, for example, the village flower show. And it is important because that flower show is a definer of the community (Hillery Jr, 1955)¹⁰ within which it is being held. Local news covers a locality and the markers of that locality (the people, places, geography, history, culture and economics) may make it significantly different from another locality just miles away (Glover, 1998; Singer, 2010). Gans (2012) suggested national identity, societal rules and definers were key to making news judgements – his work was focused on national news in print and broadcast in the USA, but, based on the research into local newspaper production in the UK, it could be argued his perspectives are also applicable on a narrower scale.

Coverage at a local level – of the flower shows, roadworks, human interest stories, the shops opening and closing, the volunteer groups, the local history societies and more – offers the people involved a platform and a voice to share their news. And when their news is covered by a journalist, it positively reflects

¹⁰ Community as defined by Hillery Jr (1955, pp.118) as a shared area, offering common ties and social interaction.

upon that individual, group and community by recognising their stories as important, by making them feel heard and part of something. That coverage – something which, until very recently, local newspapers in the UK described as their ‘bread and butter’ – is of societal importance in terms of defining and galvanising a community and marking its place on the UK map (Matthews, 2017; Franklin and Murphy, 1998).

However, fairly recent changes to local newspaper revenue, staffing and production have seen newspapers retreat from localities and, as a result, there has been a decline in grassroots community news coverage (Harte et al., 2019). While possibly not as important to society as the repeated reliance on the same powerful sources and the decline in rigorous interrogation of information and decision-making at a civic level (Cairncross, 2019b; Franklin, 2014; Lewis et al., 2008; O'Neill and O'Connor, 2008), an argument should also be made that the deterioration of reporting other types of community-based news is a significant problem for local pride, identity, cohesion and inclusivity.

2.3.1.4 Why is all this important? Local newspapers and local news impacts

The idea of a local newspaper being a badge of value to a locality was explored at the 2019 Behind Local News Conference¹¹, which focused on building communities and developing reader relationships.

There was little time given to print at the event, except for one breakout session required participants to identify the properties of a local newspaper in the UK. Both practitioners and journalism academics attended the session and, along with a tangible product, a document of local history and a crossword, a major identifying element of the local newspaper was named as ‘representing under-served communities’. This was defined as campaigning for local issues, making people in that community feeling important by recognising their achievements and validating their news.

The session identified one of the reasons overlooked by Cairncross (2019b) as to why the decline and closure of local newspapers in the UK is a concern. As legacy titles, many local newspapers hold a certain element of identity and foundation of the community they serve. Without these titles, who will accurately

¹¹ Behind Local News is a collaborative organisation run jointly by newsgroups including JPI Media, Reach PLC, Newsquest, Archant, Iliffe Media and with support from the National Council of Training for Journalists (NCTJ). The observations included here were made by the researcher during the 2019 event in Leicester.

document the history and happenings of a locality, however humdrum they may be? The idea of a product bringing a sense of identity to a place and the people within it will be explored in further detail later in this chapter. However, at this point, it is important to recognise the quality of local news which sets it apart from national printed and online product and which also makes it different to a community page on Facebook or online.

This, combined with concern about the disengagement of society from local democracy – which has been demonstrated as intrinsically linked to the decline in the provision of local news (Cairncross, 2019b; Mediatique, 2018; Howells, 2015; Harte et al., 2019), is why the product identity and jurisdictional elements of this project are important.

However, this is only part of the story. Local news might be something discussed “over a pint” (Pape and Featherstone, 2005, pp15) or, perhaps in the current digital climate, something discussed over a Facebook community group. Nevertheless, there is more to local newspapers than simply publishing the gossiping of a community. There is a point of local interest, a local focus and verification, time and resource given to that coverage. The act of journalism itself is as important in the news making process as the news being covered.

2.3.2 Defining journalism

The idea of news cannot be explored thoroughly without a definition of the concept of journalism. Again, as with the idea of news, journalism is a subject which is open to varying academic and practitioner definitions and to which it is difficult to ascribe singular defining factors (Tandoc et al., 2013).

Journalism, as defined by academics for decades, involves taking ‘news’ and filtering it through a process of investigation, verification, development, analysis and then disseminating that information in a way which aims to explain the news in a set context and in a way which engages a target consumer (Anderson et al., 2016; Harcup, 2015).

The normative ideal of journalism is much more; it is a dogged and powerful independent, truth-seeking force which has the presence and influence to shape society, define its identity and play a key democratic role in sharing important information and holding power to account (Wahl-Jorgenson and Hanizsch, 2008).

Of course, this ideal is challenged by influencing forces; especially so following digital convergence, which has, and continues to be, a particular test for the normative framework of journalism (Christians et al., 2009, ppviii).

This chapter will go on to analyse and use literature to challenge some of the normative ideals of journalism in connection to production, identity and jurisdiction, with particular scrutiny of these areas at a local newspaper level.

Firstly though, it will examine the impact of digital conversion on journalism and define digital tools for the purpose of this project.

2.4 Convergence and digital tools

When the potential impact of the internet was starting to be felt in newsrooms in western society in the 1990s there was an opinion among many journalists that the internet and digital technology was no more than a short-lived phenomenon, not to be taken seriously (Kawamoto, 2003).

Digital technology was embraced by western society, becoming an example of Marx's model of a powerful catalyst of societal change (1973, reprinted from original text c.1844). Despite the reluctance of newspaper capitalists to pay attention to digital innovation and the resulting implications in the 1990s (Kawamoto, 2003), over the following decade it soon became clear the industry was slowly going through the "predictable cycle of denial, resistance, exploration and commitment" (Stone, 2006, pp10; Nel, 2010, pp362) inspired, or forced, by western society's embracing of the opportunities provided by the internet and digital technology (Pew, 2014; ONS, 2014).

Research into digital convergence and its impact on newsrooms was undertaken in North and South America, Europe and Australia in the following years. But while scholars demonstrated similarities, and some differences, in the way in which convergence was impacting at newspapers in western culture, the focus on UK newspapers, and local newspapers in particular, was slight.

Therefore, this section will firstly introduce the idea of convergence and digital technology before going on to explore the specific impacts of digital convergence on news production processes, identity and jurisdiction of news products. It will include research from western Europe, northern and south America and Australia and narrow the focus onto national and local newspapers in the UK where possible.

2.4.1 Uniting the traditional and the digital

Digital convergence within news, defined as the practice of news providers forming partnerships in order to "meet a variety of technological, editorial,

regulatory, and market-based opportunities and challenges” (Dailey et al., 2005, pp151), has been a vast focus of study for two decades.

Overall, academics found the response of news organisations to the monolithic change brought about by the internet and digital technology to be reluctant, slow and reactive rather than proactive (Boczkowski, 2003b; Orrosen and Krumsvik, 2012; MacGregor, 2014). It also seemed newspapers strove to incorporate digital technology in a way which mirrored or fit in with traditional newspaper production rather than seeking new models (Quandt, 2008; Domingo et al., 2008; García-Avilés et al., 2014; MacGregor, 2014). Continuous change and uncertainty became an accepted given (Cole, 2012; Dailey et al., 2005).

In UK newspapers, the situation was the same, with the quickly changing business of news becoming “a constant feature of editorial life” (Franklin, 2008, pp637).

In print, advertising revenues in the form of classified and display advertising declined dramatically as customers moved away from traditional formats (Franklin, 2014) and job losses within journalism soared (Curran, 2010).

How to make online content pay was a recurring theme, with paywalls (Steinle and Brown, 2012; Kvalheim, 2013; Whittington, 2015; Sharman, 2015) considered as an option. Research found audiences were reluctant to pay for news online, both internationally (Macnamara, 2010; Chyi, 2012) and at a local level in the UK (Graham, 2010). A recent study found paywalls had been adopted by regional titles with some success in the USA and Europe (Simon and Graves, 2019), but only four of the 212 organisations scrutinised were regional newspapers in the UK and out of that sample, only one had a metered paywall. The report went on to suggest that paywalls which had been adopted by online titles were working and that younger audiences demonstrated a willingness to pay for content online.

Alternative models and solutions such as merchandising (Herbert and Thurman, 2007) and news apps (Cross, 2012; Marshall, 2012; Weiss, 2013) were also investigated.

2.4.1.1 Impacts of convergence

Digital convergence in news saw an increasing expectation of journalists to quickly and competently learn new skills using new digital technology (Usher, 2011). The result of this in many newsrooms was that job roles changed significantly, with an expectation that new skills would run alongside the

traditional role and responsibility of a journalist (Canter, 2015; Whittington, 2016).

Journalists were being asked to do more with less, but several studies illustrate how this spike in expectation, including learning new skills and taking on new responsibilities placed stress upon the workforce in the UK both in national-serving newsrooms (Wallace, 2013) and in local newspaper newsrooms (Williams and Franklin, 2007).

An initial result of this increased expectation was a change in hierarchies within the newsroom; as demonstrated in a Finnish study which found young, agile digital natives were increasingly promoted to more senior positions, while older, long-serving, less digitally fluent staff were finding themselves at increasing risk of demotion and job-loss (Nikunen, 2014).

Flexibility with adopting new technology and affiliated tasks was also expected (Robinson, 2011). While traditional journalism skills were generally unchanging in their definition (Whittington, 2016; O'Connor and Whittington, 2017; Wenger et al., 2018), digital skills and tools were wider-ranging, prone to adoption and dismissal in quick succession and less easily defined (Quinn, 2005).

This merging of skills and responsibilities was early on identified as a potential catalyst for a continually decreasing and increasingly “de-skilled” workforce within local newspapers (Pilling, 1998, pp191).

Another major element of change resulting from digital convergence was a hand-over of power to the news ‘audience’ (Rosen, 2006) who suddenly were no longer pinioned to a local news provider but instead had the choice of the entire internet to not only choose the news from, but also to share, redistribute and take part in the news-making process (Hermida et al., 2012). This will be explored in further depth shortly. However, it is worth picking it up at this moment to pose the question of the word ‘audience’ and to frame a context for the remainder of this thesis.

2.4.1.2 Introducing the news-trader

Increasingly the online audience member, or consumer of news, has become a commodity and labourer within their own right (Smythe, 2009, reprinted from the original text of 1989). The digital audience holds the power to choose the news, both in terms of clicking a button to either open or move on from a news story, but also in terms of determining news agendas (Lee et al., 2014; Anderson, 2011c) and disseminating, or sharing, news (Singer, 2014). The digital audience holds the purse strings of online news. Without the eyes and time of the digital

audience, online advertising would go elsewhere. Without the share and endorsement of the digital audience, the news provider would go unnoticed in favour of more popular options (Hermida et al., 2012; Singer, 2014). The online audience is the money. Its presence and attention is a commodity being fought over by news providers everywhere (Macnamara, 2010). The individuals making up this group are, as coined by Rosen, “the people formerly known as the audience” (2006). Those individuals are not members of an audience, but instead, they are reciprocal traders; trading time, attention, endorsement and interaction for content and information (Holton et al., 2016).

This changed status is not only reflected in international and national journalism, but has been recognised at a local newspaper level (Singer, 2010). Therefore, it is at this juncture that this thesis poses the concept of the ‘news-trader’.

This researcher argues that the term ‘audience’ is redundant in a digital news landscape. While in print, an exchange of product for money still takes place in the main, online the exchange is more subtle and the power of the news-trader as commodity and labourer more pronounced. Therefore, the term ‘news-trader’ will be used in place of the term ‘audience’ henceforth, unless a source using the word is directly quoted.

2.4.1.3 “News networks”

The change in position of the traditional audience to news-trader because of the reciprocal nature of online news-making has shifted the conceptual boundaries of the newsroom (Anderson, 2011b; Anderson, 2013a).

Studies investigating the boundaries, networks and jurisdiction of news processes and products will be investigated in greater depth later in this chapter. However, it is worth at this juncture introducing Actor-network Theory as a method of unravelling news making processes in regional newspapers.

Actor-network Theory (ANT) unpicks processes by documenting connections between actors, both the human and the material. With each actant regarded as equal in terms of research priority to document process.

We have not chosen consciously to focus predominantly on any one of the technological, historical or psychological aspects of what is observed. (Latour and Woolgar, 1986, reprinted from 1979, pp29)

ANT links to political economy with its consideration of technology as an actor within production networks. As posed by Marx, the advance of technology saw

a replacement of human workers with the mechanical (Marx, 1973, reprinted from original text c.1844). This replacement was echoed by National Union of Journalists member Bernie Corbett in Pilling's assessment of the digital impacts on the role of the local newspaper journalist (1998).

2.4.1.3.1 Using ANT to define digital tools

Bruno Latour built on Marx's idea of society shaping change within organisations by suggesting no group or person could be independent due to intrinsically linked networks of people and structures:

Just remember how much labour had to be done before each of you could 'take your life into your own hands'. How many admonitions from parents, teachers, bosses, partners, and colleagues before we learned that we had better be a group on our own (the ego)? And how quickly we forget that lesson.'(Latour, 2005, pp32)

If this is the case, when assessing how technology can create power and change societies like the news industry, it must first be acknowledged that wider society has helped award technology equality within the network by engaging with it. Foucault refers to the influence and power of "industrial innovations on the structure of societies and situations" (1977, pp138) and Russell agrees, writing: "the degree of feeling in favour of Law [or a system] is one of the most important characteristics of a community" (1987, pp20).

Technological objects used in production become part of the worker and workforce, with the lines between object and operator blurring and suggesting that one is only of use with the other.

Thus disciplinary power appears to have the function not so much of deduction as of synthesis, not so much of exploitation of the product as of coercive link with the apparatus of production. (Foucault, 1977, pp153)

If applying ANT, the role of digital tools and technology in relation to the newsroom is no different to that of the journalist or news-trader – technology is an actant which forms an integral part of the society or network and therefore has equal potential consequence as a human actor in that setting. What use is a reporter without their ability to produce content using content management systems, capture video and use social media? Without the operator, these technologies are redundant, but without these technologies in a society which values such tools, the journalist is only functioning as a half-use, and therefore is impotent within their network.

The actants under consideration within this thesis have to have influence within the field of news production. They must act as a hinge or catalyst of movement,

production and process (Domingo and Wiard, 2016). Therefore, the actors under scrutiny must be the people or technologies which would significantly change a process were they removed. This helps define the limits of digital tools for this research project. These are the tools which are used for the purposes of journalism and which, if removed from the news-making process, would impact a change of direction or outcome.

Those tools, while often defined by given name, may also be referred to as actants within the networks being scrutinised. However, in mirror of Lewis and Westlund's work (2016, pp345), in a move away from Latour's ANT, the technological tools will be specifically referred to as actants, distinguishing the technological from the human actors. This will be done in order to identify the roles played by each in the network and, as will be discussed in the next subsection, to acknowledge the human fallibility overlooked by pure ANT (Bourdieu, 2012; Vos, 2016). When referring to both human and technological en masse, the term 'actor' will be used.

2.4.1.3.2 The internal and external newsroom network

To apply ANT within this thesis, the network under scrutiny must also be identified. It is at this point this thesis introduces the idea of the newsroom network.

The actors within the newsroom network are the people and tools labouring within the news-making process. These actors 'employed' to produce news for the newspaper product online or in print may well be situated within the physical newsroom. However, they might also be working remotely from home or another labour space. They might not be actively 'on-duty' – but they might be undertaking news-making tasks. They are bound by employment in some form; employed as a waged actor by the news production company, a technological actant chosen and utilised by the production company or as a traditionally external actor linked by technological actants and labouring within the news production network. These traditionally external actants might include news-traders, sources, sister-titles and other media publishers and broadcasters. The journalistic field under consideration within this metaphor is a "space of shared motivations" rather than a space occupied only by actors who describe themselves professionally as journalists (Vos, 2016, pp385), a "news ecosystem" which includes the actants "engaged within journalistic production and consumption" (Anderson, 2016, pp412).

While the parameters of the physical newsroom and the physical presence of contracted and waged actors employed to produce the news might be how journalists within industry would define the 'newsroom', the newsroom network

to which this thesis refers is wider and more changeable. It includes actors labouring as employees to produce news for a specific product and traditionally external actors on the outer edges of the network who do not make news production for the news title their main occupation or focus, but rather who contribute to production in a passing moment either intentionally or as a by-product of interaction within another consciously defined network. The newsroom network therefore has an outer layer – the external newsroom network – and an inner layer – the internal newsroom network, within which there is a core comprising waged employees and technological actants appointed by the newspaper publishing company.

Actors within the internal newsroom network are the decision-makers who labour specifically for the news product – this includes those who actively influence the news-making process. Actors in the external newsroom network are less actively connected; instead their connection is more transitory and based on activities within other networks which bring them into contact with the newsroom network. Actors within the external newsroom network can be drawn into the internal newsroom network based on the level of their interaction with the product.

For example, **Figure 1 (pg39)**, is an example of how Facebook user ‘Stephen Pattison’, is drawn into the external newsroom network of the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, after being tagged in a *Facebook* post by news-trader Amy Spencer. Stephen may well also become a news-trader with the *Yorkshire Evening Post* by seeing Amy’s mention and clicking on the *Facebook* post or the story. Unless Amy had drawn his attention to this story and its relevance to him, Stephen may not have entered the external newsroom network for the *Yorkshire Evening Post* at this point in time. By taking an active role Amy has moved herself closer to the internal newsroom network and has expanded the boundaries of the external newsroom network to include Stephen. This story may have originally come to the attention of the *Yorkshire Evening Post* via a news-trader post on a *Facebook* community page, or perhaps a news-trader contacted the newspaper directly by emailing an actor within the core internal network about the event. Whatever the method, the source of the story has actively pushed themselves into the internal newsroom network due to their actions resulting in news production decision-making for the newspaper title. If Stephen sees he has been tagged by Amy and then goes on to share or interact with the content, he is extending the boundary reach to the people within his own network and he pushes himself further into the newsroom network with his decisive interaction. While the core of the internal newsroom network of a news organisation might be made up of interactions by the same actors on a regular and repeating basis,

the internal and external network boundaries cannot be defined by physical walls and the influences of some labouring actants might be transient and fleeting.

By regarding the internal newsroom network through the lens of ANT, “suddenly you discover swarms of entities that seem to have been there all along but were not visible before” (Latour, 2011). No one network is isolated and working autonomously, no decision goes uninfluenced.

Yorkshire Evening Post

22 mins · 🌐

Peter can still run a sub-26 minute 5k at the age of 80
Bramley parkrun

YORKSHIREEVENINGPOST.CO.UK

Veteran runner celebrates 80th birthday by running his 80th Parkrun at Bramley

👍❤️😮 19

3 Comments 4 Shares

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share 👤

View 1 more comment Oldest ▾

Amy Spencer Stephen Pattison you and Matt are in one of the photos xx

Like · Reply · 11m

Figure 1. A screengrab from the Facebook feed of the *Yorkshire Evening Post* taken on December 1, 2019.

2.4.2 The process of making the news

While normative ideals of news and journalism contribute to the capture, content and distribution of information, it cannot be overlooked that news is a commodity, its production is a process and its output is a product with capital value.

The news values identified earlier in this chapter (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001; O'Neill and Harcup, 2005; Harcup and O'Neill, 2017) acknowledge they take only the essence of information into account and do not fully consider other influences on news making decisions.

This “construction” of news is far more complex than solely ‘the story’. There are the commercial pressures of producing content which engages news-traders (Tandoc and Vos, 2016), managing resources and budgets, the constraints of advertising and commercial relations (Thomas, 2019).

There is the “strait-jacket” (Gieber, 1956) of production processes, the newspaper print deadline and the digital deadline of “news now” (Sheller, 2015a), the skills, tools and technologies and the human actors who deploy them, the boundaries and structures of the internal newsroom and the networks surrounding and interacting with that newsroom; creating the external newsroom network. There are the influences of multiple actors pushing and pulling on the news-making machine.

Both political economy and ANT demonstrate how the news-making process cannot work independently or autonomously. The production of a news story might involve a series of actors from its discovery and germination through to its publication. In the simplest example, actors will include the source of the story and the means of its discovery, the journalist who takes the information and works it into a news report, using further sources and technologies to do so. This may be followed by a checking and publication stage involving further actors, both human and technical, before the news is released via further technology. The story is then interacted with by news-traders who view it using smartphones, tablets, watches and computer screens. They may then disseminate that information further, reconnecting with the internal newsroom via share, comment, poll or other interaction (Singer, 2014; Hermida et al., 2012).

Even long before digital convergence began, this linked process was identified, with Galtung and Ruge proclaiming: “Both the processes of selection and the process of distortion will take place at all steps in the chain from event to reader” (1965, pp71).

Therefore, the existence of the internal newsroom network and its sprawl into the external and beyond is not neatly contained (Anderson, 2011b). It does not have rounded edges and a simplistic model. It is spiked and tangled with actors who link it immediately to thousands of other networks. It is not flat, but three-dimensional; a moving, organic, spherical 'sea-anemone', whose tentacles grab and meld into those 'sea-anemones' or networks around it. There is a constant movement as some actors move away and others move in. The push and pull of influences on actors within the internal newsroom network challenges the idea of hierarchies as it demonstrates the influence on actors from a number of factors.

This image or model is vastly different to the previously rather flat image of newspaper news-making, which tended to be more isolated within the solid walls of the internal newsroom and instead of being pushed and pulled by surrounding actors exerted much more of a unified push outwards (Singer, 2001). True, influences on news were still in existence thanks to commercial factors and sources (Barrett, 1964). But the news networks had more solid and less transient boundaries and the network inside the news organisation was evidently hierarchical (Warren, 1955). News-traders were not considered as influential and the actors in the external newsroom network had fewer methods to communicate – meaning their networks were less agitated and mobile and while dissemination and “distortion” (Galtung and Ruge, 1965, pp71) still occurred, it was more linear and less complex. This flatter model was also defined by strict and specific deadlines, in contrast to the constant deadline imposed by online publishing (Sheller, 2015a). Resultingly, the boundary shape of the internal newsroom was less jagged, easier to define and the walls of the network were guarded more robustly against external influence and the external newsroom network was thinner and less influential.

2.4.2.1 The human issue

What ANT and political economy overlook in favour of identifying process or power, is the individual human element of news production (Bourdieu, 2012; Vos, 2016; Domingo and Wiard, 2016). Those individual perceptions, digressions, choices and actions which have the ability to spin an event one way or another. As everything is connected to something else, ANT does work. However, following the string of 'why' would prove a challenging task. For example, a story might be sourced by a news editor about a fatal stabbing at a property in a nearby district. Police are at the scene of the crime and the news editor sends a reporter along to get pictures, video footage and interviews. The

reporter goes and gets the footage and content, posts live updates from the scene, returns and writes up a fuller story for the website and paper. They have produced to their news editor's highest expectation. But, if the reporter has recently been turned down for a promotion and feels sore about the outcome and decides to be mulish about producing a good job, or if the reporter is a trainee who is unsure of legal protocol and stops filming and deletes the footage when the police tell them to, or if the reporter forgot to charge their phone and therefore cannot video or do live updates because the battery has run out, or if the reporter has not had skills training to produce the work required, or if the reporter gets lost on the way to the scene and misses the action, then the story falls short of meeting the best it can be from a news' editor's perspective¹².

ANT analysts would suggest all these scenarios have connecting reasons which prompt the various outcomes (Latour, 2005). And they would be correct. However, to follow the minutiae of details relating to individual decision-making in terms of news production within regional newspapers would produce a different thesis to the one intended by this project. The aim this research project is to analyse the impact of digital tools on production processes, identities and jurisdiction within regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK and consequently, a wider lens is required.

It is here that Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'the field' offers an interpretative lens (Shoemaker and Reese, 2014). As applied by multiple scholars to unpick processes within the newsroom (Willig, 2013; Canter, 2013c; Ryfe, 2018), Bourdieu's concept helps to understand the dynamics of power and social capital within a field (Shoemaker and Reese, 2014). While the moving boundaries of the internal and external newsroom makes application of Field Theory "complicated" (Shoemaker and Reese, 2014, pp102), Bourdieu's concept helps to understand how relationships and individuals interact and respond to influencing forces within a defined arena, be it physical or theoretical (Hess and Waller, 2017).

Therefore, an acknowledgement can be made that human frailty, fallibility, emotion, social status, perceptions of autonomy and health create habitus (Jenkins, 2002) which has significant impacts on dispositions, networks and processes of the actor and those connected to the actor within the network, ultimately influencing the wider habitus and the product of those networks and processes (Deuze, 2019; Shoemaker and Reese, 2014; Bourdieu, 2012).

¹² These scenarios are fabricated for the purposes of illustration. However, the researcher having held positions including reporter, news editor and editor of local newspaper titles can confirm these kinds of situation unfold regularly in newsroom life.

In an attempt to untangle the complexities of news production process and its influencers, the following will be considered in discrete sections with as much direct application of literature from local newspaper production in the UK as possible: commercial influencers, skills and tools, news-traders and internal newsroom structures and actors.

2.4.2.2 Commercial influencers

Commercial influence on news-making processes was the logical first in the list due to be examined as each of the following points of inspection stem from the influence of capitalist and commercial aspects of regional newspaper production (Matthews, 2017).

Publishers of local newspapers in the UK suffered more than their national counterparts following the 2008 recession because of their reliance on advertising over newspaper sales (Edge, 2019). While print sales and advertising revenue was falling, with classified advertising also being a major contributor to the decline in revenue, no clear mechanism had been identified to make comparable revenue online (Herbert and Thurman, 2007).

The resulting fall-out has seen company mergers, falling sales, staffing reduction and centralisation of journalists; with many town centres losing their newspaper offices in favour of city or business park bases (Howells, 2015; Harte et al., 2019). Staffing cuts have included the removal of site-specific sub editors from most of major publishing companies, with page templates replacing much of the page design requirements and news editors being the final checking point for much of the content in print and online. Content management systems were also implemented to streamline print and online content (See MacGregor, 2014; Whittington, 2018b).

However, the response by the publishing companies and their managers has been to put company profit above the quality of the content being produced. Edge was referring specifically to Newsquest when he contrasted the demolition of the UK publishing company with the booming wealth of the publisher, writing: "The benefit to the company's bottom line, however, has been largely at the expense of its journalism" (Edge, 2019, pp31). This echoes similar stances on local news publishers' handling of their businesses following the 2008 crisis in terms of the decimation of the workforce and the resulting restructures (Greenslade, 2014).

O'Neill and O'Connor (2008) observed the pressures on local newspaper journalists in the UK were increasing, partly due to digital directives of parent

publishing companies. These findings were echoed by Singer, who looked at digital impacts on newsroom workflow within Johnston Press (2010). Her research found diminished resources caused journalists to struggle in producing digital work deemed to be of acceptable standard.

The impact of digital tools and the influence of the publishing company and its management of digital convergence is told starkly in MacGregor's study of the Newsquest-owned Northern Echo (2014). Here, job-losses, work flows and finance were tracked over the course of five years, with MacGregor concluding that money and sustainability were and continued to be key concerns for staff working at the coalface.

The study also demonstrated the non-linear adoption of digital convergence within UK newspaper newsrooms and the mixed messages and signals being received within the internal newsroom network from the publishing company beyond. MacGregor's research also illustrated the changing focus of journalists within the internal newsroom network, from making news and protecting news values, to making the business sustainable.

2.4.2.3 Skills and tools

MacGregor also pointed to the adoption of new technology and the knowledge and training of journalists as a barrier to smooth news production. In particular, there was evidence of a lack of leadership over new emerging technology use – leading to confusion and reticence among staff (2014). Similar reports were made in other studies of convergence at a local newspaper level in the UK, with Canter (2013b; 2013a) finding there were legal questions raised by reporters about the kind of interaction they were permitted to have with readers who posted on their websites. Williams and Franklin (2007) found training to be limited, with little incentive offered to journalists to take on new skills (and more work). Once journalists were trained, there was little opportunity for some to use their new skills, rendering the training redundant. They also found there to be technical problems with news methods which caused difficulties to the production process.

A study of the South Wales Evening Post found the language around production changed as resources decreased, the number of news pages increased and as job roles changed. Instead of writing stories, journalists “filled shapes” – the focus on producing news had shifted from a focus on the story itself to a focus on the space which required filling within the newspaper (Harte et al., 2019, pp67; Howells, 2015, pp175).

Studies conducted away from the UK local newspaper gaze, also found the implementation and use of new technology was causing difficulties. Boczkowski (2003c) and Mills et al. (2012) suggested technology at the production end caused problems when it was not as advanced as the requirement of news-traders and other external users. This was reflected elsewhere, with news providers chasing to keep up with the digital advancement and access of potential news-traders (Benton, 2014) and where, in some cases, inadequate equipment or training hindered production (Rodgers, 2015; Singer, 2004).

2.4.2.4 News-traders and news now

Research has found a certain level of contempt and mistrust held for news-traders by journalists within the internal newsroom network at UK newspapers and beyond (Holton et al., 2016; Anderson, 2013a); with journalists raising concerns about the unskilled (Bechmann, 2011) online 'mob' being allowed to dictate news agendas, spread mistruth or defamatory content and abuse others via online interaction (MacGregor, 2014; Singer, 2010; Canter, 2013b; Hermida, 2010). There has also been some acknowledgement in the same sphere that user-generated-content (UGC) allows a widening discourse and a closer relationship with the community in the external newsroom network and that in time and resource-poor newsrooms there was a use and place for UGC (Singer, 2010; MacGregor, 2014). There will be more in this chapter on gatekeeping when the point of journalistic identity is discussed. However, it is worth noting here exactly how digital conversion and technology has changed the role of the audience to news-trader within UK local newspaper production.

The influence of news-traders on news production is perhaps felt most keenly in the way 'clicks', 'likes' and 'shares' compound the popularity of a story and, in turn, suggest to the publisher that such content is successful and engaging with their 'audience' (Anderson, 2011c; Tandoc and Vos, 2016). While Singer (2011) found the influence of news-trader engagement was not a focal point for UK local newspaper journalists in terms of the value they placed on their output or the following news agenda, national and international studies have identified a link between news-trader preferences and internal newsroom decision-making (Anderson, 2011c; Lee et al., 2014; Welbers et al., 2016). In some newsrooms, screens displaying the most popular stories were found to be used as incentive for journalists to modify their methods and take a lead from the best-read subjects (Currah, 2009a). The over-all impact of this is a softening of the news agenda and a turn away from public-interest reporting (Justel-Vázquez et al.,

2016), an outcome which has “sociological and normative implications” (Anderson, 2011c, pp530).

In a US metropolitan newspaper study, the pressure of time was specifically explored, with news-traders’ expectation of constantly fresh content compromising the authority of the journalists and the quality of their work (Usher, 2018). The same study also uncovered a change in news agenda due to fresh, breaking content being a lure for web traffic. Journalists at the four titles voiced doubts about the validity of content being published online but were compelled to publish nonetheless due to the pressures of the constant gaze of online users.

The result of meeting news-trader expectation of fresh content is a perpetual-cycle of producing more to meet higher expectations. In turn, the greater the volume of content the greater the repetition and the greater the impact on the value, depth and research behind the content. The internal newsroom society is forced to respond to ensure the expectation of the news trader is met, which leads to decisions over content which would previously not have been taken (Mackay, 2012; García-Avilés et al., 2014; Usher, 2018). As said by Boczkowski, “technological developments generate editorial effects” (2003c, pp198).

Sheller (2015b) described how social media, smartphones, the internet and its flow of information, had changed the production of “tomorrow’s news today” into “news now”. But as found by Usher (2011; 2018), the never-ending rolling deadline made the working day longer, more complex and more intense, with the increase, extension and flexibility of deadlines leaving journalists feeling more constrained.

UK studies have found these time and resource pressures have also pushed journalists into unquestioningly publishing packaged news provided by sources outside the internal newsroom network, such as PR and agency copy (Lewis et al., 2008; O’Neill and O’Connor, 2008; Currah, 2009b) again, prompting questions about journalistic authority and independence.

This idea of time as a method of discipline – exerting power over people in its grasp – was explored by Foucault (1977, pp151) and fits well with ANT and political economy. He suggested that in many environments the general framework for an activity was dictated by an obligatory rhythm, a “programme” which controlled development and its stages from the outside. Newspaper production fits with this theory; with print and publication deadlines and the rhythm and return of news traders, these moments which take place externally dictate the events of the day inside the newsroom. The increased intensity of

the constant deadline of the internet and the push for news-traders' interaction and engagement emphasises the choking shackles of time imposed upon the journalists trapped within the news production machine.

2.4.2.5 Internal newsroom structures

Digital convergence has changed the structures of the internal newsroom network, with new roles, hubs and management tiers being created in response to the changing news production process and to cover gaps created by job losses (MacGregor, 2014; Whittington, 2018a). There is evidence too of increasing technological power, in terms of aggregation, dissemination and production (Plesner and Raviola, 2016; Wu et al., 2019). Such change has resulted in the disruption of communication channels, often resulting in apathy, frustration and flawed news-production processes.

Paulussen et al. (2011) found miscommunication about roles and responsibilities meant journalists were apathetic about changing their work processes and that even when they could see the value of altering their roles, they were reluctant to make the change. When discussing the complexities of change within the industry Keith and Thornton (2011) called for clarity in hierarchies and structures.

A study by García-Avilés et al. (2014) found newsrooms had shifted their focus to be more digitally motivated. Nikunen (2014) found convergence technology contributed to altered hierarchies in the newsroom – with younger journalists being promoted over long-standing, more senior colleagues. However, neither study found the structure of the internal newsroom had changed significantly – instead it continued as a hierarchical system of managers controlling the workforce despite changes in candidates, methods and techniques.

New technology was regarded with mistrust by journalists (Weiss and Domingo, 2010) and was also found to be stretching the physical parameters of the internal newsroom network, with the panoptic gaze of managers stretching to observance and monitoring of productivity in workers' home life and spare time (Downey, 2003; Robinson, 2011; Foucault, 1977).

In local newspapers in the UK, examples of confusion over structures and responsibilities and resulting apathy were uncovered (Canter, 2013b).

Management talking the language of digital convergence but failing to lead by example, resulting in confusion and frustration of staff, were also observed (Pecke, 2004; O'Neill and O'Connor, 2008; MacGregor, 2014). Confusion over role responsibility and structures was also caused by company and title mergers

and production centralisation (Smith, 2010; Lambourne, 2013; Ponsford, 2013). The implementation of content management systems exacerbated the issue further by changing the defined boundaries of job descriptions (Rodgers, 2015).

In an internal network rocked by external change in the way that newspaper production has been rocked by digital developments, it would not be unrealistic to think that the system, structure and entire nature of that network had also been forced to modify dramatically to keep in line with the external influence. However, research so far has found that while change has happened both internally and externally, the basis of the hierarchical society within the confines of the internal society, and the resulting internal power structure, has changed very little. As found by Akella (2003), even when a panoptic society (Foucault, 1977) like that of a newsroom makes efforts to change its methods and become more open to input from staff and external sources, it can still be identified as a hierarchical surveillance culture. As found in the study:

The primary concern of the management is accumulation of profits and survival and not individual employee's development and welfare. The management practises numerous surveillance techniques to create corporate clones who would readily commit themselves to achieving the goals of the organization. (Akella, 2003, pp54)

Scholars have found rather than embracing total change, newspaper societies and individuals within them instead bend traditional ways of working to fit moulds created by new methods. After thorough assessment of ten news sites from across the globe, including the UK and US, Quandt concluded that there had been "no revolution", but instead news found online was "good old news journalism" being created by people who were "limited by their reporting habits" (2008, pp735). Domingo et al acknowledged a need for further exploration into the 'motivations and context factors' of online publishing after discovering a core journalistic culture had remained largely unchanged, despite the diversity of the publications examined (2008, pp340).

Foucault described the establishment of workflows and structural systems as being:

"A multiplicity of often minor processes, of different origin and scattered location, which overlap, repeat, or imitate one another, distinguishing themselves from one another according to their domain or application, convergence and gradually producing the blueprint of a general method." (Foucault, 1977, pp138).

Over the past two decades, digital influence has gradually crept into society and it has taken that time for newspapers to go from denial and resistance of digital convergence to commitment and investment (Stone, 2006) and for methods and workflows to change accordingly.

2.4.3 Journalistic and product identity

Such change within the process of making news has clearly had impact on the identity of not only journalists within the internal newsroom network, but also on the identity of the product which they produce. The conception of the professional role of the journalist, the normative ideal, is different to the reality of role and production (Hellmueller and Mellado, 2015). Added to that, the normative ideal of the role of a journalist has been challenged and ultimately changed by digital convergence (Grubenmann and Meckel, 2017).

However, research has found journalists' perceptions of their professional identity and role may not stray as far from the former normative ideal as some research suggests (Tandoc et al., 2013).

2.4.3.1 The normative identity

As theorised by Deuze (2005, pp447) there are a general set of core values which most journalists or 'news makers' identify with, those being; providing a public service; objectivity; autonomy; immediacy and ethics.

Since publication, this list of journalistic pillars presented by Deuze (2005) have been repeatedly tested by scholars, who have produced adapted versions based on their findings These are:

- **Public service:** as discussed earlier in this chapter, local newspaper journalism in the UK takes a public service role of holding power to account and adding value to a geographic community (Klies Nielsen, 2015; Howells, 2015).
- **Objectivity:** again, as noted previously, there is a general expectation of local newspaper journalists to take an unbiased role without political or other partisan beliefs influencing their work (Franklin and Parry, 1998).
- **Autonomy:** In local newspapers the value of individual journalistic autonomy is important, as is the concept of the editorial product being an autonomous entity. Editorial autonomy is regarded as resisting influence from external factors such as politics and commercial actors (Engan, 2015) . The concept of autonomy is also widely regarded as a definer in the cultural capital of professional journalistic identities and roles

(Bourdieu, 1993, reprinted from the original of 1986; Vos, 2016; Anderson, 2013a).

- **Immediacy:** the constructs of time, the desire for ceaseless news and the compromises of publishing quickly (Usher, 2018; Sheller, 2015a).
- **Ethics:** As acknowledged by Howells (2015) the ethical guidelines for local newspaper journalists in the UK are almost identical in model to their national counterpart.

It is worth noting these five points are ideological or normative in nature and while they set out a construct of journalistic identity, the reality in comparison to the perception will likely differ. The identity of journalists is an area of definition often alluded to by scholars, but rarely defined thoroughly (Deuze, 2005), and therefore the five pillars are a solid starting point for defining identity in regional newspaper journalists.

When Deuze critiqued his widely-cited 2005 paper he established there were additional facets required in journalism in a digital age, including survival within an ever-changing industry (Deuze, 2019). This requirement of resilience is appropriate; journalism as an industry has seen a tumultuous, incessant, relentless rollercoaster ride of change. Almost two centuries earlier, Marx wrote about what would happen to an industry when new, successful technology was introduced. Following the “horrors of the period of introduction and development” (1973, reprinted from original text c.1844, pp124) Marx suggested there would be an “absolute decrease in the number of operatives employed” (pp124), followed by a growth in the amount of competition being faced by the manufacturer and a long-term increase in the number of jobs as a result of new ventures – either running as suppliers to the production effort or direct competitors. However, those who had lost their jobs were unlikely to find employment in these areas, instead with younger or less skilled workers filling the posts and being paid considerably less while finding themselves working longer and longer hours. Eventually Marx noted there would be a saturation point of need for such products, meaning smaller organisations would find themselves being absorbed into larger groups or dissolving completely.

Marx’s critique of capitalism could have been written about newspapers and the news industry rather than cotton factories at the time of the Industrial Revolution, so well does it fit the processes of what has happened since the introduction of digital innovation in society. The journalists emerging from the rubble of this revolution have been forced to adapt, change and work to suit the new models and processes; and, as change is the new norm, those journalists need the resilience to adapt again and again.

So it is surprising perhaps to find some studies of post-convergence newsrooms identifying journalistic values and identities as having changed very little (Tandoc et al., 2013; Usher, 2018). However, this suggestion starkly contrasts the clear discomfort, mistrust and low morale described in other studies.

One of the core elements defined by Deuze (2005) is autonomy. It is here that this thesis will set out the influence of perceived autonomy and argue this perception is the reasoning behind the reluctance to adapt the journalistic identity and, perhaps, the catalyst behind the devolution of journalistic identity within the newsroom network.

2.4.3.1.1 Perceived autonomy

Autonomy – to work without influence or interference – is one of the five pillars of journalistic identity (Deuze, 2005). But when applying Latour's ANT the idea of autonomy fails because of the intrinsic network linking and, in turn, influencing individual actors, meaning a fully autonomous state is impossible (Singer, 2007; Latour, 2005).

However, while complete autonomy is not possible, the enactment of autonomy offers individuals within networks and networks themselves cultural or social capital and power (Shoemaker and Reese, 2014; Engan, 2015). Therefore, the concept of autonomy plays a major part in a journalist's perception of their own professional identity (Nygren et al., 2015; Singer, 2007) or their habitus (Bourdieu, 2012; Bourdieu, 1993, reprinted from the original of 1986).

Resultingly, for the purposes of this thesis, autonomy will be understood to mean the perception of autonomy.

When applying ANT to a journalist's perceived autonomy, it could also be argued that the actors working within a newsroom for a specific title or product apply a perception of 'group autonomy' to the working environment and output of that environment (Berganza et al., 2016). Or, to phrase it differently, each individual toil contributes to the manufacture or production of a product which is unique, or unlike any other.

This perception of autonomy is a valued element of the journalistic role and it appears linked to several factors within the journalistic profession. These are:

- **Journalism training:** journalistic qualifications giving the practitioner the knowledge, expertise and therefore, the right to practice journalism without interference or influence. For example, journalists have regularly voiced their professional status to elevate their decision-making authority over news-traders and 'citizen journalists' (See Witschge and Nygren, 2009; Bechmann, 2011)

- **Resistance:** reluctance to adapt to new models or hierarchies (Stone, 2006); therefore exercising the right of the journalist to be autonomous and rebel against internal and external network influencers. For example, significantly more value was placed on 'traditional' journalistic skills over digital skills (Carpenter, 2009; Russial and Santana, 2011b; Fahmy, 2008), despite acknowledgement that social media skills, among others, are "no longer optional' for local newspaper journalists" (Dickinson, 2011, pp1).
- **Gatekeeping:** Journalists see themselves in a gatekeeping function and still claim dictatorial autonomy over external newsroom network actors, such as news-traders. For example, research demonstrates a conscious and vocalised reluctance for news-trader choices and traffic not to influence decisions made within the boundaries of the newsroom (Steele, 2008; Canter, 2013a; Singer, 2011).
- **The blind eye:** chagrin acceptance that full autonomy is impossible means journalists have adapted the perception of autonomy to allow the definition to remain, despite influences compromising their output. For example, a survey of journalists in the UK cited factors such as audience feedback and profit-making pressure being cited as increasingly influential on their work (Thurman and Kunert, 2016).

All of this also offers the journalist:

- **Capital:** The journalistic role perception acts as a cultural elevator (Bourdieu, 1993, reprinted from the original of 1986; Vos, 2016). Those with the qualifications and employment of journalism enjoy a certain elevation within their field due to increased social capital. As suggested by Bourdieu, the elevation of the individual within their internal network and more widely in their field is linked to their perceived autonomy and power within their social structures (Engan, 2015; Bourdieu, 1993, reprinted from the original of 1986). This outcome is distinctly linked to gatekeeping, which will be examined in more depth in the next section.

These definers of autonomy within journalism do not sit comfortably together, possibly because of journalists' reluctance to acknowledge the truth of their changing roles.

For example, whilst maintaining autonomy and denying influence from web-user analytics (Singer, 2011), journalists have also admitted web traffic hits are linked to success and job security (Usher, 2011; Daulerio, 2012).

A study by Tandoc et al. (2013) demonstrates how perceptions can differ from outcomes – by revealing how US and non-US journalists who identified themselves and their work to be in line with values as laid out by the researchers, were often found to be not meeting their own identification descriptors within the work they produced.

The mulish refusal to acknowledge the changing role was also noted in a study of a large daily newspaper in Switzerland (Grubenmann and Meckel, 2017) which demonstrated how the changes wrought upon a newsroom divided group identity and, in some cases, removed individual identity reference points for journalists, but the same journalists held onto the traditional values and professional elitist perspectives.

While perceived autonomy offers journalists a pillar of strength, or an identity to cling to in troubled waters, it also creates a vulnerability within the professional identity. The conflict between reluctance to adapt and the need to accept change has pushed journalists' identities into a state of flux.

The impact of this change on job security and job descriptions has left journalists feeling uneasy (Nerone and Barnhurst, 2003), downtrodden (O'Neill and O'Connor, 2008) and “fearful for the future” (Singer, 2010, pp129).

Research has also demonstrated a certain amount of suspicion and mistrust of new innovations on behalf of individual journalists as well as the reluctance of newspaper societies to embrace change. Deuze (2005), who asserted that multimedia technology “challenges perceptions of the roles and functions of journalism as a whole”, found journalists had concerns over the impact of new technologies on editorial autonomy. Orrosen and Krumsvik (2012) and Rodgers (2015) found journalists were concerned about the effect of new innovations and technology on the quality of their work.

The superiority provided by training and journalistic status has been challenged and undermined by unqualified employees taking digital journalism roles, news-traders being handed more power by social media and editors and the rise in rival publishing formats, including hyper-local sites and other digital platforms (Firmstone and Coleman, 2014; Garbett et al., 2014).¹³

¹³ This has been witnessed first-hand by the researcher. In 2014 *Yorkshire Evening Post* found itself being challenged for market dominance by hyper-local sites including *South Leeds Life* and the *West Leeds Dispatch*. Journalists at the YEP both denounced the publication as insubstantial citizen journalism, whilst also lifting or following-up stories it published. The conversations about the publications tended to be dismissive, but the threat to identity as the ‘best’ source of local news in Leeds was clearly a concern.

The increased use of the internet has also seen opportunities wasted due to lack of experience, knowledge and training – again devaluing the professional training and demoting the importance or value of journalists. Lewis and Usher (2013) and Cohen et al. (2011) both explored the opportunities of collaboration between journalists and computer scientists in order to fill the gaps in knowledge that traditional journalism training lacked.

According to Bradley (2014) journalists need to entirely change their skillset, developing coding and data knowledge and at least one regional newspaper group has been seen to be rising to the change challenge by setting up a data department (McAthy, 2013).

Despite reluctance to acknowledge it, journalists have lost their grip on the power and authority once extolled by the job title. The perception of autonomy and the crumbling foundation of this perception has further damaged the once strong perception of the pillar identified by Deuze (2005).

2.4.3.1.2 “Tell the guards to open up the gates”

The idea of journalistic gatekeeping; the choosing, shaping, production and publication of information as news has been a long-established theme within journalism research and has, more recently, been approached by scholars calling into question the validity or adapting the theory for the digital age (See Bruns, 2003; Singer, 2014; Bruns, 2015; Welbers et al., 2016; Welbers and Opgenhaffen, 2018).

Where previously news was a journalistic ‘construction’ (Vasterman, 2005), digital technology has changed the authority a journalist has over each point of the former ‘gatekeeping’ process.

At the start of the news-making process, journalists under the pressure of time, digital demand and limited resource turn increasingly to external sources as providers of pre-packaged information (Lewis et al., 2008). The analytics of online stories successful with news audiences has changed the news agenda and pushed journalists and editors into making news choices they would have previously dismissed (Anderson, 2011a; Vu, 2014; Usher, 2018).

At the other end of the process, where the seminal study by White (1950) saw Mr Gates making the final choices about news dissemination before publication, now journalists act as a conduit for information to be shared with the external newsroom network of news-traders – who then go on to decide what information is worth sharing within their own news-networks (Singer, 2014).

The option for news-traders to dismiss or avoid online content of little personal interest and the resulting role challenge by content curating gatewatchers was identified when start-up news sites started acting as a platform for multiple source stories to be presented in one place (Bruns, 2003). Gatekeeping was challenged further as digital technology developed to allow opportunities such as participatory journalism, blogging, social media and self-publication and collaborative news partnerships (Bruns, 2015).

One of the key concerns raised over the impact of digital convergence of journalistic gatekeeping has been the increased opportunities for 'fake news' and unverified information to be published as fact. Steele (2008) outlined many of the ethical issues being faced by staff, editors and publishing companies because of digital advances. He pointed to 'page-view whoring' and the fact staff had to make fast-paced decisions, with fewer people to fall back on for checking purposes. He nodded to the fact that social media use was balanced on an ethical knife-edge, acknowledging the potential to stray into subjective personal opinion or inappropriate use, tarnishing the title and more in just a couple of easy clicks. He noted the issue over user-comments, returning again to the gatekeeping role faced by journalists and editors and argued that verification of fact should still be as important when sourcing online. He nodded to the ease of plagiarism of words and pictures and concluded by calling for a return to traditional values of "accuracy, fairness and honesty" (Steele, 2008, pp58).

In local newspapers in the UK, research suggests there is an increasing removal of the internal newsroom network boundary gates, with news-trader activity online often being the source of news and providing the commentary within the news before taking the traditional role of recipient of the news (Canter, 2013a).

This two-way flow of information was also reflected in the comprehensive case study of regional Trinity Mirror titles in Wales conducted by Williams and Franklin (2007). In the report they quote Michael Hill, the head of multimedia at Trinity Mirror, as reinforcing the message to journalists about how their roles have changed from having the power of choosing and "designing" the information to be passed on, to being "curators" in a conversation, simply shunting and tailoring information from one source to another. Hill is quoted as saying:

Journalists must leave the ivory tower and cease viewing journalism as a message handed down on a tablet of stone. They must join the

conversation being conducted by bloggers, citizen journalists and readers on the websites and comment posts. (Williams and Franklin, 2007, pp7).

The result of the changes to the gatekeeping role is a closer online proximity between the actors in the internal newsroom network and those in the external newsroom network. The network walls blur as news-traders step across the boundary and become intrinsic actors within the news making process (Anderson, 2011b). Accordingly, the perceived hierarchical norms of the internal newsroom network are changed, with news-traders, not necessarily consciously, taking on a shared gatekeeping role, similar to that identified by Singer (2014), but even further elevated into a primary gatekeeping position. Never before has the news-trader attention, opinion and role been as highly valued by publishing companies (Usher, 2018; Tandoc and Vos, 2016). With news-trader preferences via social and online networks driving the news agenda, the position of the journalist as powerful gatekeeper has shifted. As noted by Russell, “As the qualities for achieving prominence change, so the prominent men change” (1987, pp23). This disintegration of the journalistic gatekeeping role has fundamentally changed not only the identity and position of the journalist, but also the product being produced and the jurisdiction of that product (Vos et al., 2019).

2.4.3.2 Product identity

Prior to digital convergence, the local newspaper in the UK was a “steadfast pillar of the community” (Matthews, 2017, pp3) and “a weekly bible” (Howells, 2015, pp235; Harte et al., 2019, pp69). In print, the masthead would usually be seen not only on newsagent shop fronts and on the shelves, but also on news-bills, delivery vans¹⁴ and, in many households, being pushed through the letterbox by a delivery boy or girl on a daily or weekly basis (Hess, 2013).

Many local newspapers carry an identifying standard under their printed mastheads. For example, the *Yorkshire Post* until recently read “Yorkshire’s national newspaper” before changing its masthead banner to “The most trusted newspaper in Britain” (Sharman, 2019b). The *Oban Times* proclaimed to have been “Serving the west since 1861” and the *Manchester Evening News*

¹⁴ Many local newsgroups in the UK had their own printing press and their own delivery fleet branded up with the masthead of the titles it was delivering. But cost-cutting saw abolition of both as printing and delivery was outsourced to larger printing and logistics companies.

described itself in 2016 as “a friend dropping in”. These claims make a suggestion of the kind of publication a reader might expect to find upon opening its pages. The *Yorkshire Post*’s claims give it a sense of importance and authority – suggesting its content will be of a similar tone. The *Oban Times* sets itself out as a servant of the community and the *Manchester Evening News* places itself in the role of confidante and personal champion.

But, in digital format, the masthead is often lost to a smaller logo which sits more comfortably on mobile phone screens and social media feeds. No longer physical in presence, the product becomes an extension of the network within which it is being used – on a desktop or, more commonly, a mobile phone. Research shows as social media increasingly becomes the source of news for news-traders in the UK, those same news-traders are decreasingly sure of the source of the information they consume (Ofcom, 2019). The physical act of buying or holding a printed product has been changed into content provision which may, or may not, be accessed and viewed by a news-trader (Olmstead et al., 2011).

Therefore, the levity and presence and, ultimately, the identity of the newspaper fundamentally changes in a digital format. No longer can it position itself with a front-page slogan. While newspapers are designed to be read in a linear fashion (front-to-back or back-to-front, depending on the reader’s news and sport priorities), online content is fragmented – elements of it playing parts in myriad individual networks which are personalised to individual news-traders (Karimi et al., 2018; Mukerjee et al., 2018). This fragmentation also changes the identity of the product – based upon the news-trader and their preferences (Mukerjee et al., 2018).

As discussed, studies have repeatedly found newspapers maintaining traditional methods, skills and processes, despite significant differences between print and digital publishing (Domingo, 2008; MacGregor, 2014). In his study of the Northern Echo, MacGregor (2014) found the Newsquest-owned newspaper regularly changed its policies surrounding online publishing. There was also experimentation with the presentation of news, with management seeking new ways of presenting content online in a way which differed to the traditional newspaper segmentation of content. This, along with experimental apps which nosed the company’s online editorial strategy away from news and incorporated sports entertainment, were a cause for concern for actors within the internal newsroom network who were worried about damage to the newspaper’s reputation.

A web-first policy was implemented by Trinity Mirror titles and Johnston Press (Williams and Franklin, 2007), with impacts on work-loads and resources. The same study also found there was a turn-away from management from print to online publishing; the publication strategy at both Trinity Mirror and Johnston Press was focused on web-first and multimedia, but neither policy appeared to address the type of content or mention any change in editorial focus or objective for online. The study also found policies to be experimental and confusing. Some newsrooms were managing print and online production as one, whereas others had two teams who worked separately – with one team producing content for print and online and the other loading it onto the web – without cohesion between the two. This digital and print divide has also been found to be the case elsewhere in later studies (Hermida and Young, 2017).

The next and penultimate section of this chapter will examine the idea of jurisdiction and how online publishing has changed the jurisdiction of local newspapers in the UK. But it is worth noting how in these studies (Williams and Franklin, 2007; MacGregor, 2014), much of the concern about product identity voiced by actors within the internal newsroom network was still referring to that identity from a printed product and a traditional jurisdictional perspective.

A report into changes in news in the UK (Currah, 2009b) found the focus of content was changing, with more focus on commentary, celebrity and a softening news agenda. It also found the impact of online news reader viewing choices was flowing back into the design and identity of the printed product, ultimately changing its identity.

The changing landscape of digital innovation has also thrown up a series of legal and ethical issues which compromise the product and its identity. There has been a cut in employment of photographers at newspapers, despite the recognised importance of photography for successful online and print communication (Harcup and O'Neill, 2017)¹⁵. The legal issues of copyright caused headaches and hefty fines for publishers who misused images online,

¹⁵ As editor of the *Pontefract and Castleford Express* and the *Hemsworth and South Elmsall Express*, a lack of available photographers caused a regular headache. Originally based just miles away in Wakefield and working for three titles in total, photographers were usually available to cover most jobs requested. Then redundancies came and half of the photographers left, the remainder were relocated to Leeds and became part of a wider team managed by the *Yorkshire Post*. Before long, most images in the weekly newspapers and online were taken by reporters using a 'point and press' camera or were, occasionally, submitted by readers. Even the front-page picture was often taken by one of the editorial team. The message was loud and clear from the powerful purse-string holders in Leeds – the weeklies were not worth the time or money it cost to send a photographer out to the sticks and the result was a decline in standards; offering another reason for readers to stop paying for the printed product.

particularly due to free online software which could trace the use of pictures within minutes (Marshall, 2011). But, as shown by Orrosen and Krumsvik (2012), García-Avilés (2014), Weaver (2012) and Fenton (2009), the pressures of a reduced workforce, increased tasks and constant deadlines caused journalists to compromise standards of quality and integrity in a “speed it up and spread it thin” situation (Fenton, 2009, pp7).

And while the internet and digital tools opened up a whole new world of opportunity in terms of production and sourcing information, it also required more management and saw the compromise of resource and quality (Paulussen and Harder, 2014; Niekamp, 2010). The constraint of technology and its abilities caused technological limitations and dictated and controlled what choices were made (Rodgers, 2015).

The change has been aggressive and relentless and has resulted in newspaper societies struggling to retain and build power externally and determine how change should happen internally (García-Avilés et al., 2014; Orrosen and Krumsvik, 2012). The pace of change, over which individual internal newsroom networks have had very little influence, has seen shifting goalposts in terms of societal expectation, technological advancement and knowledge and available capital and resource (See Moscou, 1999; Steele, 2008; Karlis et al., 2012; Hermida and Thurman, 2008; Downey, 2003; Robinson, 2011). And, as discussed, there has been resistance to change, with decision-makers only discovering after the fact whether defiance will sway the balance of power in their favour or deal a fatal blow (Boczkowski, 2003c; Orrosen and Krumsvik, 2012; Keith and Thornton, 2011).

All of this suggests there was an element of ‘sleepwalking’ into a changing product identity influenced by online networks and actors, changing technology and indecision or risk, rather than determined choices being made about the identity of products. The web-first publication policy (MacGregor, 2014; Williams and Franklin, 2007) links the content published online to the printed product; web first, print second. Content experimentation (MacGregor, 2014) and softening news (Currah, 2009b; Harcup and O’Neill, 2017), especially when considered alongside the determination of news agendas by news-trader analytics (Usher, 2018; Vu, 2014) suggests the identity of newspapers online and in print, including regional newspapers in the UK, has subtly shifted to a less defined product than their previous print-only incarnations.

2.4.3.2.1 The blurring boundaries between internal and external newsroom networks

The change in journalistic identity and the step into the internal newsroom network by news-traders has also vastly changed the identity of the product.

Management of online comment threads has been observed to be a pressure on internal newsroom network actors (Hermida and Thurman, 2008) with concerns about reputational risk aired in terms of quality control, accuracy and legality (Singer and Ashman, 2009). Within local newspapers Canter found journalists were unsure of how to respond to online comments (2013b) and that it resulted in actors “moving away from the more traditional approach of presenting a neutral face” with many instead “crossing the line between professional and personal” (2013a, pp492).

Another study by Canter (2013c) demonstrated that while staff journalists viewed citizen journalists as a source, management viewed them as a resource. This view was backed by Alan Revell of Associated Newspapers who told Hermida and Thurman (2008) as part of their study into websites run by national UK newspaper titles:

These businesses are about interactivity and it’s about it being a two-way street and people joining the conversation rather than being lectured to or talked to. (Hermida and Thurman, 2008, pp349)

The change in identity of the journalists within the newsrooms, from gatekeepers to conduits and the hand-over of decision-making power to the news-traders, means there is a new editor, in town – and those thousands of actors in the external newsroom network are changing the identity of both the online product and printed product.

2.4.3.2.2 Publisher influence on product identity

Declining resource, merging newsrooms (Usher, 2015) and implementation of content production hubs have exacerbated the creeping change in product identity in local newspaper production.

Increasing oligopoly of large publishers such as JPI Media (formerly Johnston Press), Reach Plc (formerly Trinity Mirror) and Newsquest has gone hand in hand with newsroom closures and mergers (Williams and Franklin, 2007; Singer, 2010). The one-size-fits-all approach by many of these newsgroups to digital convergence has resulted in “falling standards” in terms of journalism and the individual products (Pecke, 2004, pp2). Group-wide departments set up to

produce content (McAthy, 2013) also nullify the individual identity of news titles (Usher, 2015).

Along with the loss of product identity due to merging workforces (Whittington, 2018c), local newspapers have also had to contend with an increasing staff-turnover (Pilling, 1998) and a rising mistrust in management by those journalists who remain (Canter, 2013b); a situation which challenges commitment and results in a thinning of the product identity due to decreasing staff investment.

Despite this change in identity of the news product, there is still evidence of competition between rival newspapers in print and online (Usher, 2018) which prompts efforts to produce strong news stories (Harte et al., 2019). This suggests while the product and its producers may indeed have had their identities altered by digital technology, there is still a sense of presence and possession of place and purpose by the internal newsroom network. The traditional or original aims of the newspapers must still be perceived within the internal newsroom network – suggesting the legacy of the printed product still remains because of a sense of ‘ownership’ of, or ‘belonging’ to news-traders within a geographical or connected space – the perception of jurisdiction appears to remain despite the blurring of network boundaries and the increasing push of influence from news-trader onto those actors formerly known as gatekeepers.

2.4.4 Newspaper jurisdiction and the geo-social

In light of the influence of digital tools on news values, news production processes, news product and journalistic identities and the increasingly influential role of the news-trader, the jurisdiction of the product and individual journalists must also have changed.

Once easy to define, based upon a geography (Hess, 2013) and often uncontested in terms of direct rivalry (Temple, 2017), the jurisdiction – or reach and influence and authority – of a newspaper has become a more fluid and difficult to determine due to the changing boundaries of the internal newsroom network and the movement of actors within the internal and the external newsroom networks.

When considering the myriad networks interacting with the internal newsroom network, with news-traders forming the external newsroom network via multitudes of digital networks in the online sphere, the phrase “geo-social” as used by Hess (2013) in relation to local newspapers is applied here as a

framework for the jurisdiction of local newspapers and their digital products within the UK.

Hess applies field concept (Bourdieu, 2012; Bourdieu, 1993, reprinted from the original of 1986) to pose that geography – a specific location such as a town or region – and those people who are connected to that geography by residence or in some other way usually provides the editorial focus of a ‘local’ newspaper. She also suggests a “sense of place” is what connects a news-trader to the product. A sense of place does not necessarily mean that news-trader is located physically within the geographic region of focus, but that they are connected by “physicality, psychology or social connections” (Hess, 2013, pp49). The transaction in terms of value at the point of exchange is that the news product provides content which reinforces or connects the news-trader via a sense of place and, by return, the news-trader invests their time and possibly their endorsement of the product. Hess’ theory also suggests that local newspapers build a sense of community within a geo-social network.

Hess goes on to suggest the internal news network’s connection to myriad networks offers the opportunity to grow in importance, spread and impact. She also suggests the international audience cares little about the physical source of the product, instead focusing on the story itself (pp55), suggesting that the news value of ‘proximity’ (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Harcup and O’Neill, 2001; Harcup and O’Neill, 2017) is decreasing in value.

Upon reviewing the literature and themes covered to this point, it is clear there are three major groups of actors playing defining roles within the formation of digital news and, therefore, requiring consideration in terms of jurisdiction. These are, the news product itself, individual journalists within the internal newsroom network and news-traders, who have been found to bridge the gap between the external newsroom network and the internal.

The role of news-traders will be briefly discussed here before jurisdictions of the news product and the journalist are considered.

2.4.4.1 Jurisdiction of news-trader

News-traders have developed their own networks using their own digital tools and technology. This has resulted in the use of social media for endorsement, republishing and self-publishing (Hermida et al., 2012). The online audience may well have geo-social interests (Hess, 2013) which may result in them actively following local newspapers online or engaging with content shared within a network of others with similar geo-social links. Actants share multiple

overlapping networks (Mukerjee et al., 2018), which may also lead to news-traders sharing content for other reasons other than a geo-social link (Harcup and O'Neill, 2017; Daulerio, 2012; Bazilian, 2012).

Social media and search engine algorithms (Bruns, 2015) have created an 'echo-chamber' of content, meaning content not matching news-traders' interests is buried under content deemed to be of more interest, based upon their online habits. This, along with the constraint of time (Foucault, 1977), suggests there is a limit to the regular jurisdiction of the individual news-trader. The individual's network boundaries are limited by the ultimate gatekeepers – the social media and search engine networks – echoing Garnham's picture of capitalist power controlling all networks (Garnham, 2012, reproduced from first publication in 1986).

2.4.4.2 Jurisdiction of product

As discussed, the identity of a local newspaper often has a history of serving a particular geographic location (Glover, 1998; Hess, 2013) being branded by a masthead and often bearing a title which represents the geographic location of which it serves (Hess and Waller, 2014).

The retreat of newspapers from the localities which they cover had had detrimental impact on the actors within the physical geography of the area, partly because of a sense of loss and identity inflicted upon the place and its people (Matthews, 2017) and partly because of the removal of the eyes on the ground and the resulting decline of thorough reporting of area news (Harte et al., 2019; Howells, 2015). The resulting impact is that the authority of the news product from a physically present sense, is weakened and the physical sales of the newspaper decrease.

However, the simplified physicality of a geographic area cannot fully encompass the jurisdiction of a local newspaper, particularly in the digital age (Hess and Waller, 2014; Hess and Waller, 2017).

Some of those newspapers which have retreated have closed, but many have merged workforces with sister titles in centralised newsrooms (Whittington, 2018c). The result of this has been an increase in shared content (BehindLocalNews, 2018b) and a decrease in the amount of content being produced for singular titles – meaning a dilution in unique identity of the product. In chasing the 'audience' news providers are becoming "uniform and banal" (Bourdieu, 2012, pp402). Bernie Corbett, NUJ newspaper organiser, is quoted by Pilling (1998, pp188) as suggesting the increase in newspaper publishing

oligopolies would result in increasing numbers of local newspapers covering wider geographic areas, with many ending up as “A regional paper with local bits”.

Much of the power granted to newspapers by digital tools and technology is a double-edged sword. While new opportunities are presented, the same prospects also cause problems for news providers. For example, the internet opens up channels to a vast potential audience and offers new platforms and ways of engaging people (Newman, 2009), but it also creates the same channels for hundreds of similar news providers – meaning newspapers need to vie for news traders’ attention by creating something unique (Nguyen and Western, 2006; Bradley, 2014). The impact and authority within the wider digital network cannot recapture the once powerful jurisdiction enjoyed in specific, physical localities.

The pressure to continue to build digital viewing figures (Currah, 2009a) and the increased attention paid to news-traders’ online choices has diluted the focused identity of the news product, resulting in blander, softer and less geo-socially focused content production in regional newsrooms (Daulerio, 2012; Bazilian, 2012; Bourdieu, 2012). Not only does this dissolve the jurisdiction of the product from a geo-social perspective, but it also means the competition to have the content engaged with and endorsed by news-traders increases – so while the pool of possible audience members grows, the niche elements (Hermida and Thurman, 2008) that should have made the content popular with a geo-social audience are lost; resulting in less interesting content being promoted (Tandoc and Vos, 2016) to a wider, but less invested network of news-traders.

The jurisdictional reach of the product has been even further diluted by collaborative work (Ruotsalainen, 2018), which, while strengthening the workforce and allowing local newspaper journalists the time to attend council and court meetings (BBC, 2019), has also increased the amount of syndicated copy being used by a number of what were once rival news-producers within an area, again, removing the niche elements (Hermida and Thurman, 2008) and the content’s ‘unique selling point’ (USP).

2.4.4.3 Jurisdiction of journalist

Therefore, it would be easy to assume the journalistic jurisdiction has also decreased. But the online sphere has allowed a space for journalists to build relationships and develop their own ‘branded’ and trusted journalism (Molyneux et al., 2018; Holton and Molyneux, 2017).

Building relationships with sources via social media (Hermida, 2010) has offered the opportunity to take back some authority within their own news networked spaces (Canter, 2013a). It also opens the opportunity for collaboration with news-traders (Canter, 2013c), while ultimately guarding the gates of their own news-making choices and processes.

Within the internal newsroom network the perceived autonomy and gatekeeping role of the journalist has decreased due to the infringement of news-traders (Vu, 2014) and publishing company changes (Williams and Franklin, 2007) upon the news production process. However, the encouragement to build online relationships has allowed journalists the freedom to establish a new jurisdiction with a set of news-trader networks (Molyneux et al., 2018).

2.4.4.4 Jurisdiction of local newspapers

The retention of primary jurisdiction within the news network was identified as a major issue challenging the survival of local news as it was known (Karlis et al., 2012). Following this investigation into the literature, it has become clear the jurisdictional hold of local newspapers has loosened and the priorities of the internal news network and the actors within that network have significantly changed – with a widening and flattening of content across networks (Hess and Waller, 2017) and a push for journalists to regain some control by building personal brands for news-traders within more niche or focused networks.

2.5 Analysing the impact of digital tools on production, identity and jurisdiction at regional newspaper newsrooms within the UK

The research assessed within this literature review paints a picture of research conducted in northern Europe, the USA and Australia within a time frame of the last 15 years, with a particular view on news production processes, journalistic and product identities and jurisdiction. There are clearly emerging patterns and trends in research findings in these areas, but no recent study exists to firmly establish where local newspapers in the UK can be placed within these defined and connected areas.

The local newspaper landscape in the UK is in a “parlous state” (Sweeney, 2019) with increasing oligopoly of the major publishing companies, namely Reach Plc

and Newsquest, while the ailing JPI Media looks likely to be broken up and sold in the coming months.

While funding bids to sustain the future of local news (Nesta, 2019) are being considered following the recommendations of the Cairncross Review (2019a), there has been criticism levied by newspaper bosses about the pace and investment of government response (Tobitt, 2019b). Concurrently to this, Reach Plc recently announced significant expansion of its Live portfolio in the north of England (Mayhew, 2019) and JPI, despite its imminent sale, recently restructured its South Yorkshire and North Midlands divisions to pilot a project focusing news production fully onto digital content (Sharman, 2019a).

Therefore, there is clearly a justified case for academic research to focus on local newspapers newsrooms in the UK and for rigorous scrutiny of not only news production processes in these jeopardised spaces, but also the ongoing impact of digital tools on the identities and jurisdictions of the newspapers and the journalists producing them.

While the changing landscape of local newspapers is moving at such a pace that it is likely significant alteration will have occurred in the time it takes from this thesis being printed to it being defended at viva, the context of that change is documented here.

At times, this review of literature has been able to piece some parts of the specific jigsaw into place. There has been research into news agenda and sources (O'Neill and O'Connor, 2008), social media and gatekeeping (Singer, 2010; Canter, 2013c; Canter, 2013a; Canter, 2013b; Canter, 2015), studies into the early impact of digital convergence upon regional newspapers and journalists (Williams and Franklin, 2007; MacGregor, 2014; Howells, 2015). This researcher is grateful for these contributions and the impact they have had.

The remainder of the picture has been pieced together with research into national titles or regional news production in other countries. This has been applied with caution to the local newspaper landscape, where there is a constitutional context of UK-founded geo-social (Hess, 2013) norms and traditions underpinning the production and identity of local newspapers (Klies Nielsen, 2015).

The application of political economy (Specifically, Marx, 1973, reprinted from original text c.1844; Garnham, 2012, reproduced from first publication in 1986; Garnham, 2000; Smythe, 2009, reprinted from the original text of 1989), field theory (Bourdieu, 1993, reprinted from the original of 1986) and Actor-network Theory (Specifically, Latour, 2005; Latour and Woolgar, 1986, reprinted from

1979) has helped to frame some of the findings and assisted with drawing down some of the research to a local newspaper level.

This chapter has identified relevance on an international scale of research into newspaper newsrooms and the production processes, identities and jurisdictions of the actors and their product. It has also identified a gap in the knowledge surrounding these areas when applied to local newspapers in the UK. Framed by the backdrop of Grenfell and the Cairncross Review, there is clearly justification in investigating exactly how local newspaper journalism in the UK has retreated from geographic localities, resulting in democratic disengagement (Mediatique, 2018).

Some of the research cited here suggests the root of the decline in local newspaper journalism is connected to digital convergence, when competition online threw previously geo-socially dominant titles into jeopardy, causing falling profits, which was exacerbated by a slow response to changing production processes (Lewis et al., 2008; MacGregor, 2014). With local newspapers continuing to be a major employer for journalism graduates in the UK (NCTJ, 2015) despite the ceaseless change, questions around employability emerge. Therefore, as noted, this thesis aims to answer the following question:

1. What skills and tools are valued within regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK? How are those skills and tools valued? Is it through use or perceived value?

This researcher proposes the thesis that traditional journalistic skills and tools within newsrooms are becoming generally devalued in light of the increasing need for digital skills, adaptability and accountability to news-traders in the external newsroom network and publishing company pressure. Traditional skills may still be valued in part, but those that are valued will be applied to digital production and not considered as valuable in a traditional print context. These traditional skills may be valued for journalistic role identifying reasons rather than practical application purposes.

News production within the internal newsroom network have also remained undefined and with wider evidence suggesting news-trader agenda setting (Usher, 2018) and increasingly hybridised product intentions (Mellado et al., 2017; Tandoc and Vos, 2016), investigations into digital impacts on news production and news agendas are required. This thesis therefore aims to answer the following questions:

2. How do digital tools impact on news production?

- a. How do digital tools impact on news production processes?**
- b. How do digital tools impact news agendas?**

This researcher proposes, in light of research discussed, digital tools will have significant impact on news production from news sourcing, development, packaging and distribution. Research suggests digital tools have changed not only the sourcing and development of a story, but also the identification of a news story. The involvement of publishing companies and news-traders with the news-making process has redefined the role of the journalist as gatekeeper into a conduit of information. Technological actors may well contribute either opportunities or create barriers to news production, as will journalists who are applying their perceived autonomy to embrace or resist processes. This thesis also suggests news-traders will be significant decision-makers in terms of news agendas and will dictate content online and in print.

Journalistic role identities and product identities have been evidenced as being impacted by digital convergence. Again, there is no recently published research into this area in local newspaper journalism in the UK. Therefore, the following questions are posed:

3. How do digital tools impact on:

- a. The identity of the journalist?**
- b. The identity of the news product?**

This thesis proposes journalistic identity within UK regional newspaper newsrooms will have been fundamentally reconstructed by digital tools. The changing ambition and, resultingly the identity of the product will have influenced the dispositions of the internal newsroom network and resultingly the habitus of individual journalists will have altered.

This leads to the impact of these suggested changes on the geo-social impact of the product and those actors producing it, resulting in the final research questions:

4. How do digital tools impact on:

- a. The jurisdiction of the individual journalist?**
- b. The jurisdiction of the news product?**

The research discussed suggests a dilution of geo-social content focus and a rise in soft and breaking news will push content further through news-trader

networks. However, the geo-social relevance of that content will be diluted to engage a wider, less geographically connected audience.

Therefore, this thesis anticipates potential increasing impact and jurisdictional reach of the individual actor, but a decline in the same outcomes for the overall product of the newsroom network.

The following chapter will outline what methods have been applied to approach these research questions for this research project.

Chapter 3

Research methods: a triangulated design

As demonstrated, journalism is an industry moved by constant change. Therefore, in order to thoroughly interrogate the research questions a triangulated research plan was designed.

The project title and research questions demand an analysis of the impact of digital tools on news production, identity and jurisdiction at regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK – and resultingly it would be difficult to produce meaningful results from a research plan which took only a brief snapshot of time or a single viewpoint. Similarly, it was deemed meaningless to produce a research plan which gathered wide-ranging facts without the opportunity of deeper interrogation of the outcomes.

Therefore, this project was designed via a triangulation of three separate research elements. The first section was a longitudinal study of job advertisements which used thematic content analysis to observe skills and tools demands and mapped changes in the industry. The second was a case-study model which involved observation and interviews at two working daily newspapers owned by different publishing companies. The third was a survey of working journalists at regional newspapers across the UK.

This chapter examines the research design and positionality of the researcher before taking each element of the triangulated study and examining the design, ethics and execution of each one.

3.1 Structuring the research

This section will explore the design of the research for this project and the researcher's positionality at the start of the study. While the research was conducted in three stages, this section begins with the second research stage as this was identified at the start of the project as being an element which had the potential to produce the richest research findings.

3.1.1 The importance and challenges of a newsroom study

From the start of this project, access to working newsrooms seemed the optimal method of gathering rich data from the coalface of production. It is this method which has been applied by numerous researchers included in the previous chapter and which demonstrably resulted in valuable research findings which

have significantly contributed to knowledge in this field (For example, Williams and Franklin, 2007; Anderson, 2011b; Robinson, 2011; Usher, 2011; Canter, 2013b; Canter, 2013c; MacGregor, 2014; Anderson, 2016). These research studies provided a starting point for the template of this research plan. While newsroom access can be a rare privilege for many researchers (Cottle, 2007), it is acknowledged that securing such access allows the researcher to witness and interrogate news production as it happens (Willig, 2013). Without this access it would be difficult to authoritatively document the specific impact of digital tools on news production processes within a newspaper newsroom (Cottle, 2007).

The specific details of the type of newsroom interviews and observations conducted will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter. However, at this point it needs to be acknowledged that additional research methods alongside the newsroom case studies were required in order to strengthen the robustness of the results. This is because while observation and interviews would allow the researcher access to the primary source, there are limitations of such methods, such as reliability of the participating newsrooms and journalists, both in terms of responding to the project and the potential of external influence on their participatory responses (Cottle, 2007; Berkowitz, 1989).

There was also the 'moment in time' issue, which meant a one-off observation and interview arrangement over a limited time frame would not offer the depth of a longer-form study. One option to counter this problem would have been to set up such observations and interviews on a regular returning basis in the style of Anderson (2013a) and Usher (2011). This would have allowed for observation of practices and processes and it would also document the change happening in that newsroom over time. It would note the pace of change and interrogate the way new processes and structures had been introduced and implemented.

However, this option alone posed significant risk. As previously acknowledged, access to newsrooms for researchers is limited (Cottle, 2007) and securing an opportunity to observe and interview working journalists within the workplace is rare. Added to this is the possibility of change in management or company policy which could mean access to even initially accepting newsrooms could be denied later in the study. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, changes within news organisations occurred regularly (For example, MacGregor, 2014; Whittington, 2018a). And the risk of looking at one or two newsrooms without providing a wider view through other research methods would mean the study was only a reflection of those singular newspaper titles and would fail to answer the wider question of 'regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK'.

A newsroom study made sense in being able to observe the start of the journalistic news production process within the internal newsroom network and the role perceptions of journalists at work. However, making it the sole research method would have limited the context and therefore meaningfulness of the findings.

3.1.2 The researcher's position

The researcher's position as journalist-turned-researcher within this project has already been discussed in this thesis. This subject is returned to now due to the requirement of acknowledging how self-reflexivity was a significant consideration in the triangulated research design.

The researcher, a former regional newspaper journalist of ten years, would inevitably bring some pre-conceptions to the newsroom study (Paterson and Zoellner, 2010). Berkowitz (1989, pp4), suggests "all research is influenced by the values of the researcher", and while this could be regarded as an assistance in identifying key areas of potential focus (Callan and Reed, 2011), it could also be accused of creating preconceived ideas. As a result, it was felt creating a research framework based on a quantitative study design assessing the language of job advertisements for positions in news journalism at regional newspapers (Section 1) would directly inform the design of the qualitative section. In turn, this methodology would assist in not only strengthening elements of the newsroom study (Section 2), but also allow a more robust defence of the researcher's decision-making processes when conducting the qualitative research.

3.1.3 Testing the outcomes

The final element, a survey of working journalists employed within regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK (Section 3), was conceived in order to triangulate and test the findings of the first two elements. While mainly quantitative in design, there was space within the survey for some qualitative response in order to offer a deeper understanding of some areas.

Therefore the overall approach was one of explanatory sequential design (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Cresswell, 2014), conducting analysis of job advertisements, the results of which helped to shape the focus of the newsroom research, which in turn shaped the survey design (Creswell, 2014). This triangulation meant the researcher's position could offer "in-depth

understanding of the culture” (Callan and Reed, 2011, pp37) of the newsroom but with a reflexive understanding of positional interpretation of the research practice and its outcomes. It also reinforced the rigour of the research while allowing for probing interrogation into research outcomes (Singer, 2009). See Figure 2. (Pg.74) for a graphic of the overall research design.

3.1.4 Triangulated methodology – how it works

Studying journalists within the physical newsroom, observing their activities and documenting their actions, conducting semi-structured interviews and applying their reasoning to the documented observations can offer rich fieldwork findings (Berger, 2016). These qualitative methods of investigation are often complimented by supplementary techniques which offer a wider and more contextualised perspective, such as research questionnaires and content analysis of “the products created by the people being studied” (Singer, 2009, pp191). While these quantitative methods can be applied in direct conjunction with the ongoing qualitative study, in this case these methods were applied to give a wider and deeper context to the findings from the qualitative elements of the newsroom point of the study.

The varied facets of this study; with the need to address a UK-wide research question both comprehensively and with enough depth to justify drawing conclusions, demanded a triangulated approach to offer a more “thorough understanding” than applying solely qualitative or quantitative methods (Creswell, 2014, pp4).

The methods employed within this research design have been informed by academic research which has gone before. As demonstrated, content analysis of job advertisements can tell us much about not only skills and tools requirements within the field of journalism (Cleary and Cochie, 2011; Russial and Santana, 2011a; Young and Carson, 2018), but also the dispositions and perceptions of role and organisational positioning (Jenkins, 2002; De Cooman and Pepermans, 2012).

As discussed, newsroom fieldwork research has provided rich empirical data and has shown itself to be a successful method of assessing regional newspaper journalism and production within the UK (MacGregor, 2014; Canter, 2013c).

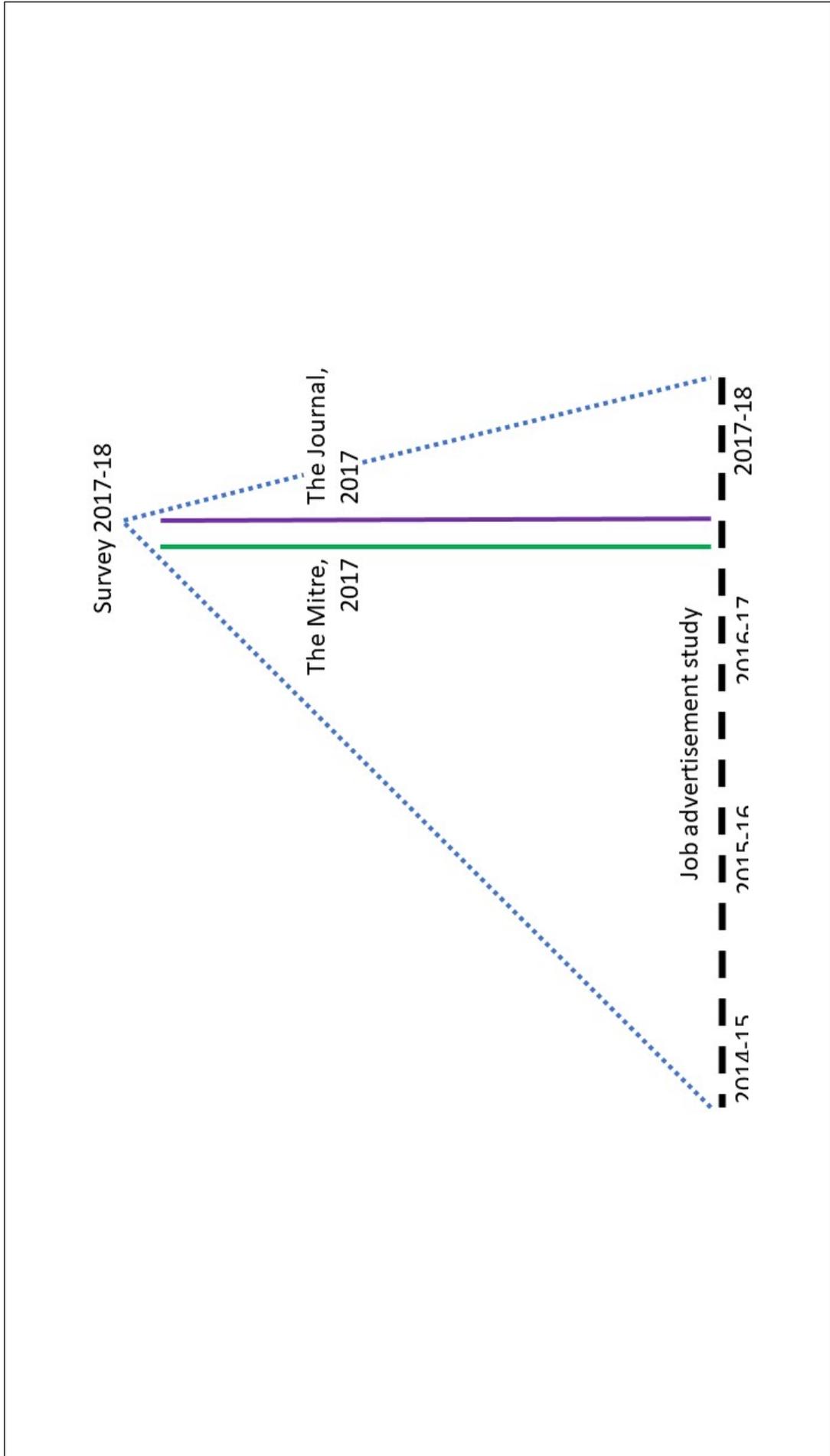


Figure 2. The triangulated research design.

Surveys of journalists working in local newspapers in the UK have also been conducted previously to analyse role perceptions, skills requirements and links between the internal newsroom network and actors operating in the external newsroom network (Singer, 2011; Singer, 2010).

The explanatory sequential design of the study (Cresswell, 2014) therefore should be placed within the context of the wider research field, allowing it to be comparable to research published prior to this thesis and creating a robust structure within which to frame the outcomes of this research.

Therefore, this mixed methods study has been designed to analyse the impact of digital tools on news production, identity and jurisdiction at regional newspaper newsrooms within the UK from a perspective over time, a case-study perspective allowing for the identities of individual people and places to be accounted for alongside the mechanisms of producing news and a rounding-up of findings offering both an analytical and descriptive response.

3.1.5 Research ethics

The ethical considerations of this research were particularly pertinent when considering the newsroom study and the survey elements. Singer's paper *Ethnography* (2009) underlines the importance of differentiation between journalistic research ethics and academic research ethics. The human participants in both sections of this research plan were considered from an academic and a former newspaper journalist perspective. Therefore, there was thorough application of Leeds Trinity University's ethical considerations, such as informed participatory consent and there was a prior understanding by the researcher that granting anonymity would mean many more people would feel able to safely participate in the research. This was based on the changeability of the journalism industry in the UK making employees feel vulnerable in their jobs¹⁶ (Borchardt et al., 2019). The ethical considerations for the different points will be highlighted during the discussion of the study sections. The approved academic ethics application can be read in full as **Appendix 1** and the letter of approval as **Appendix 1.1**¹⁷.

¹⁶ This participatory vulnerability was felt by the researcher when academic research was shared on email by employers at Johnston Press, most likely the very research being conducted by Singer for her investigation into the company's journalists' professional role identities and values. The resulting paper, *Quality Control*, was published in 2010.

¹⁷ All appendices can be found in the separate appendices document.

3.2 Section 1: Recruitment advertisement longitudinal study

A job advertisement is not only a method of seeking the best possible candidate for a specific role within an organisation (Askehave, 2010; Backhaus, 2004). It is also a projection of the ideals of the employer and the workplace (Rynes and Barber, 1990). The role description will promote the ideals and aims of the workplace, it will highlight the positive aspects of the position and will seek a candidate who can bring the best skills, experience and capabilities to the job (Askehave, 2010). As a result, a job advertisement is an excellent way of measuring not only what skills and tools are desired within a workplace (Di Gregorio et al., 2019) but it will also demonstrate how an organisation desires to be perceived by outside observers and also indicates the direction in which the company is aiming to develop in the future (Rai and Kothari, 2008). Therefore, while a job advertisement may not be the most genuine representation of a workplace, it is a clear demonstration of the workplace's aims, objectives and future ambitions as well as reflecting some of the truth of the current state.

Job advertisements are also a way of examining a company or organisation externally and without any influence upon the subject by the researcher. And while the number of regional newspaper journalism jobs has significantly reduced over the past decade (Curran, 2010; Mediatique, 2018), it was anticipated – based on prior assessment of the regularity of varying job advertisements being posted – that there would be enough competition in the market for positions to be advertised by a series of local newspaper employers for positions at varying levels within regional newspaper newsrooms.

This method offers a broad view of the UK local newspaper industry and therefore a study of job advertisements was identified as a strong foundation around which to design the remainder of the research project. The method of collecting job advertisements and analysing their content has been done previously by journalism academics (For example, Young and Carson, 2018; Du, 2011; Cleary and Cochie, 2011; Massey, 2010), but this method does not appear to have been applied to local newspapers in the UK in recent years.

As demonstrated by other studies, the method of content analysis of job advertisements had the potential to provide a nationwide view which allowed for comparison over time and between job roles, publishing companies and newsgroups.

Collection of job advertisements was developed to act as the ‘spine’ of this research project, with collection taking place at points over the four years of data collection for this study.

3.2.1 Identifying the source

In 2015, when this study began, there were a handful of websites dedicated to the news of the news in the UK. These included the media section of *Guardian* online, *Journalism.co.uk* and *Press Gazette*. However, none of these sites except Hold the Front Page¹⁸ (HTFP) were solely dedicated to local newspapers and, as a result, this was where the focus of the first study lay.

HTFP is a site which was established in 2000 in order to act as a news source documenting the achievements and changes within the regional press industry and also to offer an advertising platform for jobs at local newspapers (Linford, 2018). Since its establishment HTFP had grown and developed into one of the ‘go-to’ sites for job-hunting journalists¹⁹ and, with its heavy focus on regional newspapers (Oxford, 2019) it was the ideal source of local newspaper job advertisements for the first study.

It is true, focus could have been spread across a wider range of sources. *Press Gazette*²⁰ was also well-established and acted as a jobs platform for local press at the time of this research starting. However, because *Press Gazette* had a wider agenda than just regional newspapers, the jobs it advertised were more diverse and included more national posts with more advertisements for PR, magazine work, agencies and national newspapers. As a result, focusing on this site would not necessarily prove its worth as many of the regional press advertisements on the site were duplicates of those placed on HTFP. Few regional newspaper journalist jobs were advertised on *Press Gazette* alone.

Of course, there would be the risk that HTFP would cease to exist over the course of the research period or would change its focus to move away from solely regional newspapers. But the unique model had been so firmly established over such a long period of time, with evidence of usually two or more job adverts being placed on a daily basis that this risk was judged to be

¹⁸ www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk

¹⁹ This was the site used by the researcher to apply for and to post job advertisements during her years in local newspaper journalism. There were no other sites solely dedicated to local news and at the time of leaving journalism the major publishing companies did not advertise on their own websites.

²⁰ <https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/subject/journalism-jobs/>

minimal. It was therefore decided if the site did close it would likely be due to a significant change in the industry, which in itself would be relevant to the study.

3.2.2 Content analysis

Further details of specific coding and execution of the research conducted for this section of the project will be documented in Chapter 4. At this point, the applied method of content analysis will be critiqued.

