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‘We are all in this together’

Analysing the BBC News journalist’s performance under the pandemic.

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ABSTRACT

Studying the public service media has been the interest of many researchers however studying the public service media at a time of a crisis such as that of a global pandemic will enable me to visibly highlight certain tensions inside the public service media of the BBC.

What this thesis tends to focus on is how BBC News staff engage with their audience under the Covid-19 pandemic. By BBC News staff I mean its producers, correspondents, presenter, and editors. By engagement I mean the relationship created between the journalist and the audience. I will take the journalist's perspective in investigating this relationship based on how they produced and reported the news during the pandemic. Taking a qualitative approach in this research project will enable the understanding of the case study research from the journalist's point of view.

Moving in and out of lockdowns under the pandemic makes the United Kingdom and the BBC a unique setting to research. London by itself has been through three national lockdowns in which the everyday life of the individual has been challenged. The United Kingdom as a whole has its various stages of lockdown rules variations during the pandemic. Therefore researching the main public service media of the United Kingdom at a time of a global pandemic is vital. The BBC itself is experiencing its own existential crisis where job cuts and the license fee funding is under threat, all these points highlight the importance of conducting this research.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“The world has changed and is changing faster than the broadcaster. This is not only a challenge in terms of audience demands and ratings but also, more broadly, in terms of the value of public service media to society”

As stated by Rasmus Kleis Nielsen of the Reuters Institute at Oxford University (2020) speaking about the BBC (Horowitz & Leino, 2020, p.24).

On the 10th of April 2020, a video was released by the BBC creative team for a lockdown audience this video highlighted the importance of the public service media under lockdown. The 90-second video highlighted footage of the events that took place during the pandemic in the United Kingdom, from empty supermarket shelves to overwhelmed NHS (National Health Service) workers, people clapping for the NHS, and personal user-generated audiences’ videos highlighting the events of the pandemic, all narrated by a calm reassuring voice. This video mixed feelings, emotions, engagement, trust, hope, and togetherness. Kerris Bright, Chief Customer Officer, BBC, comments regarding this video were:

“At a time when people are apart, we wanted to focus on the things which actually are bringing us together. We hope this BBC film does that and reinforces the things which connect us in these difficult times”.

Helen Rhodes, Executive Creative Director, BBC Creative also mentioned that:

“This is a time when everyone is pulling together to get through this crisis. We really hope we’ve managed to capture the emotion of that and show the ways in which the BBC is trying to help by using all our resources to keep us connected and bring us closer.”

This video emphasizes the importance and the power that the public service media can fulfill or be a part of in society. Despite this message and its emphasis on the power of the public service media, the BBC has been accused of being outdated and redundant since the emergence of the digital revolution of 1990 (Tunstall, 2015, p.5). The public service concept in itself is under crisis, also the existence of the TV license fee has been questioned, and the fact that its funding has been challenged by the UK government all raise major arguments. However, with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, this public-service media has been infused with a new vigour.

Indeed, the Journalists played an important role in the 2020 pandemic, broadcasting media increased the value of journalism and the dependence on journalism under the pandemic as they stepped in as a main source of information, informing the audience of all the political, health, and social regulations imposed by the British government on a daily basis. It is argued that the Pandemic has saved the public service media of the BBC.

According to the words of Yih-Choung Teh, the strategy and research group director at Ofcom:

“The pandemic showed public service broadcasting at its best, delivering trusted news and UK content that viewers real value.....But UK broadcasters face a tough advertising market, production challenges and financial uncertainty. So they need to keep demonstrating that value in the face of intense competition from streaming services”

(Sweeney, 2020)

When everyone in the UK was on lockdown the journalists were one of the key workers that had to deliver news to keep the community informed of the government regulations, the health implications and broadcast other vital news from around the globe. Gathering, producing, and presenting the news to a lockdown audience was a challenge by itself to the journalist where social distance rules and safety regulations have been introduced and needed to be applied by the whole population. According to figures published by the Guardian, Since mid-March 2020 the BBC has seen a huge increase in numbers watching its news programmes. The audience for the BBC News at One has risen 85%, the News at Six 74%, and the News at Ten by 50%. This highlights that the audience is consuming the news at a higher rate than usual. According to the Ofcom 2020 media nations UK report the covid-19 crisis has reinforced the importance of public service broadcasters as trusted providers of news and information. The Ofcom report also highlighted that the BBC services were:

‘The most-used source of news and information about Covid-19, with eight in ten (82%) people saying they used them for this purpose in the first week of lockdown, well ahead of other broadcasters, social media and other sources’.

As these figures show, the role of the BBC and their journalists under the pandemic is vital. However, it is vitally important to establish a balance on the quantity and manner in which covid 19 news is broadcasted. Acknowledging the fact that too much news about the pandemic may lead to Covid-19 news fatigue that perhaps both the audience and the journalists may endure.

The place and space in which the producers, presenters, and correspondents used to broadcast the news enabled both private and public spaces to overlap together. The overlap was due to the fact that a large number of journalists were working from home to deliver and engage with their audience during the pandemic, experiences in which I will touch upon in this research paper.

This idea of working together also emerged by other Public Service broadcasting media within the European Union as they worked together under this pandemic. According to the 2020 EBU (The European Broadcasting Union) Covid-19 report, it was highlighted how several public service media outlets came together to help cover the news under the pandemic. News is being exchanged between the different public services to help broadcast news to their audiences. Tackling trust is another important aspect in this digital age. The BBC launched a reality check team and many other teams where their main aim is to combat fake news and what the WHO called 'infodemic' around COVID-19. On the hope that this will enable the audience to double-check the factuality of any fake news being circulated or consumed.

In this research project, the aim is to understand and learn from the news output measures taken under the pandemic from editorial practices adaptation, to concerns and all the experiences applied by the BBC staff during the pandemic to engage with their audiences.

Looking into the epistemologies of journalism in which epistemology refers to

'The rules, routines and institutionalised procedures that operate within a social setting and decide the form of the knowledge produced and the knowledge claims expressed or implied' (Ekström, 2002, p.260).

Ekström distinguished a theoretical framework in the study of institutionalised epistemologies in which three areas must be focused on in empirical research and these are: The form of knowledge; production of knowledge and the public acceptance of those knowledge claims (2002, P.279).

This study will enable one to acknowledge how the main public service media institution of the BBC in the United Kingdom operates during the pandemic providing valuable insight to this field of research study. Society's behavior changes under crisis and so does a journalist and therefore, this research aims to understand and learn from the news output measure taken by the BBC from the perspective of the professionals I interviewed and how they thought about their audience while producing the news during the pandemic. The way the audience is

addressed and addressing what role did the public service media play in the British society during the pandemic is vital to uncover. As a public service, the responsibility to deliver news to its audience is a must. So how the BBC staff cope under the pandemic and how they report it will be interesting to discover.

JUSTIFICATION:

This research will emphasize the importance of public broadcasters during the crisis of a global pandemic and how it can influence a society's behavior, the research will enable one to dig deep into what role the BBC played in British society from the BBC journalist's perspective. The journalist's perspective will highlight their own understanding of what their role is during the pandemic.

Choosing the UK and the BBC in particular as the main case study for this research comes from several reasons. Firstly, the UK has gone through three national lockdowns therefore both the audience and the journalist feels the strain of this lockdown as they are affected directly by it. During these lockdowns rules and regulations have been enforced by the British government continuously. Secondly, the BBC is a main public service media for the UK audience so therefore they have the responsibility to deliver news to the nation in all its forms no matter what the circumstances are therefore studying how they performed to deliver this public service is vital.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What type of space and place did the BBC news staff construct with their audience under the pandemic?
2. What relationship did the BBC professionals have with their audience under the pandemic?
3. What role did the pandemic play in the crisis of the public media broadcasting?

BACKGROUND

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BBC AND BBC NEWS

“BBC News today is clearly the UK leader in terms of reputation, audience share, number of journalists employed, and hours transmitted” (Tunstall, 2015, p.137).

According to the official UK government website, www.gov.uk, the BBC is defined as ‘A British public service broadcaster. Its main responsibility is to provide impartial public service broadcasting in the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man’. The BBC itself defines who they are by stating that ‘The BBC is the world’s leading public service broadcaster’ they emphasise their impartiality and independence which enables them to produce unique, world-class programmes daily. Their mission is to inform, educate and entertain the UK public and a worldwide audience (About the BBC, 2021). This public service is funded by the UK nation public, mainly anyone who owns a TV has to pay a compulsory yearly license fee therefore their output is not influenced by the government or any commercial parties. By being a public service the BBC has the responsibility to represent all its audience and license fee payers (Arvidson, 1995, P.137). Retaining the audience's trust and sustaining impartiality has been challenged throughout the years; according to the 2019-2020 Ofcom annual report, only 54% of adults consider the BBC as being impartial on Ofcom's BBC performance Tracker. Ofcom highlights that what the audience perceives as impartial is shaped by several factors and these aren't directly linked to news content produced by the BBC.

THE UK UNDER THE PANDEMIC

The Covid 19 pandemic was declared as a global emergency by the WHO on 30 January 2020 (BBC, 31st Jan 2020). England had three national lockdowns under the pandemic and just came out of one with governmental restrictions still imposed on its citizens. The first nationwide lockdown took place on the 24th of March 2020, the second one was on the 5th of November 2020 which lasted four weeks. The third one was imposed on the 5th of January 2021 and only allowed children to go back to school on the 8th of March 2021 (Gov.uk, 22nd Feb. 2021). To this day there are governmental restrictions on who you are allowed to see and how many people are allowed to meet at once (Syal, 2021). Each lockdown had its own rules and regulations to follow, breaking these rules meant being stopped by the police and getting fined. Any nonessential items such as clothes, furniture, etc. were not allowed to be sold. You had two options either to shop for food from the supermarket alone or order nonessential items and food online. Schools have been opened and closed twice (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>). The number of people in the UK who have lost their lives as a result of the coronavirus has exceeded 126,000 deaths (BBC, 31st of March 2021). When writing this thesis vaccinations are on the rollout and many of the older population have

already been vaccinated in the UK. Boris Johnson the current UK prime minister has stated recently that:

"We're getting through this. There's no question that things are better than they were," Johnson told broadcasters, adding that he thought the next stage of reopening would proceed on May 17, with all restrictions hopefully lifted on June 21"(Reuters, accessed on 23rd of April 2021).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The news genre, the public service media, and crisis journalism have been topics that researchers have touched upon from various angles. There is a wide range of literature that highlights the arguments relating to the public service media's role in society. I highlight some within this literature review, especially how Stuart Hall and Scannell differ in the way they look at the public service purpose in society. Additionally, the idea of Thrown-togetherness by Doreen Massey (2005) adds a great deal of emphasis on how one can link and relate the aspects of my research together. Trust, reliability, and credibility within news broadcasting and how a crisis event like the pandemic can challenge and restructure the broadcasting media organisations. All this will be explained and highlighted in this chapter with examples of research papers within this field.

Conducting my research will build upon the work of others mentioned within this literature review. However what makes my research paper unique is that it will combine several important aspects all in one document; looking into news, the public service media, the specific case study the BBC news, and the crisis event of the covid 19 global pandemic. The covid 19 pandemic is a unique crisis as it affected everyone on a personal and professional level. All the research papers I encountered focused on a smaller type of crisis or combined several small crisis events in one research. This pandemic was a worldwide crisis that did not affect one country but the whole world. It affected the world politically, financially, and socially. Narrowing down my research and focusing it on a specific global crisis event and a specific organisation in a specific country can add value to the public service media news organisation research studies.

The public service of the BBC has been the focus of many researchers and academics. The BBC is the first public service corporation that was established in 1926. Since its establishment debates and research on various public service-related topics have been produced (Moe, Syvertsen ed al, 2008, p.399). The future of the public service broadcasters within the digitalisation era has been researched by Papathanassopoulos (2002, pp.79-80) he claims that 'public broadcasters face the most difficult challenge in their long history' also he believes that the audiences are now fragmented due to this digitalisation. Additionally, in this day and age the increase in the cost of things, the loss of revenue, and the increased competition are all factors that are threatening the future of the public service media (Moe, Syvertsen ed., 2008, p.403). There has been an ongoing move from traditional media to digital media leading to challenging both the social responsibility and authority of journalism. Both Ekström and Westlund (2019) use the term '*The epistemologies of digital journalism*' to describe the knowledge production and claims distributed via digital journalism, one must also highlight these digital epistemologies of journalism pose certain challenges. Dahlgren (2009, p. 127) highlights that in this modern age, the digital developments of the internet, mobile phones, iPads, etc. are transforming the interaction between television and its audience.

Corner (2011 p.98) also touches upon this as he mentions that:

'The older model of a person sitting alone in front of a screen is being replaced by a variety of user contexts, having consequences for the multi-modal nature, durational values and phenomenological experience of 'being online as well as the character of the national division between 'public' and 'private' space'

This digital media interlinks both positive and negative aspects back to the traditional broadcast media, it permitted traditional media to increase its broadcasting platforms to include social media, apps, online websites, etc., at the same time one can foresee the challenges that it produces as it destabilizes the newsroom and fragments its audiences which lead to raising questions on how feasible it is for journalists to produce reliable, trusted information in this digital age. This leads to challenging the information landscape leading to the spread of misinformation, as conspiracy theories and alternative media output challenge the news media workflow and structure. Therefore, the risks of untrustworthy news increase with the continued emergence of new digital technologies (Ekström, Lewis, & Westlund,

2020, p.206-207). This challenges the way we think of the audience and their role in news production as they change the structural broadcasting environment by taking an active role in producing the news themselves also. Using these new technologies enables the audience to produce user-generated broadcasting content and broadcast it anywhere they wish.

This user-generated material then can spread information, this information can be either factual or false. From here we can look into the work of both Frakas J. and Schou J. (2018) where they looked into the global buzzword 'Fake News'. They both argue that term fake news has become a vital component that is used currently in political struggles to serve a certain social reality debate. They also argue that this term is now is being used like a signifier which seeks to promote an image of how a society should look like. Mass media approached this term from a number of angles; however, it had a negative component to it. During the Donald Trump era it was used extensively in a negative form to refer to mainstream media output giving them a less trustworthy stand. Frakas J. and Schou J. (2018) research contributed the new understanding of the term fake news consequences as it spreads extensively within the digitalized public sphere.

The public service media has been the main point of discussion by different well-known media scholars. Scholars have attacked, criticized, or supported the idea of the very existence of the public service media. If we take into consideration Stuart Hall's perspective; he attacked the idea of the public service media and the idea that it represented a neutral force in society. Hall (1977,p. 346) believes that the public service media has classified the world with discourses of dominant ideologies (Moe, Syvertsen ed., 2008, p.403). Whereas Scannell (1989) on the other hand did not agree with the arguments that devalued the public service broadcasting to 'A form of social control, or cultural standardisation or ideological misrepresentation' Scannell (1989 p.136). Scannell believed that a new public sphere has been established between citizens by the availability of both radio and television. 'By placing political, religious, civic, cultural events and entertainment in a common domain, public life was equalised in a way that had never been possible' (Scannell, 1989, p.140). Scannell argued also that the public service broadcasting is "perhaps the only mean in which common knowledge in a shared public life as a social good for all could be maintained" (1989, p.164). He concluded that public service broadcasting "should be defended against its enemies" (Moe, Syvertsen ed. , 2008, p.404).

Television plays an important role in this shared public culture. Scannell (1996) argues that television, at least in its national, public service context, has done a great deal to relocalize private life toward a shared public culture. The fact that the public service over the years has been expanding its on-air broadcast to include more genres and topics that are considered more familiar to its audience in which can promote discussions within society. By this process, the audience has been represented as citizens by the television. Allowing these citizens to participate in the communicative space of the public sphere (Dahlgren, 2009, p.132). This brings us to what Habermas refers to as the public sphere, he argues that the public sphere is a space in which common ideas and cultures are established between both civil society and public authority. The media plays a role in facilitating the public sphere by acting as a source for the public providing them with material concerning news, events, government, and institutional activities (Hodkinson,2011, pp.174-176).

A study focused on the Finnish public service media (Yleisradio Yle) has been established by both Horowitz, M. A., and Leino, R. (2020). They focused on the role of the public service media during the pandemic as both an informational channel and going beyond the news to create new alternatives to enable audiences to gain information, entertainment, education, and interactions. Findings showed that the public service media during the pandemic has been challenged by the interactive global platforms such as social media, youtube, Netflix and that the public service media need to scale up their digital social interactions with their audiences to meet the expectations of the lockdown audience. The study concluded that public service media should maintain its trust toward its audience during and after the pandemic by focusing on the use of different formats that deliver information, education, entertainment, and interaction with and for its audience (Horowitz & Leino, 2020).

WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

“Broadcasting then brings public life into private life, and private life into public life, for pleasure and enjoyment as much as for information and education” (Scannell, 1989, p.143)

The idea of Thrown-togetherness by Doreen Massey (2005) will be looked into within this research. Doreen is a Professor of Geography she looks into various ways in which space and place are defined. Her book *For Space* looks into the alternative approach to space. She defines space as ‘An unthought cosmology, in the gentlest sense of that term, but it carries with it social and political effects. So easily this way imagining space can lead us to conceive

of other places, peoples, cultures simply as phenomena ‘on’ this surface’ (Massey, 2005, p.4). Space is open and always changing, it’s a product of interrelations in which several embedded elements and carried out practices. Space is a sphere of possibility, this sphere is in a multiplicity, without space there is no multiplicity and vice versa. Place however in her view means:

‘The locus of denial, of attempted withdrawal from invasion/ difference. It is a politically conservative haven, an essentialism group (and in the end unviable) basis for a response; one that fails to address the real forces at work’

(Massey, 2005, pp.5-6).

The place has a special aspect to it in which Doreen calls throwntogetherness. This concept requires negotiation that is inescapable between both social and natural elements that will later on, enable engagement. Both space and place can not be purified, and both have to come to the fact of having to get together (Massey, 2005, pp.141-142). Several elements such as effects, objects, bodies, histories or stories make and remake a setting or situation (Hermes& Hill, 2020). In the case of the United Kingdom and the number of national lockdowns that were experienced can be explained by Doreen Massey’s concept of throwntogetherness. How did the public service of the BBC enable this Throwntogetherness under lockdown will be looked into. If we look into what Scannell (1989, p.149) has to say about broadcasting for him: ‘Broadcasting could not treat its audience as a crowd. It had to learn to speak to them as individuals’ The communicators must adapt their tone and behavior to suit the situation that their audience is experiencing. Therefore, the broadcaster has the responsibility to anticipate the understanding of their audience, think about what their audience is experiencing and what condition they are facing, this will enable the broadcaster to adapt their language to meet their audience needs (Scannell,1989, p.149).

According to Kunelius and Nossek (2008) traditional media broadcasts develops two types of dimensions during a crisis event. Under distributive circumstances such as a crisis event, both rational and symbolic dimensions of broadcasting are used by traditional media. The rational dimensions of broadcasting under crisis are delivered through facts and information whilst using graphs and a timeline to provide a clear understanding of the crisis situation. The symbolic dimension on the other hand occurs via the spread of emotions, symbols, and images in which the shared community construction is formed. Digging deeper into this explanation one can see how it relates directly to my research, these rational and

symbolic dimensions of broadcasting can have a direct influence in creating what Dorren Massy calls Thrown together within shared community construction.

NEWS, SECURITY, AND TRUST

Roger Silverstone (1994) - Ontological security is another vital concept to look into. According to Silverstone, mass media, especially television, is an agent of ontological security. This security enables the television to be a safe, secure place for the everyday life of society. Lockdown television is something that will be researched within the ontological security that it provides. An additional concept that Roger Silverstone (2007) also introduces is the concept of Media hospitality in which the media must produce effective communication that will provide the mediated world with meaning, sustainability and produce a difference.

It is known that the public service media can act as a source of trustable news. Giddens (1990) defines trust 'as confidence in the reliability of a person or system, regarding a given set of outcomes or events' (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998, p.172). In which Putnam (2000:136) differentiates the two types of trust that an individual may have in society; one is called the "thick" trust which is built from personal relationships and the second type is the "thin" trust which is experienced with people we don't know on a personal level however there is a degree of honesty and exceptions to enable an exchange (Dahlgren, 2009, p.112). This relationship between both trust and ontological security can be highlighted by Anthony Giddens' as he states that:

'Both trust and ontological security are the product of an active engagement in the world, of an active engagement in the events and patterns and relationships of everyday life'

(Giddens cited in Silverstone, 1994, p.5).

My research will try to investigate this by looking into how news-journalists within the public service of the BBC connect with their audience under the pandemic and whether or not this ontological security and trust is something that they try to encourage under audience lockdown.

Social media is an important angle to highlight both for audience news consumption and journalist's news production. In regards to the news consumption Newman ed. (2016)

highlight that ‘over one-third of the online population of the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Spain, and the Netherlands say they now use social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to access the news’. And regarding the production side of news, many news organisations and journalists consider social media as a primary source of news (Fletcher, Schifferes, and Thurman, 2020, p. 20). Using social media then in this case raises concerns over credibility and trust. For the news to be trusted news organisations need to verify their social media sources before using, publishing, or consuming any. One of the main news values that journalists have to achieve in reporting is the truth. In 1999 The Pew Research Centre for the People & the press and the committee of concerned journalists were questioned on which news value they consider the most important, 100 percent of them answered: ‘getting the facts right’ (Kovach B and Rosenstiel T, 2007). By getting the facts right one gains the second most important element in journalism which is loyalty.

“Loyalty to citizens is the most important asset of any publisher that claims to produce journalism. It is what makes the news content trustworthy”

(Kovach and Rosenstiel ,2007).

So going back to my main points on the use of social media platforms as one of the main news sources and means of communication for both organisations and audiences. Organisations have to verify the credibility of anything they use to gain or keep their audience's trust, one must highlight that getting the facts right is extremely difficult when dealing with an audience that sometimes finds it difficult themselves to unpack what constitutes a fact. But what role does emotions have in trust, Dahlgren (2018, p.26) sheds the light on this by highlighting the role of emotionality and affects that can enable individuals to create shortcuts when confronted with a vast amount of information. Other suggestions to determine what is true comes from Fernandez-Armesto (2010) he suggests that there are four main methods that enable one to determine what is true and these are: what one feels, what one can figure out, what is being told and what has been observed (Dahlgren, 2018, p.26). Dahlgren’s argument here is that with the rise of viral online information determining the truth of things is acknowledged by the method of feelings, what we feel when we read these viral online information helps us acknowledge its level of truthiness (Dahlgren, 2018).

The use of social media generated ongoing debates within broadcasting media organizations. Belair-Gagnon V. (2015) explored and analysed the use of social media by the BBC under crisis reporting. Her study was a mixture of ethnographic research where direct

observation in the BBC newsroom was undertaken and interviewing 50 BBC News staff journalists and senior managers, document analysis of BBC reports, studies of the BBC News and BBC academy websites. The fieldwork was conducted in 2011 at the time of the Arab spring and also the analysis focused on the use of social media under a crisis from 2005-2011. The findings confirmed that in a connected newsroom the boundaries between the audience and the producers are blurring. By incorporating user-generated material within the newsroom, the media institutions will enable more engagement with their audience. Belair-Gagnon V. (2015) concludes that the BBC has changed its newsroom organisational structure to incorporate social media within its reporting. Under crisis, the BBC with its institutional, organisation, and cultural significance in society influence the audiences in the creation of a more connected newsroom to report a crisis. However, during the crisis event of the pandemic, the facts that are needed perhaps are really complicated biological, virological, epidemiological phenomena where there is quite a lot of dispute among scientists themselves, yet to know that user-generated content was being produced heavily on a daily basis by the audiences. So, this connected newsroom, and the blurring of boundaries is challenged under the pandemic.

JOURNALISM AND ITS ROLE IN SOCIETY

Journalism has different tasks in a society, these tasks focus on informing the public, reporting the news, and being a critical surveillance. News journalism on the other hand is mostly reliant on its reputation and status in society. This reputation and status are focused on being a source of information and not just any information but important news (Ekstörn, 2000, P.470-471). Ekstörn (2000) distinguishes three modes of communication within TV journalism, which are information, storytelling, and attraction. Both journalists and producers try to attract their audience to what they are producing in one way or another. They apply a strategy that aims to deliver their intentions in what they produce. One of the main intentions is to attract and engage an audience to their output. To attract and engage the audience the journalist needs to apply those three modes of communication that Ekstörn (2000) highlights. The aim is to produce content that is meaningful to the audience, has a catching story timeline, and attracts the audience's attention. Audiences have a desire to know things, they tend to watch programmes that are relevant to them and their needs. These programmes tend to enable the audience to gain valuable relevant information on how to act in a society, it provides them with guidance in their different roles of being occupation,

consumers, casualties of an emergency, or just politically engaged citizens. People tend to be purely curious by nature and they always feel a need to be well informed of what's happening around them. This knowledge that is produced provides a sense of security to the audience (Ekstör, 2000, P.471).

Dahlgren (2009, p.128) looks at journalism in a different way, he looks into how journalism can act as a “*translation service*” where journalists take in any news information and convey it in a more recognisable and meaningful way to their audience. Investigating the push and pull dynamics between producers and audiences will enable me to understand how news production pushes audiences into engaging with its content. It will enable me to understand the power relations between the BBC and its audience. ‘Alongside commissioning decisions, or branding and marketing campaigns, producers craft content that immerses audiences in storytelling’ (Hill, 2019). But when reporting a crisis such as the pandemic we have to look out for how crisis journalism needs to be reported. When reporting in a war zone for example journalists that have a strong connection with family, friends, or community are often taken off the story which involves them as they must change the way they conduct themselves as journalists. This will enable them to stay impartial and distanced from the story they are covering (Allan & Zelizer, 2004, p.5-6). In the case of this global pandemic, this is not possible. Everyone was living the same situation, conditions, and events, so impartiality and neutrality had their own definitions during reporting the pandemic, in which my findings will underpin later on in this research paper.

CRISIS AND JOURNALISM

Olsson (2010) research looked into crisis news events within organisations, analysing how the journalist found ways to deal with a crisis event based on previous experience within a similar situation. The research was based on Swedish broadcasting media managers, where the main case study for the research was the crisis events of the September 11th terror attack. Olsson incorporates two main terms in the research (the inside the media perspective) which refers to the journalist perspective of reporting and the other term is (the outside the media perspective) referring to the social demands on media during a crisis. The research highlighted that previous experiences of crisis played a vital role in preparing both journalists and organisations into modifying their daily practices. The SVT manager interviewed explained the importance of these surprising crisis events as part of learning development for an organisation and every crisis is unique in its way, enabling organisations

to learn more. The head of news at SVT interviewed by Olsson highlighted that after every big news event or crisis a big amount of time is devoted to discussion and evaluations that take place internally in a newsroom or a news organization. Another interesting aspect highlighted was the fact that big news events are unique from one another, there are no two fully identical events or crises, however, after every big event routines get stronger and adjusted better to suit the experience gained from covering that big event. This creates a list of procedures that can be used in future big events. What Olsson (2010, p.98) concludes is that crisis events are enabled to be part of an important historical analogue. These historical analogues help media organisations to prepare for future crisis news events. So how do journalists report under crisis and what roles do they play in society is an important aspect to tackle. The pandemic is a global crisis and according to Cottle (2009, p.2):

‘News media occupy a key position in the public definition and elaboration of global crises and are often far more than just conduits for their wider public recognition. In exercising their symbolic and communicative power, the media today can variously exert pressure and influence on processes of public understanding and political response or, equally, serve to dissimulate and distance the nature of the threats that confront us and dampen down pressures for change’.