There is evidence of journalism researchers scrutinising job advertisements using content analysis to assess the field for a variety of inquiry points, including required journalistic skills and digital abilities (Cleary and Cochie, 2011; Massey, 2010; Carpenter, 2009).

These studies identified content analysis of advertisements collected either over a single period in order to assess skills requirements for that point in time (Carpenter, 2009) or in specific time periods over multiple years to analyse change in skills over time (Massey, 2010; Cleary and Cochie, 2011).

Content analysis is generally described as quantitative, in that it counts occurrences with a data set. It cannot explain the impacts or outcomes of the data it counts, but, as acknowledged by Berger (2016), there is scope for projection within an understood context of the field of what the impact of the results might be. This method of analysing messages created by a field has been established as a way of creating a starting point for a wider project which later includes empirical research methods (Riffe et al., 2014).

By designing the job advertisement collection to run over a series of years, there was clear potential for a comparative study, evaluating change over time (Berger, 2016).

The difficulties with coding for content analysis are well laid out by Berger (2016) who points out the potential subjectivity of establishing a framework which can be applied by other researchers in the future. The codes defined by the researcher for this project were established based upon commonly understood language used within the newsroom at the point of leaving journalism and starting the research project in 2014. It was checked as viable against sample advertisements from HTFP which were placed before collection started. See **Appendix 2** for the coding manual.

In order to check the application of the keyword coding was accurate Excel was used to code the advertisements collected and an intercoder reliability check (Neuendorf, 2002) was performed by Dr Richard Thomas of Swansea

University in 2018 (see **Appendix 3.**). Dr Thomas produced an agreement score of 97.1% following application of reasonable tolerance of +/-1.

Analysis was conducted by assessing the number of keywords appearing in the advertisements, to determine skills and tools requirements in the style applied by Cleary and Cochie (2011). The newspaper, publishing company, type of role in terms of hierarchy and placement within the internal newsroom network and whether the position was for single or multiple publications was also coded and analysed.

The coding and the results from this section of the research will be outlined in more detail in the next chapter.

3.3 Section 2: Observation and semi-structured interviews within regional newsrooms

At the time of designing the research plan, there were four major news publishers producing local newspapers in the UK, these being Newsquest, Johnston Press, Trinity Mirror and Local World. This marketplace was also populated by smaller publishing companies, which managed a small number of titles, usually within discrete regions of the country, and some one-off, independent publishers.

Because of this, it was decided a newsroom case study (Singer, 2009; Cresswell, 2014; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) should be conducted at more than one newspaper to allow comparison between newsrooms owned by different publishing companies and run by different editors, modelling the methods of other academics studying newsroom convergence and production (Boczkowski, 2003a; Nikunen, 2014; Singer, 2004).

A two-newsroom model was designed, which would allow research to take place at two differing publishing companies. It was planned that research would take place in each newsroom for three consecutive weeks in order to have time to “gain acceptance from the research subjects and understanding of them and the situation” (Singer, 2009, pp193). This time would allow for similarities and patterns to be drawn out and allow for individual quirks and differences to be noted but not taken as habit across the wider field of local newspaper within the UK (Singer, 2009).

Placements were sought by making direct contact with editors within the field. No case-study placements were sought within a former work place due to the

possibility of personal connections with actors potentially influencing the way research was conducted and participatory response. The research was designed this way in order to protect the research and its findings from problems caused by researcher assumption and organisational transparency, as identified by Paterson and Zoellner (2010). This approach allowed for the researcher to bring a useful general prior understanding of news production within local newspaper newsrooms (Bolton and Delderfield, 2014), but without the intimacy of previously held friendships and working relationships potentially resulting in assumed practice.

There was a slight risk of the project involving people already known to the researcher due to the small size of the industry, but by seeking observation and interview time at alternative newspapers, the risk was significantly reduced.

3.3.1 Securing research placements

As noted by Cottle (2007, pp5) observation within a newsroom setting requires careful planning in terms of research plan, securing access, assessing risk and negotiating field relationships. In addition, ethical permissions were required prior to newsroom access and research collection both in terms of observation and interviewing participants. In the case of this study, ethical permissions were granted well in advance of fieldwork commencing (**Appendix 1 and 1.1.**).

The researcher arranged fieldwork to take place in May 2017 at *The Journal* – a daily newspaper title. Arranging another placement proved more difficult, but eventually research was agreed to commence in February 2017 at *The Mitre*, another daily newspaper title owned by a different publishing company. These titles are pseudonyms due to the ethical agreements of this study meaning guaranteed anonymity of the newspapers and their different publishing companies.

Further details about the newspaper titles and the actors within them will be given in Chapter 5.

3.3.2 How research was conducted at *The Mitre* and *The Journal*

Due to the explanatory sequential design of this research project (Cresswell, 2014), the first days at both sites were utilised for introduction and observation only. This allowed for any required development of the semi-structured interview plan based on new information, terminology and the internal newsroom network structures (see **Appendix 4**). The interview plan was mainly based on the

project research questions and the initial findings from the job advertisement collection. The initial days at both sites were also utilised to introduce the research project to recruit individual human actors (see **Appendix 5** for the participant information pack and consent form).

Complete observation (Cresswell, 2014) was conducted at both sites, with no participation. As recommended (Berger, 2016), notes were taken throughout the observation period²¹. These included focus on news and content production and discussions surrounding news development and skills and tools. Impacts of digital tools on relationships between actors within the internal newsroom network and with news-traders were also noted. The notes were typed up into a templated diary log, which also prompted the researcher to immediately analyse the entries for personal reflections, Actor-network Theory (including, how is this fitting together? Where are the acceleration/power points?), news-trader influence, power and structure (who is calling the shots? How are decisions made? What is the catalyst and what is the response of other actors?) and processes. Screengrabs of stories, photographs and emails were also documented in the diary. See **Appendix 6** for an example of a blank diary page and **Appendix 7** for an anonymised example of an observation entry.

In both newsrooms the researcher attended daily news meetings attended by the editor and news team leaders, during these meetings notes were made of proceedings, dialogue and decisions as well as the way meetings were structured and who appeared to be making the decisions and holding the power in the room.

Efforts were also made to sit in various places in the newsroom in order to observe different processes on different days. Most observations were noted without interference, but at times there might be an observation which required following up – usually in the instance of referring to a piece of technology or process which was unfamiliar to the researcher and which required further explanation. This follow-up was usually conducted following conclusion of the event observed or, occasionally, during interview.

During observations the researcher documented the internal newsroom network structures in terms of human actors and hierarchies. The physical layout of each newsroom was also documented, with notes made about actant positioning within the physical space. Production of news was also mapped, with the researcher following a news story from its first appearance in the

²¹ The method of notetaking for this project was shorthand on an A4 pad. This method allowed notes to be made inconspicuously, particularly within the daily news conference meeting and during observation of conflict or tension between actors within the internal newsroom network.

internal newsroom network through to its publication. This included documentation of the human and technological actors involved in the process at the entry points of their involvement and traced the outcomes of those actors' participation in the news production process (Domingo and Wiard, 2016; Anderson, 2016; Anderson, 2011b).

The semi-structured interviews were recorded on Dictaphones. They were conducted in separate rooms or more private spaces in the building and took place within working hours. The questions were the same for both newsrooms, albeit with minor adjustments to fit the technology and situation of the specific newsroom. Possible outcomes stemming from the main questions were identified prior to the question design. However, if the conversation followed an interesting and relevant thread elsewhere the researcher allowed for this to happen while making sure the topic did not stray too far. Separate consent forms were distributed to interview participants and it was made clear identities would be protected during analysis. Interviews were designed to last between 20 minutes and an hour. The majority of participants involved in the observations were also interviewed for the research. This meant there was representative response from ratios of actors to those represented within the hierarchical structures of the newsroom and involved in the news production process.

In both cases interviews were spread across the three weeks of research in order to limit interviews to no more than two per day. This was done to minimise disruption to the newsroom and to allow for time observing the newsroom on the same days as the interviews being held.

3.3.3 Adapting to change

Adjustments and changes were made to the research plan dependent on findings made during the newsroom studies (Berkowitz, 1989). In an environment as fluid as a newsroom, where staffing changes were ongoing, journalists from sister titles and the publishing company would 'hot-desk' at the study sites for a day here and there and the tasks were shaped by events and actors based externally to the point of observation, it was essential to change and adapt points of interest and documentation. As the interviews were semi-structured, so were the observation of events and actors at both sites – with an overarching plan, which was determined prior to the start of the newsroom studies, providing the structure, but with flexibility for deviation in response to unfolding events. More detail about choices determined by change and participatory responses will be given in the Chapters 5 and 6.

3.3.4 Analysis of the newsroom studies

The analysis of the newsroom research data was conducted in a two-stage thematic review process. Initially data from the two case-studies data was analysed separately, with manual coding of the observation diaries and analysis of the visual data. This resulted in the production of emerging themes from the individual sites. These themes were then compared and any strong themes observed across both were investigated further. There was also an element of analysis of any distinctly contradictory findings. However, these were far fewer. The interviews were then manually coded for each newsroom, with the shared themes identified being investigated within the interview transcriptions of each interviewee. This explanatory sequential approach (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Cresswell, 2014) ensured the interrogation of the research findings was analytical and rigorous rather than simply journalistic (Singer, 2009).

3.4 Section 3: Survey of journalists working for regional newspapers and affiliated digital platforms within the UK.

The final point of this triangulated research project was designed with the intention of checking if the findings from the job advertisement collection and the newsroom observations and interviews were representative of the structures and processes within internal newsroom networks across the UK. The aim of the survey was to test the outcomes to see how they compared to internal newsroom networks owned by varying publishing companies. Analysis of participatory response by actors at various hierarchical levels was also of importance. Therefore, the questionnaire design was informed specifically by initial analysis of job advertisement collection and the newsroom case studies.

3.4.1 The survey design

The survey was developed as an online descriptive questionnaire aimed solely at journalists working for local newspapers in the UK (Berger, 2016). Descriptive design (asking participants to describe their internal newsroom networks) was chosen over analytical design (asking people to state why processes and identities within their internal newsroom networks were the way they were). This was because of the likelihood of participants responding with a less fact-based and more subjective interpretation to the latter (Berger, 2016), which would make robust analysis difficult. However, while the design included mainly close-

ended survey questions, there were some open-ended follow-up questions which offered opportunity for analytical explanation of a descriptive response.

The survey was hosted by Bristol Online Survey²², this site was chosen due to its compliance with ethical research standards and data security.

A pilot questionnaire was designed and tested by two former local newspaper journalists and a broadcast journalist. Adaptions were made based on their feedback and a second pilot questionnaire was tested by 11 former journalists. This process helped to finalise the questionnaire design to both satisfy the required outcomes and to ensure the questionnaire was easy to use.

Interpretation of questions was also scrutinised to ensure there was minimal variance. Questions mainly comprised multiple choice, Likert scale questions and some qualitative response questions.

The ethical approval for this element of the research meant participant responses would be anonymised for analysis. This was made clear to participants at the start, part-way through the questionnaire and upon completion. See **Appendix 8** for the survey design and anonymised responses.

Response to all questions was mandatory except for those that requested the specific employment details of the participant, such as job title and the name of their place of work; it was decided at the point of design that these personal specifics might deter participants from completing the survey if they were concerned about identification.

Participants were given the opportunity to be informed about research outcomes and to participate in further research relating to the project if required.

3.4.2 Recruitment methods

As the survey was intended only to be completed by working journalists at regional newspapers in the UK, distribution had to be closely controlled. As a result, a database of working journalists' email addresses was compiled using newspaper websites and Twitter as the starting point. A selection of weekly and daily newspapers were included in the collection – they were chosen from a database of newspapers listed by Hold the Front Page (HTFP). The recruitment list included newspapers from across England, Scotland and Wales.

Recruitment started on November 1, 2017 and closed on March 31, 2018.

This method meant only current regional newspaper journalists would be targeted and therefore the risk of former journalists, or those who had moved

²² Now known as Online Surveys. Available at <https://www.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/>

into other areas of industry, completing the survey was lowered. Of course, the limitation with this recruitment method was that any journalist not published online or using Twitter would not be recruited. However, the number of such journalists working outside of the sphere of the internet was low enough to dismiss it from being a major issue.

The survey was sent out in three phases. The first phase involved sending a targeted email to individual participants using their first names to address them at the start of the message. The aim of this email was to directly engage the reader by using their name before asking for participation.

A follow-up email was sent a couple of weeks after the first which was sent out as a group email, reminding participants generally that they were invited to complete the survey.

The third and final email was again sent to a group rather than individually targeted and it included details of a report about the survey which had been featured on HTFP and asked people if they had seen the story and if they might be able to help. It was hoped endorsement of the study by HTFP might encourage any journalists who had intended on responding previously but had not done so, to fill out the survey.

There were around 500 working journalists targeted by the emails and the aim was to get more than 60 responses. While 60 would not be enough for statistical interpretation, it would be a significant enough response to use as a foil to reflect the results of the job advertisement study and the newsroom research. In her 2010 paper documenting findings from a survey of journalists in the UK Singer acknowledges the difficulties and limitations of a similar study. In that situation the choice was made to send the survey out to journalists via editorial managers within Johnston Press, but the drawbacks to this method were the fact responses were only limited to JP journalists and that completion rates and representative samples would be difficult to control (Singer, 2010). Singer's paper demonstrates some of the difficulties of conducting survey research in this field and, as a result, her analysis of responses was conducted as numerical interpretation, rather than a statistical.

More details will be given about the survey distribution and response rate in Chapter 7. Analysis of the responses was, due to low participant rate (61 responses), non-statistical and interpretive. The responses allowed a perspective of industry on a wider scale and reflected some of the findings from the newsroom fieldwork and the job advertisement collection. The analysis, including its reflection of the prior elements of the study and the limitations and defences of this method will also be explored in more detail in Chapter 7.

Chapter 4

Research section 1: an analysis of journalism recruitment advertisements for positions within regional newspaper newsrooms

4.1 Candidate profile

The collection of job advertisements for this research project started in November 2014 with positions placed on www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk (HTFP). As discussed in the previous chapter, the website was the best-known source of job advertisements for positions within regional newspapers in the UK at that point in time²³. The collection of job advertisements followed other studies (Young and Carson, 2018; Cleary and Cochie, 2011) in terms of defining what tools and skills were required within current newsrooms. The collection included intended to investigate the landscape of how the newspaper industry was working and its projected values (De Cooman and Pepermans, 2012). Therefore, documentation of the advertising newspaper title or titles, the publishing company, the job category listed on the website were collected alongside the job descriptions.

This collection of advertisements started on November 1 and ran to January 31 each year for four years. It focused on news-only positions – so avoided collection of sport-only or features-only posts and also discounted any roles for national titles, PR positions or magazines. However, it became clear as collection continued that some positions were hybrid roles, combining news and sport for example, and as a result, these were collected. Positions outside the newsroom, such as data-unit journalists for regional newspaper publishers, were also included in collection. Duplicate advertisements were included if their publication dates differed, but any duplicates found with the same publication date were removed as error on behalf of the publisher or researcher's data collection.

In the final year of collection (2017-18) the number of advertisements being placed significantly dropped. In previous years, the number of advertisements placed in November had ranged from 21 (2014-15), 35 (2015-16) and 31 (2016-

²³ This is based upon the researcher's ten years' experience working in regional news – where HTFP was used by journalists looking to make a move within the industry for job hunting as well as using the site as a place to keep up-to-date with industry news. While other publications such as Press Gazette included regional and local newspapers within their remit, HTFP was the only publisher to focus entirely on regional newspaper provision.

17). In November 2017 only 8 advertisements were placed. A tweet referring to the low number of advertisements (see **Figure 3**, below.) prompted contact to be made by the editor of *HTEFP*, who suggested it might be wise to look at other sources of job adverts, such as the major publishers' own sites.



Figure 3. A Tweet sent by the researcher, which prompted contact from the editor of *HTEFP*.

This option was investigated and it became clear that Newsquest and Trinity Mirror were publishing many more journalism job advertisements on their own sites than had been published on *HTEFP* that year. There were no advertisements for journalism jobs on the Johnston Press website. The advertisements found were collected separately, but a decision was made to discount these advertisements from the main study as the collection had only started on November 14, meaning some positions may have been missed in the fortnight from the start of collection. When the study began in 2014, the majority of jobs with regional newspapers were advertised on *HTEFP* even if they were also advertised elsewhere. There was little evidence of journalism jobs being advertised by publishers on their own sites, so at the start of the study these sources would not have been a considered option. In hindsight, it might have been prudent to collect advertisements from more than one source, such as Press Gazette or Gorkana. However, this would have resulted in significant duplication of advertisements and not necessarily captured those which were pulled from paid-for sites and relocated to the publishers' own websites later in the study.

The outcome of these decisions was the final total of advertisements placed in the final collection was significantly down on the previous years; this must be acknowledged as an anomaly when analysing the data.

In total, 342 advertisements were included in the final collection of advertisements from *HTEFP*.

4.2 Coding the advertisements

All advertisements were copied and saved in master documents correlating to the month and year of their collection. They were saved in order of placement date on the site and were given a reference dependent on their position within the month and the year. For example, the first advert placed in November 2014 was coded as N1-2014, the second was N2-2014 and so on.

Elements of interest were copied into an Excel document²⁴ under separate column headings. These included the year of collection, the month of collection, the name of the newspaper or affiliate platform, the job title, the publishing company and the job category as listed by HTFP. The body text of the advert was also included.

4.2.1 Publisher code

Several variations or multiple names were given on HTFP for elements within some categories; meaning codes for those categories had to be created. These included a publisher code to represent the publishing company. This was required because some companies, for example, Newsquest, have multiple divisional arms all of which are overseen by the mother publishing company. For this data to produce meaningful results the group's variant branches needed to be brought together. Resultantly, all titles owned by Newsquest and its divisions were coded as NQ. In total, there were 36 separate publisher codes included. For the most prolific advertisers and prominent companies the codes were reduced to initials, but for those employers who ran five or fewer advertisements across the collection period, a word was used for ease of recognition by the researcher (see **Figure 4.** on pg90 and 91 for full list of codes and number of jobs placed by each publisher). In the period of takeover from Local World to Trinity Mirror six advertisements were placed which named both publishers as the title owners. This group was coded as LW/TM.

4.2.2 Job category code

Job category codes were created due to the numerous job titles included in the research (see **Appendix.2** for The Coding Manual for categorisation descriptors). This was particularly useful when several job categories had been included against a role on *HTFP*. For example, job reference J39-2017, a

²⁴ The Excel workbook can be viewed on the supplied data stick of supporting files and documents.

position advertised as a Digital Content Producer, was listed as being in multiple job categories on *HTFP*. These were; Multimedia Journalists, Newsdesk, Online journalists, Other, Senior reporters and Specialist Reporters. This number of categories meant the job would have been difficult to categorise based on those titles alone. It also demonstrated a lack of clarity between the job categories on *HTFP* – for example, the difference between Multimedia Journalists and Online journalists is difficult to determine and the category of ‘other’ is meaningless when included in a long list of descriptors. For that reason and because of an evident lack of consistency in the *HTFP* categorisation, the job category code was used as the primary determinant of the job role. It also indicated at what level the position was placed within the internal newsroom network (eg. Trainee/senior reporter, newsdesk or similar middle-management level, editor or similar senior management level, executive management level).

Therefore, job codes were based upon the job title and job description. For example, J39-2017, an advertisement for a Digital Content Editor, which began ‘The Courier is looking for a dynamic and enthusiastic digital journalist’, was coded as being a multimedia reporter position – referred to as M Rep for the purposes of coding.

Job coding became complicated when some job roles were clearly split positions or were unusual in their nature. For example, Job J33-2017 was for a Crime Reporter. It was categorised on *HTFP* as being a multimedia journalist and a specialist reporter role and the job advertisement reinforced the message of multimedia and specialism both being of significant importance. Therefore, it would have been incorrect to categorise the position solely as a Specialist Reporter (Sp Rep) or Multimedia Reporter (M Rep). As a result, the coding category of Specialist Multimedia Reporter was created (Sp M Rep). In total, there were 33 positions which were categorised with this code.

Some positions were difficult to code within the general code descriptors. This included seven roles which did not fit into any of the descriptors but which had news journalism elements attached to them and which required inclusion within the research. Examples of these were D17-2015, a Community Content Curator role which had significant administrative duties attached to producing content for the Manchester Evening News’ online platform, and J23-2017, an analytical role for a Trends Analyst for the Bristol Post.

Figure 4. The list of publisher codes and the number of advertisements placed by each. The major advertisers are highlighted in orange.

Publisher code	Publisher	Adverts
Arch	Archant / Archant Community Media Ltd / Archant Norfolk	27
Bailiwick	Bailiwick Publishing	2
Bath News	Bath News & Media	1
Berkshire	Berkshire Media Group	3
Bullivant	Bullivant Media Ltd	1
Caerphilly	Caerphilly Media Ltd	1
Chronicle	Chronicle Publications Ltd	1
Citizen	Citizen News and Media Ltd	1
CN	CN Group / Cumbrian Newspapers	6
Cornwall and Devon	Cornwall and Devon Media	1
DC	DC Media Ltd / DC Thomson & Co Ltd / DC Thomson LTD	23
Express and Star	Express & Star	1
Heads	Heads (Congleton) Ltd	2
Herald and Times	Herald and Times Group	1
Higgs	Higgs Group	1
Highland	Highland Perthshire Media	1
Iliffe	Iliffe Media / Iliffe Media Ltd	3
Irish Times	The Irish Times Trust	1
JP	Johnston Press	21
KM	KM Group Media Ltd / KM Media Group / KM Media Group Ltd	3
LW	Local World	54

LW/TM	Local World/Trinity Mirror / Local World part of the Trinity Mirror Group	6
Newbury	Newbury News Ltd	1
NQ	Newsquest / Newsquest (London) Ltd / Newsquest Media Group / Newsquest Sussex	85
NWN	NWN Media Ltd	1
One Media	One Media	4
Packet	Packet Newspapers	1
Regional	Regional Media Ltd	1
Scottish Provincial	Scottish Provincial Press / Scottish Provincial Press Ltd	3
South London Guardian	The South London Guardian Series	1
Taylor	Taylor Newspapers / Taylor Newspapers Ltd	2
Tindle	Tindle Newspapers	2
TM	Trinity Mirror / Trinity Mirror Plc / Media Scotland – part of Trinity Mirror Plc	78
Western Morning News	Western Morning News	1
Wyvex	Wyvex Media Ltd	1
Your Local Paper	Your Local Paper	1
Grand Total		342

In two cases (D6-2015 and D8-2015²⁵) N/A was noted as the job code. This was because the positions, advertised by Trinity Mirror, were assigned to multiple job categories by HTFP but lacked any clarity in terms of the role on offer. The positions were titled 'Newsdesk Reporters / Sub-Editors', but the advertisements were brief and lacked distinction, making them difficult to code.

There were seven posts advertised for either a trainee or a senior reporter to fill the position. These were coded as T Rep / Sen Rep. For a full list of job codes and the number of advertisements placed in those categories see **Figure 5**.
pg93.

Coding the positions in this way meant the job categories and titles would be easier to analyse. However, the clear issue with this method is the subjective nature of the process (Berger, 2016). The advertisement categorisation on HTFP, the job title and the job description were all taken into account when coding the positions and when abstract positions occurred, these had additional codes created for them. The coding categorisations were applied solely by the researcher throughout, meaning there was no risk of split judgement or different applications of meaning.

4.2.3 Other coding

During the coding process, the job type was also noted as either Print, Digital, Print and Digital or N/A (See **Figure 6**. pg94). The latter was only applied to the previously mentioned D6-2015 and D8-2015 which lacked enough information to be able to apply a category.

The categorisation was based on the job description. So, for example, if the description made it clear that the role was for the website only, then the role would be marked as Digital. Job titles and the newspaper name also assisted with this categorisation at points, but not consistently.

The vast majority of positions were categorised as Print and Digital (248), digital followed (58) and then print (34), N/A accounted for the 2 positions mentioned above.

²⁵ The HTFP categories assigned to these roles were: Newsdesk, Online journalists, Senior reporters, Specialist reporters and Sub-editors. The job description for D6-2015 read: "Looking for a new challenge in 2016? We have something totally different and exciting to offer you - if you have the expertise we are looking for." And the description for D8-2015 was the same, with the additional detail: "So if you have experience on the newsdesk or as a sub at a magazine, national newspaper or news website we want to hear from you."

Figure 5. The full list of positions advertised and the code applied.

Full role code	Code used for Excel	Advertisements placed
Digital news editor	D N Ed	13
Deputy editor	Dep Ed	3
Deputy news editor	Dep N Ed	11
Editor	Ed	11
Multimedia reporter	M Rep	32
News editor	N Ed	15
News editor / senior reporter	N Ed / Sen Rep	2
No details of job	N/A	2
Other	Other	7
Senior multimedia reporter	Sen M Rep	17
Senior management	Sen Man	1
Senior reporter	Sen Rep	47
Specialist multimedia reporter	Sp M Rep	33
Specialist reporter	Sp Rep	23
Sub editor	Sub	8
Trainee multimedia reporter	T M Rep	19
Trainee reporter	T Rep	91
Trainee reporter / senior reporter	T Rep / Sen Rep	7
	Grand Total	342

Figure 6. Job type categorisation

Digital or print role	Count of Job reference
Digital	58
N/A	2
Print	34
Print and digital	248
Grand Total	342

Figure 7 Job title categorisation

Digital or traditional	Count of Job title
D (digital)	96
T (traditional)	246
Grand Total	342

Figure 8. Single or multiple title positions

Single or multiple titles	Number of advertisements
M	119
N/A	2
S	221
Grand Total	342

Coding of the job titles to determine if the title was traditional or digital in nature also took place (See **Figure 7**.pg94). This was based solely upon the job title and only coded a title as digital if it included direct reference to a digital word; for example, N31-2016 was a position of Multimedia Journalist, N18-2015 was a position of Video Editor and D4-2017 was for a Social Media Specialist. All of these titles were coded as digital.

Some titles were coded as traditional, despite it not being clear from the title alone what the position might be. For example, N17-2016 was for a Content Editor. It was not clear from this title what the content might be, but as it did not have any direct reference to digital content the role was categorised as traditional.

Clearly, the weakness to this method is that many roles with a digital focus would be categorised as traditional if their titles did not include a digital reference. Therefore, rather than a measure of job type, this categorisation was undertaken in order to see if definers of job titles changed over time. In total, 96 jobs had digital titles and 246 had traditional titles.

Coding was also applied to determine if a position was for a single news title or multiple titles (See **Figure 8**.pg94).

Again, D6-2015 and D8-2015 were marked as N/A. The remainder of titles were coded, with almost exactly two thirds coming in as single titles and a third of roles advertised for multiple news titles. Again, determination of the category was based on the job description and, at times, the newspaper titles as listed on HTFP. Multiple titles were determined by more than one named newspaper. For example, a Press and Journal (J18-2017) advertisement noted its “six distinct editions” – these were classed as a single title as they all came under the Press and Journal banner. In contrast, the Fife Free Press (N5-2016) was looking for a reporter to cover “titles in Fife plus Stornoway, Rothesay and Midlothian”, this was categorised as a multiple-title role. It must be acknowledged that it could be the case that the job advertisements simply did not mention if a position would be across multiple titles, in which case these would be categorised as single.

4.2.4 Keyword coding

To conduct the coding and analysis, the codes and job descriptions were uploaded to an Excel workbook. The book contained two spreadsheets; one for traditional skills and tools documentation and the other for digital.

Each job description was followed directly by its word count before being analysed for inclusion of specific keywords which were determined at the start of the study.

The keywords included in the research were as follows²⁶:

Traditional *deadline, pressure, contacts, driving, NCE, NCTJ, NQJ, shorthand, qualification, print, copy, tight, writing, enthusiasm, self, exclusive, energy, ideas, sense.*

Digital: *digital, multi, platform, website, social, user, breaking, data, Twitter, Facebook, online, web skills, unique, visitor, likes, blog, code, video, podcast.*

²⁶ See the coding manual **Appendix 2**. for more information about the specific meanings/context of the keywords.)

The keywords were determined prior to collection by analysis of advertisements on HTFP and based on the researcher's experience of working in the regional newspaper industry²⁷. There were 19 keywords determined for each data set. The first round of collection (from November 1, 2014 to January 31, 2015) allowed for experimentation with the keywords being applied and it was only at the end of that process in January 2015 that the keywords were finalised. This experimentation process also allowed for keywords to be refined to allow for variations. For example, multimedia was also written as multi-media and multi media within the advertisements. As the words would be searched for via an Excel formula, the correct incarnation of the word was important. In this case, the word 'multi' was decided upon.

As a result, it became clear that the meaning of words also required consideration. For example, 'multi' could precede words such as 'multi-lingual', which would not be the correct application. The 'driving' in driving licence, a traditional skill requirement, could also be picked up in descriptions such as 'driving force', which could be applied in a number of contexts. Therefore, thorough analysis of all keywords within the job descriptions took place, with any keywords not reflecting the original intended meaning being replaced by the word 'VOID' so as to not change the word count.

Many of the keywords included can be applied to journalism for both a print or digital product, but they have been categorised under one or the other because of the application of either original or intended context.

For example, many of the traditional keywords could also be applied in a digital-only journalism position, for example, 'ideas, exclusive, energy' are all desirable skills which might be sought for an online journalist. However, these are categorised as traditional skills because they are all words originally associated with print journalism and which would have been used in that context prior to digital journalism jobs being advertised. As a result, they are traditional journalism skills.

The digital keywords and skills are less transferable and have been included in the digital category because they would have not been included in regional newspaper journalism job advertisements prior to digital journalism positions being advertised.

²⁷ The researcher had worked in management positions for six years in regional newspapers in West Yorkshire. This allowed for not only experience of being in a position of writing job advertisements and interviewing candidates, but also meant there was an experience and knowledge of the current language of skills and tools for both traditional and digital processes used in the industry.

The keywords cannot be paired as the traditional skills do not have digital 'opposites' or 'comparables'. Therefore, while this study will look at the use of these keywords, it will not attempt to compare specific skills or tools within the two sections. Instead, a general comparison between the two data sets will be made and then individual examples of inclusion or non-inclusion will be assessed.

Clearly, with the changing landscape of digital technology, one of the drawbacks to this method was the likelihood that new digital tools and skills would come into use over the course of collection. It also does not account for changing language, particularly within the digital field (Arnold, 2008). However, in order to be able to make annual comparisons, the set keywords needed to remain constant. Therefore, this study does not claim to reflect the entirety of digital or traditional skills used within regional newspaper journalism within the UK. Instead, what it aims to do is track changes over time, both of use and language. It also aims to get a wider view of the value being placed on traditional and digital skills and tools within industry.

Because of the wide viewpoint of this study, with advertisements being placed by a wide range of publishing companies and for a wide variety of positions at all levels, the results will be used as a frame or guide for analysing Study 2, the interview and observation section of the project. This will allow for a national illustration to be applied at a specific individual level and allow for balance and comparison.

The keyword results of this study, including inclusion figures and placement figures, were externally verified as prior to analysis by Dr Richard Thomas of Swansea University (see **Appendix 3** for intercoder reliability report).

4.3 Shortlisting the results

Following intercoder verification, the data collected for this story was analysed to see what trends and themes emerged. This section of the chapter will outline the important findings from the data before critical analysis of those outcomes takes place.

4.3.1 Publisher findings

As would be expected, over the course of the collection, the highest number of advertisements were placed by the largest publishing companies of regional and local newspapers in the UK.

At the start of the study, the four largest companies were Newsquest, Johnston Press, Local World and Trinity Mirror. In 2015 Local World was absorbed by Trinity Mirror (which had previously held a 20% stake in the company), but 6 advertisements on HTFP were still marked as being positions within Local World or as Local World/Trinity Mirror (LW/TM) in 2016 and 2017. These LW/TM positions will be considered independently to the advertisements placed by Local World and/or Trinity Mirror as they cannot be affiliated directly to either of the two groups.

The next largest publishing companies of regional newspapers within the UK were Norwich-based Archant, CN (or Cumbria News) Group, DC Thomson (covering the Highlands and Scottish islands and including newspapers in Dundee and Aberdeen).

Between them, the above publishing companies placed 299 out of 342 advertisements across the collection period, amounting for 87% of the advertisements placed (see **Figure 9**, below and **Figure 4** on pg90 and 91).

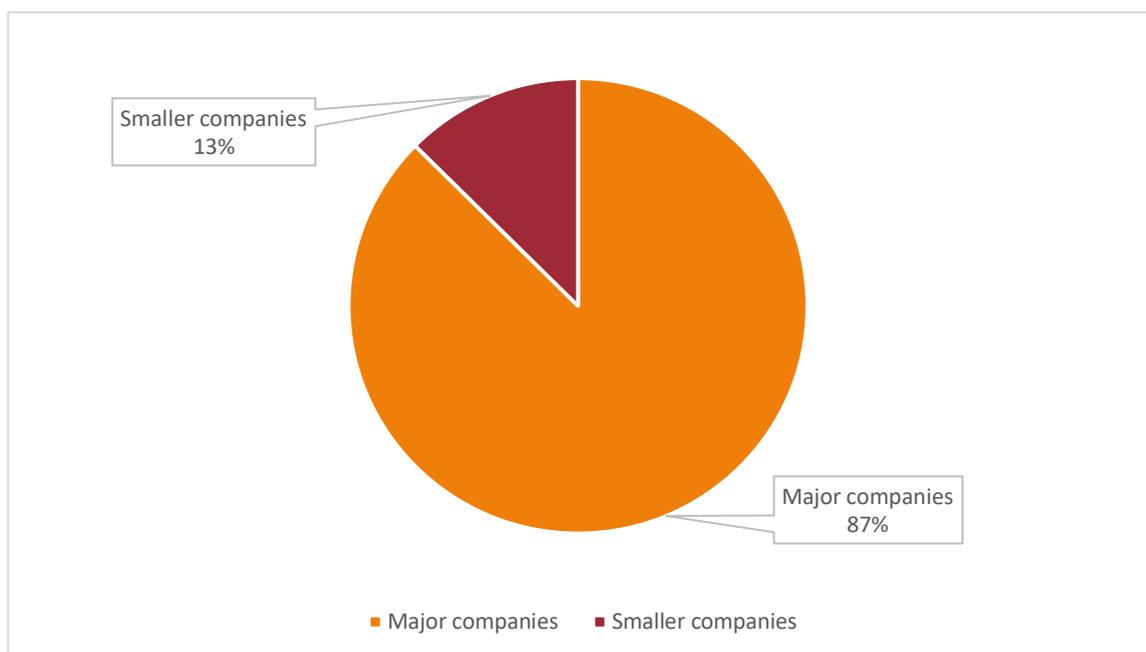


Figure 9. The total count of advertisements placed during the collection period

The remainder of the publishing companies placed fewer than six advertisements each, with the majority placing just one advertisement each during the collection period. Therefore, while the analysis of these 342 advertisements generally will include the data from these 43 placements, there will be no individual analysis of these singular advertisements as there are too

few to be considered for meaningful representation of a publishing company, newspaper title or digital platform.

Out of the eight major advertisers, Newsquest (NQ) placed the majority of advertisements (85), with Trinity Mirror (TM) coming a close second (78). Interestingly, Johnston Press (JP), a major publishing company which owned around 200 regional and local newspapers and affiliated websites when it went into administration in late 2018, only placed 21 advertisements in total during the course of collection. This meant that out of the eight top advertisers, JP was in the bottom three along with CN Group (which at its point of sale to Newsquest in March 2018 owned just two regional dailies and five weekly titles (Mayhew, 2018a) and the Local World/Trinity Mirror advertisements.

JP, which became JPI Media following a buyout by major shareholders (Whittington, 2018c; Faull, 2018), significantly decreased in size due to closures and redundancies during the collection period (Bell, 2019); partly because of a huge debt accrued following its buyout of a group of titles in Ireland for £96m in 2005. Perhaps the rapid-scale downsizing of the company and the regular rounds of restructuring and redundancy meant externally advertised positions were rare due to the pool of potential candidates within JP²⁸. The majority of advertisements placed by JP were in the final two rounds of collection; in 2016-17 it placed 10 advertisements and 7 the following year.

During the course of collection, Local World placed 54 advertisements in total (excluding the LW/TM set), the majority of which were placed within the first two rounds of collection; making it the most prolific advertiser in 2014-15 and the third most prolific the following year (behind NQ and TM).

Out of the four collection periods, the number of advertisements placed by the major advertisers increased year-on-year, until the final collection (due to the anomaly discussed in section 4.1).

Each of the eight main advertisers during the collection period will now be discussed in more detail.

²⁸ During the researcher's time as editor of the Johnston Press owned *Pontefract and Castleford Express* and the *Hemsworth and South Elmsall Express* from 2010 to 2013, there was a freeze on permanent recruitment to the company. Instead, new trainees were taken on as freelancers who had to invoice the company for their work and were expected to manage their own taxes. Often these rolling contracts would last for months before permanent contracts were offered.

4.3.1.1 Newsquest

In total, Newsquest (NQ) placed the largest number of advertisements during the collection period. Out of those advertisements, 84 were for print and digital positions and only one, placed in 2014, was for a digital post. The majority of advertisements were for single title positions (49) while 36 were for multiple titles. The number of advertisements overall increased significantly each year of collection, until the final anomaly year.

In total, the most positions advertised were trainee reporter roles. Of these 40 advertisements, 10 were for trainee multimedia reporter roles and 30 were for trainee reporters. In addition, there was one role categorised as trainee / senior reporter.

This was followed by senior reporter roles, of which there were 18 in total; 10 of which were titled as senior reporter and the remaining 8 of which were senior multimedia reporter.

There were 5 multimedia reporter positions, which did not define the level of qualification or training and 5 news editor positions. All other roles were advertised three times or less (see **Figure 10**, below).

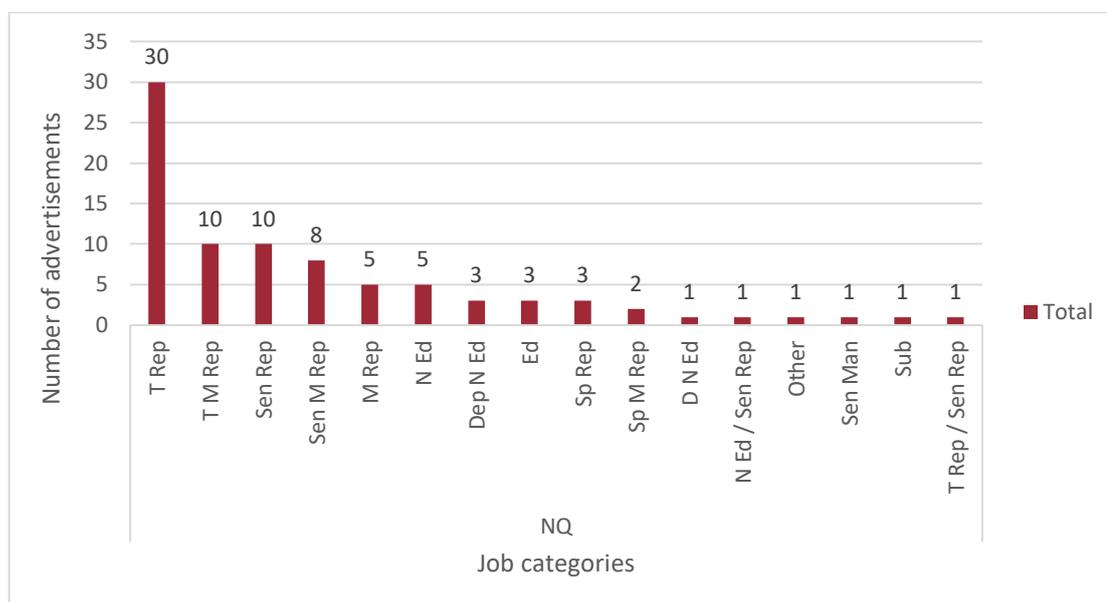


Figure 10. Newsquest job categories.

While roles with traditional job titles decreased slightly after the first year, with the trend suggesting a continued decrease over time (see **Figure 11**, pg101), the significant change was an increase in digital job titles over the first three years of collection (see **Figure 12**, pg101). Unsurprisingly, this pattern failed to

continue in the anomaly year, when only 6 of NQ's 84 advertisements were placed, and that year has been discounted from the charts for that reason.

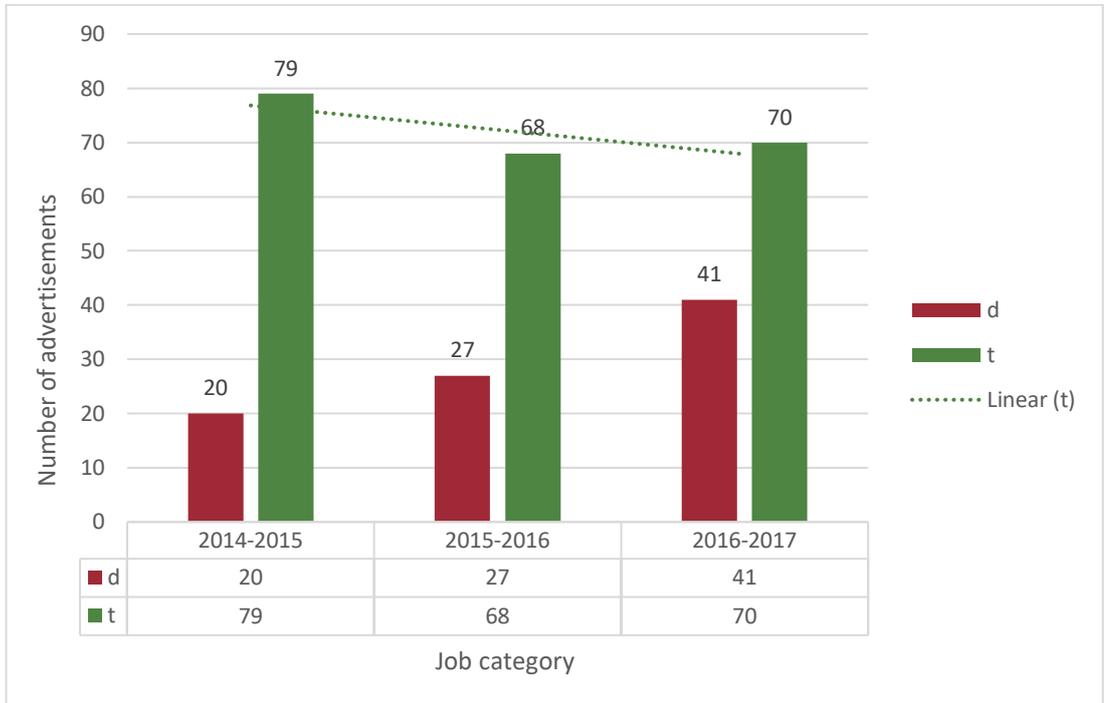


Figure 11. Newsquest traditional and digital job title categories with traditional trend line.

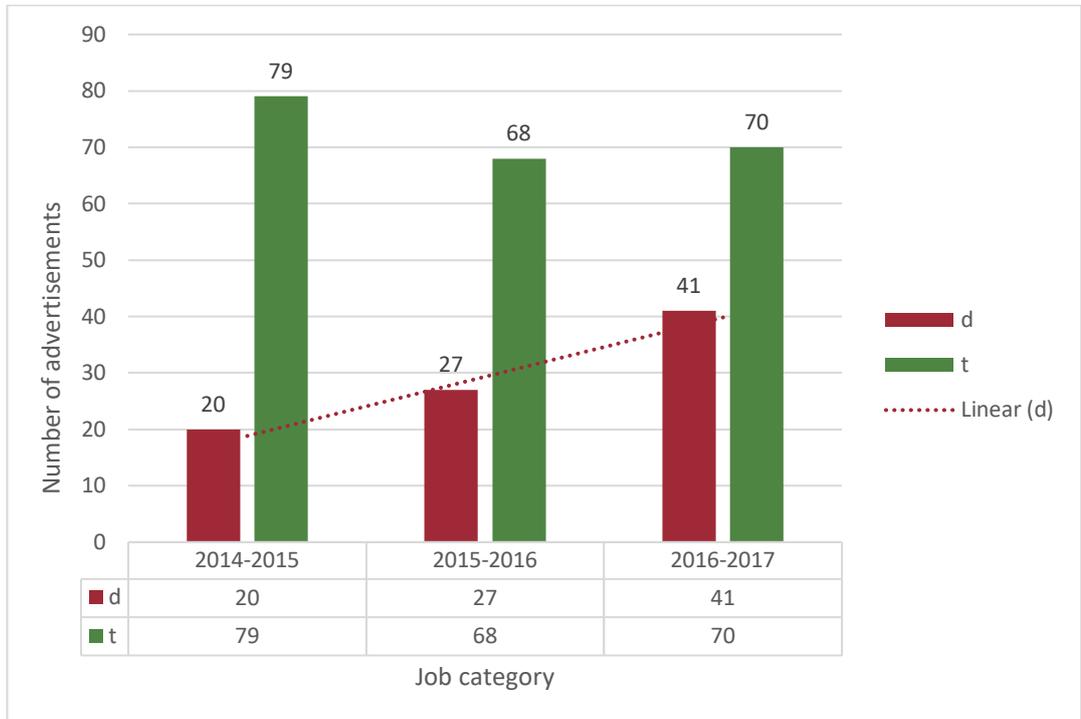


Figure 12. Newsquest traditional and digital job categories, with digital trend line.

Overall, it appears Newsquest was gradually increasing its digital terminology within its job roles over time and the number of traditionally titled positions was decreasing. However, the change was not marked and traditional terminology was still more highly prominent when describing the types of roles placed.

4.3.1.2 Trinity Mirror

In contrast, the second most prolific advertiser, Trinity Mirror, placed more emphasis on digital terminology within its role descriptors.

Out of the 77 positions advertised by the company, 22 were for specialist multimedia reporters, followed by 10 for multimedia reporters and 7 for trainee multimedia reporters. These were followed by trainee reporters and news editors, both with 6 placements each. There were 5 senior reporter roles and the remainder only had four or fewer advertisements placed (see **Figure 13**, below).

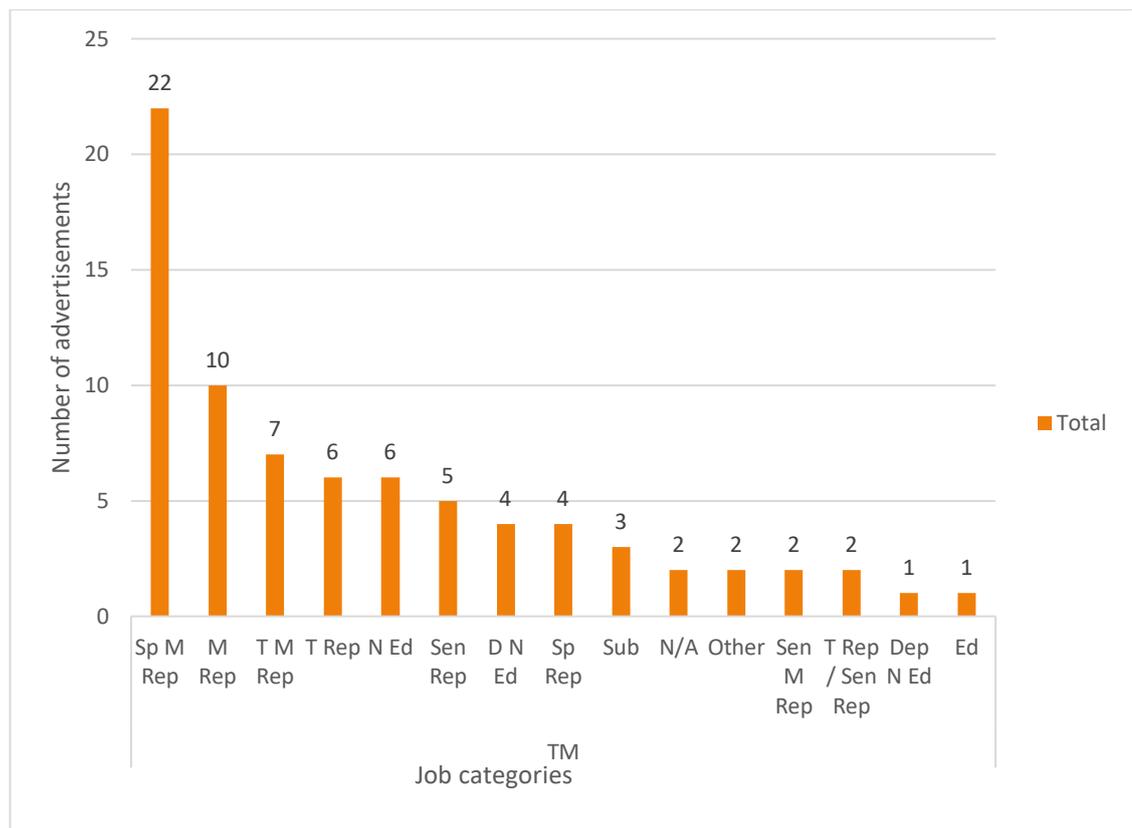


Figure 13. Trinity Mirror job categories

Upon discounting the final anomaly year, the advertisements placed by Trinity Mirror increased year on year (see **Figure 14**, below). There was growth trend projection in both digital job titles and traditional job titles.

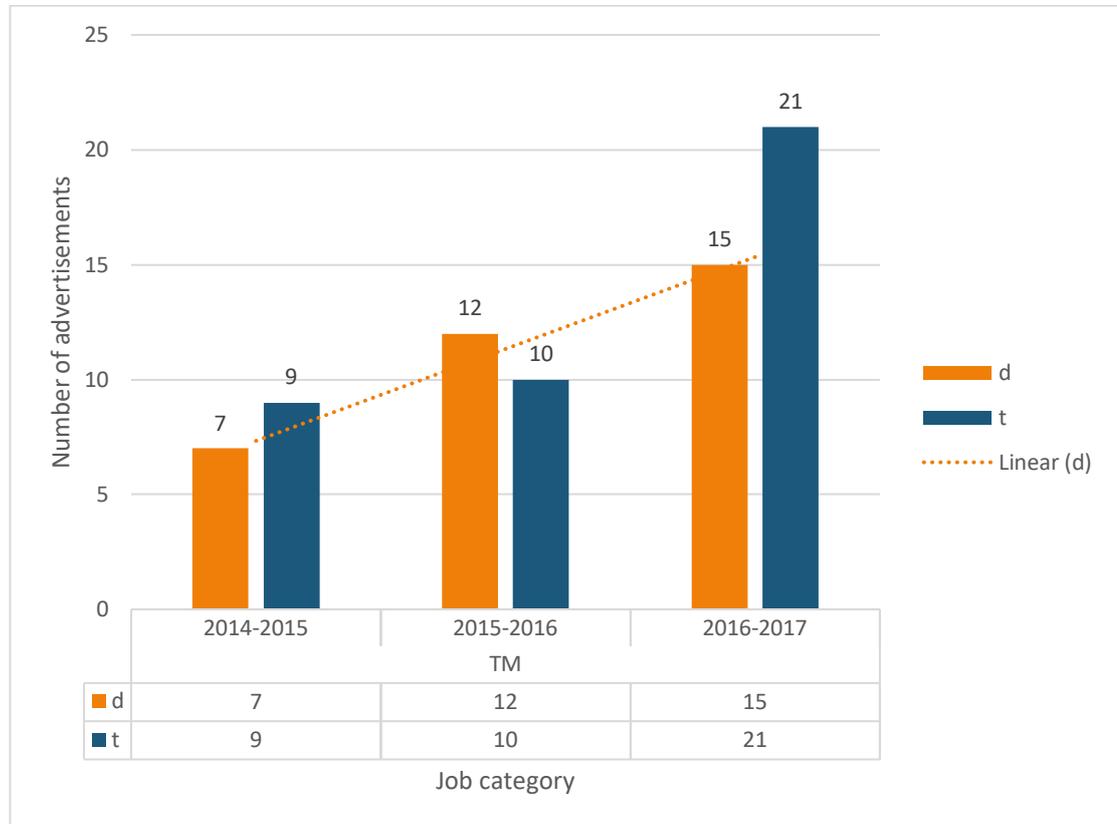


Figure 14. Trinity Mirror traditional and digital job titles with digital trendline

There was also an increase at both multiple title and singular title roles, with positions on single titles increasingly outweighing multiple title positions until the final anomaly year.

Overall, it seems Trinity Mirror was increasing its dominance in the job market over the course of collection, when discounting the anomaly year. The focus was increasingly on digital, but with increasing job advertisements there was also an increase in traditional terminology.

4.3.1.3 Local World

Local World advertised prolifically prior to its takeover by Trinity Mirror in 2015; after that the company name was still used to place advertisements, but significantly less so.

Out of the 54 advertisements placed, 23 were for trainee reporter positions. This was followed by specialist multimedia reporters and senior reporters, both of which saw 6 advertisements placed. Multimedia reporters followed, with 5 advertisements for the role over the collection period. The remainder of advertisement categories were for 4 roles or less (see **Figure 15**, below).

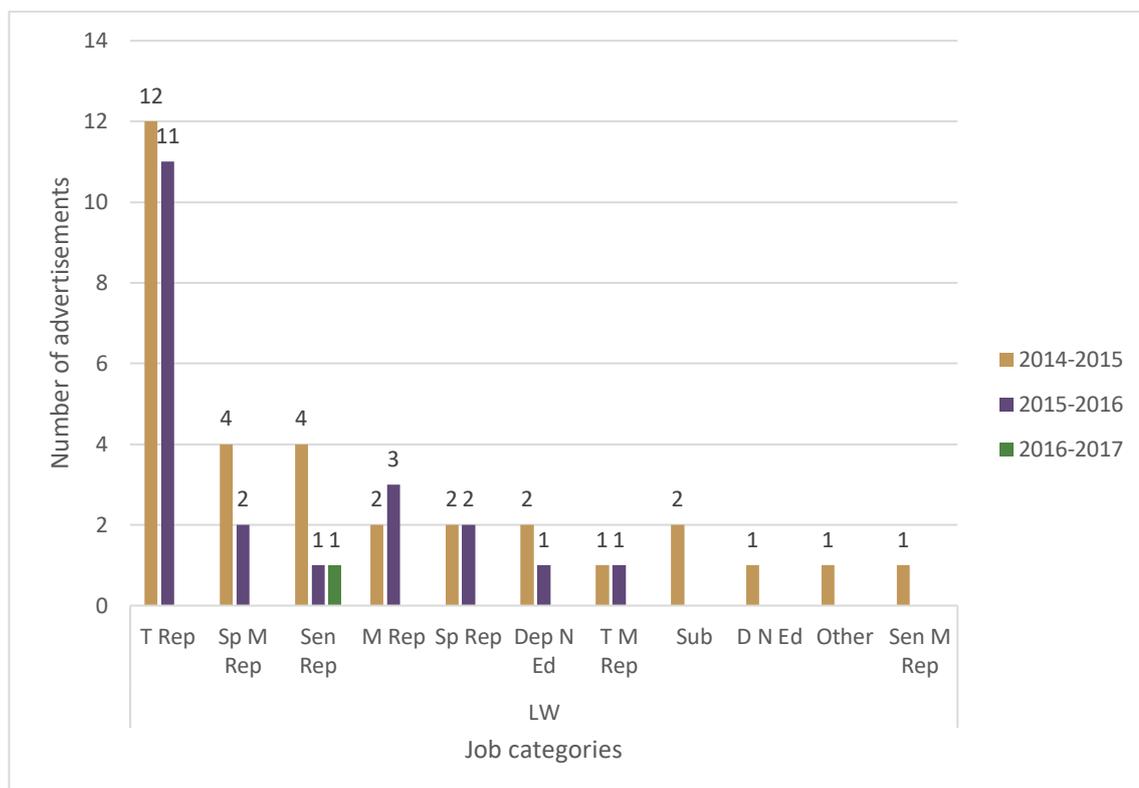


Figure 15. Local World job categories

The majority (77%) of the roles advertised were for traditionally titled positions. Due to the change in ownership of the company, it is impossible to predict a trend or take significance from the data standing alone.

What is interesting, is the fact that in the first two rounds of collection, when Local World was still operating, it placed the most advertisements out of all of the publishing companies advertising on HTFP.

Local World was a short-lived publisher. It was formed in 2013 following a merger of two smaller companies; Iliffe News and Media and Northcliffe Media. Shareholders owned the company and in 2015 Trinity Mirror, a minority shareholder, bought out the remaining shares (Linford, 2019a). The heavy investment in recruitment suggests the company was enjoying significant growth, especially as it was formed from two existing companies and was not a new start up requiring initial staffing. Trinity Mirror's acquisition of the remainder

of the company saw it become the UK's largest regional newspaper publisher (Linford, 2016).

While it is impossible to say how the roles advertised changed following the buyout, it is of relevance to include the breakdown of Local World advertisements because of its impact on the dominance of Trinity Mirror in the UK regional newspaper publishing market.

4.3.1.4 Archant

During the collecting periods, Norwich-based Archant placed 27 advertisements in total. Only 1 had a digital job title, which was coded as a multimedia reporter role. The remainder of the advertisements were in the main for trainee reporters (14 in total). See **Figure 16**, below for a detailed breakdown.

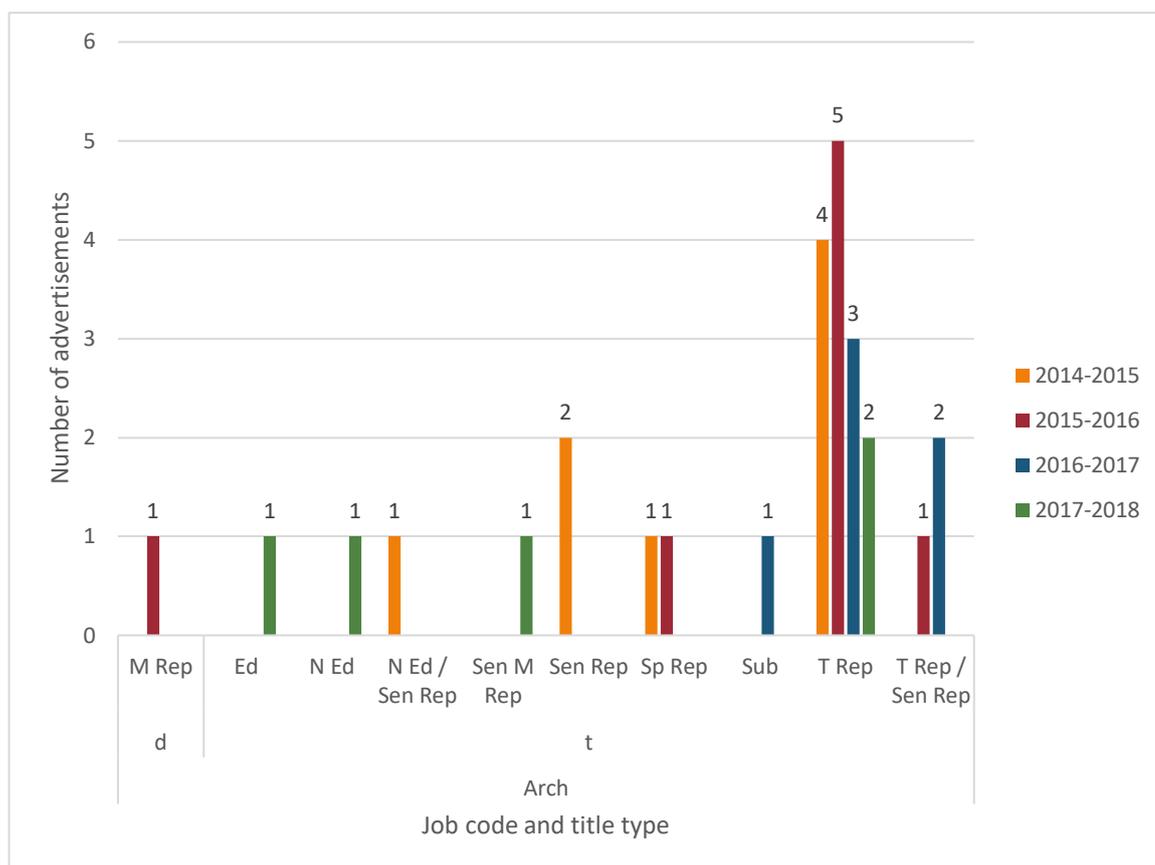


Figure 16. Archant job role and job title categorisation

The company placed 8 advertisements in each of the first two periods of collection, before the number decreased annually, to 6 then 5.

Due to the low numbers of advertisements placed it is difficult to get more than an inference of the type of company Archant was during the collection period.

The low digital emphasis suggests it was embedded in traditional language in terms of job roles. As with all other publishers assessed so far, except Trinity Mirror, its major employment focus was on trainee reporters.

4.3.1.5 DC Thomson

Scottish Highlands-based DC Thomson placed 23 advertisements in total over the collection period, with the majority (9) placed in the final collection period; bucking the trend of fewer in the final anomaly year.

The majority of roles had traditional titles, but in both digital and traditional, there was demonstrated to be an increase over time (See **Figure 17**, below).

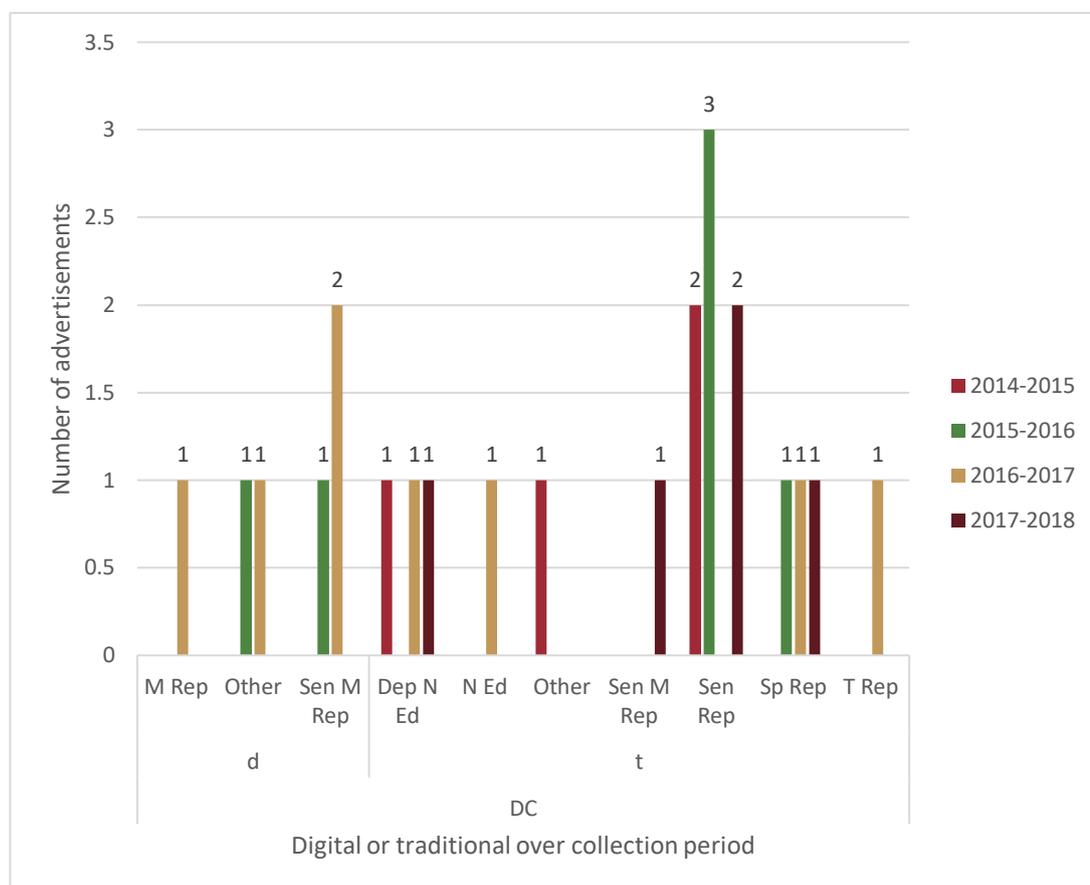


Figure 17. DC Thomson job title categories and types.

The most prolifically advertised role was senior reporter (7), followed by senior multimedia reporter (4). There was only one trainee position advertised.

4.3.1.6 Johnston Press

Out of the 21 advertisements placed by Johnston Press, 11 were for digitally titled roles (giving digital a majority of 1). The most advertisements were placed in the penultimate collection period (11 in total), followed by the final round of collecting, during which 7 advertisements were placed (see **Figure 18**, below, for a full breakdown). This bucks the trend of the other major companies, whose advertisement rates were down in the final collection period. However, as mentioned, Johnston Press did not appear to advertise on its own site during the anomaly year, perhaps meaning HTFP remained the major platform for its recruitment.

Again, due to the very low number of advertisements placed, it is difficult to take much from the data collected. However, it is clear the company had a strong element of digital focus in terms of job title language, which suggests the company was reflecting an internal culture with digitally focused elements to its production and output.

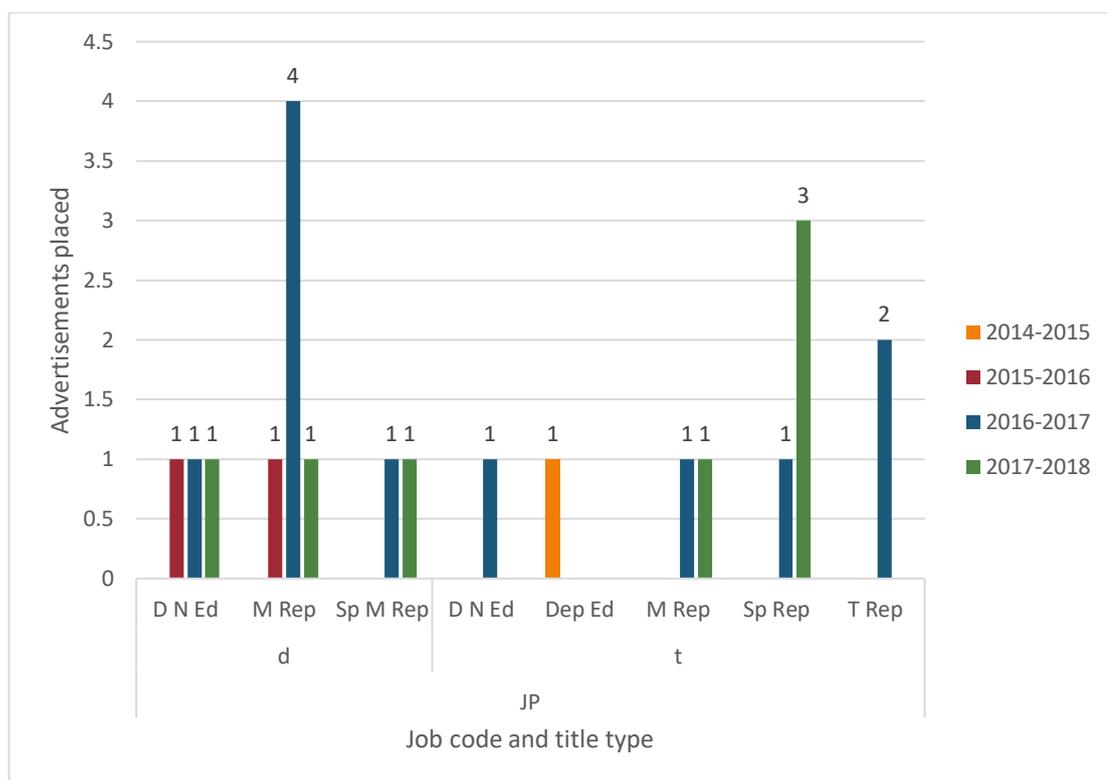


Figure 18. Johnston Press job title types and categories.

As with Trinity Mirror, which was also the only other major advertiser to place more digitally titled roles over traditional, Johnston Press did not have trainee reporter as its most prolifically advertised role. Instead it placed the most

advertisements for multimedia reporters (8 in total). Interestingly, 2 of the multimedia reporter roles did not have digitally inclined titles, therefore placing them within the traditional title set.

4.3.1.7 CN Group

The number of advertisements placed by Cumbria News Group is too low for analysis (6 placed in total). However, it is worth mentioning that only 1 advertisement had a digital title and the remainder were for traditionally named roles (see **Figure 19**, below).

The company placed the majority of advertisements in the first year of collection and no role was favoured above another.

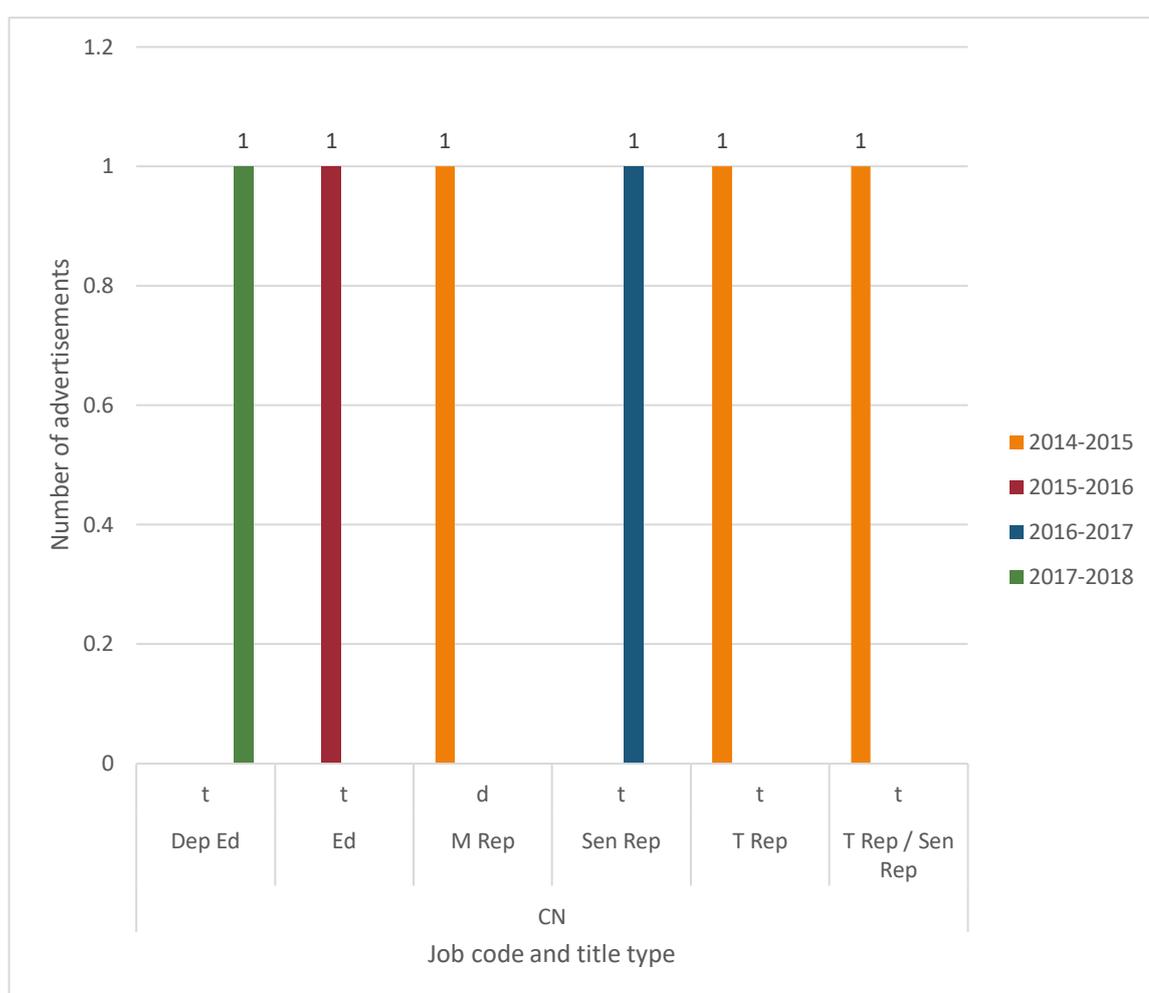


Figure 19. Cumbria News job category and title type.

4.3.1.8 Overall job category and code findings

When analysing all the advertisements collected, trainee reporter roles were the majority, with 91 advertisements placed. This was followed by senior reporters at 47. See **Figure 20**. below, for the full breakdown.

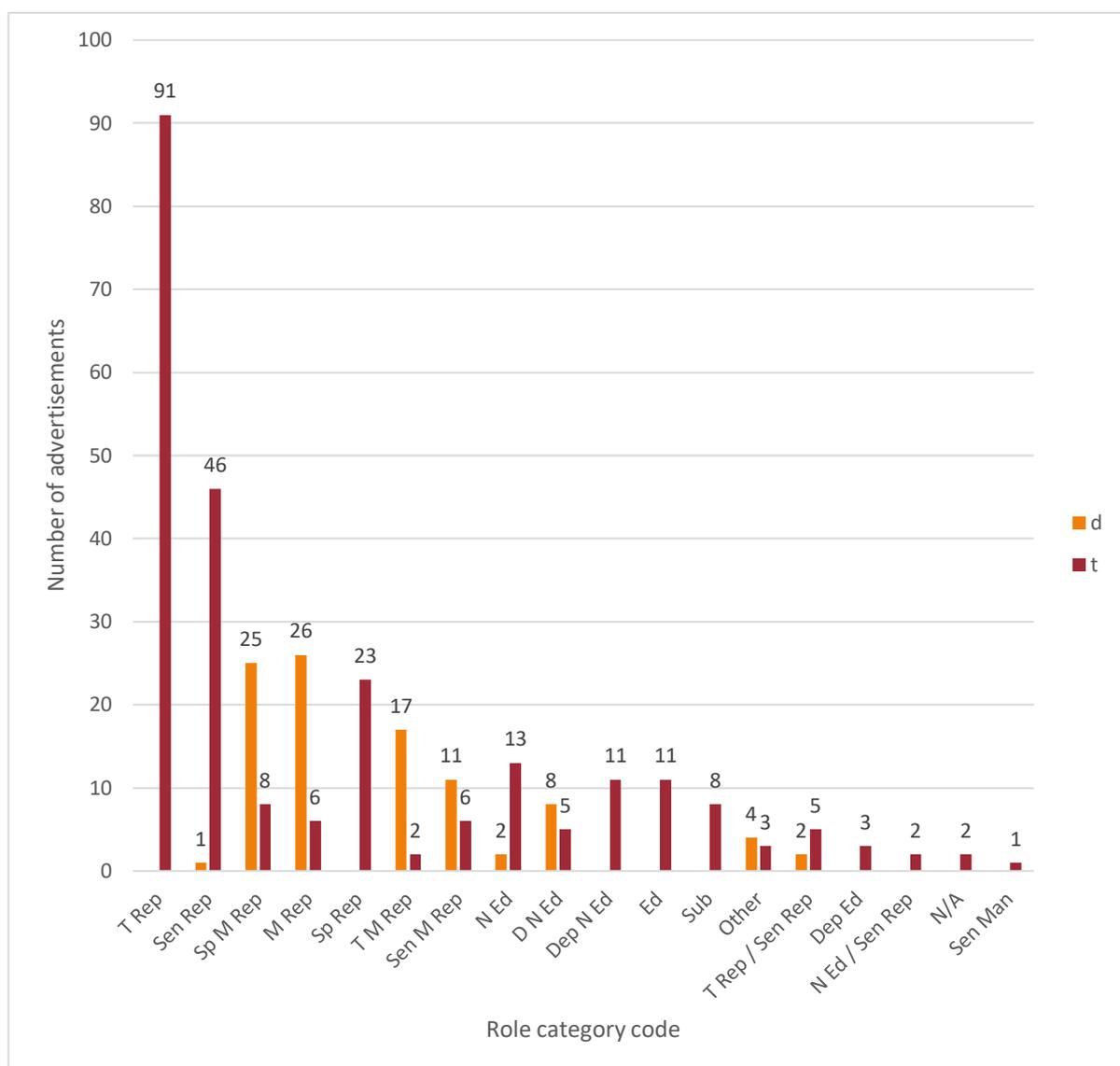


Figure 20. Job categories from full collection and digital or traditional job title type.

Traditionally categorised codes dominated the most prolifically placed job codes of trainee and senior reporters; suggesting by job type code and role categorisation that the majority were for print or print and digital positions.

This was followed by specialist multimedia reporters (33 advertisements) and multimedia reporters (32 advertisements), both of which were in the majority digitally categorised job title positions.

Overall, the job type categorisation confirms the majority of roles had responsibility for print and digital (249), followed by digital-only roles (57) and then print-only positions (34). See **Figure 21**, below.

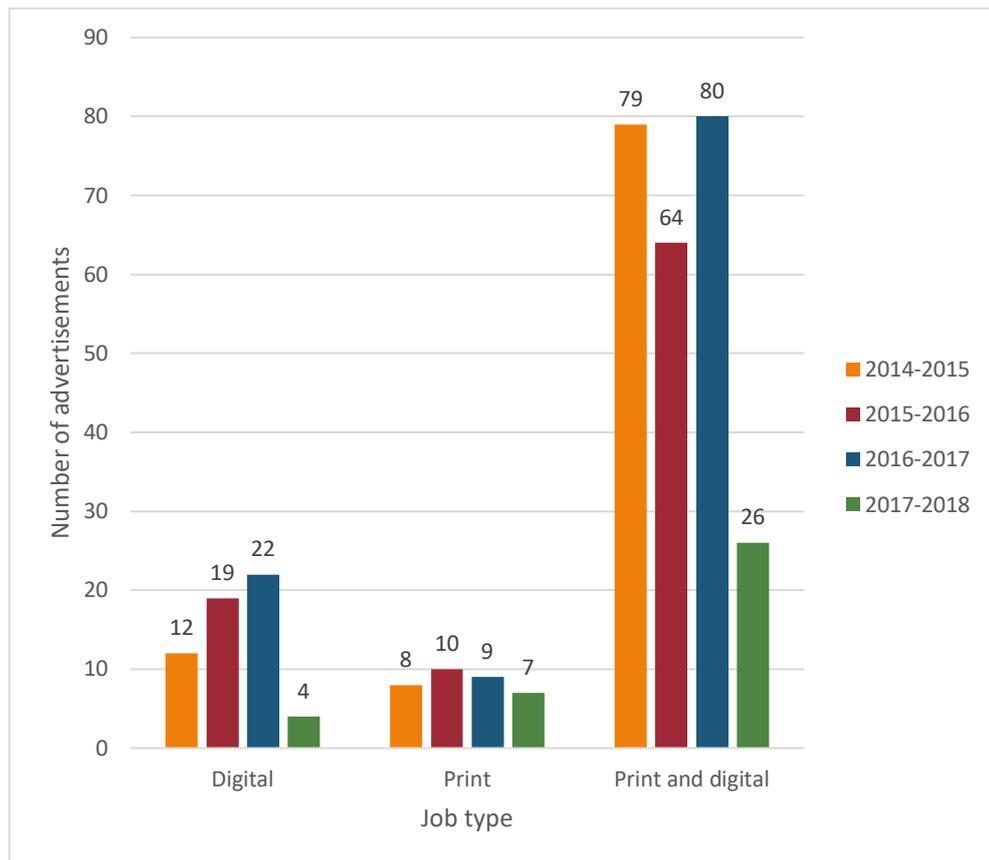


Figure 21. Job type by collection period.

If disregarding the final anomaly collection period, there is evidence of a trend in the increase of digital-only positions. Print-only and print and digital positions do not show particular movement.

There is also evidence of a slow trend increase in the placement of advertisements generally, if the final anomaly year is discounted (see **Figure 22**, pg111).

While single-title positions were the majority (221) over multiple-title roles (119), there was evidence, when discounting the final anomaly year, of growth in multiple-title positions and a decrease in singular title roles (see **Figure 23**, pg111).

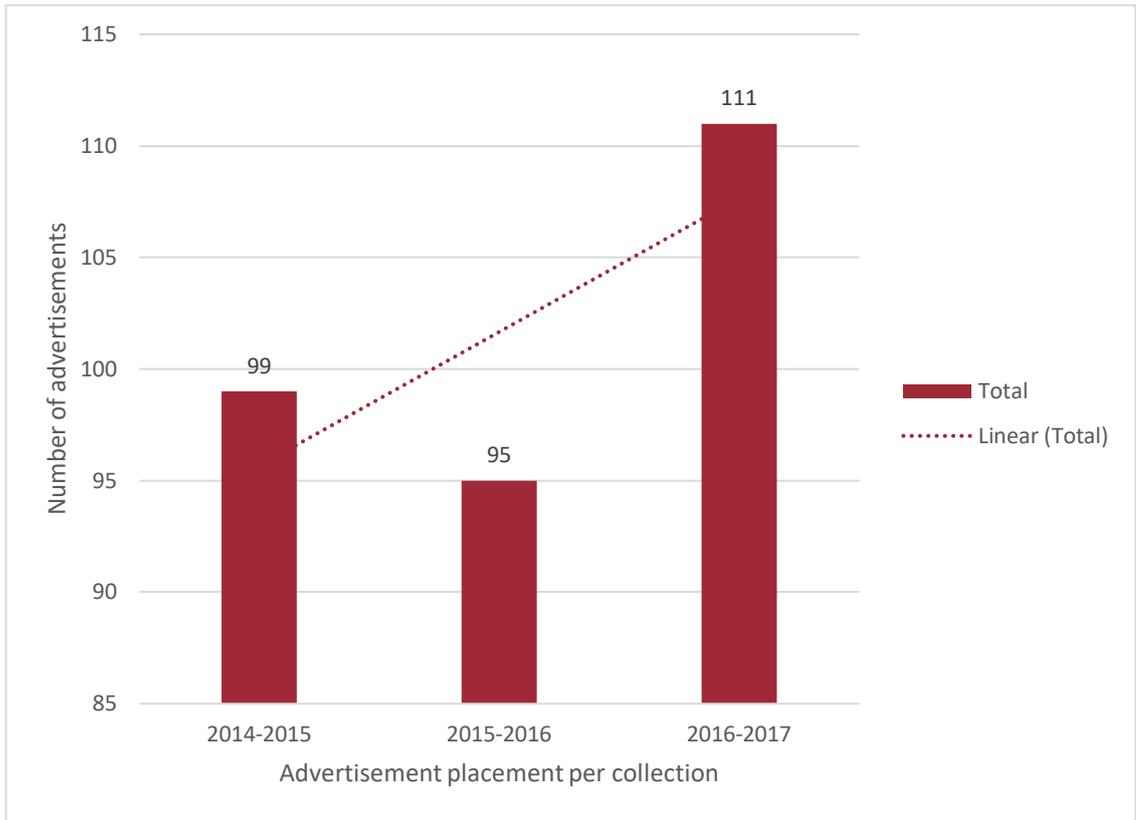


Figure 22. Trend in placement of advertisements.

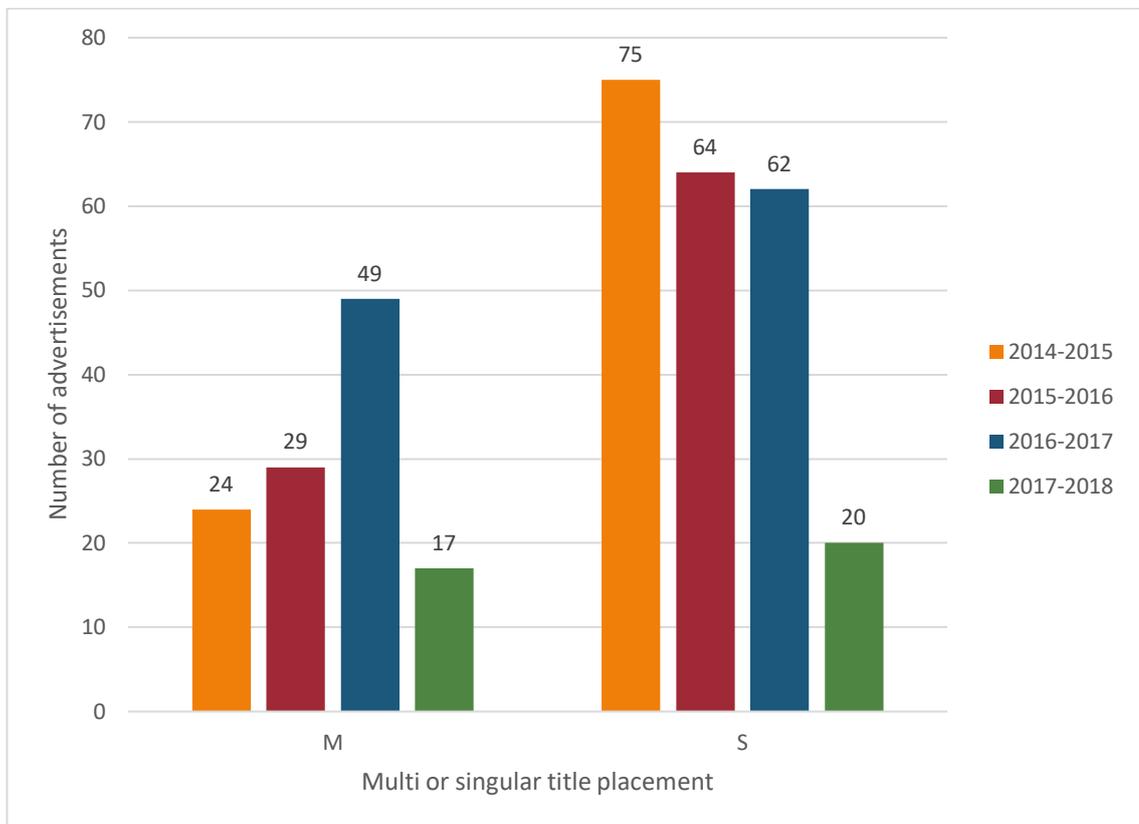


Figure 23. Placement of single or multiple title advertisements.

4.4 Keyword findings

Overall, digital keyword placement outweighed traditional keyword placement in each collection period except the final anomaly year, when traditional keywords were the majority by 2%. Across the total four collection periods, there were 1436 traditional keywords included and 2216 digital keywords, meaning digital keywords outweighed traditional by almost two thirds overall (see **Figure 24**, below and **Figure 28**, pg116).

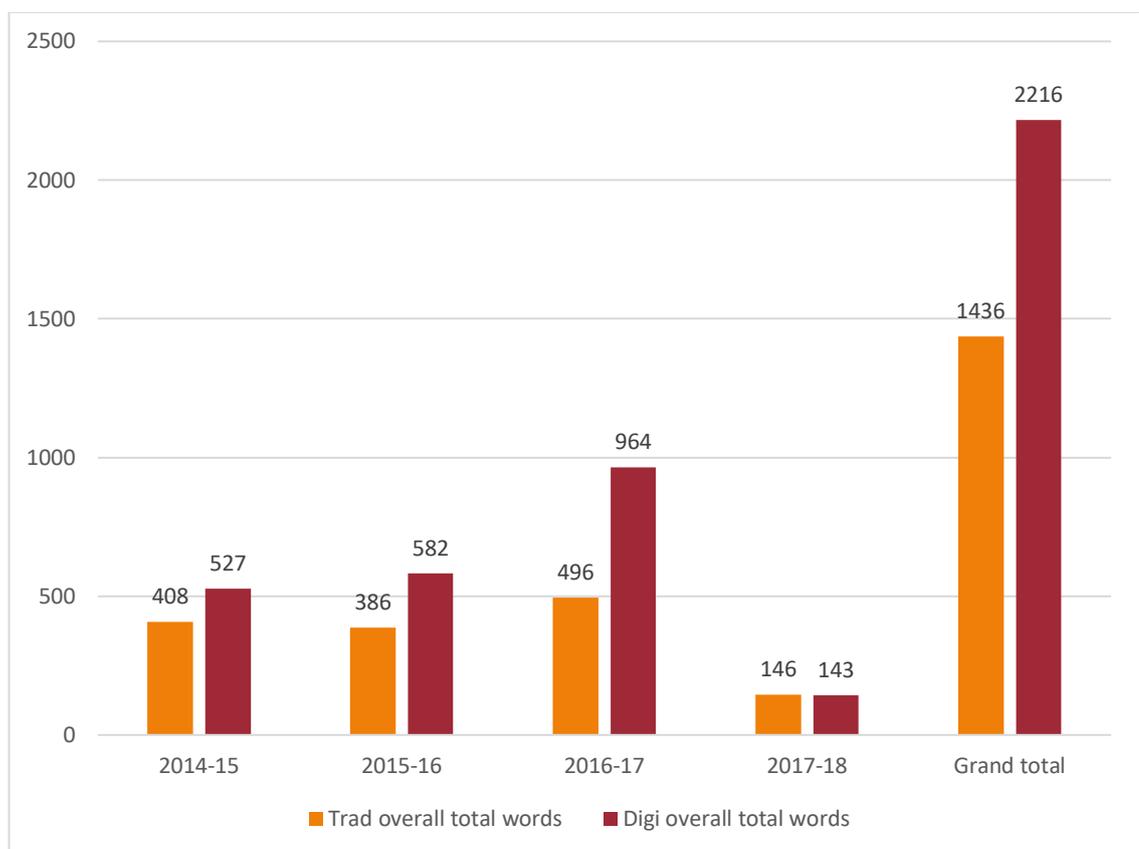


Figure 24. Total keyword placement by collection and in total.

While digital keywords outweighed traditional in placement number, the percentage share of the digital keywords used was not evenly balanced, with some words, like *digital*, *multi*, *social* and *video* appearing much more frequently than others like *podcast* and *code* (see **Figure 25**, pg113). There was more of a balanced share of placement of the traditional keywords, with all keywords appearing in the advertisements multiple times.

The balance of keyword sets also differed based on publisher size; with the main advertisers and largest publishers (CN Group, DC Thomson, Johnston Press, Local World, Local World/Trinity Mirror, Newsquest and Trinity Mirror) demonstrating a trend towards digital keyword placement (see **Figure 26** on pg114).

In contrast, the smaller publishing companies who placed fewer advertisements (all advertisers except CN Group, DC Thomson, Johnston Press, Local World, Local World/Trinity Mirror, Newsquest and Trinity Mirror), demonstrated a clear trend towards traditional keyword usage over digital (see **Figure 27** on pg115).