Researchers into how journalists report under a crisis have found that the journalists take on roles such as a comforter, psychologist, and co-mourner in times of crisis (Riegert and Olsson, 2007, p.147). Kim (2020, p.1) researched outbreak news production by looking into ‘how journalists balance the interests of their local audience with the interconnected, interdependent aspects of these global events’. Kim interviewed journalists in the US, UK, and South Korea and analyzed the news production by looking into the inner struggles, negotiations, and external forces that formulate the news under infectious disease outbreaks. The findings highlighted that under these circumstances, journalists tend to structure news in terms of tensions and contradictions. The infectious disease is conceptualized by the journalist as both a “foreign” threat and a “shared” problem. Kim is researching an interesting topic that is similar to mine however his interviews were conducted between March 2017 and September 2018 focusing on the 2014/2015 Ebola epidemic, the 2016-2017 Zika outbreak, and the 2015 MERS outbreak. What makes my research unique is the fact that it is focused on one country, one public service output, and one organisation which is the BBC. Also focusing on one main and major outbreak which is the Covid 19 pandemic.

Kim (2020, p.15) focused his research on the sociological examination of journalist news production which highlighted a confusion between what the journalist talked about and what they reported on. Also Kim did not differentiate between the reporter's various positions when conducting the research, some were reporters and some were specialists. To reach ground findings tailored questions should have been considered to each professional interviewed. These limitations that Kim experienced enabled me to think about the professionals that I will be interviewing. The qualitative interviews gave me the flexibility to focus on certain questions and disregard others depending on which professional I interviewed. The interview guide that I prepared had several themes. Each theme had a set of main questions and secondary questions all discussed in my methods section.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter will outline my methodological approach, I took a social construction approach to look into the relationship in which the journalists approached and communicated with their audience during the covid 19 pandemic. My method of approach was interviews, I adapted a qualitative interview method and then analysed the data using qualitative text analysis. The qualitative interviews were conducted digitally as the pandemic forced me into conducting all the interviews online via Zoom. The interviews were analysed using qualitative text analysis of the interview transcripts. This chapter later on touches upon my sampling techniques, the ethical considerations taken when conducting interviews and how to ensure my interviewees' privacy. I will then disclose the steps that I undertook to analyse and code my empirical material.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

“Our communicative construction of the social world and its everyday reality changes when media are involved in this process” (Couldry and Hepp, 2017, p.50)

My research took a social construction approach focusing from top to bottom to enable me to investigate how the journalists of the BBC communicated with their audiences under the pandemic. Investigating this relationship between the public service journalist and their audiences under the pandemic. In order to grasp my empirical data, power is an important aspect here and what power does the public service have on its audience. Flyvbjerg (2001, p.155) debates this by stating that ‘It shows how power defines what gets to count as knowledge. It shows, furthermore, how power defines not only a certain conception of

reality. It is not just the social construction of rationality, which is at issue here, it is also the fact that power defines physical, economic, social and environmental reality itself'. This power relation that the public service media professionals of the BBC hold in relation to their audiences is socially constructed. For instance, the relationship the BBC staff have with their audience under the pandemic mainly as a trusted educator, a facilitator of information. This power that the BBC during the pandemic will define what knowledge is being passed to their audience. Therefore, they are socially constructing the society from a top to bottom social construction perspective. Focusing my research on the public service media and on the news genre, specifically, news reporting is what my study will be targeting. News is been acknowledged as a genre that provides both reassurance and surveillance (Silverstone,1994, p.16).

METHODS

My research was conducted by using two main methods which are: qualitative interviews and qualitative text analysis of the interview transcripts. The qualitative interviews were open-ended flexible questions.

“A qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples’ experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (Kvale, 2007, p.Xvii).

The interview guide that I prepared had several themes. Each theme had a set of main questions and secondary questions. If I was short on time I would ask the main questions which were highlighted in my interview guide. This enables me to time manage my interview without effecting the quality of my research. The interviewees gave up their lunch breaks, free time, and days off to conduct the interview with me. Therefore, respecting the timeline I was given was a vital part of the interviews which lasted from 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews were all held digitally over zoom. Ideally face to face interviews are best in conducting these types of interviews as they allow for both verbal and non-verbal responses (Brennen, 2017, pp.29-30). However, due to the current ongoing pandemic, the possibility to travel to the United Kingdom was not an option. All the 11 interviews were then transcribed and qualitative text analysis of the interview transcripts took place, more details on how I analysed this is provided in the analysing the research section later in this chapter.

RESEARCH ETHICS

An informed consent form was prepared and sent to all my participants via email straight after they accepted to participate in the research. This was a more formal informative way to explain why I am doing my research, who it is for, and where it would be published. It gave an overview of the main theme of questions that are going to be asked. It also highlighted the fact that the participants can withdraw from the research study at any time. A signed consent form was obtained via email before the start of an interview. As Kvale (2007, p.26) highlights one of the vital points in conducting social science research is informed consent, the confidentiality of the subjects, and the consequences if any in being part of the research project. Confidentiality is a major point also to protect the participants'; all interviews were agreed to be anonymous. The consent form re-emphasised that this will be voluntary participation and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

SAMPLING

This research is based on interviewing 11 BBC staff employees between the period of 22nd of February 2021 to 5th of March 2021, my sample is a mix of producers, journalists, reporters, correspondents, presenters, and editors working within BBC under the pandemic. The BBC staff have been approached by using different social media mediums, I have used Twitter as the main social media medium to contact the majority of my interviewees. Made a tweet myself stating who I want to interview and why I want to interview them. I also sent private message via twitter to some journalists, and also I used emails, LinkedIn, and editors to invite their staff to participate. One of my participants was contacted via a private LinkedIn message.

ANALYSING THE RESEARCH

To code the interview transcription data I followed Bazeley's (2013) five steps of the recursive process in which basic coding was applied; where one has to describe, compare, relate, refine and theorise. I started with the descriptive codes where I questioned what the transcripts are telling me about the journalist's relation with their audience raising questions of what, when, and how, I color-coded the transcript and created a short description review of the codes. The analytical codes then addressed key themes from the findings. A coding scheme table was created with these themes and quotes from the interview were linked to

each category. I went through Bazeley's five steps several times to make sure my data is reliable and valid.

REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH

One must disclose that I have worked previously for the BBC for nearly 10 years and only stopped working for the BBC in December 2017. I have previously worked within newsgathering operations, BBC world service, and many other roles. Therefore I had a strong insider background knowledge on how procedures and decisions are taken on the ground in the BBC newsroom, however one major difference is what happens on a normal day is greatly different from what happens under a pandemic. Being a researcher requires one as Corner (2011) states 'Assume less to investigate more' and that was my motto throughout this research. In addition, one must highlight that all the participants that I interviewed from the BBC employees have no previous personal or professional connection to me personally this enables me to ethically legitimate the research.

LIMITATIONS

Bearing in mind the time limitation that I am restricted to, only 11 BBC staff were interviewed. Having additional time will enable me to look into the wider overall picture of the BBC and that in turn will enable me to generalise my conclusion to cover the whole of the BBC. Applying a Multi-method research could also have enabled me to compare and contrast in between my findings. With the availability of more time analysing articles, BBC journalist's social media tweets, posts and interactions would provide a wider perspective to this research study.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH IDEAS

One must highlight that the covid 19 pandemic is still ongoing therefore another interesting aspect that can develop my research further is researching the public service media role in the rehabilitation of the society out of the pandemic and evaluating the overall role of the public service media during the pandemic, moving out of the pandemic and when the pandemic ending has been officially announced. As this is an ongoing pandemic this aspect of rehabilitation was not looked into in my research but can be researched in the future to complement it. Another interesting aspect that can correspond to my research is looking into how other British media organization broadcasted to their audience under the pandemic.

Comparing those findings with that of the BBC can add more value into investigating what role the public service media played in society under crisis during the pandemic.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

The space and place in which both the BBC journalist and the audience exist in has been hugely affected by the pandemic. Major changes in the way journalists gather and report the news has also altered in a way that impacts how journalists communicate to their audience. In a global crisis such as the Covid 19 pandemic the BBC staff that I have spoken to have worked mainly from their homes besides three out of the eleven that I interviewed, in which they were considered broadcast critical staff. Therefore, the space in which journalists operated in has been affected on a wider level throughout this pandemic, they have adapted to new ways of communicating amongst themselves and amongst their audiences in a short period of time.

I suppose building a studio in my spare bedroom in order for me to continue to talk to members of the audience and to broadcast to them is fairly radical.

BBC News Presenter, 55 years old

The actual nature of how we gathered material has completely changed so basically it required me as a producer to give contributors a crash course in how to film because obviously, we couldn't get to places, we haven't been able to film we haven't been able to use freelancers because of social distancing and masks wearing and lockdowns which was really bad in the first-time round.

Global health producer, 42 years old

The days of right let's just get into a car and go interview somebody that was not possible anymore.

Senior producer, 48 years old

We can see from these statements that social distancing and national lockdowns in the UK were the main elements that challenged and changed both how the space and place between

journalists and their audience have been defined under the pandemic. The place has a special aspect to it which Massy (2005) calls throwntogatherness. Both space and place are inescapable of each other according to Doreen Massy and both have to find the means to get together. The confrontation of numeral elements such as affects, objects, bodies, histories, and stories construct or reconstruct a setting or a situation. In this case, the Throwntogatherness of lockdown under the covid-19 pandemic enables the BBC TV, radio, and online broadcasting to enhance the importance of the public service media outlet under crisis. These social and natural confrontations of elements enabled engagement between both the public service media and the UK audience under the umbrella of the throwntogatherness concept. Everybody was affected by the lockdown, by the virus, by the social distancing, everyone's health was under threat, the fear of the unknown all enabled the distance between the audience and the journalist to be narrowed, they were all in this together. Whatever the audience were going through was felt by the journalist themselves also.

Everybody was affected by it and there is no escape from it. Suddenly we find ourselves in a situation where we have to keep the output going but also dealing with homeschooling, illness to parents and loved ones. I think that thing that everybody has been feeling not just in journalism is that there is no escape from it the trauma is all around you, that is what I noticed most is that I got an understanding of trauma and the way that trauma affects people currently it was affecting everybody.

There was an understanding that everybody is in this together or that everybody is going through this. Often the stories that we cover cite distance from us, we are talking about people's experiences that we can't necessarily relate to. If you are reporting from the Middle East or the West Bank, then that person's experience is very different to my experience. But suddenly everybody was living through it together, everybody asking the same questions, everybody had the same uncertainties.

Senior producer, 48 years old

One can see from this statement how Massy's concept of throwntogatherness blends in with the quote above, everybody was asking the same questions, everybody was experiencing the same problems both the audience and the journalist themselves. The public service media broadcasting during the pandemic has not only attracted the audience to their platforms but created a sense of community within the British public. One must highlight that the BBC is not aiming for a specific niche audience when broadcasting, they must deliver content to all age groups both nationally and internationally, the BBC is aiming to broadcast to the whole

nation and also a wider worldwide audience that relies on its output. From my interviews, the BBC local radio stations have been mentioned several times. It was mentioned that they played a big role in reaching their local community under the pandemic, bearing in mind the staff job cuts as mentioned in my interviews, they did their best in connecting their audience and delivering quality news for them.

Radio has provided an enormous comfort to a lot of people mainly through programmes the feeling that they have a companion particularly for people who have been shielding or self-isolating without being able to see relatives for a very long time the radio has been a great comfort for them because it has provided some companionship and so I like to think that we are part of that but in news, we tend to like I say fine we only hear from listeners who get in touch with us directly if they are unhappy with some element of our coverage.

Senior broadcast journalist in news, 35 years old.

The term lockdown television emerged under the pandemic, based on what the journalists highlighted to me, people were in their homes, socially distancing and hungry for information. Every aspect of their life was affected by this pandemic and their health was at risk. An interesting aspect to explain this is by looking into what Roger Silverstone (1994) calls Ontological security. The BBC news output under the pandemic enhanced this security within the audience they were broadcasting to, it is seen to be a safe secure place for everyday life within society in the United Kingdom.

According to one of my participants, a senior broadcast journalist

'News consumption in general through the pandemic has gone up across the board from TV, radio and online understandably because people need an organisation like the BBC to make sense of these changes for them because they have seen such enormous changes in their own lives'.

Perhaps it is the BBC who is providing them with this security or one can argue that the situation that the nation is in, which made it impossible for them not to engage with the news. An argument presented by Anthony Giddens highlights the problems with ontological security. Giddens defines ontological security in the following way :

[Ontological security] refers to the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and

material environments of action. A sense of the reliability of persons and things, so central to the notion of trust, is basic to feelings of ontological security; hence the two are psychologically related. Ontological security has to do with 'being' or, in the terms of phenomenology, 'being-in-the-world.' But it is an emotional, rather than a cognitive, phenomenon, and it is rooted in the unconscious. (Giddens, 1990, 92)

He argues that trust and ontological security are both the outcome of active engagement in events, society, the world, and relationships in everyday life (Silverstone, 1994, p.5-6).

However, in the case of the lockdown, there seems to be a lack of physical active engagement, the only engagement taking place is a digital engagement that is taking place at people's homes under lockdown. Watching the news and engaging with it directly under the pandemic perhaps is a combination of both ontological security definitions. The way how both Silverstone and Giddens define ontological security interwinds with each other under lockdown. This security is perhaps enhanced by the BBC's reputation that is well known by the nation, as a trusted media that they can rely on. As mentioned by the quotes above this comfort and the feeling of companionship that the local BBC radio stations are providing their audience under the events of the pandemic and self-isolation is a form of ontological security that is enhanced by the trust that the BBC promotes.

CAPTAIN TOM AND THE BROADCASTING OF HOPE

It is clear from the interviews that were undertaken that the BBC professionals imagined and understood that the British audience required different needs under the pandemic. Broadcasters identified a strong hunger for information and clarification, therefore the BBC as a public service had to step in and deliver those needs. However, the issue was how to report those needs back to the audiences and what tone and language would be used to broadcast this information. In the early days of the pandemic, it was agreed by the BBC not to be alarmist in the way they communicated information to the public.

If every news item is talking about shock and horror there is a tendency for people to switch off so it was more important rather than trying to shock people about the news it was more important to inform and more important to get them to, it was more important for society as a whole to tackle the pandemic rather than this just should be shock and horror firefighter. So I think in those senses it was important that we not necessarily moderate the language, we were more careful about the language we use.

Senior broadcast journalist for BBC News Channel, 56 years old

You want to use language that you understand yourself in terms of if it's information you are giving there can be no ambiguity or saying. So you would write it how you would probably tell your partner or your mother or your father or your sibling like the kind of information that you want to get across them, you need to stay at home. It's kind of very different from it cannot be open for interpretation of what you want to say. So I think you do it in a style of how you would tell it to your mates you know.

Global health producer, 42 years old

It's kind of getting the tone right about not sugar-coating it but not being too alarmist. That is always important if you are covering a conflict if you are covering almost any story really if you are covering a murder scene you got to get your tone right, but this was probably in some ways one of the most challenging stories to have to do that because everyone reporting was probably worried about their own family as well as wider society.

BBC Correspondent, 56 years old

We can see from the quotes above that the tone, language, and interaction with the audience mattered to the BBC staff when reporting the news under the pandemic, the guidelines and the rules of the lockdown had to be reported in an informative unalarming way. Team managers and editors reminded their teams that there must be some type of hope in the stories they were reporting. They had to find an angle for a story that can deliver hope to the audience. This challenged the journalist as most of the news was heading towards a negative path. Trying to bring hope into their audience's life seemed like something most of my interviewees agreed on. In order to deliver positive news angles to their stories, the language news media use is very important. Bell (1991, p.14) highlights the importance of this language in his book "The language of news media", he states that a large amount of the journalists' energy is spent on their ability to discover new soft angles to the hardcore news items they are reporting on. It seems that with the pandemic this energy was doubled as my interviewees found it hard to find that positive angle to highlight. Most of what was going on in the world had a negative lead. Once a positive angle to any story arose it was used extensively.

This is where the story of Captain Tom comes to light, most of my interviewees mentioned Captain Tom. This story brought hope and a smile to the audience as mentioned by my interviewees therefore it grew and developed as the pandemic developed. Captain Sir Tom Moore was a 100-year-old man who walked laps in his garden under lockdown to raise money for the national health service NHS charities. He raised almost 33 million pounds for the NHS charities. The story was so big in the UK under the pandemic to the extent that Captain Tom was part of the London news year eve firework display as the main figure that spread hope under the pandemic. Unfortunately, he died at the hospital after contracting the Covid-19 virus himself in Feb. 2021 (BBC News, 2nd Feb 2021).

We can't control how much news people are consuming but I think it's important that when their good stories to tell that we tell them. And I think that is best encapsulated by the outpouring of affection and love for captain Tom who died about a month ago and we did enormous content about captain Tom because the audience really liked to have something to smile about. And I think as the pandemic has gone along I think I kind of touched upon this earlier we have very careful that our audience have told us that actually we like a bit of good news, we like some light in the dark, the want to see a little bit of ultraism something they can hold on to. And things like captain Tom sort of I incredible feeds of courage or bravery or unique things just a bit of light relief,

Senior broadcast journalist in news, 35 years old

There was in terms of the story decisions there was an understanding that we could not just give people bad news from our end. That everybody as we discussed the people are struggling and suffering and they needed to have some hope that there was a way out of it. Now that's not the job of the news organisation to give people hope but we were aware that we couldn't just give them a diet of bad news, bad news. So if you think of Captain sir Tom Moore's story it just went crazy, I think that's a good example of a story that almost by accident gave people some hope. And made people smile and people thought actually there are some good things going around in the world and people are getting through this on their own way.

Senior producer, 48-year-old

The concept of media hospitality can perhaps be used to explain how the BBC reported to its audience's changing needs. Roger Silverstone (2007) introduced this concept in which the

media has an obligation to produce effective communication that will provide the mediated world with meaning, sustainability and produce a difference. And perhaps this is what the BBC has partly done with the story of Captain Tom, treating media as hospitality to meet the needs of their audience under the pandemic. This institutional hospitality is threatened by the space of the internet which is also considered hospitable. It is argued that institutions can never compete or reach the level of hospitality that the internet can provide. As it is known media institutions and the BBC in my case have editorial guidelines to follow. This highlights the fact that all mediated communication hospitality is constrained and regulated by these editorial guidelines. Unconditional hospitality is seen to be impossible to be achieved by media insinuations (Silverstone, 2007). Therefore, the level of hospitality that the BBC can provide its audience can never reach that of what the internet and social media can provide. So, when a non-editorially challenging story such as that of captain Tom arises the media outlets of the BBC used it extensively, both to suit its audiences' need for positive output during the pandemic and perhaps also to compete with what the hospitality of the internet can provide its audience.

IN THE WORLD OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND DISINFORMATION

Trust is a vital factor for public service media. The BBC trust has been measured differently every year, according to an article by Tom Mills published in the guardian on the 2nd of December 2020; its highlighted by The Reuters Institute studies that the level of audience trust for the BBC has dropped from 75% in 2019 to 60% in 2020. The BBC annual reports in 2019-2020 also acknowledged that the impartiality of the BBC has been weakened therefore they were trying to develop an edited version of the editorial guidelines to rebuild this trust. This has been partially blamed on the use of social media by the journalist (Mills, 2020).

During my interviews, I asked the journalist how they maintain to be impartial and neutral when covering the news during the pandemic, living the pandemic themselves can perhaps act as an element that affects their impartiality towards the stories they are reporting on.

One of the senior broadcast journalists highlighted how all of their “*family and friends were medics and the phone calls that were received from them all were commenting on why the BBC did not report on the chaos that goes on in the hospitals, so in the beginning of the pandemic I had a medic friend a doctor friend phoned me*”

up in tears saying why aren't you showing inside of the morks why aren't you showing the bodies being stretched our because they are. Why isn't this on the news, why do people not believe what is happening she was so cross the BBC as whole wasn't much being visual about it in the way the Italian media were. And that is something that I felt the BBC perhaps could have done more off. Until very recently I was like I don't understand why we are not inside the hospitals showing this. The people and the covid deniers dragging all of this out longer for the rest of us”.

What these phone calls and personal family medics connections did is change the way the journalist was broadcasting, the journalist tried their foremost best to highlight the seriousness of the coronavirus problem but at the same time did not want to sound that everyone was doomed by this pandemic. This could be seen as a lack of impartiality but rather broadcasting an insider story, sharing a personal experience indirectly to be truthful to their audience. The news editor I interviewed however highlighted a very interesting aspect of neutrality during the pandemic

“There is sort of difficult dance of neutrality so people like us to report like vaccine skepticism with the same rate as pro-vaccine messages so people can consider that neutral and I would consider that a failure of journalism if we were to do that. So it's less than the pandemic has affected our idea of neutrality but more the area that we decided to concentrate on during the pandemic that affected our view of neutrality”

Another journalist covering disinformation during the pandemic explained that being impartial does not mean reporting on false information, one can not give the coronavirus skeptics, disinformation spreaders the same equal standing as the medical experts. It was stated that ‘I am afraid you cannot give any way to information that is false, that is not impartiality that's basically misleading your audience’. Therefore from my findings, I can say that neutrality and impartiality have a different meaning when reporting under a pandemic. The journalists are reporting on a public health crisis, everything they say can have an impact on their audiences' health. Therefore you can not be neutral or impartial; you have to report facts, governmental regulations, and medical experts' analysis on what is going on in the UK and the world. This neutrality and impartiality are mainly challenged by what Ekström and Westlund term as ‘*The epistemologies of digital journalism*’ creating conflicts between what the journalist broadcast and the audience broadcast. The new digital age enabled the Corona virus skeptics to spread their information freely and gain access to a wider audience platform.

As Corner (2011, p.98) mentioned, audiences are not just sitting in front of a TV and consuming the news, they are more interactive. Therefore the role of journalism today differs from what it was back in the days, it's challenged by its audience almost instantly with the emergence of the digital age. Neutrality and impartiality will always be challenged under crisis. It seems that the BBC decided to concentrate on what they believe is real journalism, the journalism that provides facts backed up by medical expert's advice.

Stepping up for the responsibility that the public service had for their audience and their duty as a public service to deliver accurate news has been something that has been highlighted by every journalist I have spoken to. Roles, programmes, teams, rotas, procedures all have been changed and mixed with the spirit of a team effort to enable the BBC to broadcast to its audience under the pandemic. The audience is huge, not just a British audience but also a global one. With the pandemic, there was also what the WHO called an infodemic, the spread of disinformation and misinformation between the public.

I think early on one of the things that I was personally involved in most was myth-busting, sort of online and video pieces saying both for UK audience and an international audience. You know boiling garlic isn't actually going to help you, or I mean there were tens and millions of people in India who believed that's cows' urine was going to protect you.

BBC Correspondent, 56 years old

Disinformation and misinformation challenges continue to this day, where people share news on the origins of the virus, to news about vaccines have been manipulated and spread falsely till this day both in the UK and in the world. The BBC journalists were very careful in the way they both referred to this disinformation and the way they referred to the people that spread them. Firstly, throughout my interviewees, the term fake news was not a term used by the BBC. They referred to fake news in the terms of disinformation and misinformation.

I don't actually like the term fake news because it's mostly popularized by Donald Trump as a way to the if you like to make the media less trustworthy. He kind of created this phenomenon, so if you like misinformation or whatever.

BBC Correspondent, 56 years old

If we look into the work of both Frakas J. and Schou J. (2018) regarding the term 'Fake News' they emphasise that this global buzzword has evolved and they argue that "fake news"

'has become a deeply political concept used to delegitimise political opponents and construct hegemony'. Fake news is now a term that is used to refer to misleading information, Donald Trump has used it also to refer to mainstream media output giving them a less trustworthy stand. Therefore the term has become a vital component in the political struggles and a floating signifier giving an image explaining how a society is and how it should be structured (Frakas & Schou J., 2018). The pandemic has seen this term evolve even deeper to include all the disinformation news published via social media and digital platforms. However, we can see how the BBC does not like to refer to this term in its output. The negative association that it relates to does not correspond with the BBC's editorial decisions in reporting disinformation and misinformation under the pandemic. Secondly, the BBC staff were really careful in the way they referred to the people spreading these false news statements and conspiracies. They made sure and agreed collectively that normal members of the public are not considered conspiracy theorists.

So decided early on that we would stop referring to people as a conspiracy theorist for a start just because somebody is with the lockdown protest or is refusing to wear a mask or whatever because we are trying to be sympathetic and understanding to the problems people are facing.

Disinformation Journalist, 35 years old

The fact that people were losing their jobs, losing loved ones, feeling down and mentally challenged made the journalist think twice before they name someone a conspiracy theorist. As Dahlgren (2018, p.26) emphasis 'Affect can lead people to and shortcuts to deal with the massive amounts of information that confront them'. The rise of the role of emotionality that Dahlgren (2018) suggests plays a big role in determining the truth under the pandemic as we can see from the quotes above. The audience feelings were thought of when producing the news by the journalist. Therefore, journalists don't believe that their job is to point out the disinformation news spreaders or believers but to guide them or provide them with the means to discover their wrongdoing or wrong understanding of the situation.

The way in which the BBC dealt with disinformation was not positively perceived by all the audience. There were always challenges reporting disinformation to the public. Some would appreciate it and others will fight back. This can be explained by what Putnam (2000, p.136) refers to as the two types of trust is in society. One is called "thick" trust and the other is the "thin" trust. This thick trust can be achieved when a personal relationship has been achieved, so if some of the audience members feel that they have some sort of personal relationship

with the BBC for example, this relationship can be with a well-known TV presenter or a correspondent that they have been following for years and years; then perhaps the thick trust would develop. This thick trust also can be developed with members of the family for example. Therefore the BBC was the educator around disinformation, it tried to educate the population to what they saw as being false, misleading, and disinformation. This education can stop the spread of any information that can lead to major national health implications. “Thin” trust on the other hand is experienced with people that are not known to the audience on a personal level, like people posting on social media, or an unknown media broadcasting corporation, or suspicious personals (Dahlgren, 2009, p.112). From analysing the words of the professionals I interviewed it seemed that during the pandemic, the BBC output enabled the audience to experience the two types of trust both thick and thin together at different stages of the pandemic. As they saw a huge number of the audience tuning in to the news especially at the start of the pandemic and then tuning a bit down later in the year. This can be explained by trust or loss of interest or an overload of information. Social media did not shy away from expressing this:

We were also attacked on social media by a community that themselves were kind of was fueled by hatred to the BBC, by hatred to the government, hatred to medical experts, medical ileitis and fuelled by misinformation conspiracy theories and you know dispute all the positive feedback we were looking at from professionals. Dealing with those people was actually the overwhelming problem that continues to this day
News editor, 42 years old

This hatred came in all its forms from social media messages to life-threatening threats towards the journalist and staff that are reporting on disinformation. Cyberbullying or harassment against journalists is a type of tactic that certain individuals or groups use to force the media to incorporate or eliminate an idea or a group (Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016, p.889). There are two categories of journalists’ harassments that Nerone (1994) points out, exclusionary or inclusionary. Exclusionary violence tends to divert the media attention towards certain ideas or groups and the inclusionary violence involves individuals who are trying to divert or change the media’s news agenda (Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016, p.889). I argue from my findings that pandemic enabled both the exclusionary or inclusionary violence and online harassment to take place. The social media platforms enabled the corona virus skeptics, the disinformation spreaders and the BBC haters to harass the BBC disinformation journalists. Perhaps aiming to change the disinformation news output to incorporate their

ideas. However, in the case of the pandemic as my interviewees mentioned giving the corona virus skeptics the same weight of platform as the scientists and the basic health facts will be considered misleading the audience and a failure to journalist. Peoples' health is at stake therefore anything broadcast would affect the audience directly. Digging deep into why people spread disinformation and who is spreading which individuals have been spreading them is something that specialised teams within the BBC took care of. There was a disinformation team and disinformation reporter, BBC monitoring teams, reality check team, and many more. It seemed that there is a sense of sharing and teamwork between these teams to unpack the reasoning, gains, and consequences of spread disinformation and misinformation. They had one aim to achieve which is to help the audience understand if what they are reading and consuming was fake or real, helping the audience understand how they can investigate a fake news story.