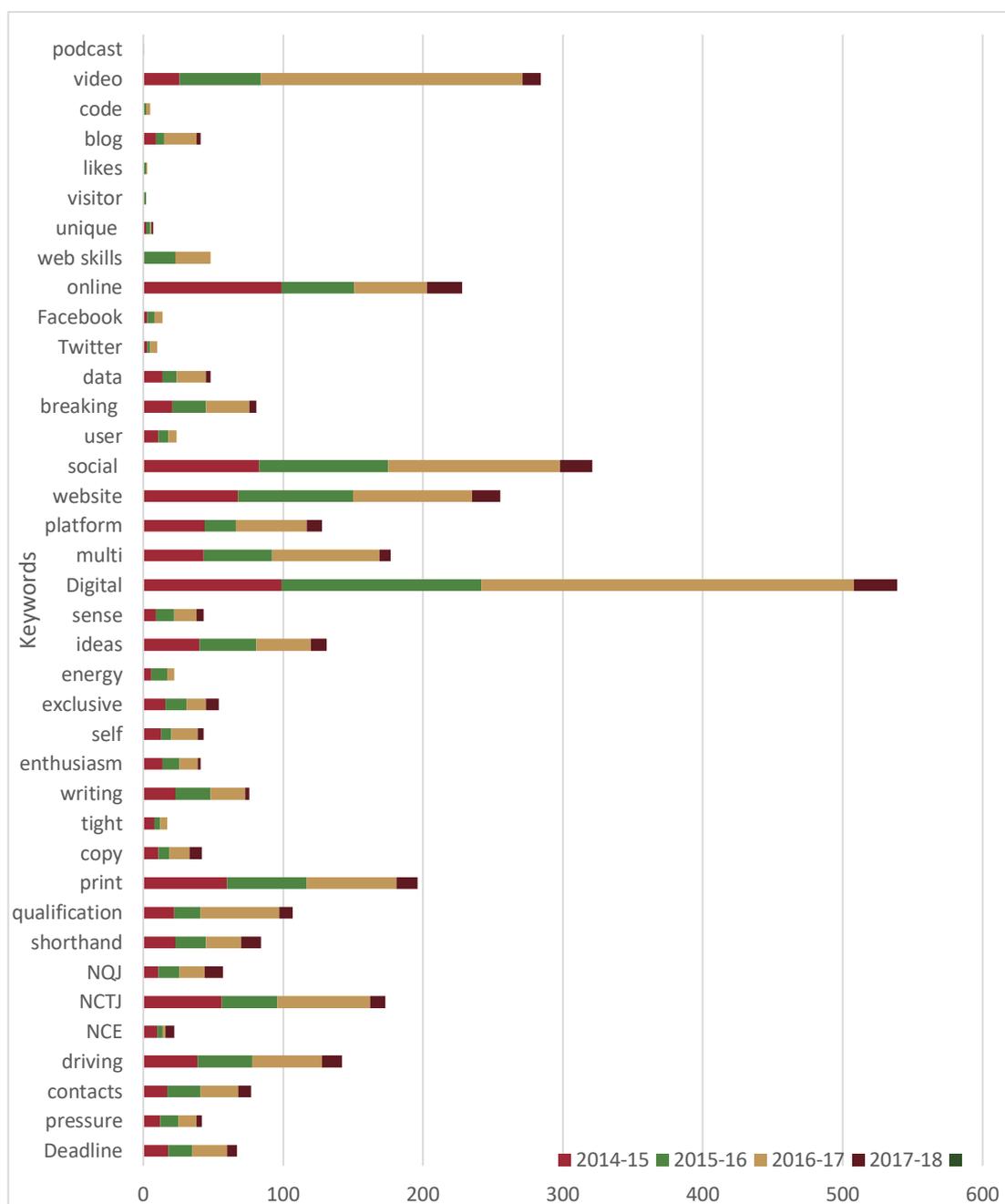


Figure 25. Keyword placement by collection period

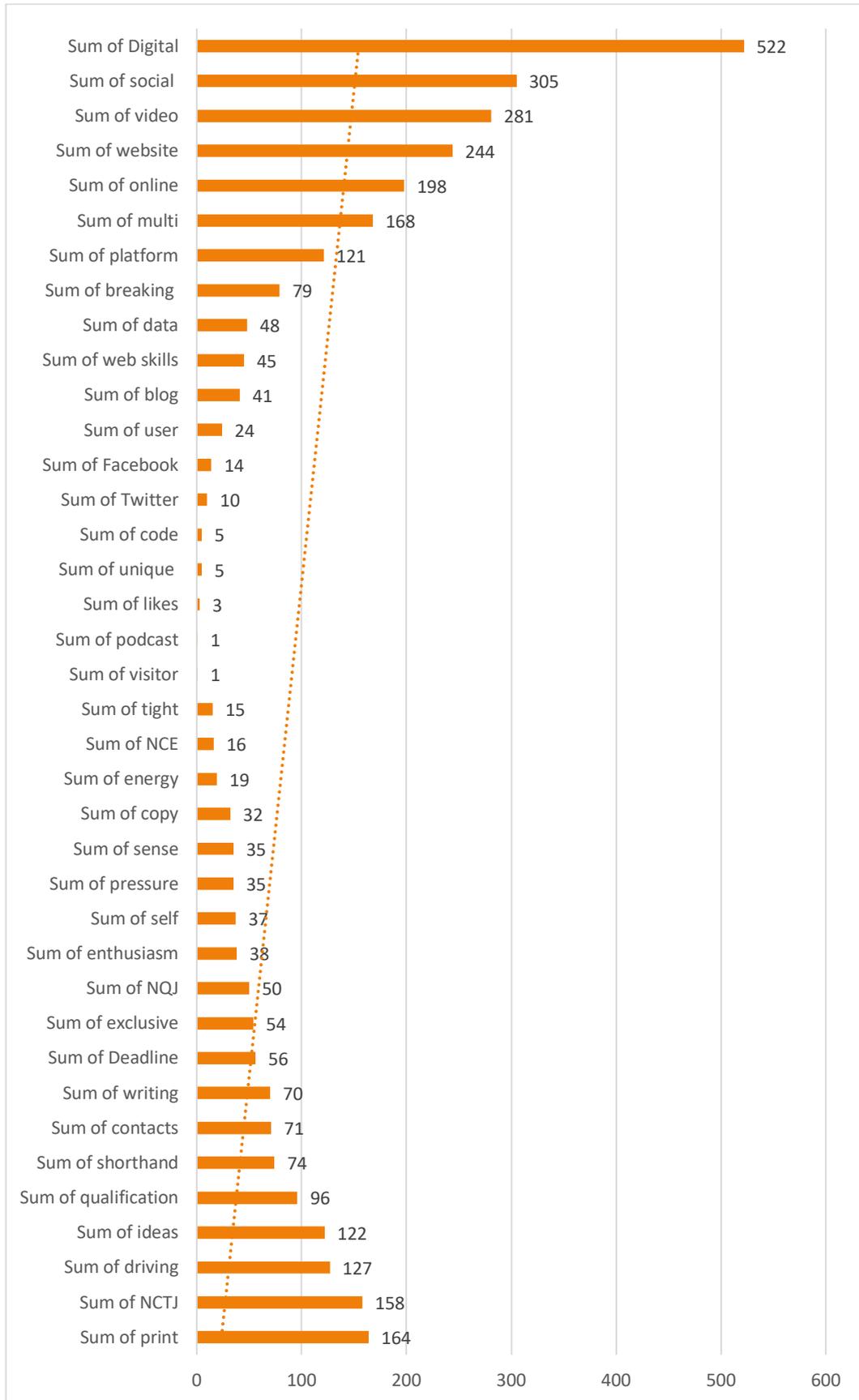


Figure 26. Keyword trendline placement by the major advertisers (Arch, CN, DC, JP, LW, LW/TM, NQ, TM).

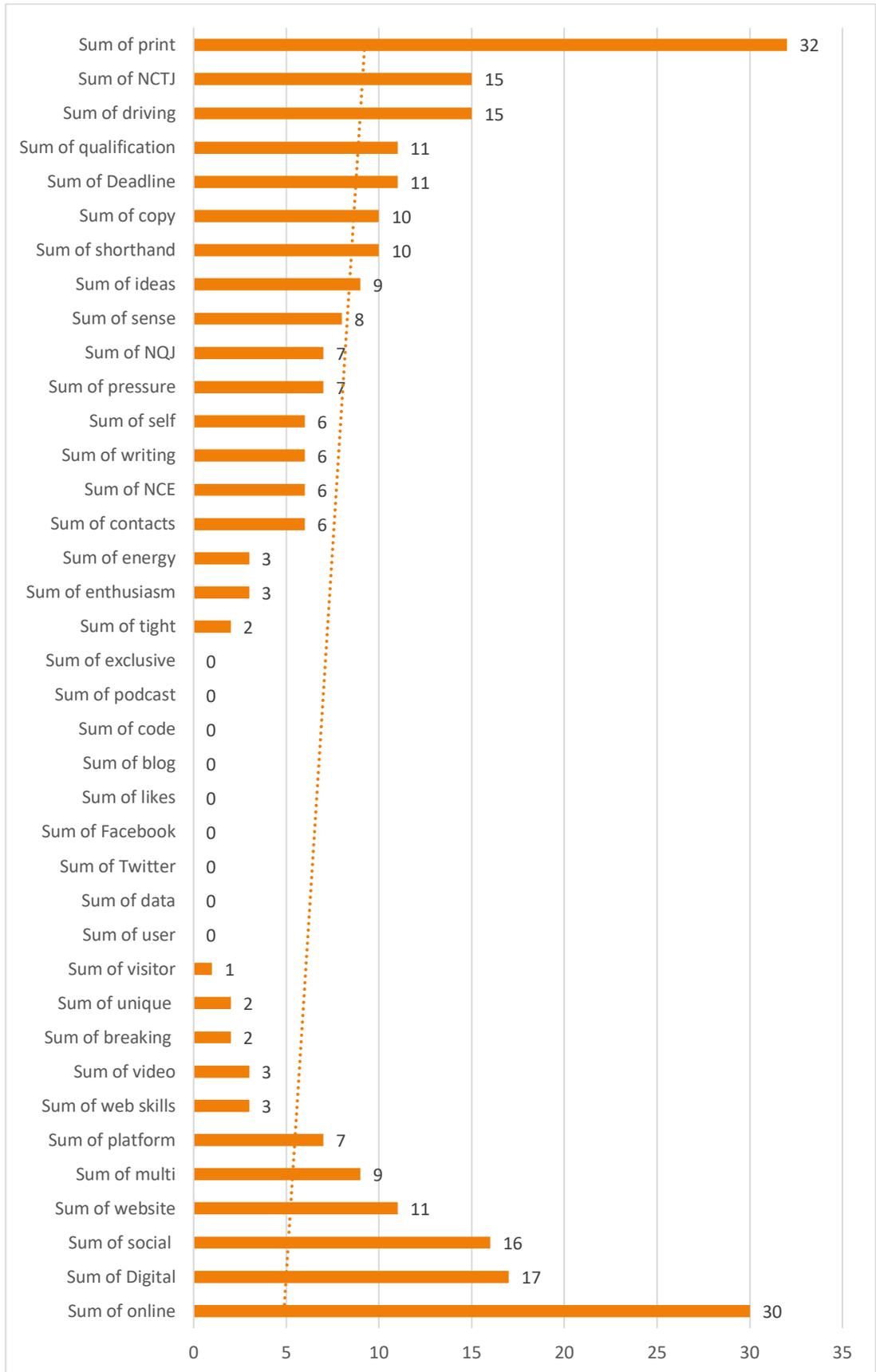


Figure 27. Keyword trendline placement by the smaller advertisers (all except Arch, CN, DC, JP, LW, LW/TM, NQ, TM).

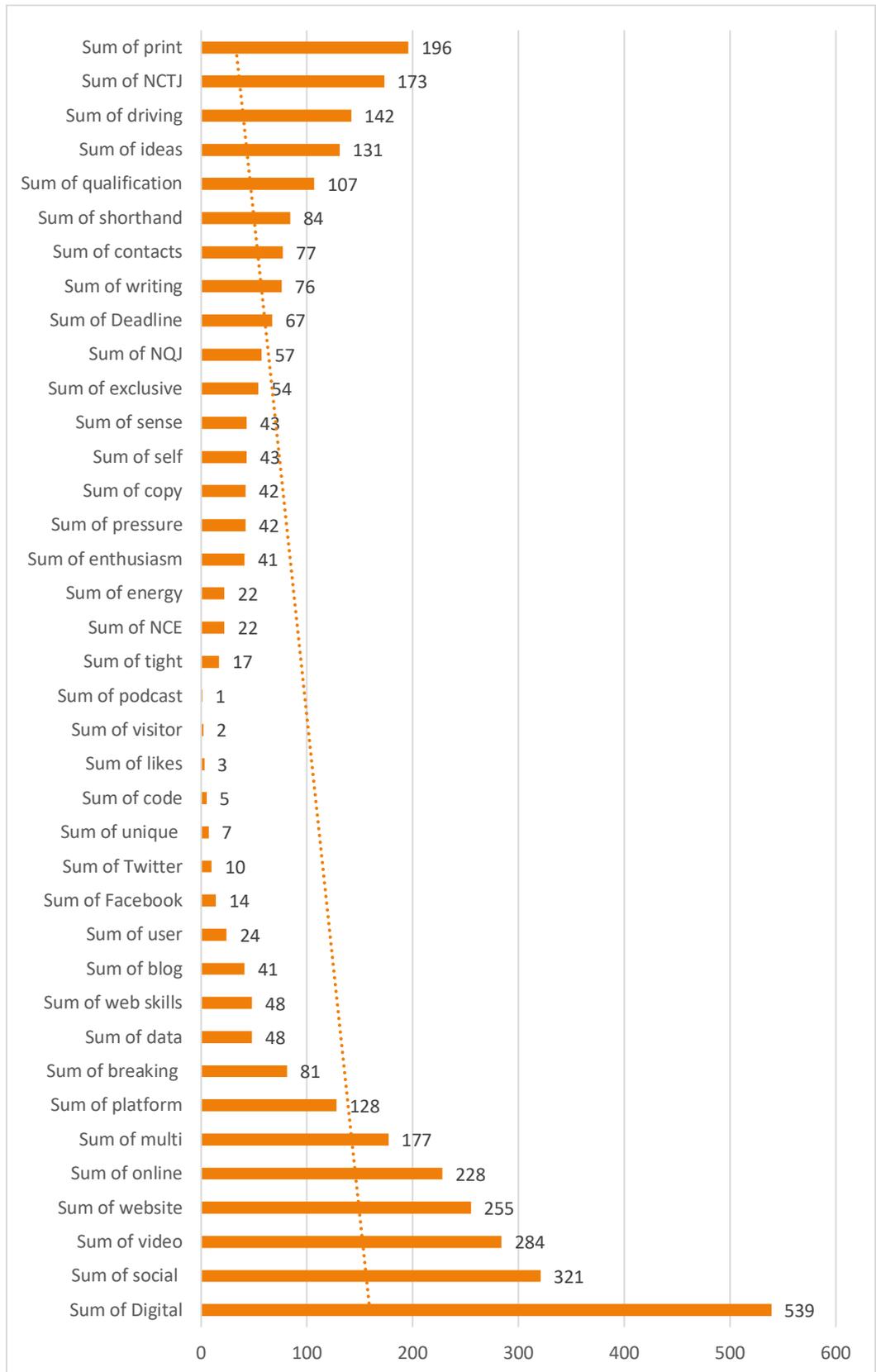


Figure 28. Total keyword placement with trendline.

4.4.1 Traditional keyword findings

All keywords within the traditional set were included at least 16 times or more throughout the collection period.

The most prolific keywords in the set were print (181 placements), NCTJ (162), driving (128), ideas (120) and qualification (97) (see **Figure 28**, pg116 for the full breakdown).

If discounting the final anomaly year, over the collection periods it appears there was only a small margin of differentiation in insertion of the keywords over each collection period. For example, the keyword *pressure* appeared 12 times in the 2014-15 data set and 13 times in the following two data sets (see **Figures 32**, pg120 and **33**, pg125.)

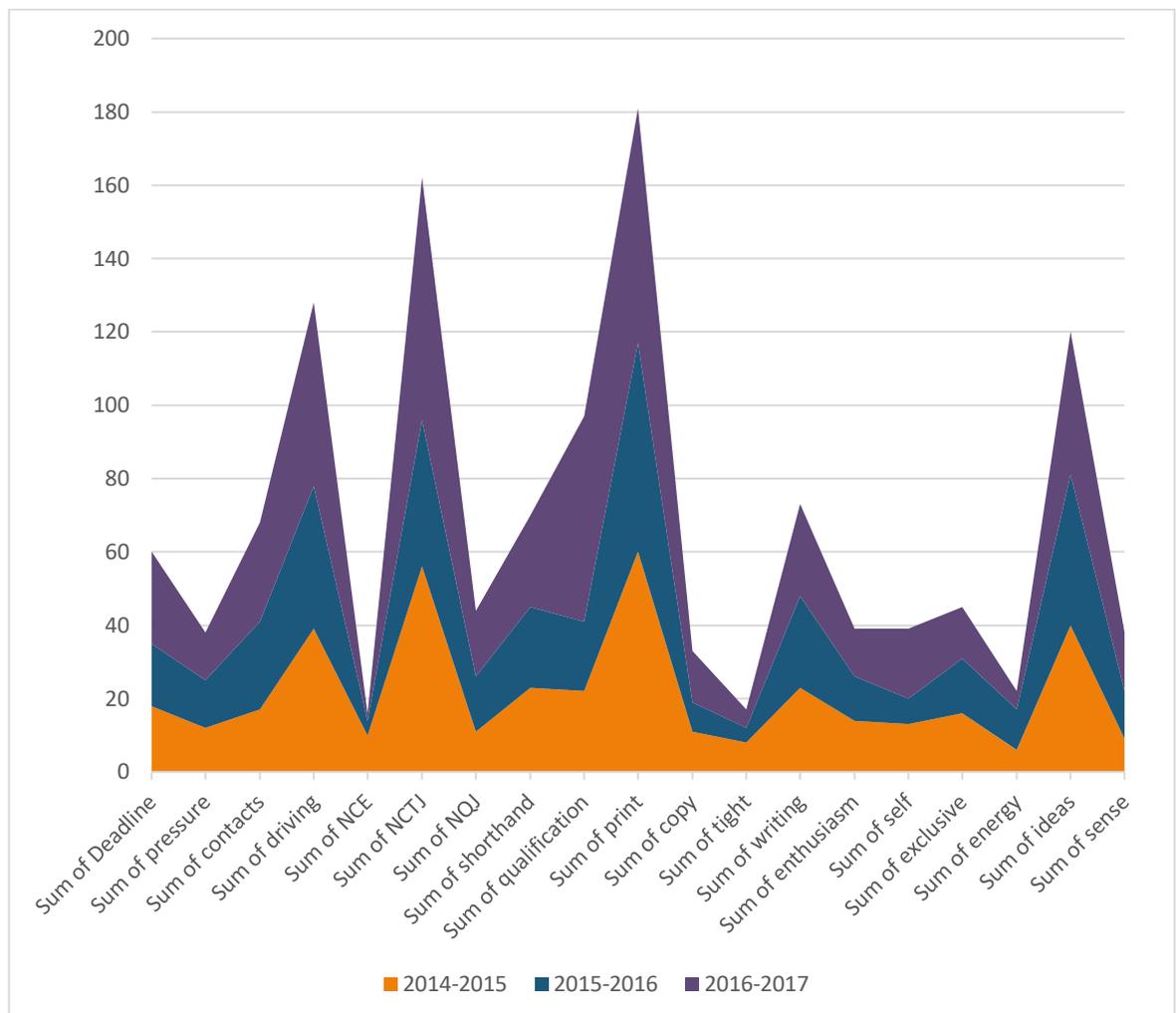


Figure 29. Traditional trends over time, excluding the final collection.

Most traditional keywords followed an anticipated pattern of inclusion which followed the total number of advertisements collected over each period. The trend in the inclusion pattern was a steady increase, usually tempered by a dip

in the second collection period due to a dip in the overall advertisement number (see **Figure 29**, pg117 and **Figure 30**, below).

However, some keywords broke the trend by failing to dip in the second year, resulting in a yearly increase overall. These included the keywords *contacts*, *pressure* and *NQJ*.

Figure 30. Traditional keyword inclusion, including the final year.

Traditional keywords	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	Grand Total
Deadline	18	17	25	7	67
pressure	12	13	13	4	42
contacts	17	24	27	9	77
driving	39	39	50	14	142
NCE	10	4	2	6	22
NCTJ	56	40	66	11	173
NQJ	11	15	18	13	57
shorthand	23	22	25	14	84
qualification	22	19	56	10	107
print	60	57	64	15	196
copy	11	8	14	9	42
tight	8	4	5	0	17
writing	23	25	25	3	76
enthusiasm	14	12	13	2	41
self	13	7	19	4	43
exclusive	16	15	14	9	54
energy	6	11	5	0	22
ideas	40	41	39	11	131
sense	9	13	16	5	43

Other keywords saw a decline in use, including *tight*, *ideas* and *exclusive*, but the differences between the collection periods were minimal. *NCE*, the qualification which was replaced by *NQJ* in 2013, unsurprisingly decreased in its inclusion over the collection period.

Possible areas of significance were those where there was little change or increase between the second and third collection period, indicating a decrease in use when compared against the increase in advertisement numbers from second to third collection period.

These included *writing*, which stayed reasonably static across the three collection periods and did not change in the second or third. It also included *shorthand* which dipped in the second collection period and then only increased by two inclusions overall in the third period. *Enthusiasm* also failed to significantly change and dipped slightly overall, as did *exclusive*. *Ideas* also dropped in use year on year overall, despite a small increase in use in the second collection period.

When analysing the dataset trends with the anomaly year included, the keywords tended to follow the same patterns as discussed above, with indication of a slight variation in some areas. These included a slight increase in the use of the keywords *driving*, *NQJ* and *exclusive* and demonstrates a dip in the use of the words *energy* and *tight*. Despite the significant drop in advertising numbers, the keyword *NCE* increased in its use in the final collection period.

4.4.2 Digital keyword findings

Digital keywords were much more varied in their inclusion ratings than traditional keywords, with some keywords appearing fewer than 10 times overall and others being included in their hundreds (see **Figure 31**, pg119 and **Figure 32**, pg120).

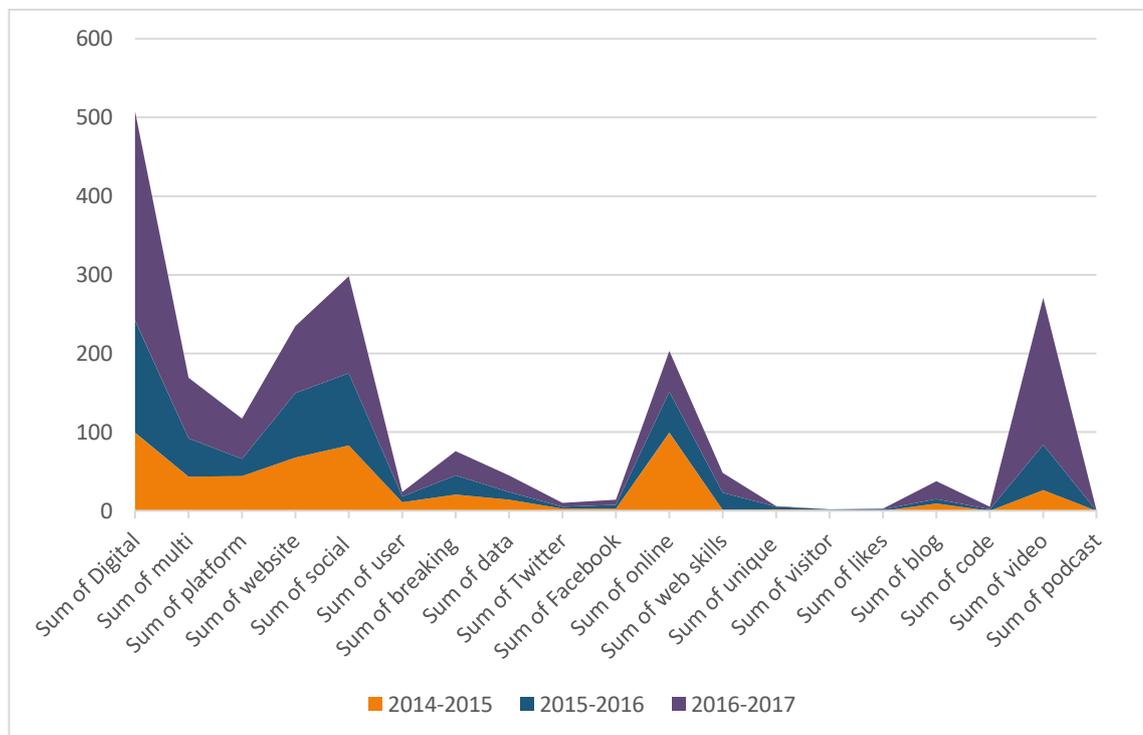


Figure 31. Digital keyword inclusion trends, not including the final collection period.

Figure 32. Digital keyword inclusion, including the final year.

Digital keywords	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	Grand Total
Digital	99	143	266	31	539
multi	43	49	77	8	177
platform	44	22	51	11	128
website	68	82	85	20	255
social	83	92	123	23	321
user	11	7	6	0	24
breaking	21	24	31	5	81
data	14	10	21	3	48
Twitter	3	2	5	0	10
Facebook	3	5	6	0	14
online	99	52	52	25	228
web skills	1	22	25	0	48
unique	2	3	1	1	7
visitor	1	1	0	0	2
likes	0	2	1	0	3
blog	9	6	23	3	41
code	0	2	3	0	5
video	26	58	187	13	284
podcast	0	0	1	0	1

The most significant keywords were *digital* (appearing 539 times), *social* (321), *video* (284), *website* (255), *online* (228), *multi* (177) and *platform* (128). These were contrasted by keywords which appeared in single figures, such as *podcast* (1), *visitor* (2), *likes* (3), *code* (5) and *unique* (7).

In contrast to the traditional keyword placement trends, the digital keyword trends demonstrated significantly more difference between the collection periods (see **Figure 31**, pg119 and **Figure 32**, above).

When discounting the final anomaly year, there was significant growth year on year for some keywords, despite the dip in the number of advertisements placed in the second round of collection. These included *video*, *social*, *digital*, *breaking* and *multi*.

Other keywords increased year on year, but with a gentler increase in the second to third collection period. These included *website*, *code* and *web skills*.

Several keywords followed the advertisement placement pattern, with keywords dipping in the second collection period in synchronisation with the dip in the number of advertisements placed. There was still demonstration of a general trend towards increasing use of the keywords. These included *blog*, *data* and *platform*.

The inclusion of specific social media platforms *Facebook* and *Twitter* was minimal overall, with neither reaching more than six inclusions per collection period and with little variance year on year. The world *podcast* was included just once, in the third collection period.

Some keywords saw a decrease in use or overall trend decrease over the first three collection periods. The majority of these keywords appeared less than 10 times in each collection period and included *likes*, *visitor* and *unique*. The category also included *user* which appeared 11 times in the first period but decreased after that point.

When analysing the digital keyword trends including the final anomaly year, there was a sharper drop-off than represented by the traditional keyword trends. Only *unique* came close to matching its inclusion figures from the previous year.

4.5 The rise and divide of digital: analysis of the data

It is clear from the advertisements collected that there is a representative spread of advertisements placed by regional newspaper publishing companies in the UK; with the largest companies tending to place the most advertisements and the medium-sized and small companies following suit.

Across the spectrum of possible job roles there is also proportional representation of positions within the traditional hierarchical internal newsroom network; with fewer senior and management roles than newsdesk positions and fewer newsdesk positions than reporting roles. Other and sub editing roles were also following the expected pattern of being fewer in number than reporting and management roles.

Therefore, while it could be suggested that while 342 is a small data sample for analysis, the advertisements which have been placed are representative of the UK in terms of the range of publishers and also indicative of the traditional hierarchical structure of internal newsroom networks. Similarly low counts have been used by scholars conducting similar longitudinal studies, with Cleary and Cochie's (2011) paper referring to two collection cycles of 180 and 238 advertisements respectively and Massey's study (2010) using 210 advertisements for analysis.

Therefore, size of the sample is enough to provide a foundation for this research project to create a scaffold to inform and shape the second and third sections of the study.

The analysis of these outcomes will look specifically at how the data sample can be interpreted to answer the research questions, with focus on tools and skills value, news production processes, identity and jurisdiction.

4.5.1 The value of skills and tools

This section of the research project is designed to particularly answer the research questions **1. What skills and tools are valued within regional newspaper newsrooms within the UK? and How are those skills and tools valued? Is it through use and impact or perceived value?** The latter part of the question is more difficult to answer through advertisements alone because of the representative and idealistic quality of job advertisements (Rynes and Barber, 1990; Askehave, 2010).

4.5.1.1 Digital Vs traditional

The initial impression from analysis of the job advertisements is that digital tools and skills made up two thirds of the keywords included in the advertisements and that, until the final year, the digital keywords were increasingly prevalent within the data set. As discussed, the final year is an anomaly due to the low number of advertisements placed. Interpretation of the reasoning behind the shift in focus in the final year will be discussed in the next section.

Overall, at the most basic level, the data does indicate a preference for digital over traditional. However, it would be too simplistic to interpret the majority keywords as entirely dominant. There is evidence of differentiation between publishing companies and complexities caused by nuances of language within the keywords.

4.5.1.1.1 Publishing company influence

The breakdown of digital and traditional keyword inclusion has to be compared against the publishing companies placing the advertisements.

As demonstrated, the larger publishing companies in the UK placed the majority of advertisements. It was also the larger companies which demonstrated a prevalence towards digital keyword inclusion, with smaller companies showing a trend towards a higher traditional keyword use. It is likely that this is the reason behind the final year showing a slight shift towards traditional keyword use, as the percentage of advertisements placed in the final year by smaller publishing companies was up by 17% on the previous three years.

The reasons for the differentiation between the larger companies and their digital focus and the smaller companies with a more traditional focus are linked to the capitalist model of the publishing industry. The smaller publishing companies generate less revenue due to smaller sales and fewer print and digital advertising options. They have smaller workforces and cover less geographic ground, most often operating within a certain geographic area, and have fewer readers paying for their print and online products. Therefore, their profit is also lower and they have less money to spend on technology, less flexibility within the workforce and fewer journalists to manage the technology (Quinn, 2005; Reid, 2012).

The larger publishers produce more print and digital content for a larger audience, they have larger teams and more flexibility to pool resources across geographic areas and the publishing company, as well as having the capital to spend on new methods of news production and the actors required to manage it. The larger the publishing company, the more affordable the rollout of new technology due to the wider spread of actors and outputs benefiting from it. As a result, they have an increased ability to respond to new trends and to capitalise on consumer choices (Reid, 2012; Quinn, 2005). The news consumer in the UK has been demonstrated to be moving online to access news (Ofcom, 2019; Mediatique, 2018); the larger newsgroups have had more opportunity due to finance and flexibility to aim to capitalise on this change.

It is unsurprising that the larger companies are the most prolific advertisers as it is these companies which have the larger workforces and, as a result, an elevated number of staff and positions; therefore, it is those publishers which dominate the advertisement agenda. The data's evidence of a prevalence in digital language is specifically linked to the larger newsgroups; the same newsgroups which dominate the advertisements and the industry and the same news groups which have a capacity and revenue for larger digital investment.

As a result, while digital keywords were more prevalent within the data set overall, the inclusion of those digital words was weighted more heavily towards the major publishing companies and is not representative of all of the publishers within the UK.

4.5.1.1.2 Defining the language of the data

The language of the data set is also an important consideration when analysing the outcomes.

When designing the content analysis coding for this study, the identification of keywords was crucial in differentiating between traditional and digital elements within the advertisements.

As previously discussed, the keywords were defined based upon study of recruitment advertisements from HTFP and also the researcher's knowledge of the language used within industry, particularly in terms of skills and tools descriptors for recruitment within regional newspaper journalism. The results from the data collection indicate the majority of keywords chosen were suitable for inclusion because of their appearance within the data sampled. All of the keywords appeared at least once within the data set and the majority were included multiple times.

Analysis of the coding places the keywords into different categories in terms of the word type. The word type categories include specific tools and skills, general tools and skills, character qualities and product descriptors (**see Figure 33**, pg.125).

The keywords were originally identified to define within the advertisements the skills which might be sought and also the ability and requirement to use specific tools. It could be argued that character qualities can be categorised as a natural skill. The technology and results of technology identified in the product descriptor category could be categorised under the ability to produce for, use or understand a tool. As a result, all the keywords within the traditional and digital data sets are relevant to the question of skills and tools value.

However, this analysis also demonstrates the similarity in meaning between some of the keywords, particularly in the digital set.

In the general tools and skills section, the words *digital*, *multi* (for multimedia) and *web skills*, all have a wide, unspecified meaning. All three keywords can be applied in a similar context, for example, the word *digital* in a sentence reading 'the candidate must have excellent digital skills' could be interchangeable with *multimedia* or *web* and still carry the same meaning. The words *visitor*, *user* and *unique* can all be applied to mean the online audience and platform, *website* and *online* could also be applied to mean the same product. In the traditional set *tight*, *writing* and *copy* can also be used in similar contexts to allude to the same thing.

Figure 33. Traditional and digital keyword categorisation.

	Specific tools and skills	General tools and skills	Character qualities	Product descriptor
Traditional keywords	NCE NCTJ NQJ shorthand driving	deadline pressure contacts qualification tight writing	enthusiasm self, energy ideas sense	print copy exclusive
Digital keywords	Twitter Facebook blog code video podcast data	digital, multi, web skills, social, breaking		platform website user online unique visitor likes

However, in all these examples, the individual keywords can also be applied to have slightly different meanings. For example, *platform* can have a wider meaning than *website* as it can refer to more than one kind of digital output and *online* can have an even more general meaning than platform as it refers to the internet in its entirety. *Unique* gives a definition to a user profile which is not identical to a repeatedly returning *user* and *visitor* is a word which could be used as an alternative to *user*.

In the traditional set, many of the keywords have more defined and specific individual meanings, some of which are summarised by keywords with a wider

meaning. For example, *NCE*, *NQJ*, *NCTJ* all define specific qualifications. When focusing on *NCTJ*, one element of the qualification is 100 words per minute *shorthand*. *Shorthand*, which is challenging to achieve, has been defined as a key skill by editors and is often specifically sought as a result (Canter, 2015). When widening the focus, the keyword *qualification* allows employers to cast a wider net and include other journalism qualifications as well as the *NCTJ*.

Therefore, the inclusion of each of the keywords is important because of the variance in meaning. The lack of defined language allows for a variance in terminology whilst also capturing the essence of key skills and tools within the job descriptors.

This flexibility in terms of definition and interpretation of language is of particular note in the digital keyword set. This alone suggests a newness of language and use which means there is less industry-influenced jargon (unlike in the traditional set, where there are jargon-based keywords such as *tight*, *self*, *copy* and *sense*) and less specific definition to the keywords.

This is reflected in the results of the data analysis with the wider variance in the trends of digital keyword inclusion over time. For example, *Facebook* and *Twitter*, which are two specific social media platforms, barely appear. Instead, *social* is used as a term which encompasses both platforms and more and which has a significant inclusion rate which increases over time.

The use of the specific word *website* decreases over time, while the less specific and wider term *platform* increases.

This lack of industry-specific digital language and the evidence of the shift in language used over time, suggests the digital landscape within newspapers is not yet cemented and that a flexibility and adaptability is required. While the digital keywords are prevalent and increasing, they are not steady in their use in the way that the traditional keyword set is. Instead there are spikes and drops in usage, which indicates a shift in digital tools and skills focus. While the focus is clearly on digital tools, technology and skills, the data suggests the pathway to creating a digital product is less established and more changeable than the traditional print path (Arnold, 2008).

4.5.1.2 Laying the foundations

In spite of the difficulty in identifying specific digital words with longevity of use, the keywords included most prolifically within the data set throughout are general digital keywords which have a strong presence in the first collection period and increase significantly across the second and third collection period.

This, when analysed alongside the categorisation of the job titles and the categorisation of the job description, shows a clear increase in digital focus across the data set – with both the larger publishing companies and the smaller publishing companies demonstrating a rise in digital categorisation.

This increasing dominance of digital keywords clearly indicates a high value being placed in digital skills and tools. The rise in digital keywords, when analysed alongside the rise in digital job types and digitally titled roles suggests an increase in digitally focused journalistic roles within the workforce. The overall rise in advertisement numbers (excluding the final collection period) when analysed alongside the sharp rise in digital terminology and categorisation and the more gradual rise in inclusion of traditional terms and codes suggests digital technology is creating a growth opportunity for publishers. Publishers are clearly still recruiting for traditional roles and skills but are widening their nets in order to also capture digitally skilled journalists.

The presence and gradual trend increase in traditionally coded jobs and traditional keywords is a strong indicator that while digital focus might be increasing, there is no compromise on the need for traditional skills and tools. The data suggests traditional elements are highly and consistently valued and while digital focus was a booming growth area, traditional was a steady element of tools and skills requirements.

4.5.1.3 Keyword specifics

Scrutiny of individual keywords and their trends is required to answer specifically what skills and tools are valued within regional newspapers in the UK.

4.5.1.3.1 Traditional keywords

As discussed, the inclusion of traditional keywords has been strong and steady, with no one word unused during the collection period.

The most included traditional keyword was *print*, with 196 references. The word appeared often in order to reference the existence of the newspaper, often in paired alongside reference to the digital product. For example in D14-2017 an advertisement for a Trainee Reporter for the *Bury Free Press*, an Iliffe Media title, the word appeared 3 times, with the first appearance reading: “We are proud to be at the heart of the communities we serve and have a strong readership both in print and online.”

Often the word print was used as an identifier of the product and the job role. For example, in J28-2017 an advertisement for a senior reporter with the *Derby Telegraph*, a Local World/Trinity Mirror publication, read: “Based in Derby, you will work for the *Derby Telegraph’s* print and web publications.”

The word appeared multiple times in some advertisements and was included repeatedly by some advertisers, while others did not use it at all.

Print was included by all of the major advertisers (Arch, CN, DC, JP, LW/TM, NQ and TM), with the most use by Trinity Mirror, the company which placed the second most number of advertisements (78 in total). The patchy use of the keyword demonstrates it was not a definer for many of the job roles and product advertised.

NCTJ was the second most included traditional keyword, with 158 appearances. With the majority of positions advertised being for trainee reporters, it is not hugely surprising that the entry-level qualification was included multiple times. However, the keyword was not restricted to use within trainee advertisements only, with the qualification also included within senior reporter, multimedia reporter, newsdesk and specialist reporter roles.

Other industry-accredited qualifications were also included multiple times, with the senior qualifying exam – the *NCE* and its replacement *NQJ* – appearing 79 times in total. *Shorthand*, an element of the *NCTJ* qualification, appeared 84 times and the word *qualification*, was included 107 times.

Clearly, from this data, industry-recognised skills and qualifications are still regarded as important within regional newspapers and by a spread of publishing companies.

Driving (for driving licence) was included 142 times, with a slight increase in the third collection round. Again, the skill remained reasonably constant throughout, including within job advertisements coded as having digital job titles.

Ideas – a keyword categorised as traditional due to the journalistic character quality of thinking of new ideas – was the fourth most included traditional keyword. As discussed earlier, it is a keyword which has traditional roots but might be included within a digital role, making its inclusion difficult to interpret in terms of having a digital or traditional slant. What can be recognised is the importance of the character quality of being able to have new ideas, with the quality clearly of value due to its high placement within the traditional word set.

While the remainder of the traditional keywords were clearly of some value to publishers, due to their minor levels of inclusion, they will not be discussed individually at this point.

4.5.1.3.2 Digital keywords

While digital keywords were so prolific in their total inclusion that they outweighed traditional keywords by almost two thirds, the weight and value of the individual keywords was much more diverse within the data set.

As discussed, the keywords which were most prolifically used within the digital data set – *digital*, *social*, *website*, *online* and *multi* – had had the properties of being wide in their application. However, the word *video*, which was the third most prolifically used, could be considered a more specific skill.

Video, which appeared 284 times in total, grew steadily from the first to the second collection period, before it significantly spiked in the third. The word's appearance was 80% in advertisements categorised as digital, with 19% of its appearances being within print and digital advertisements and 4% in print advertisements.

While the inclusion of some digital keywords avoid specific definers of the skills and tools required, *video* not only defines parameters but its growth suggests the skill is establishing potential longevity within regional newspapers.

Many of the other prolifically used keywords within the digital keyword set demonstrate a rise or wane in usage, such as *online*, which peaked in use in the first collection round, but declined after that. *Website* rose slightly in the second collection round, but barely increased into the third. *Platform* halved its appearance in the second round, before climbing dramatically in the third.

This interchangeable terminology, as discussed, demonstrates a lack of certainty within the companies represented about terminology and specific skills. However, in a field changing as rapidly as newspaper journalism (MacGregor, 2014; Williams and Franklin, 2007), perhaps this lack of definition of specific skills is unsurprising. While it is clear digital skills and use of digital tools are a valuable requirement, employers are reluctant to restrict potential or define specifics in an environment where change is the norm.

4.5.2 News production processes

Clearly advertisements are a starting point for recruitment, casting an idealised picture of both the candidate and the job role and environment (Askehave, 2010). Therefore, analysis of the advertisements in order to pinpoint digital impacts on news production processes must be acknowledged as painting a picture of news production, rather than defining a solid reality.

However, much can be taken from the job advertisements to paint the picture of news production, not least, because of the strong trend increase in digital categorisation and keywords year on year.

Clearly the processes of making news within regional newspaper newsrooms is increasingly digital, with publishing companies projecting their plans to become more digitally focused via the job advertisements.

The heavy use of the words *social*, *multi*, *online* and *website* as well as *video* demonstrate a split focus across publishers' websites and other publishing platforms such as social media.

However, traditional terminology is also of importance, with steady inclusion of traditional keywords, suggesting news production adheres to some checks, balances, qualifications and has not strayed exceptionally far from the traditional model.

The hierarchical structures represented by the various job role codes suggests the internal newsroom network is not significantly changed, but instead has spread out to accommodate digitally-focused positions. This suggests the traditional structures within the newsrooms have not been altered by digital tools, but instead have adapted to include digital-facing positions. As a result, it could be inferred that news production processes are similarly adapting, rather than changing in their entirety. A suggestion which would align with the findings of the literature reviewed at the start of this thesis (García-Avilés et al., 2014).

There are some specialist roles within the data set, with specialist multimedia reporters (33) slightly outweighing specialist reporters (23). These specialist roles suggest a shift in production processes to encompass new digital specialisms and to channel production into digital-only outputs. Roles include video specialists, social media positions and what's on reporters. There are also positions titled 'advanced content writers' which focus on strategic planning and writing entertaining content which can be used at any time.

4.5.3 Identity

This change in job role focus, with a surge in digital keywords throughout the data set and the identification of specific media roles, suggests there will have been a shift in the role identity of the journalists within these internal newsroom networks. While there is evidence of traditional identifying elements of UK regional newspaper journalists, such as journalistic qualifications and recognisable hierarchical structures, the increasing and intense shift towards digital language and job categorisations suggests the identities of the actors

within the newsrooms and, in turn, the identities of the products they are producing, is changing. This would align with research conducted in the US, which suggested modelling of journalistic identity was discursive (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017). If following the model identified by Hanitzsch and Vos, the rising digital language from this element of the study forms the “normative” and “narrative” elements of the model, with the fieldwork and the survey discovering the “cognitive” and “practiced” elements (2017, pp124). While the language of these job advertisements is representative of the publishing companies and their projected values (Askehave, 2010), there has to be some significant reflection of the advertisements within the internal newsroom networks represented (Massey, 2010; Cleary and Cochie, 2011). Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest the language of the advertisements reflects elements of the field and the actors within that field, both in terms of their habitus and disposition (Jenkins, 2002; Bourdieu, 1993, reprinted from the original of 1986).

The keywords suggest the requirement for journalists to be, in the main, multi-skilled in digital and traditional production techniques, again, reflecting previously published research (MacGregor, 2014; Cleary and Cochie, 2011).

It could be suggested that the majority focus on employment of trainees reveals dual reasoning for the companies analysed. The first being the cost of employment of a trainee being lower than a more senior position, suggesting expenditure on employment is of key focus for the publishing companies paying for advertising. The second being a suggestion of movement within the company. Either via promotion of trainees within the publishing company to more senior roles, therefore freeing a trainee position to advertise. Or a general movement out of the editorial workforce to roles elsewhere, with replacement of those people mainly being trainees.

As documented, there have been closures, job losses and mergers documented in the past decade in local newspapers in the UK (Mediatique, 2018). Therefore, the trainee roles advertised are likely to have been mainly created due to movement within the internal newsroom networks and the wider publishing company networks rather than because of new titles or start-ups. This suggests, unless trainee reporters are moving out of news organisations as much as they move into them, there is a movement of experienced and skilled journalists out of the work force alongside creation of new digital roles. The result of this kind of movement is a generally younger, less experienced workforce, which will, in turn, have an impact on the product, its quality, focus, priority and identity (Nikunen, 2014). It is these small shifts which produce significant overall change in terms of the perceived power structures within the internal networks (Foucault, 1977).

The inclusion of specialist roles demonstrates value is still placed upon some journalists focusing on singular areas within their work. The specialist role is traditionally more highly elevated within the hierarchical internal newsroom structure because of the importance and responsibility placed upon that individual actor to cover a specific subject. However, the job advertisement data demonstrates a decrease in traditional specialist roles until the final collection, when there is an upsurge (in line with a slight upsurge in traditional focus and the increased ratio of smaller publication companies). In contrast, specialist multimedia reporter roles, which significantly outweigh traditional specialist reporter roles throughout the collection, demonstrate a trend increase. The digital specialism roles, when examined more closely, in the main are categorised as digital roles demanding specialisms in areas such as video or blogging. Only a small number suggest a requirement of a traditional role, such as court reporter or crime reporter, with a digital focus. Therefore, the evidence suggests a move away from value being placed in subject specialisms and a move towards value being placed in specific digital knowhow. This, when assessed with the vagueness of the digital language overall, places question on the value of the specialist roles.

It is possible the elitist nature of a traditional specialist role is not being replaced by digital specialisms. This is because digital specialist roles are not only more common, and therefore less elitist, but, perhaps more importantly, there is a clear shift in trends in digital values over the collection period. This shift may well impact on the permanency of the digital specialist roles as digital trends peak and trough. Traditionally, specialist roles tended to be single opportunities within the internal newsroom network which took responsibility for subject areas in print and, as convergence took place, online. But as multiple title positions increase and new digital specialisms emerge with a focus on digital-only production, the value of the individual roles in both traditional and digital categorisation decreases. This decline in the placement of traditional specialisms and surge in digital specialism suggests internal newsroom network hierarchies are widening and flattening (Anderson, 2011b), with less opportunity for promotion and career progression and more opportunity to focus on a specific digital area. This results in isolation from the wider production process rather than controlling a subject area across the internal newsroom network as the actor undertakes their specific role within the network.

While there is evidence of shifting change, as discussed, there is also evidence of slow or delayed response to external influence, particularly within the smaller news organisations. For example, the keyword *NCE* was used in each collection period, ending with a slight upsurge on what had been a steady

decline in use (in correlation with the increase in the ratio of smaller companies advertising). This continued use of a qualification descriptor scrapped by the NCTJ in 2013 demonstrates a slow response to change and a possible reluctance to adapt to new terminology. This correlates with other research suggesting the pace of response to external change and consumer for digital content has been slow (Williams and Franklin, 2007; MacGregor, 2014)

An increase in the number of advertisements taking in multiple titles also suggests a dilution in identity of the news product and the journalists. While the role of the journalist has quickly spread to include increasing digital capabilities, whilst maintaining traditional foundations, this 'Jack-of-all-trades' identity also appears to be mirrored in the internal newsroom networks. The increasing work on multiple titles suggests journalists are increasingly less likely to focus on single news products; resultantly they are spreading their attention across multiple products, in print and online, and across multiple communities as a result.

The widening spread of focus in terms of news titles and geography for the individual journalist reduces the element of identity established by working for one specific product within one specific community. The sense of competition and cultural capital with the field (Bourdieu, 2012; Grubenmann and Meckel, 2017) is diffused by cross-working, collaboration and shared content (Usher, 2015). The result is a role identity more defined by the individual and their job title and less defined by the specific product identity (Molyneux et al., 2018; Brooks and Waterson, 2019).

4.5.4 Jurisdiction

The widening of focus across titles reflects a change in the jurisdiction of news products, particularly as multiple-title positions are more widely advertised for by the larger publishing companies.

As discussed, the larger companies have more opportunity to share resources across regions or even company-wide due to the oligopoly of the market in terms of titles owned and geographic areas covered (Ramsay and Moore, 2016). The job advertisements collected overall and those for the larger publishing companies suggest a trend move towards multiple title positions and a decrease in single title roles. In the smaller publishing companies there is less of an obvious trend in either category; most probably because of the variance in advertisers, with some only owning single newspapers, while others manage small numbers of multiple titles within distinct geographic areas.

This move towards shared staffing would marry up with the news production process trend evidenced for shared content, with common content being used in multiple titles (Ramsay and Moore, 2016; Whittington, 2018b) . With thinning paginations and increasing amounts on online content, a suggestion of movement towards shared content in regional news production suggests there will be a 'standardisation' of content, with less tailored focus on specific geographic regions or communities. This indicates that while the network reach of regional newspaper titles and their journalists is widening, the jurisdictional influence of those titles is likely to be diluted by shared 'one size fits all' content.

4.6 Conclusion

Job advertisements are a window which project the most positive view of an organisation. By seeking to recruit the best person to a role, the position and its situation are generally described in the best terms possible. In a limited space, a company not only picks out the main requirements for the candidate profile, but it also highlights how it sees itself, or, projects an image of how it would like to be seen. Therefore, it must be acknowledged job advertisements cannot be considered as a true representation of a workplace, but instead, represent the ideals, the aspirations and the best of a company and available position (Askehave, 2010).

When accounting for this idealised projection, it is clear from this data set that digital skills and tools and digital influence over production processes, are significantly increasing in value within regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK. In turn, traditional skills, tools and processes appear to be considered as an important foundation, but with a demonstration of gradual decline in significance.

The domination of a handful of publishing companies demonstrates a growing oligopoly of regional newspaper provision within the UK and it is these publishing companies which particularly value digital tools and skills so highly.

However, despite evidence of digital convergence creating new job roles and growth opportunities within these larger organisations, there is also evidence of uncertainty and unrest and a related decline in product and journalistic identity and jurisdictional impact.

While traditional skills, tools and specialisms are represented universally by language and inclusion, these are in decline. Digital language and related specialisms, skills and tools are represented by a strong upsurge overall, but the specific skills and tools do not enjoy a continual and smooth increase. The

uncertainty and lack of longevity demonstrated by the pattern of some of the digital language reflects a rocky and changeable working environment which might see significant increases in recruitment due to the wheels of change being in faster motion.

With the significance of digital technology clear within the data set, digitally-driven roles might well be placed in higher value by the employer. However, due to the high number of trainee positions there is also an overall suggestion of digital native employees being more highly valued than actors with significant journalistic experience (Nikunen, 2014). This is possibly, in part, due to the cost of employing trainees over experienced seniors. But it also suggests the value of the human actor is not as significant as the value of the digital role they play within the news production process of the internal newsroom network.

In turn, it could be suggested that within the internal newsroom network, human actors being recruited are being placed on the same value scale as digital actors; with technology and digital actants increasingly being the reason for recruitment and those technologies acting as an extension of the human actor being sought to operate them (Latour, 2005; Anderson and De Maeyer, 2015) .

The keywords with the most usage also carry a heavy suggestion of where the companies see the money being in regional newspaper journalism. For example, *print* as an overall catchword demonstrates a significance in the printed product overall – it is, after all, where the highest advertising rates still stand and, in the majority of cases, the only part of the product which is paid for. The keyword *NCTJ* ties in with the employment of trainee reporters – another cost saving over employing more senior staff.

In digital language, the keywords are vague but dominant. There is a demonstration of multiple products or representations of the product – *digital*, *social*, *website* etc.. The third most popular digital keyword is video, a word which significantly and strongly increases each year. The longevity and focus on this specific word suggests there is a reason for emphasis on this specific digital skill; this thesis suggests there will be evidence in the fieldwork element of this study to demonstrate video is seen as a way of making money online.

The increasing but less defined focus on digital tools and skills language and the increase in trend towards multiple news titles suggests a dilution and change in the professional identity of the journalist, the product and the jurisdiction of both.

In an attempt to achieve success in the changing digital market it appears, from this data, that less emphasis is being placed upon the individual news product and that while the hierarchical structures of the newsroom are still evidenced,

these are changing due to the internal newsroom network walls expanding to incorporate multiple products and multiple job title types at more senior positions (Anderson, 2011b; Anderson, 2013a). This thesis anticipates there will be evidence of a dilution in identity and jurisdiction of news products and a change in terms of the identifying habitus (Bourdieu, 1993, reprinted from the original of 1986) of the actors working within the internal newsroom networks.

The demonstration of change due to digital technology within the data set is likely also to be reflected later in this study. It will be of particular interest to investigate if trainee positions are translating into senior roles and whether career progression is in evidence within the newsrooms being observed. Evidence of change within those newsrooms may well also resonate with the job advertisement findings.

In future studies based on this model, it would be worth revisiting the data collected here and comparing it to newly collected advertisements to investigate how digital language has changed and if there is emergence of a more settled or an equally turbulent descriptors surrounding the digital elements of local newspaper journalism in the UK.

4.6.1 Thematic conclusions

The findings from this data collection therefore identify several emerging themes which will contribute to analysis of the case-study research, the survey and overall emerging themes. Those emerging themes are as follows:

- A clear and increasing rise in digital skills and tools values
- A very gradual decline in traditional skills and tools values
- An emerging oligopoly of large newspaper publishers
- An increase in multi-title working for individual journalists
- An unpredictable and transient digital landscape and future
- A decrease in traditional specialisms and an increase in digital specialisms
- An increasingly young, inexperienced workforce

Chapter 5

Research section 2: Practice, process, change and agenda; case study evidence of digital impacts

While job advertisements can offer perspective into how internal newsroom networks project the public image of their environment, product, performance, values, aims and priorities, the scene is painted by industry marketeers and cannot be considered the full picture.

To gain a more experiential view of how digital tools have impacted on news production, identity and jurisdiction within regional newspaper newsrooms within the UK, direct access was sought to newspapers run by various publishing companies.

Access to conduct observations and interviews proved challenging, with the majority of titles approached either ignoring or refusing the request. In time, two daily titles participated in the project. They were owned by two of the three largest publishing companies in the UK in 2017 (Johnston Press, Newsquest and Trinity Mirror).

Observations and interviews were conducted over separate three-week periods, both taking place in the first half of 2017. As a result, the findings from this element of the research project provide a snapshot of time, offering rich, in-depth empirical data.

The research findings will be analysed in isolation in this chapter and discussed in Chapter 6. This will be followed by the survey chapter, which will analyse the results of the survey in the context of findings from the job advertisement study and the case studies. Overall emerging themes and conclusions will be discussed in Chapter 8.

Of the two titles involved in the case study research, the editor of one was happy for the publishing company to be named, but for the newspaper title to be withheld to allow participants anonymity. However, the editor of the second title was reluctant for the publishing company, title or participants to be named and due to the small pool of major publishing companies and for the interest of balance, it was decided both should be made anonymous.

As a result, the names of the titles have been changed, no reference has been made to their geographic location, some potentially identifying job titles have been modified slightly and all participants have been allocated a code (**Appendix 9**). Details such as age, length of time as a journalist and length of time at the participating titles have been included as it was not felt this

information alone would be enough to identify individuals from a pool of hundreds of potential local newspaper journalists.

Participants were recruited at the start of the observation period, with actors who had been absent on that first day approached for recruitment on their return to the newsroom. All participants were provided with a project pack, which included details of the project and ethical agreements in place and required their signed agreement for participation. Only journalists working in news were approached, and, similarly to the job advertisement study, those in features and sport positions were not included in the research unless they also worked on news. Those actors who refused participation were at times involved in events or discussions being recorded, but in transcription they were not alluded to by name or job role and their contribution was only referred to in note-making and analysis if their involvement was pivotal to the discourse.

Newsroom observations were conducted, which included noting actions and conversations around news production processes, tools and skills, decision-making and outcomes within the newsroom and within news conference²⁹ (See **Appendix 7** for an anonymised example of a fieldwork diary entry). Semi-structured interviews with actors within the internal newsroom networks also took place over the same time period as observations (see **Appendix 3** for the interview plan and **Appendix 10** for an anonymised example of an interview transcription).

Other evidence was also collected, such as story mapping (investigating the digital and print process of producing and publishing a news story from its source to its publication- see **Figure 36** on pg175 to **Figure 40** on pg179), mapping hierarchies (see **Figures 34** (pg142) and **35** (pg143)) and newsroom layouts and taking screen grabs of content published online, video links and printed copies of the newspapers.

Analysis of the observational elements of the fieldwork drew out a series of themes which will be explored in this chapter and which will be interrogated further by analysis from the interviews conducted.

However, firstly the context of the fieldwork will be set by introduction of the two participating titles and actors.

²⁹ The daily meeting of managers which decided the news agenda for the coming day.

5.1 The Mitre

In early 2017 the researcher spent three weeks conducting interviews and observations at daily title *The Mitre*³⁰. The newspaper was founded in the 1800s and had been purchased by its operating newsgroup in the second half of the 20th century.

The newspaper offices, including advertising and editorial, were based in a business park. The newspaper had moved there following the sale of its high-street-based offices.

The newspaper was a daily title which covered a city and the surrounding villages and towns within the local authority area. *The Mitre* was printed remotely late in the evening every day except Saturday. *The Mitre's* print sales were in decline but, in contrast, *The Mitre's* online viewing figures documented year-on-year (YOY) growth for its website viewing numbers and Facebook and Twitter followers.

There were no direct print rivals in the city covered by *The Mitre*, but there were rival titles operating at wider level and covering closely neighbouring towns and cities, with some overlap on the outlying parts of the circulation area. The rival publications were owned by other major news publishers.

At the time of the research taking place, *The Mitre* was in a state of change within the internal newsroom network; the editor of some significant years had taken redundancy, leaving their position at the end of the second week of observations. The new editor started in the week following the conclusion of observations. The title also saw a photographer and administrative staff leave on the same day as the outgoing editor. A trainee reporter started in the final week of fieldwork and appointments were being made for a videographer.

There were 19 participants at *The Mitre*, including the outgoing and the arriving editors, associate/production editors and news editors for print and digital, senior reporters, trainee reporters and sub editors. Each participant was allocated with a TM (*The Mitre*) participant number.

³⁰ The names given to the newspapers in this project are used for the purposes of reference in this study only and are in no way indicative of the identity of the participating newspaper titles.

5.2 The Journal

In the first half of 2017, three weeks were spent conducting interviews and observations at *The Journal*, a daily newspaper originally founded in the 1800s. Based at a high-street office, journalists at *The Journal* also produced *The News*, a paid-for weekly title, and *The Mail*, a free weekly title.

There were no rival publishers to *The Journal's* city focus, but a sister title³¹ included some coverage of *The Journal's* circulation area. Sales figures for *The Journal* were declining.

The title was printed remotely before midnight each day except Saturdays. As with *The Mitre*, the internal newsroom network was in the midst of change when the research was conducted. A new content editor joined the newsdesk to oversee print and digital production in the final week of research. The title was also piloting new content management software for the publishing company which allowed quicker publication onto the web. If successful, the software would be rolled out across the company.

There were 23 participants at *The Journal*, including the editor and senior editorial managers, news editors, reporters and the picture editor. Not all the participants were directly managed by actors within the internal newsroom network, but instead were overseen by other sections of the publishing company. The hierarchies and structures will be examined in more detail in the following section.

5.3 Observational themes

During the course of the observational research within the two participating newsrooms, a series of themes emerged. These themes were identified during analysis of the fieldwork diaries. The interviews were subjected to thematic review based upon the themes identified. Those themes which have relevance to the research questions will be discussed below. They include, hierarchies and structures, news production divides, story handling, network boundaries and professional spaces and making money from the news.

³¹ A separate title owned by the same publishing company.

5.3.1 Hierarchies and structure

The internal newsroom networks at both *The Mitre* and *The Journal* had undergone significant restructures in the 18 months prior to research commencing in order to prioritise digital production and publishing. Both titles were in the process of further change at the point of research taking place. The result at both titles was a degree of confusion which resulted in occasional duplication of directives and reporting work. The lack of clarity also allowed for actors within the network to avoid unpopular elements of their work and it also resulted in some work being missed or overlooked.

At both titles hierarchies were complicated (see **Figure 34** on pg142 and **Figure 35** on pg143), with managers often giving directives to journalists not on their immediate teams. At *The Mitre*, there was a divide between digital management and print management and the messages and priorities delivered by individual managers focusing on the separate elements were sometimes conflicting. Work was ongoing to unite the production processes with digital leading and the print content and production being informed and led by digital. To achieve this, the team was facing more change with the introduction of a new editor who was expected to alter structures and production processes. Sub-editors, who were solely print-focused, were imminently due to undergo training in digital production.

At *The Journal*, structures were even more complex. Production was divided again between managers for print and digital, with print split between separate teams overseeing news and contributed content³².

The digital team and the contributed content team were both run by editors who were managed by actors based in a sister title newsroom. The news journalists, who were Specialist Reporters, were overseen by a Head of Print who, in turn, reported to the Editor. Again, to unite print and digital production, there was the imminent appointment of a Content Editor, who was due to start in the final week of research and whose job was to improve workflow and communication between digital and print actors.

³² Content provided by press release or news-traders (also known as user-generated-content or UGC). This content was treated by a team who used it to fill the back news pages of *The Journal* and *The News* and almost the entirety of *The Mail*. The contributed content journalists were expected to make little or no change to press releases. Instead they acted as a curator of content, syphoning information into the newspaper and publishing it online. They also produced commercial features and features.

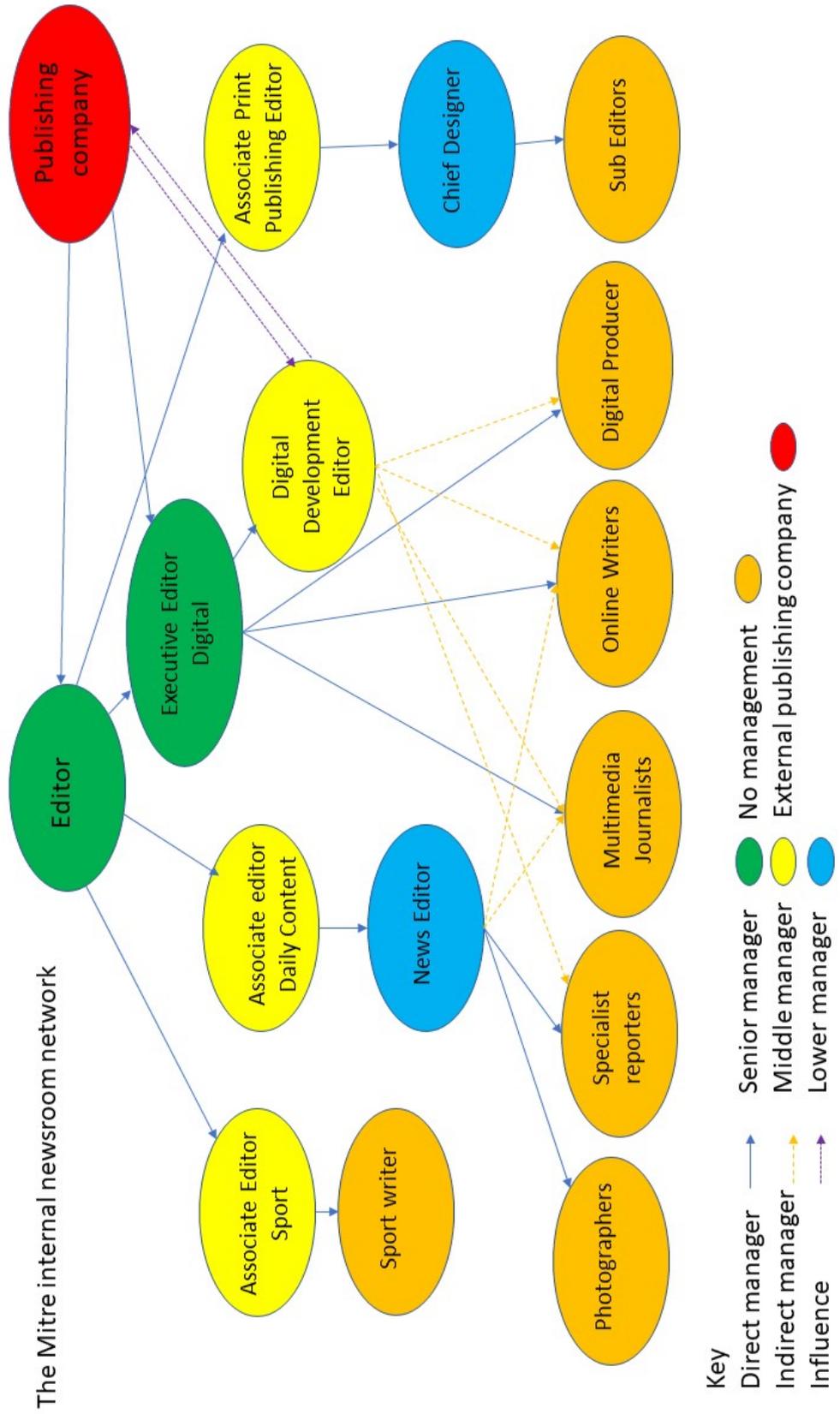


Figure 34. *The Mitre* internal newsroom network structure.

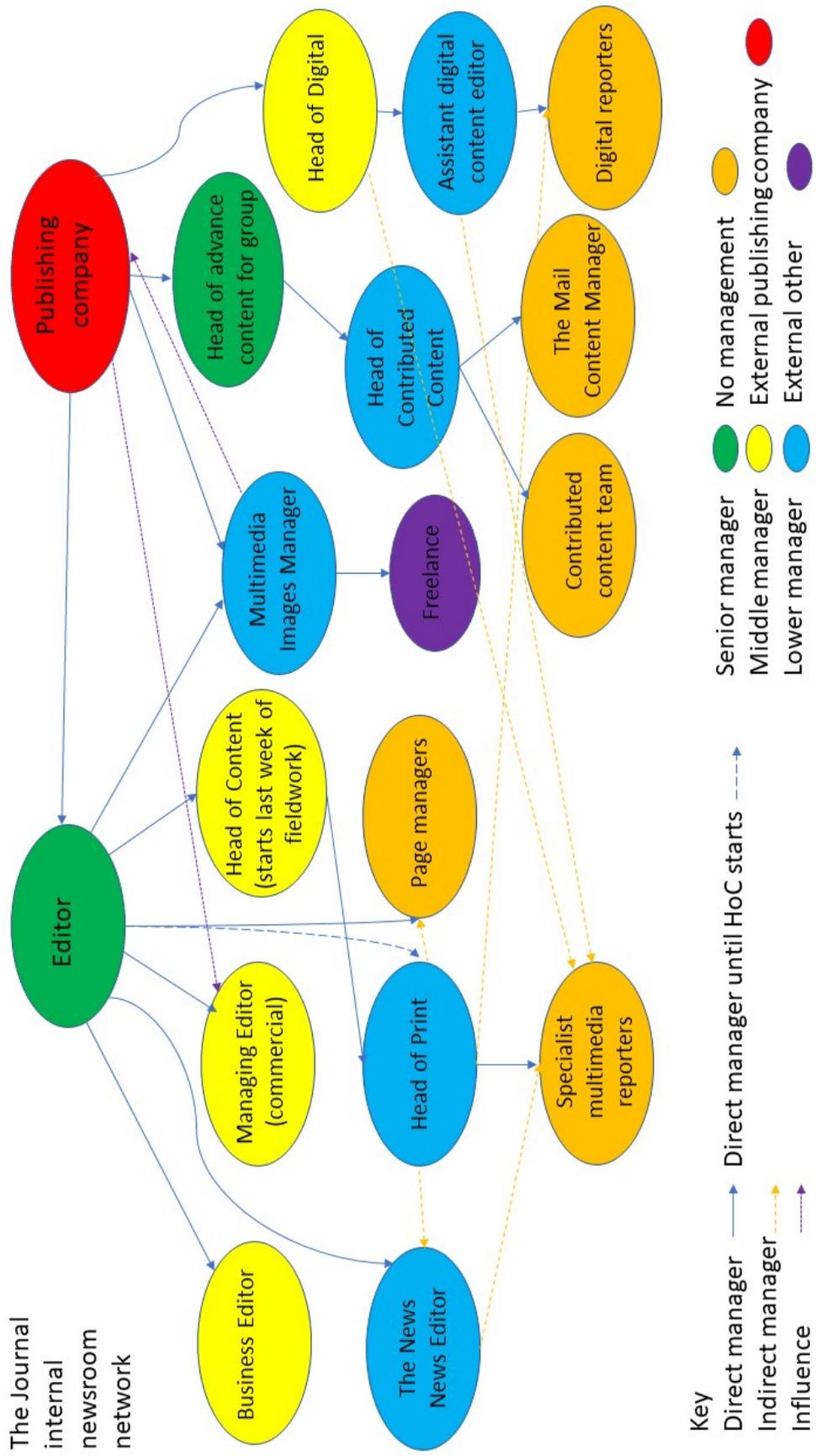


Figure 35. *The Journal* internal newsroom network structure.

The impacts of digital conversion clearly continued to be felt within both newsrooms. Senior managers in both teams had a digital focus and understood the companies' aims in terms of driving up online audience figures. However, there was evidence at both titles of complications in production caused by regular change, mixed messages, confused passages of communication and actors resisting or failing to meet expectations.

5.3.1.1 Actors and hierarchy

At *The Mitre*, the internal newsroom network represented a traditional hierarchical structure which retained a physical distance between the internal newsroom network and the publishing company. While the Editor was overseen by the publishing company, the remainder of the actors within the core internal newsroom network stemmed from his leadership, meaning the line of command and the network structure in terms of hierarchy was clear.

However, despite the clear lines from the editor, the number of middle managers overseeing news production and the priority placed on digital publishing formats caused complications, confusion and problems with morale, as will be discussed in detail below.

At *The Journal* there was a clear hierarchy in terms of actors within the roles, but the structure of the newsroom lines of command were much muddier and the publishing company was more closely embroiled within the internal newsroom network because of its direct management of three actors within the group (the Editor, the Head of Advance Content and the Digital Editor), meaning the network boundaries were less clearly defined. As with *The Mitre*, the number of middle-managers at the paper also caused some issues with production and confused lines of communication.

As found in previous studies (Nikunen, 2014), there was an inversion of hierarchies, particularly at *The Mitre*, where significantly younger actors with less or no management experience had been promoted to senior positions over and above older actors with more industry and management experience.

All actors within *The Mitre* newsroom appeared to understand and generally accept the digital direction and motivation of the company, but in interview, some staff members admitted a difficulty in retraining their focus from print to online production. There was suggestion in at least two of the interviews that actors felt incapable of meeting the expectations of the company and their senior managers due to lack of natural digital ability. Their language suggested

they felt their roles, skills and contributions were not always valued in the newsroom.

***TM13:** I think that can be quite frustrating for some of the younger staff who perhaps don't appreciate as much, that it is a completely new skill to us and something that we do need our hand holding, to an extent, with. So, there is a bit of a concern that you almost get a two-speed newsroom these days. You've got your internet whizz kids who have grown up with it all and it's second nature and it's very simple, and then you've got the old-timers who have had to relearn everything that they've done over decades and adapt their skills to a changing world.*

***TM12:** You see, people who are really, really good on Twitter find themselves with 100,000 followers overnight and you've got the BuzzFeed generation who seem to be doing it far better than anyone else, the kids in their 20s. So, I do feel as if some of the old-fashioned skills are not really regarded so much anymore. It's really all about the celeb gossip and whatever else is the flavour of the day.*

At both titles there was evidence of print-focused middle managers and the journalists who had originally been working with a print-focus on the products feeling opportunities for personal progression were narrowing and their skills, experience and contributions were decreasing in value.

***TM12:** They're taking on trainee journalists – good. Are they doing that because they want to shove the older ones and the better-paid ones out the door? I don't know.*

***TJ3:** You've either really got to be a content generator or a revenue raiser, these days, from what I can gather. And if you're neither of those, then you're not really wanted.*

In contrast, there was evidence in interviews with digitally-focused journalists and managers and senior managers that opportunities within the industry were widening for actors with their skill set and outlook.

TM4: I can imagine it being very hard for someone who's been in the print journalism sector all their life and is seeing that kind of die a little bit. But for me and for the set of skills I have, I feel like the opportunities are just opening up.

TJ18: Someone like TJ15 who, this time last year he was still a trainee reporter on a weekly title and now he's in a management role in a daily. Opportunities like that didn't exist for people like that. It was a much longer process. But we advertised a role, interviewed a long list of good candidates and TJ15 had the ability. And the ability shone through.

5.3.1.2 Muddy management

At both titles there was evidence of challenges to news production and the hierarchical structure of the internal newsroom networks, generally caused either by confused communication or uncertainty about management lines and responsibilities.

This led to actors sometimes working on the same job without realising and reporters often being swamped with multiple directives from different managers at the same time. In interviews with reporters at both titles there was strong evidence of confusion about management structure and seniority; at least one actor at *The Journal* admitted to not knowing who their line manager was. *The Journal* also had the additional complication of some teams being managed remotely, with the editor of the title admitting in interview that the system, which had been designed to benefit the wider regional publishing group, was 'not working very well'.

TM5: There are, on a daily basis, too many cooks. TM13 is the news editor, TM2 is the head of content, TM18 is the digital development editor and TM15 is the digital editor. There have been times when, on a day, all four of them have asked me to do things, all four of them have given me different stories. One wouldn't necessarily know what the other had asked me to do or wouldn't know what my schedule was. One would give me some advice that the other would contradict, and I think there are too many people involved with managing it.

TJ1: *That's the great irony of the structure. They deliberately changed the structure so that, for example, the head of digital here reports in to somebody in [REDACTED]. But obviously, if something happens he just comes and talks to me. You're never going to pick up the phone, have a conversation with somebody in [REDACTED] and then work out what to do here. So, it's meant to work much better than it does.*

TJ10 talking about the incoming content editor: *I think if you've got one person overseeing everything, she'll know what TJ9's reporters are working on, what TJ3's reporters are working on, whether there's crossover. We just need someone to pull it all together.*

5.3.1.3 Reporters

At *The Mitre*, there were clear divisions between the Digital Journalists, the Multimedia Reporters and the Specialist Reporters. The latter were subject specialists covering areas such as crime, council, health and business. This group were expected to produce geographically-focused, subject specific content. Their work was treated traditionally as it was sent to their manager, the News Editor, for editing and published in print and online by different actors after that point. While there was expectation of this group to produce additional digital content such as video and social media, often it appeared there was minimal pressure for the Specialist Reporters to do so and they often abstained from producing multimedia content due to lack of engagement or a lack of ability or confidence. There was evidence of some actors within this group being dismissive of the title's online agenda, with their representation of their own roles being displayed as more journalistically professional than their displayed opinion of the Multimedia and Digital Reporters. Interviews suggested Specialist Reporter's positions were perceived as elite due to their specialism and traditionally had automatically received higher pay, but that more recently actors taking on the role had been forced to fight for increased pay along with the job title. There was also evidence of some Specialist Reporters who since being given the job title had gone part-time and lost their specialisms. As a result, they no longer had a defined role within the internal newsroom network. In interview, some Specialist Reporters also suggested they believed their roles would soon be abolished and that specialist staff would become Multimedia Journalists without specialism.

Multimedia Journalists at both titles were in a Jack-of-all-trades role which expected both geographic-focused news production and digital publishing and production skills. The content produced by this group was often sourced and covered digitally and was produced for online and then pushed into the printed product.

***TJ1:** I would have hated, as a reporter, to go out and you've got to get everything and do Facebook Live and talk to your phone on Facebook Live for an hour. It's incredible what they do, but we just chuck them out there and say, "Off you go. Make sure you're Tweeting. Make sure you Facebook Live. Come back with a little bit of footage you can edit," and all that sort of thing. It's just so important.*

At *The Mitre*, Multimedia Reporters' status was less elevated than Specialist Reporters', partially it seemed because they did not enjoy specialist titles and their salaries were lower. Due to their focus on digital, they had less time to spend investigating news stories and at times complained in interviews of producing content which they perceived as having lower journalistic value due to the audience-driven soft subjects and the reliance on social media for newsgathering.

***TM12:** You may find that some people who work on the digital side don't pick the phone up. They might be picking stories up off eBay or some post on Facebook or something like that, and just turning it around really quickly. They may not even pick a phone up to check something or get a quote or whatever.*

***TM9:** There's a much stronger drive towards stuff that's audience related. You basically want to bring in clicks... And less of an emphasis on stuff that's worthy but people aren't going to click on or be interested in.*

At *The Journal*, the role of Multimedia Journalists was slightly elevated as specialisms had recently been re-introduced into this group and while management expected the team to produce multimedia content like images and video, they were also given time and space to work on more in-depth stories. This group were directly line managed by the Head of Print. To help the reader

navigate this thesis without confusion, this group will be referred to as Specialist Multimedia Reporters from this point onwards. In interviews, the focus of the Specialist Multimedia Journalists was split between print and digital and all of those questioned suggested they equally valued getting a front page story in print to having their work at the top of Chartbeat³³ or doing exceptionally well in terms of audience clicks. This was a contrast to the Specialist Reporters at *The Mitre*, who suggested, in the main, the biggest accolade was to do well in terms of online engagement, with placement in the printed product not regarded as an important measure of success.

TJ6: It is a dying breed, but you can ask any reporter, even some of the digital people, they have a front page and they walk past a shop and see their name in it, it obviously gives you a bit of a boost. But also, on the flipside to that, if one of my 150-word stories cobbled together from a crash has got 30,000 views in the day and there's a big email sent round and you see your story at the top, that gives you another bit of gratification as well.

TJ4: Unless it's a digital story that's got 150,000 hits or something. But then, that would be the same as if the paper sold three times more than it normally would because of your story or largely because of it, then you get the same job satisfaction either way.

TM5: our names don't go on the front anymore. It's just a picture and a headline and there's not any real text or any real content to it. I think that visual of seeing your name on the front page used to be quite, "Oh, I got the splash today!" but that doesn't happen anymore.

TM14: To be honest, I don't look at the paper anymore. I just – yeah, I have kind of – it's like I've forgotten about the paper, really..

At *The Mitre*, Online Writers focused entirely on the online product and had very little to do with the printed newspaper. Their team was the smallest and comprised of the only trainee reporter in the newsroom³⁴ and another actor who

³³ Chartbeat was the analytic software used to measure real-time audience analytics.

³⁴ This was until the final week of observation when a trainee Multimedia Journalist joined the team.

had no journalistic training³⁵. Their roles included publishing breaking news before passing it on to a Multimedia Journalist or Specialist Reporter for development and producing popular online content which would drive up the audience analytics. As a result of their unqualified status and their subject focus, their roles within the newsroom appeared to be viewed as lesser by the Multimedia Journalists and Specialist Reporters. However, their ability to produce online content such as live social media videos often meant they were relied upon by other actors within the team to deliver or train others in specialist digital skills. Their production of content which drove analytics also gave them an elevated value in the eyes of management.

At *The Journal*, the Digital Reporters had similar roles to the Online Writers at *The Mitre*, in terms of covering breaking news before passing it on for development. There was also an expectation of the production of 'quirky' or 'evergreen' content and identification of new ideas to drive digital audience figures. The Digital Reporters, who were both in their 40s and had come from print backgrounds, shaped their roles to suit them; while one focused solely on digital and making a name for himself with the type of soft, entertaining and unusual content he published online, the other still enjoyed working content up for the newspaper or for fuller online coverage.

At *The Journal*, there was clear digital focus from the digital managers and the Editor at the title, but the messages they put out in the news conference in regards to digital strategy and production company aim were not as strongly reflected by the multimedia reporters in the team. This did not appear to be due to resistance, but instead appeared to be due to divides within management and poor communication. The news editors in charge of the printed products were rarely heard to talk about digital values or vision in the newsroom and there was perceived to be a feeling of digital being the domain of the digital team – meaning other managers tended to avoid proactive involvement³⁶. This was coupled by ideas discussed in news conference not being conveyed clearly or effectively to staff, resulting in actors refusing to participate in digital agendas or lacking in confidence or direction to carry out digital directives. Therefore, the vigorous efforts being made by digital managers to push digital targets and strategies were not always being heard or understood by junior actors within the team.

This resulted in the internal newsroom network at *The Journal* being made up of digitally-proactive senior managers, middle managers with, in the main, no

³⁵ This person opted not to be a participant in the study.

³⁶ This issue was acknowledged and there was clear expectation that the incoming content editor would improve communication and workflows.

incentive for responsibility for digital production and a journalistic workforce receiving mixed messages. In their interviews, two senior managers (**TJ1** and **TJ5**) referred to 'digital dinosaurs', meaning young journalists who operated with a print product dogma.

TJ1: people said, "beware the young digital dinosaur". And there's actually quite a lot of them, because they still come in and what they really want to do is print.

However, the evidence from observations and interviews suggested journalists were open to changing their practices and to being directed by management, but communication break-downs were chiefly responsible for issues with workflow and practice, not old-fashioned dogmatic ideals.

The Journal also had the Contributed Content division, which was made up of six journalists who worked in the office or remotely, usually from home. Originally, their role was to take User Generated Content (UGC) and press releases and quickly tailor them for use primarily within the second half of the news pages of the print editions, before running them online. However, in the year prior to research commencing, changes were made which incorporated forward planning, features and commercial elements of production into the group. This included placing advertising on the print pages and writing advertising content as well as working on advertising-led supplements online and in print. Other defining features of the team were that several worked part-time and the majority worked within 9am-5pm Monday to Friday, or opted for flexible working within the week. One of the team, who was not involved in the research, did not have journalism qualifications and another (TJ16) was a senior reporter who said she had been moved into the group because she lacked a driving licence. It appeared from interviews that actors placed within the Contributed Content team were perceived as having a decreased journalistic validity in comparison to the Digital or Specialist Multimedia Journalists because of their lack of focus on news, their flexible working and their reliance on PR and contribution to commercial elements of the product.

Due to the number of reporters content-gathering in different units which were managed by separate actors, there was a regular accidental doubling-up on stories. This was often caused by multiple managers overseeing journalists who, in their distinct groups, might have picked up on the same story. As a result there was occasionally evidence of conflict over handling and ownership of stories and, at times, evidence of confusion over at what point a story should be passed over to another team.

TM5: There is still some crossover. You've got TM4 who will live-blog things as they happen. And if the police issue a statement, she will blog it. But there's still a crime reporter who's working on the same story and there's duplication.

TM14: Communication and who's doing what is a constant issue. There's either overlap or underlap. It never seems to be "everybody knows what they're doing."

From newsroom observation: TJ10 is writing an update but then TJ2 says "TJ6 called in with that story, he said it was a good one."

TJ10: "So is TJ6 doing it? If he is, I should take this one down"

TJ9: "Well, there is no need to fall out about it, you keep that one up and we will work it out."

At both titles there was evidence of structural change which had resulted in the loss of journalistic jobs. Interviews also suggested actors within the internal newsroom networks anticipated further change and job losses.

At both titles, most qualified journalists were seniors who had passed the NQJ or equivalent exams. At *The Mitre* there was a trainee due to sit her senior exams and another due to start, who would replace a trainee who had left the paper to move to London before taking her exams. At *The Journal* there was only one trainee and he was waiting for his senior exam results.

Much of the movement within the network seemed to be due to new digital roles being created and structural shifts to incorporate increased digital working. At both titles, newly created digital management roles were filled by external applicants or actors who had only been employed within their internal newsroom networks for five years or less (see **Appendix 9** for identification of these actors). While there were redundancies at *The Mitre* during research, new roles were being created, again, with a digital focus.

5.3.1.4 Reversed responsibilities

At both titles there was evidence from interviews to suggest members of the team who had resisted change brought about by digital convergence were no

longer employed by the company. The acceptance of ongoing change and the digital production and ambition of the publishing companies was reflected as being understood by the majority of actors being observed and interviewed.

While there was evidence of challenge or discontent, there was no evidence at *The Mitre* of direct rebellion against the publishing company's digital strategies. However, the push towards producing digitally engaging content did create occasional reversed responsibility; with less digitally-experienced journalists being trained by younger, more digitally inclined journalists. There was also observation of digitally inexperienced senior staff being challenged by younger, more digitally experienced staff about their digital decision-making.

From observation: TM13 is talking to TM4 about a road traffic crash story. TM4 has found a comment from a woman involved in the crash on a private Facebook page. TM13 reads the comment out; it contradicts a police statement (the police said there were no suspicious circumstances, but the man driving the other car 'ran off' according to the Facebook post). TM4 says she messaged the woman to see if she will speak. But TM13 says 'let's use what's on the [FB] page.'

TM4 says: "I should check with her as it's on her private FB page" But TM13 is insistent that the comment is used. He says: "We don't need to name her, we can just say 'believed to be'"

TM4 says: 'OK.' Adding: 'I'll message her anyway.'

5.3.1.5 Shaping the role

At both titles there was evidence of opportunity for actors within the internal newsroom networks to shape their roles, within limits. At *The Mitre*, ambitious actors who demonstrated an interest and affinity in digital publishing were given the chance to develop their skills and explore new ideas, digital publishing innovations and opportunities. There was also evidence of some Specialist Reporters shaping their news agendas by avoiding or pleading ignorant to digital directives, and because of the lack of repercussion if they failed to produce multimedia content, they were able to sidestep the shackles of digitally directed production and pursue a news agenda of their own determination.

At *The Journal*, actors who identified opportunities for either digital innovation or commercial opportunity were allowed the time to pursue them. There was also an awareness of the Editor's drive for multimedia journalists to do more in-depth

reporting and campaigning, although this appeared to be more difficult to make time to achieve. Actors within other units also expressed elements of independence within their roles, being given the opportunity to produce features or work on projects outside of their remit; although some admitted they were allowed the flexibility due to low staffing elsewhere creating the need for content or production cover.

On a day when *The Journal* covered news of a terrorist attack in another city there was evidence of the team pulling together to produce the best product possible. Journalists shrugged off the limits of their usual job descriptions and expectations and identified and filled gaps in production by picking up tasks, working over their allotted hours and thinking quickly and creatively about how to cover the story. This effort was reflected in online audience figures and an email shared by the digital manager the following day (See **Appendix 11**).

5.3.1.6 Raging against the machine?

This is not to suggest, however, that journalists were totally positive and compliant with company aims and managerial directives. At both titles there was evidence of journalists questioning digital impacts on news values.

TM9: I wanted to do decent public service journalism. It's not necessarily stuff that's – it can be a bit dry but it's just issues that people want to know about and I'm just utterly fed up of everything getting squeezed and squeezed and squeezed.

TJ20: There's stories you probably know aren't going to get many hits, but it doesn't mean you can just ignore them because that's just going to erode the trust in the paper.

At *The Mitre*, journalists from each distinct section expressed concern about news being 'dumbed down' (**TM14**), about a lack of in-depth, 'public-interest' content, about conversational approaches to news writing verging on flippancy and about lines between editorial and advertising blurring as sharable content focused on PR from big-name companies.

TM6: Things we would never have considered news stories 10 or 20 years ago because it was advertising... I don't know if I dare mention the incident, but there was some story that went online about McDonald's latest version of their burgers. And how much it costs. And where you can get it. This isn't news, this is an advert.

In middle-management and traditionally print-focused roles morale appeared to be low, with interviews suggesting this was due to constant change, decreasing value in traditional news production agendas and priorities and, accordingly, perceived decrease in their own professional value within the internal newsroom network.

TM13: You've seen how difficult it all is. We've had redundancies kicking in in the next couple of weeks that are going to bite properly deep into what we do, and obviously the editor going and a new editor coming, as if we didn't have enough uncertainty and trouble out in the newsroom without having all that to deal with.

At *The Journal*, journalists spoke regularly about clickbait and the pressure to publish popular content over less popular 'public interest' information. However, there was also positivity about the restructures which allowed the multimedia journalists specialist focus and more independence to build relationships and develop trust with contacts.

5.3.2 Divides between print and digital production

Evidence of continuing alteration in product focus, structural shifts, implementation of new tools and the expectation of further change contributed to a sense of settled uncertainty among some actors.

It was clear at both titles that significant steps had already been taken to accommodate digital publishing and that the publication of content online was increasingly the major priority for the publishing company and managers within the newsroom.

However, the degree of digital focus varied between the titles; digital publishing, news-trader and web analytics dominated the news agenda and the internal newsroom network structure at *The Mitre*. Senior and middle managers demonstrated a focus on digital priority and while not all of them were working

in the 'digital first' way expected of the news team, they were clearly accepting of the publishing company's digital agenda and attempting to modify their working methods.

Structural changes made less than a year prior to research commencing had seen appointments of two digitally-focused managers; the Executive Editor (Digital) (TM18) and the Digital Development Editor (TM15). Both were significant roles, but particularly the Executive Editor, who was second in command to the editor.

Reporters were clearly aware of the value their managers and the publishing company placed on digital activities such as publishing online, producing video and using social media for content and brand promotion, but they independently took varying approaches to it within their own work. This was amplified due to varying managerial expectation of digital production placed upon distinct groups and individuals within the newsroom. Part of the divide was structural; reflecting managerial expectations of digital performance between the differing roles. There was also an unspoken division decided by or about individual actors based on their role interpretation, digital participation, attitudes, profiles and abilities. These divisions will be explored in more detail shortly.

At *The Journal*, there was more evidence of a pull of priorities between print and digital focus. Attention given to both forms of publishing was led by the editor, who was vocal in conversations with the researcher about the priority given to digital, but spent significant time focusing on the printed product, sales figures and promotional print opportunities in the news conference.

The communication of some these messages was diluted when delivered by middle-managers to journalists in the newsroom. Often sales figures discussed in conference were not passed onto staff and positive comments about one-off editions doing well were also not clearly communicated. This contrasted with the commentary on digital targets and analytics, which was permanently visually present within the newsroom by way of the big screen displaying real-time analytics. Journalists also received analytical information every morning via an email with the previous day's figures detailed. The digital editor spoke about targets and also sent occasional emails with updates on specific events or days, pointing staff back towards the monthly target and how the figures fit with the bigger picture. This meant there was more of a focus on digital in the working newsroom than represented in the conference room. Interviews made it clear that staff were aware of digital targets, whereas discussion about sales figures was vague and generally negative but without specific figures being exemplified.