Young J. (2020) looks into the affective dimensions of misinformation in which affects and emotion play a powerful role in the structure and social aspect of misinformation. He highlights that without taking into consideration these affective dimensions it would be difficult to tackle misinformation and its effects will worsen. He argues that: 'misinformation is effective because it exploits a collective desire for affective belonging and community in the face of pervasive prevarity' and since social media were designed to create our own communities they become a vital place where misinformation is spread but also a place where affect is spread. The result is that these social media communities will be full of affectivity charged communities that will do their utmost to spread their ideas whether this was factual or false. This results in people who are part of these social communities being vulnerable to disinformation campaigns that seek to use affective tools to attach people to their ideas. Baring in mind my findings the BBC professionals took an approach of educating the audience of the circulating disinformation content, they have taken some measures that perhaps Young (2020) would consider not enough. But the other argument would be who's role is to educate the public about this rise of disinformation on social media platforms and in both digital & physical communities. Is the role of the public service media or the government or other non-governmental organisations that is something to be debated. Social media platforms have tried to take certain measures during the pandemic to tackle disinformation themselves. At the time that I was conducting some of my interviews, Twitter announced that they will start to permanently ban users who spread Covid misinformation

(Al Jazeera, 2nd of March 2021) when highlighting these new Twitter regulations to my interviewees the response was this:

“I think social media platforms have been quite late every step of the game in this pandemic, they were late to realise the scale of the problem and they were late to introduce measures to control the problem they were late to change policies in response to the problem but you know we are where we are.”

Disinformation Journalist, 35 years old

“It seems like enough has built up, the people who have spread these stuff have been able to build up large followings and use social media platforms to spread this stuff relatively easily and when there has been policies introduced you feel that a lot of the damage has been done. And there is an interesting question about globally whether the social media companies are less good at monitoring accounts in different languages as well”

Broadcast Journalist, 31 years old

So how effective social media platform interventions in tackling disinformation during the pandemic is questionable. Young(2020,p.3) highlights an interesting argument that

‘Technical interventions, such as the censoring of misinformation on social media platforms, may fuel more resentment and conspiracy theories when they threaten narratives that support feelings of community’

From fueling more conspiracy theories to being too late to intervene in the spread of misinformation during the pandemic, many arguments haven't been answered to this day. However, taking in Young 2020 suggestion by tackling the emotion and affects that this disinformation creates can enable a step forward towards the fight against disinformation.

Then there is the bigger challenge on how to report disinformation. The BBC has been well known for being neutral and impartial, but how did they balance this when reporting on fake news and the spreaders of fake news is an interesting finding.

There is sort of a difficult dance of neutrality so people like us report like vaccine skepticism with the same rate as pro-vaccine messages so people can consider that neutral and I would consider that a failure of journalism if we were to do that. So, it's

less than the pandemic has affected our idea of neutrality but more the area that we decided to concentrate on during the pandemic that affected our view of neutrality.

News Editor 42 years old

If I am covering a story about the anti-vaccine community, I am not going to give them equal coverage to all of the scientists, doctors and all of the health authorities and say no you should get vaccinated, obviously, I am not going to do that, but still, I am going to try and reflect their views but in a way that the audience recognises that you know this is not a good idea by the way. And then the authorities saying no you should get vaccinated. I am afraid you cannot give any way to information that is false, that is not impartiality that's basically misleading your audience.

Disinformation journalist, 35 years old

We can see here that the journalists cannot mislead their audience to be neutral. There is a fine line to consider. False information that is scientifically proven to be wrong cannot be given the same weight as the truth. The journalist cannot mislead their audience and the staff and have to highlight the facts behind any statement that they make. Being neutral cannot be considered as spreading misleading information. The pandemic is a special story where people's lives are at risk therefore journalists were very careful in the way they presented and reported disinformation. Journalists had to think about their tone, speed of dealing with fake news and even its place in the running order makes a difference, it should not be presented as the first item in the news bulletin for example, and should not be emphasized.

Another interesting aspect to highlight is who are the fake news consuming audience and how can one appeal to them. They are perhaps the same audience that the BBC broadcasts to however their current circumstances have changed. Social media played a big role in being the main medium that spread misinformation and disinformation to society under the pandemic. People are in their homes under lockdown and using their phones and computers constantly to consume the news.

All of these harmful ideas and claims that we check they all become big because of social media, like if social media didn't exist none of those things would happen. We know for a fact, we know people who died because they read or saw something on social media, and they didn't take the necessary cautions and unfortunately, either

themselves or members of their family got the virus and died. We know people who took wrong harmful advice about how to prevent or cure coronavirus. And unfortunately lost their lives. So in a way, you could say it's all been negative but that's not necessarily correct either, quite a lot of the information that people accessed during the pandemic from the WHO or their local or national health authority lots of it was from social media like we know here in the UK the NHS social accounts the number of people who follow them and read them regularly went up enormously during the pandemic because people were interested in seeing what sort of national public health that they trust is saying about the pandemic what they should do what measures they need to take. And they were looking at all of that via social media. So, you know its benefits but it's also downsides too.

Disinformation journalist, 35 years old

So, in addition to spreading fake news, social media was one of the main sources for accessing valuable news also. The BBC made sure to broadcast to its audience on all platforms, from the website, radio, TV, and social media platform in all their shapes and forms. Their target was to reach all the audiences no matter what age group they belong to. Consuming disinformation via social media has had real-life effects on audiences for example if we look at this story:

One of our important pieces was interviewing an American gentleman who had, he and his wife believed that it was all a hoax by what they read on the internet and they both got coronavirus and his wife eventually died of it which was pretty bad. It's good that he managed to speak because he wanted to speak out and to tell people to take it seriously and not to believe what they have been reading on Facebook. Facebook has told him not to wear a mask and live your life as normal and he did that he was a taxi driver he brought the virus home and his entire family got it. That is the kind of reporting we had to do, and it is pure public service broadcasting to tell people about the reality of something without voice tinting it and without hiding anything.

Journalist, 55 years old.

When looking at the epistemology of digital journalism Ekström and Westlund (2019) offer an explanation of the increased fake news distribution. Journalism now a day in the digital age has new challenges. The new digital age is creating conflicts between what the journalists broadcast and what the audience broadcast on social media as an example, this can have

direct effects on the receiver of this information as we can see in the example above. Under the pandemic distributing misleading information can lead to life and death situations. Dahlgren (2009, p.127) also evaluates how the modern age digital developments have transformed the interaction between television and its audience, people nowadays as Corner points out are not just sitting down and watching the TV broadcast they are interacting with it by the help of the new digital age. So the use of social media and the audience's ability to produce user-generated content has changed the structural broadcasting environment. We can see from the two examples above that epistemologies of digital journalism can have a positive effect when it enables audience stories to be heard but also has its negatives when we see the spread of disinformation on social media platforms is harming the audiences.

If we look into Belair-Gagnon V. (2015) research findings in which confirmed that in a connected newsroom the boundaries between the audience and the producers are blurring. The use of user-generated content by the newsroom in the media institutions will enable more engagement with their audience. Belair-Gagnon V. (2015) concludes that the BBC has changed its newsroom organisational structure to incorporate social media within its reporting. Under crisis, the BBC with its institutional, organisation, and cultural significance in society influences the audiences in the creation of a more connected newsroom to report a crisis. From my findings, I can see how the epistemologies of digital journalism and the rise of disinformation under the pandemic has challenged the concept of a connected newsroom that Belair-Gagnon V. (2015) concluded. The relationship between the audiences and the journalist was challenged as truth and loyalty were being questioned with the rise and spread of disinformation over social media and inside the communities.

CAN YOU EVER BE PREPARED FOR A PANDEMIC?

In my literature review, I highlighted the study of Olsson (2010) in which journalists reporting on crisis events usually base their reporting on previous experiences they had within a similar situation. Olsson studied how journalists report a crisis event such as the September 11th terror attack. But the question is how prepared were the BBC journalists for the pandemic. My findings touched upon previous experiences of reporting the news under crisis. Both the inside media perspective and the outside media perspective that was highlighted in Olsson's research was touched upon in my research findings.

The nearest match would be the financial crisis as a business journalist. It was a huge story and it affected most people in the world and it affected your own pay, job

prospects, and the rest of it but people weren't dying not in the hospitals and all the rest of the world.

Senior broadcast journalist, Business, 35 years old

Listening to the BBC correspondent that I interviewed as he highlighted his 2009 Asia reporting of SARS, he described how different covering an event such as the pandemic is. He mentions that the Covid 19 pandemic was unique in many ways:

I spent a couple of weeks in 2009 in east Asia covering SARS so the idea for me that there was the potential to have a pathogen that can suddenly spread around the world was not you know completely foreign and if you knew people who work in that field it is something that they warned about in terms of general population in terms of something that can genially go global in the way covid 19 did in the way the SARS or meres or other recent viruses didn't quite thankful I mean they spread but not anything like the same way. So no I think it's been like it has been for every business almost every individual I think it's just been a unique period of our lives I think.

BBC Correspondent, 56 years old

The events of 9/11 that Olson has focused on were also mentioned by one of my participants. The BBC News presenter, 55 years old was one of the first international journalists to reach ground zero, reporting and presenting under the pandemic reminded her of the shock and horror she experienced then under the 9/11 reporting. This comparison was brought back again to highlight that the 9/11 events are not a direct comparison to the pandemic however 'The sense that the news then was about life and death, the future of our children and when there is a sense of threat people usually turn into sources that they know and trust'. So the pandemic brought back the senses or precious experiences in crisis reporting, the feelings, the shock, the feelings of the unknown, it is these arising emotions that are remembered.

Building on the conclusion that Olsson (2010) portrayed which is that historical analogues help media organisations to prepare for future crisis news events. In the case of the pandemic, this is not quite applicable, even though the participants that I have interviewed had previous crisis reporting experience on both a national and international level, there is certain overall consent that the pandemic took them into shock. They were part of the crisis that they were reporting which makes it difficult to compare directly to any other crisis news event they have reported on. If we look into what the Senior broadcast journalist for the BBC News Channel, 56 years said:

‘To be honest nothing that I have ever done has been anything like this I mean I covered huge, huge stories, I covered 9/11, tube bombings, Princess Diana’s death and so on, nothing I have ever seen has wiped out the news agenda for a year like the way this has, nothing has ever impacted our news organisation the way it has, nothing has impacted society the way it has’.

The only thing that it was compared to is the second world war, not in terms of the actuality of the event but in terms of its effects. That everyone is affected by it, behaviors have been changed. It was mentioned that is the only comparison that can be compared to. This comparison to the world war was brought back up again by senior broadcast journalist, 48 years old, in what he stated:

‘There really has been only one news story in the daily agenda day after day after day. And I don't think short of a world war, I can't think of a same story that has had the same impact on people and that is not surprising because its did everybody’s daily lives’

This temporal engagement with the pandemic also questions the very definition of newsworthiness in a sense. Both Dahlgren and Hill (2020) mention these temporal relations within the parameters of media engagements as the *‘intensities of engagement are strongly connected to temporal relations with media and memory cultures’* However questioning the very definition of newsworthiness as nothing is really new in the daily news being reported under the pandemic, but however a very close continuation of what was just a day ago. The variation of non-crisis news reporting offers a dynamic understanding of the work but now it's just the same news repeated and updated. Also, the structure in which news was conceptualized when reporting on infectious diseases has been described as both a foreign threat and a shared problem. This was concluded in Kim’s (2020) research. This shared problem is acknowledged between the journalist and the audience when reporting the news

THE ROLE AND THE CRISIS OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

The importance and the very existence of the public service media in society has been debated extensively by different scholars. My literature review has shown how these debates and arguments are highlighted. From Stuarts Hall (1997) argument that the public service media classifies the world with dominant ideologies moving to the argument of Scannell’s new public sphere establishment and then we have Hodkinson (2011) where he believes that media plays a role of the facilitator of this public sphere proving the public with news and

information. From my findings, I could touch upon a number of these arguments that highlight the role of the BBC under the pandemic.

The public service media of the BBC as highlighted by my sample of interviewees played a very important role in the pandemic. The journalists have a mission to accomplish as one of the senior broadcast journalists mentions to educate, inform and entertain.

To educate, inform and entertain

Senior broadcast journalist in business- 35 years old

To deliver the facts, clearly and comprehensively

BBC News Presenter, 55 years old

Our mission is to sort of try and tell the nation what is going on and what it should be doing.

The BBC mission is very much to inform, entertain and educate.

A senior broadcast journalist for BBC News Channel, 56 years old

Because of the BBCs position in public life that we have a real duty to provide the information that people want and need. This is not a time for speculation, this is not a time for guesswork. We needed to provide very solid public service journalism.

Senior producer, 48 years old

So, the public service journalists have focused on broadcasting facts and reporting those facts clearly and comprehensively. This is explained by Dahlgren (2009,p.128) as he describes this as a “*Translation service*” in which the BBC journalist under crisis reporting gathered the news from its different sources and translated it back to its audience in a more recognisable, accessible, and understandable way.

The public service, therefore, plays an important role within society during a pandemic and the BBC here acts as a facilitator to the public sphere providing its audience with news mainly from the governmental guidelines during the pandemic and the audience themselves. In reporting the news the BBC News Presenter I spoke to also mentioned that the news programme she was presenting gave the audience the chance to share their experiences and feelings as she mentions it was “*an attempt to allow people who were never on TV before to speak in their own words at length and sometimes quite emotionally of what was happening to them*”. This shared public culture that Scannel argued for seemed to make sense when

listening to the journalists' experiences. Scannel believed that the public service media which in my case the BBC provides a shared common knowledge. This shared common knowledge relocalized private life towards a shared public culture. Also, this has a direct impact on what I talked about earlier facilitating the public sphere. As explained by Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2019) both journalists and audiences value the personal and emotional stories. They are valued because *“they have the capacity to cultivate compassion and enlarge our world views”*.

But what is being broadcasted by the BBC is argued to be a selective type of reporting. One must highlight that journalism is selective in reporting the stories that we watch on TV or read online or listen to on the radio. It is argued that we are subjected to news that the journalist or the broadcasting organisations think are important for us to know about. Hall (1997) argued that the public service media can discourse dominant ideologies to their audience. Stuart Hall called this the *“Television ideological effect”* in which audiences viewed a partial, selective, and an edited version of the reality they are living in. This was formed as being a transparent representation of what the journalist believed as a representation of contemporary social life (Scannel, 2013, p.356). Although these arguments are realistic to some level from my findings it seemed that the BBC was mainly serving their audience with the best they can in the most difficult times of their career history. They focussed on delivering facts and information to an audience that needed this information. They became the bridge between the government guidelines and the people's needs. As the BBC correspondent, I interviewed highlights

‘when we are in a crisis moment which was clear was that people do still trust the BBC and we are very dry far from perfect but we are big enough and we have enough outlets which appeal to different sections of the population younger audience, older audience, people who want more in-depth, people who want basic information and we kind of do all of it, as I said it's very far from perfect but I think people will, it's shown when there is a crisis people will switch to the BBC because they trust it’

Crisis reporting is one thing, the pandemic is another but one must bring into the light that there is another type of crisis taking place within the BBC itself. The crisis of the existence of the public service media in the UK.

'In some newspapers, if there were a plan by the government to really rain in and cut down the heart of the BBC those will be rolled back a bit by the event of the last year and the coverage of the pandemic and what the pandemic reminded people about the BBCs role'

BBC Correspondent, 56 years old

'I do think the license fee is on borrowed time. I don't know what other public service broadcasters have elsewhere but I guess it is similar. I think it's on borrowed time because purely it's because I think when you have such big completion now from services like Netflix and amazon prime although the actual business module gives you a lot more for you money for the license fee for the 170 quid that I think it is now and a Netflix subscription is 10 pounds a month, when you have other modules operating like that are super popular and very easy going in term of how you access them, I think there will be increasingly more people that just feel that the license fee is outdated and a tax that is really unaffordable so although it's having a moment where it has revived slowly I think it's on borrowed time. I really don't think in 10 years' time I can't see how it can exist'.

Global health producer, 42 years old

The very existence of the public service media in the UK and the yearly license fee that audiences need to pay has been an issue discussed and debated for the last two decades, the argument is that with the emergence of new channels, organisations created in an age of spectrum scarcity have become redundant. These discussions and debates label the compulsory license fee as unsuitable to the audience in an increasingly competitive media environment (Murdok, 2005,p.1). However the argument doesn't end there Murdok (2005) argues against the below and defends the public service media against its enemies, he argues that:

'We have to stop thinking of public broadcasting as a stand-alone organisation and see it as the principal node in an emerging network of public and civil initiatives that taken together, provide the basis for new shared cultural space, a digital commons, that can help forge new communal connections and stand against the continual pressure for enclosure coming from commercial interests on the one hand and the new moral essentialism on the other'

Being part of the new shared cultural space is an interesting way to look at the public service broadcaster. Murdock (2000, p.61-62) highlights that the public service broadcasters focus on the quality of their programmes rather than the quantity, it is this quality relation that matters to their audience. The audience appreciated their programmes more than the commercial television programmes, ratings show that audience value and the average percentage of population viewings to public service broadcasters programmes are high. The digitally connected audience can easily connect to Netflix, the internet, social media platforms as they are in easy reach and available for a low cost. These low-cost digital services are putting pressure on the BBC license fee, therefore new funding modules need to be introduced as suggested by some of the BBC professionals I have spoken to. Many suggestions did come up in the interviews as smart ways and ideas of funding the BBC need to be thought of as an example creating a form of a subscriber system for certain channels like BBC radio four.

‘I do think we need to look at different ways of funding and different modules of funding and needs to be stretched on a long time. I think what the pandemic has done is bought us that time and we will see’

BBC Correspondent, 56 years old

This public service media crisis was heightened while reporting on Brexit. The interviewees I spoke to highlight the effects that Brexit had on the BBC’s reputation. The government and the public were divided over Brexit and so was their opinion on the way the BBC reported Brexit.

‘There is suspicion about the BBC, oh we are saying what the government wants us to, They are using us, they are lying. We saw during Brexit the BBC was seen by one side or the other as being for the government or totally left-wing and anti-government’.

Senior broadcast journalist, 48 years old

‘coming into the beginning of the pandemic you know we just had a general election this big divide over Brexit a lot of complaints from within the government about how the BBC handled all of that there was basically a ban on cabinet members, you know

senior ministers appearing on the Today program in the morning for several months, there wasn't a single cabinet minister on the Today programme or news night.

I think covid has done the BBC a favor in a sense, it reminded people in government how important it is to have an impartial public broadcaster and the value it can bring to public debate and if they are in an emergency situation you need to reach people and explain things to people to have this I think most countries would value having something like the BBC who don't have it'.

BBC Correspondent, 56 years old

We can see from the quotes above this idea that the pandemic has given the public service media time to fight for its position within society, broadcasters like the BBC were a huge asset to the government as they facilitated their message across to the audience, similar to what Hodgkinson (2011, pp.174-176) put across on the role of the media, in which it facilitates the public sphere, and here the BBC actually did that under the pandemic, providing their audience with news, information and governmental guidelines. The future argument for public service media has become stronger than ever under the pandemic. The future of the public service broadcasters within the digitalisation era has been researched by Papathanassopoulos (2002, pp.79-80) he claims that “public broadcasters face the most difficult challenge in their long history” he believes that the audience is now fragmented due to digitalisation and the increase in cost, loss of revenue and the added competition is threatening the future of the public service” (Moe, Syvertsen ed., 2008). Even though the audience has been fragmented I believe from analyzing my findings that the BBC has brought them together under the pandemic.

The future is still yet to see what is waiting for the BBC but my interviewees almost all agree that it would be a smaller BBC, with job cuts and saving to account for, the size of the BBC would be much smaller than what it currently consists of. However, only time can tell what the outcome of the pandemic can have on the BBC. Just recently the Director-General of the BBC Tim Davies announced that 400 BBC jobs will move out of London out of the basis to reflect the output more on the entire of the BBC (Independent, 18th March 2021). Another argument here presented by the NUJ (National Union of Journalists) questioned this move as Paul Siegert, the NUJ's national broadcasting organizer, highlights: *'We welcome more diversity and creating more content out of London is a good thing, as is extra investment in apprenticeships. However, It's strange that at the same time the BBC is talking about the importance of getting out of London and investing in the regions as a means*

of better serving the audience, it has also axed 450 posts in English Regions and cut £25m from that budget’.

We can see here two sides of an argument to what movements are currently taking place inside the BBC however, the bigger picture is the role of the public service in society and the role it played under the pandemic. From all of the above arguments, discussion, answers, and conversation I argue that the public service media of the BBC made the case of the very existence of the public service media stronger under the pandemic.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This thesis is focused on two main crises, the Covid 19 pandemic crisis and the crisis of the public service media. It sheds the light on the public service media outlet of the BBC under the pandemic. I look into the relationship that the BBC holds in the social construction of its audience and the UK society under the pandemic. My case study focused on the United Kingdom and the public service media of the BBC this is because firstly the UK has gone through three national lockdowns therefore both the audience and the journalist feels the strain of this lockdown and is affected directly by it. Secondly, the BBC is a main public service media for the UK audience so therefore they have the responsibility to deliver news to the nation in all its forms no matter what the circumstances are.

A constructionist approach was adopted in this research paper because the BBC Staff I interviewed considered their news output during the pandemic vital, they focused on informing the public, keeping them up to date throughout the pandemic with the knowledge that they thought was important. The relationship the journalist has with their audience is socially constructed with the help of the power that they BBC hold in the British society. This power is based on reputation, trust, and loyalty all of which were touched upon in this research paper.

This chapter will answer my thesis questions which are:

1. What type of space and place did the BBC news staff construct with their audience under the pandemic?
2. What relationship did the BBC professionals have with their audience under the pandemic?

3. What role did the pandemic play in the crisis of the public media broadcasting?

Also, it will provide you with a summary of my findings and the contribution that these findings add to other research conducted within this field. I will then recommend how this research can be developed further and what steps need to be taken to enable that.

The space in which journalists are used to working in on a daily basis has been adapted and reshuffled almost instantly under the pandemic. The pandemic took the BBC newsroom by surprise challenging them with the social distancing measures and the health and safety requirements that need to be applied for them to continue conducting their duties towards their audiences. The social distancing measures that were taken challenged the journalist but did not override them. The professionals I interviewed all continued to broadcast to their audience, they rearranged the way they were broadcasting to suit the current pandemic situation. However, programmes, schedules, creating new programmes, building studios at home, or taking the risk of working from the office have all been taken to make sure the public service mission continues to deliver content to their audiences.

Creating this communicative space in the public sphere enables the audiences to participate and interact with the news Dahlgren (2009, p.132). This public sphere that Habermas referred to enables the society and the public to share common ideas and cultures between both the civil society and the public authority (Hodkinson,2011, pp.174-176). So here is where the BBC comes in during the pandemic, my findings bring to light the big role they played in facilitating the public sphere by acting as a source for the public providing them with material concerning news, events, government, and institutional activities. The social and natural confrontational elements of the pandemic enabled the engagement between both the public service media and the UK audience to be enhanced under the umbrella of Doreen Massy's concept of throwntogetherness. The phrase "We are all in this together" was brought up several times by my participants. Since everybody is affected by the lockdown, by the virus, by the social distancing, everyone's health was under threat, and the fear of the unknown enabled the distance between the audience and the journalist to be narrowed, they were all in this together. Whatever the audience were going through was also felt by the journalist themselves. Journalists and the audience shared the same concerns, experiences, uncertainties, and questions. Scannell argued that the public service broadcasting is 'perhaps the only means by which common knowledge in a shared public life as a social good for all could be maintained (1989, p.164). This social good for society and the audience that the

public service provided under the pandemic is not only maintained but developed to suit the current pandemic crisis. The public service media of the BBC tried with its broadcasting to bring the country together by keeping them informed and educated about every single detail they knew. It was brought to my attention also that my findings emphasised how the BBC local radio stations played a big role in reaching the local community under the pandemic as if they were their friend chatting to the local community, advising the local community, alerting the local community especially when they were all under lockdown. During the crisis the space and place in which the BBC staff facilitated was not just for sharing common ideas, it's also created a sense of togetherness. To answer my first question the space and place that the BBC staff constructed with their audience under the pandemic was a shared, connected, throwntogetherness space.

The relationship between the BBC professionals and their audience was looked into from the perspective of the BBC staff I interviewed, I researched this relationship by looking into how my interviewees produced and reported the news during the pandemic. As I stated within my research the most important elements of journalism is reporting the truth and enhancing their loyalty. Loyalty makes the news newsworthy. This loyalty and truth were challenged by the modern age technologies in which the audience nowadays have easy access to the internet, digital devices and are connected online one can argue every second. So, the interaction between the audiences and the media is transformed as Dahlgren (2009, p.107) highlights. The relationship between the audience and the journalists became more intertwined together but to some extent some of the intentions on what they share clashes. The future of the public service broadcasters within the digitalisation era has been researched by Papathanassopoulos (2002, pp.79-80) it is claimed that public broadcasting is now experiencing a fragmented audience due to digitalization, and they are going through difficult times as costs increases, loss of revenue and the added competition that digital media is accumulating, all threaten the future of the public service media (Moe, Syvertsen , 2008, p.403). My research findings argue against this, as the importance and the need for the public service media is needed more than ever under the digitalisation era. You would need a media organisation that is not commercially funded that can deliver unbiased news to its audience, especially at times of a global health crisis. However, public service loyalty and trust were challenged with the emergence of the digital media.

To gain and sustain this loyalty and trust that the BBC is well known for, they focused on enhancing their disinformation teams and programmes. There were disinformation teams,

disinformation reporters, BBC monitoring teams working on disinformation, a reality check team, and many more. It came to my attention that there was a sense of sharing and teamwork between these teams. The BBC staff worked together themselves to deliver the factual news to their audience. They had to educate themselves on subjects related to health and public health in order to deliver accurate information. They aimed to achieve a public understanding of what is considered fake news and what is considered factual news.