TJ10: I suppose the policy, the direction, here, is, basically, we've got to get hits. We've got to get hits. I think they're aiming for two million – I don't know whether it's unique users or whatever. Two million seems to be this magic number that we're trying to get to. I think it's every month. Never got there yet. I suppose to get there, I suppose you need the quirky, the different, the sensational stories to draw people in.

5.3.2.1 News conference and agenda setting

The news conference was a time in the day where managers at both sites gathered privately to discuss the news agenda, identify planning needs, analyse figures, disseminate information from the publishing company and iron out problems. At both sites, the conference offered rich insights into the impact of digital tools on news production.

At *The Mitre*, there was heavy focus on digital in conference and clear influence from the publishing company in terms of the title's digital aims. Online analytics were the first topic discussed each day. The commercial benefit of video³⁷ drove the news agenda.

Observation: *TM1 explains video is monetised. The amount made for the company per-watch is confidential, but videos pull in money through pre-roll advertising and as a result there is a high expectation from the publishing company that there will be video with every story online.*

TM15 says there is an audience expectation for video and while video on social media, for example, might not be profit-making it builds the profile of the company. The publishing company expects there to be 456K video views on the website this month, which TM15 suggests is a reachable goal due to a strong start.

Company targets were referenced, and week-on-week and year-on-year analytics were regularly discussed. Digital tools and production drove the online and print news agenda, with the news conference led by analysis of audience analytics and the allocation of tasks and stories following on from the

³⁷ Videos on the website pull in revenue from pre-roll advertising and as a result there was a high expectation that there would be video with every story online. This did not happen with every online story at *The Mitre*, but efforts were being made to drive video content and encourage journalists to produce video regularly.

conversation. Allocation of stories to the newspaper was of a lower priority, with content published online being ‘scraped’ to populate the print product. Journalists’ news agendas were regularly shaped by the performance of stories already existing online. Development or replication of popular content on *The Mitre*’s site or elsewhere within the publishing company was often identified as a reason to pursue a story.

Planning for online content was proactively discussed, with content considered for publication because of its potential to drive the online audience and retrospective discussion of online performance often taking place; successful stories were identified for follow-up to capitalise on prime performing content.

Stories with a geographic focus were discussed, but there was also regular discussion of running generic stories which were ‘trending’ on social media or succeeding on other sites within the publishing company, regardless of geo-social (Hess and Waller, 2014) link to the newspaper’s circulation area.

Observation: *TM15 starts with trends and explains there is little going on. However, she has picked up on a Facebook trend for posting heart emojis with no words – it’s a cancer research awareness drive. TM15 says she has written a piece about the drive and added links to the charity etc.. to explain the idea behind it all.*

Publishing company directives discussed in conference not only addressed online targets and analytics, but also included instructions to localise and run content produced by the company’s data unit³⁸.

Observation: *TM15 talks through a publishing company-wide story which is being pushed out by the data unit and which must be covered by the title. It is based around research done by the data unit asking Brexit voters how they would vote now if they had the power of hindsight. Each title within the publishing company has been sent a personalised package of information corresponding with responses from the news patch - the data can be broken down by demographic, area, and other details. The data unit has also provided an interactive widget for the website and TM15 is working to get*

³⁸ The data hub identified stories with a national angle and produced figures and a press release for each newspaper within the publishing company network. The content would be embargoed, with an instruction to publish online at a set date and time. The online publication appeared to take place the evening before print publication in daily titles.

graphs and graphics sorted so they can be published alongside the story on Sunday at 8pm (the national embargo time).

There was no evidence of discussion of newspaper sales figures of the printed product during the news conferences attended.

At *The Journal*, there was more of a focus on print than evidenced at *The Mitre*. The news conference at *The Journal* was framed more traditionally, with conversations about page leads, resources and photographers often dictating the agenda and newspaper sales figures discussed regularly. However, this was balanced by a motivation to achieve digital targets and produce online content. Digital figures were especially focused on as the end of the month drew closer, with attempts for the title to achieve 1million views for the first time. In contrast to *The Mitre*'s proactive planning, much of the discussion about online content was reactive, with discussion of what stories had been published and were doing well that day. Content identified as performing well was identified for 'acceleration' – with more stories of a similar ilk or new angles to the story being published online to capitalise on the audience interest. The conversation about online content was usually led by the Digital Editor or the Assistant Digital Editor and generally it was more of a delivery of digital agenda to the other actors within the room rather than a method of setting the agenda for that day's overall news provision.

News was often discussed in terms of the story itself, with different actors representing the various elements of how the story would be covered in print, online and visually. Instead of being led by digital or print, the conference was led by the topics and while online performance was considered, the handling of the item was also decided based upon the story and resources available.

Observation: *News conference discussion about a Specialist Multimedia Reporter covering a politician's visit to the city.*

TJ2: *'What about photos then?'*

TJ3: *'He can do a bit of Facebook Live and then break off and do some pictures.'*

TJ1: *'He needs to get his quotes, but he can check his video back.'*

Visual imagery and resources were regularly discussed in conference, particularly in terms of print. Access to images and availability of photographers

along with the news agenda of a sister daily title which occasionally piggybacked *The Journal's* photographic resource were all factors taken into account when deciding on where a story would be placed in print and how it would be covered overall.

Observation: *Discussion over a potential front-page story about a surgeon who has conducted botched operations.*

TJ3: *'There's a photograph of him, but it costs £50 which is a photographer's shift isn't it?'*

TJ2: *'Well, if it's going on the front it may be worth it.'*

TJ7: *'It's done well online hasn't it?'*

TJ1: *'It has done well online.'*

5.3.2.2 Production processes

5.3.2.3 Tools and skills

Both titles had introduced new digital software and hardware into news production processes and there was expectation from managers that reporters would engage in digital production and promotion of content. However, at both titles it was also evident that how technology and tools were used varied between journalists.

At both sites, there was expectation of all journalists to produce multimedia content, using smartphones for video capture, editing and apps for sharing back to the news editors. All teams also had the ability to publish online directly, without all content being checked or edited by their managers.

5.3.2.3.1 Specialist avoidance

However, at both *The Mitre* and *The Journal*, there was evidence of specialist reporters not delivering all of the digital expectations set out by managers, with some avoiding video production, others not using social media to promote their work and avoidance of live video.

Observation: *TM16's story about the councillors squaring up to each other in a full council meeting was published at 18.11 yesterday. There has been no social media promotion of the story.*

Observation: *It is not naturally assumed that TJ6 will do a Facebook Live video and it is clear that up to this point the idea has not been suggested by TJ6 himself.*

The following was apparent at both titles when examining the various reasons behind lack of specialists' digital production:

- Direct line management by an actor whose chief focus was print and who did not promote or enforce digital expectation.
- Lack of habitual use, meaning some tools and software was unfamiliar to reporters and confidence was low in application.
- A mistrust of the technology or a dismissive response to the company or managers' agenda.
- A dislike of using certain technology and a reluctance to incorporate its use into workflow.
- A dislike of involving news-traders in the news production process.

Not every specialist reporter failed to deliver on digital expectation every time and the reasons listed above were not always identified for the reasoning behind lack of digital production activity. However, it was evident at both titles that the digital ambitions of senior management and the publishing company did not always translate into production.

At *The Mitre* there was a suggestion in interviews that the Specialist Reporters being guided by a print-focused news editor (TM13) and editor (TM1), combined with the fact that there was a team of Multimedia Journalists and Online Writers who news-gathered, curated and produced digital content with an online focus, almost excused the specialists from producing multimedia news. In observation it appeared that when some Specialist Reporters did produce comprehensive multi-media content their efforts were met with surprise, suggesting there was a culture of expectation of lack of digital production which had the potential to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Observation: *TM3 calls up and tells TM13 that he's sent a couple of videos to Brightcove. TM18 is surprised and she tells TM4 that TM3 has sent video there. TM4 says: "I have already put it on." TM18 is clearly taken aback by TM3's digital efforts...*

Ironically, there is also evidence at *The Mitre* of Specialist Reporters using digital tools to avoid doing certain stories or tasks. For example, holding content

back from the Live List³⁹ and pleading ignorance or misunderstanding of analytics, journalists pursued their own agendas rather than following the directive of their managers or publishing company.

TM15: I think people just get stubborn about things and just dig their heels in and I think there's a little bit of that here.

Observation: *TM18 is asking the newsroom who looks at daily reports (web analytics) and asks the room if they are useful. TM13 says "I think they are quite useful." TM16 says "it's too complex." TM15 sounds slightly exasperated when she replies "It's getting into the habit of logging on and just having a look."*

There was a strong expectation evidenced in interviews that the digital focus for all staff would change with the arrival of the new editor (TM19) and there were suspicions raised by some staff during interviews that specialisms would be abolished to mirror other titles in the publishing company.

In contrast, at *The Journal* the editor had recently reintroduced specialist roles after it had become clear journalists were struggling to do all the online publishing tasks as well as producing in-depth news. However, there was still an expectation that Multimedia Reporters would gather content using digital methods such as video and live video and would promote work via social media. During observation though, it became apparent that the multimedia journalists sometimes produced work using more traditional methods and that digital production was treated as an afterthought. This will be evidenced shortly in the story development and mapping section.

5.3.2.3.2 Training, application and approach: a spanner in the works

There was evidence that new technologies caused issues with workflow and the quality of the news product due to genuine problems with use or application.

At *The Mitre*, members of the team at various levels within the newsroom structure, from trainee to manager, were seen to assist other journalists with using digital tools. While there were training courses provided on the intranet and in person by the publishing company, there was a significant amount of on-

³⁹ The Live List is a Google document which can be accessed and edited by all journalists. It is a schedule for publication times of the news stories being actively worked on over the course of the day.

the-spot training, most often provided by younger actors within the internal newsroom network.

At both titles, occasional issues with technology not working or having a limited application prevented actors from working efficiently or producing the best product.

Observation: *There are issues with technology in the newsroom today – with internet connections not working for some staff, which is hindering their ability to do any news production. TM15 tells me the content management system breaks down regularly when she accesses it remotely.*

Story map. Figure 40, pg179: *‘TJ2 takes pics on SLR camera (until rain stops equipment from working)’*

However, it was the approach of the human actor which appeared to have the most impact on workflows or outcomes; with communication, attitude and approach being the best indicator of success and quality of a story. This was evident in the approach taken at *The Journal* to the terror attack coverage, when all actors involved applied their personal best practice to the job. The proactive and positive teamwork meant the online and print product were the best they could be and this was reflected in the online audience figures and in the feedback from TJ9.

It was also reflected in the lorry crash story map at *The Journal* (See **Figure 40**, pg179), when multiple actors applied themselves to a variety of resources and communicated well as a team. Production was smooth, quick and the story received attention until there was nothing more which could be said or done. As a result the outcome was the best possible result for the story. There was no resource wasted and efficient handling meant actors’ time was used proficiently.⁴⁰

When actors planned poorly, refused to participate or relied on others to produce work which they could have done themselves, workflows and the resulting outcomes were compromised. There was evidence of this happening at *The Journal*, when ideas voiced by digital managers about making a success of a national event to promote trust in local news (#TrustedNewsDay) failed to translate to reality. Plans discussed in conference included running a live interactive stream on Facebook, interviewing a Digital Reporter and also

⁴⁰ This is the researcher’s subjective opinion. As an experienced news editor and editor, the researcher is applying personal opinion to how far a story should be covered. In this case, the researcher felt the team did the maximum required for this type of event (which would be old news by the time it was printed, but which would be useful and a point of interest to residents, commuters and visitors to the city at the time the incident was causing disruption).

following a journalist as they covered a story. These failed to translate because there was:

- Poor communication of the plans by digital managers to the Digital Reporter.
- This resulted in the Digital Reporter refusing to participate on the day.
- Lack of digital managerial presence in the internal newsroom on the day of the event also resulted in no alternative being arranged.
- This led to a live stream of the newsroom from a single vantage point for 30 minutes with no interaction from actors. The video was lacking in interest points and failed to communicate the messages which had been discussed in news conference.

Observation prior to #TrustedNewsDay: TJ1: *'Instead of streaming for 30 minutes is it not worth going getting each reporter to say what they are doing?'*

'Are we getting TJ10 on at 6.30am saying 'this is the day starting'?''

Conversation between researcher and TJ10 after #TrustedNewsDay:

TJ10: *"It wasn't very exciting really." I ask if she did the Facebook Live interview (discussed in the conference last week) and she said "no", adding "It was mentioned to me on Thursday in passing as a kind of joke but nobody asked me if I would do it, so the first I properly knew about it was when I saw my photo on the Facebook page previewing it. I wasn't really that comfortable about it so I told TJ1 and she was fine."*

Barriers to productivity were also witnessed at *The Mitre*, for example when actors refused or lacked the confidence or training to participate with the potential of the story.

Observation: TM13 asks TM4 to do a piece to camera to go with the television drama story and she agrees, but they don't go to do it immediately. Over the course of about half an hour to 45 minutes TM13 asks TM4 if she is ready to do the video. He says: "Are we going to do this video then?" TM4 says "yes" but does not make a move to do it.

Observation following video capture: *The video is recorded in another room within a couple of minutes. Five minutes after that TM13 says the video has gone to WeTransfer – the whole recording and editing process has taken less than 15 minutes.*

The reluctance displayed by TM4 in this situation appeared to be caused by a number of possible factors:

- Poor response to being managed by TM13, who is not a digital manager and does not have direct management line to TM4, despite being her senior in the newsroom.
- Observation of TM4 telling an actor other than TM13 that she was to be 'sick' of the story in question prior to TM13's request for the video.
- General negative response to being asked to do something outside of her self-governed routine (the time of observation is early in the morning, prior to the arrival of any other actors in the newsroom other than TM4 and TM13).

As a result, the video is delayed, time spent discussing it has been wasted and potential early-morning news-trader interaction has been lost.

5.3.2.3.3 Traditional skills and tools

Interviews at both titles suggested traditional skills were still highly valued, but observational evidence contradicted these claims slightly, with evidence of digital methods replacing some skills.

At *The Journal*, print-focused managers and the editor said they believed shorthand remained a vital skill, with the head of print citing a temporary journalist who did not have shorthand as "his role not matching his skillset". However, video was evidenced as replacing shorthand note-taking when reporters were covering a live story and the digital editor suggested job applicants with less than 100 words per minute would be considered if they demonstrated significant digital skills.

At *The Mitre*, there was evidence of shorthand being used by journalists. However, interviews suggested there was less of a focus from management on new recruits achieving 100 words per minute. The Executive Editor said in interview there had been frustrations that some managers were still focused on shorthand over other skills, citing a recent incident when an applicant had been removed from the shortlist for a trainee position because she lacked 100 words per minute.

TM18: We've just interviewed for a trainee and somebody, I don't know who it was, took her out of the shortlist because she only has 70 words per minute shorthand, but she had amazing video editing skills and she had all this experience.

The journalists interviewed also suggested while shorthand was a useful skill to have, it was decreasing in its importance. Many of the interviewees said they used shorthand, but a couple said they had also started to record interviews instead of taking shorthand notes. While the incoming editor said he would expect new recruits to have traditional skills, he did not make any specific comment about shorthand.

The same patterns followed for holding a driving licence. At *The Journal*, the skill was described by the editor, managers and reporters as being of real importance. As mentioned, one reporter was 'demoted' to the Contributed Content unit for not having a driving licence and another (the same reporter who lacked shorthand), was on a temporary contract.

TJ1: People say, "Oh, shorthand is getting outdated and you don't really need to be driving," but actually, I think you do. You really need those basics. It's people who have unhappily been moved into communities because they haven't got what they need.

At *The Mitre*, the Online Writers appear to be desk-based, with their news gathering, often including finding images, conducted online. The Agenda Writers and Multimedia Journalists did leave the newsroom to cover jobs and most of them had driving licences and cars, which were useful in particular due to their out-of-town office location. However, much of the live coverage by these actors was pre-planned and breaking news was picked up on social media by the Online Writers, who tended to cover the live events using social media and news-trader contributions rather than going to the scene themselves.

There was no discussion of legal training or journalism qualifications evidenced in either fieldwork observation. However, during discussion about complaints made by the public about online content, there was evidence of ethical and legal considerations being taken into account at both titles.

In interviews at both titles, legal qualifications were spoken about as non-negotiable by the majority of actors. Training and being kept-up-to-date with

new laws was also mentioned by a handful, who suggested more training from the publishing companies could be provided.

At *The Mitre*, there were more than three sub editors who designed the printed product every day. They were assisted in production by the outgoing editor (TM1) and the associate editor for print (TM10). However, there were clear expectations of imminent change to this system, with plans to train the story editors on digital production and reduce the time and attention given to the newspaper. At *The Journal*, there were two Sub Editors who worked with the Head of News (TJ3) who produced all titles including *The Journal*, *The Mail* and *The News*. They were unofficially assisted on deadline by other members of the network with sub-editing skills. There was also a hub of Sub Editors used by all titles in the region owned by the publishing company, who produced a percentage of pages for each title per publication. The Sub Editors within the hub were used for design-led pages, usually including the front, meaning the page editors at *The Journal* were expected to use templated pages only and were not supposed to make design changes to the templates being used.

5.3.2.3.4 Digital tools and software

Workflow processes for newsgathering and online publishing involved significant use of digital tools and software.

Videos and photographs were taken by reporters using smartphones and editing and sharing content to the newsdesk for publication was also conducted using apps on the same device. At times there was evidence of interviews also being recorded using smartphone technology.

On production of content all reporters at both titles were expected to fill out metadata information, including keywords, headlines and captions and attach images to the stories. Information was planned for publication by the reporters using scheduling software.

At the time of research being conducted, *The Journal* was trialling a new digital content management system for the publishing company which published straight to the web – making the process much quicker. The trial was a coup for the title, placing it in a prestigious position within the publishing company. The system did not work alongside the existing content management software used for print and online publishing; as a result, news published online using the new system was then emailed to the newsdesk for consideration within the printed product.

The Journal also used social media management software which handed a degree of autonomy to the digital programme. The software identified prime

publication times for the story on Facebook and Twitter based on factors including the story type, headline, other content in the publication queue and timeframe as identified by the Journalist. It also automatically dragged in a thumbnail image to be published with the content, so prior to publication reporters were instructed to attach an image of their choice to the story to avoid incorrect images being used and to allow the use of a larger image.

Journalists at both titles were expected to engage with social media promotion of the online publication. Journalists were expected to either set up professional profiles or use their own social media accounts to interact with news-traders and some of the journalists' accounts had been verified by the social media platform. There was evidence at both titles of news gathering, contact with sources and internal newsroom network actors and promotion of product taking place outside of work hours and away from the internal newsroom network; extending the network into the homes and lives of journalists. There was also suggestion that some of the older actors within the networks had needed to consciously incorporate social media usage into their work due to a lack of social media use prior to convergence. Some of these actors admitted difficulty in using social media for daily work.

TM6: I find it a bit hard. It's a lot newer to me. People who join the paper are used to doing all of this anyway. They've all got Facebook accounts. Very quickly get the idea, get the hang of it. It's a bit more difficult for me. It's not my scene.

Social media platforms offered both titles additional support because of their official news provider status. Twitter offered the opportunity for journalists to have verified accounts in order to promote trusted sources. Facebook's Instant Articles function was also used by *The Journal* to allow news-traders to view content on mobile devices on a page hosted by Facebook. While the content looked like it was on *The Journal* website, it in fact kept news-traders on Facebook. The function meant the pages loaded quickly on mobile (unlike the pages on the actual site which were slow to load and hampered by pop-up adverts), reducing the number of 'bounce' viewers⁴¹. The analytics and advertising revenue from the Instant Articles still went to *The Journal*, with the benefit to Facebook being that news-traders remained on its site.

⁴¹ Viewers who start to load a page but 'bounce' off onto other content before the page loads.

Facebook was also used significantly at *The Journal* to produce live video, with multimedia journalists and the digital team both expected to produce live video during coverage of significant events. Interviewees suggested the tool was of value because of its ability to connect news-traders to a live event and the digital editor suggested there were plans in the pipeline to monetise connected advertising. Journalists at the title had been given skills training hosted by Facebook to make sure they made the most of what the social media platform had to offer.

TJ6: The reader couldn't get any closer to the action unless they were stood next to the reporter there.

At *The Mitre*, there was expectation of reporters to source and produce video for most major stories and for content which had been demonstrated to perform well online. However, as discussed, some journalists were resistant to producing video, relying on photographers or contributed content rather than making their own. There was also a degree of push-back on the company directive to produce pieces to camera if there was nothing visually stimulating to capture on video.

TM16: We all do video to some extent. Again, it depends on the circumstances. I, some people are tasked with looking for videos, theoretically we are all tasked with it, but realistically, some people are more able to do it than others. So, we look for videos that we can write stories around, and also when we have got a story that we think will make a good video we try a bit harder to do a good video. There is a kind of policy to do video with every story, obviously some don't really work, some of them are quite dull. Like, if I'm a sole reporter doing a council meeting there's no real video I can offer to that story.

Journalists were evidenced to prolifically use social media for story sourcing, making and retaining contacts and as a communications device for interacting with news-traders. In interviews, several journalists spoke about the usefulness of social media for newsgathering and communication with sources.

Digital analytics, tracking news-trader interaction with content on websites and social media were used at both titles, with an expectation at both that individual actors would engage with the figures. Both titles used real-time analytic

software called Chartbeat, which displayed audience trends and viewing figures across a range of platforms. At *The Journal* a big screen showing Chartbeat's list of the title's top stories was displayed in the newsroom.

At *The Mitre*, software was also used to track page views over time. This software sent daily reports to the journalists in the newsroom so they could see how well their content had performed against others. The software also allowed users to look at bounce rate, see the number of views and the number of unique visitors and was used by managers to forward plan and identify opportunities to maximise visitor time spent on the website⁴².

The Journal used similar software to track trends and identify news-trader referral sources. The software produced a report of the top 20 articles from the day before, this was circulated to all staff daily.

At *The Mitre*, concerns were raised in interview about analytics being used to measure individual journalist performance – an idea which had been mooted by the production company, but later scrapped after union involvement.

TM16: *The company wanted us to be ranked on how many hits our stories got. Which would have been very corrupting I think, both in terms of quality and in terms of morale.*

Analytics were used by the publishing company to measure audience performance of each newsroom within the company and interviewees spoke about the pressure of such monitoring pushing the news agenda from 'public interest' to 'interest to the public'.

At *The Journal* there were similar concerns raised about journalistic story count being measured, with one interviewee admitting he consciously relied on press releases to boost his story count after a being told in a development meeting that his story count was low. He also said he avoided covering news which required in-depth investigation because of the time it would take to produce.

TJ6: *I sometimes have days where I fire off a load of stories and I'll put off the big stories I need to be doing because I want a story count.*

⁴² For example, the use of picture galleries and links to other similar stories on the site.

The digital teams at both titles also monitored trends online using tools such as Google and Chartbeat and by interacting with other titles within their publishing companies. There was evidence at both sites of identifying popular content online which might not have relevance to the title's circulation area and repurposing it for use with a local angle or reusing it without editing simply because of its potential to push up web hits. While managers spoke of this kind of content in positive terms, there were more negative opinions aired by reporters at both titles, with concerns about the product image and the quality of the story being raised multiple times.

***TM16:** there's a certain section of our company that recommends them and they kind of spread like wildfire across the country. So, if one of the major papers does it then everyone else does it. Word gets out that McDonald's are doing its Monopoly game or something and they do a story on it.*

***TJ6:** You'll have seen the story about the couple in [redacted] [a town with no geographic connection to The Journal], in a takeaway, basically engaging in sexual activity. [redacted] [name of weekly newspaper] did it, a [redacted] [production company] title, it went round, shared around the county in these meetings, every tabloid picked it up, we got absolutely hammered on the website, but then we got complaints from parents afterwards saying, "My two ten-year-old girls have watched this"... We ran it for the fact that the bloke who was in the takeaway had a [redacted] [football team] shirt on and they'd played [redacted] [The Journal home team] that afternoon. And to me and some of the others, we were literally just like, "Are we actually running this?" And we did, and it did really well. Managers will see that, they'll look at a list and go, "Mm, 25,000 views."*

Both titles used Google Docs⁴³ to share information with the internal newsroom network. At *The Mitre*, the recent creation of the 'Live List'⁴⁴ allowed journalists to list stories they were working on for the day against time slots when they anticipated them to be ready to publish. There was suggestion that the use of the Live List was slowly increasing, but that some reporters deliberately held back from including stories on there in order to have more control over their time agendas. At *The Journal* there was a shared contacts list which had been

⁴³ Software provided free by Google which allows multiple users to access and edit the same document online.

⁴⁴ The daily publishing schedule.

created to prevent issues arising with contacting sources if journalists were absent from work.

5.3.2.3.5 Resources

At both titles there was evidence of limited resources in terms of skilled actors or available technology, impacting the news agenda or product.

At *The Mitre*, a photographer was leaving the company at the same time as the editor (TM1) and he was due to be replaced by a videographer. The photographic diary was managed by the news editor and it was clear that photographic resource, or lack of it, sometimes pushed managers into making expensive choices, or caused them to scrap stories altogether.

Observation: *It's 4.30pm and there is an issue with some pictures taken for a new exhibition. The photographer had to leave for another job before the artwork was unwrapped from the packaging and as a result there is no usable picture. TM2 phones the venue and asks if they have taken any pictures. They have, but only on a camera phone. TM9 says he follows a freelance photographer on Twitter who has got some pics. TM2 replies that he also has a freelance price tag too. He says "let's wait and see what venue pictures are like. If they are no good we will follow that up maybe."*

Observation: *TM4 has got news of a crash between several cars and a bus. She tries to get a photographer to the scene but struggles to get someone available.*

At *The Journal*, the Multimedia Images Editor (TJ2) managed the photographic diary and had five freelance photographers working for the title regularly. At times the photographic resource of *The Journal* was also used by a nearby sister title and occasionally the sister title would provide resource for *The Journal*. Negotiations about images were often centred around cost or availability and there was an awareness campaign being run by TJ2 to prevent people misusing online images due to legal costs which had recently stung the company.

Observation: TJ2 refers to a picture that has been used mistakenly online by commercial staff running an entertainment and what's on section of the website and that has incurred a cost. She says: "£450 that picture." The picture had been taken from Wikipedia. **TJ2** says: "It's not coming out of my budget."

The Journal's weekly freesheet title, *The Mail*, relied heavily on user-generated-content (UGC) to fill its pages. However, the lack of professional news photographers was seen to impact on the quality of the images submitted, meaning some resource had to be pushed towards the paper to include the more traditional type of newspaper image.

Observation: TJ1: "We need to get more faces in *The Mail*. At the moment we are getting about 100 - I have to count them - we need about 300. The problem is we have so much UGC in there, we are not getting the pictures with the faces on there. Let's see if we can get a big picture with lots of faces on it."

The Mitre's attitude to online image sourcing and UGC appeared to be quite different. There was suggestion of images being taken from the internet and used without permission (see **Figure 39**, pg178.) and much of the UGC content ran online only. The handling and tone of UGC content will be discussed in more detail in the Story Handling section below.

There was evidence at both titles of actors within the internal newsroom network working under stressful and pressurised conditions on days when staffing levels were low. At *The Mitre*, the departure of the Editor and his assistant, paired with the secondment of the Digital Development Editor and a busy day of breaking news stories and events, resulted in issues over production. Delays in news production and story handling and communication and production issues with advertising and page templates meant work towards the printed product was delayed, causing a back-log of work for the Sub Editors.

At *The Journal*, on a day when *The Mail* was also being sent to the printers, there was again evidence of issues with advertising, page design and templates, which resulted in assistance being provided by the heads of advanced content production to meet the print deadline.

In both situations, the advertising department and a breakdown in planning or communication was a key element of the reason behind the delayed production.

This, combined with stretched staffing, caused concern with actors in both teams that the print deadline would not be met.

***TJ18:** There are things which are obviously just so annoying, like ad placement and advertising people can be just a nightmare. They just don't get the editorial side of it at all. That can be really frustrating*

On another day there were no reporters in *The Journal* newsroom due to a training event and other absence. This resulted in actors on the newsdesk producing content for the printed product.

At both newsrooms there was less evidence of a resource burden on digitally-focused staff, possibly due to the lack of physical deadline in digital publication, the lack of requirement to interact or rely on other departments within the newspaper and because digital at both sites was well staffed during the observation period.

5.3.2.4 Story handling

The treatment of news content for online and in print was handled slightly differently at the titles, with production for *The Mitre* in print driven by the online product, while production for *The Journal* was split more equally between online and the printed product. The specific treatment of stories will be discussed in the sections below, examining; the source and story development, the tools used and actors involved, decision-making moments and news-trader influence.

5.3.2.4.1 Story development and mapping

At both titles the researcher mapped story processes to assess the workflow of production from sourcing to publication of content. This was done by interviewing actors involved with the story after publication had occurred⁴⁵ and relied on their testimony. Checks on print content, online publication and social media promotion were also carried out for verification purposes.

At both newsrooms, stories by specialist reporters were mapped (see **Figure 37** on pg176 and **Figure 38** on pg177) and stories by digital journalists were mapped (see **Figure 39** on pg178 and **Figure 40** on pg179). See **Figure 36**, below, for a key to understanding the story maps.

⁴⁵ This approach was taken so as to not make actors change their behaviours due to awareness of the story being mapped.



Figure 36. Story mapping key⁴⁶

At both titles, the production process of the stories by the digital reporters were much more complex, involving multiple human actors and digital actants and more forms of publication and promotion. There was evidence of interactivity with news-traders and a variety of multimedia tools utilised during production in both instances; video was produced, multiple images were used, the story was promoted during its development on social media and, at *The Journal*, the story was also released as a breaking news alert which would alert followers of the newspaper's smartphone app⁴⁷. Both stories also went into the printed product. Both the stories were developed quickly – with production from start to finish taking place within a working day.

In the mapping of both specialist reporters' stories, the number of actors involved in the production process was far fewer and the pathways of the stories were more linear. Both stories were traditional public interest reports, with *The Mitre* story being a focus on council development plans and *The Journal* covering the level of dog fouling in part of the city. The story development was conducted by one journalist and both stories were followed up over the course of several days or weeks. There was no promotion or responsive online interaction from news-traders until the stories were published. Even at that stage, there was minimal promotion online, no videos were used and there was no real involvement by the digital team. Both reports were chosen as the splash in print⁴⁸, but despite being chosen as the best story of the day in terms of the newspaper, neither received particular promotion online.

⁴⁶ All story maps can also be found as Power Point slides on the supplementary document data sticks so examiners can see them in enlarged format if required.

⁴⁷ The news alert was used due to the type of story being covered; a lorry crash into a bridge on a busy city centre highway, which was causing travel disruption.

⁴⁸ The front page story.

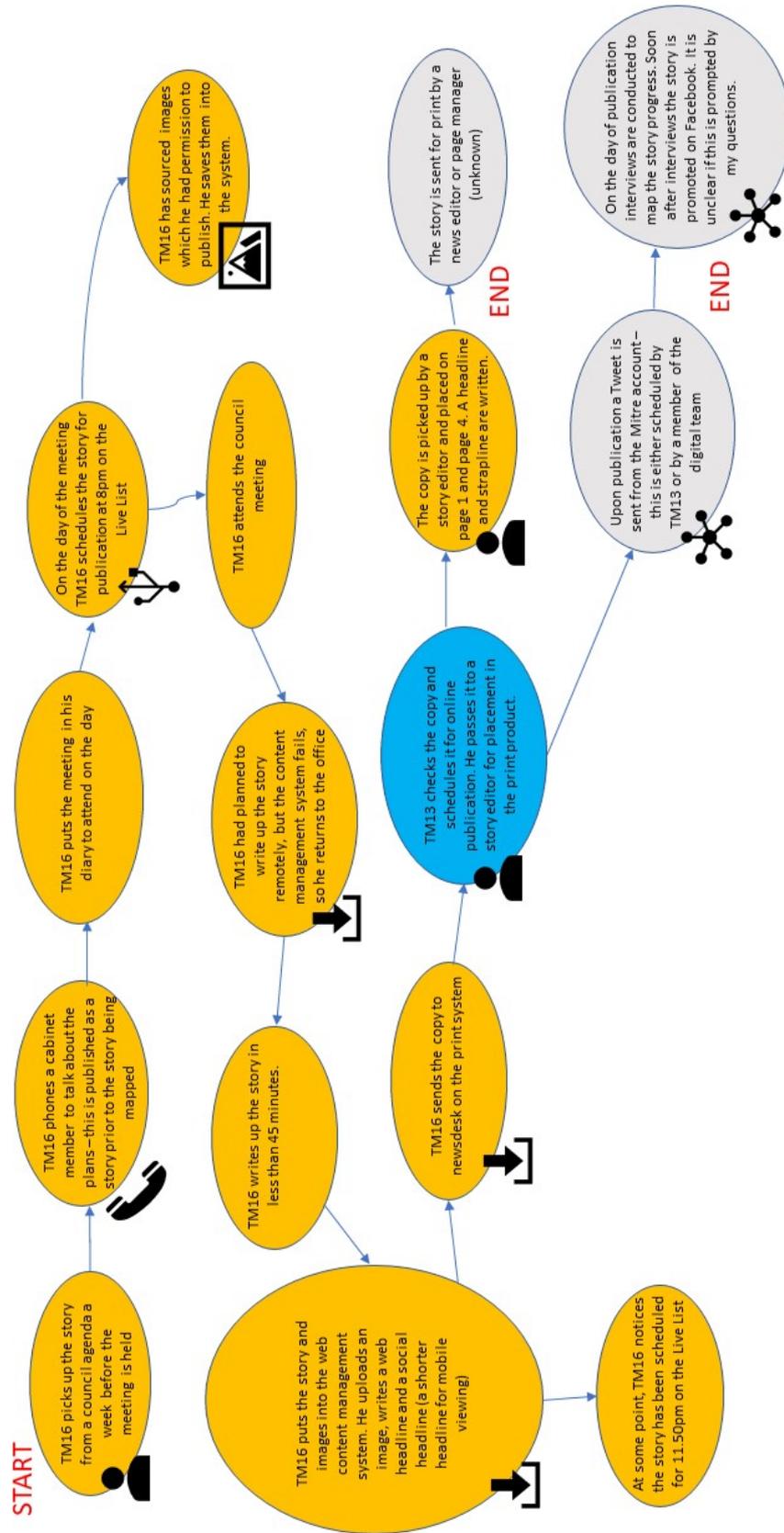


Figure 37. Map of Specialist Reporter story published by *The Mitre* about local authority planning for town centre regeneration.

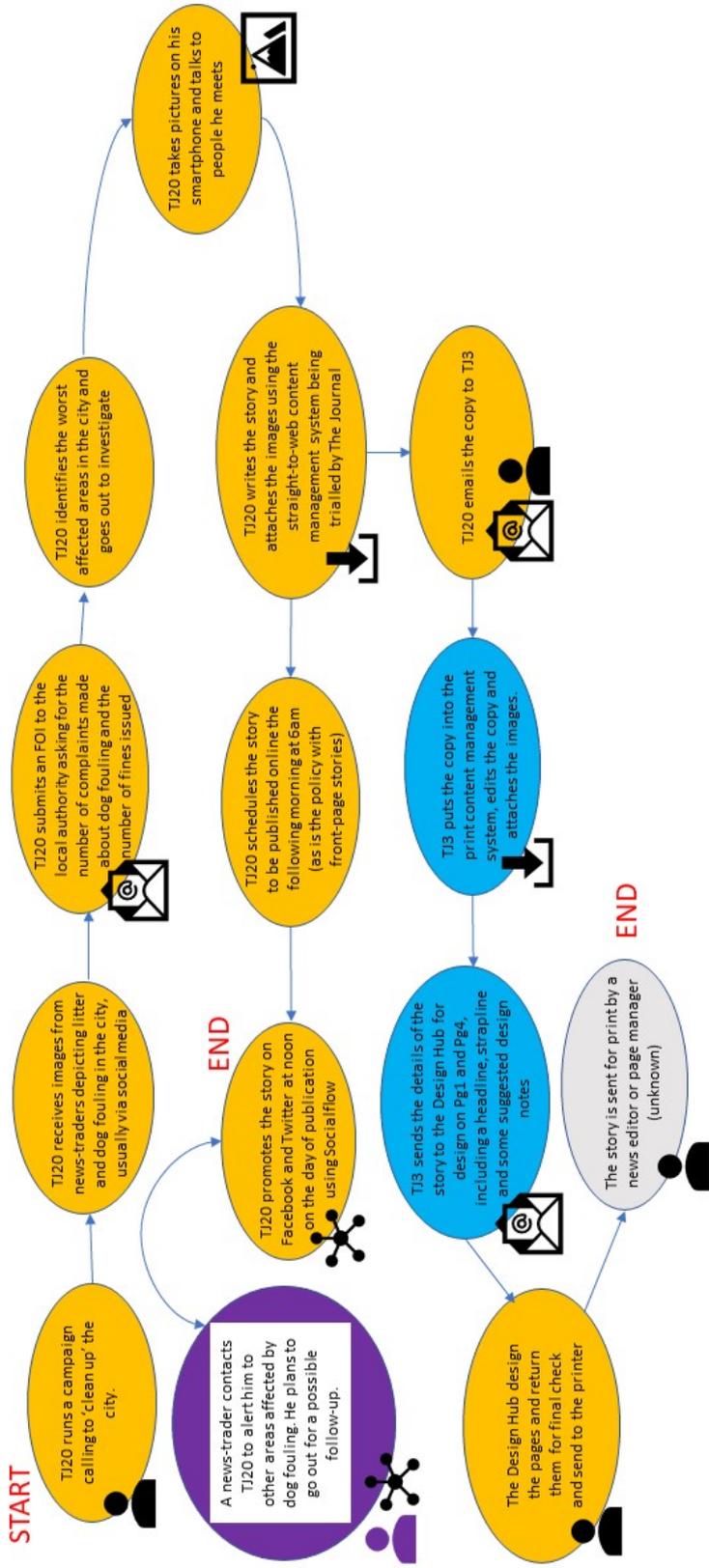


Figure 38. Map of Specialist Multimedia Reporter story published by *The Journal* about dog fouling

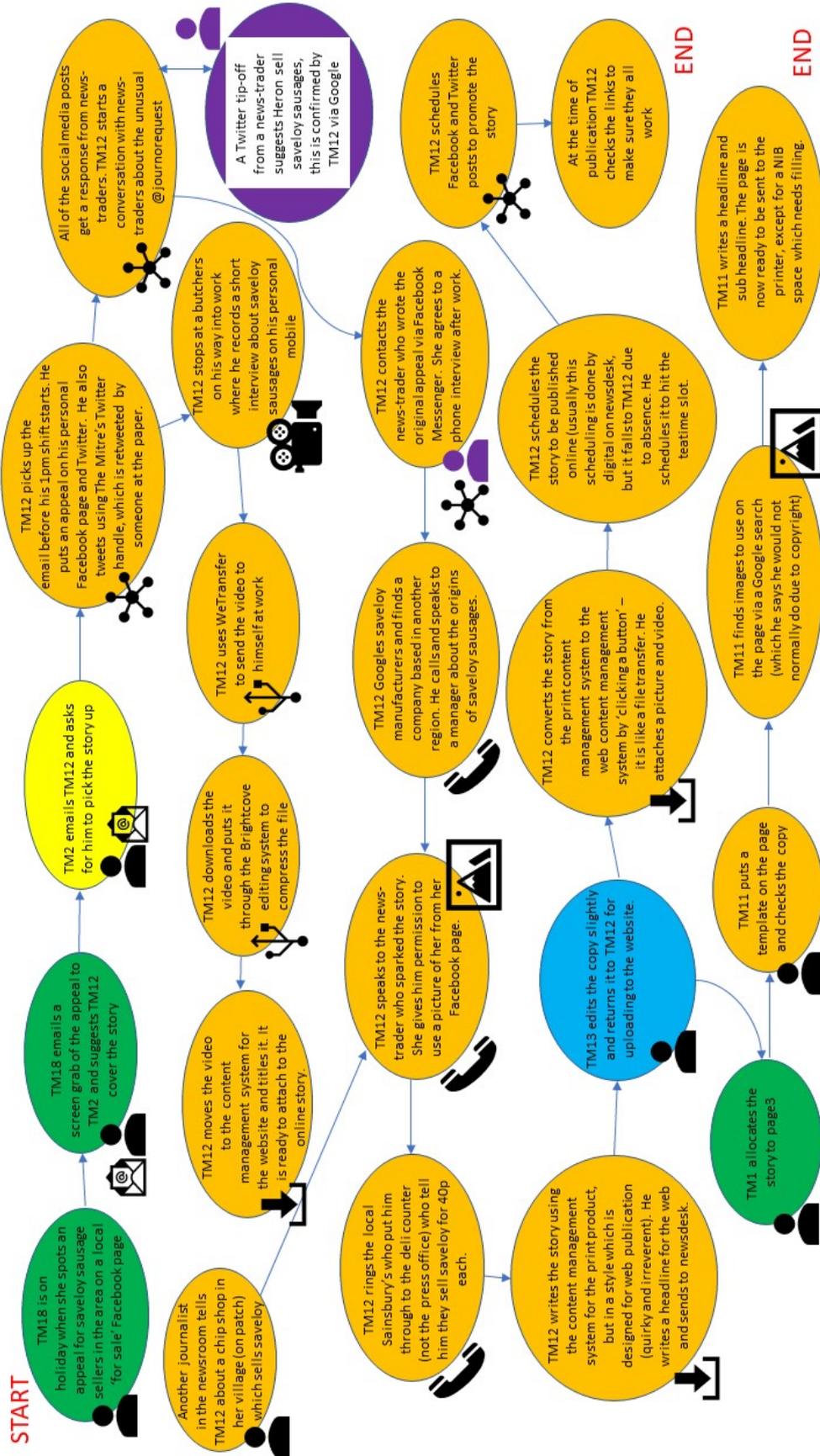


Figure 39. Map of story by Multimedia Reporter at *The Mitre* about a reader appeal to find a shop selling saveloy sausages.

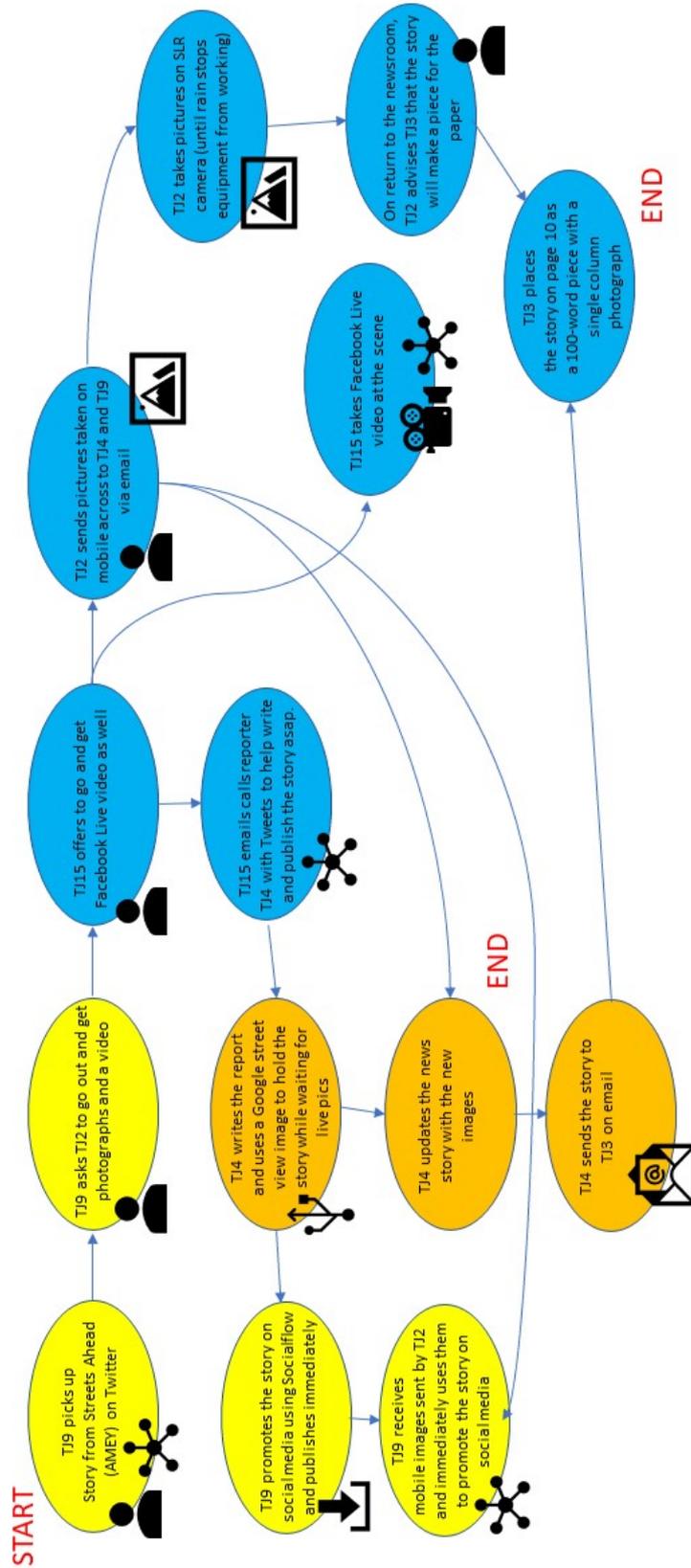


Figure 40. Map of story by Digital Reporters at *The Journal* about a lorry crash with a bridge on a city centre road.

In both newsrooms, the mapped stories produced by the digital teams were significantly more successful online than the mapped stories produced by the specialist reporters.

In news conference meetings it was clear the digital teams focused on stories which performed well online, and this type of content was replicated or 'accelerated' to maximise the online audience analytics and interaction. The type of content which appeared to do well online had a series of similar characteristics at both titles, they were:

- Breaking news, serious hard localised news, light entertaining content and content which was seen to be 'trending' elsewhere online⁴⁹
- Promotion on social media, especially Facebook
- Use of engaging images and headlines
- Often accompanied by live or edited video

When a story was seen to be performing well at both sites, the following patterns were observed:

- Further promotion of original content online via social media
- Additional content added to original online story, republication and pinned placement at the top of the website
- Multiple angles or versions of the story published, and links set up between stories online and further promotion on social media
- Breaking news apps used to alert smartphone users
- At *The Journal* there was also evidence of similar archived content being republished and links to new content set up

There was a disregard by the digital team of stories which were not considered to draw audience. This included grassroots news-style journalism (charity events, low-level good news stories and content about a specific and small group of people or places) and low-level public interest journalism (council meetings and non-major council decision making, public meetings of community groups, stories about local authority or minor crime issues). Therefore, there was a demonstrable lack of interest by the digital teams in certain types of stories often produced by the specialist reporters, with the focus not being deemed 'sexy' enough to interest the wider online audience.

⁴⁹ This was identified via Google search and trending software and often involved identifying content on social media. The content was sometimes from a personal page, such as a video or images and at other times might involve multiple users referencing a social trend or fad, such as a charity challenge or popular television drama.

TM18: *“One thing that I think I have had a really positive influence on is the amount of boring stories that we’re not doing anymore. I’m really pleased with that, because we were writing – we still do a bit – but we were doing page leads on people doing things for charity and I don’t think there’s the same news value in them anymore because I think everyone does it.”*

There are the following points to consider when assessing the possible reasoning behind the digital team’s lack of attention and the online audience’s lack of engagement with the specialist stories which were mapped:

- There was a digital expectation of promotion by the specialist reporters
- There was managerial oversight of production by a print-focused leader
- Therefore, as the story is not ‘owned’ by or involving the digital team, it is less likely to be of personal focus to the actors on that desk
- This results in less engagement with promotion during development and post-publication
- There could have been a lack of interest, confidence, thought, time or knowledge in terms of digital development and promotion by the specialist reporters

Overall, the result of the online neglect was twofold; the specialist stories, seen as important enough to be used on the front of the paper, did not receive the maximum potential development and promotional focus online. Accordingly, the audience engagement with those stories was less than that of stories produced by the digital team. If this pattern was followed with the majority of specialist stories, the outcome could be predicted to be a growing spiral of online neglect of specialist content, justified by a lack of news-trader engagement. By performing poorly, there is less inclination by the digital team to push that kind of content and as a result, that kind of content is even further neglected.

TM5: *I think it’s really important for newspapers to never stop covering council and court, but I think we need to find a way of doing it better in a digital age. I think sometimes if they don’t do well online – and I think mainly with council, and I think because I’ve got the background of doing council, it can sometimes be overlooked. I think there needs to be more discussion of how to make it work online because we’re the only people that are ever going to go and hold the council to account.”*

At both titles the content of the printed product was evidenced to be influenced by the success of online stories, particularly so at *The Mitre*. The news agenda was clearly driven by digital analytics at *The Mitre* and to a degree it was shaped by the same at *The Journal*.

5.3.2.4.2 Sources, news values and verification

Sourcing of news was conducted in the main using online tools at both titles. While some content was sourced by alternative means, such as via observations made by actors within the internal newsroom network, telephone calls from sources and, very occasionally, by post, the clear majority of newsgathering was conducted online.

While Specialist Reporters used the internet to check agendas, reports and other official documents and press releases were sent via email to either individual actors' or the newsdesk email, it was apparent that a major source of news-gathering, particularly for the digital teams, was social media.

There was evidence at both titles of Facebook and Twitter being used to find news, via searches, daily observations of online community pages, comments and direct messaging from news-traders and trending topics.

There was also evidence of social media being used to follow-up and develop news stories, at times replacing telephone or face-to-face interviews with news-traders.

At both sites there was evidence of content being produced because the subject was proving successful elsewhere on social media. At *The Mitre*, a story about a local café owner having a public spat with customers on its Facebook page was covered by the title. In news conference the editor questioned the validity of covering the story without first sending a reporter to the café to investigate. The Executive Editor was adamant something needed to be published as soon as possible because 85k people were discussing the subject online.

Observation: *TM18* says: "I really think we have got to get something – everybody is talking about it." *TM1* says: "Ask *TM9* to go down and do a video outside the café addressing the fact that there's something going on without going into the detail of it."

At *The Journal*, a story ran about a copulating couple who were unknowingly videoed by a member of the public in a town centre alleyway. He had posted the video on his personal Facebook page and it had been viewed 0.5million

times in a day by social media users. The video was deemed 'too graphic' to put onto *The Journal's* website, but a still image taken from the film was used which clearly depicted a couple having sex. The angle of the news story was the fact that the video had been shared so prolifically online.

These were just two examples of content posted on social media which became 'news' because of the number of times it had been viewed by other social media users. In both stories a significant news angle was the number of times it had been seen or shared online. The implication from managers in both cases was that the reason for the story was to directly benefit from the interest shown by news-traders by running content with a highly 'clickable' value.

At *The Mitre* there was regular discussion about maximising the opportunity of 'trending' stories online. While managers appeared generally unconcerned about news values being influenced by news-trader trends and analytics, there was some worry raised by other staff in interviews that content was 'dumbed down' and lacking genuine news values, as evidenced previously.

At *The Journal*, there was an apparent but subtle divide between the digital managers' approach to content and other actors' opinions within the internal newsroom network. Conversations about 'clickbait' were regularly heard, usually led by either comments made by news-traders against online content provided by *The Journal*, or by actors within the internal newsroom network who were concerned about the impacts a story or approach might have on the reputation of the title. These concerns were raised in several interviews by participants who worried that the inclusion of content because of its online trending potential or the writing of headlines or presentation of stories was damaging the identity and image of the product overall. However, the Head of Digital and the Assistant Digital Content Editor asserted confidence that all content run by the title was justified. They defined clickbait by the headline, rather than the content or images accompanying the report, asserting that clickbait was essentially the use of misleading headlines to encourage clicks. Both actors suggested they consciously worked to encourage reporters to write creative and clickable online headlines which honestly reflected the content of the story and both felt it was a goal generally achieved by the title. However, the concerns raised by others suggested a different interpretation of clickbait, with interviews suggesting it was stories chosen solely because of their likelihood to encourage audience 'clicks', not because of the news values of the story. While many actors discussed the issue in concerned tones, at least one member of the Digital Reporter team freely admitted writing occasional 'clickbait' headlines to draw in a larger potential audience.

TJ12: Absolutely. I'm not gonna deny that some of the things that we do are clickbait. We know that.

At both titles there was evidence of the publishing company having some control over the news agenda. As previously mentioned, at *The Mitre*, there was facts and figures, images and data charts provided to the internal newsroom network by the Data Hub. The content was issued with a mandatory directive for use in print and online and it was developed further by a journalist within the internal newsroom network before being used.

At *The Journal* there was mandatory involvement with an annual #TrustedNewsDay drive which was being taken up by titles run by a number of local newspaper publishing companies in the UK.

In both cases there was a high level of enthusiasm from the managers about the publishing company directives for content inclusion and at *The Mitre* there was also a degree of enthusiasm exhibited by reporters.

This enthusiasm was a contrast to the attitude over content sharing with other titles within the publishing companies. Competitive language was used when discussing cross-over content which could be used in more than one title. At *The Mitre*, there was annoyance over a sister title which regularly overlooked its responsibility to share relevant content. At *The Journal* there was an understood sharing of content and resources with a sister title. This agreement appeared generally unproblematic and provided a small amount of content for *The Journal* on a regular basis, although there were suggestions in interviews that the process of sharing content could work more smoothly and with more success. However, there was some evidence of frustration at the sister title's use of *The Journal's* photographic resource; due to the perception within the internal newsroom network that the sister title (which had its own photographic and sub editing team) was better funded.

At both titles, content was shared for use by sister publications and was also provided by sister publications for use, without the original source being made clear to the reader. This meant reporters were able to have their work and their bylines reach wider online audiences, but it did not acknowledge the original source newspaper.

There was also evidence of a syndication unit running within *The Mitre's* publishing company, which sold content to rivals. At *The Journal*, there was evidence of localised syndication with small agencies and there was also

discussion in interviews of content being ‘stolen’ and reused without verification by national titles and the same being done at times by staff at *The Journal*.

TJ12: In the past, if you found a story in another paper, it would entail putting your own calls in, checks, making sure whatever is in that paper is true. Now, it’s an open season where everybody just steals everything else. Our stories just get taken constantly by the nationals. I’ve seen things that have blatantly been cut and pasted by The Mirror, The Mail, The Sun. Nothing checked out, they’ve no idea. But then we do the same in return. You’re taking it that what that person has said is correct.

Verification of facts was evidenced as being important at both titles, with some verification practices observed and numerous interviewees suggesting verification was a core element of journalistic practice. However, there was also evidence of pressures of online publishing and the requirement of ‘news now’ (Sheller, 2015a) pushing some actors into running stories without verified information or required permissions.

5.3.2.4.3 News-trader influence and change

At both titles there was evidence of news-traders not only dictating the news agenda via engagement analytics, but also influencing decision-making about existing content via comments on stories on the website and social media. At *The Mitre* there was evidence that while there was a general feeling that comments on stories were often extreme representations and overtly negative in tone, news-trader criticism of headlines and story content often led to copy being changed to appease the critics.

Observation: TM15 says a video about the police incident, which went alongside an updated story, was doing well. She said there had been some flack online (on social media) over the headline. As a result she changed the headline.

At *The Journal* there was evidence of a desire to engage with news-traders, but there was also more resistance to news-traders dictating change, with a split in approach evidenced between the digital team and the editor. In once instance a woman featured in an online story about her wedding day being ruined by an unconnected protest march. The comments on Facebook left by other news-

traders were negatively aimed at the bride, who then called *The Journal* to complain. While the digital editor suggested there was no legal requirement to remove the story, which had performed well in terms of audience analytics, the editor insisted the story be removed, suggesting the audience numbers were unlikely to significantly increase days after publication and prioritising the individual news-trader who had complained. The editor justified her stance by balancing the importance of the complainant against the company priority of analytics, demonstrating the role of audience analytics in decision-making at the title.

Observation: TJ1 says: "*It's not going to get any more hits is it? We should just take it down.*"

5.3.2.4.4 Story tone

The approach to story tone and balance of stories being used in print and online varied between the titles.

At *The Mitre*, there was little evidence of discussion about presentation or balance of the overall daily package of news. In conference, stories were discussed on an individual basis and there was no evidence of reflection on the overall tone of stories.

At *The Journal*, there was consideration given to the balance of content in the print products, but less reflection on the balance of content published online.

At both titles it was observed that the tone of the UGC regularly contributed by news-traders had an element of voyeurism or public humiliation. For example, *The Mitre* ran a video submitted by a news-trader of a man running out into traffic and throwing himself in front of a car. The man in the film was identifiable and it was only following a complaint from his father, who said his son was suffering from mental health problems, that his identity was blurred. Other uses of UGC included a picture from a woman whose car had been trapped in a car park by another careless driver, whose actions then became the focus of the story. At *The Journal*, the story of the couple having sex in public prompted republication, or 'amplification' of other similar stories which had been run by the title in the past, many of which also stemmed from UGC and had a voyeuristic, sexual tone.

At *The Mitre*, there was little discussion about how content reflected on the title or its news patch and while there was efforts to cover positive content, such as

documentation of a public campaign to save the town's accident and emergency department and another public effort to help homeless people in the area, there was no evidence of the title actively campaigning or pushing an agenda.

TM5: we need to find somebody that's going to say something interesting and have a public voice. I'm not saying we should have a Katie Hopkins of The Mitre, but I think sometimes we lack that authoritative voice.

Journalists voiced awareness of the need for an online product identity, but while some raised concerns about the lack of online voice, others suggested they were working at creating 'a voice' or personality – although this appeared to be more about their own online presence rather than creating a voice for the product.

TM4: I think one thing I'm trying to really focus on, as well, is having a voice on social media. I think that's really important. I think it's a strategy that a lot of companies are using at the moment, to have a voice on social media and make it clear that they're not just a bunch of robots.

At *The Journal* there was more discussion, led by the editor in news conference, about how coverage should be handled and there was evidence of the title both campaigning and also making efforts to proudly represent the city and its residents. There were concerted efforts made by the editor to connect the editorial team to the title's readers and community by running positive stories about the city, getting involved in city-led campaigns, running a business awards scheme and a shop-local campaign and by directing tone of written content to be positive about people connected to the city.

TM1: I realise there's a lot of bridge building. So I've basically spent the last year trying to build bridges and build that trust back.

Evidence of the title's representative stance included its response to the previously mentioned terrorist attack. The attack resulted in some residents from *The Journal's* circulation area being injured or killed. The response from the title was reverential in terms of the victims and projected a sense of

solidarity in terms of the city and its residents. It changed the strapline under the masthead to *We Stand Together* and in its online and print coverage it conveyed a sense of shock, grief and dismay. In a different week, the title covered a crucial match win by the city's football team as a wrap⁵⁰ of the paper and again, it changed the masthead strap to reflect the glory of the city. These kinds of details projected an overall sense that the title endeavoured to represent the city and the people it covered with pride and positivity. While the masthead changes were not reflected online, the tone of the content was the same.

5.3.3 Network boundaries and professional spaces

There was evidence at both titles that the boundaries of the internal newsroom network were blurring in terms of physical and digital location.

Digital managers at both sites communicated with other actors in similar positions at external sites within the wider publishing companies via established groups on Facebook and email. The networks were used to not only troubleshoot issues with digital technology and training tips, but also to share 'best practice' ideas. While trending content was generally identified via analytic software at both sites, the digital-networks' Facebook chat was also a key source of content ideas which worked well online. At *The Mitre*, the Digital Development Editor had been recognised by the publishing company for her forward planning and ideas, to the point where she was sent on secondment to deliver digital tools training to actors within other newsrooms within the network. This widening of the working space allowed by the online communities developed by the digital actors meant the internal newsroom network for those actors was much wider than the networks within which the print-focused actors functioned. TM15 expressed frustration in interview that more journalists did not take the opportunity to communicate online with other actors within the publishing company network.

As discussed, news-traders were taking a defining role in news values and agenda setting at both titles, which saw the boundaries of the internal newsroom network widen and weaken. Not only was there a sense of widening space, but other boundaries such as the definition of the working day, were also widening. This was caused by journalists interacting with news-traders outside

⁵⁰ A wrap is the front and back page of the newspaper being used for a sole purpose – usually as a large image to make an historic event or an advertisement.

of official working hours and often from personal settings due to social media use.

While actors at *The Mitre* were encouraged to set up professional social media accounts, many used their personal accounts for communicating with news-traders, often resulting in out-of-hours communications taking place. At *The Journal*, actors were encouraged to use the official title accounts, in order to distance from news-traders and personal accounts, but in interview, many admitted to interacting online in a professional capacity from personal accounts or out of working hours. At both titles, actors admitted working late nights or early shifts had always been part of the job, but some expressed discomfort with the digital personal proximity that social media had created with news-traders.

TJ1: Everything is 24 hours, now, isn't it? I think they've [The Journalists] got to have a bit of space for themselves if they want it. if they don't want it, fine.

TM12: The problem is, I'm quite a private person. I don't really want all and sundry to know where I live, for instance, and the fact I've got two children. I may do a story once upon a time where somebody doesn't like it. I don't want to be easily tracked down. I may cover a crown court story. I've had it before where people have given you a little nudge in the ribs as you walk past them because they don't like you. So yeah, being part of the community is one thing but if you do a story that someone doesn't like, you don't necessarily want to be really visible. So it's a conundrum.

Managing online comments, particularly on social media, was raised as a difficult path to navigate, with actors balancing positive interaction on a successful story with negative and personal comments on other content they produced. It appeared neither publishing company had a clear policy about how to manage negative comments and during interviews journalists described a raft of management measures.

TJ1: I think everybody thinks they can be a journalist now, so I think the criticism. I think back in the day, there was probably a lot more respect for that print by-line. And now, everyone will have a pop. One typo. There's always been typos and they've no idea. They think there's hundreds of us.

They've no idea that it's one poor reporter stood out there in the rain trying to get photos.

TM4: *We've kind of learnt not to respond to negativity and to respond to positive comments, unless it's something that someone is saying that needs addressing, like accusing us of something, or to clarify a situation.*

Despite difficulties caused by comments, many of the journalists interviewed were positive about development of trust and relationships with news-traders made possible by social media. Several described social media as being an access point to the title's circulation community and almost saw it as a physical extension of their journalistic presence within the geo-social (Hess and Waller, 2014) space.

TM4: *It's incredibly important in the age of social media to have a two-way relationship because the whole point of social media is that idea of people being more accessible*

Being a physical presence within the geographic community was still seen as an important element of local journalism by many of the actors interviewed, as was covering local events and living on patch.

TM6: *If we're not covering a council meeting, nobody is covering it and nobody is reporting on it and those decisions are never publicised. They aren't always the meaty stories but sometimes you feel it's part of – it sound pompous – it's part of the role of a local newspaper to cover things like that, local government.*

TJ16: *I like that local news is so personal and obviously, alright, I'm not from here originally but I've lived here for nearly six years, now. It feels like home, it is home, and I care about it. So to feel like you're part of it and you're doing something for the community that's good, that's why I like local news.*

5.3.3.1 Branded journalism

Journalists at both titles spoke about the opportunities provided by the internet in terms of developing their own online personas. They spoke of the infinite space of the internet allowing publication of content which might have been turned down for the newspaper and they also spoke about becoming a recognisable name for their brand of journalism which, in turn, helped develop and grow their follower numbers. While this was seen as a positive by those who spoke about it, they also acknowledged it created an expectation of journalism type and social media behaviours which could also make them a target for negativity if they failed to meet news-traders' expectations.

TJ10: If you've got two, three, four thousand followers, your name is out there. People do come to you. They do interact with you more. I think you get a lot more tweets than you do emails or phone calls like you used to years ago. I suppose we're more accessible because we've all got our phones. You get a tweet at 10 o'clock at night, you'll probably reply. Whereas in that past, you'd maybe get an email and you wouldn't reply for another 10 hours, so it's more of an immediate exchange of information.

TJ12: I think I've obviously got this reputation that goes before me, now, of these sort of quite outrageous headlines and things. I think they're the ones that stick in people's minds. I think this is it. The sex, all that kind of thing. I've done them, but I've done hundreds and hundreds of others which people don't notice and don't click on...I think you do get a bit of a reputation and people seem to be able to spot one of mine before even clicking on it, which I suppose is a bit of a badge of honour.

TM9: Digital is a lot more democratic, so if something is a good story, it'll go on web and a lot of people will read it, unless it's absolutely buried and we don't tend to do that because there's lots of space to put them, and we have a quick turnover of them. So in that sense, you're a bit more empowered rather than if you could do a story that you thought was great and your news desk didn't it could get buried, but it doesn't matter anymore because it's online now and it's a lot more democratic.

5.3.3.2 Digital spread

There was evidence at both titles of more flexible circulation boundaries online than in print. At *The Mitre*, the editor spoke about the print audience valuing focused coverage within the traditional geographic circulation area of the title and disliking other content. But he said the online audience responded positively to content covering outside neighbours to the traditional boundary.

TM1: The Mitre's print audience is pretty much south [redacted], [redacted], they do not like north [redacted] stories, they think [redacted] is below them, or not part of their community, would be a more friendly version. They don't want to read about [redacted] and [redacted], but on the website it goes enormously well.

At *The Journal*, discussions in conference demonstrated inclusion of content which was deemed as having the potential to do well with a wider, national audience or which was being covered by the daily sister title – with the spend on resource being a factor taken into consideration. However, the content was not limited to website use only, with such content seeming to also be considered for the printed product.

TJ3 says: "She's from [redacted] [town outside circulation]" and TJ1 replies: "Well do we give a shit then?"

TJ3: "The [redacted] [sister title] are wanting to go and do more pics, they wanted one of ours [photographers] to do it but they have got about six photographers and one of them is sitting in here."

TJ1: "Do we like it or not like it?"

TJ3: "I think it's a nice little story. I think we should get a page lead on it."

TJ1: "It will do well nationally, we had better get her in then."

This use in print and online of content covering neighbouring geographic locations, only included stories which were considered to have some kind of link to the region. The wider use of content, such as trending stories with no real geo-social link to the circulation area, were only used online at both titles.

5.3.4 Making money from the news

Revenue at both *The Journal* and *The Mitre* was made from print sales and advertising and online advertising which ran alongside written and video content on the website.

However, despite their similarities in model, there were significant differences in the editorial approach to the commercial elements of their companies.

At *The Mitre*, there was no real discussion about print revenue in news conference or the internal newsroom network. Sales figures or cover price were not discussed and the only real mention of advertisements in the printed product was when placement on pages near print deadline caused issue with editorial production. In interviews some actors mentioned sales figures, cover price or revenue generated by print advertising, but only the Agenda Writer with specialism for business talked at length about print-generated revenue; mainly because of his focus on a separate business magazine which drew sponsorship and revenue from local commercial supporters. When other actors mentioned print revenue it was usually in negative tones and critical of the publishing company's prioritisation of digital targets over print.

In stark contrast to the lack of print revenue focus was the attention paid to digital revenue, specifically from video advertisements. News conference focused on video on a regular basis, with clear drive from managers to increase video production amongst all journalists. A videographer was being brought in to replace a redundant photographer and journalists within all departments were clearly aware of the publishing company and the managerial drive to include video with web content.

TM8: If you're talking cash, which they [the production company] are always concerned about cash only, they don't care about their employees, the print product brings in mega bucks and digital doesn't, and yet everything is being thrown at digital.

TM12: They do seem to have a strategy which is digital, making money out of that, making money on the back of videos and audience growth, which does appear to be growing. But on the flipside, they don't seem to be that interested in the newspapers.

TM1: Print still brings in more money. But, that balance is changing. Changing for two reasons, because obviously the print revenues are dropping, it's not so much that digital is closing in fast on what the print brought in two or three years ago. It's a combination of digital rising but print revenues are falling, but it is still overwhelmingly print. But the growth in digital revenue is significant and growing.

At *The Journal* there was more of a focus on print sales and more involvement from editorial over advertising opportunities in print and online. News conference involved regular analysis of sales figures and the impact of cover price rises. Front page design and content and promotion of content inside the title was discussed as an important factor in selling the newspaper. Discussions about issues with stockists and special event sales opportunities also took place.

Daily online content was monetised with pop-up advertisements but there was no real drive for specific types of content, unlike *The Mitre's* focus on video. The production company's online viewing targets were linked to advertising revenue targets, but this connection was not discussed specifically in conference or within the internal newsroom network and the editor said in interview she had deliberately avoided connecting page views to key performance indicators.

TJ1: In terms of the digital commercial side of it, we get updates as in x-amount of pageviews bringing x-amount of money. But we're not judged on that. We have a figure for the month in terms of page views so I can tell you whether we hit that. So we've got those but we don't have commercial ones that we have to tick, as such, although the managing editor does a lot of commercial work but we said from the beginning, we don't want KPIs.

Where *The Journal* significantly differed from *The Mitre* was with its approach to stories, particularly PR content, which was felt could be monetised. If publication of a story was identified as being financially beneficial to a company or organisation efforts were made to pull it from the news list and instead approach the source of the story to agree a payment for publication deal. The project was led by editorial, with editorial team members identifying potentially commercial content, an editorial manager making the approach to the potential client and journalists within the contributed content team producing written and multimedia content if a deal was agreed. Digital journalists were also involved in

paid-for content production; conducting social media takeovers, producing videos and Facebook Live videos for a fee. The project relied on *The Journal's* social media and online audience figures as well as its sales figures as much of the space sold to clients was website space and social media platform inclusion. To meet advertising standards, the content produced for revenue had to be branded as such to make it clearly distinct from a piece of standalone editorial. However, unlike an advertising feature, which tended to be sold by commercial only, this project saw clients pay for journalistic content production, without having a right to editorial approval. As a result, trust between the title and the client appeared to be a major element in securing a deal, along with the editorial team's judgement over ethics and conflicts of interest. The project, which had been running for a year at the time of research taking place, was proving so successful it was due to be rolled out at other titles within the publishing company and the team behind it had won a company award.

Evidence of the project changing news agendas was witnessed within newsroom observations and the project was mentioned in positive terms by several interviewees.

Observation: *TJ2 asks TJ19 if he is doing a Facebook Live for a story about some student flats that are opening. TJ19 says "no", adding, "There might be some money in it."*

TJ17: *I can think of lots of examples where we've made money where previously, we'd have just done it for nothing. Another one of the earlier projects, we were approached by VOID which is what was VOID to honour grassroots sporting heroes, but they hadn't got a way of getting enough people involved because they had no presence, no reach. So, I said, "We will run the vote for you. We'll open up nominations. We'll do stories on those nominated and then we'll run you an online vote. And of course, we're regularly attracting 120,000 to 140,000 people a day to The Journal's website. So that was great for them. They paid us to do that, whereas in years gone by, we'd have just done it or we'd have put a coupon in the newspaper and you'd have written in. We'd have done it for free and we'd have been happy to be there on the night with our branding there. We may well have done an eight-page pull-out for them, who knows. But we were really strict on what they were getting because we knew they had a budget and we were determined to get a share of it, and I think we got five grand out of that."*

There was also a digital drive at *The Journal* to run positive content online which advertisers would be comfortable paying to be alongside. The kind of story being targeted was termed 'Most Valuable Content' (MVC) and it included coverage of softer subjects like education, which would usually garner less clicks but also less negative commentary and criticism. The digital editor spoke in interview about the company initiative to push for an increase in 'MVC' content as it aimed for 20% of page views to be from that type of editorial.

TJ19: A murder story is going to get 40,000 pageviews, but does an advertiser want to have it being on that page or do they want to have something seen as more lifestyle? Softer news. Education, that sort of thing. So we're going to be setting a target to increase.

5.3.5 Thematic conclusions

The Mitre and *The Journal* were two very different newsrooms in terms of location, production company, internal newsroom structures and the tone of content produced. However, observations and interview findings has clearly drawn out thematic similarities which will be analysed against the research question in the next chapter. In short, these are:

- News-traders, revenue and resource driving the news agenda
- A divide between digital and print production at middle management level.
- Management structure dictating digital production of individual journalists.
- Increasing digital dominance within internal newsroom and publishing company networks.
- Marginalisation of print products and the actors focused on print
- A spiral of increasing production focus on soft and breaking news and a spiral of decreasing production focus on specialist and public interest news.
- Regular changing internal newsroom network structure and hierarchy.
- Complicated and confused communication pathways.
- Actor compliance, ability and ambition impacting production outcomes.
- Blurring network boundaries.
- Unperceived change of the news product identity online and increasingly in print.

Chapter 6

Research section 2, discussing the case study evidence: Identifying the spiralling decline of public interest journalism

The evidence collected during the observation and interview process at both *The Mitre* and *The Journal* in the first half of 2017 demonstrates clear ongoing digital impacts on production, identity and jurisdiction within both newsrooms. This chapter will address the emerging themes and analyse the data against the research questions outlined in the first chapter. It will also identify the thesis emerging from this research project and emphasise why these findings matter.

While it is clear the observations and interviews conducted at *The Mitre* and *The Journal* identified digital impacts which have been documented by research elsewhere are also occurring in local newspaper newsrooms in the UK, this process has also uncovered entirely new data which offers a unique contribution to knowledge in this field.

As determined by the Cairncross Review, (2019a), public interest journalism has seriously declined in the UK due to changes with local newspaper publishers following digital convergence. The story maps and observations documented by this study identify how that change happened in newsrooms and uncover a spiral of declining focus and output of public interest journalism which has been caused specifically by the integration of digital actants into the news-making process. This, resultingly, has impacted on the identities of the product and the professional identities of the journalists within the internal newsroom network. The jurisdiction of the news titles has spread in terms of network reach, but its geo-social impact is in decline. Meanwhile, digital tools have offered journalists the opportunity to develop their own jurisdictional impacts, but this is ultimately to the detriment of the product which they produce.

These findings led on from the job advertisement data, which demonstrated a decline in traditional specialisms, a rise in digital specialisms and which identified a rise in cross-title working.

Analysis of the data to demonstrate specifically how the spiral of decline has occurred will be discussed in detail below. However, it is worth outlining at this point why this finding is important. The long-term risk of spiralling neglect of public interest news is causing an irreversible democratic crisis in the UK. As cautioned, undoing the Capitalist development of production results in “unacceptable consequences” for the corporations involved (Garnham, 2000,

pp42). The spiral of decline identified by this research is intrinsically linked to the Capitalist structures of the news publishing companies and the desire for labour to produce as much profit as possible (Marx, 1973, reprinted from original text c.1844). Ultimately, without conscious change to prioritise public interest journalism over news-trader-driven revenue, this pathway would nullify the geo-social identity of the news products and reshape the purpose of local newspaper journalism in the UK entirely.

The findings from the newsroom observations will be analysed by research question, with the thesis which emerges in further detail acknowledged and defined in full in the concluding sections of this chapter.

6.1 What skills and tools are valued within regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK?

How are those skills and tools valued? Is it through use and impact or through perceived value?

News production at both *The Mitre* and *The Journal* relied entirely on digital technology for both print and online publication. From story sourcing, production and transfer of content, the majority of non-verbal communication both within the internal newsroom network and with those in the external news-network (namely, news-traders), publication of content, analysis of the product and for online commercial opportunities, digital tools and skills were essential.

However, this is a simplistic view of why digital production was monarch of the newsrooms. For example, the content management systems used to produce the news were simply regarded as necessary elements within the process. Being able to work with those systems was a requirement of every role and those who struggled to connect with day-to-day processes were regarded as inadequate. Instead, it was those journalists who not only worked with in-built digital technologies as part of the daily production process, but also used digital tools and applied digital skills proactively for commercial benefit and to engage and grow audiences, who were recognised positively by managers and the wider publishing company.

Both newsrooms exhibited a divide in production teams (Hermida and Young, 2017), which elevated the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993, reprinted from 1983) of those working in a digital capacity above the print-focused actors or those who did not engage with digital content production. This elevation was, in part,

due to the instant feedback on digital content production, with success measured by audience-analytics and content with high audience engagement rates being lauded as best by digital managers. This message was reinforced to all editorial staff via a live screen at *The Journal* and via daily analytics emails within both newsrooms. In turn, analytics were used as a measure of overall newsroom success by the production companies and, at *The Journal*, there was also evidence of journalists' performance being measured by online story count. The commercial opportunities posed by video, at *The Mitre*, and by potential PR agreements at *The Journal*, along with the overall drive to increase audience numbers for advertising benefits, were key deciders of the news agenda at both sites and, as a result, journalists who engaged with that strategy were valued more highly than those who did neither by job role or design. There was evidence that the digital content drive at *The Mitre* was more accelerated than at *The Journal*, where there was resistance by the editor to introduce KPIs and where the printed product was discussed in news conference equally, if not more, than online content. However, this did not translate when communicated by middle managers within in the internal newsroom network. This was because, at both sites, digital managers were more dominant in their presence; with discussions about digital figures, content, multimedia production and successes often accompanying the regular on-screen reminders of audience analytics and audience growth successes.

New or emerging digital skills were often taught by digitally-focused staff within the newsroom, again visually and vocally reinforcing the importance of the online or multimedia production techniques. The rapid promotion of young, less experienced journalists into positions of seniority at both titles demonstrated the focus by management and the production company on digital capability. In turn, this undermined the contribution of more mature and traditionally experienced journalists, echoing findings from other research studies (Nikunen, 2014).

Digital skills of value particularly included the ability to produce video, at *The Mitre* and live video at *The Journal*. All journalists were also expected to be able to use social media to source news, promote their work and connect with news-traders. They were also expected to be able to take pictures, source content online and use smartphone and online apps to manage and transfer digital content. There was evidence of an emergence of digital specialisms, with a videographer due to join *The Mitre*, a vacancy for a social media editor being advertised, online writers who managed a live blog and management positions including a digital development editor and an executive editor with digital focus. *The Journal* had fewer digital specialisms, but within the digital team one writer

focused on 'quirky' stories to grow digital audience and there were two managers overseeing digital content production.

This increasing focus on digital specialisms ran in contrast to traditional specialisms at *The Mitre*, which were evidenced to be decreasing in number and were anticipated by some actors to be under threat entirely. At *The Journal*, traditional specialisms had been reintroduced, but with a digital focus and, as suggested by one Specialist Multimedia Reporter, pressures to produce a high story count meant there was less opportunity to develop in-depth content.

Traditional skills, particularly media law and NCTJ qualifications, were still regarded as important. However, some skills, like shorthand and driving licenses were being driven down in value by the rise of digital focus on video and using social media to gather breaking news, information, video and images. Verification was still important, and this was demonstrated by some actors during observation. However, at *The Mitre*, there was evidence of digital pressures leading to rash decision-making and abandonment of verification practices (Hermida, 2012). This was particularly evident in decision-making by middle-managers, some of whom did not have extensive digital production experience and who described themselves in interview as lacking in confidence with some areas of digital publishing. At both titles, there was evidence of younger or less senior staff questioning decisions being made about the online product and voicing concerns about impacts of quick-decision-making on the product identity (Usher, 2018). Those who voiced these concerns were often more recently qualified and it could be inferred that the idealism established within their training was being tested by seniors who had more experience of taking risks. However, at *The Mitre*, the print-focused managers who took digital risks often admitted in interview that they were not entirely comfortable with digital-decision-making and this suggests the snap decisions which were criticised by colleagues were made in response to digital pressures rather than due to planning or strategy.

At both titles there was heavy expectation of journalists, who were expected to be able to not only produce successful online content but also be able to publish and promote it via social media and publishing software. These staff were similar to others observed in digitally convergent newsrooms; they were expected to perform an increasing number of skills alongside their traditional roles (Canter, 2015; Wallace, 2013). However, there was evidence the specialist journalists, who worked under print-focused managers, were more-print focused in their approaches and either wilfully or accidentally neglected elements of their digital responsibilities. In contrast, there was much less flexibility in role determination for newsdesk managers who were a major

action-point in the news-making process (Foucault, 1977) due to the uncompromising publishing company focus on digital, meaning they were trapped by the expectation of constant production in a 'news now' (Sheller, 2015a) network. They had less opportunity to escape the pressures of digital production expectation than the journalists, who were able to dodge the digital 'strait-jacket of production processes' (Gieber, 1956) via avoidance techniques including pleading ignorance to expectation or denying ability or understanding of relatively new news-making methods.

In both newsrooms the newly created digital roles were mainly filled by actors who had been brought into the internal newsroom network for that purpose (**see Appendix 9** for evidence). While the majority of those actors had come from a print-focused background, they started at *The Journal* and *The Mitre* in response to a digital job role and responsibilities. Those actors who had remained within the internal newsroom networks for more than five years were generally working in more traditional print-focused roles or overseen by managers who had a print-focus. As a result, the split within the newsrooms between print and digital was exacerbated. There was also evidence of more movement in positions within the digital team, with new recruits being promoted more quickly or moving elsewhere in the publishing company due to their digital abilities. All new positions being advertised at *The Mitre* and all recent positions filled at both titles had a digital focus. There was also evidence of movement within the digital skills required at the titles, with new software being trialled and innovations within social media platforms being just two areas in which actors were required to learn new skills. Actors who abstained or struggled with digital methods were placed into positions where there was less digital emphasis and expectation and, as a result, their value within the internal networks decreased. Not only that, but there was less expectation of them performing digital roles and, as a result, they continued to not perform digital roles, therefore continuing to drive down their own value within the network. The consequences of this in terms of news production processes will be explored shortly.

Consequently, while there was some shift in traditional importance and evidence of some traditional skills being driven down by digital methods, generally journalistic actors within the network were required to have a solid traditional skill set. In contrast, digital skills, which were deemed as essential in new recruits, were much more varied in their application. This was based on job role and the individual human actors' approach while performing in the role. Those who applied themselves enthusiastically and innovatively to digital requirements and news-making methods were valued the most highly within the

newsrooms and recognised and rewarded via successful audience analytics and career development opportunities by the publishing companies.

6.2 How do digital tools impact on news production and news agendas?

At both titles, news production relied on digital actants as much as it relied on the human actors within the internal newsroom network (Plesner and Raviola, 2016). Digital tools were also found to facilitate the widening of the internal newsroom network boundaries (Anderson, 2011b; Anderson, 2013a), allowing news-traders to move firmly into the internal space. Here, en-masse, news-traders not only laboured within the news-making process (Smythe, 2009, reprinted from the original text of 1989), but they became significantly powerful decision-makers over news agendas at both titles and resultingly, as a group, moved into the core of the internal newsroom network.

Not only were digital tools essential for manufacturing and distributing the news, but they were found to be intrinsic to every element of the news-making process from sourcing and development to distribution. The expectation of managers and the publishing companies in terms of news production hinged heavily on digital tools and the most proficient outcomes usually involved a number of actants, digital and human, playing their role to the fullest potential within the internal newsroom network. The outcomes of the most proficient examples of digital news production within the research were high audience engagement figures and increased revenue for the production company as a result.

Therefore, at both titles, there was a resulting expectation of best digital performance; at *The Mitre* in particular there was awareness of the capital benefits linked to best practice digital news production. At both titles, the expectation of revenue-boosting digital news production had major impacts on both news production processes and news agendas (Usher, 2018; Tandoc and Thomas, 2015; Vu, 2014). There was also evidence that normative, or expected, role performance was often compromised by individual cognitive, narrative and practice-based influencers (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017).

6.2.1 A spanner in the works; failing actants and perceived autonomy

Both internal news networks observed for this research were clear examples of human and technological actants playing a role within a process which would be significantly changed by their removal (Lewis and Westlund, 2016). The majority of the technological actants were involved in the process via human design; for example, a journalist might use their own personal smartphone to capture video due to it being familiar and easy to use, or a specific software to analyse audience figures was used by digital managers because that is the programme for which the publishing company holds a licence. Human actors were therefore often anticipating clear and set outcomes when using digital tools. However, there was evidence at *The Journal* of handing decision-making powers to a content management system for social media, which would use algorithms to define when and how content should be displayed (Wu et al., 2019). The trust placed in digital actants generally was evidently higher than trust the journalists within the internal newsroom network had in news-traders, who were generally predictable in their engagement with content, but less predictable in their response. However, there was a degree of trust placed in news-traders to take a 'secondary gatekeeping' role by sharing content, interacting with content and by assisting with further engagement (Singer, 2014).

Interdependency between human and technological actors (Lewis and Westlund, 2016) within the internal newsroom network faltered upon considering failure to perform to full ability. Where technology failed to work correctly, the outcomes were potentially significant within the process; forcing change in approach or stymieing the potential of the product. Where humans failed to work correctly, there were also negative outcomes for the product, but usually these had potential to affect fewer actors and fewer outcomes. Shared abilities and skills meant the majority of human actors could cover for one another in the case of illness, absence or failure. This replacement was not replicated by much of the software within the network, with digital actors mostly being the unique performer of a specific role and with many human actors usually relying on that role for their own production success. On occasion when human actors were absent from the network, the task they performed was usually picked up by someone else and while the disruption caused production to take longer, it was almost always possible to complete as intended.

Technological actants' roles were more difficult to replicate because of the "black box" mysteries presented by the technical software and hardware (Domingo and Wiard, 2016, pp400; Anderson and Kreiss, 2013) and the impact

on the actors within the internal network was usually greater due to the numbers relying on the digital tools within the process. Failure of actants was occasionally due to technological issues and faulty tools. However, much of the failure of digital actants was due to human actors; either deliberately or accidentally misusing technology (Boczkowski, 2003b; Mills et al., 2012). Training to use digital tools was therefore required for smooth production (Singer, 2004; Rodgers, 2015).

Allowing tools like social media management software to play an active role in publication of content at *The Journal* meant gatekeeping and jurisdiction of a story was handed to the technology as a final part of the news production process (Wu et al., 2019). This placed the technology firmly into the role of an actor in the network. It also creates an expectation of trust between the human actors and the technology – with expectation that the content will be published correctly and without fault. This final element of production being taken on by a technological actant and based around news-trader demand and expectation hands the dissemination element of the gatekeeping role over from human to the software. From there, the content's pathway into the wider networks is technological, with human and technological actors taking secondary gatekeeping roles (Singer, 2014; Anderson, 2011b).

In the instances of deliberate misuse, human actors were seen to use digital tools as a way of asserting their autonomy within the network. Of course, autonomy cannot exist in application of ANT, because of actor reliance and response to actions and actors within the network (Singer, 2007); but perceived autonomy is a concept which should be acknowledged as the perception of an autonomous role within the news-making process has been identified as a core pillar of journalistic identity (Deuze, 2005). Actors in these networks were observed to use mismanagement of digital production as a way of avoiding diktat or as a rebellion against the production machine. The majority of these rebels were print-focused actors who professed a dislike of digital agendas. These actors were also, in the main, the ones who spoke of future opportunities being limited; but by avoidance or deliberate mishandling, they were creating their own closed futures within networks which prized digital enthusiasm and ability.

6.2.2 Structural divides and news values

Disruption caused by digital convergence to the structures and hierarchies of the internal newsroom network continued to resonate at both titles. At both, there were divided newsrooms with separation between digital and print

production (as demonstrated by the newsroom structures illustrated in Figures 34 and 35 on pg142 and pg143). This divide created a tension between journalists with responsibilities for print-production, those with digital agendas and those who were expected to produce content for both. This split in focus resulted in confused communications between managers and staff, inverted hierarchies and power discordance and a certainty of continued change (Franklin, 2008).

Journalists at both titles expressed a hope that new incoming managers would be able to resolve some of the issues caused by digital disruption; namely, uniting production processes to minimise duplication of work and to improve communication channels. However, the structures and hierarchies observed during research had formed via a “multiplicity of minor processes” (Foucault, 1977, pp138) established in response to digital convergence; as publishing company focus on digital production and revenue increased the traditional production models had been repurposed to adapt, as found in similar UK newsroom studies (MacGregor, 2014; Williams and Franklin, 2007). This meant the human actors within the network were also adapting to change and creating new habitus (Bourdieu, 2012). This created discord between those who had originally been employed with a print focus and who were gradually adapting and new recruits to the digitally converged newsrooms, whose focus and intention looked towards the digital ambitions of the companies from the outset.

In both newsrooms, those journalists with specific digital management focus had been brought in from external settings with the aim of driving forwards digital change, meaning many of the actors who had been employed at the titles originally with a focus on print, were placed within teams where there was less requirement of digital innovation or digital publishing. News Editors with a tradition in print at the titles were managing Specialist Reporters with the same history, therefore there was less digital focus demonstrated within the specialist teams, despite the general expectation of all actors taking part in multimedia production.

The digitally focused journalists were led by digitally focused managers and news editors who led their teams with an expectation of maximising the opportunities to boost audience analytics throughout the production process. As a result, the production processes for the distinct teams were clearly different, as demonstrated by the stories mapped at the two titles (see Figures 36 to 40, pg175 to pg179).

This divide was reflected in the news agendas within the newsrooms, with digital tools impacting on the definition of ‘news’. At both titles, there were three

clear factors influencing news agenda decision-making, these being, news-traders (Tandoc and Thomas, 2015; Usher, 2018), revenue (Holton and Molyneux, 2017; Tandoc and Vos, 2016) and resources (Canter, 2013c).

When considering the latter, it was clear both newsrooms were at times limited with their resources, both human and technical, in part due to cost-cutting conducted by the publishing companies. Photographic resource, or a lack of it, was the most dominant problem and freelance budgets were used as deciders of whether a story was worth covering, where it appeared and to how much depth it was reported upon. A stretch on resource in terms of human actors available within the core internal newsroom network on poorly staffed days also inspired an increase in team-working within the newsrooms, with actors pulling together to deliver the product. This appeared to lead to team unity, but production processes also failed during these times due to individual actors becoming stressed and difficult to work with or due to actors stepping away from their usual role to perform less familiar tasks. This problem appeared to impact print production processes far more than digital, where there were fewer set deadlines and more actants with digital focus and production ability.

Commercial impacts on news agendas were also felt, with videos being produced in order to generate revenue rather than for their news value at *The Mitre* and stories being pushed off the news list in order to approach the subjects to agree a PR deal at *The Journal*. The differences here demonstrate the companies' drive for revenue to be a significant influence on content handling. While little thought was given to the news value of the videos at *The Mitre*, with any video being considered to be better than none, there was strong focus on the revenue potential of the content at *The Journal*, with editorial lines being blurred against advertising and news values considered against potential commercial gain. Neither scenario suggested normative news values (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001) were top considerations for the editorial teams when making these decisions.