Neutrality and impartiality of the BBC and the journalist were challenged when reporting during the pandemic by living in the crisis event themselves, they can't physically and mentally distance themselves out of the story like they normally would. But it was generalized that you can't be neutral with fake news. Fake news must not have the same weight as scientifically proven news, otherwise, it would not be considered neutral but it would be a failure in journalism as one news editor states. Certain practical procedures were taken to emphasize this statement as Journalists had to think about their tone, speed of dealing with fake news and even its place in the running order makes a difference, fake news should not be presented as the first item in the news bulletin for example and should not be emphasized. The way the BBC professional reporting was based on reporting information in an unalarming way, they did not want to alarm their audience even though the situation of the pandemic was alarming. Researchers into how journalists report under a crisis have found that the journalists take on roles such as a comforter, psychologist, and co-mourner in times of crisis (Riegert and Olsson, 2007, p.147). It was clear that the almost all of the individuals I interviewed made sure to approach their reporting in a way that can care for, make room for audiences to be met and perceive themselves as belonging to something. This can be explained the term “media hospitality” by Silverstone (2007) when the BBC staff reported to their audience, they are searching for that positive news item in between the overriding negative news stories that they were surrounded by. Media hospitality has the obligation to produce effective communication that will provide the mediated world with meaning, sustainability and produce a difference. And that's how the story of Captain Tom grew it was thought by the interviewees that it had a great positive impact on society, as it hoped to produce a difference to bring back hope into the audience's lives. This confirms what the researchers have found about reporting under crisis, the BBC was the comforter, psychologist, and co-mourner that lived the pandemic with its audiences. That light at the end of the tunnel was the hope they wanted to broadcast into the hearts of the audience. Digging deep to find it was a challenge, but they took every opportunity that arose to highlight this hope. This fragmented audience that Papathanassopoulos (2002, pp.79-80) highlights can be

evaluated differently under the pandemic. The increase of audiences watching the BBC news programmes under the pandemic has increased dramatically since mid-March 2020. The audience for the BBC News at One has risen 85%, the News at Six 74%, and the News at Ten by 50%. It is seen that at times of crisis the audience's relationship with the public service media of the BBC has brought them together by the trust and loyalty that the BBC staff aim to provide, this audience fragmentation seems to divert back to what is well known as trustworthy news. So the relationship that was created between the BBC professionals and their audiences was one that was based on trust and loyalty. The relationship was intertwined with each other but was challenged with what is called by digital-age media output. The BBC was hospitable to its audience reporting information in an unalarming way and spread the hope that they can spread. They were a comforter, psychologist, and co-mourner under the pandemic.

Public service media on the other hand has its own crisis. We cannot compare the crisis of the public service media to that of the pandemic however the argument here is to evaluate what role that the pandemic played in the crisis of the public service media broadcasting. There have been ongoing discussions that the very existence of the public service media of the BBC and its funding that is based on the compulsory license fee is under threat. From my findings, it was highlighted that reporting on Brexit created a huge political debate for the BBC, as some parts of the government and the audience believed that the BBC took one side or the other. This political debate added to the pressure of the BBC crisis.

However, the pandemic is arguably made the argument for the public service stronger. The pandemic has given the public service media the time to fight for its position within society, broadcasters like the BBC are a huge asset to the government as they facilitated and distributed their message across to the audience under the pandemic. The role it played in the pandemic from providing the shared public sphere that Scannell mentions to its role in combating disinformation, its non-commercial driven output that has been a great asset to the government guidelines acting as a "translation service" as Dahlgren (2009, p.128) would refer to it. The BBC journalist took the news and information and reformulated it to broadcast back to the public in a meaningful way.

Concluding the answers, I got from the professionals I interviewed when asked about the future of the BBC almost all of them agreed that the BBC will exist in the future in some form however it will be much smaller than what the BBC currently looks like. The saving

and cuts are a reality that is not denied however the place the BBC holds in British society would not allow it to disappear. The Pandemic has proven to the government and the British society why they need public service media in general and specifically under a pandemic. To answer my last research, question what role did the pandemic play in the crisis of the public media broadcasting. The pandemic has given the public service a stronger argument for its very existence, it has proven to both the British government and the British public that when a crisis such as a global pandemic arises, one must have an impartial broadcaster to rely upon. I have highlighted how this impartiality was challenged and questioned however the percentage of the audience who came to the BBC when the crisis struck demonstrates its importance in the British society.

“So, I guess a lot of people have just sort of realised that dedicated not really well-paid people who are working really hard and have a common mission to be public service broadcasters actually can be relied upon to give them good information ”

News Editor 42 years old

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

- Can you introduce yourself? How long have you been working for the BBC? What position do you hold at the BBC?
- How did the pandemic change the tasks or duties of this position?
- Did the pandemic force you into new practices?
- Were you ever prepared for the pandemic as a journalist or as an organisation?
- Can you relate the pandemic to any other crisis journalism news event you covered or read about? How can you relate this?

Throwntogethernes

- How did you report/present/produce to a lockdown audience ? did you think about the audience differently due to the pandemic?
- What was your main focus when you produced/ presenting the news under the lockdown?
- How did you choose your words when producing? Did you change your tone? The way to speak ? If yes in what way?
- What did “You” do to connect/reach the audience under the pandemic? Is it in any way different from the pre pandemic way you are used to?
- What did the “BBC” do to connect/reach its audience under the pandemic that is different from pre pandemic broadcasting?
- Did you identify or feel a sense of community between both the BBC output and the BBC audience during the pandemic?
- Any new news sources you used to produce or report the news? Which ones was focused on more?
- What was the role of social media in your reporting?
- How do you use social media? Personally, and professionally

- What value do you think the social media adds to the news that you produce ?
- Did you face any challenges with using social media as a news source or as a way of connecting with audience?

Crisis journalism

- As a public service media employee what do you believe your role is during the pandemic ?
- How much of this role was achieved by both you and the BBC do you believe ?
- What challenges did you face or are you facing in regards to the responsibility of delivering news to your audience?
- What does being neutral mean in this crisis? You are living the pandemic yourself so how do you make sure to be neutral in your news Production/ Presentation ?
- How did you combat being overwhelmed with news about the pandemic , both for yourself and the audience?
- What practices did you take to make sure that you balance the corona dominating news whilst balancing reporting other headline in the news?

Trust

- Why do you think that the BBC is a trusted public service?

Supporting fact: According to the Ofcom 2020 media nations UK report The covid-19 crisis has reinforced the importance of public service broadcasters as trusted providers of news and information.

- The pandemic conspiracies played a big role in society can you give examples of what you heard and how you dealt with it?

Examples of conspiracies:denying that Covid 19 exists, empty hospitals, 5G network is spreading the virus, the vaccine will change your DNA.

- What challenges did the fake news impose on your everyday working practice?

- In your opinion did social media platforms deliver support to tackle fake news under the pandemic? For example Social media started labelling certain news items as state news media to help tackle fake news, what are your thoughts on that?
- As a journalist what role, responsibilities and duties within tackling fake news do you have for your audience?
- How can one build trust? anything particular as a journalist you focused on?
- What do you think of conspiracy theories and the aspect of distrust ?
- From your experience why do audiences trust or consume fake news?
- How can the BBC appeal to the fake news consuming audience? Anything done differently to approach them?
- In what manner do you address the fake news ? Tone, the speed of addressing them?

Ontological security

- From your experience working for the BBC under the pandemic How can you define the term Lockdown television.
- Why do you believe audience watched a lot of the BBC news during lockdown?

Supporting Fact: According to figures published by the Guardian, Since mid-March 2020 the BBC has seen a huge increase in numbers watching its news programmes. The audience for the BBC News at One has risen 85%, the News at Six 74%, and the News at

- As a public service media producer what responsibility do you have towards your lockdown audience?
- The public service media has been experiencing its own crisis and challenges, where issues around the licence fee payment, job cuts and the existence of the public service itself is under threat. Do you believe that the pandemic changed any perspectives towards the public service threats? If yes in what why? And if no why do you think so?
- What do you think the future of the public service holds?
- Do you have anything else to add?
-

APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FORM



LUND
UNIVERSITY

Consent Form:

This research seeks to explore and analyse the public service of the BBC and how it is broadcasting news to its audience under the Covid-19 pandemic.

As a public service the BBC has the responsibility to deliver to its audience and when this responsibility is affected by a pandemic and the staff's safety is at risk, how did the BBC produce its news to its audience is something that I have been wondering about throughout this pandemic.

I will ask questions on how did you report/present/produce to a lockdown audience, whether or not the pandemic changed any daily practices, what challenges were faced, issues within trust and credibility etc.

Each interview will last 30-40 minutes. The interviewees name will be anonymous and the data will be used in the confinement of a masters thesis for the Media and Communication Studies program at Lund University. This thesis will be made publicly available however It will not publish your legal name.

I would like to record the interview via zoom and use the dialogue to present my findings. I will record the interview only with your written consent. Please feel free to say as much or as little as you want. You can decide not to answer questions, or to stop the interview any time you want. You have the opportunity to drop out of the research even after participation in it.

By signing below, you are agreeing that: (1) you have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet, (2) questions about your participation in this study have been answered satisfactorily, (3) you are aware of the potential risks (if any), and (4) you are taking part in this research study voluntarily (without coercion).

Full name of the Interviewee

Age

Occupation

APPENDIX 3: EXAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Q/ Can you introduce yourself please how long have you been working for the BBC? And what position do you hold in the BBC?

A/ I am I been working for the BBC Oh God ! Just done my 25 years ! So 25 years so I been there a long time.

Q/ And what position do you hold

A/ a senior producer

Q/ how did the pandemic change the tasks or duties of this position?

A/ It changed it pretty fundamentally first and foremost because I can travel you know. So the most obvious change was I usually spend about half my time travelling overseas and virtually over night that stopped. Not just for me but for everybody travelling became very difficult if not impossible. So **the first thing was we had to think how are we going to cover foreign news without actually travelling.** But that was made some what easier but frustrating by the fact that the space in the news bulletin to do foreign news was very small you know. The kind of news that I do diplomacy, foreign affaires, at the start of the pandemic in March, April May most of last year really there wasn't hardly any scope for foreign news in the bulletin it was all about covid. So just getting on air was very difficult and **trying to find stories that were going to break through beside from covid was very difficult.** And i think **we realised early on in some ways there is no point trying to hard in getting those stories on air because given the news agenda it was so dominated by Covid.** With the best news in the world we wouldn't be getting stories on air with the way we normally would have and that was frustrated for people because we want to get our stuff on but overtime we did come to an acceptances that that's the way is going to be for as long as it is. I think the other big change was you know working in foreign news you need to go into another country and setting up an operation and getting on air very quickly. So that didn't daout me too much for some of my colleagues especially the correspondents who use to work with the producer who does all the technical stuff for them suddenly we weren't with them face to face. **There is a quite steeping curve for the correspondents as well. They suddenly had to get to grips with the technical side of things . Learning to use the apps that we use, learning the kit that we use to get on air very quickly** and you know what correspondents are like. Even though I weeks in advance said this is the kit you are going to have to get the kit ready some of them were a little bit slow to take notice of that. And then they realised when lockdown happened and then suddenly we have to learn how to do this.

Q/ that answered my question of the new practices that was use and did the pandemic force you into new practices?

A/ very very much so a side from the safety practices wearing masks the social distancing the mics on interviewees we had to use stick mics a lot of practical challenges. **We couldn't go out on stories the way that we worked was complete different.** We had to think about a whole range of things that we learned about before and you know what news is like we do things quickly getting out there getting it done. And suddenly **everything is much much more**

complicated we had to think about a whole range of safety things that we haven't thought about before. That was difficult because the days of right lets just get into a car and go interview somebody that was not possible anymore. That took a while to get use to we realised its going to take time if we were going to a shoot, it will take longer to set up equipment safely to sanitise it afterwards and so on.

Q/ where you ever prepared for the pandemic as a journalist or as an organisation?

A/ No, I mean as you know journalist who work in hostile environments do they hostile environment course but the kind of threats and dangers safety stuff that we have to think about in a hostile environment course are very different from a pandemic. So I suppose we had this can do attitude , of ok how are we going to make this work. In terms of taking a plan off the shelf for a pandemic there was no plan for that what so ever. For most people I think it felt like a threat that seemed quite unlikely. You know people have been warning about it for years but weren't prepared for something at this magnitude that was going to change this completely. And that felt it through in every way you know , you spent enough in the organisation to know we went from everybody in the office to the fact that virtually no one in the office over night. And even though i was not directly involved in it the challenges just getting enough laptops, getting enough logins sorting out the technical stuff, enough kit that is occupying peoples time massively. So it did take a while for the kit to be available for the training to be available my colleagues in the early months were doing lots and lots of online training. Zoom training for people who have never considered the possibility that they might have to work from home and currently from home for so long. The BBC is a ... its not the best organisation to trying to adapt to things quickly yet it had to . I don't think anybody in the world could have planned fully to what we had to adapt to.

Q/ Can you relate the pandemic to any crisis news event you covered or read about, you have covered a lot I kind of looked into your profile . How can you relate this?

A/ I think the big difference with this pandemic, the stories that I do I am used to dealing with trauma , I am use to dealing with personal stresses and stresses that are affecting other people but those are distance things, you go to a story, you go to a war zone and you cover a story and those stresses are being felt by the subjects you are reporting on. I think the difference with this is that everybody was affected by it. And there is no escape from it. Suddenly we find ourselves in a situation where we have to keep the output going but also dealing with home schooling, illness to parents and loved ones . I think that thing that everybody has been feeling not just in journalism is that there is no escape from it the trauma is all around you, that is what I noticed most is that I got an understanding of trauma and the way that trauma affects people currently it was affecting everybody in the UK . Everybody was feeling their mental health was challenged, everybody was feeling stresses, and that was something new it was right at the door step and we were living with it everyday. I would hope that I had some of the skills necessary to deal with that better then some people. You know because I have worked in difficult places, how to look after my mental health and well-being. But for other people it was completely new and I think they found it more difficult to adapt .

Q/ and how did that affect the output? So you are living the same situation, you are living the pandemic yourself as well as your audience. How did it affect the output? Did it change anything?

A/ yea there was an understanding that everybody is in this together or that everybody is going through this. Often the stories that we cover are quite distance from us, we are talking about people experiences that we can't necessarily relate to. If you are reporting from the Middle East or the West Bank then that person experience is very different to my experience. But suddenly everybody was living through it together, everybody asking the same questions, everybody had the same uncertainties. I think that was different, I think probably that distance between the audience and the journalist probably got smaller because we understood what people are going through. And possibly is more difficult to turn off at the end of the day. We as journalists wanted to know what is happening with Covid and we were living it at the same time. So we did feel some of the times especially at the early before we got used to it that there is no escape from this pandemic. It feels overwhelming that we spent all day writing about and reporting what was happening. Then we go at home and have to deal with the implication of the pandemic when we got home. So it did feel quite overwhelming at times there was no escape from it and no way of turning off from what's happening.