This lack of consideration of 'news' was also replicated when both teams produced digital content – with focus being much more centred around news-trader response than the definition of news. Online content worthy of producing was discussed in terms of potential popularity online and discussions about clickbait or news values were considered as a secondary element to the decision-making process. In this situation, the publishing companies' objectives to increase online audience numbers to maximise revenue potential and the news-traders' objectives of finding online content of personal interest (Harcup and O'Neill, 2017), meant both groups were operating within the core of the internal newsroom networks. While this intervention by the publishing

companies was clear, conscious and direct, news-traders were not consciously making news agenda decisions, they were curating the news values of the titles by engaging with certain types of existing online content (Usher, 2018; Justel-Vázquez et al., 2016). At times there were conscious interactions by news-traders which resulted in editorial change being made or content being used; these situations extended the arms of those news-traders, drawing them into the news-making process and allowing them knowledgeable control over singular elements of the news agenda and product. However, the majority of news-trader influence was unconscious and en-masse; defined by individual clicks, shares and time. As well as exchanging their attention for content and advertising (Garnham, 2012, reproduced from first publication in 1986), news-traders were also labouring (Smythe, 2009, reprinted from the original text of 1989) by taking an unconscious gatekeeping role (Singer, 2014).

There was evidence of news-traders having an influence, as a result, on news-values, or rather 'valuable news' within both internal newsroom networks. The digital teams actively sought content deemed quirky, unusual and 'shareable'. This content was mostly geo-focused, with some links to the geographic area being covered. However, the links were sometimes tenuous and at times there was no clear link at all. Dramatic or shocking stories were valued highly and there was no real evidence of digital teams prioritising positive content, in contrast to the findings by Harcup and O'Neill, who identified positive content as a success with online audiences (2017). At *The Journal*, the editor's drive for positive stories to reinforce the city and its residents was more focused on by the print managers. However, this ambition was overshadowed by the digital team's focus on popular content which had the potential to damage the reputation of the circulation area and its residents. Entertainment and interest to the public was prioritised more highly than traditional public interest news (Harcup and O'Neill, 2017).

6.2.3 Mapping the decline of news agendas

This lack of priority or interest in traditional or specialist subjects by the digital teams is well-represented by the story maps drawn up during observation.

These maps demonstrate different news values coupled with varying handling techniques by the digital and print factions within the newsrooms. They were chosen for mapping due to time and actor availability, rather than because of

the story type. However, their subject matter is typical of the type handled by the separate groups involved.

The stories being handled by the digital actors (Figures 39 and 40 on pg178 and pg179) were a breaking news story about a lorry crash disrupting traffic and a 'soft' news story about where to buy saveloy sausages locally, which was produced for entertainment as much as information purposes. While the lorry crash story was hard news, with values including meaningfulness, frequency, unambiguity and unexpectedness (Galtung and Ruge, 1965), it was also a story which only had resonance at the time of it breaking (Usher, 2018). Even several hours later, the news values of the story would decrease and by the following day, it would no longer hold news value. The saveloy sausage story included the news values of unexpectedness (Galtung and Ruge, 1965) and entertainment (Harcup and O'Neill, 2001), but due to the soft subject, it had little potential of lasting meaningful impact with the news audience.

In contrast, the stories covered by the specialist journalists (Figures 37 and 38 on pg176 and pg177) displayed more potential impact as they were both public interest topics (Cairncross, 2019a) and of societal importance (Morrison and Svennevig, 2007). Of the two, one covered a council proposal for town centre development and the other was covering the scourge of dog fouling in the city. Both stories included the news values of frequency, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance and the dog fouling story also referred to people and something negative (Galtung and Ruge, 1965). The latter also included the news value of campaigning (Harcup and O'Neill, 2001). Both stories had the potential to have long-term consequence for the circulation area and were the kind of coverage of local issues which would be overlooked if it were not for their local newspaper.

However, it was not only subject matter which contributed to the online performance of the stories, the production processes were also a major element in their performance outcomes.

The mapped stories produced by digitally-focused reporters involved a number actors from the start, including other digital journalists and/or news-traders. Story development involved a number of multimedia functions, such as social media promotion, video or live video, images and live updates. The pathway of the story development was complex and not linear, due to the number of actants involved in the process. Both of the digital stories mapped were handled efficiently over a short period of time (lasting no more than a working day).

The specialist stories mapped, were much more linear in their development. Handled by a single journalist and involving far fewer actants, both human and

digital, there was less online presence within the process, despite story development taking place over days or weeks. As a result, there were fewer opportunities for and instances of news-trader interactions with the stories. Both news stories were used on the front page of the newspapers and, as a result, were promoted online late at night or the following day to coincide with print publication.

The outcome of the differing techniques was significant. The closed process of the specialist stories resulted in significantly less online promotion, with the publication of the story online only being tweeted and put on Facebook once. The wider ownership of the digital stories and the more interactive properties of their development saw several iterations of the story being promoted by various methods on social media, leading to far greater interaction opportunities for news-traders.

At both titles, there was no strategic planning for the online news agenda and the most popular stories dominated as a result. This was exemplified by the mapped stories, which were successful online in part due to their subject matter. However, those stories were also given the best opportunity to be popular and to receive successful audience analytics due to their handling by the actors within the internal newsroom network. In contrast, the stories produced by the specialists were deemed to be the type of story which would fail to do well online and they lived up to this prophecy, in part due to being given much less opportunity to do well.

6.2.4 Exacerbating the spiral of decline

At both titles there was evidence of quick-hit online journalism compromising the product; running legally or ethically risky content about people within the readership area, near-pornographic stories about sex and advertisements dressed as news for internationally successful capitalist companies, such as McDonalds. These stories were run without discussion about the implication such content could have on the identity of the product and were celebrated as successes due to the audience analytics they garnered. The amplification of such stories further exacerbated the tone being set by the titles, “eroding the prestige of the title brands” (Justel-Vázquez et al., 2016, pp864).

By following the capitalist model being led by the publishing companies – to produce content popular with the online audience – news of public interest or societal importance was being lost in a cacophony of soft content or flash-in-the-pan breaking news. In a self-fulfilling spiral (see **Figure 41**, pg211 and

Figure 42, pg212⁵¹) the lack of digital journalists' being attention given to 'worthy' content (TM9) and the resulting poor audience analytics, fuelled the reason for reducing attention on that type of story in the future. The opposite action happened with content deemed digitally popular, which, in light of good online performance, would be replicated or amplified – giving news-traders even more opportunity to interact with that type of content and swamping the meagre promotion of public-interest stories.

This, combined with digital dismissal of public interest stories and a lack of content oversight or planning by digital managers, resulted in the online product having low and decreasing societal importance or impact. When combining that with the regular inclusion of content without a geographic link and content shared with sister titles, the unique selling point (USP) of the product online was being diluted. While online, the network of news-traders was growing and the digital jurisdiction of the titles was expanding, the relevance, importance and authority of the newspapers was significantly decreasing.

With evidence suggesting the newsroom models were moving increasingly towards online content filling the newspapers, there was also evidence of the print product losing some of its identifying factors and dampening its value in terms of holding power to account and public interest coverage.

Within the internal newsroom networks, actors were aware the identities and purpose of their products were being threatened by the overriding pull and pressure of following the news-trader news agenda. However, there was a lack of recognition of the specific pattern described above and while at *The Journal* the editor was working hard to continue producing socially important news in print, the pull of the digital team's drive and the pressure of the publishing company's online analytic focus was distorting the end product. At *The Mitre* there was even less regard for the online publication of public interest news and, with the potential of specialisms being scrapped and the determinedly digital-focus of the incumbent editor, there seemed little chance of the decline in public service of the product being remedied.

Therefore, at both titles, there was evidence of the products' production processes 'sleepwalking' the titles into a changed identity, which sought to garner clicks and generate revenue over serving a community and representing the old ideals of watchdog journalism (Deuze, 2005), community value (Temple, 2017; Harte et al., 2019) and social justice (Coleman, 2017).

⁵¹ This can also be viewed as a Power Point slide in the supplementary documents.

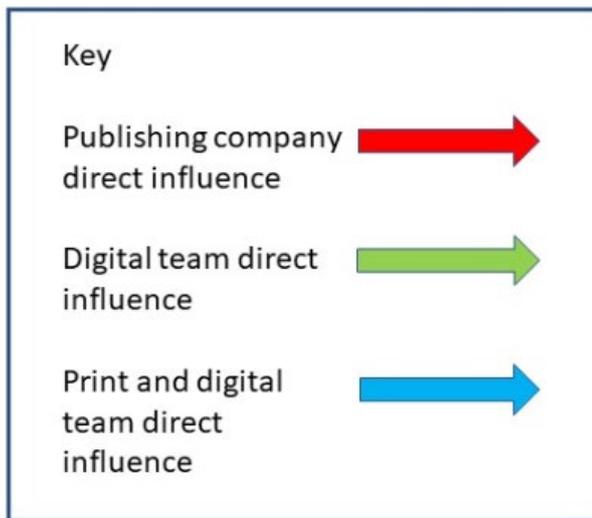


Figure 41. The key for interpreting Fig. 42.

6.3 How do digital tools impact on the identity of the individual journalist and the news products?

While the cumulative effect of digital impacts on news production processes was causing a steady drift of change in the news products, the individual journalists working within both networks were sensitive to the impact of digital tools on their identities, roles and contributions to the products.

There was a clear expectation of journalists to have the skills and tools expected to do their job. A lack of application of these skills – digital or traditional – prompted frustration within the newsroom. Individuals were measured by their actions in terms of proactive journalism, attitude and abilities by managers. If reporters required too much management or guidance they were branded as a problem by leaders within the team. There was evidence of these people being given less challenging roles or being ostracised from responsibility and, as a result, becoming devalued within the core internal newsroom network (Bourdieu, 1993, reprinted from 1983; Vos et al., 2019).

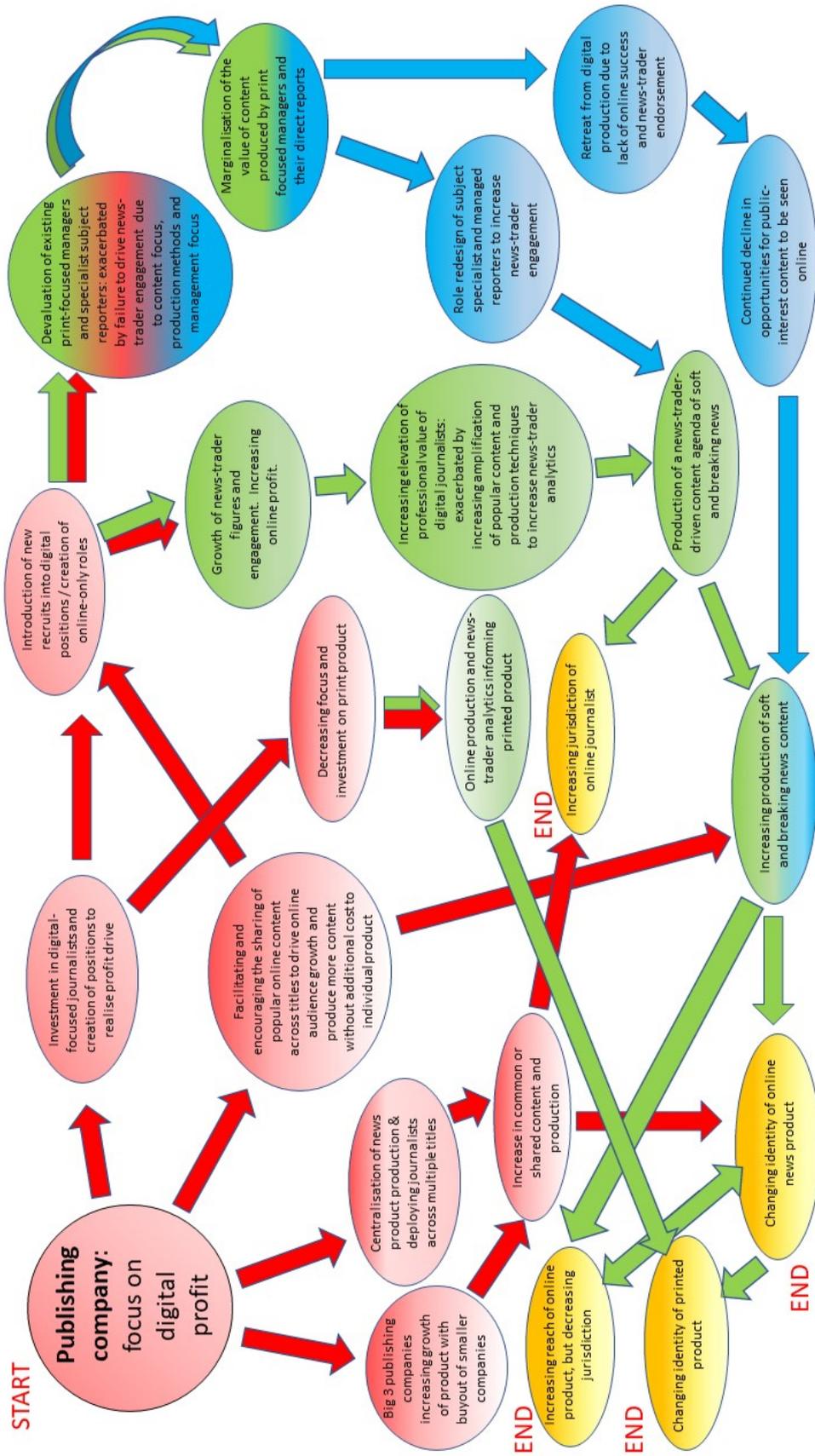


Figure 42. The spiral of decline of public interest news production and its impact on identities and jurisdictions.

6.3.1 The divided network

The divides within the newsroom created by digital convergence created varied professional role identities within the core internal newsroom network. Digitally-focused actors demonstrated a perception of having separate values from the print-focused or traditional actors and visa-versa. Generally, the outlook of digitally-focused actors appeared to be a positive self-perception with anticipation of future job opportunities within the publishing company. While there was acknowledgement of news-trader influence, concerns about news-values and journalistic norms being overlooked in favour of clicks and shares was dismissed. Those with less digital ability or focus were dismissed as old-fashioned, in denial and lacking the adaptability to fulfil expectations within the newsroom.

The outlook of actors with a print-focus or led by print-focused managers was generally more negative, with pessimistic predictions about future opportunities and concern about news-trader impacts on the product identity, quality and aim (Usher, 2011). They were more mixed in their response to digitally-focused actors, with some taking a lofty stance, suggesting they were better journalists than those who were focused on analytics and others suggesting the world of journalism had changed and that they no longer fit the mould required (Nikunen, 2014).

Many of these individuals were managers who were older actors with more professional journalistic experience than their digital counterparts. However, the promotion of younger, less experienced journalists into newly created positions seemed not to cause friction between the groups. Instead there was a general acceptance that the digital roles were out of their remit and this was reinforced by the response to their digital ideas by the younger digital managers, which was witnessed to be dismissive or condescending. The print-focused actors, news editors in particular, had been subject to significant change in their role, despite their personal role descriptors not changing much at all. Instead, by remaining still and not changing while the environment around them changed, those actors found their status and authority diminished and their contributions less valued (Hermida and Young, 2017; Vos et al., 2019). Their news sense and agenda setting roles were constantly undermined by news-traders and, in turn, the digital managers and digitally-focused journalists within the internal newsroom network. Their journalistic identities were diminished and their positivity about the value of their roles and their career future was low. The potential long-term outcomes of this divide between the print and digital teams

was significant; if change was not enacted by management, actors would find it difficult to break free from the expectation of their more traditional-focus due to their colleagues' expectation of their failure to adapt. This was problematic if the companies continued with their digital drive and development as it decreased the worth and opportunities of those actors and made their positions more vulnerable to future rounds of redundancy. If the titles continued to change by replacing long-standing journalists on the titles with newer, younger journalists from the outside, there would be fewer actors to bring in historical and geographic knowledge so often relied upon within internal newsroom networks (Brooks and Waterson, 2019). This would have an impact on the identity of the products, with less depth of knowledge exhibited within content and less ownership of the product from within the internal newsroom network. Therefore, the intrinsic identity of product and journalist, which is part of what makes a regional newspaper different to a national, was under threat as a result of digital tools.

This stagnation of traditional middle management was contrasted with potential flexibility of the actors whom they managed. The evidence of potential adaptation of journalists, with actors changing from one division to another depending on their changing skills and demonstration of abilities and interest, allowed increased perceived autonomy at this level and facilitated a higher level of control over their job roles and their futures (Vos et al., 2019).

6.3.2 Digital role design

The confused hierarchies and newsroom divides allowed actors to push back on work not seen as being within their remit and also respond less proactively to managers not seen as directly overseeing their work.

Avoidance of tasks via pleading ignorance or deliberate misuse, as mentioned, had the potential to lead actors into narrowed futures and was particularly risky for print-focused actors due to the increasing company focuses on digital publishing.

However, some actors were also seen to use digital tools to extend their own personal reach and to create a journalistic identity by creating online personas for themselves and interacting with the online audience using a distinct, curated 'voice' (Molyneux et al., 2018). This online characterisation of actors helped to develop relationships with news-traders and, while there was evidence of negative comments on stories, there was also observation that this conversational method meant individual actors were able to draw out

information and build trust with news-traders. This was seen to result in some news-traders occasionally coming to the defence of journalists and the news title if others were attacking them online.

Social media also allowed journalists the opportunity to use the product identity as an online shield, although it was clear no set 'voice' had been determined for either of the titles. This put the journalists using the titles' accounts in a position of significant trust and responsibility and it also meant the identity of the online produce varied depending on the actor. The title's social media accounts acted as a faceless barrier between news-traders and the internal newsroom network, taking on a gatekeeping persona which kept news-traders at arms' length and reminded all actors involved of the 'official' role of the news title. This had the potential to act as a shield for journalists who were wary of online interaction with news-traders, but it also curtailed their potential development of an online professional persona, which, as discussed, had the potential to build positive relationships with news-traders (Molyneux et al., 2018; Grubenmann and Meckel, 2017).

There was also evidence of a couple of journalists exploiting the space on the internet and the publishing companies' desire for high story counts to follow their own news agendas and publish content which would previously have been turned down for publication in the printed product. This potential for journalists to use digital tools to forge their own agendas gave the perception of autonomous working. However, that work was still governed by online audience analytics and only worked for the individual actors if the news-trader response was positive.

6.3.3 Blurred boundaries, the digital identity shift

At both titles it was clear news-traders dictated the online news agenda and this translated into the print product, with online response being used as a measure of placement and use within the newspapers. However, there were significant differences between the handling of the titles which had impact on their separate identities.

At *The Mitre*, the online content produced against the 'Live List' schedule during the working day was 'scraped' for use within the newspaper. This meant online news-traders were shaping the tone and type of content in both products. This, combined with a lack of 'voice' for the title, the lack of campaigning stances and

the multitude of popular, generic and shared content, meant the identity of the title was significantly shifting due to digital publishing tools. Entertaining content with a geographic link was included in the print product, and while public interest stories often held the front page, there was no agenda being set by the title. There was also an absence of any written content on the front page, with the style favoured being a headline and image with the story contained inside the paper. As a result, journalists' bylines were not featured on the front. The lack of identifying features on the front translated into an apathy within the newsroom which was exacerbated by a dearth of printed newspapers available for viewing within the internal newsroom network and poor communication by managers, meaning journalists often had no idea if they were writing the front page story and rarely got to see their work in print.

Instead, personal successes were determined by journalists within the network based solely on audience analytics and this was amplified by the publishing company's focus on online engagement, which saw celebration of top performing stories, no matter what their subject or news value. This widened the opportunities for focus on individual glory within the publishing company while simultaneously dismissing the value of the print product to the journalists. As a result there were opportunities for journalists within the network to be noticed online for popular stories, which, as discussed, were often soft, entertainment or quick-hit content which lacked a public interest agenda. At the same time there was very little recognition of the public interest news being produced, which had the potential to run on the front page, but which failed to do well online, for the reasons previously discussed. The values being placed on journalists were shifting, with a new breed of journalists emerging (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017; Mellado et al., 2017; Vos and Thomas, 2019). These journalists had a good nose for an online story, were the fastest to get content online and were adept at spotting opportunities to get more out of online content to make the most of popular stories. They were multitasking and thought digitally, with no thought reserved for the printed product and with the production company's drive for audience analytics and revenue generating video at the forefront of their agendas. While traditional skills were important to these actors, these were trumped by speed and news-trader response (Usher, 2018).

At *The Journal*, the title retained an identity, which was strongly represented by the printed product but which was diluted in its online presence. This identity was one which sought to represent the city and its people and which campaigned on their behalf, celebrated their successes and mourned their losses. This 'friend to the people' approach was thoroughly shaped by the

editor, who drove the tone of the title via news-agenda discussions within the daily conference.

However, this identity was conflicted by the publishing company and, in turn, the digital management's drive to achieve high audience analytics. While the editor was also keen to achieve online targets, she was unwilling to compromise the identity and tone of the title. But there was evidence that her expectations were not taken into account when content was tailored outside of the news conference. This led to a significant amount of negative or contradictory content running online, which, due to the digital team's interactive methods and the news-trader appetite for light, entertaining or quirky news (Harcup and O'Neill, 2017), often shot up the analytics board and occasionally damaged the family-friendly aspirations of the editor. The lack of forward planning of online content and consideration to how the title was representing itself online, combined with the varying actors using the official social media accounts and the deficiency of pre-determined online 'voice' of the title meant its overall online identity was muted and contradictory.

Commercial factors were also not only influencing the news agenda but also changing the face of the title and production company potentially in the eyes of news-traders, but certainly so with businesses and enterprise within the city. This influence was also reflected in the newsroom, particularly in the contributed content division and to a degree in the multimedia journalist group, where actors were producing corporate content for PR purposes alongside journalistic editorial. This directive blurred the divisions between editorial and advertising and challenged the perceived autonomy and editorial standards of journalistic identity.

This challenge appeared to be less keenly felt at both titles when it was the production company directing the editorial content. Instead, it seemed to be generally accepted that the mother companies were an extension of the internal network and that control was ultimately exerted at that level. At *The Journal* the digital and contributed content managers as well as the editor were a direct link between the production company and the internal newsroom network.

At *The Mitre*, while the direct link was the editor, there was a publishing company communication network, which involved the digital managers and which knitted the two networks more closely and cemented the company's aims and agendas throughout the production process and, as a result, the internal newsroom network.

6.4 How do digital tools impact on the jurisdiction of the individual journalist and the news product?

The changed news-agendas, increasing audience analytics, the changing identities of actors and products and the structural divides within the internal newsroom networks had significant impact on the jurisdiction of the news products, both in terms of reach and impact.

The drive to increase audience analytics and spread the reach of the titles by increasing the number of news-traders engaging with content saw the jurisdiction of both titles increasing. But while the reach of both titles was widening (Anderson, 2011b; Anderson, 2013a), it was less focused as the push for popular content diluted the geographic USP of the online products. As a result, a wider network of news-traders was engaging with content without a geo-social connection (Hess, 2013; Hess and Waller, 2014). This widened the reach of the news titles, as news-traders pushed the engagement outwards by clicking and sharing content. However, the meaningfulness and resonance of the titles was decreasing with the widening reach of their content.

When considering the concept of jurisdiction there are two meanings within the word; the reach of something or someone and the meaningfulness that something or someone has on the actor it reaches. If something has reach, eg. It touches or makes contact with other actors within a network, it can only claim true jurisdiction if that contact is meaningful, eg. It has resonance with the actor within its reach. The eye of the storm has the most intense impact upon those who come into contact with it. This impact is still greatly felt by those living in settlements neighbouring that which the eye is focused upon. Those living slightly further out still, might be touched by the wind and rain of the storm, but not have the damage caused to their homes and livelihoods caused to those living nearer the centre. Those still further out might experience some drizzle and breezy weather, which is the subject of passing conversation and no more. The intensity of the impact of the storm depends on the intensity of its eye; the true strength of the epi-centre.

This analogy could also be applied to the news and content being produced by *The Mitre* and *The Journal*. While a story with a strong set of news values and a geographic relevance to a place, traditionally the type of content produced by both news titles, would have significant impact upon those news-traders within and adjacent to its epi-centre, the impact and resonance of the story to the wider news-network would decrease with geo-social distance. The immediate impact and its ripple effect would vary, depending on the amplification,

resonance and unexpectedness (Galtung and Ruge, 1965) of the story. However, the titles were also producing content which had no or weak geo-social significance or low news values. This content had the potential for a wider 'ripple' as it was not limited by its geography, but the initial impact had less significance in terms of resonance for the immediate audience and therefore, the eye of the storm was less intense.

Significantly, this effect was not the same when analysing the impacts of digital tools on individual journalists' jurisdiction. With the opportunity to create online personas and build relationships with news-traders, the potential personal reach and impact of actors within the internal newsroom network increased. While geo-social focus still held significance with the network of news-traders engaging with the product because of its geographic focus, the potential for journalists to forge a voice or produce news in an area of specific interest meant the news-trader audience varied for each journalistic actor within the network. The facelessness of the titles online and the lack of voice was contrasted by the actors within the network, some of whom worked to develop a voice, online personality and a following of actors within the external news network. Those actors in the external network, acted as curators, or gatekeepers of content relating to their own interests (Singer, 2014) and therefore, had the potential to extend the reach and meaningfulness of individuals within the internal newsroom network as a result. The result of increased resonance with news-traders was an increased chance of having work shared in the future, therefore increasing the jurisdictional opportunities and potential reach over time. Of course, this option was only open to actors within the internal newsroom network who chose to exploit the opportunities offered by digital tools. Those actors who avoided or only minimally engaged with digital publishing were limiting their jurisdiction.

This difference between the jurisdiction of the product and the actors within the internal newsroom networks was evidenced when content was shared by sister titles. At both publishing companies, shared content was not acknowledged online, but was instead published as though it had been produced by the platform sharing it. However, the author of the content was still named. Across the two publishing companies, shared content was diluting the geo-social USP of the individual titles but widening the potential reach and impact of the individual actor, as demonstrated in **Figure 42** (pg212).

6.5 Convergent divergence: the digital split and decline in public interest identity

The case studies analysed for this research project confirm the significant upsurge in digital skills and tools requirements alluded to by the advertisement content analysis. The introduction of those skills and tools has clearly taken place over time, with the small changes (Foucault, 1977) resulting in reshaped internal newsroom networks within which news-traders and publishing companies have significant decision-making power.

The divide within internal newsroom structures caused by convergence has elevated digitally-focused actors and marginalised others (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017; Vos, 2016). Constriction of middle-manager roles and lack of digital accountability in specialist reporters has reduced the impact and resulting jurisdiction of their work.

The rise in popular content without a geo-social (Hess and Waller, 2014) resonance produced by digital team is swamping the public interest content produced by the specialist reporters online. This, combined with a lack of multimedia interactive news production methods by the specialists, has limited the news-trader opportunities for engagement with their work.

This has resulted in both titles sleepwalking into changed identities, with soft and breaking news content dominating the online output (Usher, 2018; Harcup and O'Neill, 2017). The widening reach of the products has pushed the focus on geo-social content even further off the digital agenda, as geography loses its value to the news-traders in the furthest reaches of the network (Hess, 2013).

This spiral of weakening focus is exacerbated by shared content across the publishing company, which has further diluted the USP of the individual titles. However, a lack of awareness of the cycle of decline within the core internal newsroom networks means the products are sleepwalking into identity crisis with no sign the course will change its pathway (Garnham, 2012, reproduced from first publication in 1986).

This matters because if these titles lose focus on the localities they serve, they lose impact, authority and relevance and ultimately become bland, unidentifiable and useless to the news-traders who valued their geo-social output (Bourdieu, 2012). The capitalist model is dominating the production process, titles are becoming clones, at some point the market will be saturated (Marx, 1973, reprinted from original text c.1844) and the jurisdiction and identity of the individual titles will become meaningless. They will lose their focus on holding power to account and providing a platform for voices within their

patches to be heard, unless those voices are powerful (elite persons or organisations) or can pay.

The outcome is likely to be further merged newsrooms and products, continuing loss of definition, job losses and decreasing representation of communities (Hillery Jr, 1955). While individual journalists have the opportunity to strengthen their personal online brands and have impact, this is only open to those who are digitally-minded and it is to the detriment of the identity of the titles which they serve.

The case-studies analysed for this research project have provided rich empirical results. While the findings are a snapshot; demonstrating the situation in two local newspaper newsrooms in the UK in the first half of 2017, the similarities in the findings suggest there is significant reason to suggest the spiral of declining focus on public interest, geo-social news is worth examining at a wider level.

This data provides significant insight into how digital tools have impacted on news production and, consequently, product and professional identities and jurisdictions within these newsrooms. When compared against the job advertisement study, there is evidence to suggest these findings will not exist in isolation and that there is potential to apply them more widely. The survey element of this research project will be considered against the spiral identified here and suggested as potentially occurring elsewhere within the job advertisement chapter.

6.5.1 Thematic conclusions

The results from this element of the triangulated research project fully demonstrate the findings from the job advertisement study are reflected by news production, identities and jurisdictions in and of *The Mitre* and *The Journal*.

While elements of this research mirror findings from studies held elsewhere, the identification of how public interest news has declined in local newspaper journalism is a unique and new addition to knowledge in this field. The thematic outcomes of this element of the study will be scrutinised against the job advertisement findings and the survey results in Chapter 8. Those thematic outcomes are as follows:

- A newsroom divide between digital and print production
- Increasingly strong focus on audience analytics driven by publishing company focus on revenue

- News-traders en-masse acting as key decision-makers over news agenda and online production
- Rise in popular content without a geo-social connection
- The spiral of weakening focus on public interest, geo-social journalism exacerbated by shared content across the publishing company and increasingly merged workforces
- Products sleepwalking into identity crisis
- Individual journalists forging online identities and creating their own jurisdictional networks

Chapter 7

Research section 3: Surveying the situation in newsrooms across mainland UK

Job advertisements paint a picture of what employers would like their newsrooms to be in an idealised world and ethnographic-style interviews and observations provide a rich illustration of how digital tools influence production, identity and jurisdiction within certain local newspapers at a specific point in time. However, in order to move the findings from these elements of this research forward and justify their application on a wider scale, research was required into digital influence within newsrooms across the UK. To gain physical access on such a scale would be near impossible, therefore, a survey of working journalists in newsrooms across the UK was identified as a method of checking findings against multiple news organisations and from multiple positions within internal newsroom networks.

7.1 Design and distribution

Based upon the initial job advertisement and newsroom findings, a questionnaire was designed to be distributed by email directly to working journalists in the UK (see **Appendix 8** for example questionnaire and anonymised responses) in line with ethical agreements (**Appendix 1** and **1.1**).

The survey was designed in the second half of 2017, based upon the initial impressions taken by the researcher from the fieldwork study conducted earlier in the year and also on surface analysis of the job advertisements collected at that point. Participants were promised anonymity and reassurances were made that no publication of results would reveal their identity.

The majority of questions were closed, and designed to achieve quantifiable descriptive results (Berger, 2016). There were a handful of questions which allowed qualitative responses to help give context or provide further insight.

After testing the design with the assistance of former journalists and those no longer working in regional newspapers⁵², the questionnaire was made ready for distribution.

⁵² This testing approach was taken in order to allow participants to provide insights based upon industry knowledge but who were not eligible to be part of the study; this was due to anticipation of low response rate due to the researcher's prior experience of working in newsrooms and the likelihood that many journalists would not complete the survey due to other demands on their time.

The aims of the survey were:

1. To find out about digital tools' impacts across a spread of news organisations, especially the three major publishing companies which were not only responsible for the majority of local newspaper output across the UK, but which were also demonstrating continued growth and absorption of smaller and independent companies; these being Johnston Press, Newsquest and Trinity Mirror.
2. To find out about digital tools impacts across a range of perspectives; from trainee reporters through to editors and senior managers.
3. To find out about digital tools impacts within newspaper newsrooms from a variety of regions in the UK.
4. To find out about digital tools impacts from a range of daily and weekly newspaper journalists.

Rather than risking responses from participants not employed as working journalists within local newspaper newsrooms in the UK and potential participants were directly targeted. This also meant specific newsgroups and journalists at a variety of levels within newsrooms could be targeted for participation. The drawback to this method meant considerable work had to be done to identify potential participants. However, the benefits of specific targeting were judged to outweigh the limitations as specifically targeted journalists were more likely to respond if approached by name and returned responses were more likely to be valid (Berger, 2016).

To draw up a list of potential participants, a list of daily and weekly newspapers in the UK was accessed via www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk – the source of the advertisements used in the first section of this project.

A sample of newspaper titles was chosen from the list, based on the geographical and company goals as identified above. An online investigation was conducted to gather the names and email addresses of journalists working on those titles. When a title was identified as a target, a search for journalists working there was also conducted on Twitter, in order to target those not listed on websites (which often had out of date contact lists on them) and those whose bylines were not regularly published online (for example, a news editor or editor). The address formats used within the different organisations were also used to contact journalists whose email address was not easily available. Hold the Front Page was also used as a resource, with journalists featured in news stories at the target titles also included on the list.

Over the course of three months (from November 2017 to January 2018) a list of participants was identified for targeting. During the course of the distribution,

an initial email which targeted the individual by name, was sent out (see **Appendix 12**). Those who responded at this stage were moved off the target list. A second reminder email was sent out between a week to ten days later (**Appendix 13**) and a third email was sent to non-responders about a week after that (**Appendix 14**). Following the initial round a second group of potential participants was identified and targeted in the same method as the first. The survey opened on November 1, 2017 and closed on March 31, 2018 and during that time around 500 potential participants were targeted.

Those who responded to the survey were sent a thank you email which also included their unique response code and encouraged them to share the survey with their newsroom colleagues.

7.1.1 Managing survey challenges

There were limitations and challenges within this research methodology which must be acknowledged. The target participant list would be considered a small sample size in quantitative research and would clearly require considerable extension if this were a foundation for the research project. However, due to the researcher's understanding of working newsrooms, it was known that a random approach would be easily overlooked by journalists within busy work environments and that addressing target participants by name was much more likely to be fruitful. To do this on a wider scale would have taken significantly longer and time limitations prevented the direct targeting approach on a larger scale. It could have been possible to ask publishing companies to get on board and distribute the survey to staff internally. However, as discussed in Chapter 3 and acknowledged as problematic by Singer (2011), it was felt such an approach would rely too heavily on the participation of a third party which would potentially have a vested interest in the survey distribution and results. This might have also resulted in perception of organisational collusion with the project – which might lead to distortion of the results due to participant scepticism about the research agenda and confidentiality of the research. There was also the risk that if publishing companies were approached they would not only refuse to distribute the survey, but would also request staff not to participate in external research. Therefore, this method was decided as too risky due to the ambition of surveying those who worked for companies or newsrooms which had refused participation in the earlier fieldwork study. As this element of the research was to act as a check point for the outcomes of the other elements, it was decided quality of response was more desirable than quantity and the final method was identified as the best option.

Other challenges throughout the process of distribution included email addresses failing; this usually occurred when journalists were no longer in positions within the target organisations. This, combined with journalists on secondment and maternity leave, reduced the target pool slightly. Only one hostile response to the research was received by the researcher, who duly removed that person from the mailing list.

There was also the limitation of this method only primarily targeting those with a visible online presence – meaning those with print production roles would not necessarily be included in the participation list. While participants were encouraged to share the survey with colleagues, this only resulted in a handful of extra participants and there was no way to know if the survey in that situation had been shared with a small pool or the entire internal newsroom network. However, due to restricted recruitment methods this can only be acknowledged during analysis of the results.

7.2 Survey results

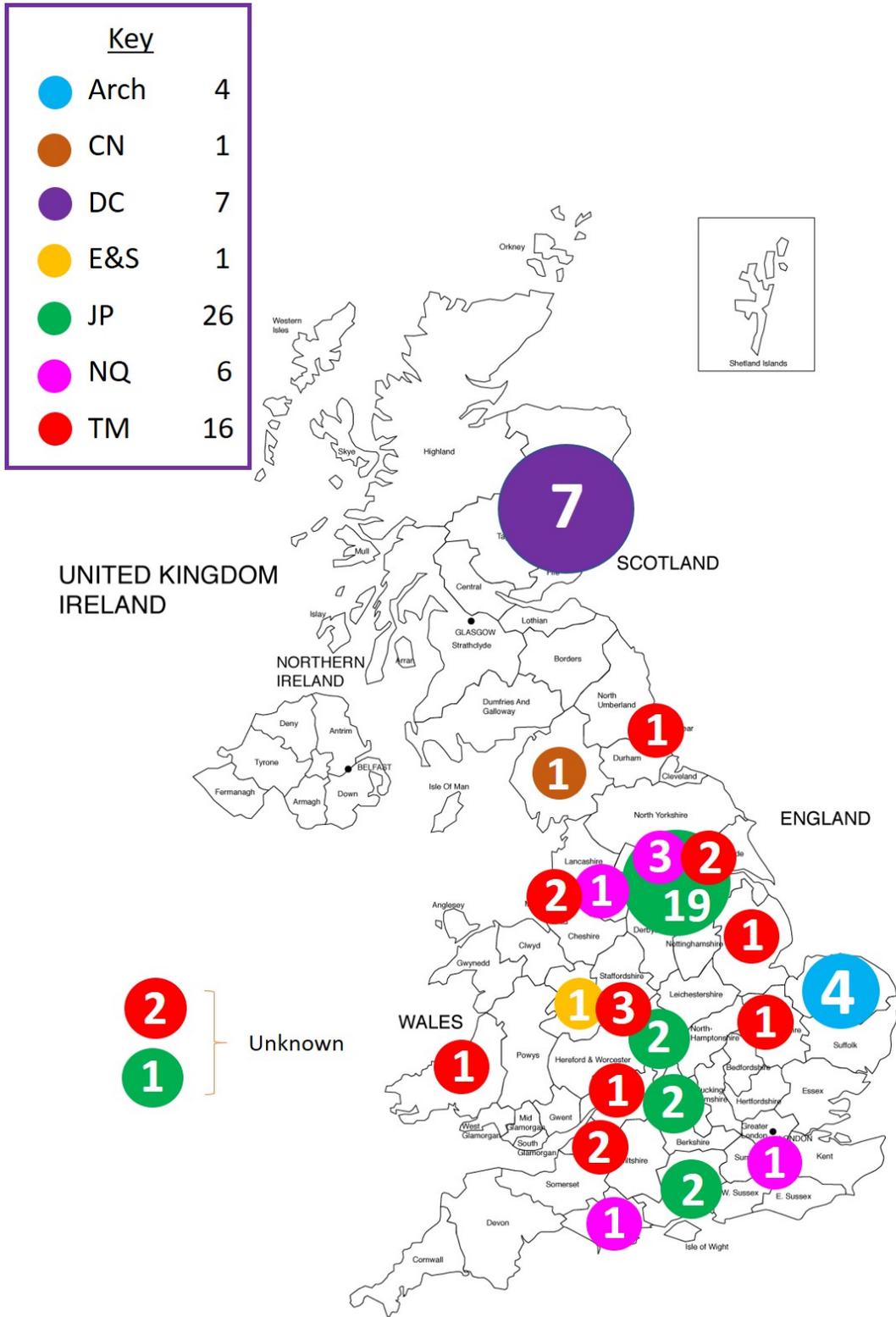
In total, 61 surveys were completed by participants, the majority of whom had been targeted during distribution and a small number who had been passed the survey by colleagues within their newsrooms or made contact to offer participation.

While this response number is too low to count as viable in terms of a quantitative research project, the results are valid as a check-point for the rest of this study and to glean some valuable insights into working newsrooms throughout the UK.

As anticipated, the responses varied in terms of publishing company representation, geographic location and participant position within the newsroom. As a result, the survey can be considered a useful reflection of the impact of digital tools within regional newspaper newsrooms across the UK.

7.2.1 Responses: Who, what and where

Survey respondents were based across the UK, with the majority throughout England and a small sample from Scotland. Only one participant was based in Wales and there were no respondents from Northern Ireland (see **Figure 43**, pg227.) Out of those responses, the major publishers were best represented with 79% of respondents affiliated with one of the ‘big three’ – Trinity Mirror (TM), Johnston Press (JP) and Newsquest (NQ) (**Figure 4**, pg90).



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Figure 43. Response distribution map of location and publishing company.

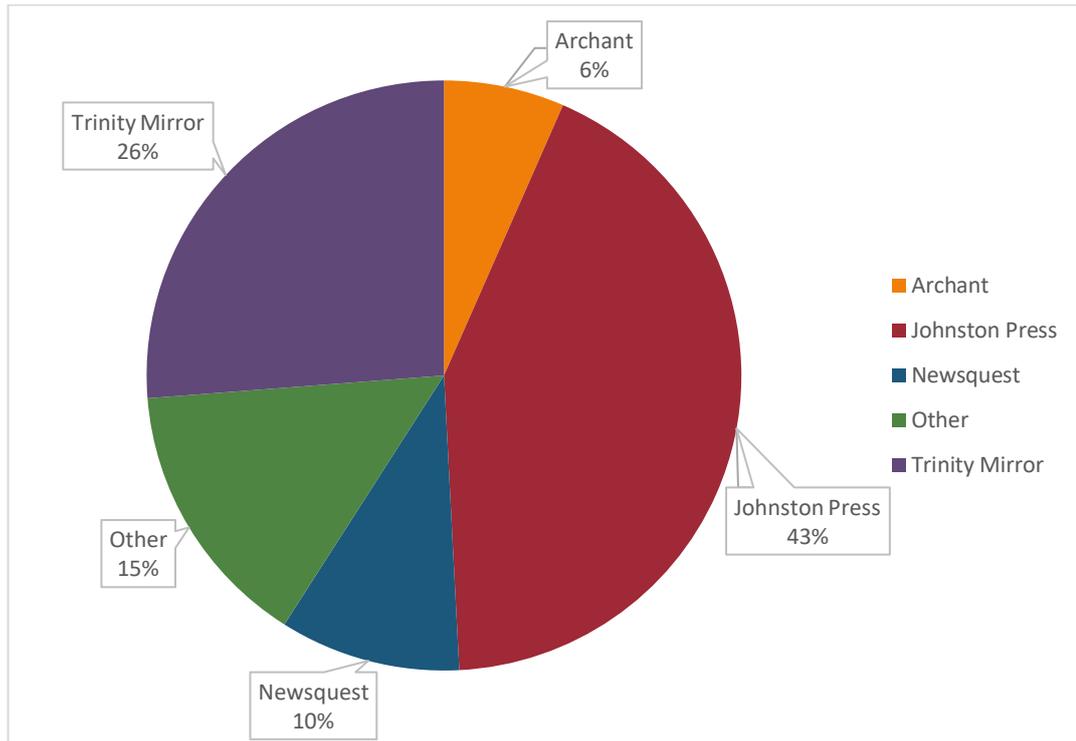


Figure 44. News organisation response

Johnston Press was by far the most well represented news organisation, with just under half of the responses originating from that news group. This was a contrast with JP's representation in the job advertisement study, where it was one of the least prolific advertisers within the sample, despite being one of the larger news organisations. See **Figure 44**, above, for the response breakdown. In contrast Newsquest, which had been the most prolific advertiser, was the least represented major news organisation by the survey, with just 10% of the overall response.

Respondents from smaller news publishers included representation from Cumbria News Group (CN), the Express and Star (E&S) and DC Thomson (DC). During analysis of the results, these groups were at times amalgamated to prevent the risk of possible participant identification.

7.2.1.1 Evidence of increasing multi-title working

Participants were coded as working for single titles or multiple titles based on the response to optional question 18. What is the name of the newspaper, website or newspaper group that you work for? Only 3 participants chose not to respond. Response to optional question 21.a Can you provide more detail about

the newsroom management structure (which was a follow-up to those who said they were managed by more than one person) was also taken into account if there was indication of multi-title working. All respondents were coded as working for single-titles unless there was a suggestion in the response to Q.18 or 21.a that there was multi-title working involved in their roles. Only one participant could not be coded due to a lack of response to the optional questions. Almost a third of participants (31%) were coded as working for more than one title (See **Figure 45**, below).

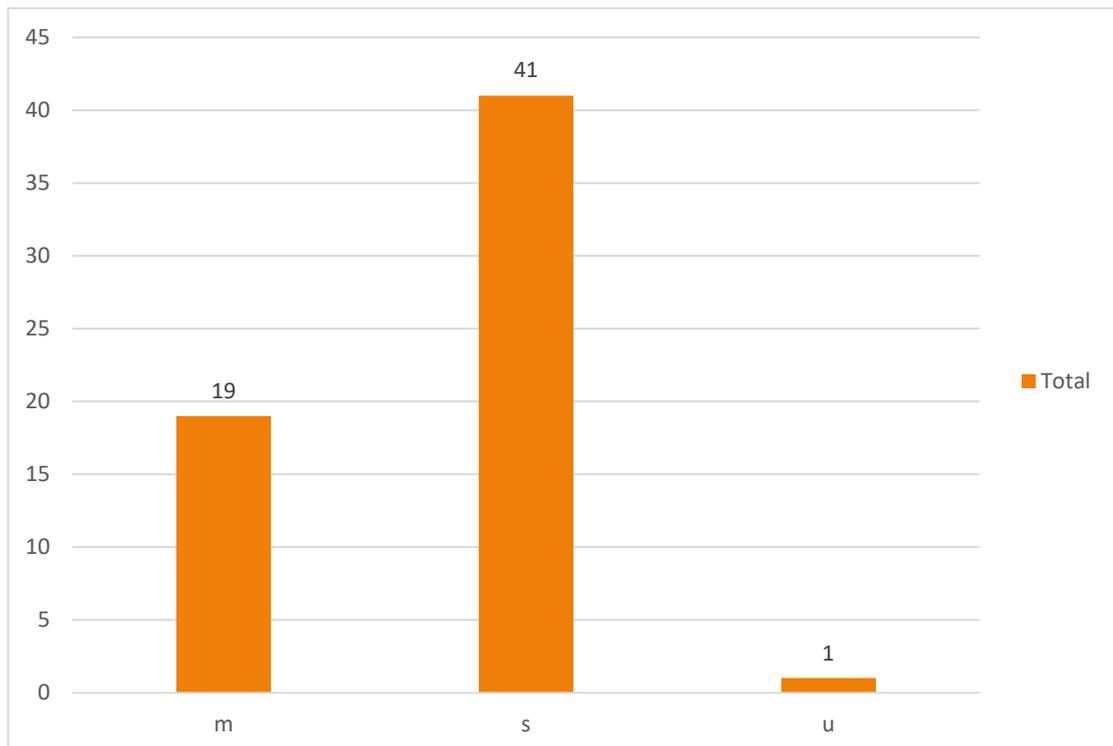


Figure 45. Indication of single or multi-title working.

7.2.2 Hierarchies and structure

7.2.2.1 Participant coding

In a mandatory question, participants were asked to choose the job role closest to their own. This was followed up by an optional question asking for their specific job title, to which all but three participants responded. This information was used to code the job type, using mainly the same coding as designed for the job advertisement study.

Participants were also asked to select the role closest to their line manager's role and, optionally, to identify their line manager's job title. Using the information available, the participants were then coded into print, print and

digital or digital only roles and the same coding was applied to the managerial positions. The coding was based on the researcher's interpretation of the response and respondents were only allocated into the print or digital only categories if there was clear indication of singular focus. For example, a participant who selected 'reporter with specialism' as the role closest to their own identified their job title as 'digital reporter'. They identified their line manager as being closest to a news editor position, but their job title was 'digital editor' – this resulted in that participant being coded as a digital position due to the indication of digital focus within their own and their manager's position. Digital participants were employees of Johnston Press, Archant and Trinity Mirror.

In hindsight, it would have perhaps been useful to make clearer the anticipated interpretation of roles represented by the job titles in the survey question. For example, the word 'multimedia' can have varied interpretations and without specific indication of a digital or print and digital focus, can only be exempt from a print-only categorisation. Therefore, those who chose 'multimedia reporter' as the job role closest to their own, were only categorised into the digital section if their job title clearly indicated a digital-only focus. This interpretation was galvanised further by the role of their manager (see **Figure 46**, p232, for an example of the coding process).

7.2.2.1.1 Figure 4. Participant coding process illustration

Therefore, the coding results demonstrate the lowest illustratable numbers of participants in print only or digital only roles; meaning it is quite possible participants coded as 'print and digital' had a more specific, digital-only role which was not indicated by their survey responses or job title.

The spread of roles represented in the newsrooms mirrored the hierarchical structure of traditional newsrooms in terms of the number of respondents at differing levels, with fewer senior or middle managers (17) than lower management or those without management responsibility (44) (See **Figure 47**, pg233233). It is worth acknowledging the lack of responses from trainee reporters; a contrast to the job advertisement study which listed trainee reporter roles as the most recruited for position.

This lack of response from trainees could be due to the recruitment method; with newer recruits in newsrooms perhaps less likely to be listed on websites. It could also indicate a reluctance in trainees to participate in a survey about skills and tools; perhaps either due to a lack of confidence about production methods within their newsrooms or concerns over company rules around participating in external research.

When breaking down the roles to analyse for patterns in management, there was evidence of 54% of the digital-only participants being managed by digital managers (see **Figure 48**, pg234). This ratio changed to 71% when digitally coded participants in a management role were discounted. All three companies with digital-only staff demonstrated a digitally managed digital team.

Print and digital-coded journalists were managed by managers coded in the same category, except for one participant whose manager had a digital role (see **Figure 49**, pg235.). It is possible this participant also had a digital-only role, but this was not evidenced in their responses and therefore could not be coded as such. The single participant to indicate a print-only role was managed by an editor whose role was coded for print and digital.

Of the survey participants, almost two thirds (62%) said their work was overseen by more than one manager. Qualitative responses to a question asking for more detail about newsroom structure included:

Johnston Press, specialist reporter: *“Head of news for [REDACTED]⁵³ and head of news for [REDACTED] both report to Head of Content for our newsroom. Each paper then has its own editor and a shared deputy editor. We also take instruction from the digital team, which has its own management structure and includes a head of social media.”*

Trinity Mirror, multimedia reporter: *“Editor in Chief, followed by print editor and head of audience, followed by content editors and deputy head of audience, followed by chief reporter, followed by specialist reporters and senior reporters, followed by reporters, followed by content writer.”*

Newsquest, specialist reporter: *“Editor/news editor (same person), assistant editor, audience and content editor, business and technology editor (same level in structure as audience and content editor), chief reporter.”*

DC Tomson employee⁵⁴: *“We have a chief reporter, assistant news editor, news editor, deputy editor and online editor all making their own demands.”*

⁵³ Newspaper titles removed to protect participant identity.

⁵⁴ Job title redacted to protect participant identity.

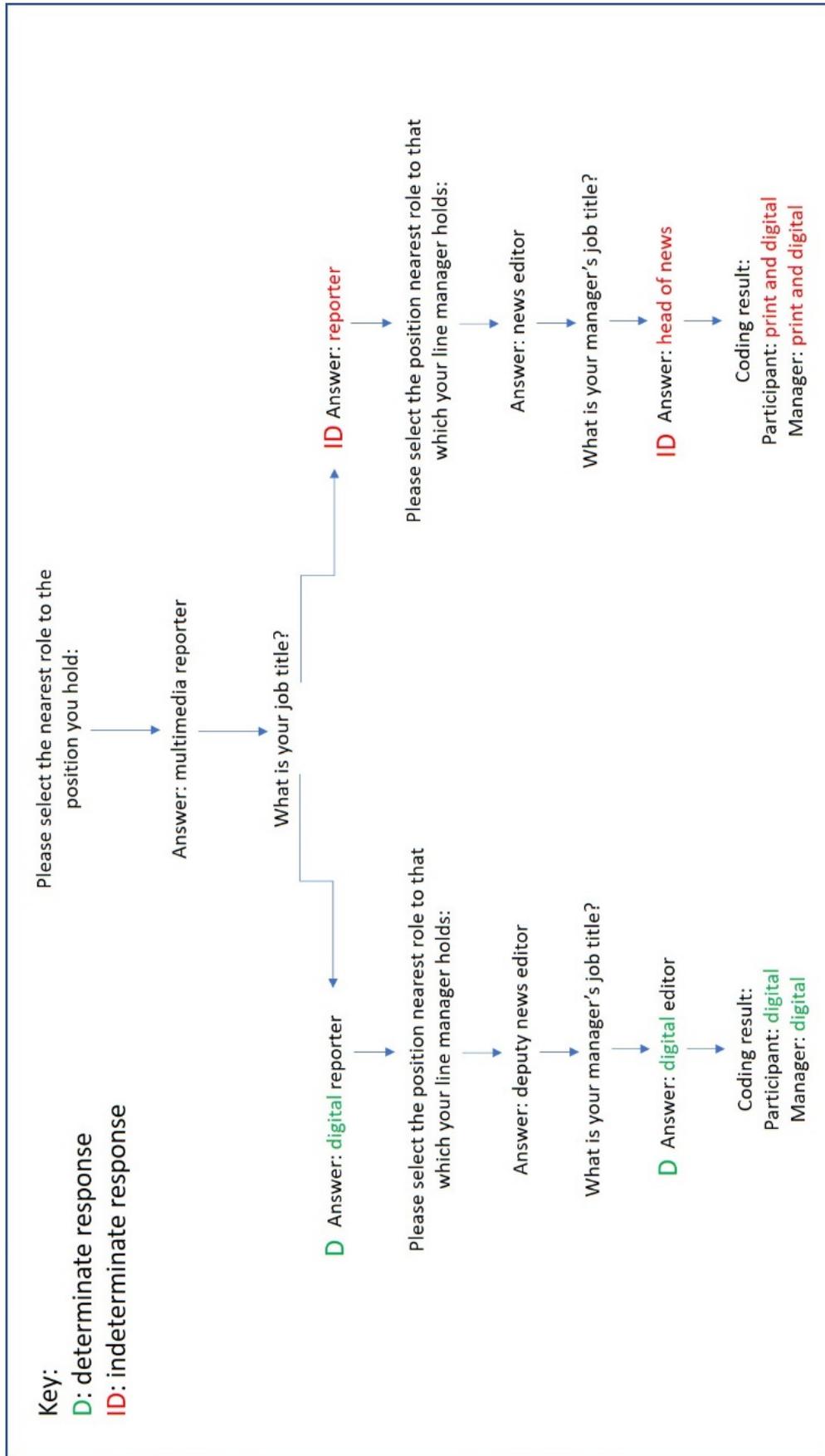


Figure 46. Example of the coding process

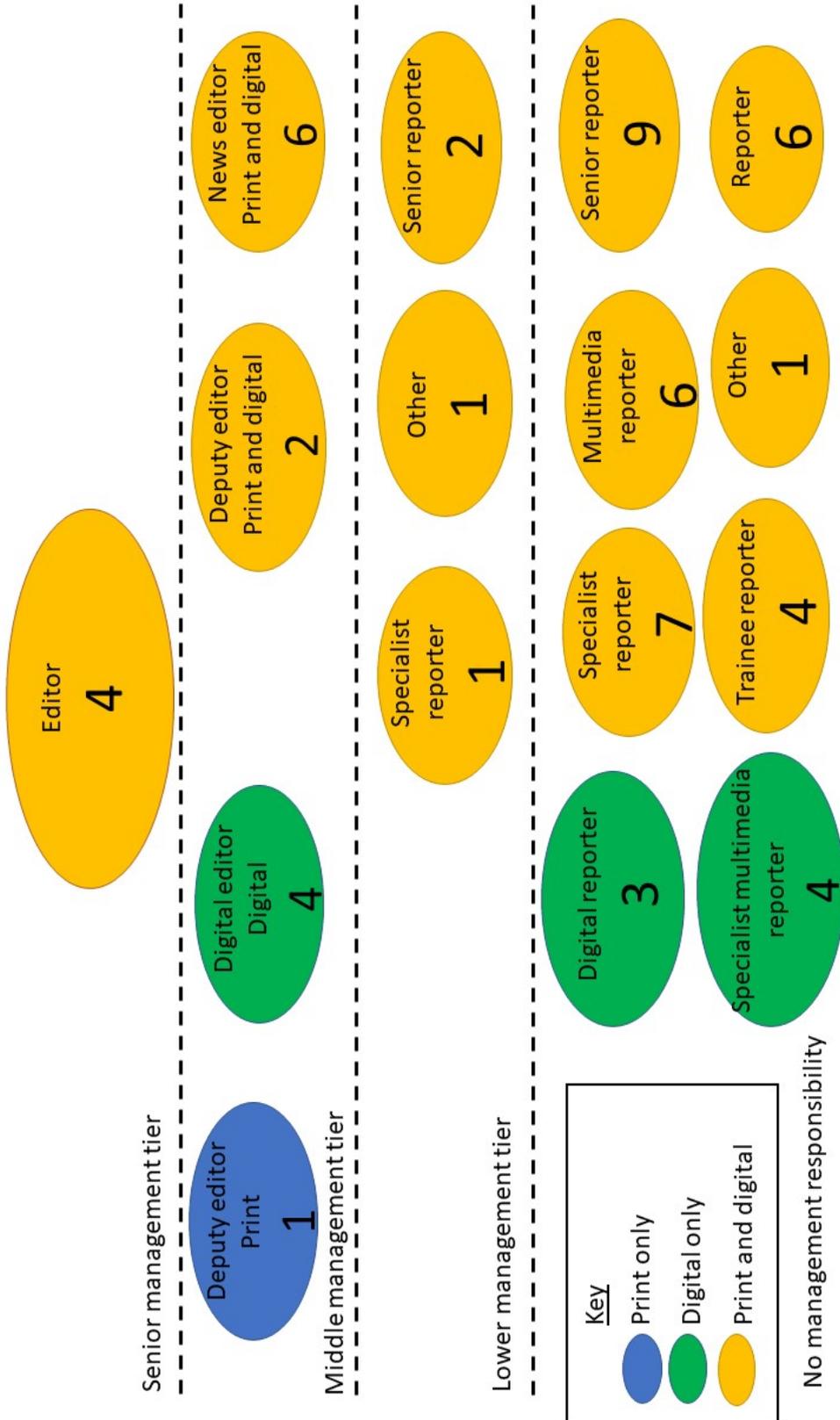


Figure 47. Survey participants represented in hierarchical structure

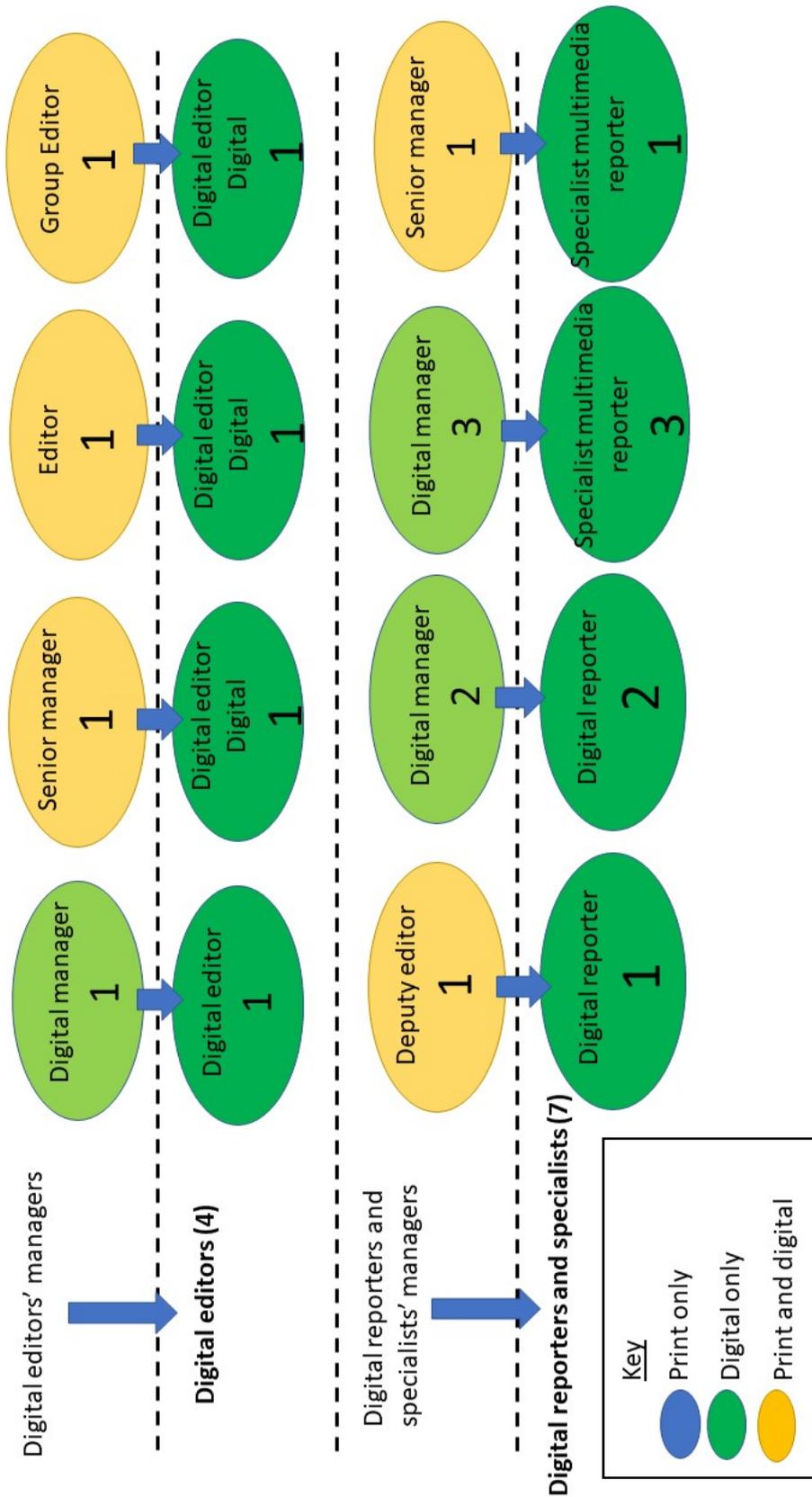


Figure 48. Digital only participants' and their managers

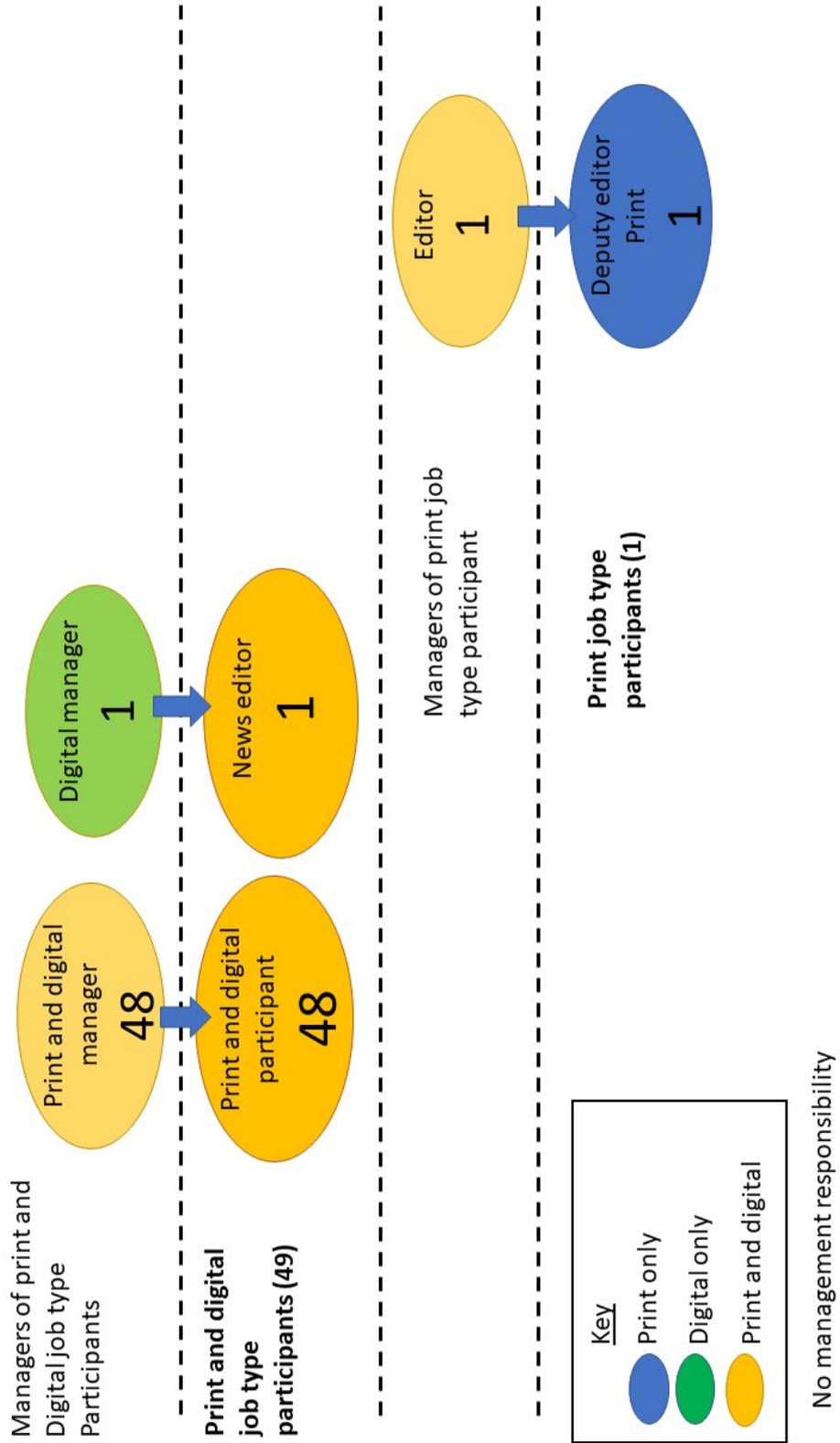


Figure 49. Print and digital participants and print-only participants and their managers

7.2.3 Skills and tools values

There was clear evidence of a belief in upsurge in the importance of specific digital tools and abilities and a decrease in the perceived value of some more traditional skills and tools.

While there was no one tool which was perceived to be increasing in value by 100% of respondents, 75% believed smartphones to be increasing in importance, 73% suggested Facebook was increasing in importance, closely followed by Twitter at 67% (see **Figure 50** on pg237 for full results). Out of the same categories, only 4% believed Twitter to be decreasing in importance and only one participant suggested smartphones were becoming less important. No participants suggested Facebook was decreasing in value.

Of the participants, 63% suggested website analytic software was increasing in importance, closely followed by Search Engine Optimisation at 59%. Neither of these tools was seen to be decreasing in value by any participant.

Social media management software was also seen to be increasing in value by almost half of respondents, but only one participant believed its value to be on the wane.

Traditional tools on the list were generally perceived to be decreasing in importance rather than increasing. While six participants suggested the use of a car was on the increase, 16 suggested it was in decline. There were 3 participants who suggested the use of a camera (other than a smartphone) was increasing in importance, while 35 respondents suggested the opposite.

Analysis of the overall response to skills demonstrated a similar pattern. The top four skills identified by most as increasing in importance were all digital (See **Figure.51** on pg238). All but 10% of respondents suggested social media skills were increasing in importance, followed by understanding web analytics, which was identified as increasing by 74%. No participants identified these skills as decreasing in importance.

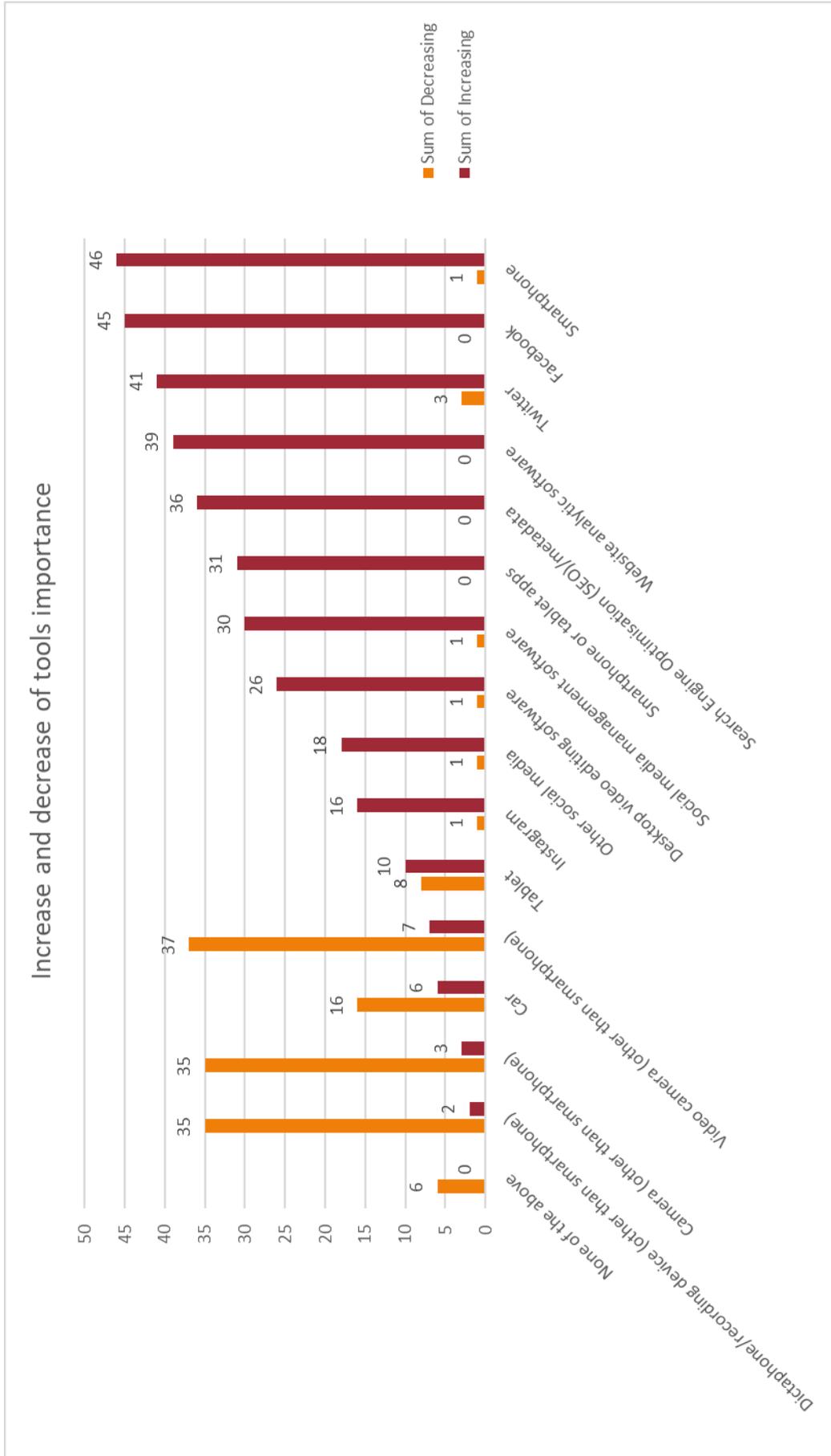


Figure 50. Tools increasing or decreasing in importance.

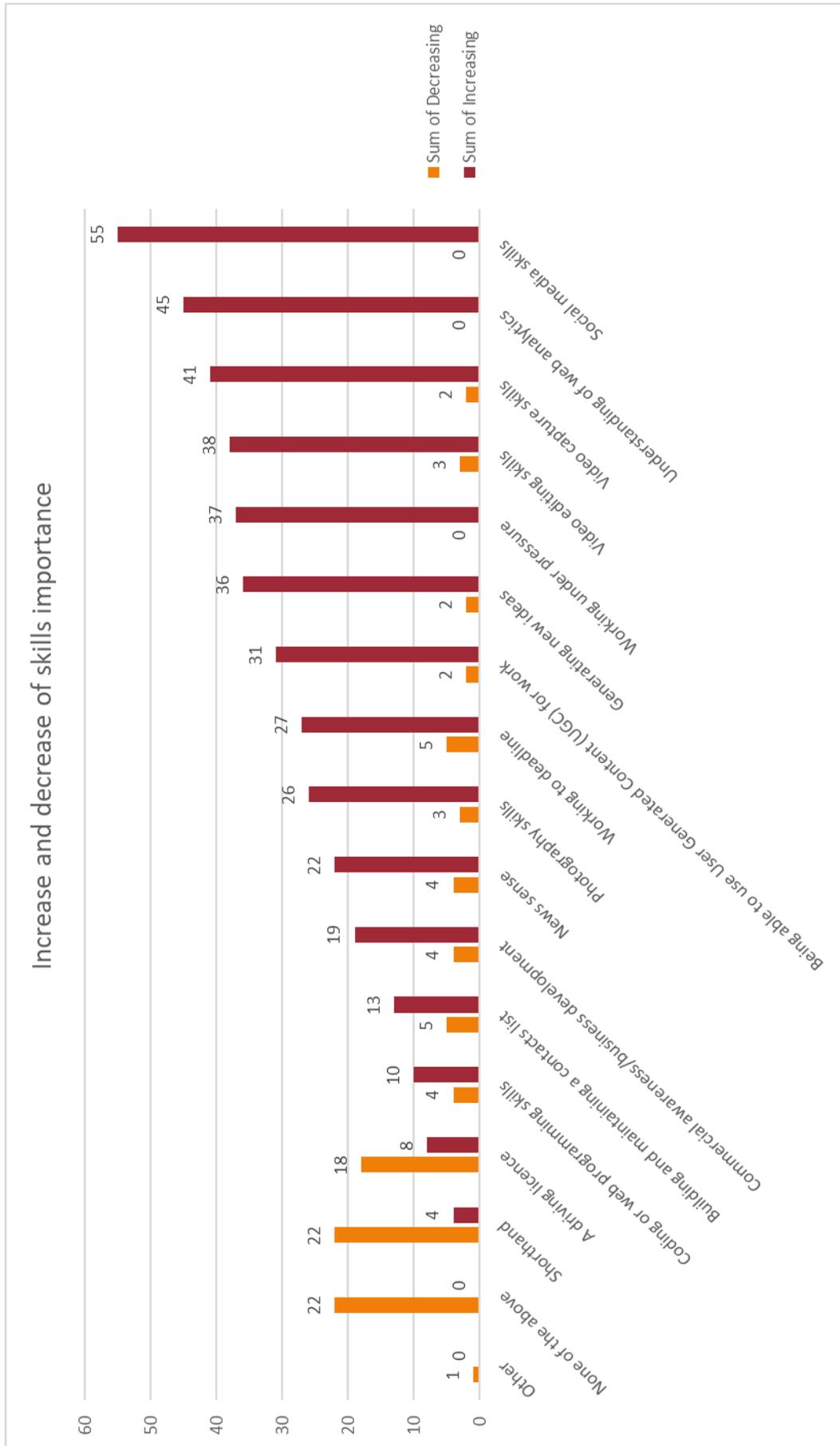


Figure 51. Skills increasing or decreasing in importance.

Video capture skills came third, with 67% of participants identifying it as increasing in importance, followed by video editing skills, as identified by 62% of participants. Less than 5% of participants identified the same skills as decreasing in importance.

The majority of skills listed were identified by a higher number of participants as increasing in importance than decreasing. However, where this trend differed was in the traditional skills of shorthand, which was identified by 36% as decreasing in importance and holding a driving license, as identified by 30%. This was contrasted by 7% of participants who believed shorthand to be increasing in importance and 13% who said the same for driving licence.

This perception of increasing importance was reflected by the use of skills and tools by participants; with the tools and skills regarded as increasing in importance by the majority also being used regularly and recently by participants (see **Figure 52** on pg240).

However, the perception of decreasing importance was challenged by the use reported of the same skills and tools. While shorthand was perceived as a decreasingly important skill, it was also identified as a regularly used skill by 86% of respondents and 80% of participants claimed to have used it for work purposes in the past five working days.

The same pattern was reflected by the perception that use of a car and a driving licence were decreasing in importance, contrasting the indication by 60% or more participants that both were regularly used and had been used in the past five working days.

This trend was also evidenced by participants' indication of the usefulness of skills and tools identified as decreasing in importance.

For example, two thirds of respondents said shorthand was vital in terms of its worth and 29% said it was useful (see **Figure 53** on pg241) and just under half of respondents suggested having a driving licence was vital and almost the same number said it was useful (**Figure 54**, pg241).

When analysing the 22 participants who identified shorthand as a decreasingly important skill in the newsroom, the majority (45%) were Trinity Mirror employees, followed by Johnston Press (23%).

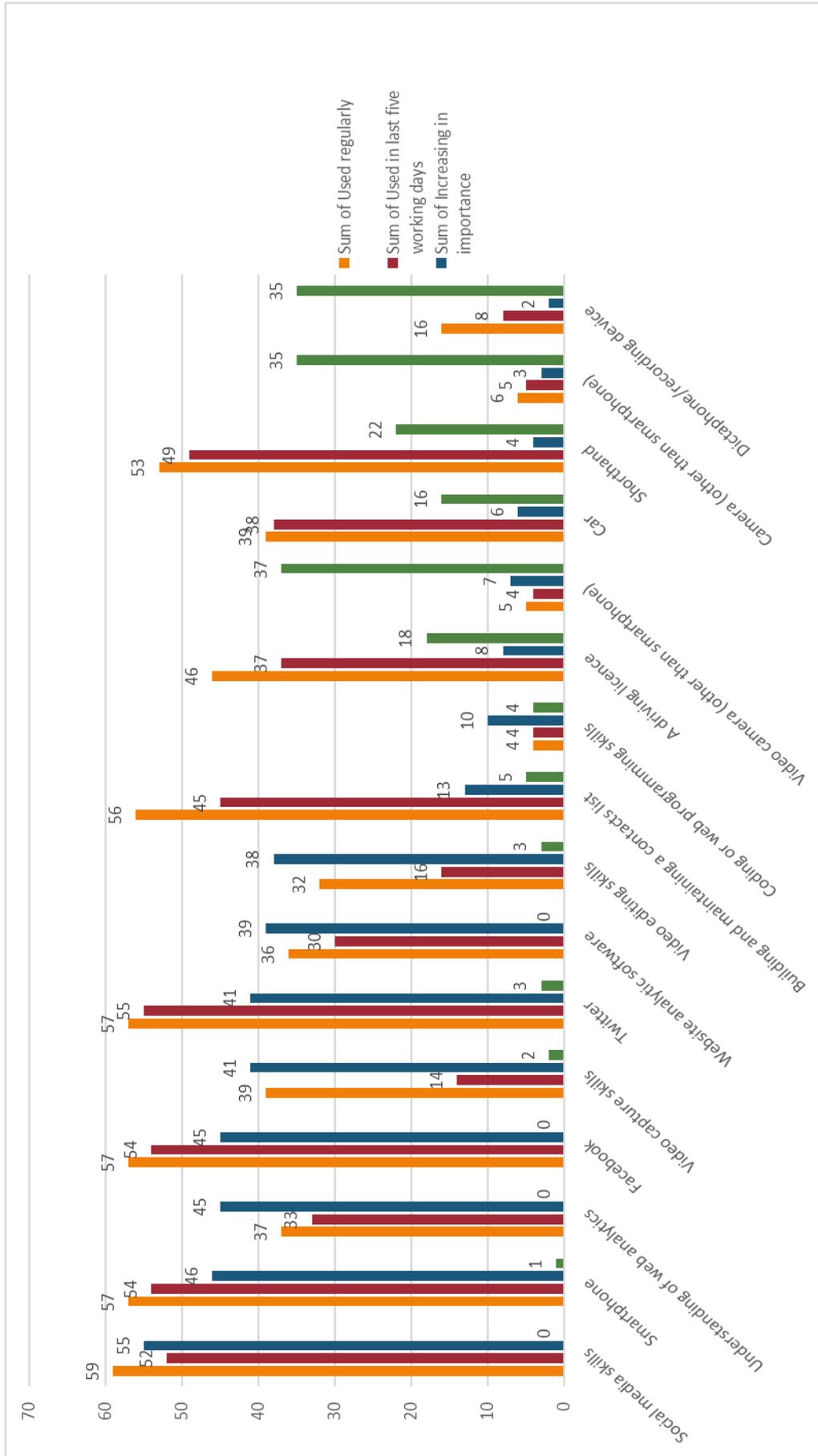


Figure 52. Skills and tools perception against usage

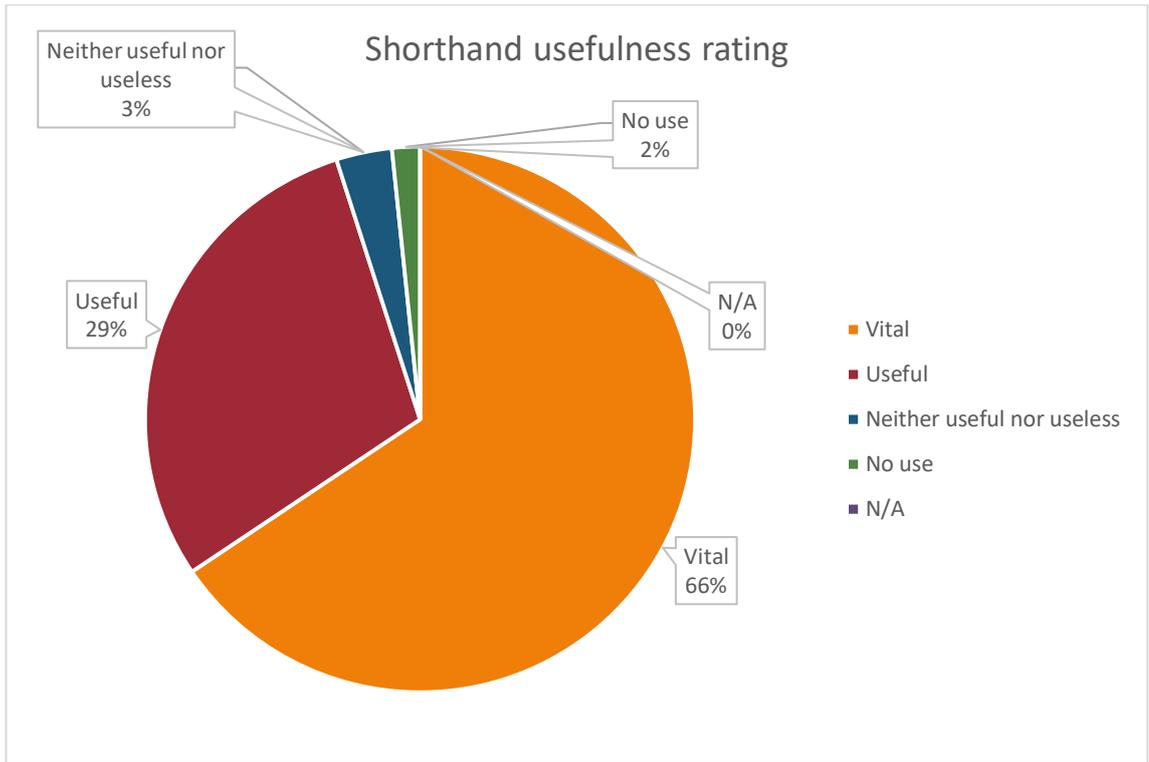


Figure 53. Usefulness rating of shorthand.

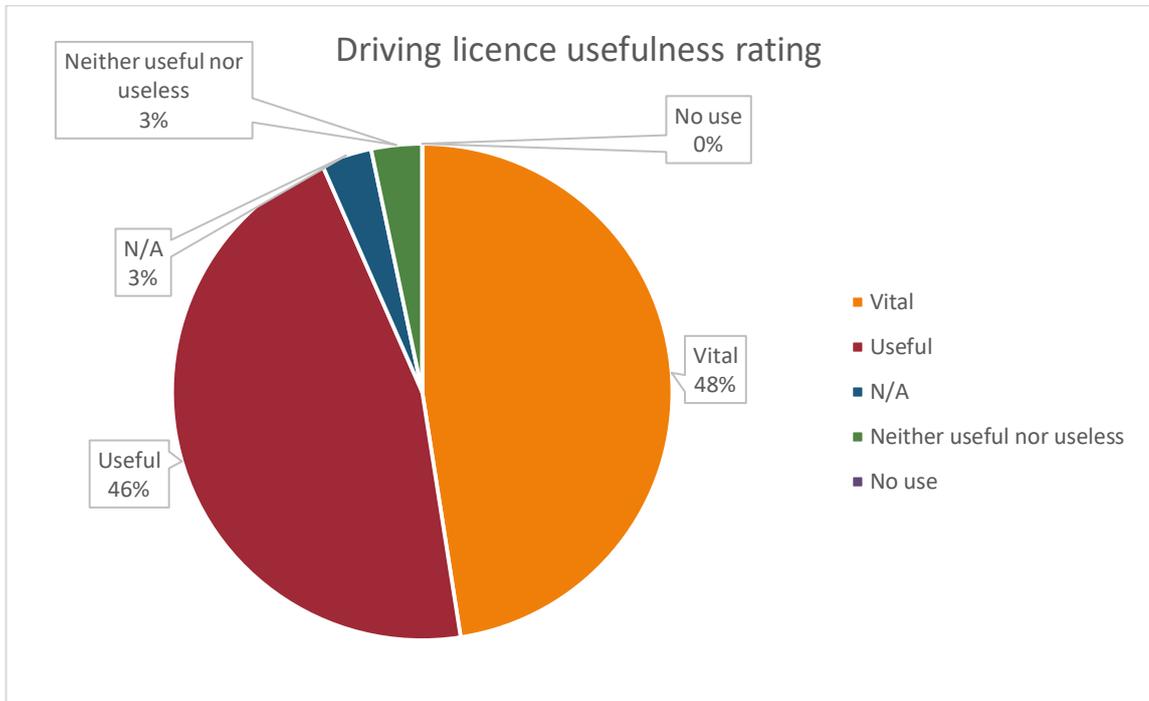


Figure 54. Usefulness rating of driving licence.

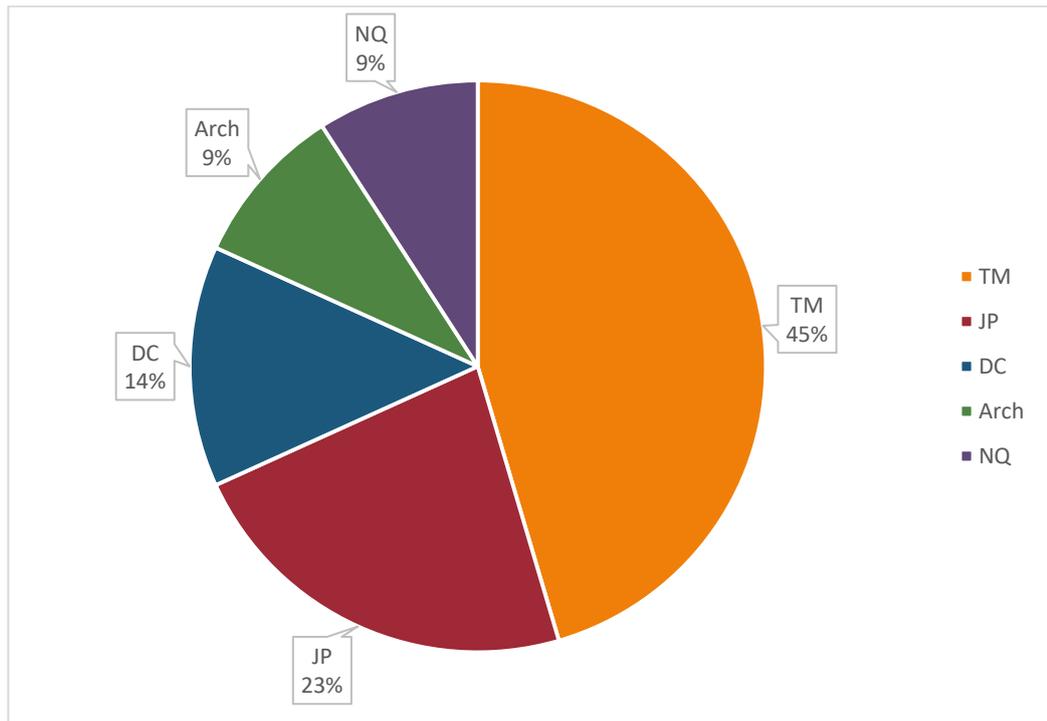


Figure 55. Representation of the publishing companies of the 22 participants who identified shorthand as decreasing in value.

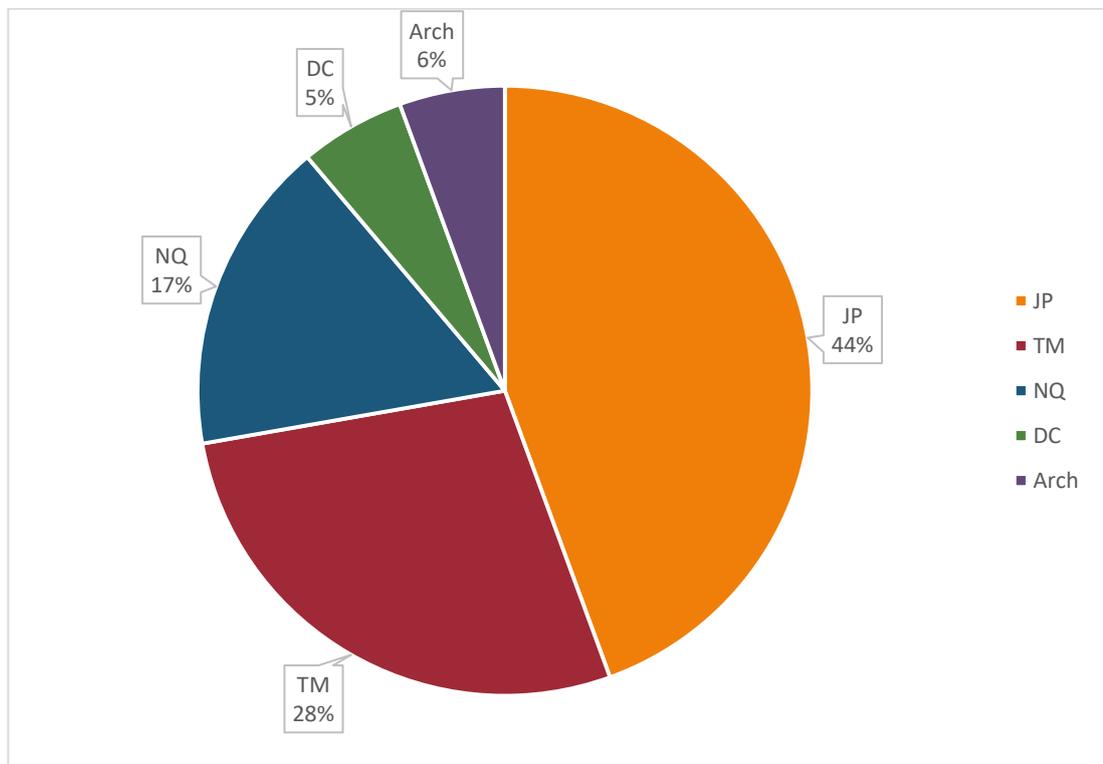


Figure 56. Representation of publishing companies of the 18 participants who identified driving licence as decreasing in value.

Of the 18 participants who identified a driving licence as decreasing in importance Johnston Press employees represented the majority, with 44% of the response, followed by Trinity Mirror at 28% and Newsquest with 17%.

7.2.4 Developing the story; finding out how and why

How social media and web analytics were being used in newsrooms was evidenced within the survey, with setting the news agenda being a recurring theme within the results (**Figure 57**, pg244).

While 85% of participants suggested social media and analytics was used for identifying popular content topics, 75% also said the tools were used to measure the success of their work and 72% said the tools were used to shape news agendas.

While 40% of respondents said individuals' analytics were not measured or audited within their newsrooms, just over a third said individual analytics were measured and a quarter said they did not know if they were or not (**Figure 58**, pg245).

Overall, there was evidence to suggest individual analytics were audited or measured within the three major publishing companies (Newsquest, Johnston Press and Trinity Mirror) and also at Archant.

When asked for more details, qualitative responses from those who had suggested analytics were being measured or audited included:

Archant, digital reporter: *“We use sites such as Linkpulse and Omniture to track analytics. We see what works well and what doesn't. Use this to show journalists what they should be doing more or less of.”*

Johnston Press, editor: *“These will be used as a training and development tool and to ensure reporters aren't writing content which has little interest/engagement or writing good content which isn't being correctly amplified online.”*

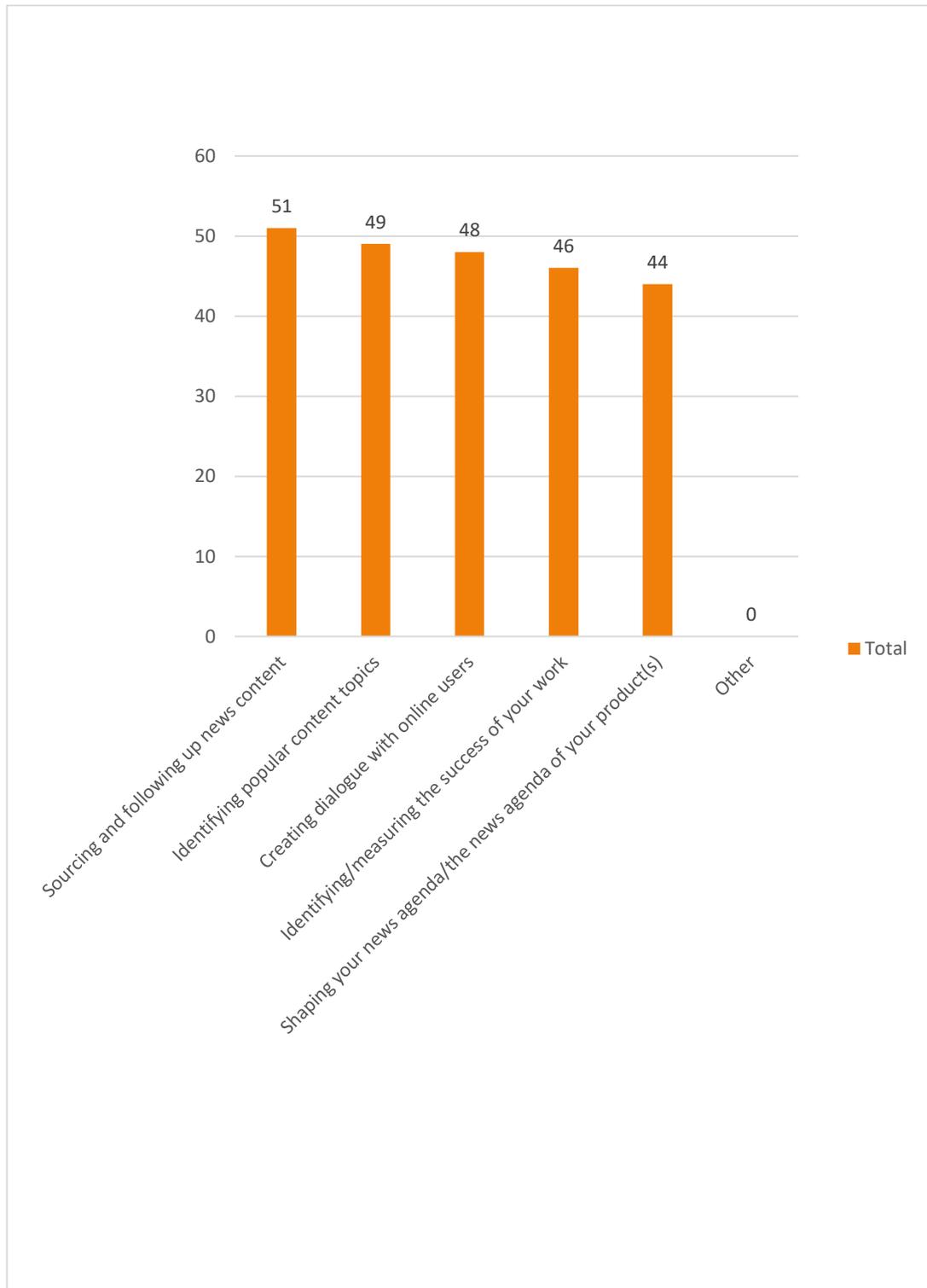


Figure 57. The uses for social media and web analytics.

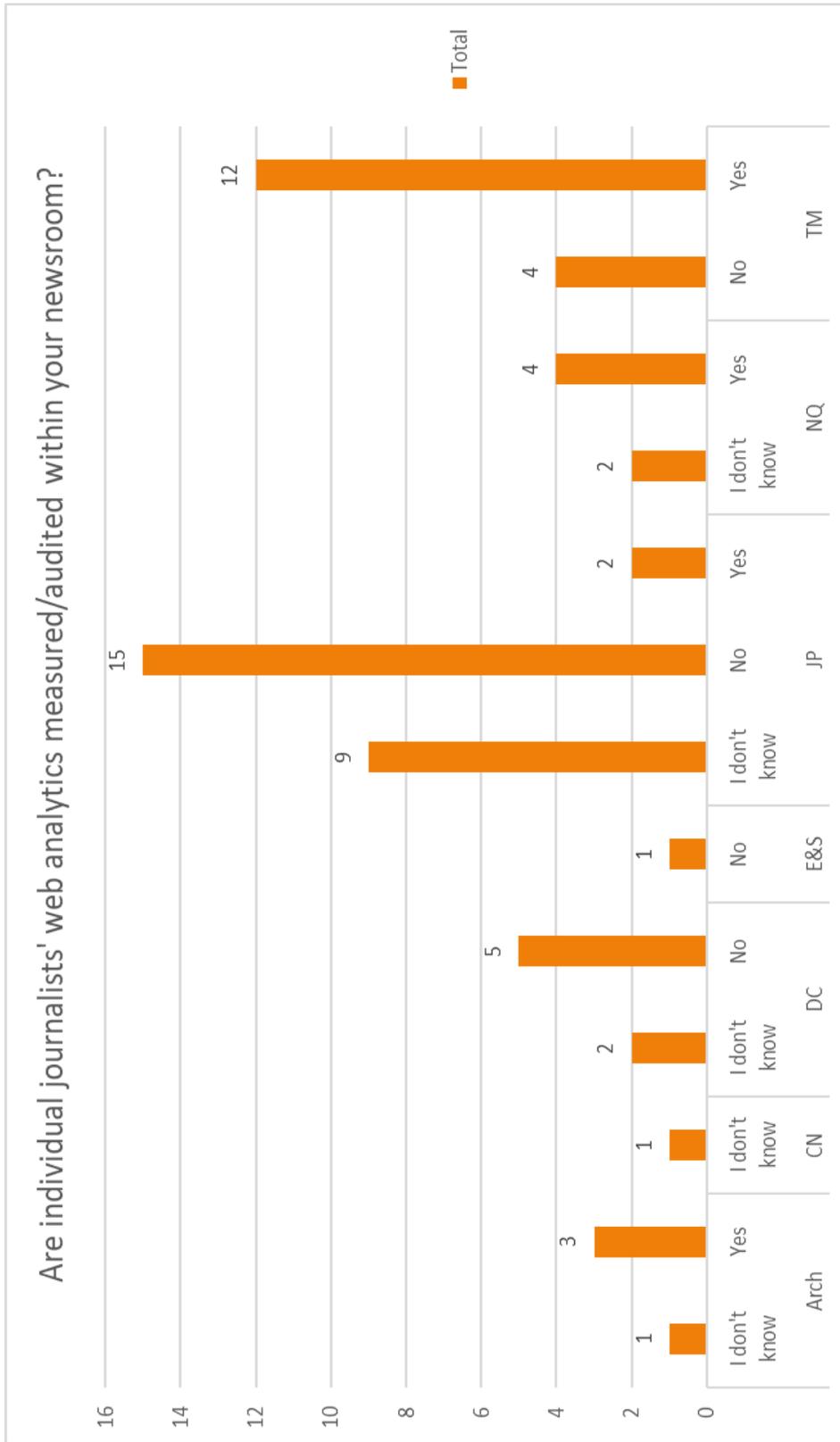


Figure 58. The measurement of individual web analytics within newsrooms, by publishing company.

Newsquest, editor: *“Story counts and, to a more general extent, the performance of stories online by reporters are measured - as well as UGC. We're careful that this is only part of the picture - we want to create websites that regularly updated and with big audiences but not at the expense of quality or variety.”*

Trinity Mirror, news editor: *“We have team targets, not individual targets but all reporters receive a daily report of the page views their stories have generated. They use this to consider follow-ups and to work out why some stories perform better than others.”*

Evidence within the survey suggested almost a third of respondents believed commercial awareness and business development was an increasingly important skill (**Figure 51**, pg238). Those participants were asked for further details, qualitative responses included:

Johnston Press, multimedia reporter: *“As print revenues decrease and digital revenues continue to develop, we are increasingly asked to be aware of any opportunities to 'monetise'. Reporters now get regular emails about commercial/business development element of the company, this didn't happen 10 or even five years ago to the same extent.”*

Johnston Press, digital editor: *“Identifying commercial opportunities around content. Sponsored content.”*

Newsquest, specialist reporter: *“A general awareness that the revenue comes from selling papers and getting the maximum number of online views, and directing your time accordingly.”*

Trinity Mirror, news editor: *“Being aware of profitable opportunities in our content creation e.g.. always asking for or including video with online stories, as the pre-roll advertising is very profitable. Also, hyperlinking to certain brands who have signed a 'skimlinks' deal with our company.”*

Participants also indicated in depth how they used smartphones for work; the tool identified as increasing importance within newsrooms by the most participants. The top three uses were taking photographs (92%), social media for work (89%) and capturing video (87%) (**Figure 59**, pg248).

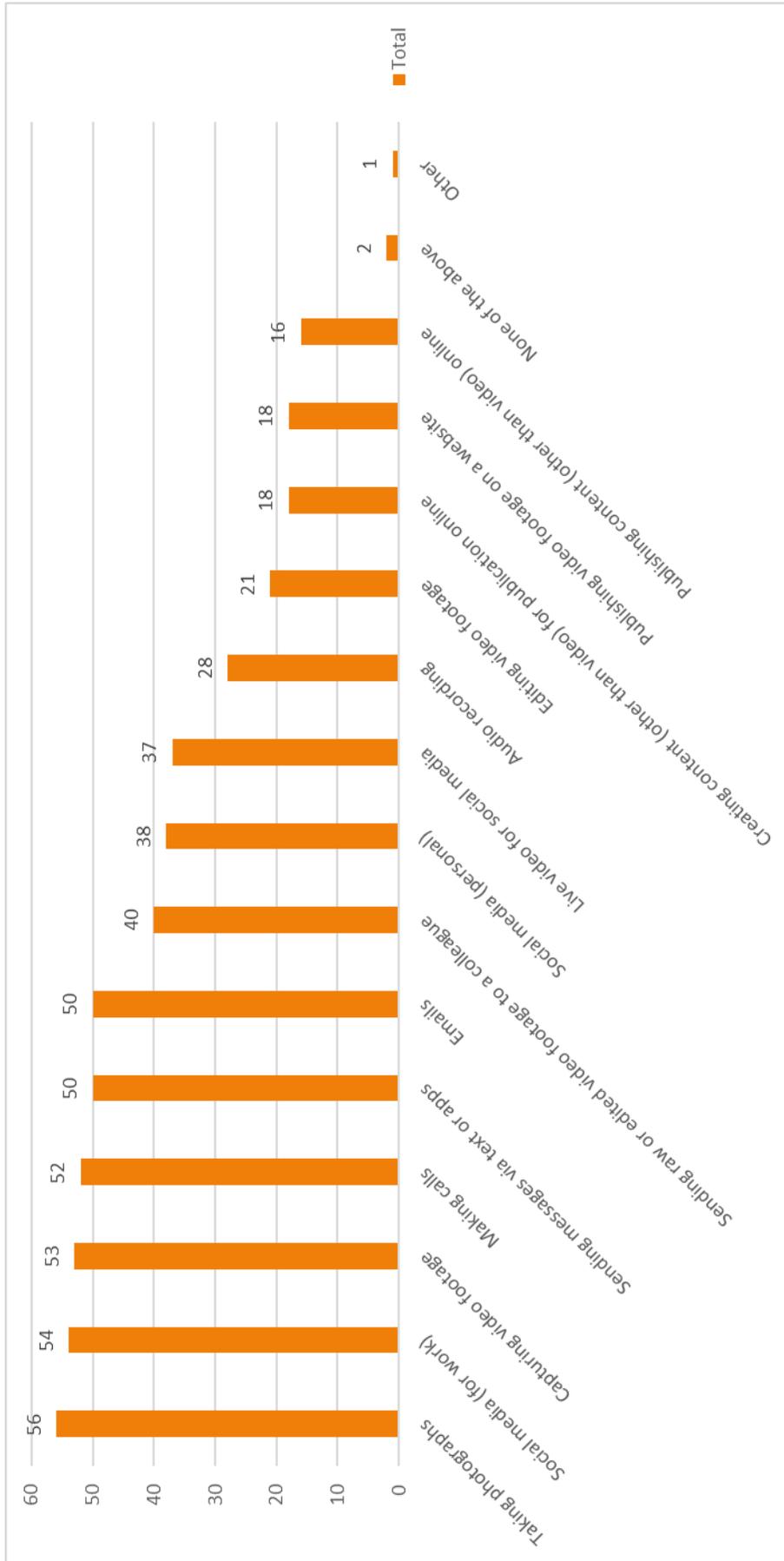


Figure 59. How smartphones are used for work.

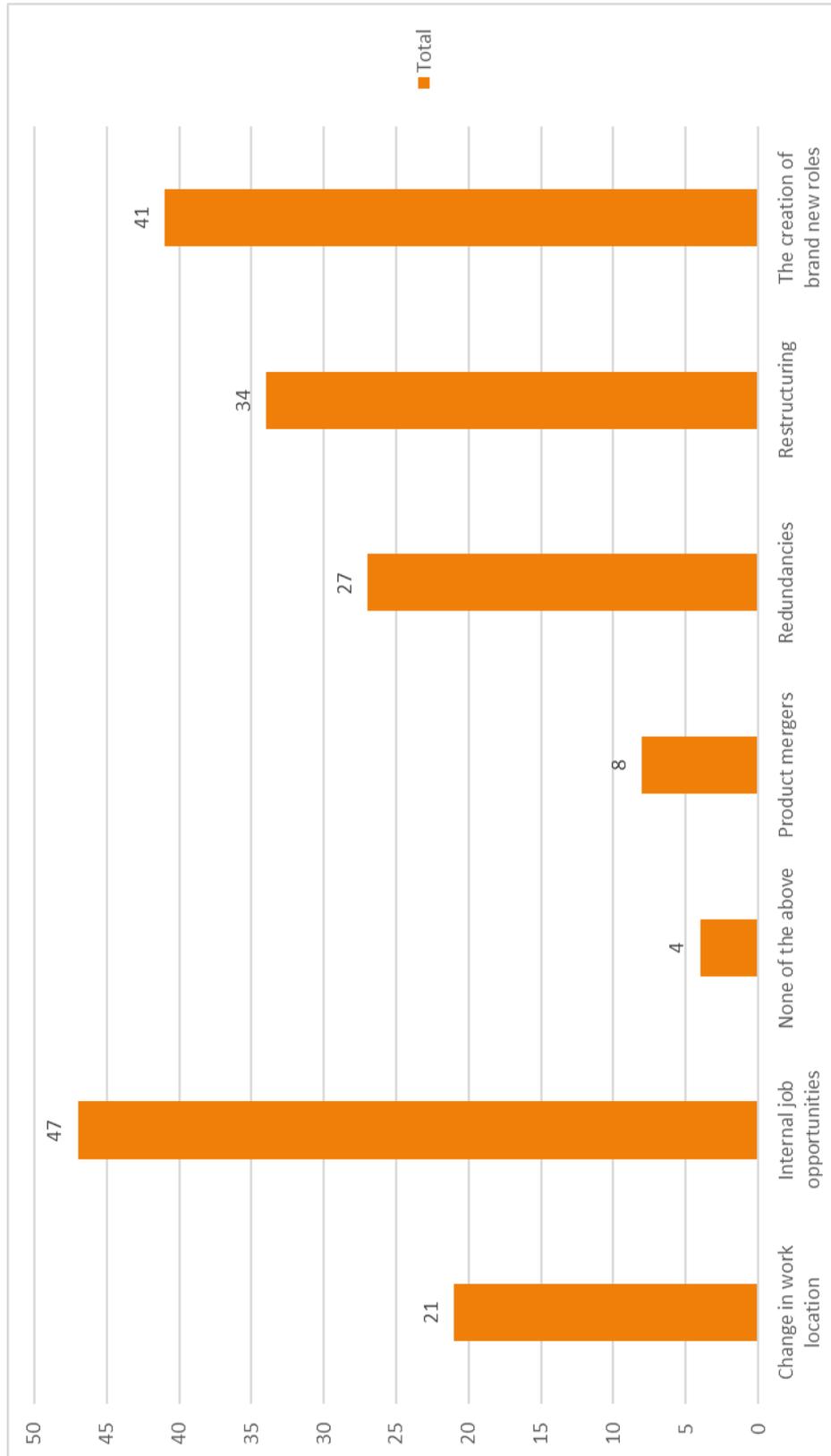


Figure 60. Response to a question asking if participants had been exposed to the listed options over the past 12 months.

An environment of constant change and uncertainty was also reflected by the response to a question about change, threats and opportunities over the 12 months prior to survey completion (**Figure 60**, pg248).

Out of the publishing companies represented, only the *Express & Star* participant answered 'none of the above'. DC Tomson was the only other company not to have a participant list 'redundancies' as one of the elements. Johnston Press and Trinity Mirror both had 'product mergers' listed by respondents and all except Cumbria News and *Express & Star* had 'change in work location' listed by respondents.

Finally, participants were asked if they had anything they would like to add in response to the survey. The majority declined, but three left the following comments:

Johnston Press, reporter: *"Companies can provide as many fancy smartphones, tablets and laptops as they like but, in the long run, they are meaningless unless you have sufficient numbers of staff to use them. Also, the internet has brought many changes to newsrooms and newspaper but the most important part of a journalist's job remains the same as it ever was: finding good stories and writing them well."*

Trinity Mirror, digital editor: *"I hope the survey will provide a good illustration of how much the industry has already changed and the progress which continues to be made in the way we research and provide news and information to readers."*

Trinity Mirror, editor: *"Shorthand - it appears to be decreasing in importance because young reporters don't have the skill but I believe it's still a very important skill and would not take on a trainee without it or without the agreement they would achieve 100wpm."*

7.3 Survey analysis: sketching an impression of local news in the UK

As a piece of stand-alone research, this survey gives an impression of how digital skills have impacted news production, jurisdiction and identity within regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK. It creates a sketch rather than a detailed image and, if produced as a primary method, would require development in the form of increased participatory response or other investigative means.

However, this element of the research project was always designed to act as a check of the findings from the job advertisements analysis and the newsroom research and, as such, serves its purpose well.

Where the job advertisements tell the story from a publishing company perspective; highlighting the most positive aspects of working within local news; and the fieldwork findings shed light on how the research questions can be answered within two newsrooms in isolation; the survey has the scope to check these findings as it tells the story from local newspaper journalists across the UK. The parities in responses demonstrate a pattern across the UK and, when viewed against the backdrop of the job advertisement analysis and the newsroom findings, a more detailed picture, with colour, depth and meaning, starts to emerge.

Therefore, unlike the previous elements of this study, which were analysed in isolation, the results from the survey will be scrutinised as intended; as a comparison against the earlier study elements.

7.3.1 Skills and tools values

Digital tools and skills are of increasing importance within newsrooms, according to the findings of this survey and, in affirmation of the results from the job advertisement analysis and fieldwork research.

However, in contrast, most traditional skills and tools were placed in higher usefulness value than digital by participants. The skills of working under pressure and working to deadline were seen as increasing in importance within newsrooms and 'vital' in terms of their personal usefulness by 95% or more participants. In contrast, the smartphone – the tool perceived by most participants as increasing in importance within their workplaces – was only described as 'vital' by 88% of respondents and other increasingly important

tools such as Facebook, Twitter and analytic software scored even lower on the usefulness value rating.

If taken at face value, this lukewarm response to digital tools could be seen as an indicator of a slow down in the surge of digital focus within newsrooms. However, the wording of the questions plays a key role in understanding this pattern; especially when compared to the earlier elements of the study.

While digital tools and skills were overwhelmingly described in the survey as increasing in importance within newsrooms, the personal value to the individual participants was lower.

In similar contrast, the survey indicated a decline in some traditional priorities; being able to write in shorthand, a driving licence and a car were all indicated to be of decreasing importance within newsrooms but continued to be 'vital' or 'useful' to the majority of respondents.

These contradictory patterns suggest a number of things:

1. There is an increase in the importance of digital skills and tools, specifically social media and analytic software, within regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK.
2. This increase is publishing-company or management-driven and is not perceived by all journalists to fully represent their own professional role (Mellado et al., 2017).
3. As found within the job advertisement analysis, some traditional skills are applied for digital purposes. For example, working under pressure and to deadline is seen as increasingly important in a 'news now' (Sheller, 2015a) environment.
4. The perceived vitalness of some traditional skills, such as shorthand, was thrown into question when compared to recent usage figures. Therefore, the reliability of the participatory response in terms of belief of usefulness over actual usage suggests a connection between skills and tools and journalistic identity might influence the perception of their essentiality.

This latter suggestion would reflect similar findings within the newsroom research; where some specialist reporters and print-focused managers appeared to deliberately eschew digital news production methods due to their perceived journalistic values and identities. This suggestion will be discussed in more detail shortly.

Therefore, while it is clear some traditional skills, such as working under pressure and to deadline are reflected as being of high importance and value within UK newsrooms, others, such as shorthand and being able to drive, appear to be in decline in general, even if individual respondents still hold those skills in high regard.

The Trinity Mirror editor whose comment was specifically about shorthand, also reflected a willingness to recruit a candidate who did not have 100 words per minute shorthand, on the agreement the speed would be achieved. This flexibility in recruitment requirements was reflected during interviews in the newsroom study, where at *The Mitre*, there was frustration over a print-focused editor's refusal to interview a trainee applicant due to their lack of shorthand. This decision had been regarded by digital managers as problematic and the candidate was later appointed because of their digital news abilities.

When analysing the response by job type there was evidence of a higher percentage of digitally categorised journalists indicating digital skills such as understanding web analytics or being able to capture video were vital, over those categorised as print and digital. A higher percentage of the print and digital journalists suggested traditional skills such as news sense and shorthand were vital over their digital counterparts. However, these results have to be treated with a degree of caution; the digital coding for the participants, as described earlier, was based on strong evidence of a digital role and so there is a likelihood of some participants in the print and digital category not being coded correctly. The difference in numbers in the coding categories (38 in print and digital and only 9 in digital) also means there is less depth available to the digital results. Nevertheless, these results can be taken as an indication that digital employees within participating newsrooms values digital tools and skills more highly than those with a print and digital or print-only role.

7.3.2 News production impacts

As demonstrated by both the job advertisement analysis and the newsroom findings, there is evidence within the survey of a digital divide within some newsrooms; with digital managers overseeing reporters with a digital-only focus. While this structure is demonstrable only in part by the coding of job roles, there was also evidence of the digital divide in qualitative comments made by participants.

This included part of a comment made by a JP reporter, who said: “*We also take instruction from the digital team, which has its own management structure and includes a head of social media.*”

Another JP reporter from a different title, said: “*Our newsroom has been restructured. We have a digital team and a team of multimedia reporters who also write for the net but also the paper too.*”

This, along with evidence of digital specialisms and the indication of increasing importance of digital tools and skills and the evidence of audience analytics being used to drive the news agenda, correlates with evidence from the job advertisements and newsroom data to suggest the divide between traditional/print elements of news production and digital production exists within a number of newsrooms in the UK. It also strongly indicates priority focus being given to digital production within those newsrooms.

The influence of news-traders on news agendas (Usher, 2018) and production techniques was also evident, with participants’ responses to the use of analytics and social media indicating, as with the newsroom findings, news-traders were in a position of decision-making power (Tandoc and Thomas, 2015) within the internal newsroom networks represented.

This, combined with the indication of increasing commercial influence on news production and the multi-management structures within internal newsroom networks, suggests the picture is similar to that at *The Journal* and *The Mitre*. It also suggests the increased focus on digital production as evidenced by the job advertisements translates to reality within newsrooms in the UK.

7.3.3 Journalistic and product identity

While there were no direct questions asking participants about their perceived professional identities or the identities of their products, inferences about these elements could be derived from the survey.

The affiliation participants demonstrated over some traditional journalistic skills such as shorthand was contradicted by their reduced estimated use of the same skills and their decreasing importance within their internal newsroom networks. The rejection of some digital tools and skills, mirrored by an opposite pattern of recent use and increasing importance within the newsroom, suggests a positioning of individual professional identity within the wider internal newsroom network. As discussed earlier, this perception of individual values contradicting the suggested values of the wider internal newsroom network suggests

establishment of professional ideology and habitus (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017). Eg. The publishing companies prioritise digital and news production evidences use of digital, but the personal affinity with traditional skills and tools is stronger. This interpretation could be explained, with the justification of the job advertisement and newsroom findings, in the following points:

1. The majority of participants were classed as print and digital respondents, meaning their focus is divided between both products.
2. The majority of participants (77%) indicated they had National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) qualifications, which, until recently, included shorthand as a mandatory element and continues to include a number of traditional skills demands such as news sense, working to deadline and media law (Ponsford, 2016; NCTJ, 2019)
3. As demonstrated by the job advertisement data, there is a sense of transience in many digital skills and tools, while the traditional equivalents were less changeable in their inclusion. This, when accounted for alongside the identifying factors of specific vocational qualifications such as the NCTJ, suggests traditional journalistic skills and tools offer a more stable and historic identifying professional definition than digital skills.
4. The unprompted defence of use of audience analytics and social media evident in some of the qualitative responses suggests an awareness of the threat or impact of digital tools on the quality or impact of the product.
5. Therefore, there is evidence of a conscious and unconscious defining of journalistic identity within the survey responses; with the historic values shaping individual perception of professional self (Bourdieu, 2012) and more realistic depiction of use and value within the wider networks being projected onto the internal newsroom networks and publishing companies as a whole (Grubenmann and Meckel, 2017). This response suggests human actants individually like to project themselves as different to their publishing companies in terms of journalistic role and values (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017).
6. The dismissal of digital tools in terms of usefulness also suggests human actants do not accept an equality with digital actants within news production processes. So, while there is acknowledgement of increasing importance, there is a clear perception of human actant superiority within the news production process (Lewis and Westlund, 2016).

There was evidence in the survey of regular change both in terms of internal structures and shifting boundaries of the internal newsroom network.

Participants indicated there had been structural changes and also suggested complex management structures. This regular uncertainty and lack of clarity mirrored the newsrooms at *The Mitre* and *The Journal*, where professional identities were compromised and redesigned due to the shifting priorities of the production companies.

As found within the job advertisements and at both newspaper titles, the survey evidenced cross-title working at all of the major publishers. Responses to a question about changes, threats and opportunities suggested product mergers had also taken place (Usher, 2015).

While there was little to suggest the impact of this result within the survey itself, if this evidence is compared to the other elements of research, it indicates the reach of journalistic identity across multiple products in the UK; giving opportunity for individual journalistic reach and impact, but potentially compromising the identity of the individual product identity itself due to increasingly merged and shared identities (Bourdieu, 2012).

7.3.4 Journalistic and product jurisdiction

Online audience growth was a clear priority evidenced by the responses to how analytics and social media were used and within some of the qualitative responses from participants.

This, when accounted for alongside the evidence of multi-title working and product mergers, suggested a widening reach of the product and the individual journalist. While this mirrors the findings of the newsroom research and the job advertisements, there is no hard evidence within the survey of shared content and a resulting dilution of geo-local focus. However, this outcome, if following the pattern defined within the other elements of the study, could be inferred; particularly when considering the evidence of a news-trader-driven agenda. So while the jurisdictional reach of the individual and product is widening, the identity of the product would be diluted by less geo-social (Hess and Waller, 2014) content focus and a wider news and content agenda.

7.4 Conclusion

This survey acts as a check list for findings from the job advertisement research and the newsroom observations and interviews.

The findings from those elements of this research project required application to a wider UK picture in order to ensure statements being made could be justified to apply on a UK-scale.

As such, this survey confirms the following can be referred to on a UK-scale and when, specifically, referring to the major news providers in the UK.

- A news-trader-driven production agenda
- A divide in newsrooms between online-only production and print and digital-focused production
- Increasing importance of digital tools and skills, with the production company values placed upon those being higher than those placed on traditional skills and tools
- Individual print and digital journalistic rejection of digital tools and skills value
- A foundation requirement of traditional skills and tools
- Commercial influences impacting news agendas
- Hierarchical confusion and workplace disruption
- Journalists working across multiple titles
- A rise in the value and news-making role of digital actants within internal newsroom networks

This confirmation of findings suggests the problems identified by the job advertisement study and newsroom analysis could be applied on a wider UK scale. Therefore, there is strong suggestion the decline in production and priority of public-interest news, combined with the drive for increased news-trader numbers, is creating the spiral of continued dismissal of important geo-local journalism in the UK.

The following and final chapter will pull together the themes which emerge across the triangulated points of study and present the problem and possible solutions to the emerging crisis in local newspaper journalism in the UK.

Chapter 8

Conclusion: How digital tools have ripped up local newspaper newsrooms in the UK

Over four years, this research project has taken a longitudinal view, conducted a detailed close-up and applied a checkpoint on the findings to establish the impact of digital tools on news production, identity and jurisdiction within regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK. This triangulated approach was conducted to thoroughly and rigorously analyse the research findings.

Until this point, research had been conducted into digital convergence within regional newspapers in the UK (See Williams and Franklin, 2007; MacGregor, 2014; Lewis et al., 2008; Matthews, 2017; O'Neill and O'Connor, 2008; Canter, 2013a; Singer, 2011), but much less had been done in terms of taking the story forwards by analysing what happened next.

This research project aimed to pick the story up by investigating what happened in local newspaper newsrooms after convergence. It aimed to establish what “green shoots” had started to emerge (Curran, 2010, pp469) and how newspapers were reshaping themselves and their journalists in a post-convergence field (Bourdieu, 2012).

The context of the project was provided in part by the researcher’s experience of working in local newspapers as digital convergence struck. The overwhelming response was of confusion, panic and fear. Sometimes it was neatly disguised as embracing progressive practice, at other times it was clear nobody had a clue what would happen to the product and its people (Whittington, 2018c).

This context gave reason and insight, but it had to be checked by existing academic research, which shaped and honed understanding and, resultingly, informed the triangulated research design. This structure, viewed through the lenses of Actor-network Theory (Latour, 2005), Political Economy (Marx, 1973, reprinted from original text c.1844; Garnham, 2012, reproduced from first publication in 1986; Smythe, 2009, reprinted from the original text of 1989), and Field Theory (Bourdieu, 1993, reprinted from 1983) allowed interest and experience to inspire this research, without letting it adversely influence judgement or interpretation.

Evidence of the thesis which has emerged during analysis of this research and which will be outlined in full in this chapter, was only starting to lift its head in the

newsrooms of West Yorkshire during this researcher's career. But now, in 2020, as this story draws to a conclusion, the digital rift created by adaptation of traditional newsrooms to accommodate digital news production (García-Avilés et al., 2014) exists in plain sight. Examples of how the digital rift and its impacts continue to be evidenced by the local newspaper industry within the UK will be included at the end of this chapter.

Resultingly, this is still the start of the story. The research conducted is post-convergence but pre-Cairncross. It sets the context of what is happening now in local newspapers across the UK. It offers an explanation for the decline in public interest journalism and the cessation of the local newspaper's role in validating its patch, its community and its potential geo-social (Hess and Waller, 2014) readership. This chapter concludes with some solutions to change the destructive path being forged by local newspaper editors and their teams. But with the increasing oligopoly of a select number of newspaper publishing companies in the UK and the quest for an increasingly profitable online offering, it is questionable whether such solutions would ever be considered.

8.1 Digital divides, news-traders and the thirst for profit

The thesis which has emerged throughout the course of this project was outlined by the longitudinal job advertisement analysis and fully emerged during analysis of the newsroom observations and interviews. The survey of local newspaper journalists found significant elements of this thesis could be identified in multiple newsrooms owned by a number of large and medium-sized publishing companies across England, Scotland and Wales; suggesting the situation identified at *The Mitre* and *The Journal* was likely to be representative of multiple titles across the UK.

The thesis identified by this research project will be documented shortly. It will then be unpacked to demonstrate not only how each element of this triangulated study substantiates the thesis, but also how each element answers the following research questions:

- 1. What skills and tools are valued within regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK?**
How are those skills and tools valued?
- 2. How do digital tools impact on news production in terms of:**
 - a. News agendas?
 - b. Production processes?

3. How do digital tools impact on:

- a. The identity of the individual journalist?
- b. The identity of the news product?

4. How do digital tools impact on the jurisdiction of the news product?

- a. The jurisdiction of the individual journalist?
- b. The jurisdiction of the news product?

8.2 The thesis: the spiralling decline of local newspapers

The thesis identified by the research conducted in this project is as follows:

1. Accommodating digital conversion into print- focused newsrooms has caused a split in newsroom structure between print-focused managers, who oversee journalists producing for print and online and digital managers, who oversee journalists producing for online only.
2. Publishing company focus and news production is increasingly trained on news-trader engagement and online profit.
3. This divide, combined with the publishing company priority of making profit online, places the digital journalists focused only on online production in a more highly valued position than the print and digital-focused teams; this further exacerbates the structural divide created by convergence.
4. Within the newsroom there is increasing focus on audience analytics and this results in news-traders driving the online news agenda. Consequently, soft and breaking news stories top the agenda which, in turn, feeds back into the print product as well as dictating the future online agenda.
5. This results in the following:
 - Lack of digital/online ownership in working processes of print-managed specialist reporters. This results in a lack of online interaction or engagement opportunities by specialist news reporters which results in poor news-trader interaction with the content, exacerbating its lack of value in the eyes of the digital team and publishing company.
 - This results in the digital team's dismissal of public-interest geo-social journalism produced by print-managed specialist reporters.

This results in minimal interest or promotion by the digital team, ultimately reducing online interaction or engagement opportunities. This leads to a spiral of increasing dismissal of similar content due to poor news-trader analytics.

- This dismissal of public interest, geo-social content by the digital team and, ultimately, the publishing companies, pushes some specialist reporters into re-designing their roles by also dismissing public interest geo-social journalism and a moving towards news-trader driven content agenda. Other specialists choose instead to dismiss digital production methods and the value of increasing news-trader engagement; both circumstances result in further decline of public interest news production and decreasing promotion of online public interest geo-social content. This ultimately adds to the spiral of decline.

6. Popular online content shared across titles within publishing companies contributes further to the dilution of the individual product identity online and saturates the online offering, further diluting the potential impact of public interest news which has only been minimally exposed on the same channels.

As a result of the above, public interest and geo-social journalism is increasingly losing its importance within the news agendas of local newspaper newsrooms. The content which is put online is lost due to a lack of engagement opportunities being created during or after production. That content is also lost in a flood of soft and breaking news produced in a way which increases news-trader engagement opportunities throughout and after production. The publishing company focus on increasing profit online is driving the decline in public-interest and geo-social news production via digital journalists who are valued more highly than their print-focused colleagues due to their ability to drive online profit.

An increasing oligopoly of the major publishing companies in the UK is only exacerbating the decline as popular content online is shared across the publishing company, regardless of geographic links to the product.

Ultimately, if the spiral continues, the future agenda for local newspapers and their online platforms will cease to be to serve a readership in a geographic locality and will, instead, be solely to continue to build news-trader numbers and engagement opportunities to increase the profitability of the products online. This ultimately results in an increasing decline in access to public interest

journalism and, consequently, public engagement in local democracy, as identified by the Cairncross Review (2019a).

8.3 Breakdown of thesis via findings

The following sections will examine the thesis points raised above using evidence from the findings of this research project.

8.3.1 The digital convergence divide: Accommodating digital conversion into print- focused newsrooms

The assertion that accommodating digital convergence within local newspaper newsrooms in the UK has created a divide between online-only production and print and digital production is evidenced by all three elements of this triangulated research project.

Earlier research suggests the morphosis of print-focused newsrooms to print and digital publishers managing multiple online platforms was a progression of minor shifts and changes which took place over time (Foucault, 1977; Williams and Franklin, 2007; MacGregor, 2014). In the midst of busy newsrooms, an oversight of the bigger picture appeared to be lost. The unpredictability of what might come next and grappling with the unfolding crisis commanded focus (Franklin, 2008; Franklin, 2014; Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2016; Whittington, 2018b), and failed to allow space to step back and observe the potential impacts of creating a digital divide.

Therefore, as digital convergence occurred and the focus on news-trader engagement, analytics and commercial opportunities online increased, the split between former priorities of geo-social (Hess and Waller, 2014) journalism and community service (Singer, 2011; Glover, 1998) and the growing aim to reach and engage with increasing numbers of news-traders (Usher, 2018; Tandoc and Vos, 2016) widened and deepened.

To manage the conflicting priorities, this research suggests new roles with a digital and news-trader growth focus were increasingly created. Digital language within the job advertisement data significantly outweighed traditional journalistic terminology. This was combined with a definite increase in digital-only and digital specialism roles and a marked decrease in print-focused roles and traditional subject specialisms. As noted in the analysis of this part of the study: “hierarchical structures represented by the various job role codes suggests the

internal newsroom network is not significantly changed, but instead has spread out to accommodate digitally-focused positions”, reflecting other research findings (García-Avilés et al., 2014; Anderson, 2013a).

This evidence of a split in priorities, focus and internal newsroom structures was demonstrated in greater clarity by the fieldwork findings and confirmed by the survey.

Newsroom structures at *The Mitre* and *The Journal* were both divided, with digital-only production teams managed by digitally focused managers, all of whom had been appointed specifically to fulfil a digital-only role from an external position. These managers had a strong focus on news-trader engagement and analytics and, as a result, demonstrated an expectation of their direct reports to produce news using multimedia methods and with production speed, engagement and analytics at the forefront of their agenda.

In both newsrooms, the traditional subject-specialist reporters were managed by managers whose job roles were focused on producing the printed product. These managers had been at the titles for considerable time and had seen their roles change due to digital convergence. While the specialist journalists were expected to produce content for an online audience, their direct line-management focus was on the print production and there was less evidence of expectation of digital production methods.

This divide was confirmed as existing in newsrooms across the UK by the survey; which evidenced digital-only departments, management lines and specialisms – particularly within newsrooms operated by the three main news publishers; Johnston Press, Newsquest and Trinity Mirror.

This evidence answers the following research questions:

1. What skills and tools are valued within regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK?

There is a clear and increasing value in digital tools and skills, which overshadows the underlying expectation of traditional journalistic skills and ability to use traditional tools. While the job advertisements demonstrate variance in the skills and tools required within regional newspaper journalism, there was a significantly strong and increasing presence of digital requirement, particularly video, social media and use

of a number of digital platforms – indicting multiple channels of communication. Traditional skills and tools were evidenced as being relevant and important, but the inclusion of these elements was significantly lower and in gradual decline. This sense of traditional skills and tools being a backbone of news production and journalistic identity but overshadowed by the rise of digital production was mirrored by the split in the newsrooms – where traditional skills and tools were expected but new digital methods were highly prized. The survey confirmed this outcome, with indications of increasing importance of digital skills but evidence of some traditional skills and tools remaining relevant and highly valued, either for their usefulness or for their role in shaping journalistic identity and ideology (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017; Mellado et al., 2017; Grubenmann and Meckel, 2017).

2. How do digital tools impact news production processes and news agendas?

The stealthy change from print production to digitally converged newsrooms was prompted by undeniable evidence of a content-hungry digital “audience” (Rosen, 2006). The rift created by digital convergence was a direct result of the publishing companies’ response to online demand. In these converged newsrooms, the news agenda is resultingly split, with news-traders and their analytics setting the expectation in terms of pace (Sheller, 2015a) and type of content being produced online (Welbers et al., 2016; Usher, 2018). The hierarchical divides created by the requirement to incorporate digital production into a legacy print newsroom (García-Avilés et al., 2014) is a key element of the reason behind the declining spiral of public interest journalism identified in the newsrooms of *The Mitre* and *The Journal*. Therefore, the digital divide evidenced throughout this study pushes the news-trader agenda not only into a position of secondary gatekeeper, as identified by Singer (2014), but it dissolves the once solid walls of the internal newsroom network and creates a “blurred boundary” (Schudson and Anderson, 2009, pp98; Anderson, 2013a), putting the news-trader into a position of powerful decision-maker (Vos et al., 2019; Usher, 2018). As a result, the increasing surge in digital focus of the newspaper publishing companies has reshaped the production process to favour and focus on online publishing, with content produced for online being used to either fill or shape the printed product.

3. **How do digital tools impact on journalistic and product identity?**

The digital divide in newsrooms has resulted in a dual-identity product being produced. As uncovered by the newsroom research, the digital teams commanded an online agenda dictated by news-traders via analytics and comments with the focus and intention to capitalise on popular online content; the resulting output is less focused on geo-social and public interest news and is more firmly trained on audience growth and revenue (Usher, 2018; Welbers et al., 2016). This digital-led agenda runs alongside digital and print output with a more subject-specialist geo-social focus, produced by specialist reporters or overseen by print-focused managers. The digital handling of the content produced by the two teams was varied (production variances will be discussed shortly), resulting in content produced by the digital teams having more opportunity for engagement and interaction than that produced by print-managed journalists. This results en-masse in an overall online product identity increasingly moving away from geo-social, public interest news and towards popular, soft and breaking news content. The printed product was also found in the newsroom study to be influenced by popular online content produced by the digital-team (Lee et al., 2014); therefore, there is evidence that the divide within newsroom structures was also changing the identity of the printed product.

Individual journalistic identities were also altered by the digital divide. While specialist journalists managed by print-focused managers, were tethered by the printed product and produced news tailored for both print and online, digital positions were evidently designed to focus on driving online audience and using multimedia production methods to produce engaging content. There was evidence within newsrooms of digital management roles being elevated in importance above those in print-focused equivalents and of subject specialist journalists redesigning their roles to become more important within their internal newsroom networks (Hermida and Young, 2017). This will be discussed further shortly.

Despite this, there was evidence throughout the study of traditional values providing a foundation for journalistic production. Some defining skills, such as shorthand, were evidenced to be in decline due to the digital divide. However, there was also evidence of research regarding such skills as valuable to themselves even if they were decreasing in value to the wider industry. This is evidence of journalists using elite professional skills to define their journalistic identity and role and to signal professional authority and distance (Vos et al., 2019) over

untrained actants within their internal and external networks.

4. How do digital tools impact on product and journalistic jurisdiction?

With the digital divide within newsrooms existing due to increasing publishing company demand for higher online engagement and resulting revenue, in the simplest terms, digital jurisdiction of local newspapers was evidenced to be growing (Hess, 2013). Newly created digital job roles were increasingly noted within the job advertisement collection, this was also evidenced by the newsroom research and the survey. This extending reach prompted by digital growth was also found to offer journalists online the opportunity to forge new networks and communities and expand their own individual professional reach (Molyneux et al., 2018). Conversely, the printed products were declining in circulation and, resultingly, in audience reach.

However, while reach is one element of jurisdiction, there must be meaningfulness within that reach for there to be a jurisdictional impact. This will be discussed in further depth later in this chapter.

8.3.2 Publishing company focus and news production is increasingly trained on news-trader engagement and online profit.

The digital divide within internal newsroom networks and their wider publishing companies occurred due to the increasing focus on growing news-trader analytics and online revenue, which is evidenced throughout this research project.

The job advertisement data evidences digital growth as a significantly increasing. Within that, there is indication of news-trader engagement being a priority, particularly with the growth of words such as 'social'; a direct indicator of social media being used to connect with news-traders, and 'platform'; an indication of multiple online sites and tools being used to connect to news-traders.

But when analysing the job advertisement data alongside the newsroom findings, it is possible to further interrogate the outcomes within the dual contexts. Therefore, the keyword 'video' vastly increasing each year of the study could be interpreted as a means to increase audience engagement and

online revenue – as both newsrooms used the tool for these specific purposes. The rise in the word ‘breaking’ also indicates a focus on dramatic and sudden news being produced quickly to reach and engage an online audience.

While the job advertisements give a subtle overview of the increasing focus on news-trader engagement and online revenue, the newsroom results are inseparable from this aim and agenda. As demonstrated within analysis of the newsroom research, news-traders set the agendas during news conference and this was reinforced by use of audience analytics to define and capitalise on successful online content (Harcup and O’Neill, 2017; Usher, 2018). Content deemed a success was replicated and repeated and that which performed less well online was dismissed. This influence also translated into the printed product, where stories were discussed and given priority in line with news-traders’ response to the online content.

News agendas were also shaped by commercial opportunities, with *The Journal* marketing its own platforms to organisations wanting the title to publish their PR and *The Mitre*’s policy to produce video alongside all major online content due to pre-roll advertising revenue (which was dependent on news-trader numbers), regardless of its subject or the journalistic quality of the video.

Not only was product performance measured by online viewing figures, but the same measure was applied to individual news stories; with the journalists within both newsroom networks being sent analytic performance updates via email on a daily basis. This was reinforced further at *The Journal*, where a big screen in the newsroom documented the best performing stories of the moment using live analytic tracking software (Tandoc and Thomas, 2015).

The results of the survey suggested the newsroom findings were indicative of the wider picture within internal newsroom networks across the UK. There was evidence within the survey to suggest analytics and social media were not only widely used to set news agendas, connect with news-traders and measure role performance success, but also that the importance of analytics and social media was deemed to be increasing (Tandoc and Vos, 2016).

There was also a suggestion of video driving revenue and, in a lesser measure, of commercial opportunities influencing editorial decision-making.

Altogether, these findings answer the following research questions:

- 1. What skills and tools are valued within regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK?**

There was a clear indication throughout the research findings of the

increasing importance of social media, video and news-trader engagement within local newspaper newsrooms in the UK. The newsroom and survey findings robustly demonstrated the importance of audience analytics and how analytic software was being used to not only measure product success (Welbers et al., 2016; Usher, 2018), but was also being used as a measure of individual performance (Usher, 2018). There was also evidence of editorial decision-making being influenced by commercial opportunities (Tandoc and Vos, 2016), which were being extended by the production of online video and news-trader engagement with online content.

2. How do digital tools impact news production processes and news agendas?

The focus on audience analytics and online revenue, demonstrated within internal newsroom networks and being driven by newspaper production companies, was demonstrated to be driving the online news agenda within newsrooms (and, in turn, the agenda of the printed products). As a result, the online production processes within newsrooms were being focused to maximise the potential of news-trader reach and engagement and increase revenue opportunities. This was demonstrated particularly by the surging increase in digital focus of the job advertisements and the constantly reinforced importance of audience analytics within the newsroom study, which was also echoed by the survey.

3. How do digital tools impact on journalistic and product identity?

The overriding influence of news-traders on the news agenda of newspaper titles has clearly had an impact on the type of content being produced by journalists within the internal newsroom networks. Resultingly, the news values of titles are being dictated by news-traders rather than by journalists, changing not only the identity of the product being made, but also the professional role identities of the journalists producing it (Mellado et al., 2017; Usher, 2018; Vos, 2016). This will be analysed in further detail shortly.

4. How do digital tools impact on product and journalistic jurisdiction?

The drive to increase audience analytics goes hand-in-hand with the drive to further the reach of the online news products and, resultingly, the

journalists who produce the content also extend their reach (Vos et al., 2019). However, as discussed, reach is only one element of jurisdiction – with resonance and meaningfulness also being important elements of jurisdictional authority (Hess, 2013). This will be analysed momentarily when news values are examined in further detail.

8.3.3 The newsroom divide and increasing focus on online revenue has placed online journalists and digital specialists into a more highly valued position than the print and digital-focused teams, further exacerbating the structural divide

The digital divide, caused by a push to increase analytic and online revenue targets, has resulted in the promotion of the digital managers and their teams to a more elevated level of importance within internal newsroom networks and publishing companies.

While there was evidence within the job adverts of traditional skills and tools requirements, these were in slow decline and were significantly overshadowed in scale by the soaring escalation of digital requirements.

There was also a decline in traditional subject specialisms and an increase in digital specialisms and digital management positions demonstrated by the job advertisement content analysis, suggesting increasing focus and priority of these areas within newspaper publishing companies.

As suggested within the job advertisement chapter, recruitment for these roles placed the value of human actors at the same level as the digital actants required to produce content online (Lewis and Westlund, 2016). Without the technology, these positions would not exist and without the journalists employed to work the technology there would be an impossibility of producing content online (Marx, 1973, reprinted from original text c.1844). Both the human and technological actants involved in the news production process are therefore vital to the publishing companies' digital growth agendas, making those actants more highly valued in achieving those agendas than other actants within the news-making process (Wu et al., 2019).

Within the internal newsroom networks observed there was evidence of the high value placed on digital news production, digital innovation and online success, as measured by analytics and revenue (Tandoc and Vos, 2016). The regular messaging about digital importance from the production companies to the

managers and the relaying and reinforcement of digital focus by digital managers pushed digital focus higher up the production agenda. Online success was recognised and celebrated by sharing of analytics and amplification of high-performing online content.

This elevation of digital production contrasted with a marginalisation of print within both newsrooms and, resultingly, a degradation in the stature of print-focused managers and their direct teams. While efforts were made at *The Journal* to maintain importance in print, the messages being outlined in the daily news conference were being watered-down in translation to the news-teams then drowned out by the strength of focus on the online agenda in the newsroom. At *The Mitre*, print figures were not discussed in conference and the messages being pushed out to the newsroom were focused solely around digital. This, combined with a lack of communication by managers about what story was running on the front page, a removal of front page journalistic byline and an absence of printed copies of the newspaper in the newsroom, entirely pushed print off the production agenda and traduced its value in the eyes of the journalists within the internal newsroom network.

The result of this within both newsrooms was a starkly divided scene. While recently established digital managers and their teams received accolade for growing the online audience and revenue with popular news-trader-led agendas, the print-focused managers and their teams produced traditional public service, public interest geo-focused journalism, without recognition or reward from their publishing companies and with a heavy decline in sales and circulation figures dogging their tracks.

To even further deepen the divide, long-standing team members were found to be performing in print and digital roles while new recruits were brought into newly created digital management roles – the majority of the new digital managers were younger than their print counterparts and were evidenced to be climbing the hierarchical ranks more quickly. Their value was partly attributed to age and digital experience and, as found in other studies, the longer-standing, more experienced print-focused managers expressed concerns about vulnerability in their roles due to worries about lack of digital confidence and expertise and their lack of digital value to their employers (Nikunen, 2014).

The survey was suggestive that the elevation of digital journalists was likely to exist more widely across the UK. The increasing importance of digital skills and tools such as understanding analytics and social media, coupled with the evidence of analytics being used to increase revenue via increased audience

engagement, reinforced the strong and rising value of those actants involved in that process.

The evidence outlined here, answers the following research questions:

1. What skills and tools are valued within regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK?

The value of digital actants and the digital journalists required to use them is clearly higher than those in more traditional functions. There is acknowledged value throughout the research findings of the foundational values of traditional tools and there is also evidence of an expectation of journalists to have those foundation skills as part of their portfolio. However, in terms of achieving successes and professional and product development, there is a clear enduring and increasing focus on digital skills and abilities.

2. How do digital tools impact news production processes and news agendas?

This increasing focus on digital production is connected to the expansion of digital opportunities within newsrooms with an increasing focus on online production. This indicates a developing structural arm to internal newsroom networks, with growing digital teams and increasing focus on variations within digital production. The newsroom research in particular demonstrated a switch in focus from print-led production processes to a digitally led production process which then fed into the printed product. There was evidence of organic growth of this part of the internal newsroom networks, with new positions being created to answer demand and trends.

There was evidence throughout to suggest this increasing focus on developing the digital offering was due to requirement to capitalise on online revenue opportunities by increasing the news-trader numbers (Usher, 2018). This resulted in the online news agenda being directed by news-traders (Anderson, 2011b) who, in turn, became human actants within the news production process via the digital actants with which they connect (Singer, 2014). As a result, news-trader response was shaping news agendas to replicate popular online content and to reduce focus on content which performed less well online (Tandoc and Vos, 2016; Tandoc and Thomas, 2015).

3. **How do digital tools impact on journalistic and product identity?**

Traditional journalistic role identities were being devalued by the rise of digital value. Traditional skills and tools, while valued, were no longer the measure of success and openers to new opportunities and career development (Nikunen, 2014). In the newsrooms, this resulted in some print-focused journalists negotiating and adapting their roles and skills to reach for higher value within their networks (Usher, 2018; Molyneux et al., 2018; Grubenmann and Meckel, 2017; Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017). In other cases, some print-focused journalists shunned digital development of their role in a bid to retain their original journalistic role identity (Grubenmann and Meckel, 2017).

The increasingly news-trader-led news agenda was also changing product identity, with content dictated by online success trumping other journalistic content. This was also pushed into the printed product.

4. **How do digital tools impact on product and journalistic jurisdiction?**

There was evidence the impact of increased value of digital practitioners was widening the reach of the product online (Anderson, 2011b; Anderson, 2013a), with new methods of communication and increased publishing platforms. These increasing online outputs and publishing opportunities meant the news-trader driven agenda would be reaching wider audiences (Singer, 2014). The potential reach of the digital journalists producing the content was also reaching further as a result of their cultivated branding online (Molyneux et al., 2018) and multimedia methods of increasing news-trader figures.

8.3.4 Within the newsroom there is increasing focus on audience analytics, resultingly with news-traders changing the online news agenda.

The news-trader and online revenue-led agendas discussed above resulted in a dismissal of geo-social public interest news by newspaper publishing companies (Cairncross, 2019a) and an increasing focus on soft news content and breaking news stories, due to online popularity of this type of content (Usher, 2018; Harcup and O'Neill, 2017; Usher, 2016).

This was suggested by the job advertisement study, where 'breaking' and 'blog' were evidenced to be an increasing digital keywords and where digital specialisms were also growing in number; with this suggesting increasing focus on digital production and audience engagement.

In the newsroom research, there was strong evidence of news-traders taking a decision-making role in setting the news agenda, with analytics governing how online news was treated due to company targets pushing for high audience engagement figures (Usher, 2018). This resulted in clickable content being at the top of the digital agenda, with dramatic or soft news, entertainment and breaking news stories identified by the digital managers as the type of content likely to do well online (Harcup and O'Neill, 2017). Content trending elsewhere; either on social media or performing well on a sister or rival site, was also picked up and pushed out, often without any consideration about the geographic resonance of the content in terms of the product's news patch. This resulted in a significant amount of online content being published which had little geographic connection to the title's circulation area.

There was an evident disinterest by the digital teams in stories produced by subject specialist reporters, unless the content fitted the clickable content brief (Justel-Vázquez et al., 2016). This resulted in a lack of digital team engagement with this type of content.

However, any content which did well with the online audience was identified for repurposing, repackaging and republishing, or 'amplification' by the digital journalists (Vasterman, 2005). This escalation of successful stories also included the republishing of similar content which had been produced in the past, creating a flood of similar content on the online publishing platforms run by the titles.

The survey strongly suggested this kind of news agenda drive by news-traders was occurring in multiple publishing companies across the UK, with participants acknowledging analytics and social media were used for determining and setting the news agenda (Tandoc and Thomas, 2015; Justel-Vázquez et al., 2016). There was also some evidence within the survey to suggest news-trader clicks on video and online content was a revenue driver for the publishing companies.

These findings answer the following research questions:

- 1. What skills and tools are valued within regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK?**

Clearly the push to meet analytic and online revenue targets set by the

publishing company results in the requirement for journalists to be able to identify and produce content which performs well online. The shaping of the news agenda by news-traders means the use of technology to connect with news-traders and to identify and promote potentially successful online content is an increasingly important journalistic skill.

2. How do digital tools impact news production processes and news agendas?

The news agendas within internal newsroom networks of local newspapers within the UK are largely and increasingly dictated by news-traders. This has ultimately pushed the news agenda away from the historic focus on news which is geographically-resonant and much of which has a public interest or community service value (Pilling, 1998). Instead, the increasing focus of online content, as dictated by news-traders, is focused on shocking or entertaining stories – as found in similar studies and experiments (Daulerio, 2012; Currah, 2009a) and breaking news, as determined by Usher (2018).

This has resulted in increasing focus on capitalising on the news-trader agenda within the production process; with increasing digital specialised job creation and, within the newsrooms studied, a digitally-led news conference influencing decisions for the printed product. With digital managers leading teams to capitalise on news-trader interest, the production process incorporates specific individual responsibilities for sourcing potentially popular online content and for covering stories in a multitude of ways during their development in order to grow news-trader interest and maximise opportunities for engagement.

3. How do digital tools impact on journalistic and product identity?

As a result of the news agenda setting by news-traders, the online identity of the product has changed. The digital offering, while still including geographically relevant content and public interest news, has been diluted by content without a geo-social connection (Hess and Waller, 2014), stories and content trending online and popular content shared across the news group. The online multimedia maximisation of content being produced by the digital team pushes content popular with news-traders to the forefront of the publishing process, meaning it dominates the online agenda. The influence of popular content on the printed product has an impact on its identity, with evidence of news-traders dictating decisions made about story placement and resources.

The creation of new digital job roles to meet news-trader demand challenges the traditional normative professional journalistic identity (Vos et al., 2019) and widens the professional role descriptors to incorporate news aggregators (Anderson, 2013b), marketer (Tandoc and Vos, 2016) and curator (Bakker, 2014). The influence of news-traders is also felt within the print managed teams, with journalists reshaping their professional identities to elevate their positioning within the internal newsroom network (Grubenmann and Meckel, 2017) or shunning the reformed journalistic identity and limiting their professional value as a result (Grubenmann and Meckel, 2017). This will be discussed in more detail in the following findings section.

4. **How do digital tools impact on product and journalistic jurisdiction?**

This capitalisation on content popular with news-traders was evidenced to be widening the spread of the news products online, with growing audience analytics and social media followers. However, the jurisdictional impact of the products was losing resonance (Galtung and Ruge, 1965) in terms of offering a local news product. The changing product identity, from geographically connected provider of public interest information and servant of the geographically connected community (Hess and Waller, 2014), to provider of popular online content had widened the product scope and devalued its unique selling point (USP). This resulted in a widening but weakening jurisdictional network, where product reach was increasing but the meaningfulness and resonance of the content with news-traders was decreasing.

8.3.5 Identifying the spiral of decline in local news.

The findings identified above, ultimately were found to culminate in a spiralling decline in local news values, identities and jurisdiction (see **Figure 61**, below, and **Figure 62**, pg277).

This spiral was exacerbated by a lack of digital ownership in the working processes of print-managed specialist reporters (Grubenmann and Meckel, 2017), which prompted digital team dismissal of the content produced by the print-managed teams, both of which resulted in limited opportunities for news-trader engagement with the content and a decline in audience figures for specialist news stories. This prompted dismissal of company-wide digital

objectives or role-redesign by the specialist reporters (Vos and Thomas, 2019), which ultimately contributed further to the spiral of decline. These linked outcomes will be discussed in more detail below.

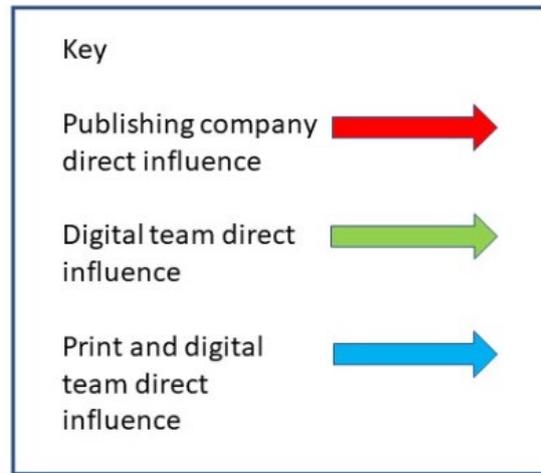


Figure 61. Key to Figure 62.

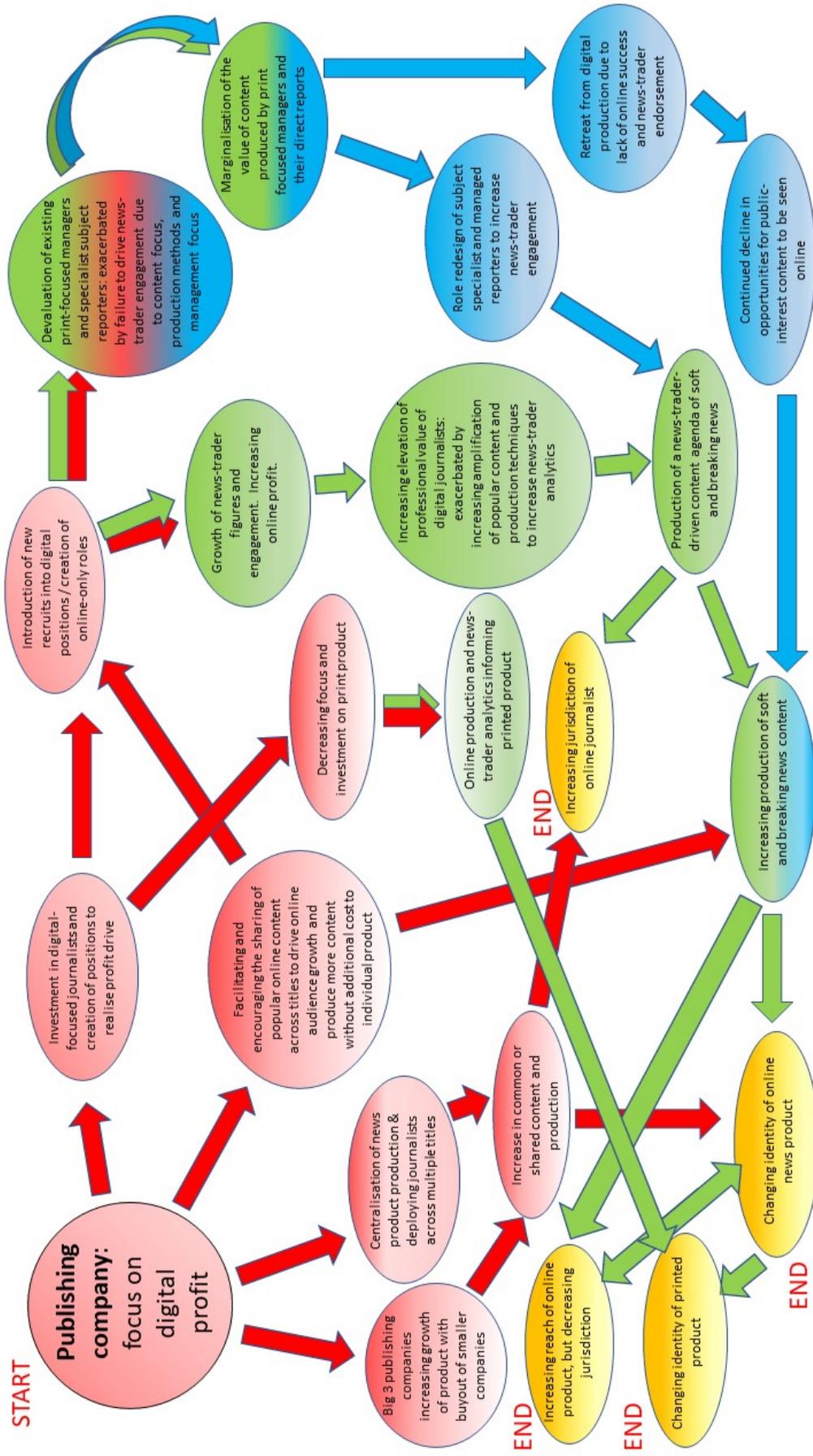


Figure 62. The spiral of declining identity and jurisdiction within regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK.

8.3.5.1 Digital distancing by subject specialists.

While difficult to identify within the job advertisement and survey findings, the neglect of digital production techniques and reluctance to take responsibility for using digital methods to maximise news-trader engagement opportunities was strongly evidenced by the newsroom research findings (Grubenmann and Meckel, 2017).

Interviews, observations and story mapping demonstrated a lack of multimedia digital production focus within the teams managed by print-focused news editors. This resulted in decreased opportunities for news-trader engagement with news stories as they developed, with online promotion often only happening at the point of publication.

The print-focus of the managers of the teams producing the subject specialist news resulted in a lack of direct accountability for digital production methods, meaning missed opportunities were not being addressed.

The digital distancing witnessed within the newsroom research appeared to be a combination of deliberate dismissal of online production opportunities and unconscious dismissal. The reluctance to maximise the opportunities of digital production occurred due to a lack of practical knowledge and understanding; resulting in ignorance of the techniques or lack of confidence in having a go. There was no sustained or substantial effort from digital managers to maintain expectation and support delivery of online opportunities and the print focused managers did not take responsibility for their direct reports' lack of digital publishing.

This meant there were fewer opportunities for news-trader engagement with the public interest news being produced by the subject specialists and the resulting analytics were low in comparison to content being produced by the digital teams.

Ultimately, this exacerbated the lack of digital value in content produced by the subject specialists in the eyes of the digital team and publishing company, resulting in decreasing attention being paid to similar content by digital journalists. The outcome of this was a spiral of cumulative dismissal of subject specialist public interest content due to poor news-trader analytics.

8.3.5.2 Role re-design

This dismissal of public interest, geo-social content by the digital team and, ultimately, the publishing companies, was evidenced by the newsroom research to have prompted some print-managed specialist reporters into re-designing their professional roles (Vos and Thomas, 2019; Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017). This included evidence of subject specialists officially moving over to digital roles or tailoring their own journalistic methods to focus on producing news-trader driven content (Vos and Thomas, 2019; Grubenmann and Meckel, 2017). While it is, again, more difficult to evidence this within the job advertisement findings or the survey results, there was some indication of workforce movement. Within the advertisement research findings there were an increasing number of digital positions advertised and it is likely some of these posts will have been filled by external applicants previously holding print-managed journalistic positions elsewhere (as was evidenced to have happened at both *The Mitre* and *The Journal*). There was also evidence in the survey of new job opportunities and shifting structures. The overall evidence suggests new roles had significant digital focus, and there is justified reason to believe internal newsroom opportunities would follow the pattern of increasing digital importance.

In contrast to the role redesign undertaken by some subject specialist journalists, others in the same role were dismissive of both digital production methods and the value of courting news-trader engagement via digital production methods. This dismissal appeared to go unchallenged by managers within the participating internal newsroom networks.

In both circumstances, the ultimate result was a further decline of public interest news production and decreasing digital engagement opportunities of online public interest geo-social content. This ultimately added to the spiral of decline in publication of public interest and geographically resonant news.

These findings answer the following research questions:

1. **What skills and tools are valued within regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK?**

The increasing value of digital skills and tools within internal newsroom networks, as promoted by the publishing companies and digital managers, and the resulting marginalisation of the print-managed subject specialists pushed some specialists to adapt their roles to meet the company's expectations. This resulted in further marginalisation of the

subject specialists retaining their role, who went on to shun multimedia production methods. This appeared to result in them isolating themselves from the company's development focus, which devalued their contribution and standing within the internal newsroom networks.

2. How do digital tools impact news production processes and news agendas?

The dismissal of traditional subject specialist reporting and the role adjustment to produce more content with a news-trader-driven agenda (Usher, 2018) meant the overall focus within the internal newsroom networks was further tailored towards audience analytics and engagement (Usher, 2018; Usher, 2016; Justel-Vázquez et al., 2016). This role adaption by some specialists and digital dismissal by others further divided the internal newsroom structure. It also contributed to the increasing spiral of decreasing engagement opportunities for public interest and public interest news by pushing increasing amounts of news-trader-driven content into the process and even further minimising the opportunities for public-interest content to be seen online by news-traders due to the decreasing number of actants producing such content and the minimalization of digital production techniques for such content, meaning engagement opportunities decreased.

3. How do digital tools impact on journalistic and product identity?

The result of this role adaption meant there was strengthening of a new journalistic identity within local newspaper newsrooms in the UK (Vos, 2016). This emerging identity was less defined by perceived journalistic autonomy over editorial choices (Deuze, 2005) and increasingly governed by analytics (Usher, 2018). There was also evidence of journalists using their move from subject specialists to digital journalists to develop their own online identities (Grubenmann and Meckel, 2017). The change in habitus and its impact on the disposition of the internal newsroom network (Bourdieu, 1993, reprinted from 1983; Bourdieu, 2012; Vos, 2016) contributed further to the changing identity of newspapers both online and in print. The flood of popular online content and the reducing amounts of subject-specialist journalism, combined with the online production and promotional methods exacerbating news-trader interaction with the former and further limiting it for the latter, meant the online product was increasingly tailored by news-traders. This content flood also changed the amounts of specialist content available for use in

the newspaper and increased the amount of popular news-trader-led and easy-turn-around PR content (Lewis et al., 2008; O'Neill and O'Connor, 2008) used within the printed product; changing the outward identity of the printed product as a result.

4. How do digital tools impact on product and journalistic jurisdiction?

The turn towards increasing news-trader-led agendas not only contributed to the widening reach of the online product as its online following continued to grow, but it also contributed to widening individual journalistic reach (Anderson, 2011b). However, while the product relevance in terms of geographic focus and meaningfulness was thinned by its attempts to grow its online audience analytics, the results demonstrated a different picture for digital journalists. By developing an online persona and identity, journalists were seen within the newsrooms to cultivate their own jurisdictional networks away from the product. This personal branding approach on social media (Molyneux et al., 2018) saw further maximisation of interaction with news-traders and development of conversation and rapport with increasingly widening networks. This development of personal jurisdictional networks resulted in those journalists working to strengthen their online 'brands', resulting in further deepening neglect of content deemed to be less popular with their news-trader networks. As a result, the strengthening journalistic jurisdiction within the internal newsroom networks contributed directly to the dilution of the traditional geo-social public interest focus of the product and, as a result, contributed to the widening reach of the online products but the weakening of their USP and the resulting brittleness of the product jurisdiction.

8.3.6 Shared content contributing to homogenous production

Findings from across the job advertisements, newsroom research and the survey indicated increased multi-title working for individual journalists (Usher, 2015).

The job advertisements and the survey both demonstrated a significant proportion of multi-title positions. The survey also suggested more than 10% of participants had been exposed to product mergers in the past 12 months.

The outcomes of working across-titles was demonstrated in depth by the newsroom research, which showed journalists were producing single items of content for multiple newspaper titles. The journalists behind shared content were often named by all publications using the work. However, if content was shared after publication in an original product, that publishing source was not acknowledged in any reproduced versions online or in print.

There was also evidence of high-performing online content being shared to sister titles in the wake of online success.

This blanket use of successful online content further exacerbated the spiral of declining coverage of geographically relevant news and, resultingly, even further dampened the original purpose of the individual newspaper titles.

This outcome answers the following research questions:

2. How do digital tools impact news production processes and news agendas?

Production was being widened across newsrooms, with shared actants producing multiple products, ultimately reducing the publishing companies' investment in individual products and maximising the potential production of individual actants within the networks. This resulted in an ever widening-news agenda, with news-traders connected to one specific product ultimately dictating news agendas for another news title. This resulted in the widening of the internal newsroom network, not only to include news-traders connected directly to the named product, but also those influencing a sister title.

3. How do digital tools impact on journalistic and product identity?

The result of the shared workforce and content was further dilution of the USP of the individual product online and in print, with homogenous content being produced for inclusion across multiple titles.

4. How do digital tools impact on product and journalistic jurisdiction?

While the sharing of product across the publishing companies offered individual journalists the chance to increase their jurisdiction and develop their online networks (Molyneux et al., 2018), the titles themselves were not given the same opportunity. Instead, no recognition was given for the source publisher and the value of the content was decreased in relation to the individual titles by the multiple-share of potentially popular online

content. As a result, both the reach and the impact of the individual titles were stifled by content sharing, ending with decreasing jurisdiction of the individual products.

8.4 Actor-network Theory, Political Economy and negotiating a new professional habitus

Actor-network Theory has been a useful tool to navigate the places, spaces and actants involved in this research project.

Throughout the study, there has been demonstration of the balance of value and purpose between human actors and the digital actants used to produce content.

Within the job advertisement findings, the production companies' drive to recruit trainee reporters and digital natives over those with significant journalistic experience demonstrates the trained experience of the human actor is not as significant as the value of their digital potential. Within the internal newsroom network, human actants being recruited are being placed on the same value scale as digital actors; with technology and digital tools increasingly being the reason for recruitment – acting as an extension of the human actor being sought to operate them (Wu et al., 2019; Lewis and Westlund, 2016).

While within the internal newsroom networks of *The Mitre* and *The Journal* the human actors had a clear disregard for digital actant value in comparison to their human counterparts, there was evidence of an interdependence between the human and the digital (Rodgers, 2015; Lewis and Westlund, 2016). Digital actants were particularly relied upon to determine the news agenda via social interaction and news-trader analytics. Digital tools were also used to make autonomous choice in terms of publishing and analytics. While human actants were in denial about their digital counterparts' value within the news production process, the outcomes desired by the publishing company would be impossible without an interaction between the human and digital within the internal and widening newsroom networks.

These findings were corroborated by the vitality of digital tools as indicated in the survey. Not only did participants indicate digital tools and skills importance trumped some human-applied skills, but again there was demonstration of news-trader involvement in setting and measuring the success of the news agenda via analytics and social media. Therefore, despite denials of digital

significance documented by the qualitative feedback, the equality of digital actants in terms of role and production potential as supported by the survey.

Political Economy has also proved a useful frame to interpret and understand the findings of the research. Profit, revenue and resource have been exemplified throughout the study as reasoning for the majority of major decisions and outcomes within the findings.

News-traders are not only a commodity (Garnham, 2012, reproduced from first publication in 1986) within the mechanics of production, but they are also labourers within the internal newsroom network (Smythe, 2009, reprinted from the original text of 1989). Therefore, news-traders are the actors behind decisions to maximise or marginalise types of content, the reason for the evident increase in the importance of video (widening news-trader engagement and pre-roll advertising revenue) and the driving force behind the digital divide within news production.

Merging news products and shared resource can again be explained by the companies' push for cost-saving against revenue. The results are, as predicted (Marx, 1973, reprinted from original text c.1844), a dilution and a devaluing of the product and a saturation in market leading to closure of smaller, outfits and a further increasing takeover by the larger production companies.

The professional role perception of the actors within the internal newsroom network is evidenced to be shifting. While some subject specialists are negotiating news-trader-led roles for themselves based on a desire to be valued within their internal and external newsroom networks, others are consciously isolating themselves by clinging to print-focused ideologies (Grubenmann and Meckel, 2017). These negotiated roles, combined with the emergence of a new professional role identity shaped by news-trader demand, demonstrate a changing professional habitus within the field of local newspaper journalism in the UK (Bourdieu, 1993, reprinted from 1983; Jenkins, 2002; Bourdieu, 2012).

8.5 Research outcomes: We are not local

As discussed in Chapter 3, the triangulated explanatory sequential design (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Cresswell, 2014) of this research was designed to robustly examine how digital tools impacted news production, identity and jurisdiction within local newspaper newsrooms in the UK.

With the researcher's professional background in local newspaper journalism, it was important to design the approach to minimise past experience adversely influencing the research and its outcomes. Therefore, the research design relied on a backbone of quantitative findings which could be used as a foundation for qualitative investigation before the survey was implemented as a check point for the wider picture (see **Figure 2**, pg74). Therefore, it is with confidence supported by this robust design, that it can be stated the findings from this research have answered the research questions and the thesis title.

This research has identified a clear, forceful and increasing rise in the importance and value of digital skills and tools within regional newspaper journalism in the UK. It has also identified traditional journalistic skills and tools to be of foundational importance, but with gradually decreasing value over time.

There is a clear identification of divides between digital and print production within newsrooms, caused by an organic incorporation of digital convergence (García-Avilés et al., 2014). The growing focus on digital value and the divides within newsrooms has created conflicted internal newsroom structures. This, combined with the publishing company push for increasing online revenue via audience engagement and pre-roll advertising, has elevated the positioning of digitally-focused journalists over the traditional print-managed teams.

The outcome is a deliberate growth in production of popular breaking and soft digital content (Usher, 2018; Usher, 2016) and dismissal geo-social (Hess and Waller, 2014) public interest content deemed unpopular online (Justel-Vázquez et al., 2016). The structural divide has resulted in digital managers pushing their teams to make digital content as engaging and interactive as possible to maximise engagement opportunity and print managers not challenging a lack of digital content production by their direct teams. Therefore, soft and breaking news content produced by digital journalists performs online to its best capability while geographic, public interest content produced by the print-managed digital specialists does not achieve its best online performance potential.

The result is replication of best performing content and dismissal of poor performing content and increasing company value of journalists producing successful content and marginalisation of those not performing well online. A reinforced spiral of increasing general soft and breaking news and decreasing public interest geo-focused news has emerged (see **Figure 62**, pg277).

The spiral is magnified by role adaption by some subject specialist reporters seeking validation from their employers – while others push the public interest

production even further off the agenda by dismissing digital production and minimising online engagement opportunities as a result.

Shared content across titles further changes the identity of individual product, a situation which can only be exacerbated by the growing oligopoly of the larger publishing companies (Mediatique, 2018).

The results of this study compellingly demonstrate a marginalisation of public interest reporting and a resulting decline in geo-social news values within both local newspaper newsrooms and these findings are an important element of the picture of how local newspaper journalism has reached the state cited by Cairncross (2019a).

With news-traders clearly in the driving seat of setting the news agendas online and the spiralling impact of the divide between digital and print focus within the newsrooms, the product identities of both newspapers were significantly weakening. This, combined with the publishing companies' drive to increase profit online, saw a distinct disarmament of editorial control within the internal newsroom networks.

While the potential to grow the online audience was mounting, the meaningfulness and resulting value of the products are decreasing. If following prediction of the capitalist model (Marx, 1973, reprinted from original text c.1844), this would eventually result in saturation of market and a decline in customer demand, ultimately resulting in loss of revenue alongside the fall in product value.

If the cycle represented here is universal within the oligopoly of publishing companies in the UK, individual local newspaper journalism online will soon no longer be clearly distinguishable from that produced by its sister titles. While individual journalists have the opportunity to strengthen their professional roles and have an increasing jurisdiction and impact, this is only open to those who are digitally minded and has been demonstrated to contribute to the decline of product value. By capitalising on their own individual potential, successful online local newspaper journalists may well be leading the product by the hand as it sleepwalks down a pathway of irreversibly changed identity.

8.6 Why this matters now: the landscape of local news in a post-Cairncross era

There are limitations in this study which must be acknowledged; the situation described is a snapshot in time from 2017 and much has changed since then. However, this documentation of exactly how public interest and geo-social news production has declined, a symptom identified by The Cairncross Review (2019a), is significant. Not only does it demonstrate the failings within the production process, but it also helps to identify a solution; by encouraging more news-trader interaction and digital journalistic involvement with public interest, geo-social content within individual newsrooms.

The evidence suggests parity of expectation from digital and print-focused production methods and a top-down reinforcement of the value of specialist and investigative journalism would help to elevate the importance of journalists being marginalised by digital managers. This, combined with increased points of multimedia production throughout the development of a story, would offer more opportunity for news-trader interaction, which would drive audience analytics and elevate the resulting importance of such content. With this approach there would be opportunity to reverse the spiral of decline identified by this research.

If this research project were to be developed, this researcher would seek to increase the survey response rates. There would also be adaption of the survey and the job advertisement analysis to reflect emerging digital language and participant comprehension. A return visit to *The Journal* and *The Mitre* would demonstrate if the structural changes being felt at the time of research taking place in 2017 had healed or widened the digital rift.

A return study to further map story production and newsroom structures would help test the results identified within this research project at a later point in time. A widening of the study, to include other publishing companies and newsrooms within the UK would demonstrate if these results are similarly applicable elsewhere. There is also clear potential for deeper investigation into the new emerging professional role identities of local newspaper journalists in the UK.

8.7 News now: what the landscape looks like in 2020

However, local newspaper production industry, as observed from an external perspective since research concluded on March 31, 2018, does not look to have strayed far from the path identified in this thesis.

There has been significant upheaval in terms of newspaper ownership; with the major publishing companies continuing to absorb their smaller rivals¹, often with job losses and restructuring coming close behind.

There has been significant change within the ‘big three’ with only Newsquest retaining its original name – Trinity Mirror became Reach Plc in 2018 (Sweney, 2018) and Johnston Press went into administration in the same year, and was bought out and rebranded as JPI Media (Faull, 2018).

At the point of ‘putting this thesis to bed’², the future of JPI hangs in the balance after shareholders put it up for sale in 2019. Upon publication of this work, Reach Plc had dropped out of the running to buy out the company and a third contender, David Montgomery, the owner of former publishing group Local World, was rumoured to be the highest bidder (Tobitt, 2019a), with Newsquest’s involvement not clear at this stage. However, at this point, no sale had been agreed.

Reach Plc has strengthened its offering by making territorial advances into rival territories with the roll-out of its digital-only news ‘Live’ platforms. Following its departure from the JPI sale negotiations, the company announced it will be setting up seven sites in cities currently served by legacy Newsquest and JPI local newspaper titles, including Sheffield and Bradford (Mayhew, 2019).

Following its rumoured departure from the JPI negotiations following questions around competition law possibly preventing its acquisition of titles in Scotland (Linford, 2019b), Newsquest has also been developing its portfolio, with the launch of two new print titles (Mayhew, 2020).

Meanwhile, there have been further efforts made by local newspaper competitors such as the BBC, Facebook and Google to counteract the digital impacts on local democracy reporting (BBC, 2019) and widening collaboration between local news organisations in the UK (BehindLocalNews, 2018a).

Hyperlocal news has become more widely recognised as an officially emerging market with the potential for genuine public service (Harte et al., 2019) and following the publication of the Cairncross Review (2019a) the Future News Fund has announced a pilot funding scheme for projects to strengthen the

¹ For example, in spring 2018, Newsquest took over Cumbria News (CN).
Mayhew, F. 2018b. *Newsquest journalists will strike over ‘poor pay’ on Cumbrian newspapers*. [Online]. [Accessed February 26, 2019]. Available from:
<https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/strike-over-poor-pay-planned-on-newsquests-cumbrian-newspapers-including-news-and-star/>

² ‘Putting the paper to bed’ is the term used in industry for sending the newspaper to the printing press.

sustainability of public interest news provision within localities in the UK (Nesta, 2019).

The turbulence of change identified as having an impact on the findings of this research still continues to rock the industry more than five years after this research beginning.

Therefore, this thesis and the identification of exactly how public interest journalism has declined within local newspaper journalism in the UK (Cairncross, 2019a), acts as a series of brushstrokes to bring focus and comprehension to a large and, at times, abstract painting of local newspaper journalism in the UK.

It offers a perspective which demonstrates how the decline has occurred and offers some solutions to enabling a return of public interest and community service importance to local newspaper journalism online and in print in the UK.

By identifying the pathway (Garnham, 2000) of public interest and geo-social news decline, as trodden by the capitalist model of local newspaper publishers, this thesis offers an original and unique contribution to the knowledge surrounding the local newspaper industry in the UK. Furthermore, it identifies a route to change which would allow “green shoots” (Curran, 2010, pp469) of public interest and geo-socially relevant journalism to emerge from the crumbling model of legacy local newspaper titles and re-engage news-traders with local democratic process (Mediatique, 2018; Cairncross, 2019a).

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APPENDICES

Analysing the impact of digital tools on news production, identity and jurisdiction at regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK

Rebecca Lucy Whittington

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

Leeds Trinity University

School of Arts and Communication

January 2020

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1. Approved application for ethical approval



APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW

This form is to be completed by PIs or supervisors (for PGR student research) who have completed the University Research Ethics self-assessment form and have decided that further ethical review and approval is required before the proposed programme of research can commence. The form can also be used by supervisors or module managers of undergraduate Final Year research projects as an alternative to the taught students research ethics block approval form.

<i>Office use only:</i>	
Application No:	Reviewing REC:
Date Received:	Date Approved:

PART A: Summary

A1. Title of the research:

Measuring the impact and efficacy of digital reporting tools at regional UK newspapers

A2: Purpose of research: *(tick as appropriate)*

- Staff research project
- Postgraduate student research project
- Undergraduate research project or module

If yes, module code & title:

--

Other (please specify)

--

A3. Principal Investigators, supervisors (PGR projects) or UG supervisor/module manager (UG projects) contact details:

Name: (Title/first name/family name)	Mrs Rebecca Whittington
Position:	PGR student
School/Institute:	Journalism, Leeds Trinity University
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Work Tel No:	0113 2837193
University email address:	g.roberts@leedstrinity.ac.uk

b. Co-investigators or co-supervisors contact details:

Name: (Title/first name/family name)	Ms Catherine O'Connor
Position:	Supervisor
School/Institute:	Journalism, Leeds Trinity University
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Name: (Title/first name/family name)	
Position:	

School/Institute:	
Work Tel No:	
University email address:	

c. Postgraduate student contact details (PGR projects only):

Name: (Title/first name/family name)	Mrs Rebecca Whittington
Student No:	1408281
Course of study:	PhD
School/Institute:	Journalism, Leeds Trinity University
Work Tel No:	0113 2837123
University email address:	R.whittington@leedstrinity.ac.uk

A4. Estimated start date of research: 01/12/2016

Estimated end date of research: 01/09/2019

A5. Funding: (List funding sources, including internal sources, and status of each)

Funding body	Approved / Pending / To be submitted
Leeds Trinity University September 2014-September 2019	

A3. Summary of research

Describe the purpose and background rationale for the proposed research, as well as the hypotheses/research questions to be examined and the expected outcomes. Do not simply reproduce or refer to the protocol.

*This section must be completed in **language comprehensible to the lay person**. Please explain any technical terms or discipline-specific phrases.*

Study of the impact of digital reporting tools on newspaper production and culture is nothing new. But few academics have examined the situation in relation to local newspapers in the UK, where job losses and cost cutting has been endemic for a decade. This study will employ mixed methodology to investigate how digital tools have changed and impacted on local newsroom culture and production, applying a Constructivist viewpoint and Actor Network Theory to assess changes in power balances and societal structure. Quantitative research with annual data collection over a four year period will assess key skills requirements in local newspaper journalism job advertisements. Qualitative interviews and observation will be held at three newspapers.

Together, this research aims to answer the following research question:

PART B: The research

B1. What are the aims of the research? *(Must be in language comprehensible to a lay person)*

These methods aim to achieve results which could impact on planning and production in newspaper publishing and bridge the gap between academic teaching and practical skills required at industry level.

B2. Select from the list below to describe your research:

(You may select more than one)

✓ Research on or with human participants

Research working with the data of human participants

✓ New data collected by qualitative methods

✓ New data collected by quantitative methods

✓ New data collected from observing individuals or populations

✓ Research working with aggregated or population data

✓ Research using already published data or data in the public domain

✓ Research that constitutes scholarship, or increases knowledge and understanding of educational processes.

Research that involves NHS patients, relatives or carers of NHS patients, NHS staff, NHS facilities, or tissue/materials or data from NHS patients. *(If your research involves any of these, then an application should be made to the*

National Research Ethics Service as NHS ethical approval will be required. There is no need to complete this form)

- Research working with human tissue samples
- Research that has a significant environmental impact (*If yes, please give details*)

B3. Research methodology and design:

Please give a description of the research design and methodology proposed. Qualitative methods as well as quantitative methods should be included. Include what participants will be asked to do (e.g. number of visits, time, interviews etc). Must be in language comprehensible to a lay person.

I plan to design a survey to be sent to local and regional newspaper journalists from newspapers and affiliated websites across the UK. The survey will be designed to assess both skills and tools usage and requirement within their workplaces. I intend to send a test survey to members of the LTU journalism department, who will be able to test it for journalistic/industry sense and I also plan to send it to other associates who can respond in terms of clarity and interpretation of questions. It might be that I ask final year/post grad students to also help with testing as many will have conducted work placements in regional newsrooms and may be able to apply recent industry experience to the effectiveness of the survey.

To get results from testing I may conduct short email/telephone/face-to-face interviews and I may also hold focus group events to get live response.

The final survey will be sent to at least 50 and no more than 1,500 working journalists on a link via email and social media. The social media element will include my own website and a private page on Facebook to which I can invite working journalists. The Facebook page will be a private page which will only be viewable by invited journalists. The website page will be open to all for viewing but will not allow open access to the survey, instead it will direct interested parties to me so they can indicate their interest and relevance to the project. The social media element should allow for ease of access to the survey by busy working journalists who use these methods of communication on a daily basis. This may make participation easier for some journalists and should hopefully mean the likelihood of participation increases.

Survey reminders will also be sent up to three times on email and social media following the initial survey mail out.

Following on from that, I propose to visit three separate newspaper offices for periods of two to three weeks at a time in order to conduct observation of how journalists work, what tools they use and what skills they use. It might be that for some part of that time I will also take part in the newsgathering process to experience first-hand the demands and opportunities experienced by working journalists. During this time I also aim to conduct semi-structured interviews with journalists at a variety of stages in their careers in order to further interrogate the results of the survey. Participants will be asked, in the main, to take part in one interview each only. There may be reason to follow-up on a minority of interviews for further clarification, but this will be kept to the minimum. The results of the survey, observation and interviews will be used to map a network of how tools, skills and journalists work together within the newsroom and how they work with the newspaper audience to

B4. Vulnerable participants:

Will the participants be from any of the following groups? *(Tick as appropriate)*

- Children under 16. *Specify age group:* _____
 - Adults with learning disabilities
 - Adults with other forms of mental incapacity or mental illness
 - Adults in emergency situations
 - Prisoners or young offenders
 - Participants who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator, eg members of staff, students
 - Other vulnerable groups
- No participants from any of the above groups

Please justify the inclusion of the above groups, explaining why the research cannot be conducted on non-vulnerable participants

PART C: Recruitment and consent

C1. Recruitment:

Please state clearly how participants will be identified, approached and recruited. Explain each point and give details for each sub-group if appropriate. Include any relationship between investigator(s) and participant(s) (e.g. instructor-student)

Note: Attach a copy of any poster(s), advertisement(s) or letter(s) to be used for recruitment

Survey test participants will be contacted verbally, by email and face-to-face. It will be optional participation and no more than three attempts to get a response from first contact will be made. Final survey participants will be identified and recruited via social media, identification via the internet through newspaper websites and their affiliated online products and through the printed product. The survey can be completed anonymously, although participants will be encouraged to provide details which could lead to identification (eg. Job title/employer) for the purposes of the research and will also be asked to leave contact details in case of further participation and to update on results. All data from the survey will be treated with confidence, will be anonymised and coded for the purposes of the research and will be stored securely on a password-protected hard-drive in a locked drawer within my locked office at Leeds Trinity University. It is possible that, due to my work as a newspaper journalist, I may contact some people who I know or who I worked with in the past. These people will be approached in the same manner as all

The newspapers I aim to conduct research at for the observation, participation and interview stage of the study will be in the north of England and again, due to my employment history, may employ individuals who I know. I aim to reduce this risk by approaching newspapers where I have not previously been employed. I intend to approach managing editors or company managers to arrange my research with the newspapers and, if possible, I will only conduct interviews with people who I have not met or worked with in previous employment. These participants will be identified while observing at the newspaper sites. They will be verbally approached initially, with appointments scheduled in writing via email or text following verbal agreement.

Please see attached letter for the initial approach being sent to management. Please also see attached the email/social media contact which will be sent to survey participants.

C2. Participants as subjects of the research:

Describe the number of participants. How was this number decided? If you have a formal power calculation, please replicate it here

Specify any inclusion or exclusion criteria (e.g. age, gender, location, affiliation, level of fitness etc.). If you are excluding individuals, what is the rationale for this?

The test survey will be tested by no more than 50 participants and will aim to reflect the diversity of final survey participants in terms of age, ethnicity and gender.

Participants in the survey to be more than 50 and no more than 165. This range was decided on due to realistic expectations of the survey being completed and the yielding results. If each survey is completed and returned saturation should be reached by 165 participants. If no more than 50 complete the survey then there will only just be enough information to yield meaningful results.

At each newspaper the number of observation participants will vary dependent on numbers employed and present. Interviews will be conducted with staff at varying levels of employment responsibility within the newsrooms. These will include, hopefully, editors, news editors, deputy news editors, senior reporters, trainee reporters, specialist reporters. At each newspaper there may be 12 participants or fewer.

C3. Informed Consent:

Will informed consent be obtained from the research participants? Yes No

If yes, please give details of how it will be done. Give details of any particular steps to provide information. Attach a copy of the participant information sheet or any other material used in the consent process, and a copy of the consent form. If consent is not going to be obtained, justify why not.

What arrangements will be made for participants who might not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information, or who have special communication needs?

How long will participants have to decide whether or not to take part in the research?

*If participants are to be recruited from any of potentially vulnerable groups, **give details of extra steps** taken to assure their protection. Describe any arrangements to be made for obtaining alternative sources of consent. Include any permission / information letter to be provided to the person(s) providing the consent.*

During survey and test survey recruitment, participants will be given a clear outline of the survey and how data will be used. They will be sent the initial survey and up to three reminder contacts. It will be up to the recipients to decide whether to participate or not and they will have up to 12 months to make that decision.

Observation within newsrooms will be arranged via the manager/editor of the newspaper. Information about the study will be circulated to all staff on email prior to my attending. Any staff wanting to opt out of the observation process will be able to contact me with their request at any point during the observation period.

Only consenting staff will take part in the interview stage of the study.

C3. Deception:

Will the research involve any element of deception? Yes No

If yes, please describe the nature and extent of the deception involved. Justify why this it is necessary. Include whether, how and when the deception will be revealed, and who will administer this feedback.

C4. Participant withdrawal:

*Describe whether participants will be able to withdraw from the study, and up to what point? How will participants be informed of their right to withdraw? What will be done with the participant's data if they withdraw? If withdrawal is **not** possible, explain why not.*

Test survey participants can withdraw at any point of the testing process if they wish. Following their participation their responses will be kept on file, but they will be able to withdraw their consent to be contacted for possible follow-up research at any time.

Participants in the survey will be given a 30 day period following completion during which they can withdraw. Following this point they will not be able to due to results being used in quantitative analysis. However, participants will be able to withdraw their consent to be contacted for possible follow-up research at any time.

If either a test or a final survey participant decides they no longer want their personal information to be held as part of the research this can be deleted and destroyed on request. The participant will instead be given a code in order to avoid duplication of responses.

This will be explained to the participants at the point of completing the part of the survey that requires personal information to be shared.

Observation participants will be able to opt out at any point during the observation process, with any records documenting direct observation of that individual being destroyed on request. This will be explained in writing prior to the observation taking place.

Interview participants will be able to withdraw at any point during the process and for 30 days following completion. Following this point they will not be able to due to results being used in analysis. However, participants will be able to withdraw their consent to be contacted for possible follow-up research at any time.

If a participant decides they no longer want their personal information to be held as part of the research this can be deleted and destroyed on request. The participant will instead be given a code in order to avoid duplication of responses. This will be explained at the start of the interview process.

C5. Compensation:

Will individual research participants receive any payments, fees, reimbursement of expenses or any other incentives or benefits for taking part in this research?

Yes No

If yes, please describe the amount, number and size of incentives and on what basis this was decided. If participants choose to withdraw, how will you deal with this compensation?

C6. Confidentiality:

Please describe the procedures to be used to ensure anonymity of participants and/or confidentiality of data both during the conduct of the research and in the release of its findings.

If participant anonymity or confidentiality is not appropriate to this research project, explain why, providing details of how participants will be advised of the fact that data will not be anonymous or confidential.

All participants will be given an individual code, which will be used for the majority of the work. Their codes will be stored alongside names and contact details on a secure, password protected hard drive(s) which will be kept in a locked drawer(s) within a locked office at Leeds Trinity University and also on the university's secure database (when it is ready for use). Research release will not refer to participants by name but it may refer to them by job title or newspaper/publishing company. All participants will have the right to insist on their job title or publishing company/newspaper not to be referred to in the same instance so as to avoid possible jigsaw identification.

C7. Disclosure:

Will interviews/ questionnaires discuss any topics or issues that might be sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting, or is it possible that criminal or other disclosures requiring action could take place during the study?

X Yes No

If yes, please describe how you will deal with these issues

Confidentiality will be assured – the sensitivity will revolve around employment and being asked opinion of working methods, structures and tools. The opt out methods discussed above should allow participants to remove themselves from the research if they are uncomfortable.

PART D: Research Data, Implications and Impact

D1. Data storage, access and disposal:

For how long will data be stored? 10 years, 0 months

Describe what research data will be stored, where (e.g. secure server), the measures that will be put in place to ensure security of the data (including if data is to be transferred), who will have access to it, whether or how it will be shared or disseminated (including by publication) and the method and timing of its disposal.

Data will be stored on a secure university server (when it has been activated) and on a separate hard drive(s) which will be password protected and kept in a secure, locked drawer(s) in a locked office at Leeds Trinity University. Only myself and my PhD supervisors will have access to the raw data. Processed data, which has been handled in line with the methods discussed above, will be included in the PhD write-up and may also be used in other publishing formats.

D2. Significance or benefits of the research:

Outline the significance or benefits of the research

The research aims to demonstrate the balance of power being transferred between journalists, regional newspaper readers and the tools being used to disseminate or access news online. The results of the research and the resulting network design will inform journalism training within higher education and industry.

D3. Risks of the research:

*Outline the potential risks to: a) participants; b) researchers; c) other individuals not involved in the research; d) Society; e) environment and the measures that will be taken to **minimise** any risks and the procedures to be adopted in the event of mishap*

- a. Participants may be concerned that their opinions and practises will jeopardise their careers if documented in a research project. This is why every effort will be made to anonymise responses prior to publication.

D4. Other ethical issues:

Are there any other ethical issues raised by the research? Yes No

If yes, please specify

PART F: Declaration:

In completing and submitting this form, I declare that I:

- Have answered all the questions truthfully and to the best of my knowledge and belief, and that I take full responsibility for these responses.
- Undertake to observe ethical principles throughout the programme of research
- Will submit progress reports or participate in audits if required
- Will report any changes affecting the ethical issues, or adverse or unforeseen events arising from the project to my School or Institute Research Ethics Committee.
- Agree to abide by the UK Research Integrity Office's code of practice for research, the University's research ethics policy and any other policies, procedures or guidance related to research conduct or integrity issued by the University.

PI/Supervisor/module manager signature:

Date:

Rebecca Whittington

November 02, 2017

Catherine O'Connor

November 30, 2016



8.7.1 Appendix 1.1 Ethical approval evidence



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www.leadstrinity.ac.uk

PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL

Dr Suzanne Owen

Chair of SAC Ethics Committee

Tel: 0113 283 7100 ext.678

E-mail:

S.Owen@leadstrinity.ac.uk

Date: 13th December 2017

Dear Rebecca

Re: Measuring the impact and efficacy of digital reporting tools at regional UK newspapers. AMENDMENT - SAC/2016/035A

Thank you for your recent application for ethical approval for the above named project.

After reviewing the application at the SAC School Ethics Committee meeting which was held on Monday 11th December. It has been resolved that the research project is granted ethical approval.

I wish you well in your study.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Suzanne Owen'.

Dr Suzanne Owen

Chair of School of Arts and Communications Ethics Committee



2. The coding manual

Full role code	Code used for Excel	Coding descriptors
Digital news editor	D N Ed	A news desk or similar middle-management position which involves planning, sourcing and decision-making about digital content. Might also include social media strategy responsibility and delegation of work to reporters.
Deputy editor	Dep Ed	An editor position with senior management status acting in a supporting role to the editor.

Deputy news editor	Dep N Ed	News desk position with a supporting role to the news editor and with responsibility to run the newsdesk in the news editor's absence. Management of reporting team.
Editor	Ed	Editor position overseeing overall print and/or digital production. A senior management role. Might include managing a series of news publications.
Multimedia reporter	M Rep	A reporting role with a strong digital focus. The advertisement will not make mention of training for senior qualifications. The role does not demand specific senior qualifications.

News editor	N Ed	Managing or sharing the management position on newsdesk. Includes planning, decision-making, managing reporting team, strategy and content sourcing and placement.
News editor / senior reporter	N Ed / Sen Rep	A dual role which includes stepping onto the newsdesk and helping with news desk duties as well as reporting. Often has an element of management of the reporting team.
No details of job	N/A	Not enough detail to categorise.
Other	Other	A role with journalistic elements which cannot be categorised within an alternative code.

Senior multimedia reporter	Sen M Rep	A reporter with NCE/NJQ or the equivalent whose role has a strong or solely digital focus.
Senior management	Sen Man	Those with a position above the editor.
Senior reporter	Sen Rep	A reporter with NCE/NJQ or the equivalent.
Specialist multimedia reporter	Sp M Rep	A reporter with a specialist agenda either in terms of subject focus reporting (eg. online health reporter) or with a production specialism (eg. video production journalist) whose role has a strong or solely digital focus.
Specialist reporter	Sp Rep	A reporter with a specialist agenda in terms of subject focus reporting (eg. health reporter).
Sub editor	Sub	A page designer and content editing position.

Trainee multimedia reporter	T M Rep	A trainee reporter position with a digital focus.	
Trainee reporter	T Rep	A trainee reporter position.	
Trainee reporter / senior reporter	T Rep / Sen Rep	A position open to be filled by either a trainee reporter or a qualified senior reporter.	
Traditional keyword	Trad keyword meaning/context	Digital keyword	Digi keyword meaning
Deadline	The skill of meeting tight deadlines	Digital	Understanding and experience of using digital technology or expectation of digital communication skills
Pressure	The skill of working in a pressurised environment	Multi	The skill of producing multimedia journalism
Contacts	The skill of meeting and maintaining journalism contacts	Platform	Referring to an externally facing digital interface which presents or promotes product content. For example, a website or a social media application.
Driving	A driving license	Website	The news product's own website or websites.
NCE	The National Certificate of Journalism. A senior	Social	Social media

	reporter qualification accredited by the National Council of Training For Journalists (NCTJ). The qualification was replaced by the NQJ in 2013.		
NCTJ	The trainee journalism qualification accredited by the NCTJ (see above).	User	Web audience/digital users
NQJ	The National Qualification in Journalism senior journalism qualification accredited by the NCTJ (see above).	Breaking	Handling a breaking news story when publishing online.
Shorthand	Using shorthand for journalism. One of the key components of the NCTJ 'gold standard' accredited qualification	Data	Interpreting big data sets for the production of journalism
Qualification	To be included when referring to journalism qualifications	Twitter	The social media platform
Print	The print product	Facebook	The social media platform
Copy	Written content	Online	Publishing on the internet
Tight	Succinct journalistic writing	Web skills	Being able to demonstrate proficiency in online journalism or the tools required for online journalism

Writing	Ability to write well	Unique	Unique users; individual visitors to online platforms
Enthusiasm	An energetic and positive approach	Visitor	The online audience
Self	Self-starter; someone who brings in ideas and is proactive in approaching their work.	Likes	Evidence of social media audience's appreciation for the online product.
Exclusive	A story which has not been broken elsewhere	Blog	A personal online written account being used for journalism and connected to the product
Energy	Someone with drive and stamina	Code	The ability to write web programming code
Ideas	Someone who comes with ideas for content – this can be print or digital content, but the ability to generate ideas has been sought traditionally in journalism as a skill.	Video	The ability to capture, edit and publish video or the ability to source and publish externally provided video for online content purposes.
Sense	News sense – the ability to identify a potential story	Podcast	The ability to capture, edit and publish audio content in a podcast format for the digital product.
Print or digital job category code		Coding descriptors	

Digital	Working for an online publication or platform only. No print attached to the position.
N/A	Not enough detail to categorise.
Print	Clearly a print-only position with no digital responsibilities.
Print and digital	Working with both print and online focus.
Digital or traditional job title code	Coding descriptors
D (digital)	A position with a digital or affiliated to digital word or words within the job title.
T (traditional)	A position with no digital or affiliated to digital words within the job title.
Single or multiple titles	Coding descriptors
M	Reference to responsibility for more than one newspaper or print and digital news product within a news group. Must clearly be multiple individually identifying titles, not editions of the same title.
N/A	Not enough detail to categorise.
S	Reference to responsibility for only one newspaper or print and digital news product. Can also include products with more than one edition of that single product. May also include advertisements where no specification about multiple titles is made.

3. Intercoder reliability report from Dr Richard Thomas of Swansea University

Rebecca Whittington research verification

Word number

<u>Line number</u>	<u>Rebecca</u>	<u>Richard</u>	<u>Rebecca exact match</u>	<u>Richard exact match</u>	<u>Rebecca +/- 1</u>	<u>Richard +/- 1</u>
3	136	136	yes	yes	yes	yes
9	220	219	yes	no	yes	yes
12	101	101	yes	yes	yes	yes
22	112	112	yes	yes	yes	yes
26	231	231	yes	yes	yes	yes
31	538	538	yes	yes	yes	yes
40	240	240	yes	yes	yes	yes
44	308	308	yes	yes	yes	yes
70	152	152	yes	yes	yes	yes

74	238	238	yes	yes	yes	yes
	201	201	yes	yes	yes	yes
	660	660	yes	yes	yes	yes
	252	251	yes	no	yes	yes
	334	334	yes	yes	yes	yes
	104	104	yes	yes	yes	yes
	268	268	yes	yes	yes	yes
	111	111	yes	yes	yes	yes
	243	243	yes	yes	yes	yes
	257	257	yes	yes	yes	yes
	119	119	yes	yes	yes	yes
	168	168	yes	yes	yes	yes
	162	162	yes	yes	yes	yes
	626	626	yes	yes	yes	yes
	109	109	yes	yes	yes	yes
	491	491	yes	yes	yes	yes

	87	87	yes	yes	yes	yes
	203	203	yes	yes	yes	yes
	170	168	yes	no	yes	no
	152	151	yes	no	yes	yes
	103	103	yes	yes	yes	yes
	167	167	yes	yes	yes	yes
	62	62	yes	yes	yes	yes
	97	97	yes	yes	yes	yes
	527	527	yes	yes	yes	yes
	260	260	yes	yes	yes	yes

	Percent Agreement	Scott's Pi	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha (nominal)	N Agreements	N Disagreements	N Cases	N Decisions
Variable 1 (cols 1 & 2)	88.6%	-0.061	-0	-0.045	31	4	35	70

	Percent Agreement	Scott's Pi	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha (nominal)	N Agreements	N Disagreements	N Cases	N Decisions
Variable 1 (cols 1 & 2)	97.1%	-0.014	0	0	34	1	35	70

TRADITIONAL

Number of keywords

Tried the first 10 highlighted in yellow (make not about no root words, need exacts matches)

	<u>Deadline</u>	<u>Pressure</u>	<u>Contacts</u>	<u>Driving</u>	<u>NCE</u>	<u>NCTJ</u>	<u>NQJ</u>	<u>Shorthand</u>	<u>Qualification</u>	<u>Print</u>	<u>Copy</u>	<u>Tight</u>	<u>Writing</u>	<u>Enthusiasm</u>	<u>Self</u>	<u>Exclusive</u>	<u>Energy</u>	<u>Ideas</u>	<u>Sense</u>	<u>SAME</u>	
3			1								1										
9										1				1			1				
12					1				1				1			1					
22		1				1		1	1										1		
26				1		2				1											
31									1	2											
40													1							1	
44						1					1								1		
70																					
74			1	1		2		1													

	Percent Agreement	Scott's Pi	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha (nominal)	N Agreements	N Disagreements	N Cases	N Decisions
Variable 1 (cols 1 & 2)	100%	undefined*	undefined*	undefined*	190	0	190	380

*Scott's pi, Cohen's kappa, and Krippendorff's Alpha are undefined for this variable due to [invariant values](#).

Position of key words

	<u>Deadline</u>	<u>Pressure</u>	<u>Contacts</u>	<u>Driving</u>	<u>NCE</u>	<u>NCTJ</u>	<u>NQJ</u>	<u>Shorthand</u>	<u>Qualification</u>	<u>Print</u>	<u>Copy</u>	<u>Tight</u>	<u>Writing</u>	<u>Enthusiasm</u>	<u>Self</u>	<u>Exclusive</u>	<u>Energy</u>	<u>Ideas</u>	<u>Sense</u>	<u>SAME</u>	
3			69								74										
9										112				196			195				
12					31				32				35			40					
22		96				40		45	42										69		
26				177		171				64											
31									298	56											
40													181							74	
44						203					106								83		
70																					

31	7	2		1	1	1					1		1							
40	3			1	2			1			2									
44	1	1	1	5	7	1	1		1	1	2					2		1		
70	1			2	1						1									
74				4																

	Percent Agreement	Scott's Pi	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha (nominal)	N Agreements	N Disagreements	N Cases	N Decisions
Variable 1 (cols 1 & 2)	100%	undefined*	undefined*	undefined*	190	0	190	380

*Scott's pi, Cohen's kappa, and Krippendorff's Alpha are undefined for this variable due to [invariant values](#).

Position of key words

	<u>Digital</u>	<u>Multi</u>	<u>Platform</u>	<u>website</u>	<u>social</u>	<u>user</u>	<u>breaking</u>	<u>data</u>	<u>Twitter</u>	<u>Facebook</u>	<u>online</u>	<u>Web skills</u>	<u>unique</u>	<u>visitor</u>	<u>likes</u>	<u>blog</u>	<u>code</u>	<u>video</u>	<u>podcast</u>	<u>SAME</u>
3	101			31																
9	114	162		64																

12		55		24							61										
22	74		75																		
26					140		115				58										
31	58	309		385	238	41					35		40								
40	7			67	102			209			10										
44	15	162	143	61	73	163	128		163	165	70					133		265			
70	37			26	115						75										
74				35																	

	Percent Agreement	Scott's Pi	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha (nominal)	N Agreements	N Disagreements	N Cases	N Decisions
Variable 1 (cols 1 & 2)	98.4%	-0.008	0	-0.005	187	3	190	380

Intercoder report

I was asked to validate a sample of data from within this study. I took a sample of approximately 10% (35 observations) to consider when assessing the accuracy of the number of words that had been recorded for each article. I cut and pasted the words from each selected advert into a Word document, and noted the word count. Intercoder agreement was calculated using the accepted online tool designed by Dean Freelon which is available here <http://dfreelon.org/utills/recalfront/>

The intercoder agreement for the word counts was 88.6%. In other words, these were exactly the same 88.6% of the time. If a reasonable tolerance of +/- 1 word was applied, the agreement score rose to 97.1%. Both are considered to be very high.

The more detailed variables of number and positions of key words were considered for both the “traditional” sample and the “digital” sample. Only 10 sample adverts from each were taken, since the multiple variables for each would generate sufficient data for a thorough test. All intercoder agreement scores were calculated to be 100%, apart from the positions of the Digital keywords, which was calculated at 98.4%. All scores are summarised here:

Variable	Intercoder score precentage
Word count	88.6 (rising to 97.1 if tolerance applied)
Number of key words (traditional)	100.0
Position of key words (traditional)	100.0
Number of key words (digital)	100.0
Position of key words (digital)	98.4

I am therefore satisfied that the original data collection for this study has been executed with care and almost perfect accuracy.

Dr Richard Thomas

Senior Lecturer in Journalism

Programme Director - MA Journalism, Media and Globalisation

Department of Media and Communication

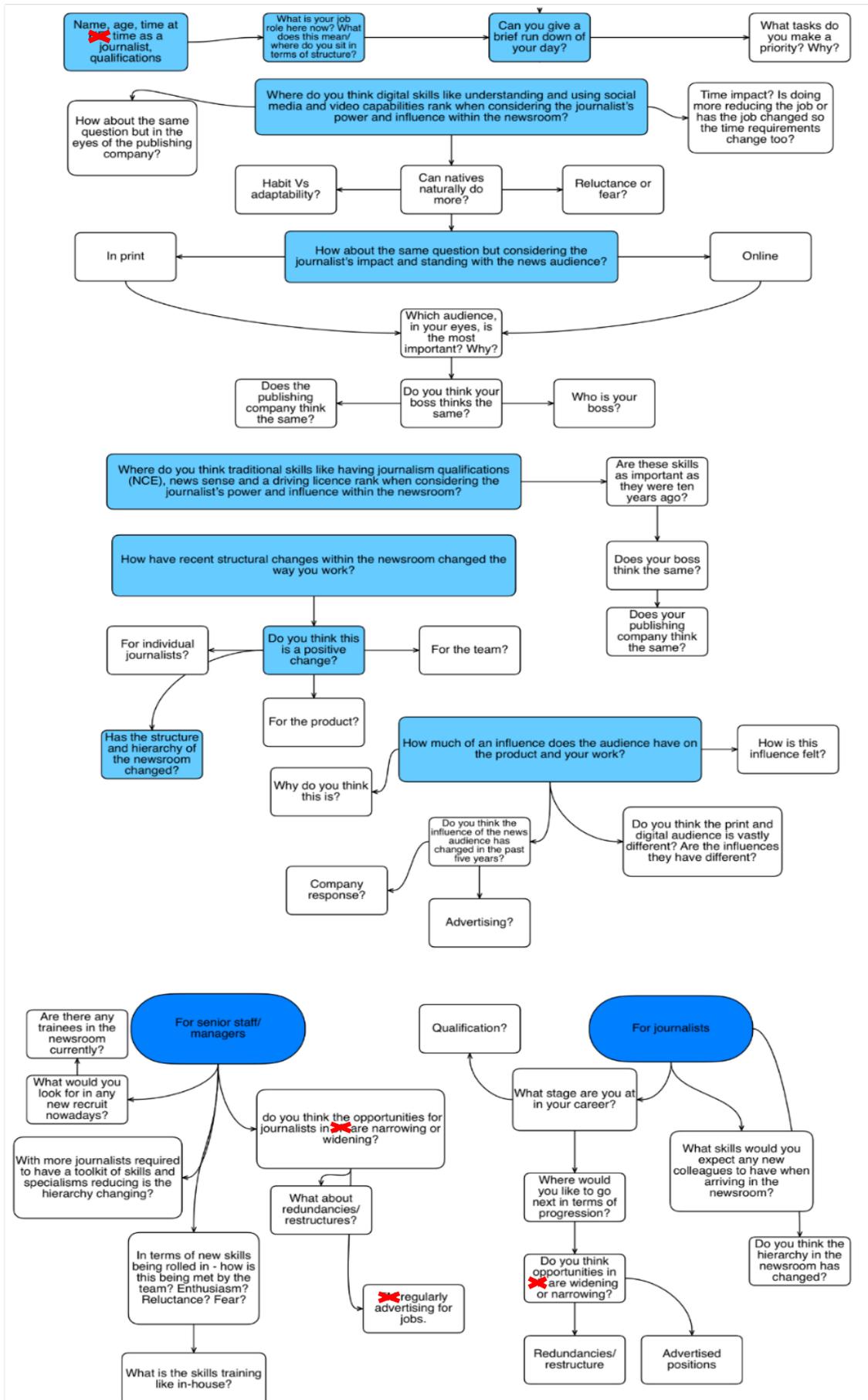
Keir Hardie Building Room 416| Adeilad Keir Hardie 416

Swansea University | Prifysgol Abertawe

Swansea | Abertawe

Wales | Cymru SA2 8PP Telephone 01792 513212

4. Case study semi-structured interview plan



5. Observation and interview participant information pack.



Leeds Trinity
University

Measuring the impact and efficacy of digital reporting tools within local UK newspapers



I am a former regional newspaper journalist and I am conducting research into skills and tools used by journalists at regional newspapers within the UK.

The research is part of a PhD project which I am completing at Leeds Trinity University, where I also work as a graduate teaching assistant working with student journalists.

The research aim is to build a picture of the skills and tools required and the processes used within regional newspaper newsrooms with the intention of informing journalism training in higher education and industry.

Prior to this I worked as head of news at the Yorkshire Post and Yorkshire Evening Post, I was editor of the Pontefract and Castleford Express and the Hemsworth and South Elmsall Express, I was a news editor for the Yorkshire Weekly Newsgroup and I was a reporter and video journalist at the Telegraph and Argus in Bradford.

I am a champion and supporter of regional newspapers and I have a great deal of respect for regional newspaper journalists. I know how hectic newsroom life can be and I'm also aware of the issues being faced by titles and their staff on a regular basis. If you can assist me by taking part in my project I hope to be able to shine a light on the work that goes on to produce newspapers, websites and affiliated news products. I will endeavour to avoid disrupting news production processes and I will treat your participation with confidence and respect.

Please do not hesitate to ask if you have any questions. You can speak to me directly, by text, email or over the phone. Or you could contact my PhD research supervisors if you wish. All contact details are listed below. You can also find out more about my background and research by visiting

www.rebeccawhittingtonmedia.com

Thank you,

Rebecca

Principal researcher: Rebecca Whittington, Leeds Trinity University, Brownberrie Lane, Leeds, West Yorkshire, LS18 5HD. Phone: 07793728499. Email: r.whittington@leedstrinity.ac.uk Twitter: [@RebeccaWMedia](https://twitter.com/RebeccaWMedia)

Supervisors:

Prof Graham Roberts, Postgraduate Research Tutor, Leeds Trinity University, Brownberrie Lane, Leeds, LS18 5HD. Email: g.roberts@leedstrinity.ac.uk

Catherine O'Connor, Head of School of Arts and Communication, Leeds Trinity University, Brownberrie Lane, Leeds, LS18 5HD, United Kingdom. Email: c.oconnor@leedstrinity.ac.uk

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



Measuring the impact and efficacy of digital reporting tools within local UK newspapers

Introduction

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study because of your work as a journalist for INSERT TITLE HERE. Before you decide whether to take part in the study, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or would like more information.

Why am I doing the project?

The research study is central to my PhD which I am studying for at Leeds Trinity University. To date there has been limited academic research into the impact of digital tools at regional newspapers in the UK. I hope to be able to gain an understanding of what skills and tools are required within a regional newspaper newsroom and intend to use this information to inform journalism training both within higher education and industry.

Why have you been invited to take part?

The observation and interviews I hope to conduct at three newspaper titles in the north of England are the final piece of a jigsaw which should give a picture of how journalists at varying levels within the newsroom environment conduct their work. It should be a way of identifying what skills are required and what tools are used

to produce and distribute the news product. This fieldwork follows on from the distribution of a survey to journalists working at regional titles across the UK and annual collection of recruitment advertisements for regional newspaper journalists on www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk from November to January.

Will your participation in the project remain confidential?

All information that will be collected from you during the course of the study will be kept strictly confidential, and any information about you will have your name removed so that you cannot be recognised. Participating newspapers will be anonymised and referred to only by publishing company, regularity of the publication of the printed product and area of the UK. For example, the INSERT TITLE HERE will be referred to in the study as ‘a [REDACTED] daily title in the north of England.’ This should ensure there is no ‘jigsaw identification’ of participants. You can be assured that if you take part in the project you will remain anonymous.

What will you be expected to do if you take part?

I plan to visit the INSERT TITLE HERE for three weeks from May 8 to May 26, 2017. During that time I would like to observe how journalists operate within the newsroom in terms of tools that are used, skills that are employed and the processes of news production. If you go out of the newsroom to conduct your work (for example, to attend court or to conduct work of some kind) I may ask if I can come with you to observe the same processes outside of the newsroom. I will also invite some people to take part in face-to-face interviews (at a time and place convenient to the participant) to find out more about the individual perspective and experience of each journalist. Each activity you are invited to take part in is explained below, along with an estimate of your time commitment.

Activity	What is it and what will happen?	How long will it take?
Semi structured interview	A confidential one-to-one conversation between you and the principal researcher. The researcher will ask you a series of semi-structured questions based on your	1 hour (maximum)

	experience of producing news for the INSERT TITLE HERE.	
Participant observation	The principal researcher will spend time with you and participating colleagues observing the processes of news production and the skills and tools employed within those processes.	Participants will not be disrupted in their work as observation should not interfere with the processes taking place.

If you wish to be part of the study, you will be contacted by the principal researcher (Rebecca Whittington) to arrange a convenient time to discuss your involvement and agree on your participation day/s/times at a location convenient to you.

The study will involve audio-recording of interviews, which will be discussed with you before the interview begins.

Expenses and payments

The researcher thanks you for your consideration to take part in the study. Unfortunately due to the scale of the study, expenses or payments will not be available to participants.

What are the advantages of taking part?

This study provides you with an opportunity to discuss your working processes and to think about what skills and tools are used within a working regional newspaper newsroom. We cannot promise that the study will help you personally but the information gleaned from the study will potentially be used to inform journalism training within both higher education and industry and will inform academics and of the work being done by the often overlooked sector of regional newspaper journalists within the UK media landscape. You can choose to be kept informed of the study outcomes by ticking a box below.

Are there any disadvantages of taking part?

It could be that you are not comfortable talking about your involvement and experiences of working as a regional newspaper journalist. If you would like to take part in an interview but would prefer to do so in your own time, away from work, this can easily be arranged.

Do you have to take part in the study?

No, your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part you do not have to give a reason and you will not be contacted again.

Similarly, if you do agree to participate you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you withdraw from the study, we will destroy all personal data (i.e. audio-recorded interviews, observations of your working processes). Should you wish to withdraw, you can email or text the principal investigator, or the supervisory team. Details are below.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

Participants often want to know the results of the study in which they were involved. In the future (late 2017 onwards), results may be published. At this stage a summary of key findings will be available and will be shared with participants who have indicated an interest (see box below). You and your newspaper title will not be personally identified in any report/publication.

All personal data collected for the study (survey response, observation notes and interview transcripts) will be stored securely on a password protected hard drive. This data will be destroyed ten years after collection.

What happens now?

If you are interested in taking part in the study please sign below that you have read, understood and are interested in taking part in the study. You will also be asked to sign a consent form.

Name (PRINT FULL NAME).....

Sign:

Date:

Would you like to be kept informed of the outcomes of this study? (tick):

Email address:

Contact details

Principal researcher:

Rebecca Whittington, Leeds Trinity University, Brownberrie Lane, Leeds, West Yorkshire, LS18 5HD.

Phone: 07793728499 Email: r.whittington@leedstrinity.ac.uk

Supervisors:

Prof Graham Roberts

Postgraduate Research Tutor

Leeds Trinity University, Brownberrie Lane, Leeds, LS18 5HD, United Kingdom

Email: g.roberts@leedstrinity.ac.uk

Catherine O'Connor

Head of School of Arts and Communication

Leeds Trinity University, Brownberrie Lane, Leeds, LS18 5HD, United Kingdom

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www.leedstrinity.ac.uk



Research authorisation letter for Rebecca Whittington	Date: 31/01/2016
Title: Measuring the impact and efficacy of digital reporting tools within local UK newspapers	

This letter is to confirm that Rebecca Whittington intends to conduct research for the above PhD project beginning on February 6 2017 at three regional newspaper titles within the north of England. The research involves a series of semi-structured interviews and observations within the newsroom at a daily INSERT PUBLISHER HERE title, a weekly INSERT PUBLISHER HERE news group and a daily INSERT PUBLISHER HERE title. I can confirm that ethical clearance and risk assessment clearance has been applied for and authorised by the University.

As the supervisors for the PhD project you are very welcome to contact us for further information, our contact details can be found below.

Prof Graham Roberts

PhD Supervisor and Postgraduate Research Tutor

Leeds Trinity University, Brownberrie Lane, Leeds, LS18 5HD, United Kingdom

Email: g.roberts@leedstrinity.ac.uk

Catherine O'Connor

Head of School of Arts and Communication

Leeds Trinity University, Brownberrie Lane, Leeds, LS18 5HD, United Kingdom

Email: c.oconnor@leedstrinity.ac.uk

CONSENT FORM



Measuring the impact and efficacy of digital reporting tools within local UK newspapers

Name of participant (PRINT FULL NAME)

.....

By signing this form I confirm that:

- The purpose of this study had been explained to me via the participant information sheet.
- I am satisfied that I understand my involvement in the study.
- The possible benefits and risks of the study have been explained to me.
- Any questions which I have asked about the study have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that, during the course of the study, I have the right to ask further questions about it.
- The information which I have supplied to Leeds Trinity University prior to taking part in the study is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief and I understand that I must notify promptly of any further changes to the information.
- I understand that once the study has been completed, the information gained as a result of it may be used for research purposes with appropriate ethical approval in place (your name and newspaper title will never be disclosed)

Signature of the participant

Date:.....

Contact details of participant:

Telephone:.....

Email:

Thank you for participating in this research project. If you would like to be updated on the outcome of this study please tick here:

6. Example blank fieldwork diary entry

Date:
Activity/Event:
Feelings/Personal reflections:
Actor Network Theory (how is this fitting together? Where are the acceleration/power points?):
Newstrader (what influence has the newstrader had on processes?):
Power and structure (who is calling the shots? How are decisions made? What is the catalyst and what is the response of other actors?):
Processes (if this, then that):
Emerging questions/analyses: see above

7. Anonymised fieldwork diary entry¹

Date: Feb 21
Activity/Event: Newsroom observation
Feelings/Personal reflections: <p>Noon: Richard brings me his press cuttings book to look at. It's full of clippings from his work at the [REDACTED]. He is clearly proud of his work and feels it's important I see it. It is sweet but a bit weird; I'm not sure why he thinks I need to see it. I agree to interview him on Friday in the afternoon.</p> <p>Sarah is talking to Layla about a car accident that Layla is covering but that Sarah originally covered. It's the car accident in which Sarah found people involved on a Facebook page and had the conversation with Matthew about how to use the material.</p> <p>There is a discussion about a car dealer who is due to retire and the story has been put on Facebook. Lisa says: 'The comments on here are all saying he's a crook and a con man.' She says: 'I'm going to take the story down, it's not worth it.'</p> <p>Adrian agrees and says: 'The amount of money he spent with advertising over the year.'</p> <p>Adrian makes everybody on the desk (where I am sitting next to him) and nearby the desk a cup of tea. He doesn't ask me if I want a drink. I feel this is making a pointed gesture. However, I need to get over it as I am supposed to be blending into the background after all. I guess Adrian is maybe trying to make a point of me being an outsider, but I'm not sure. It's a bit rude really! ☺</p> <p>13.30: Alan asks which photographer is on the diary. Adrian says "Do you not have access to the photographic diary?" Alan shakes his head and Adrian says "We must get this set up." He seems frustrated.</p> <p>Lisa says "It was Helen (the editor's secretary who left on redundancy at the same time as the editor). She had the diary and nobody else had access to it really."</p>

¹ All participants have been allocated false names to allow for anonymity. This was done rather than using participant codes in order to make the diary accessible for readers.

Adrian says "Maybe so, but he [meaning Alan] doesn't have access to the digital diary either."

Lisa says: "I'm sure I set that up."

In a minute I hear Alan say: "I have got the diary, I just don't know where to look for it."

Systems and technology and users: all of this needs to be working properly.

Adrian later asks Alan if he got sorted (scuppering my chance of a cup of tea in the process) and he goes over to Alan's desk to show him how the diary works.

13.45: Adrian is talking to the sports editor about the page plan for the paper. He said he's trying to get some adverts moved.

Aled turns round and says to Adrian that the problem isn't with getting the ads moves, it's about getting 19 pages completed by deadline. Adrian says: "Well, I can proof some of them." Aled says it's not that, it's getting them done. There is clearly tension in the air. The sports editor offers to put the copy on the pages himself and Adrian says "Thanks, that would be a big help."

It's interesting that in taking the role of paper editor in Rob's absence Adrian is also taking the role of newsroom manager. This is a difficult week for staff as it's in between editors and there is a clear state of flux.

Lisa is on the phone with the police press office explaining the motivation behind the polite notice story. She explains how the friend had done some digging and had found it was not illegal to wear the vest.

She says: "We were just wanting to do a story on the fact it is OK to wear them. I don't know if you wanted to make a comment about any of it really," she says.

Aled is swearing about production and how someone in planning needs to come back from his lunch. Adrian says to the rest of newsdesk: "We need a news meeting." He calls planning to try to reduce the size of the paper by 4 pages.

I avoid news conference this afternoon as the tension is high and I feel like by attending I may cause more tension for the situation which in turn would mean I was impacting on news processes. I don't think I would help and I run the risk of causing myself problems by attending.

Colin is on the phone with planning while the news conference takes place. He says it had been noticed about an hour ago that the paper had been increased by 8 pages. This is probably the cause of all of the tension over pages. Mark and Lisa are also off today, and so the usual paper managers are absent.

News conference finishes and Aled produces a page plan that has stories with it. Lisa tells Alan that she is moving a story position on the live list. Aled is in a much better mood. He compliments Colin on the headline 'Argy Bargy' but Colin says 'I cannot take any credit for it, it was on there for the web already.' Aled makes an appreciative noise.

Lisa says to Matthew and Adrian: 'I have tidied up the live list so it is a bit better.'

Sarah has found something online called Friends Fest. It's in [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] (so not on patch). She calls Lisa over and asks her advice as to whether it is worth running or not. Sarah says: 'It did really well last year as a bloke proposed to his girlfriend in the set.' Lisa says 'yes, I think we should do it.' Sarah says 'It is in [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]?' But Lisa says 'No, let's go ahead.'

14.50: Lisa is talking to Matthew about an issue with content in which she is having to transfer some content from an advertising system to an editorial system. The lack of cohesion between the two systems is making it a laborious task for her and she tells Matthew that she cannot ask someone from production to do it as they don't know how to and she is not in a position to sit down and tell anybody today. Matthew agrees and Lisa says 'To be honest, they are supposed to know the basics but they are unable to do that even in some cases.' She is talking about some of the story editors (subs) and their lack of digital knowledge.

I have noticed there is less talk of video this week. Sally is obviously on secondment and she talks about video a lot. Lisa talks about it a bit, but the focus from the rest of the newsroom seems to not be as sharp. On looking at the website this afternoon there are two stories with video on them. One is a video of a car hitting some sheep that went live yesterday. While the ideal of getting video online with every story is known by people, there is no attempt to do this without the voice of Sally pressing this point it seems people are more focused on print.

I overheard the story editors saying they are twiddling their thumbs and that later on it's going to be busy. There is an issue with workflow and getting copy to pages. The idea that web content should fill the pages seems not to work at the moment, partly due to the times that people are working to.

15.48: Sarah asks Alan if he knows how to live stream video through the live blog as [REDACTED] is due to do a live web chat at 4.30pm. Alan doesn't know and Sarah says she has done it once before for a two minute live video. Alan goes to sit with Sarah and she shows him how to set it up so that the video can run.

Alan is doing video production despite the previous discussion in conference - this is due to the lack of other people available to do it. This is an example of a more senior member of staff being told what to do and shown how to do it by a more junior member of staff simply because she has the skills and he doesn't and because she runs the live blogs and therefore has the authority to ask somebody to do this. Alan says: "Thanks for that."

As I leave Adrian asks me how long I have left. I tell him I'm here for the next couple of days and he asks who I have left to speak to. I say Richard and Layla and reassure him that I will not interfere with schedules. I expected certain hostility today and I am not sure, especially after cup-of-tea-gate, whether this is hostile or genuine interest. But it leaves me with the impression that Adrian will be glad when I go – I can understand this and I am not taking it personally. It has been a difficult day for the management/production team and the pinch of people leaving is being felt. Having somebody observing, however discreetly it is being done, does not make life easier and most likely makes people feel self-conscious when they are being watched and recorded under pressure.

Actor Network Theory (how is this fitting together? Where are the acceleration/power points?): It's clear that with the role taken by Sarah that her role clashes with the crime reporter Layla – or rather that the two cross over in terms of how they work. This is touched upon in interview by Layla and Sarah – it is worth interrogating how and why this duality of responsibility exists and the knock-on effect it has in the newsroom.

Adrian has taken the role of editor in Rob's absence despite Lisa being more senior. When it comes to paper production he is trying to manage tense and difficult situations working with colleagues who are clearly feeling pressurised by the newspaper deadline. Despite in interviews Rob and others telling me that in theory the content for the web should naturally fill the paper, this does not happen in practice (or at least is not as simple as is suggested). Tensions are high and Adrian is working as mediator between Aled and sport/news to produce the paper.

Lisa's conversation with Matthew highlights the need for individual actors to have and use individual knowledge. While everybody is expected to get on board with the overall message of digital production, there are still specific areas and skills that define specific roles. If an individual is expected to have a specific skill but either does not make use of that skill or is unable to use it properly it makes the network less productive and has impact on a number of actors. The subs'

inability to use the programmes Lisa refers to has caused production issues. This is compounded by the loss of production staff and a busy day, which means Lisa is unable to find the time to go over the system with those individuals again. Instead she believes her time is better spent doing the job that they cannot do, even though it is delaying her other tasks. The other network issue raised at this point is the incompatibility of the systems Lisa is working on. The two systems, which are actors in their own rights, do not work together meaning a manual merge of data is the only way to get information from one system to another. This lack of logic in the design of the production system causes a delay/glitch in the network that could be smoothed by a more inclusive content management system.

Newstrader (what influence has the newstrader had on processes?):

Power and structure (who is calling the shots? How are decisions made? What is the catalyst and what is the response of other actors?):

Adrian has established himself in the news conference as the leader/manager of the newsroom in the editor's absence and now he is making his distaste for my being there known by excluding me from the tea round. In many ways, this deliberate exclusion singles me out more than allows me to blend into the background. However, I'm unsure if other people have noticed or not. Whatever the case, it makes me feel slightly uncomfortable and I wonder if the coming week might be a bit trickier than the previous weeks when Rob was editor.

Inverted hierarchies are well demonstrated when Sarah shows Alan how to stream live video on the blog. Despite her lack of seniority and her lack of experience as a journalist, Sarah has skills that older, more experienced journalists do not possess. She shares her knowledge with Alan, who is an experienced journalist of many years.

Processes (if this, then that): Lisa and Sarah decide to run a story which is not on patch because of the draw they believe it will have with news traders. The editorial boundaries are very different online to how they are in print and while the story is off patch they decide it is near enough and will have enough impact to make it a worthwhile story to run.

Emerging questions/analyses:

8. Anonymised survey and responses



Online surveys

Journalism skills and tools survey 2017

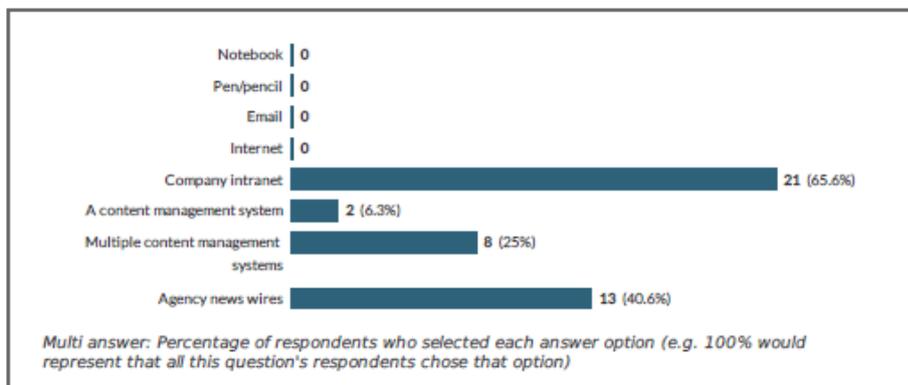
Showing 61 of 61 responses

Showing **all** responses

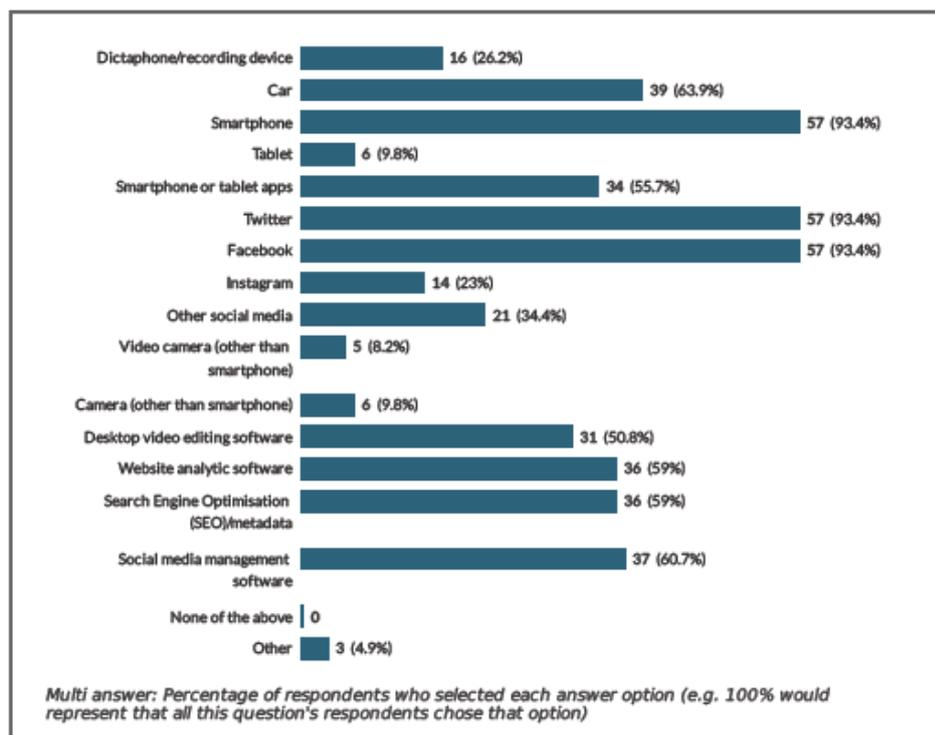
Showing **all** questions

Response rate: 61%

1 Please tick any tools which you DO NOT use for work on a daily basis.



2 Which of the following tools do you rely on regularly to conduct your work? Tick all that apply.

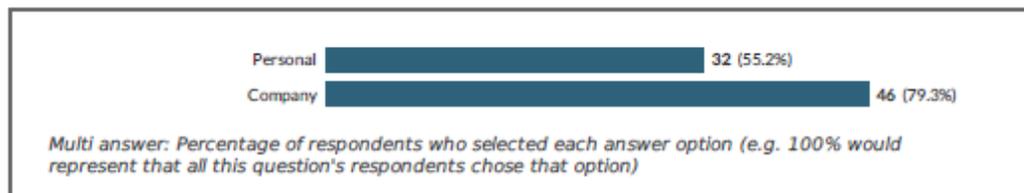


2.a If you selected Other, please specify:

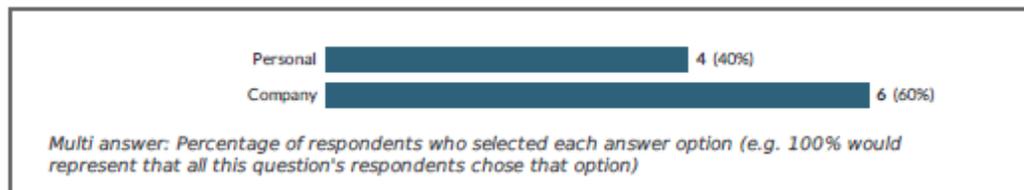
Showing all 3 responses	
Shorthand	[REDACTED]
Landline	
Laptop	
Notepad/pen	
Traffic system - Inrix	
Content management system	

2.b If you ticked smartphone and/or tablet, please indicate who the equipment belongs to. Tick all that apply.

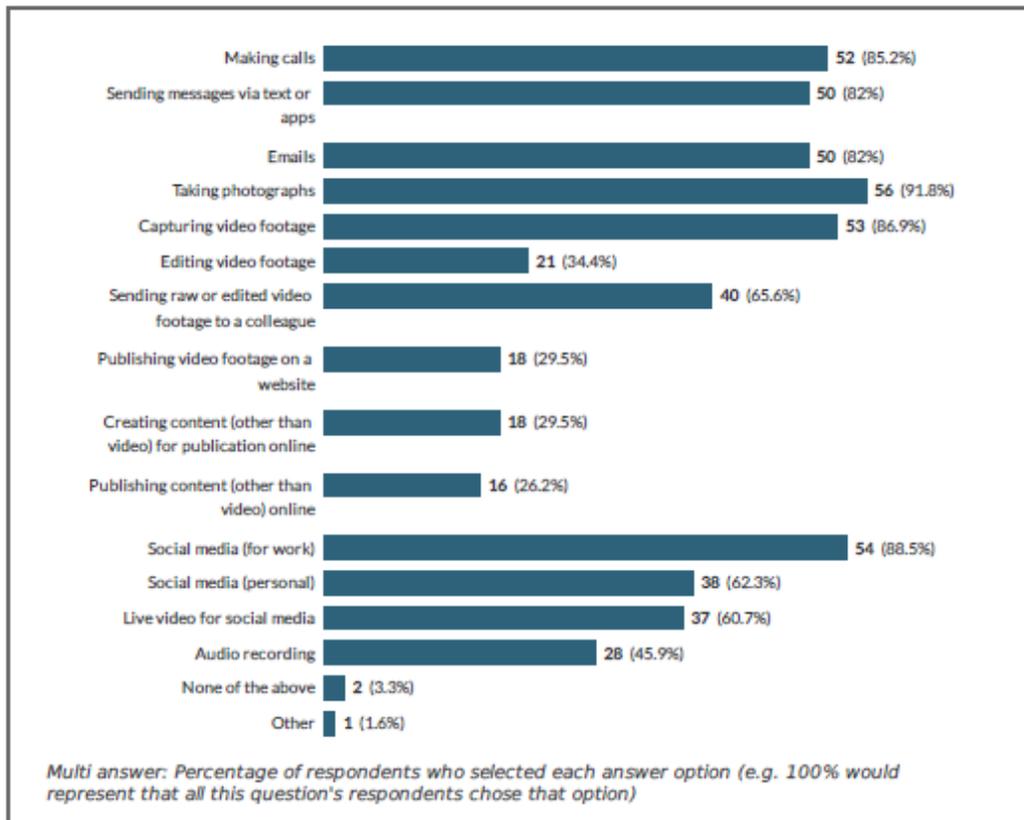
2.b.1 Smartphone



2.b.2 Tablet



3 If you use a smartphone or tablet for work, please indicate in what capacity you use them. Tick all that apply.



3.a If you selected Other, please specify:

Showing 1 response	
Monitoring daily digital news plan	[REDACTED]

3.a If you selected Other, please specify:

Showing 1 response	
Monitoring daily digital news plan	[REDACTED]

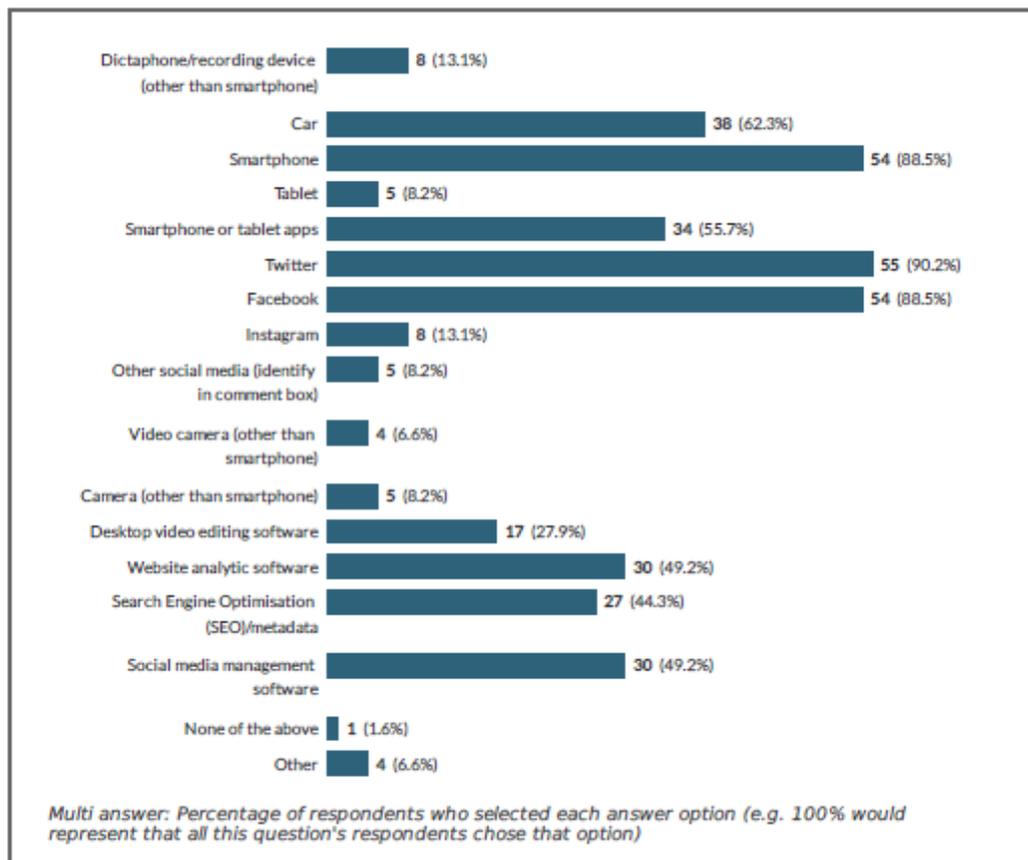
3.b If you use downloaded apps on your smartphone or tablet for any of the above functions, please name those which you use regularly.

Showing all 36 responses	
imovie, whatsapp, twitter, facebook	[REDACTED]
Facebook, Twitter	
filmic pro	
VoiceRecorder, Viss, WordPress	

voicerecorder, vine, worurress
Twitter, Camera+, WeVideo, WeTransfer
Whatsapp, Twitter, Facebook
Facebook and twitter
Twitter Facebook Gmail
Facebook, Twitter, Gmail
Twitter, Slack, What's App, Gmail, Pages Manager
Facebook Twitter Google maps Voice memos Whatsapp Facebook messenger Twitter DMs
Facebook, Twitter
imovie
Twitter, Facebook, Whatsapp, iMovie
Facebook Twitter Instagram Reddit Whatsapp Trello Chartbeat Facebook Pages Manager Facebook Messenger
YEP app, Googlemaps, Twitter, Facebook, BBC news, scanner app,
Twitter Facebook
WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook.
Twitter, Facebook
Voice recorder, FB, Twitter apps
Facebook, Twitter, camera and voice recorder.
facebook twitter instagram chartbeat
Facebook Pages, Twitter, Insta, Zoe (video editing).
Adobe Clip
Twitter, Facebook, Email, Messenger, Whats App, advanced sound

Twitter, Facebook, Email, messenger, whats App, advanced sound recorders,	
Slack	
Twitter Facebook	
Hi-Q recorder, Facebook, Twitter, Gmail, Google Messages, Phone,	
Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, apps that come with the iphone	
WhatsApp	
Recorder (app), Audioboom, WhatsApp, Slack	
Chartbeat Trello Facebook Twitter Gmail	
Chartbeat, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp	
Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, iMovie, Fotor, Google Drive	
Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Adobe Premier Clip, Google Chrome	
Facebook, Twitter, Google	

- 4 Which, if any, of the following tools have you used for work purposes in the past five working days? Tick all that apply.



4.a If you selected Other, please specify:

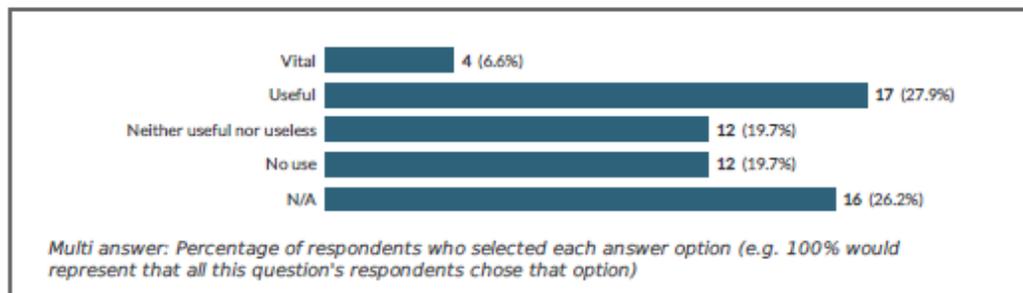
Showing all 4 responses	
Pen and paper - shorthand	[Redacted]
Inrix - traffic google maps	
Content management system	
Only because I've been on holiday in the last five days	

4.b If you selected 'Other social media', please specify:

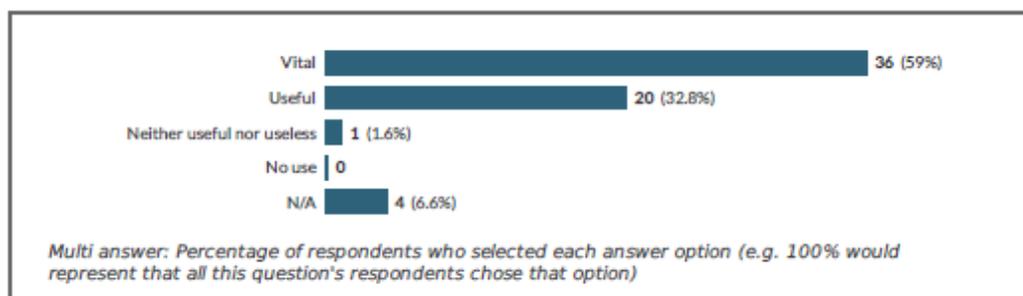
Showing all 5 responses	
Reddit	[Redacted]
YouTube - for video creation (music source).	
Linked In	
LinkedIn	
Tweetdeck (important)	

5 How useful do you believe the following tools to be when conducting your work? Please supply an answer for each tool listed.

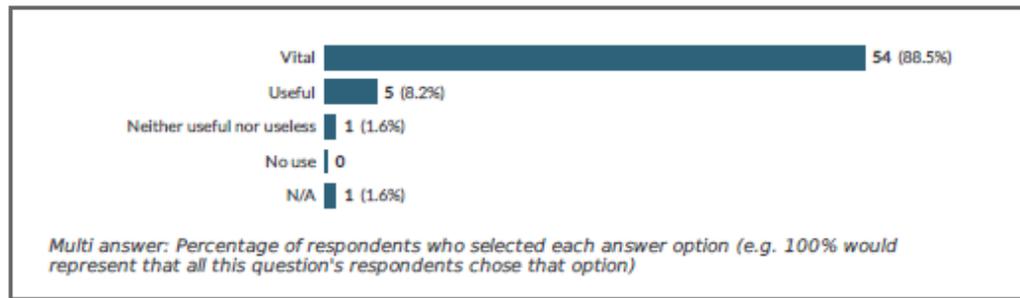
5.1 1. Dictaphone/recording device (other than smartphone)



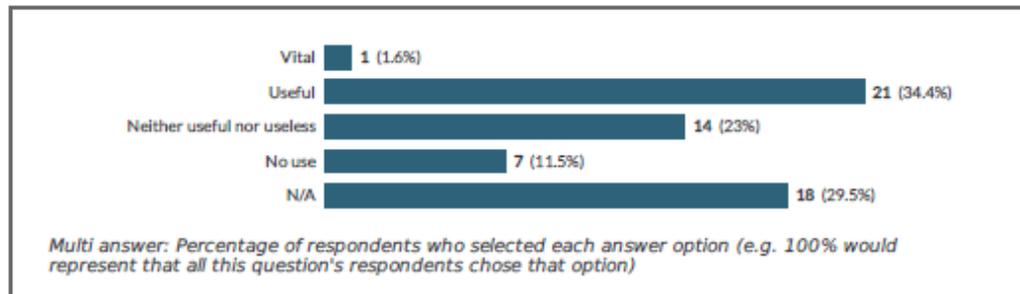
5.2 2. Car



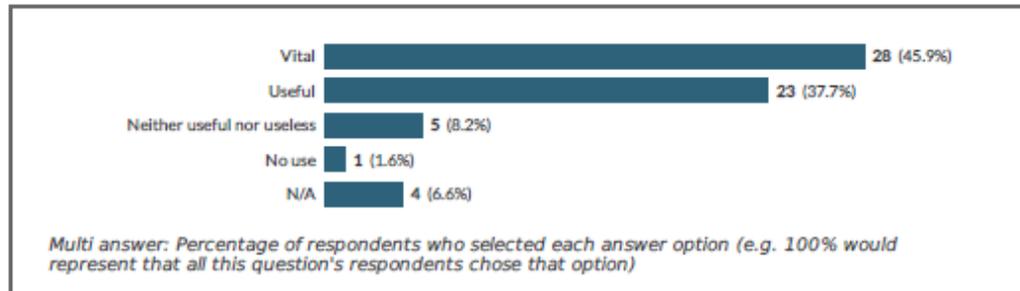
5.3 3. Smartphone



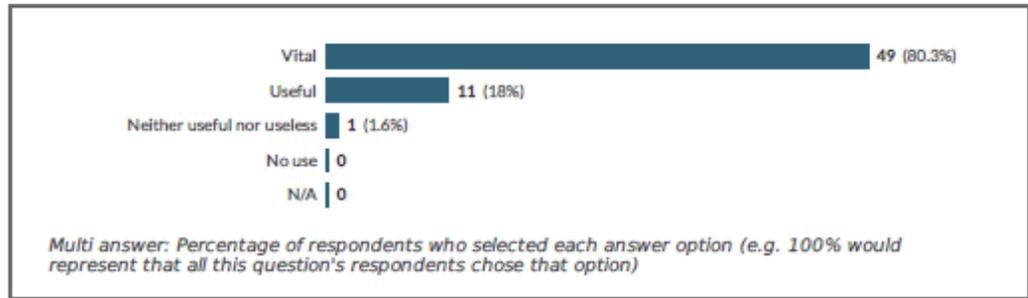
5.4 4. Tablet



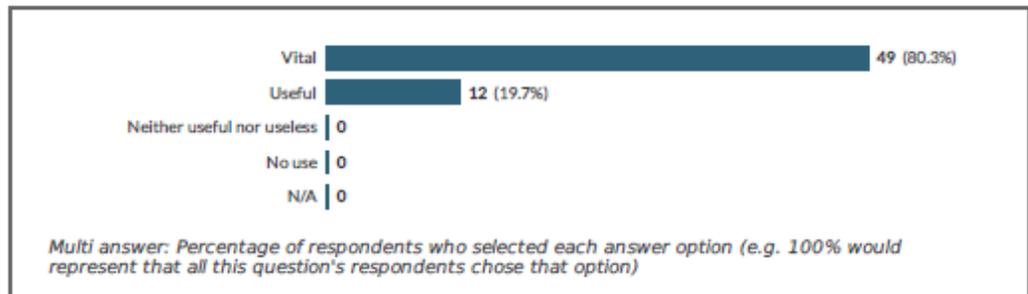
5.5 5. Smartphone or tablet apps



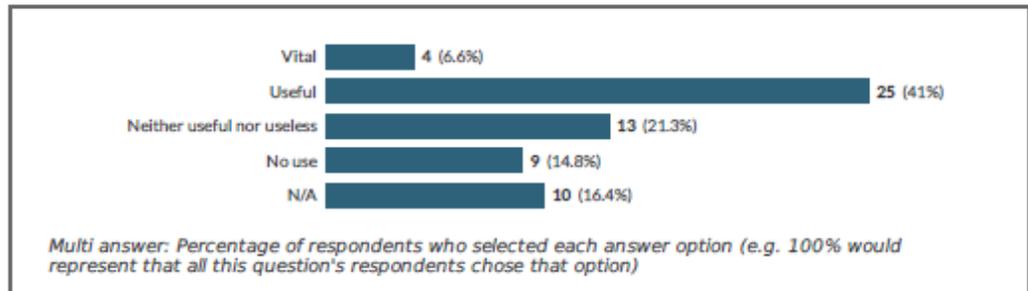
5.6 6. Twitter



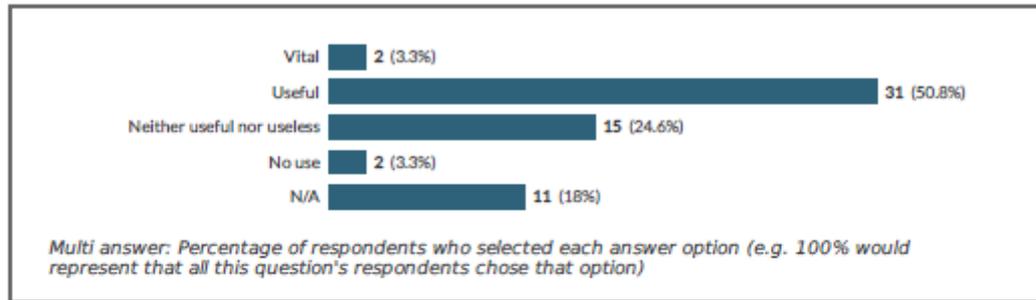
5.7 7. Facebook



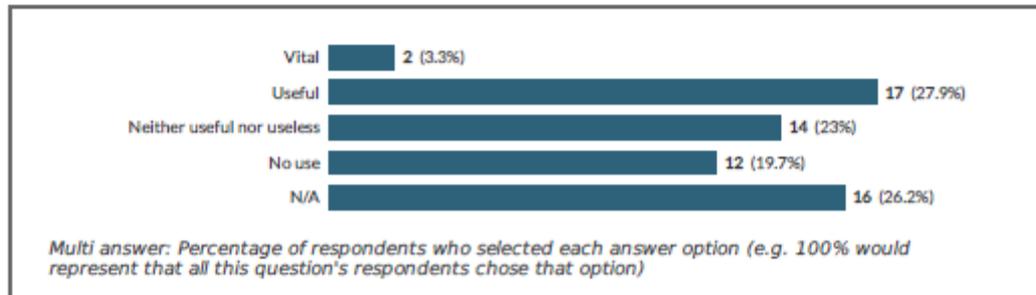
5.8 8. Instagram



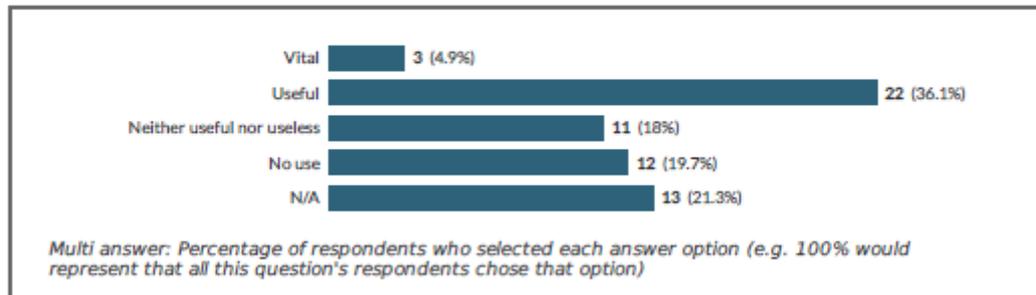
5.9 9. Other social media



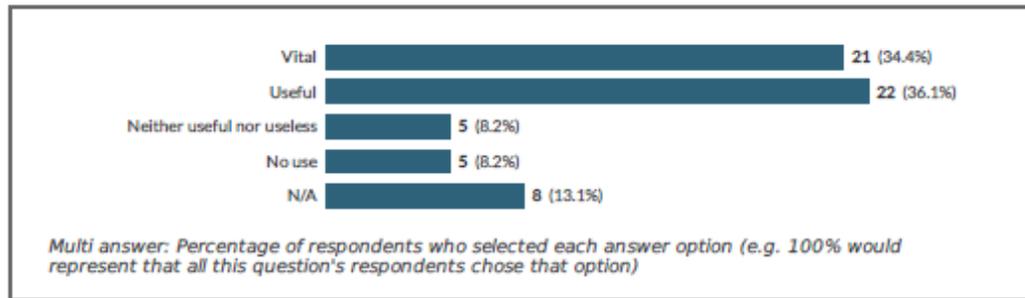
5.10 10. Video camera (other than smartphone)



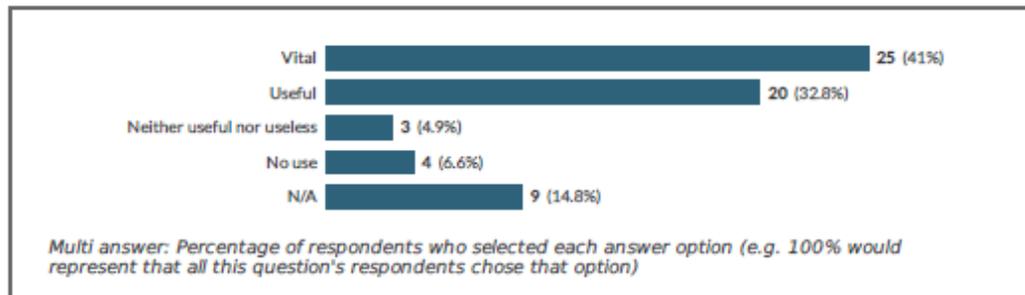
5.11 11. Camera (other than smartphone)



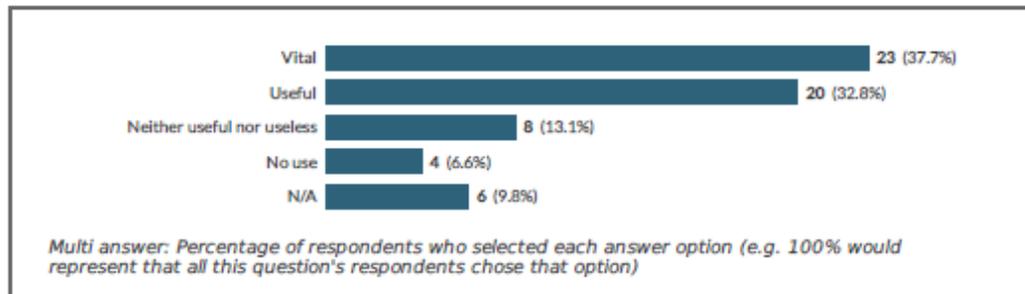
5.12 12. Desktop video editing software



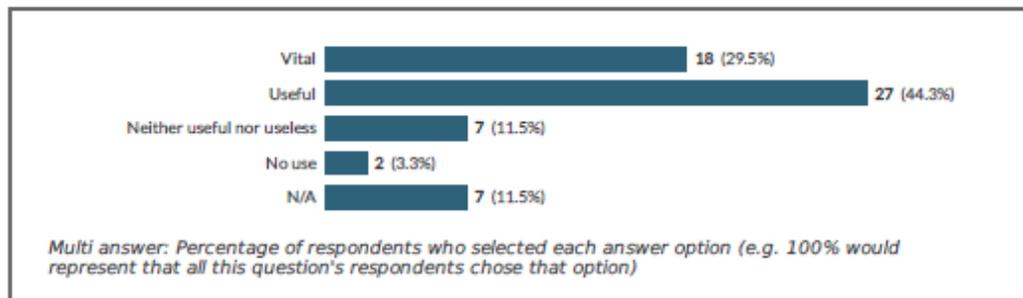
5.13 13. Website analytic software



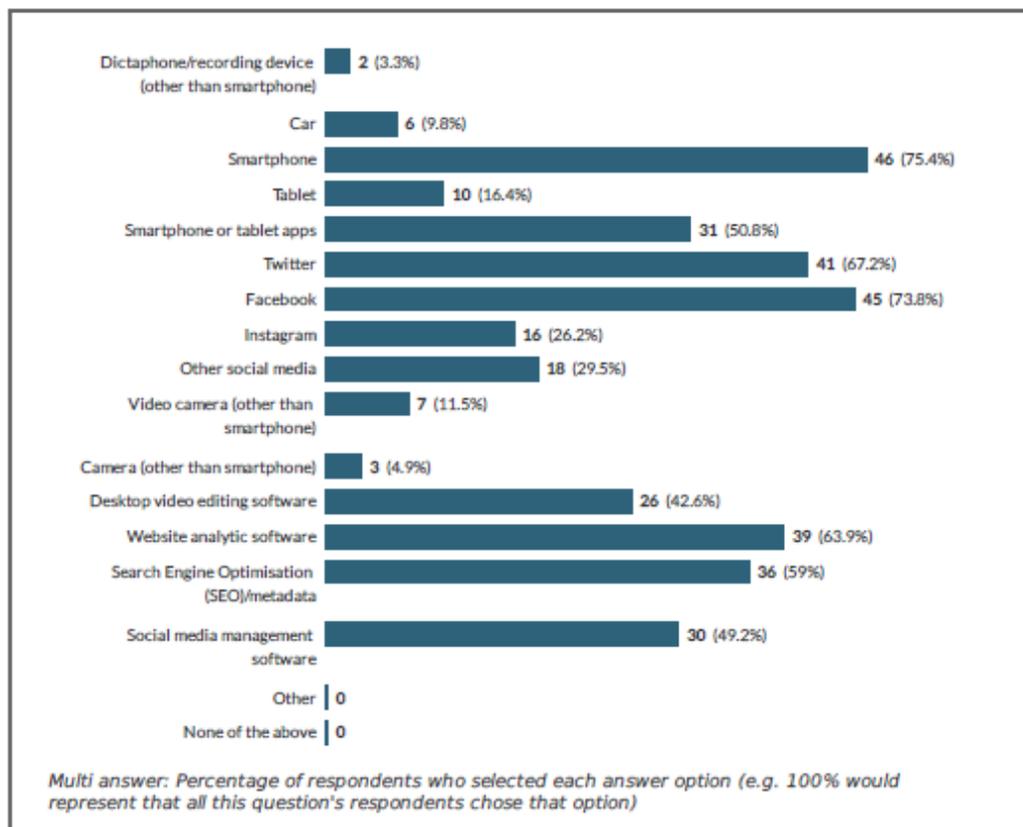
5.14 14. Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)/metadata



5.15 15. Social media management software



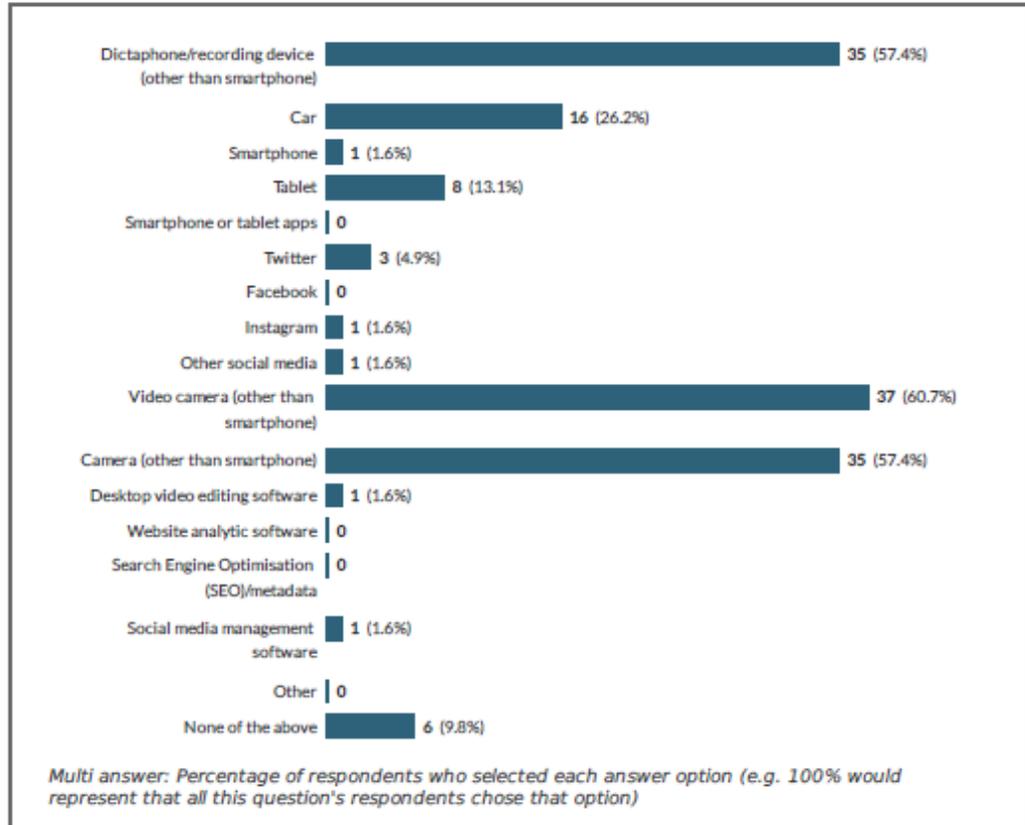
- 6** Which, if any, of the following tools do you think are INCREASING in importance within your newsroom? Tick all that apply.



- 6.a** If you selected Other, please specify:

No responses

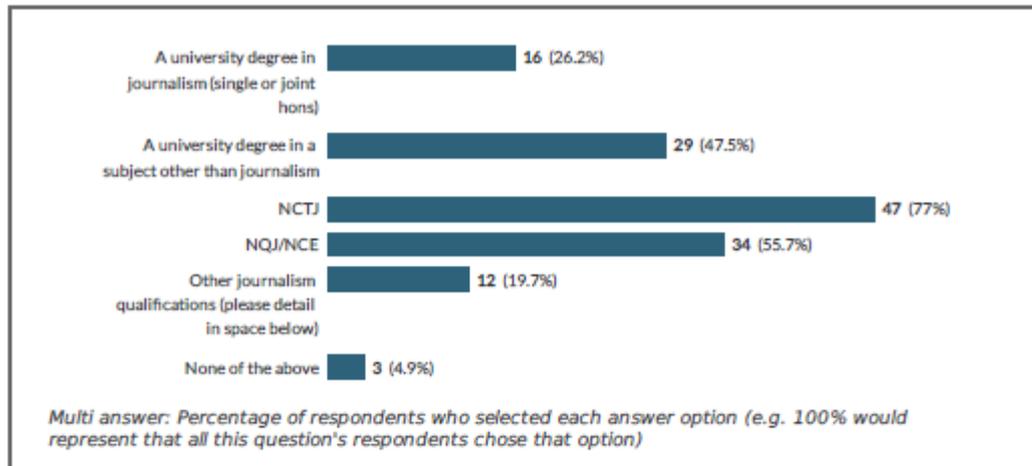
- 7** Which of the following tools do you think are DECREASING in importance within your newsroom?
Tick all that apply.



- 7.a** If you selected Other, please specify:

No responses

- 8** Please indicate if you have any of the following qualifications.



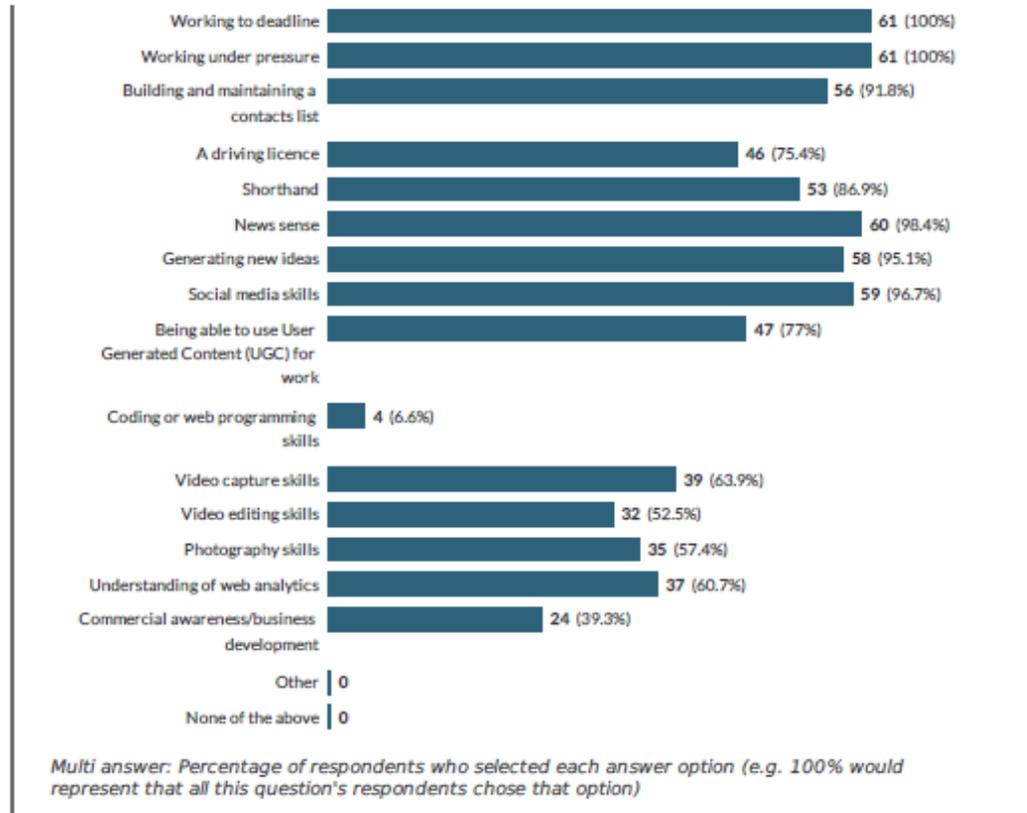
8.a If you selected Other, please specify:

Showing all 13 responses	
Scottish Higher National Diploma in journalism studies from [redacted] the years before it became a degree course)	[redacted]
Level 4 NVQ in journalism	[redacted]
NVQ level 5 in Photo journalism	[redacted]
Postgraduate Diploma in Print Journalism	[redacted]
City and Guilds in Journalistic Competences	[redacted]
Post grad diploma in Journalism	[redacted]
Trinity Mirror Certificate of Journalism (NCTJ accredited)	[redacted]
Professional Journalism Qualification from newspaper publisher	[redacted]
Postgraduate diploma in journalism	[redacted]
Masters degree in journalism	[redacted]
Teeline shorthand	[redacted]
Post-graduate diploma	[redacted]
BJTC	[redacted]

9 Which of the following skills or abilities do you use regularly to conduct your work? Tick all that apply.

- 9 Which of the following skills or abilities do you use regularly to conduct your work? Tick all that apply.

15 / 45



- 9.a If you selected Other, please specify:

No responses

9.a If you selected Other, please specify:

No responses

9.b If you selected commercial awareness/business development please explain how you apply this skill in your workplace. Specific examples would be useful. Remember, all responses will be anonymised and any specific details will not be used in any way which could breach confidentiality.

Showing all 20 responses	
I work on the Business Desk and so pass on leads to commercial departments and suggest ideas for content on occassion. I am involved in editorial for awards and other schemes.	
We are always looking for ways to bring money in for the company (press releases about new businesses will not simply be just printed now, for example. Instead we contact them and try to sell advertising or encourage	

16 / 45

them to run a competition for example)	
Identifying commercial opportunities around content. Sponsored content	
Passing on 'crossover' stories with a commercial/promotional angle to the advertising team	
We are all expected now to see commercial value in press releases. What packages we can offer for businesses who would normally have had new coverage for free. We forward info to commercial editor who tries to sell a package to them. One example was the new IKEA opening. they didn't want to pay for advertising so we only used coverage of the opening online - our biggest hitting story of the day - this never went in print.	
Creating content which will drive figures/sales Competitions with advertisers Sponsored social media posts	
Creating website content that is not strictly news - ie service journalism	
A general awareness that the revenue comes from selling papers and getting the maximum number of online views, and directing your time accordingly.	
Being aware of profitable opportunities in our content creation e.g.. always asking for or including video with online stories, as the pre-roll advertising is very profitable. Also, hyperlinking to certain brands who have signed a 'skimlinks' deal with our company.	
As print revenues decrease and digital revenues continue to develop, we are increasingly asked to be aware of any opportunities to 'monetise'. Reporters now get regular emails about commercial/business development element of the company, this didn't happen 10 or even five years ago to the same extent.	
In my role I have a key role in developing and maintaining commercial relationships both for revenue and editorial interests	
Reporters encouraged to negotiate bulk paper sales deals where appropriate and check newsagents/supermarkets for good product placement - in context of less newspaper sales staff.	
I have a hybrid editorial/commercial role and work as a PR service for local property-related companies	
Looking for commercial opportunities in stories I write or that are presented to us. For example we informed our commercial team and video editor when a new pub opened in case they wanted to push for a commercial opportunity. Another example: a very well known local business turned 30 and we shared the news with our commercial team for them to speak to the company about promotional opportunities before we published.	
Work with [REDACTED] on an advertorial campaign	
Knowing where there are opportunities for advertising - although not at the cost of editorial independence	
As an editorial team we have prestige within the business community and contacts. It is important we utilise these when possible to help drive	

revenues in to the business to support our work, without jeopardising our editorial independence and integrity.

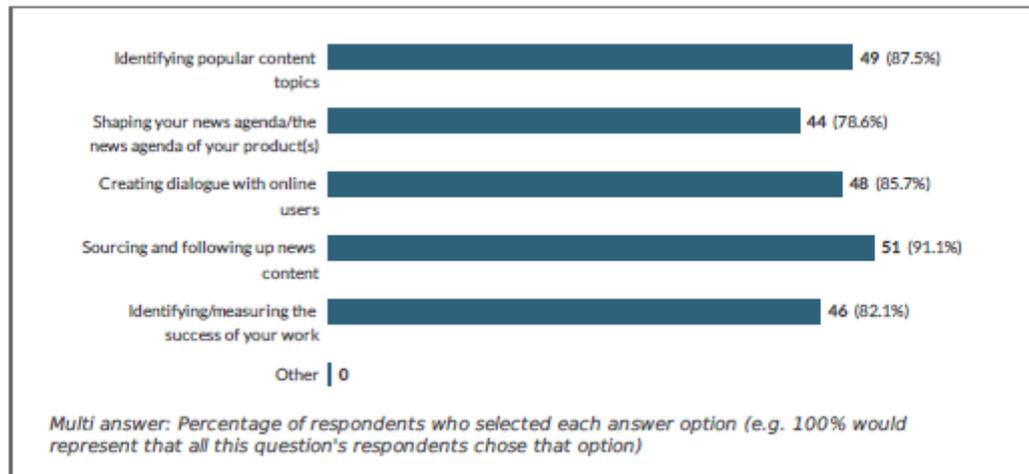
I liaise with the advertising team about potential opportunities to sell ads

As an editor of free newspapers, it is important to understand that the newspaper has to strike the right tone in general. There are no stories we wouldn't run but in general, the paper needs to have an upbeat feel. I'm also acutely aware of budgets and how to make the most of the staff we have and planning for future eventualities.

Understanding newspaper sales & commercial priorities



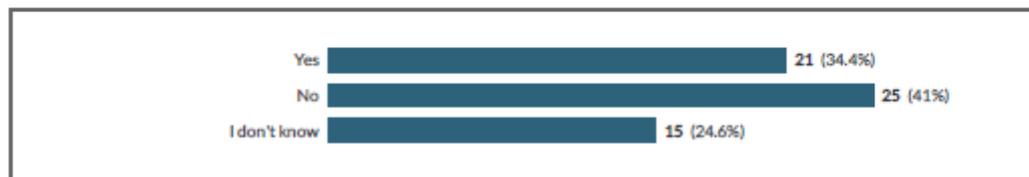
- 10** If you use web analytics and social media skills for work, please indicate if they assist you with any of the following (tick all that apply):



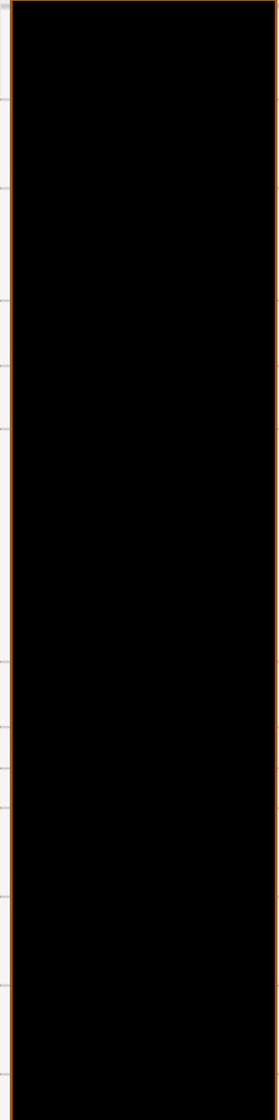
- 10.a** If you selected Other, please specify:

No responses

- 11** Are individual journalists' web analytics measured/audited within your newsroom?

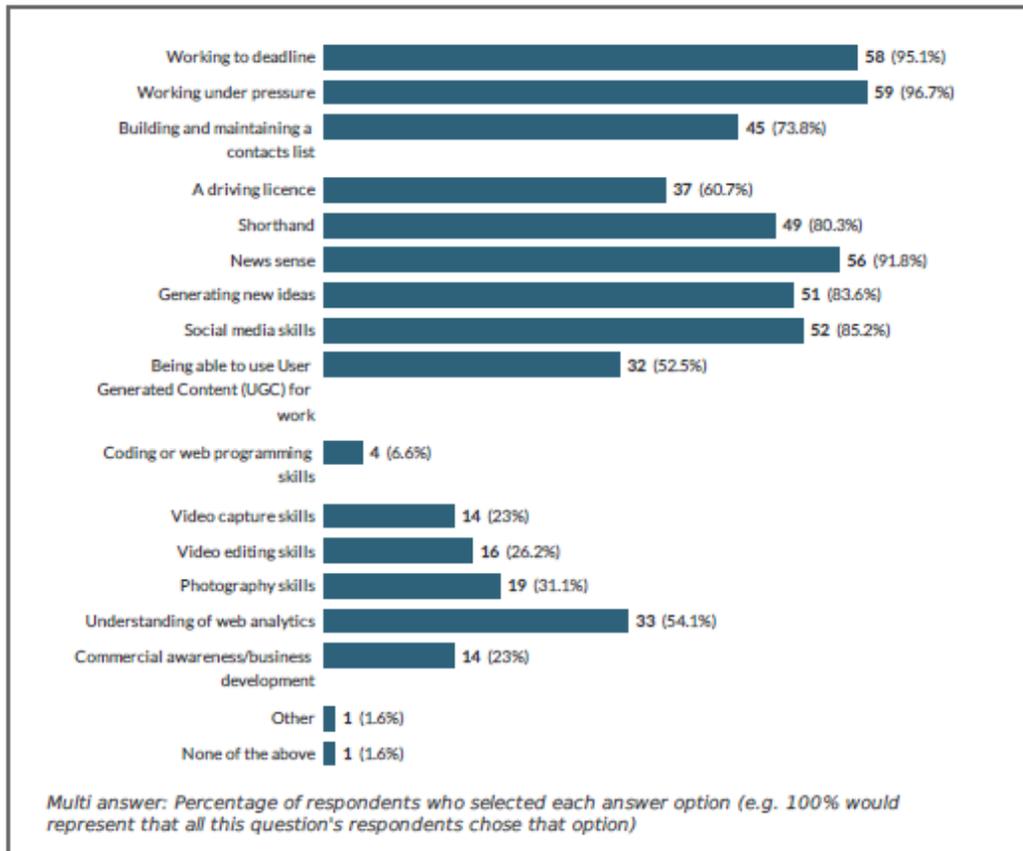


- 11.a If yes, please can you give more detail about how this works in your newsroom. Remember, all responses will be anonymised and any specific details will not be used in any way which could breach confidentiality.

Showing all 23 responses	
It is used by managers to assess performance - but it is NOT referred to by the manager when speaking to the reporter. It is just useful information which doesn't tell the full story.	
We use sites such as Linkpulse and omniture to track analytics. We see what works well and what doesn't. Use this to show journalists what they should be doing more or less of.	
They are measured and the top 20 hit generators are published each day along with top stories but there is no ranking against each other (other than friendly rivalry) at this stage. We all have access to analytics software to see what does well etc.	
Although individual targets were not brought into our newsroom, regular one to ones address your personal performance.	
Allegedly only for monitoring what works and doesn't work and is not linked to pay, performance or promotion	
I answered no but I wanted to explain my answer. Our desk does keep an eye on our analytics and the hits we receive however it is not used against us in any way just yet. Commonly we do have to supply our monthly page views and unique views for our quarterly reviews. This is then used to see how you are performing compared to others, previous months and if there are any stories that did very well or didn't do very well. Then we look at why something may or may not have done as well as expected.	
Via a dashboard of results supposed to be discussed regularly with managers	
As a learning tool to make future content decisions	
Not yet, although it is highly likely this will come into play	
Each reporter looks at their own web statistics. Occasional reviews look at how stories can be presented and angled to increase the number of readers.	
Yes - author pages are monitored for page views, but not in a performance related capacity. This is helpful for writers to see what content works for them and what doesn't.	
They are measured in daily target briefings, but hold no meaning. A reporter that has 2,000 views will not be treated differently to one with 10,000.	
The background information is there but is viewed only by Editor and shared with senior colleagues for identifying issues largely so they can be addressed with further training or direction. The data is not mined deeply or presented to staff	

Software is used to track views of particular stories, which also identifies individual journalists via their email addresses. Daily monitoring reports include a chart of the 15 journalists who got the most page views on their stories the day before.	
We use a program called Adobe Omniture which tells us how many 'web hits' we get each day. All reporters have access to this but they don't necessarily use it	
Software shows who's doing the best at any time, and how everyone else can take from that, and improve that which they are doing	
To be honest we are aware that our numbers are being monitored, but we don't know for what purpose yet. My suspicious is the company will introduce personal page view targets in the future. Hopefully the NUJ will help support us through this.	
Individuals' web metrics can be tracked but this is done more by the reporters themselves because they are interested - at a newsdesk level we do not use them as comparators. The metrics software does enable it, though.	
On just in progress - but these will be used as a training and development tool and to ensure reporters aren't writing content which has little interest/engagement or writing good content which isn't being correctly amplified online	
We have team targets, not individual targets but all reporters receive a daily report of the page views their stories have generated. They use this to consider follow-ups and to work out why some stories perform better than others	
Story counts and, to a more general extent, the performance of stories online by reporters are measured - as well as UGC. We're careful that this is only part of the picture - we want to create websites that regularly updated and with big audiences but not at the expense of quality or variety.	
Web hits are measured and used to identify stories for follow-up	
We cannot be seen to be targeting individual journalists web hits etc but each reporter is given a breakdown of how well their stories have done, how long people read their articles for etc	

- 12 Which, if any, of the following skills or abilities have you used for work purposes in the past five working days? Tick all that apply.

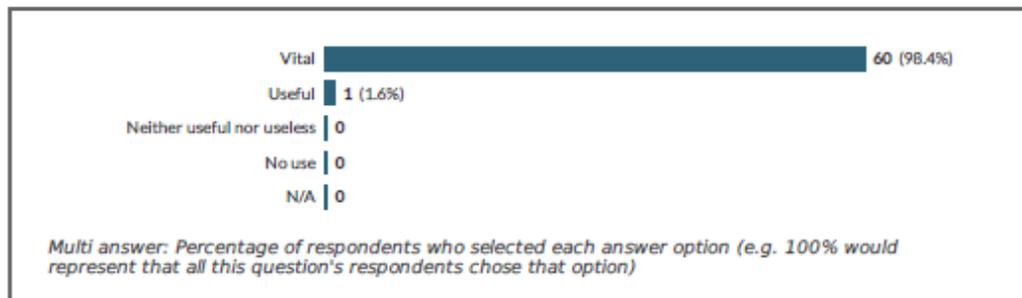


12.a If you selected Other, please specify:

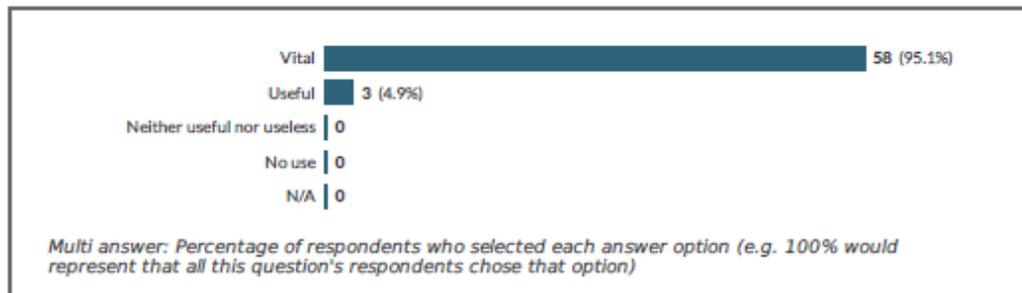
Showing 1 response	
Legal qualification	[REDACTED]

13 How useful do you believe the following skills or abilities to be when conducting your work?

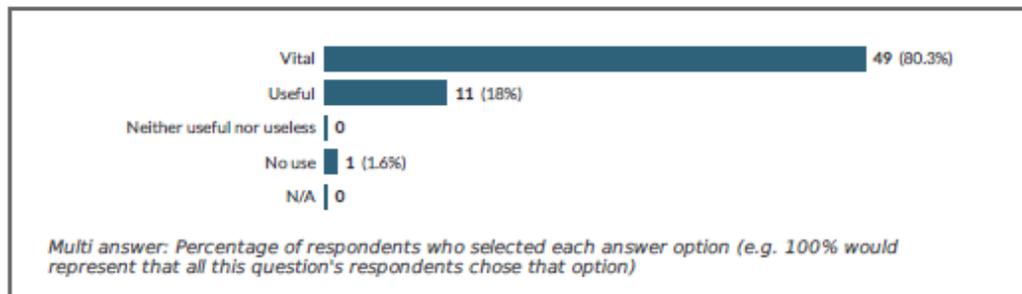
13.1 1. Working to deadline



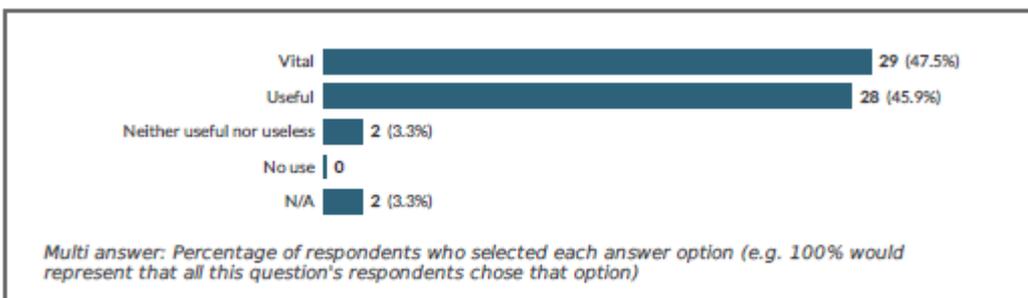
13.2 2. Working under pressure



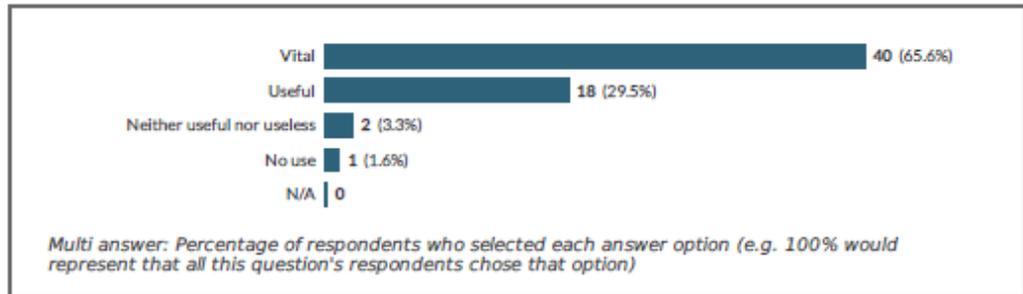
13.3 3. Building and maintaining a contacts list



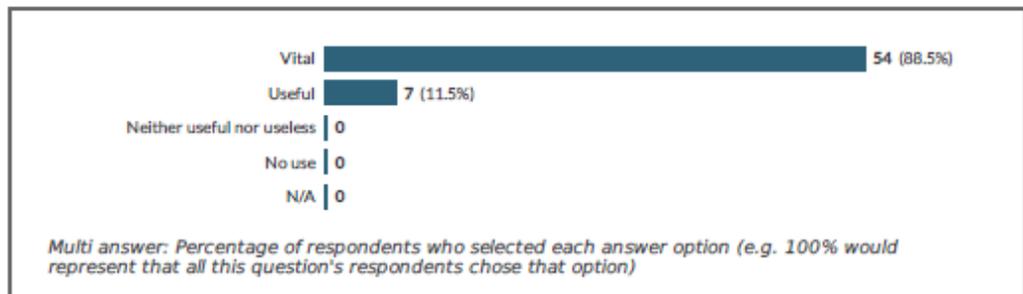
13.4 4. A driving licence



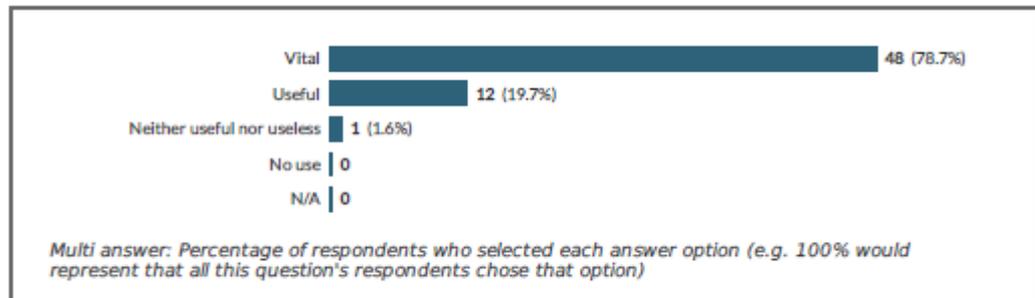
13.5 5. Shorthand

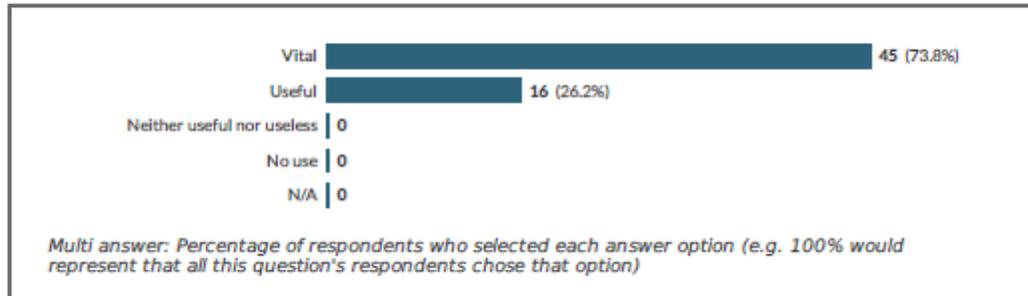


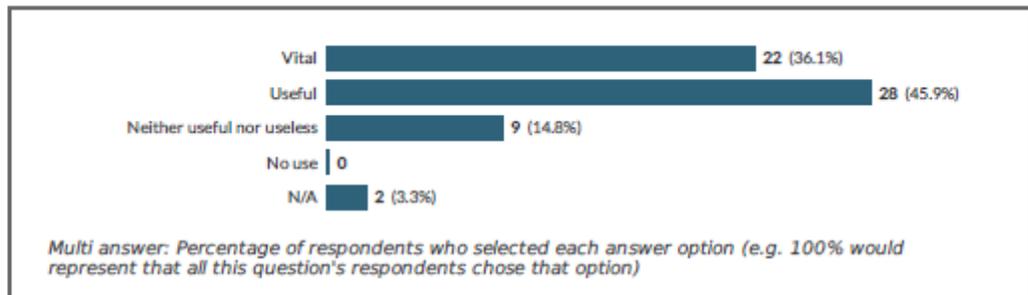
13.6 6. News sense



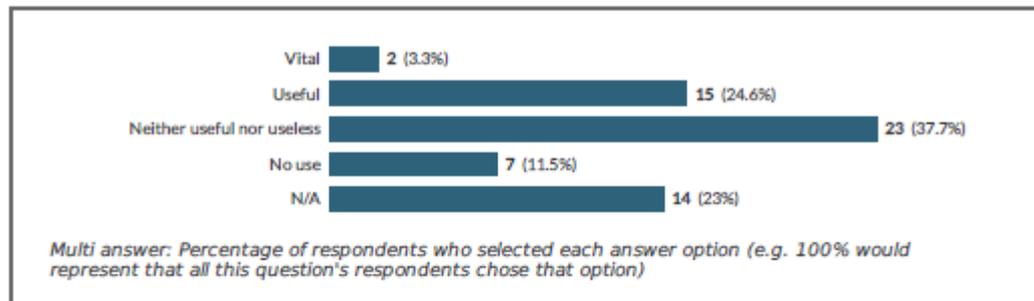
13.7 7. Generating new ideas



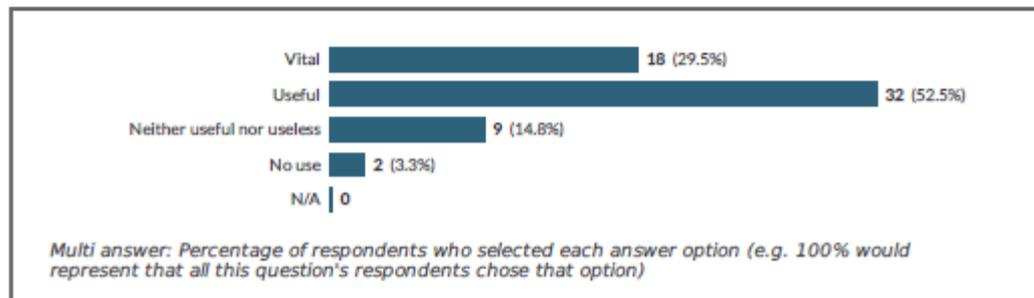
13.8 8. Social media skills

13.9 9. Being able to use User Generated Content (UGC) for work

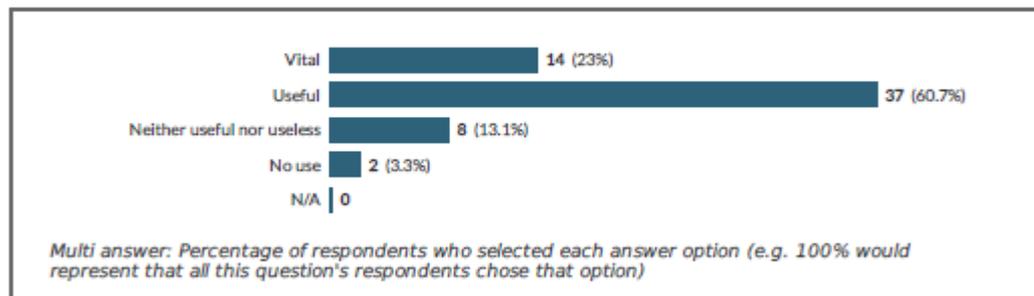
13.10 10. Coding or web programming skills



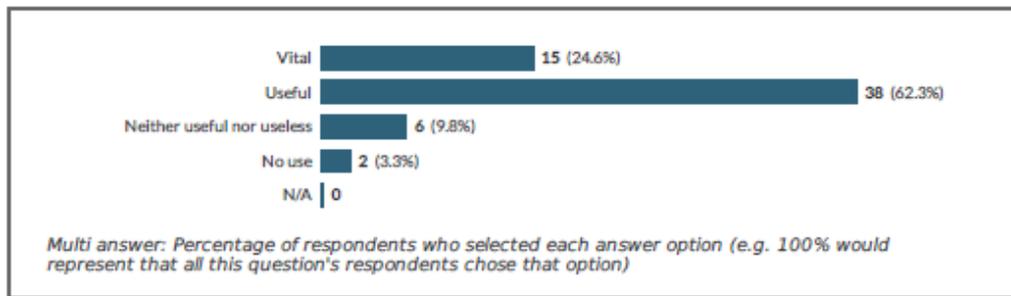
13.11 11. Video capture skills



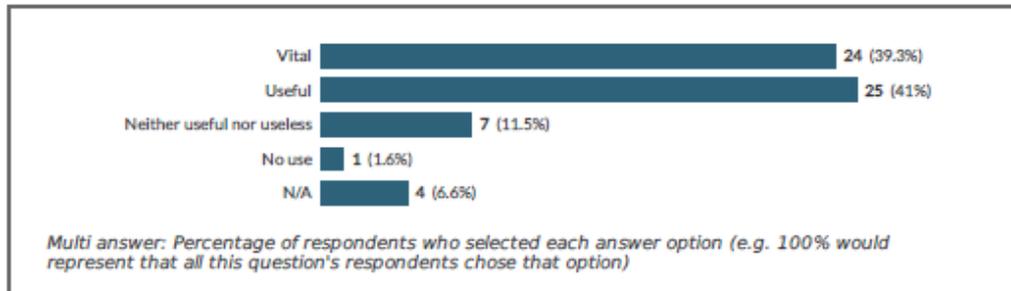
13.12 12. Video editing skills



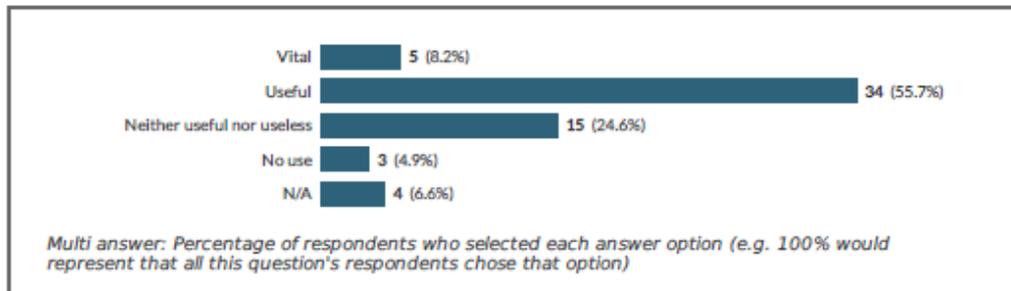
13.13 13. Photography skills



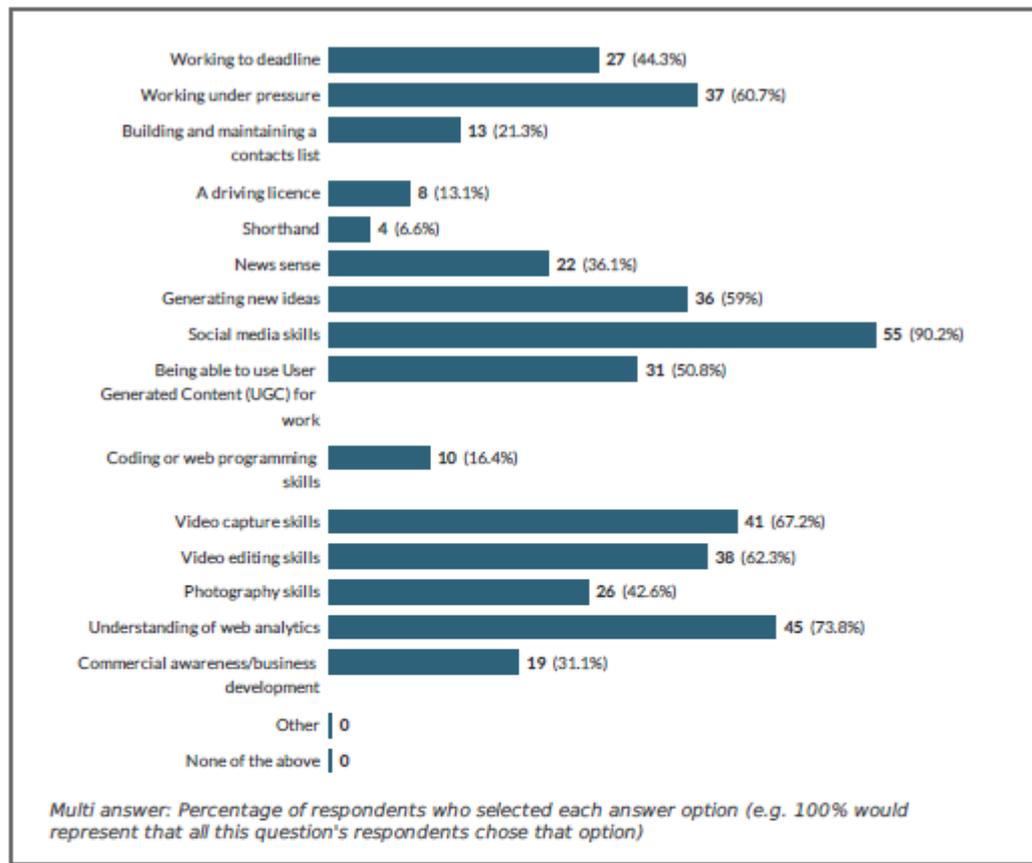
13.14 14. Understanding of web analytics



13.15 15. Commercial awareness/business development



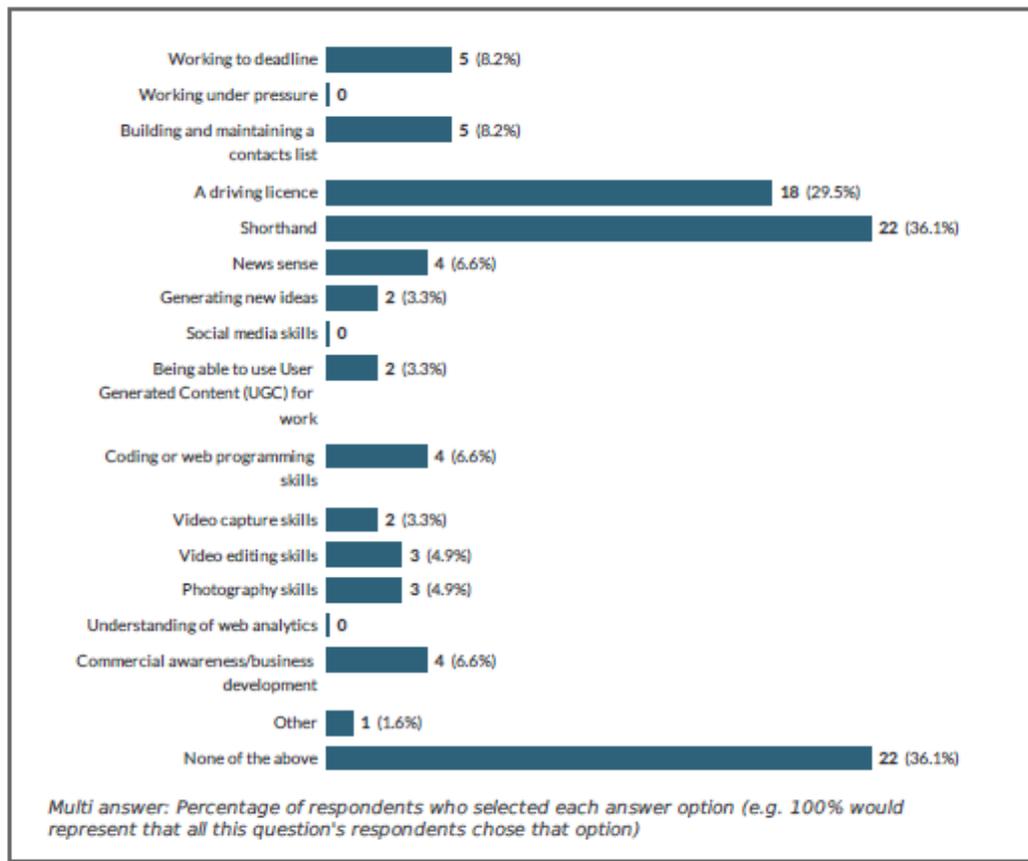
- 14 Which, if any, of the following skills or abilities do you think are INCREASING in importance within your newsroom? Tick all that apply.



14.a If you selected Other, please specify:

No responses

15 Which, if any, of the following skills or abilities do you think are DECREASING in importance within your newsroom environment? Tick all that apply.

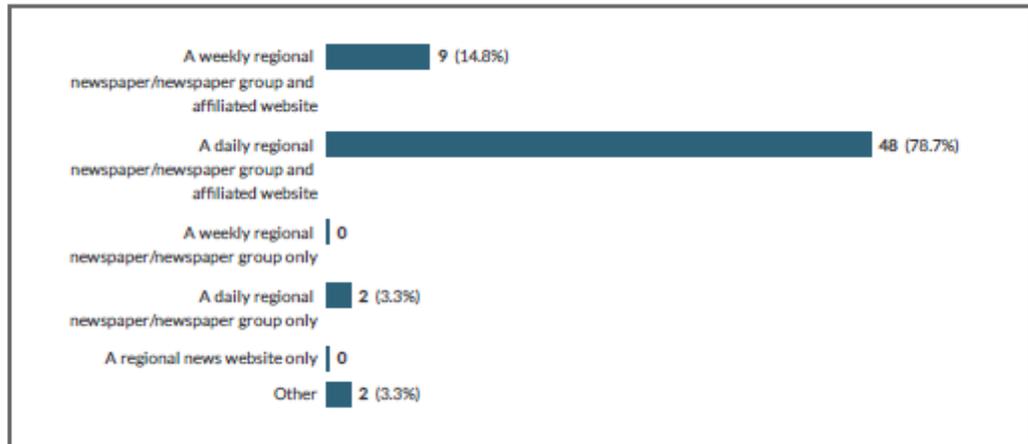


15.a If you selected Other, please specify:

Showing 1 response

These are all skills needed for a modern news room

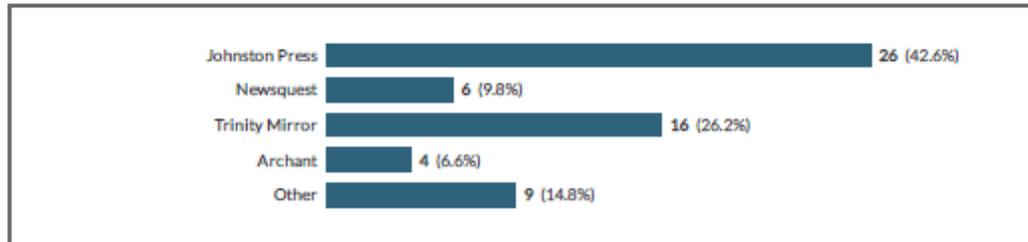
16 Do you work for:



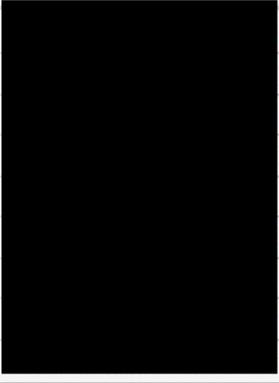
16.a If you selected Other, please specify:

Showing all 2 responses	
Daily and weekly titles within the newspaper group	[REDACTED]
A weekly regional newspaper group and a daily regional and both the affiliated websites as the team works across several papers.	[REDACTED]

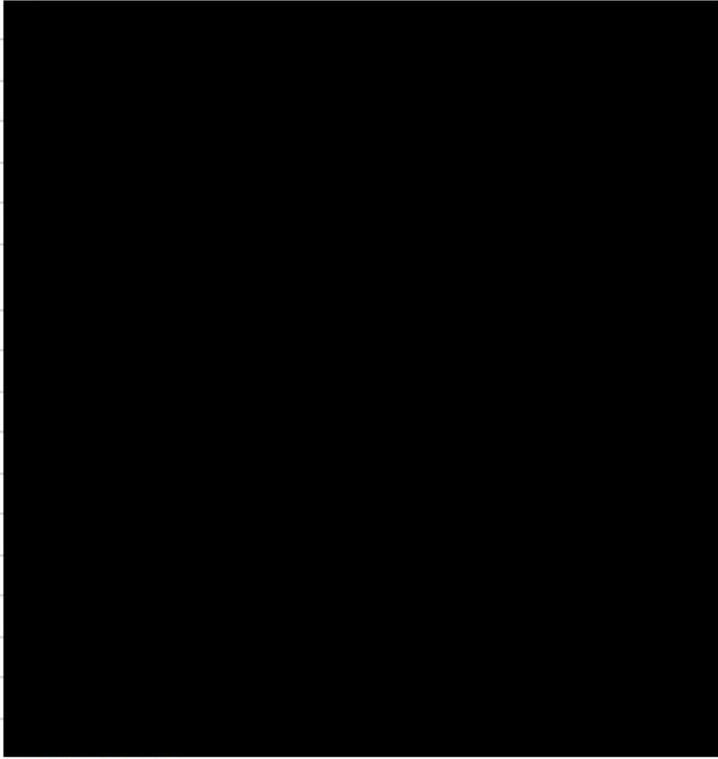
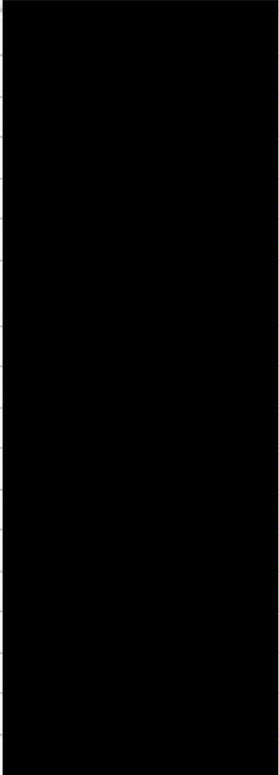
17 Are you employed by:

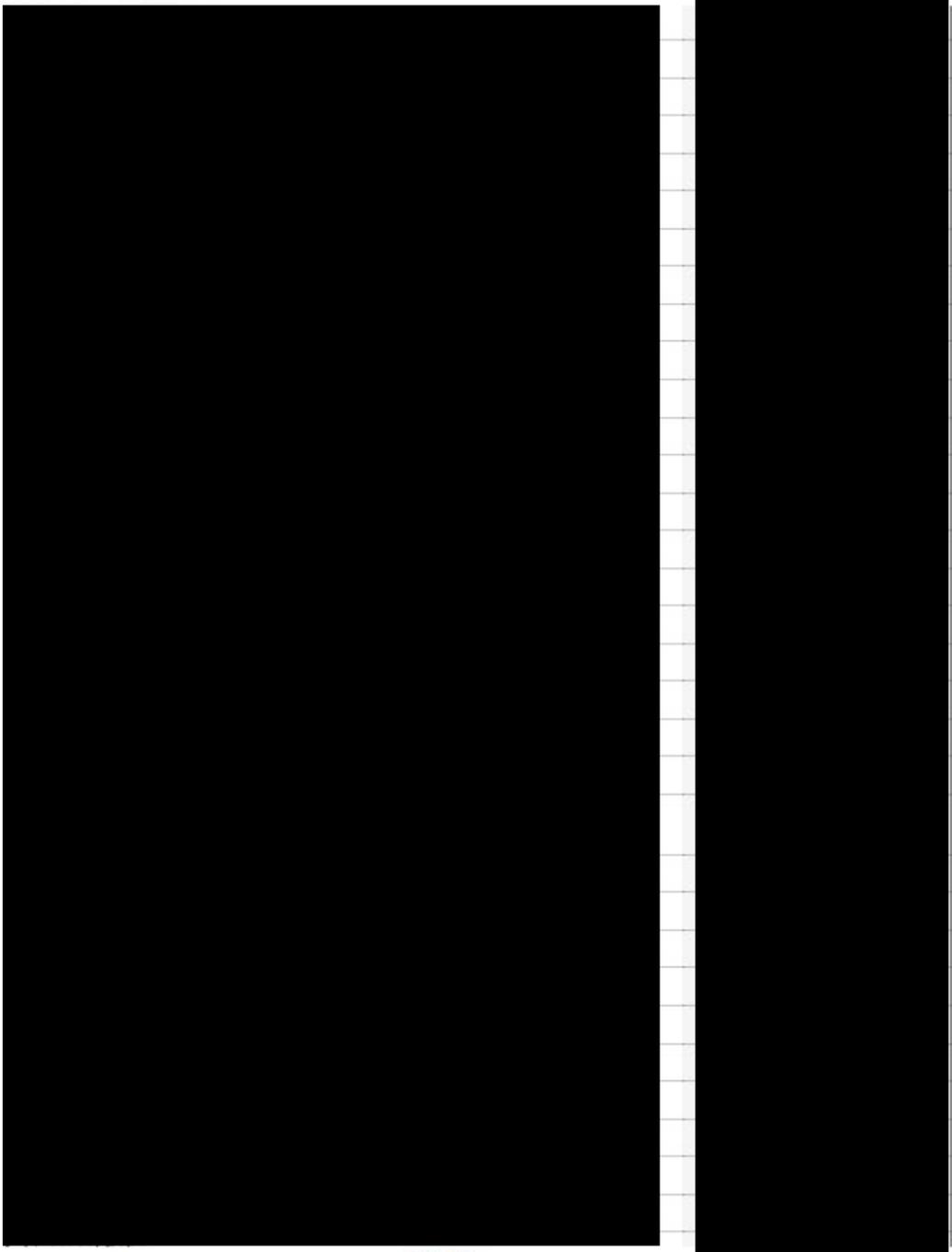


17.a If you selected Other, please specify:

Showing all 9 responses	
DC Thomson & Co Ltd	
DC Thomson and Co Ltd	
DC Thomson and Co Ltd	
CN Group	
DC Thomson	
Aberdeen Journals Ltd	
DC Thomson	
DC Thomson & Co Ltd	
Midlands News Association	

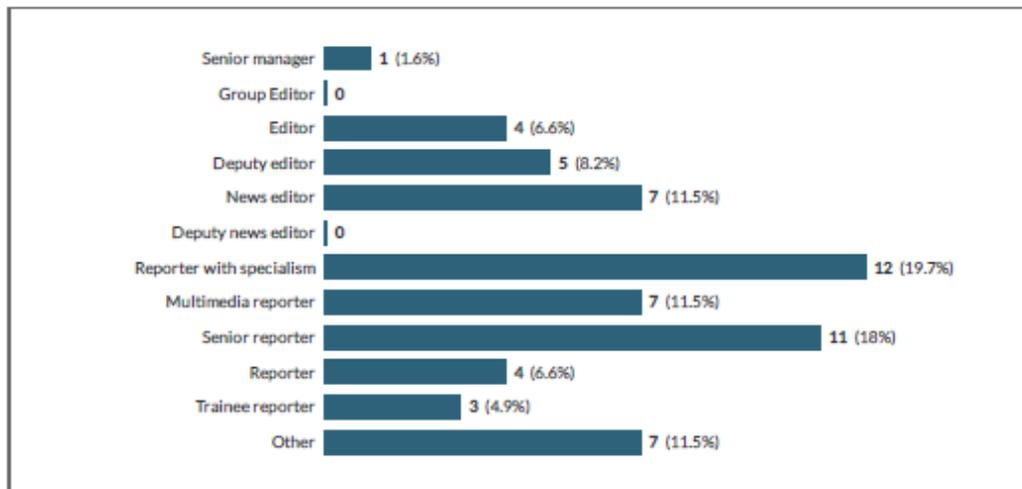
18 What is the name of the newspaper, website or newspaper group that you work for?

Showing all 58 responses	
	





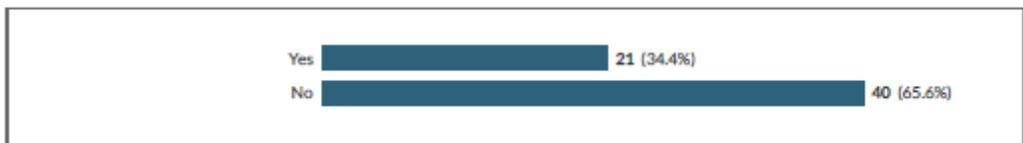
19 Please select the nearest role to the position you hold.



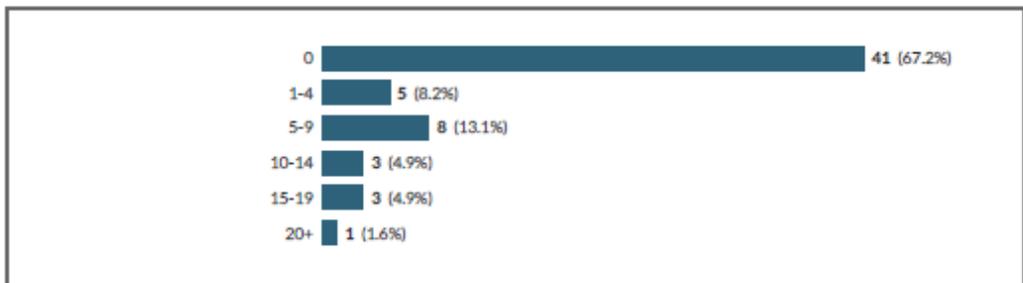
19.a If you selected Other, please specify:

Showing all 7 responses	
Video Editor/Content Editor	
Digital Content Writer	
Video Journalist	
Digital Editor	
Picture Editor	
Hybrid advertising/editorial role	
Video specialist	

19.b Do you have any management responsibilities?



19.b.i How many people do you directly manage?



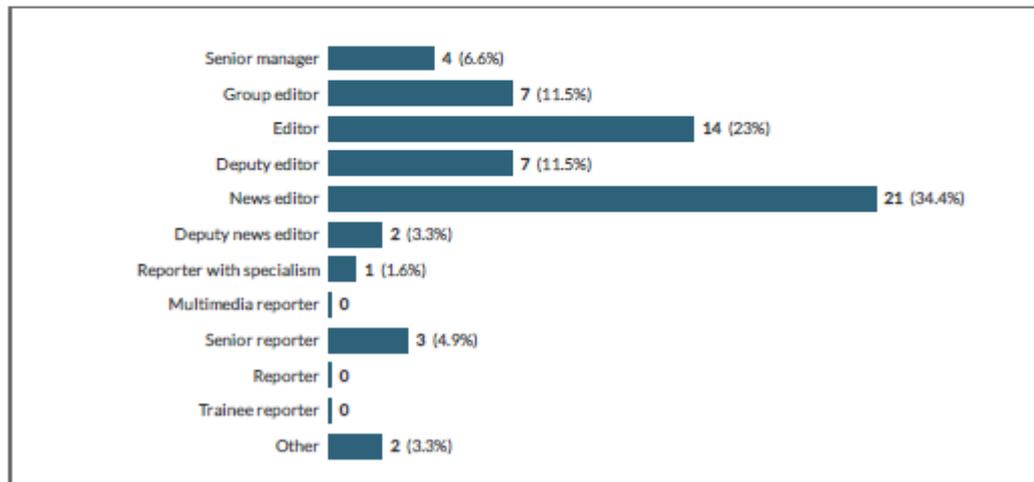
19.c What is your job title?

Showing all 56 responses	
National Video Editor	
Reporter	
Reporter	
Video Journalist	
Chief Reporter	

Business writer
Senior reporter/Content Editor
Agenda Writer
Digital reporter
Head of Digital
Senior multimedia reporter (with some newsdesk)
Senior Community Reporter
Crime reporter
Breaking News Editor
Digital reporter
Multimedia Images Editor
Senior journalist
Trainee Reporter
Executive editor
Editor
senior reporter
Senior reporter
Reporter
New reporter
Content editor
Senior news reporter
Business and technology editor
Executive editor (print)
Lifestyle Editor
News Editor
Content Direct Editor
Multimedia reporter
Digital Editor
Reporter
Political reporter
Multimedia reporter
Senior reporter
Group property content edito

Trainee Reporter (only on paper - options are trainee or senior and I am neither)	
Senior reporter	
Trainee Reporter	
Business writer	
Senior reporter	
News and sport reporter	
Multimedia reporter	
political reporter	
Head of News	
Editorial Director	
Senior reporter	
Editor/Head of Content	
Content Editor	
News Editor	
Video specialist	
Deputy Editor - Video	
Senior reporter with the advanced content hub	
Senior reporter	

20 Please select the position nearest to that which your line manager holds.



20.a If you selected Other, please specify:

Showing all 2 responses	
Chief reporter	
Group Video Manager	

20.b What is your line manager's job title?

Showing all 53 responses	
Editor in Chief	
Chief Reporter	
Chief reporter for the [redacted] area	
Group Video Manager	
Assitant Editor	
Business editor	
Head of content	
Head of Content	
Digital editor	
Head of Audience Engagement	
head of news	
Key Area Editor	
Head of news	
Executive editor live news	
Digital editor	
Group Editor	
Head of content	
Multimedia Content Manager	
Editor	
Editorial group director	
chief reporter	
Head of News	
News Editor	

Head of News	
Content editor	
Editor	
Editor	
Editor in chief	
Editor-in-Chief	
Editor in Chief	
Editor	
Head of Content	
Editor in Chief	
Content editor	
Deputy editor	
Content editor	
Group editor	
News editor	
News Editor	
Content Editor	
Business editor	
News editor	
Editor in Chief	
News editor	
Editor	
Editor in Chief	
Chief reporter	
Head of digital	
Group managing editor	
Editor	
Editor	
Editor - Video	
Deputy area editor for the advanced content hub	

21 Do you have more than one member of staff managing you or overseeing your work?



21.a If yes, can you provide more detail about the newsroom management structure?

Showing all 33 responses	
We have a chief reporter, assistant news editor, news editor, deputy editor and online editor all making their own demands.	
reporter, chief reporter, head of news, deputy editor, editor	
I work under the business editor, we then have a news desk of seven or eight plus an editor and editorial directors.	
Editor, head of content, head of audience engagement and two full time news editors	
Executive Editor, Head of Content and News Editor all jointly run the daily news operation. The Editor is also hands on with the flow of stories and ideas.	
Digital editor [redacted] Deputy digital [redacted] Head of content [redacted]	
head of content is in charge of head of news.	
I have one line manager, but there are other people in management positions who can sometimes give me tasks to do and also proof read my work before it is sent to press.	
Head of news for [redacted] and head of news for [redacted] report to Head of content for our newsroom. Each paper then has its own editor and a shared deputy editor. We also take instruction from the digital team, which has its own management structure and includes a head of social media	
Regional bosses Editor in chief Digital editor Exec editor live news Senior content editor content editors reporters	
We are now classed as [redacted] senior colleague [redacted] also have a say in what happens too.	
Head of Content, assistant, digital; editors	
Top: Editor Next: Multimedia Content Manager, deputy news editor, two sub editors, web editor	

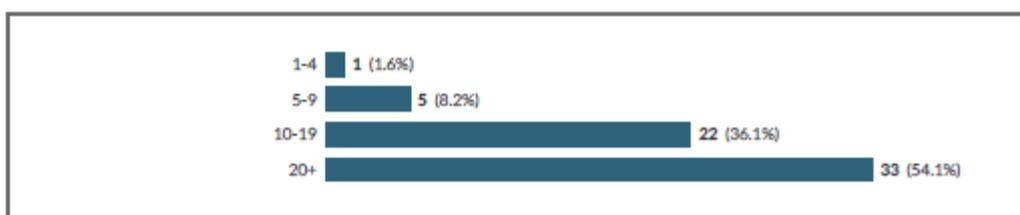
Bottom: Reporters	
Head of News (news editor) Head of Content (oversees two newspapers) Assistant Editor (day to day management) Editor/Editorial director	
Two content editors, manage reporters across two titles. They are overseen by one overarching content editor.	
We have an editor in the office and a group editor for our area which covers several newspapers.	
Editor/news editor (same person), assistant editor, audience and content editor, business and technology editor (same level in structure as audience and content editor), chief reporter	
Traditional newsroom with reporters/newsdesk/other heads of department/deputy editor/editor but separate news, communities and digital teams working collaboratively	
There is one editor for the paper, and a deputy editor which oversees around six other papers, all with their own content editors, and then an editor above them who oversees the region.	
Content eds for various titles	
Numerous managers - two heads of news, head of content, head of audience engagement, head of social media and both editors	
Content Editor, deputy content editor	
We have an editor, two deputy editors, then on the desk we have one news editor and two deputies, who oversee the journalists.	
News editor reports to deputy editor and editor.	
Reporters are managed by two content editors, who are managed by a head of news, who is managed by a deputy editor and a main editor, and editor in chief.	
I am managed by the business editor but the newspaper's editor still has oversight of our team.	
Editor> newsdesk which has a team of 3 including deputy editor, news editor and assistant news editor. There is also a pic desk editor and a website editor who can make requests	
Newsdesk operational with around seven employees, managing different areas and stories	
Editor in Chief, followed by print editor and head of audience, followed by content editors and deputy head of audience, followed by chief reporter, followed by specialist reporters and senior reporters, followed by reporters, followed by content writer	
Editor Deputy Editor Content managers Chief reporter	

The regional MD sits atop of the Group Managing Editor, though he does not manage me directly.

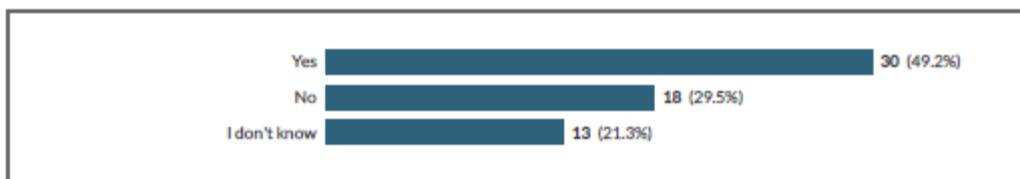
I am managed by two deputy area editors, one for the editorial section and one for the lifestyle section of the newspapers. They run the advanced content hub, previously called communities, while news editors run the news editorial. Above these managers are editors for both teams, and then an overall YWNG editor.

The [REDACTED] a news editor who oversees my work. Sometimes, though, my work will also be directed by our head of news, who is in charge of the [REDACTED]. To further complicate matters, when I am writing for the [REDACTED] then their news editor will oversee my work.

22 Approximately how many paid news journalists (from trainee reporter to editor) produce your news product?



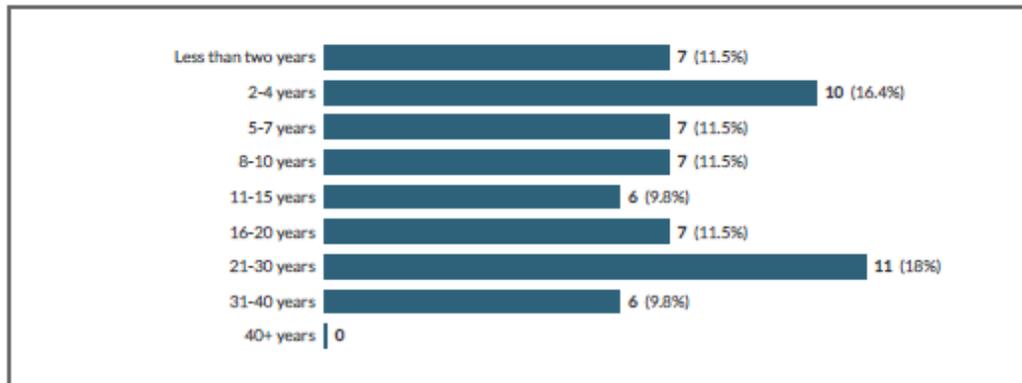
22.a Do any unpaid volunteers contribute towards the production of your news product?



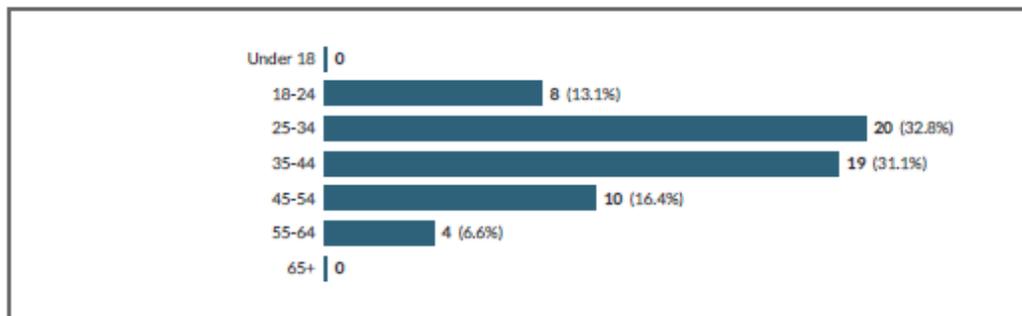
22.a.i If yes, can you provide any more detail?

Showing all 26 responses	
We have a weekly work experience person who helps with web and print content.	
Only in terms of submitted columns and work experience.	
Columnists and people who write for our Retro section	
Unpaid columnists and sometimes work experience students.	
Some columnists	
We have regular columnists submit copy for our weekly titles	
Readers	
contributed content both regularly (eg columnists/PRs, press officers) and on an ad hoc basis - send in pics/info etc	
review writers	
Village news correspondents	
Reviewers, lots of UGC	
Columnists and district digest contributors.	
Readers' contributors, students on weekend shifts.	
Occasional work experience volunteers - although it is difficult to spare time for them.	
Ugc	
Occasionally we have people come in for work experience, who sometimes write stories for the paper. Especially when they're here for an extended period of time.	
Work experience students in news and sport	
Reviews	
Columnists are not paid, nor are people sending in ad hoc pictures/stories but that's about it.	
Readers' UGC, work ex, journalism students	
Students are given the opportunity to write community stories, also UGC contributors	
We welcome contributions from columnists and an amount of UGC	
Columnists	
We have a community news programme scheme with students from [REDACTED] who are working towards their NCTJ	
We have regular work experience volunteers	
Some grassroots content for [REDACTED] comes from community correspondents.	

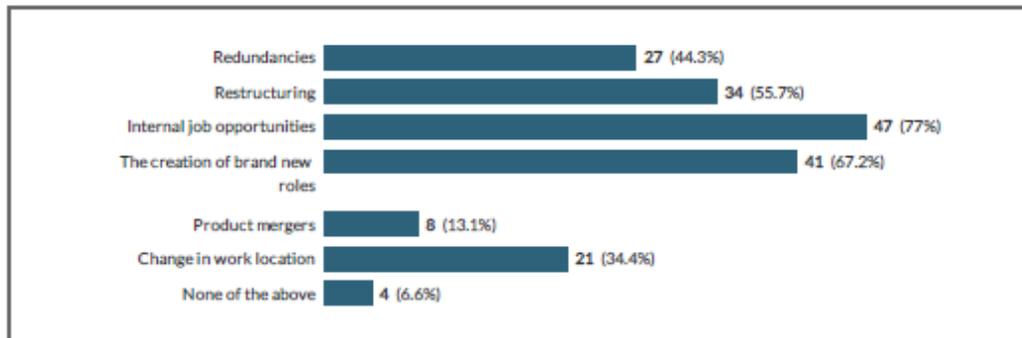
23 How long have you been working as a regional newspaper journalist?



24 How old are you?



25 In the past 12 months have you or your immediate colleagues been affected by or had the opportunity to apply for (tick all that apply):

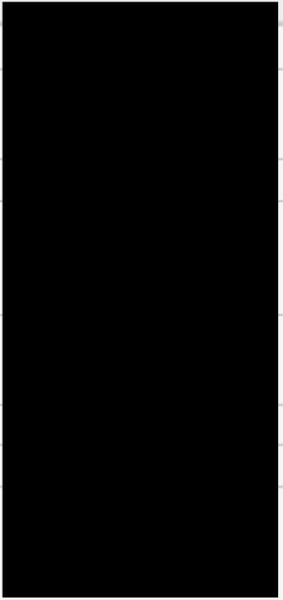


Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option)

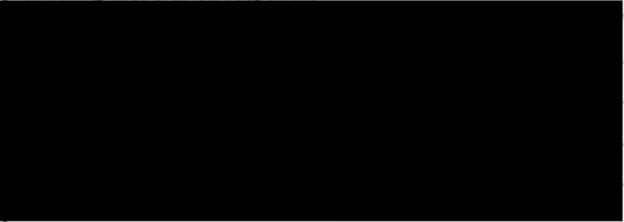
25.a Please give more detail if you wish.

Showing all 10 responses	
I worked for [redacted] which was sold. I stayed with [redacted] to join the new [redacted] websites including [redacted]	
Move to refurbished office.	
There was a large restructure in January and since then our TV station has been sold.	
Our newsroom has been restructured. We have a digital team and a team of multimedia reporters who also write for the net but also the paper too	
With JP having mergers with [redacted] there has been ample opportunities with role changes etc for journalists and other managers	
New jobs are constantly advertised internally. The newspaper is also soon to move office, while we also have options to move to the 'district' offices elsewhere in [redacted]	
Expecting a change of work location in the next two years.	
A lot of the above	
As with newsrooms elsewhere, we have had to manage a handful of redundancies in the past year and we have a new-look newsroom structure. At the same time, there have been new roles created - most notably the BBC Local Democracy scheme - which colleagues have had the chance to apply. Personally, I took redundancy from a different role in the company 18 months ago but was happy to return when another role came up.	
Audience content editor role has been created and is being rolled in to effectively merge web editor/news editor role	

26 Would you like to make any other comments about the subjects covered in this questionnaire?

Showing all 8 responses	
N/A	
In general I feel most of the classic skills are still vital and used but more and more we are having to pick up stories via telephone/email rather than going to events/incidents.	
no	
Shorthand - it appears to be decreasing in importance because young reporters don't have the skill but I believe it's still a very important skill and would not take on a trainee without it or without the agreement they would achieve 100wpm.	
I hope the survey will provide a good illustration of how much the industry has already changed and the progress which continues to be made in the way we research and provide news and information to readers.	
no	
No thank you	
Companies can provide as many fancy smartphones, tablets and laptops as they like but, in the long run, they are meaningless unless you have sufficient numbers of staff to use them. Also, the internet has brought many changes to newsrooms and newspaper but the most important part of a journalist's job remains the same as it ever was: finding good stories and writing them well.	

27 Please leave your email address so you can be sent a unique participation code:

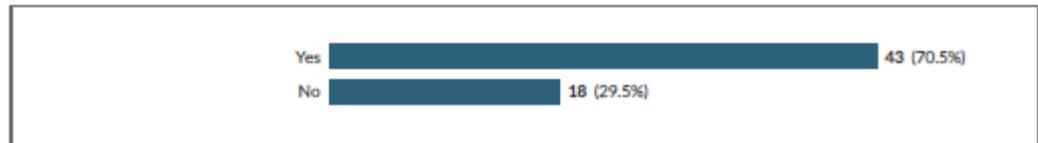
Showing first 5 of 61 responses	
	

27.a Please confirm your email address:

Showing first 5 of 61 responses

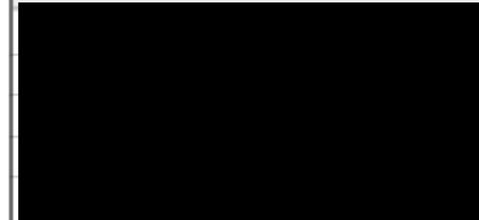


28 Would you like to be contacted for updates on the results of this research?



29 Would you be willing to be contacted for further research into journalism and journalism skills? If so, please leave your name:

Showing first 5 of 34 responses



9. Case study participant coding manual

Key	Newly created digital role			Newly employed at the title		
	Newspaper 1			Newspaper 2		
Name	The Mitre			The Journal		
				Also included in some elements of research are: Weekly: The News Weekly: The Mail		
Location	Business park			City centre		
Single or multiple titles	Single – one daily newspaper plus affiliated online platforms			Multiple – one daily newspaper with localised editions, two weekly titles plus affiliated online platforms		
Participant number	19			23		
1	TM1	Editor	Age: 51-55 Journalist: 31-35 years	TJ1	Editor	Age: 36-40 Journalist: 16-20 years

			At The Mitre: 11-15 years			At The Journal: 0-1 year
2	TM2	Head of Content	Age: 51-55 Journalist: 31-35 years At The Mitre: 31-35 years	TJ2	Photographic editor	Age: 36-40 Journalist: 16-20 years At The Journal: 1-5 years
3	TM3	Multimedia Journalist	No interview	TJ3	Head of News	Age: 51-55 Journalist: 26-30 years At The Journal: 16-20 years
4	TM4	Online Writer (trainee)	Age: 21-25 Journalist: 1-5 years	TJ4	Specialist reporter - digital.	Age: 31-35 Journalist: 11-15 Years

			At The Mitre: 1-5 years			At The Journal: 1-5 years
5	TM5	Specialist reporter – no specialism PT	Age: 31-35 Journalist: 11-15 years At The Mitre: 6-10 years	TJ5	Head of contributed content	Age: 56-60 Journalist: 36-40 years In current role: 0-1 year
6	TM6	Specialist reporter Business	Age: 56-60 Journalist: 26-30 years At The Mitre: 26-30 years	TJ6	Specialist reporter - health. Trainee.	Age: 21-25 Journalist: 1-5 years At The Journal: 1-5 years
7	TM7	Freelance reporter	Age: 46-50 Journalist: 26-30 years At The Mitre: 0-1 years	TJ7	Managing editor	Age: 46-50 Journalist: 26-30 years

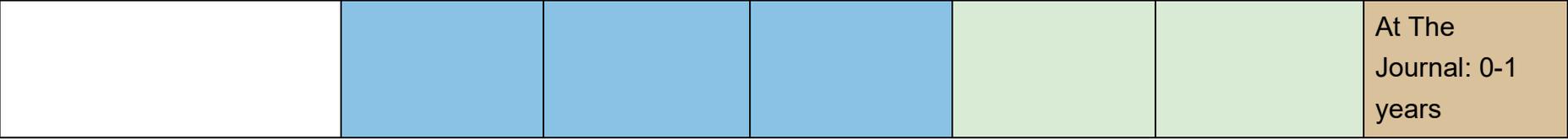
						At The Journal: 21-25 years
8	TM8	Chief sub editor	Age: 41-50 Journalist: 16-20 years At The Mitre: 16-20 years	TJ8	Deputy Head of contributed content	Age: 26-30 Journalist: 11-15 years At The Journal: 1-5 years
9	TM9	Specialist reporter / Multimedia Journalist	Age: 36-40 Journalist: 11-15 years At The Mitre: 11-15 years	TJ9	Head of Digital	Age: 36-40 Journalist: 11-15 years At The Journal: 1-5 years
10	TM10	Associate editor (print)	Age: 51-55 Journalist: 26-30 years	TJ10	Digital reporter	Age: 36-40 Journalist: 16-20 years

			At The Mitre: 26-30 years			At The Journal: 16 -20 years
11	TM11	Sub editor	Age: 36-40 Journalist: 16- 20 years At The Mitre: 0-1 year	TJ11	Community content reporter	Age: 26-30 Journalist: 6- 10 years At The Journal: 6-10 years
12	TM12	Online content reporter / multimedia journalist	Age: 46-50 Journalist: 21- 25 years At The Mitre: 0-1 years	TJ12	Digital reporter	Age: 41-45 Journalist: 16- 20 years At The Journal: 1-5 years
13	TM13	News Editor	Age 46-50 Journalist: 26- 30 years	TJ13	Specialist reporter - The Mail	Age: 26-30 Journalist: 6- 10 years

			At The Mitre: 1-5 years			At The Journal: 0-1 years
14	TM14	Specialist reporter – crime PT	Age: 31-35 years Journalist: 6- 10 years At The Mitre: 1-5 years	TJ14	Night editor	Age: 41-45 Journalist: 16- 20 years At The Journal: 11-15 years
15	TM15	Digital development Editor	Age: 26-30 Journalist: 6- 10 years At The Mitre: 1-5 years	TJ15	Assistant digital content editor	Age: 21-25 Journalist: 1-5 years At The Journal: 0-1 years
16	TM16	Specialist reporter	Age: 36-40 Journalist: 6- 10 years	TJ16	Community reporter	Age: 21-25 Journalist: 1-5 years

			At The Mitre: 6-10 years			At The Journal: 1-5 years
17	TM17	Sub editor	No interview	TJ17	Specialist reporter - education	Age: 31-35 Journalist: 6- 10 years At The Journal: 1-5 years
18	TM18	Executive editor (digital)	Age 36-40 Journalist: 11- 15 years At The Mitre: 1-5 years	TJ18	Content editor	Age: 46-50 Journalist: 21- 25 years At The Journal: 21-25 years
19	TM19	Editor	Age: 36-40 Journalist: 16- 20 years	TJ19	Specialist reporter – no specialism	No interview

			At The Mitre: 0-1 years			
20				TJ20	Specialist reporter - investigation / campaigns	Age: 31-35 Journalist: 11-15 years At The Journal: 0-1 years
21				TJ22	Sub editor	No Interview
22				TJ23	Sub editor	Age: 51-55 Journalist: 26-30 years At The Journal: 26-30 years
23				TJ24	Head of content	Age: 31-35 Journalist: 11-15 years



10. Anonymised interview transcript

R: Researcher

TJ10: TJ10

R: So, this is interview with TJ10 at 10:30 on 15th May. So, this interview is basically just finding out about your job and your role within the wider picture of what goes on in the newsroom, really, so how you fit in. I suppose everybody does something slightly different. So, could you start off by telling me how old you are, how long you've been at the paper, your journalistic career to date, including qualifications?

TJ10: I'm 40. Been here since 2001. Before that, I worked for [REDACTED] [REDACTED] for my local paper, the [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. I was there from '97 to '99 and then I went to the evening paper, the [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]. I was there for two years and then I came here. I started work - . I finished my degree, I was at [REDACTED] University, did the journalism degree. Finished in May and I started in June so I was straight into it. What else did you want to know?

R: So you did your degree after you'd worked as a journalist or you did your degree at [REDACTED]?

TJ10: Degree at [REDACTED], finished, and then a month later I started as a trainee at [REDACTED] in [REDACTED], and then here.

R: Was your degree accredited? Did you do your NCTJ as part of that?

TJ10: Yeah. So [REDACTED] University's journalism degree course, I was in the very first intake of students so we were like the guinea pigs, really. But it's a really popular, successful course, I think.

R: And have you done your NCE since then?

TJ10: Yeah, I did that when I was in [REDACTED]. I did the NCE, but I also did – was it the NVQ level 4, was it? The journalism one. There was an in-house one that they wanted us to do.

R: A [REDACTED] one, was it?

TJ10: No, it was up in [REDACTED], a [REDACTED] – [REDACTED] [REDACTED] they liked all their trainees, even though we had a degree and did the NCE there as well, they liked

us to do this in-house thing as well, which was accredited. So I've got that as well. [Laughs]

R: [Laughs] Very qualified then. What was your job when you started here? Has it changed as time has gone on?

TJ10: Well, it wasn't advertised. After four years of being in [REDACTED], I just felt like I needed a challenge and wanted to write about bigger things, more exciting things. I just contacted the company, said, "I'm interested in working for you. Have you got any openings?" And they just asked me down for a chat and I was offered a job. I just came as a general news reporter but I quickly discovered that it was the crime side of things that I liked. There was a crime reporter here, at the time [REDACTED], he's been here for years.

R: I know [REDACTED], yeah.

TJ10: So if there was a murder or a shooting or anything like that, he'd stay in his office and ring his contacts and I'd be the one that would go out and door-knock and talk to locals, find witnesses. I did that for a couple of years. I started covering for him when he left, when he was off, for example. And when he did leave, I applied for the job and I got it. Just a gradual progression, really. Like a general news reporter with an interest in crime and then eventually took over. But things have changed again. They offered the reporters a chance to – well, [REDACTED], to either be on the multimedia team, join the contributed content team. After about 15 / 17 years of being at the coal face, kind of thing, I thought it may be nice to have a bit of a change and do more feature things, so I decided to do that. It was more family friendly, as well. The hours suited me. So I started doing that and then probably about six months ago, there was another change. And they said to me that they'd like me to join the digital team if I'd like to, because they wanted to take advantage, I think, of my police contacts and crime background and do the early shift and basically just populate the internet, early doors, because they know that I'm quite fast at getting stories out there so they asked me to do that and I said yes, and that's where I am at the moment.

R: Ok. So what's your official job title?

TJ10: Digital reporter.

R: Can you tell me a bit about your job? Give me a brief rundown of your day, for example.

TJ10: So I'll start at six. My hours are six till two, and the idea is basically, while people are sleeping, just to get a few things online so that when people wake up at seven o'clock and grab their phone, see what's happening, check Facebook, that there's something on there that's fresh from overnight. I think the last story we probably write is done between 10 and 11 o'clock so we've got a break. If I come in at six, if I can have a couple of stories up by half six or seven, something fresh for people. And then another two or three between seven and eight, and just throughout the day my aim is to get as many stories on there as I can. I think probably, in an average day, I'll do anything between 15 to 22 stories. Some might only be little fillers but some are splashes. The idea is just to get fresh content on all the time to draw people in. That's the idea of my role, or it was when I started. The idea was that I wasn't to have anything to do with the newspaper, that I was to get the leads, get the stories on and then move on to the next story. So I get a story, get it online, even if it's five paragraphs, "There's been a body found." You pass it on to the multimedia team, they're called, and one of those guys will go out and investigate.

R: And that's to see if it's worth working up the story.

TJ10: Yeah, and developing it into possibly a splash or a lead for the next day. but quite often, what happens is I'll do the first few paragraphs. I might see the whole thing through to the end if there's nobody around or if they're all busy. And I work with TJ4 in the digital team. He is good at going out and talking to people and door-knocking so quite often, the digital team seems to do a lot of that where we were supposed to just get things online and pass it on. So there's been a bit of a shift.

R: So if it did get passed on to a multimedia reporter, would they go out and maybe do a bit of video and that kind of thing? So they'd maybe be working for the paper and the site, in theory?

TJ10: Yeah, that's why they're called multimedia, because they're supposed to work for both teams where I'm just supposed to work for the digital side. I think it's all a bit of a mishmash. I don't think it's very well organised. I think we should just be one big huge team that we all work for the digital team, first of all, get it out straightaway and then I think if you get a decent story, you maybe develop it yourself for the paper. I don't know.

R: Do you like developing it yourself? I mean, you sound a bit frustrated that it's not working in the way that it's supposed to, but also, like you're saying, if it's a decent tale.

TJ10: I like to break news, I like to get stories first, I like to get them out there. And if it is a decent tale I do like to see it through to the end if possible. But that's not really my role, I've just got to populate the site. But on the other hand, I suppose I've trailed the streets for 20 years, talking to people and doing all that kind of stuff, so maybe it's time for the new ones to come in and get their grounding and learn. So I do offer them a bit of advice because I've been here a bit longer and if they'll come to me and ask me, "What would you do? Where should you go?"

R: There's one story that you've been working on which is the body that was found in the flat. So that was obviously, somebody phoned in about it.

TJ10: Somebody rang in and on the day they rang in, we put a call in to the police to see whether there's any truth in it. We're quite a limited -. There's not many of us. If we followed up every single phone call in terms of going out to every single scene, they'd come back and you've got nothing. There's nothing to fill the paper with. You've got nothing online, so you've got to, I suppose, use your contacts and try and find out, "Is there anything in this?" But it took them a week to come back to tell us whether there was anything in it. So we didn't do anything because we had no proof that it had happened or confirmation that a body had been found. So when they came back six days later, I finally was able to put something online. But in the meantime, somebody else had called in and spoken to TJ6. That person had heard somebody falling down some stairs or something, so I think he'd put some calls in to the police as well but he hadn't got anything back either.

R: And did you know -?

TJ10: No. I suppose there isn't one central person –

R: Collecting news lists in the morning.

TJ10: No, in control. That tells us what's happening. It just seems a little bit chaotic. We've got a digital editor, we've got TJ3 who is like the print side and then we're gonna have a new person who I think will probably sit above those people. She probably will take overall charge. I think when she comes in, it might be a bit more organised.

R: I suppose the risk is that you're doubling-up, like you and TJ6 were potentially doubling-up on that story, then when that story came in and you got the call, did you want to follow it up or did TJ6 want to follow it up? It was a bit, like. [Laughs]

TJ10: I know.

R: So your direct boss is TJ9, isn't it?

TJ10: Yeah.

R: And he doesn't collect news in the morning because he doesn't need to, does he, because he sees what you're putting online?

TJ10: Yeah. So if TJ9 wasn't in, if he was on holiday or something, I would come in, write my story, put it online, put it on to the homepage, top story, I would Facebook it, I would tweet it. That's if there was nobody else in. But because they want me to turn stories round quickly, somebody comes in half an hour after I start and the idea is that all the stories that I write, there's somebody there ready to pick them up and to do all that kind of stuff for me, to social them, to Facebook them, to get them on the homepage. When they're not here, I can do it but it does slow you down because you work on your next story, you're messing about.

R: And do you use [redacted] [a straight-to-web content management system] then?

TJ10: Yeah. I find that quicker than Atex. Easier to use, as well.

R: Makes a lot of sense, doesn't it? That makes sense to me, that's great. So, one of the areas I'm looking at is digital skills. Having digital ability is being able to do social media, being able to do a video if you need to and edit it if you need to and stick it online, like Facebook Live, being able to use the content management systems, all that kind of thing, how that impacts on the journalist's power and influence within the newsroom. So it's not necessarily outside of the newsroom but within their working environment. What's your thoughts on that?

TJ10: What do you mean?

R: I suppose it's like, do you think that having those skills changes the way that a journalist is viewed as part of the working team, for example? The way that they interact with other people, the way that they do their job.

TJ10: In terms of whether you think it makes you more important or more valuable?

R: More valuable, more powerful, I suppose.

TJ10: Yeah, I think you're definitely more valuable with the more skills you have. We all know that at some point in the not-too-distant future, there'll not be a print version, everything is gonna be online, so you have to be au fait with all the digital tools that are at your fingertips.

R: I suppose you and I are in that group of people that aren't, what they call, digital natives, because we didn't grow up with digital technology, did we? So you presumably had to learn on the job, to a degree?

TJ10: Yeah. I feel confident with social media, not so confident with editing videos, things like that.

R: Is there somebody here that does that, that would do that?

TJ10: Yeah. When I used to go out to crime scenes, I would take my phone and video and come back, before the days of Facebook Live, and I could edit. I used to edit, but it took me quite a long time and it was fiddly. Or, if there was somebody else that was free -. We used to have reporters that literally used to specialise in just videoing, like [REDACTED], he was good at that but he's gone now. Sometimes they would come out with us and we'd double-up for speed so we could edit. But now it's Facebook Live, you just do it there and then so it gets away with the need to edit.

R: And Facebook Live is the main way that people do video here, now, isn't it?

TJ10: Yeah.

R: Does that mean there's not much video on the website? Are most of the videos on the Facebook page?

TJ10: Yeah. Two or three years ago, they wanted video, video, video. But it's mainly Facebook Live, now.

R: Makes things easier in terms of editing, at least.

TJ10: Yeah.

R: How do you think those digital skills have actually changed the way that you've been able to work in terms of contacts and the audience and that sort of thing?

TJ10: I don't know what to say. [Laughs]

R: It's ok, I don't want to put you on the spot. [Laughs]

TJ10: [Laughs] I feel like I'm in a job interview. [Laughs]

R: [Laughs] You're not in a job interview. [Laughs] And it's all confidential, not that you're saying anything scandalous. But do you think that it's made your job easier, or?

TJ10: If you've got two, three, four thousand followers, your name is out there. People do come to you. They do interact with you more. I think you get a lot more tweets than you do emails or phone calls like you used to years ago. I suppose we're more accessible because we've all got our phones. You get a tweet at 10 o'clock at night, you'll probably reply. Whereas in that past, you'd maybe get an email and you wouldn't reply for another 10 hours, so it's more of an immediate exchange of information.

R: So you would reply, potentially, if you were at home?

TJ10: If I spotted it, I would reply, yeah. I feel like, in the digital era, you're never off duty. I suppose, as a journalist, you shouldn't expect to be. You've got to be able to respond at all times of the day and night. So if I see anything interesting, I will respond. Or if I see anything and think, "I'd like to know a bit about that," I'll send them a tweet. I think it's just expected these days.

R: So going back to when you come in in the morning and you put the stories on straightaway, are most of those from police lines?

TJ10: Well, so the police put things out on their Facebook pages, they tweet things. So the force, like ██████████ Police, for example, they've got an official press office that put things out, that everybody gets. But they have lots of little local policing teams and they're all encouraged, now, to use social media. And they all tweet. Chances are, not everybody follows the same people as I do, for example. So I'll pick up little stories that way. People will send personal messages on Twitter and things. We get people sending The ██████████ Facebook messages as well, so we follow up them.

R: You check those in the morning?

TJ10: I check every morning.

R: So if somebody has given you a tip-off about something, what time is the police press office open?

TJ10: Officially, they start answering the phone at eight o'clock but I know there's somebody in there from about half-six, so I will drop them an email straightaway. They won't pick up the phone at half-six but they'll respond to an email if they think it's urgent enough to respond to. Or I would just ██████████, the switchboard, and I would just say, "Could you put me -? Can I speak to the force incident manager about this incident, because your press office isn't working at the moment?" And they'll either come back with information of they'll refer it on to the press office.

R: So there's ways and means of getting -?

TJ10: Yeah, it's not like the old days where you could ring up an old DI or your contacts that you used to go and have a cup of tea with every morning. Those days have gone.

R: So you don't have that CID call that you used to get once a week or once a day?

TJ10: No. Like in ██████████, I used to literally have a cup of tea and a slice of toast [Laughs] with a sergeant every single morning. Then when I came

here, I used to pop down to [REDACTED] Police Station, again, have a cup of tea every day. Over time, those contacts retire, move on, and everything has just changed. The police are now -. Everyone is terrified of saying the wrong thing. You don't build up those old-fashioned relationships like you used to.

R: You get the impression that they get the three-line whip from above, don't you?

TJ10: Yeah.

R: So they wouldn't date. It's changed quite a lot. But things like the Twitter and Facebook pages are great, aren't they?

TJ10: They are. Just Twitter and Facebook in general, members of the public -. Because the police -. Because those relationships have gone, you don't get the quirky little stories that you used to get. You don't find out half as much as you used to from them, but we find out, probably, more than we ever did through social media, through Facebook, through Twitter. Because all these people out there that tweet us, they're like extra reporters, really, aren't they? They're like our eyes and ears on the street. There's not many of us so we rely on these people tipping us off about things. So without social media and the way the police forces are going in terms of clamping down on the information they're giving out, without them, I don't know what state we'd be in because there's less and less coming from the police forces and the authorities. I'm just thankful that people do tweet and tip us off about things.

R: And talk about things. Makes a big difference. So we've talked about digital skills. So when it comes to traditional skills, like having journalism qualifications, so your NCE, NCTJ, being able to identify a story and writing ability and a car and a driving licence, all that kind of thing. Do you think they're still as important within the newsroom?

TJ10: I think you need to have a qualification to prove that you've got your law, you've got your shorthand, because shorthand is still vital. Law is obviously the most important thing. I suppose the ability to have a car, I suppose with social media these days, you can always get hold of somebody somewhere and there's people always sending videos in. Maybe that's not as vital.

R: Generally speaking, do you feel that traditional skills are still quite important?

TJ10: Yeah, I think I feel that for people to trust journalists, I think they need to know that we've got a certain level of education and training behind us.

R: Like you say, it's like a trust mark, then.

TJ10: I think it is. People that use Twitter, people that use Facebook, they all think they're reporters now, don't they? Some of the comments, some of the tweets, some of the messages they put out there, you're squirming thinking, "Oh my word, you shouldn't be saying -!" You know, we would never dare say that because you've got to qualify everything, corroborate everything. These amateur reporters, so to speak, they think they can get

away with doing anything. But I do think it's important to have people like that that do it so that we can then follow things up and investigate it properly and get to the truth of the matter rather than just speculation.

R: How much of an influence do you think -? We've kind of talked about this already, to a degree. How much of an influence do you think the audience has on your work and on the product that's produced by the newsroom?

TJ10: A lot more now that we've got this [REDACTED] tool in the office which maps and charts how popular certain stories are doing online. It monitors how many people are clicking on through Facebook or Twitter or whatever. I think there's a tendency here to do the kind of story that they know are gonna get the hits. I suppose you might call it clickbait, some of the stories that some people do. I don't tend to do those ones. [Laughs]

R: With clickbait, do you mean quirky ones that are gonna catch people's attention?

TJ10: Some of those ones. But if there's a bad weather forecast coming up and we probably know we're not gonna get hit that much, but we could have a headline, "Arctic Freeze on its way to [REDACTED]." I wouldn't say "fake news", I would just say just exaggerated.

R: Pushing the boundaries.

TJ10: Just a little bit, just to get the hits. [Laughs]

R: It's something that I've heard talked about quite a lot in this newsroom, clickbait. People have used that word quite a lot. In conference, some people have said they didn't want it to be too clickbaity, and other people said, "Oh, I thought it was a bit clickbaity but it worked, didn't it?" Stuff like that. I think there's awareness of it in the whole newsroom, people are thinking about it, and I guess, is there a direction on it?

TJ10: I suppose the policy, the direction, here, is, basically, we've got to get hits. We've got to get hits. I think they're aiming for two million – I don't know whether it's unique users or whatever. Two million seems to be this magic number that we're trying to get to. I think it's every month. Never got there yet. I suppose to get there, I suppose you need the quirky, the different, the sensational stories to draw people in.

R: So those stories exist, like you say, to get people to come to the website. Do you think there's a decent balance, all the stuff that's going on?

TJ10: Yeah, we don't have specialists anymore, now. It's probably a cost-cutting thing, I imagine. But we do have reporters that prefer certain areas. Even though I'm not the crime reporter anymore, because when I moved to the community team, I was no longer the crime reporter so I lost that title, then. But that's the area that, even though I'm a digital reporter and I could write about anything, and I do, that's the area that I concentrate on. We've got people out there that are interested in education or council, so even though we're not classed as specialists, there are people that put a lot of time and effort into getting exclusives

and doing in-depth reports, as well. So I think there is a balance, do in-depth features. The other day, I did a feature on female genital mutilation, a double-page feature that actually went into The [REDACTED] rather than The [REDACTED]. So, we do do in-depth subjects.

R: Yeah, things that are worthy, I suppose, and have had time and effort put into them. Did that go online as well, then?

TJ10: Yeah, it went online but it was all for The [REDACTED] rather than The [REDACTED]. That's another thing: I'm a digital reporter. [Laughs] I'm just supposed to be doing things for the web, but quite often – well, every day, I do leads that end up in print as well that I do from start to finish. But also, I work for The [REDACTED] as well. [Laughs]

R: Jack of all trades.

TJ10: Yeah, I think we all are, to be fair. For me – I know this is probably not the area you're looking at, but for me, it just feels a little bit chaotic.

R: It kind of is as well because I'm looking at the newsroom structure and I have to say, the structure of this newsroom, it's taken me quite a while to get my head around it.

TJ10: That's probably because we don't really understand where we all sit, really.

R: Do you think, when this new content manager comes in, it may help pull things together a little bit more?

TJ10: I think so. I think if you've got one person overseeing everything, she'll know what TJ9's reporters are working on, what TJ3's reporters are working on, whether there's crossover. We just need someone to pull it all together, I think.

R: Yeah, to stop doubling-up and maybe missing, as well.

TJ10: I think the idea is ok in principal, I think it just needs tweaking a bit.

R: Maybe a bit more structure.

TJ10: Yeah.

R: So, coming to the end, you'll be pleased to know, [Laughs] Obviously you've had quite a lot of change in your career in the last couple of years, considering the time that you've been working as a journalist.

TJ10: It has been the last couple of years it's all gone a bit chaotic. [Laughs]

R: The whole world of journalism is quite unpredictable, isn't it? [Laughs]

TJ10: Yeah.

R: Where do you see yourself going from here? Where would you like - ? If you could do something and you could do anything, what would you do?

TJ10: In the newsroom?

R: Yeah.

TJ10: I don't know. Years ago, you started off as a reporter and you eventually became a news editor and then an editor of a physical paper. But that paper product is going, isn't it? It's on its way out. I don't know. At the moment, I'm happy doing what I'm doing. Years ago, I would have said, eventually, edited a paper. But these days, I think an editor is just a manager. It's all about figures and stuff. It's not about journalism.

R: You're not so sure you'd fancy that now, really?

TJ10: I'm not so sure of the answer, to be honest. [Laughs] I don't know where I'll be in five years' time. I don't know. [Laughs] I haven't got a future aim. I'm just seeing what happens.

R: The thing is, it might change again and there might be some new opportunities. Do you think, for the company ■■■, obviously I know that they've had tons of cuts so that's been quite challenging, but then there's new innovations happening so you've got the digital team, for example, and that's opened up new opportunities. So for somebody like you, do you think the opportunities are widening or narrowing in the company, as a whole?

TJ10: I suppose widening, really, because like I say, years ago when I first came there was just a print edition to come out. But now there is a print edition, but there's also the internet site. Who knows, we might go into a TV -. I don't know, I think there's more opportunities, really.

R: And if you had a new trainee coming in to the newsroom, I can't specify which team they'd be working on or whatever, but what skills and abilities would you expect that trainee to have when they came in?

TJ10: I think definitely to be digitally savvy, for definite. Shorthand. The ability to communicate, to speak to people at all levels. Just the ability to get out there, to get into the communities, to make contacts. I know it's old-fashioned, now, to meet contacts but you do still need to do that as well as relying on the digital side of things.

R: Yeah, to have a face within the community.

TJ10: Yeah, represent the paper.

R: And lastly, but you've kind of half-answered this already, do you think the hierarchy in the newsroom has changed in the last couple of years?

TJ10: Yeah.

R: So like you said before, it's like the role of the editor has changed and you've got these different teams and you've got the content manager coming in, so I guess it kind of widens.

TJ10: It's widened it. I don't know what else to say. [Laughs]

R: That's fine.

TJ10: There seems to be more teams but I don't think anybody is really pulling them all together, yet.

R: That's everything, thank you.

* End of Interview *

11. Email sent by TJ9 following the terror attack coverage⁵⁸

Our coverage of the VOID terror attack dominated yesterday's Top 20 stories. Of the the Top 20, 14 of the stories were about the attack. These 14 stories were viewed 150,000 times between them.

Yesterday was a real team effort from start to finish. It started with **TJ15** and [REDACTED] getting the breaking news online in the early hours of the morning and **TJ10** coming into the office early for 5am. It finished just after midnight with **TJ14** breaking the terribly sad news that missing [REDACTED] woman [REDACTED] had indeed been killed in the attack.

In between times I think more or less the whole news team worked all the local angles of the horrific events in [REDACTED].

⁵⁸ This has been anonymised to prevent identification

It's a story that will no doubt continue to develop at a rapid pace today. More stories will be coming out of the victims and those caught up in the attack and there are also the implications of the terror threat level being raised to Critical. Today or in the coming days we could actually see troops on the streets of [REDACTED] - something that is unprecedented in our lifetimes.

12. Targeted survey recruitment email 1.

Dear [REDACTED],

I am a former journalist conducting research into tools and skills used within regional newspaper newsrooms. My research aims to build a picture of requirements in newsrooms across the UK with the intention of informing journalism training in education and industry.

For the results to be meaningful I need as many journalists working in a variety of job roles as possible to take part, so if you could spare 20 minutes to respond to the survey I would be most grateful.

The survey link is here: <https://ltu.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/journalism-skills-and-tools-survey-2017>

The results will be combined with findings I have from research in two regional daily newsrooms and job advertisements placed on www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk to provide a rounded picture of skills and tool requirements.

All responses will be anonymised prior to analysis.

Please feel free to share this link with regional newspaper journalist colleagues.

Many thanks and kind regards,

Rebecca Whittington

Graduate Teaching Assistant and PhD researcher

Journalism

Leeds Trinity University

0113 283 7100 (ext 572)

@RebeccaWMedia

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13. Targeted survey recruitment email 2.

Hi,

Can you help shape the training of future regional newspaper and online journalists? Can you tell me about how you use tools such as smartphones, cameras and cars and skills like shorthand, social media and keeping deadlines in the workplace?

I am a former regional newspaper journalist and I am conducting a PhD research project which will feed into journalism training in higher education; but to make sure we are equipping student journalists with the knowledge and skills they need in the working world, I need your help.

If you can fill in this survey <https://ltu.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/journalism-skills-and-tools-survey-2017> you will be helping shape the trainees of the future.

The results of the survey will be combined with findings I have from research in two regional daily newsrooms and job advertisements placed on www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk to provide a rounded picture of skills and tool requirements and a reflection of the current concerns of regional newsrooms.

The survey takes no more than 20 minutes to complete and **all responses will be anonymised prior to analysis.**

For the results to be meaningful I need as many surveys to be completed as possible, so please feel free to share this link with regional newspaper journalist colleagues.

Do drop me a line if you have any questions.

Many thanks and kind regards,

Rebecca Whittington

Graduate Teaching Assistant and PhD researcher

Journalism

Leeds Trinity University

0113 283 7100 (ext 572)

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14. Targeted survey recruitment email 3.

Hi,

You may have seen yesterday's report (below) on Hold the Front Page about my request for survey participants to help with my research project into regional newspaper production.

As you are already on my target mailing list, I wanted to ask you again if you would consider taking part?

The survey takes no more than 20 minutes to complete and all responses will be kept confidential. No participants will have their identities revealed in the resulting research thesis.

I understand time is precious, so I very much appreciate your participation if you can assist.

To start the survey just click the following link:

<https://ltu.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/journalism-skills-and-tools-survey-2017>

Thank you in anticipation and very best wishes,

Rebecca

Regional journalists wanted to aid research into newsroom skills

by David Sharman Published 15 Jan 2018

Comment 0



A former daily journalist is asking current regional journalists for help with research she is conducting.

Rebecca Whittington, ex-head of news at the Yorkshire Post and Yorkshire Evening Post, is studying part-time for a PhD looking at the impacts of digital reporting tools on regional newspapers in the UK.

As part of her research, Rebecca, pictured, has collected regional newspaper job advertisements over the past four years, and plans to analyse them for the prevalence of digital and traditional skill keywords.

She is now looking for 100 participants to complete a confidential and anonymous survey on what skills and tools are being used by journalists working in regional newsrooms.

Rebecca told HTFP: "I'm now in the final stages of my fieldwork, which essentially is cross referencing the skills and tools highlighted in the advertisements and takes some inspiration from initial findings from my fieldwork to see if journalists working throughout the UK are using similar skills and tools.

"The survey is open to all journalists currently working for regional daily and weekly newspapers and their affiliated online platforms. It has been completed so far by journalists working for a number of publishers – including the big three and a variety of smaller groups or independent titles. I have had responses from people ranging from trainee reporters through to group editor level."

"However, for this element of my research to be viable – e.g. for the figures to count as well as the feedback and reasoning given by individual participants – I need to get at least 100 participants. I totally understand how precious time is for working journalists – but if anyone thinks they can spare 20 minutes in their day or evening to complete the survey I would be hugely grateful.

"Some people might be put off because they are worried that their responses will be made public – but I want to reassure participants that responses will be made anonymous prior to analysis and nobody will be identified in the resulting research project."