Q/ I think you answered this, how did you report/ produce/ present to a lockdown audience? This is important, did you think about the audience differently during the pandemic when you reported? Like what was your main focus when you produced and presented under lockdown?

A/ I think there was a very strong emphasis on basic good public service journalism. We were aware of of misinformation going around, concerns over the pandemic being caused by Bill Gates and 5G and all of that misinformation going around. And I think especially for an organisation like the BBC there was there is a strong understanding that the people looking to us as an organisation to provide reliable comprehensive news coverage to answer basic questions. The message went out very strongly that people are looking to us to find out the answers. Because of the BBC's position in public life that we have a real duty to provide the information that people want and need. This is not a time for speculation, this is not a time for guess work. We needed to provide very solid public service journalism. Sometimes I think that may, some of the output is a little bit boring that we did spend a lot of time answering basic questions. Now on the News channel, your questions answered is just on the news channel now, answering those basic questions. But I think that's the role of the BBC in the pandemic is to answer the questions that people are asking without too much speculation, without too much window dressing, you know that is what we are there for at a time like this.

Q/ How did you choose your words when producing? Did you change your tone? the way you speak? If yes in what way? For a lockdown audience did that change anything?

A/

I don't know whether it changed to way we reported, we still reported the way that we always had back to basic stuff. There was in terms of the story decisions there was an understanding that we could not just give people bad news from our end. That everybody as we discussed the people are struggling and suffering and they needed to have some hope that there was a way out of it. Now that's not the job of the news organisation to give people hope but we were aware that we couldn't just give them a diet of bad news, bad news. So if you think of Captain Sir Tom Moore story it just went crazy, I think that's a good example of a story that almost by accident it gave people some hope. And made people smile and people thought actually there is some good things going around in the world and people are getting through this on their own way. So I think we did look for stories that weren't just bad news stories.

stories the elements to the pandemic people are doing other things to help people, to keep their spirits up or to help the community and I think that was really important. Because there was an awareness that this diet of constant bad news was not healthy for peoples wellbeing. But the people were listening to us you can see from the percentage of the number of people come to the BBC for news about the pandemic. We had a great responsibility to to respond to that.

Q/ You mentioned the example of the Captan Tom story , this brings me to my question did you identify or feel a sense of community? Between the BBC output and the BBC audience during the pandemic? Was there a feeling of a sense of community that you got to recognise or somehow that you felt?

A/

We do think a lot of our audience , we never use to think about the ways things are going now we are aware that we cant stand on the roof form our audience we need to be engaging with our audience in a conversation and we need to be on the level with them. So i think we could identify with them more closely and i think probably if what local stations done , bbc local stations were doing which is much more reaching their community on a daily level, iam sure they were doing a lot of stuff to feel part of the community, I think we were aware that people were looking to us. That specially in the early days there was a lot of uncertainty , there was a lot of confusion, a lot of fear, and we sort of had a job to answer that and just to give people the information they were looking for as simply as we could and to answer peoples questions.

Q/ you mentioned you identify with them closely. So how could you identify with them closely?

A/ well we all , the stuff we were reporting on weather its was schools closing, closure of shops, weather its concerns over loved ones particularly, people getting ill and people getting sick that wasn't something that is distance from us anymore we were all going through that in our own way. We all had relatives that we were worried about, we all had loved ones that we couldn't see and still do. So obviously you have to create some distance from what you are reporting on there is a danger of getting to involved in the individuals story but certainly that distance between the audience and the reporters narrowed because what ever they told us about and going through then you were probably going through it as well. As I say that comes with problems as well because as well as sometimes i think that distance from you and the people you are reporting on can be a positive thing, you can just sort of step back a little. But that was more difficult but inventible during lockdown when it was something that affected all of us to some extent.

Q/ What value do you think social media adds to the news that you produce? Did you face any challenges when using social media as a news source or a way of connecting with audience or do you use it?

A/ I think we all know that social media and a blessing and a curse. I think there is generally amongst a current constituency of people there is suspicion about the BBC oh we are saying what the government wants us to, They are using us , they are lying. We saw during Brexit the BBC was seen by one side or the other as being for the government or totally left wing and anti government. So i think in some ways people were seeing in our social media what they want to see but I do think that we did have a responsibility which I hope we rose to the

challenge of challenging that disinformation and misinformation. It's very difficult because as I say people will always pick up and tweet "yes that proves that the BBC is this that or that other". I think we just focused on what our job was, which was give the best of information at any time to update people regularly to make sure our news was comprehensive as possible. But we had the same uncertainties as anybody else. One criticism that I might have weather we asked enough questions to the government at the start. I dont know weather we did or not. When the PPE crisis was happening at the start did we ask enough questions? Challenge what was going on? Enough I dont know. We still need more time to look on how we covered it overall. But you know you got to make the decisions based on the information you got and I think The main focus was keep it simple, give people the information they need and to be a trusted source of news peoples can come to us and they did come to us the audience was huge at the start of the pandemic if somebody switches on BBC news they know what we tell them is going to be accurate based on the best information that we got at that time.

Q/ you answered my question, as a public service media employee what do you believe your role is during the pandemic.

A/ yea so maybe I did answer that, I think

Q/ Has this role been achieved? if you want to add something about that as well.

A/ I hope we have done well. Bare in mind we were facing a lot of restrictions in the way that we could work as well. There was stories that we wanted to tell but we just couldn't due to the limitations that we were working under. It was very very difficult at the start when everybody cleared out of the news room and started working from home I did think my god how are we going to keep the channels on. It was such a massive shift in such a short period of time. I think a lot of peoples first thoughts was lets keep the output going. But I think we have achieved our objectives in a trusted sorted news. Have we done everything perfectly? No. Have we asked enough difficult questions? Maybe not. I think our main aim was to play it as safe as possible, as i said before not speculate get into the rounds of what if and just give the people the basics facts unfortunately the government is so good at media management now if I would to make one criticism maybe at times we were led too much by the government agenda, the governments narrative and we could have been abit more questioning at times but those are lessons learned over time.

Q/ What does being neutral mean in this crisis? You are living the pandemic yourself so how do you make sure to be neutral in your news production and presentation?

A/ In many ways its no different from what we always tried to do. You know we always try to be neutral that doesn't mean we dont ask difficult questions at times. But you know I think that is what the BBC has always set out to do. We are not a campaigning organisation we are not Fox News. We are not there to get ratings so I guess that's one of our benefits, we don't have to worry too much or as much about ratings and advertising and that kind of stuff so we can just focus on giving people the information that they are looking for. We were getting a lot of feedback from audiences on what there questions were, what there concerns were and we were able to respond to that. I think there was a strong feeling that our job was not to scare people. We all knew that this is an unprecedented situation and it is very easy to dip into the doom and gloom and everything is terrible and more people have died and I think there was a strong desire not to do that. Just focus on what we can prove, focus on statistic that we can prove, on what was happening and just news that you can use. Just tell people this is what we know at the moment, this is the information we have this is what we don't know

and focus on that so that we were a trusted source. And you hear a lot of rumours going around about My friend said this and I think there is a crisis here and try and steer away from all of them and **try to focus on what we can prove. Just the basics journalism.** I dont think even though the extent of this story has been greater I dont think journalism changed remarkably.

Q/ and how did you combat being overwhelmed with news about the pandemic both for yourself and for your audience?

A/ yea that was a difficult one, I saw some data that suggested that after about , as we got to April and May people were starting to turn off. There was a strong sense of covid fatigue. And I felt it as well, I had numerous stages in the pandemic before the vaccines came online we didn't know how long is this going to go on , where you just watching the news all day and its bad for your mental health. I cope with it by just switching off for a period of the day . Just tuning into the news on a set period in the morning and in the evening. Because I did find that being plugged into it all day as I normally do was not doing me any good. And the data suggested that the audiences were doing the same to an extent. The audience was thinking you know what there is only so much that I can handle I am going to go and do something else. From management the word came down that you have to take breaks from the news make sure you switch off, make sure you switch off your computers. Because the other thing that we haven't really mentioned but I think is important is **that in the last year all in our lives the personal and the professional the boundaries have completely blurred. We are working at home surrounded by the impact of the pandemic, we are reporting on the impact of the pandemic but when your home becomes your office its very difficult to switch off.** So I very deliberately found ways switching off weather its going for a walk, switch the news off, do something else, spend time with my family, just to switch the news off and think it will still be there when I get back. I suspect that audiences have been doing the same. Because there is only so much bad news you can cope with especially during the winter when we had some positive news but the weather is being terrible. It's been tough for people, i think it was easy in the summer. I think we can all feel that it was easier in the summer where we can get out and even see people to an extent and then it got dark and it got miserable and i think people have found this lock down much tougher.

Q/ Why do you think that the BBC is a trusted public service? So according to the Ofcom 2020 media nations UK report The covid-19 crisis has reinforced the importance of public service broadcasters as trusted providers of news and information.

A/

I think we are very aware of all our charter commitments , what are our role in public life is we did have discussions. **We are aware that the BBC is coming under challenges from the public and from the government from other media sources, from the digital age and the license fee is coming under question from some people and I think we realised during the pandemic that if ever there was a time for the BBC its now.** And I think that as i said some people are never going to trust what we tell them, they are going to think the pockets of the government and so on. But all you can do to counter that is just keep doing what you are doing. I do think we have some of the best journalists , i do think we have , we certainly have more reach and more influence then most news organisations and i think people responded to that. I think we met that challenge by just being cautious sometimes too cautious but I think we were just cautious and stuck to the basics. This is what is happening, this is what we

know, what we don't know, and I think people responded to that. People are looking for certainty in this pandemic, people been looking for facts they can trust and I think we proved that we have been able to do that. Sometimes by the simple stuff, the statistics, the numbers, try not to be too ambitious realising that actually the information the people want during this pandemic is the basics its not a time for speculations or getting too far of the day to day of the story.

Q/ What challenges did fake news impose on your everyday working practice? With all the conspiracies happening around and the fake news on social media did that affect or challenge the way you were reporting?

A/

We are currently aware that it is out there, we have reporters like Marianna Spring who is our disinformation reporter who has done great work on challenging some of the fake news. In some ways I don't its our job to challenge every crazy conspiracy theory we can say its out there and what some people think and the highlight the fact its out there, but I think our job is not necessarily to challenge it but just to be an alternative to it. Some people are always going to believe what they read on facebook or what they read on twitter. Although we have done well in Q and A programmes where people who have got concerns are able to talk directly to virologists and experts in epidemiologist and have a form where there concerns can be questioned. And i think all that we can do again it goes back to what you asked on why we are a trusted news organisation, all we can do is provide the information that allows people to trust us and encourages people to trust us. That fake news that disinformation is always going to be out there sadly and i think the best way we could respond to it is just to take a separate path and not necessarily engage with it too much.

Q/ is there a different approach, or how can the BBC appeal to a fake news consuming audience? Anything done differently to approach them. Or is it just normal reporting?

A/

I think we have to be even more regress with our facts, the people are watching us and challenging us, conspiracy theorists as they always have will always find something in the BBC that they object to. There was theories during Brexit about what the BBC role was, some of the stories that we cover in the Middle East you will know that conspiracy theories will grow up the way we reported Syria or what ever. And i think all that we can do is make sure that everything that we put on air is reliable is factually correct , the best way to challenge fake news is to provide not fake news provide accurate news. It's not going to make the fake news go away because for some reasons some people will always going to believe that. But I think the best thing we can do about it is to stick to what we do and to do it at the best of our ability .

Q/ Why do you believe audience watched a lot of BBC news under lockdown?

A/ Because there is nothing better to do ! “Laughs”

Q/ like since mid-march 2020 The BBC has seen a huge increase in audiences watching news programmes, audience for BBC news at one has risen by 85%, the news at six by 74% and so on.

A/ I mean the figures at the start were incredible especially for programmes like the one o'clock news. And you can put that down too people were living their lives and they were at

home also and able to switch on the news at lunch time that was partly a reflection on the way peoples lives are changing in lockdown. I think it's partially the fact that on the day to day basis not during the pandemic you can often feel distant from people they watch the news but that doesn't apply to my life i dont need to know that, why do i care to what is happening is Scotland or what ever. But obviously during the pandemic it was affecting everybody and the audiences figure are driven by peoples genuine desire for reliable information. I wanted to know what the latest was, i wanted to know what was going on , so i put the news on. I think people didnt consume a lot of news before the pandemic , started consuming news during the pandemic because it affected their daily lives massively and they wanted to know what was going on. But overtime they started to get overwhelmed by it and turned away a little bit. I think its just a reflection of the magnitude of the story. And going back to what I said at the start it being difficult in getting some foreign stories on during the pandemic , i think its inventible consequence that for the last year there has been only one big foreign story . There really has been only one news story in the daily agenda day after day after day. And I dont think short of a world war , i cant think of a same story that has had the same impact on people and that is not surprising because its did everybody's daily lives. When somthing affects sombodys life so profoundly they are looking to us for guidenes People were scared, we all became amature epidemiologists over the last year , we can all talk about later low flow test. If we cross out minds back a year we didnt know what was going on. We had no clue of what his was going to mean for our lives and i think thankfully the BBC still has that role in public life that people as a whole trust us to give them the facts . In many ways you can argue its too early to say , its could have been the savour of public service journalism in the UK because we proved there is a need for it and that there is a market for it.

Q/ that brings me to my question which you answered now. So the public service media has been experiencing its own crisis and challenges where issues around the license fee payment , job cuts , the existence of the public service itself is under threat. Do you believe the pandemic changed any perspectives towards the public service threats if yes in what way and if no why do you think so?

A/ The BBC is a very easy lighting rode or a whipping boy for peoples concerns the right of politics will criticise us for being too left wing, the left wing will criticise us for supporting Brexit or what ever you know how it goes that we are an easy target for left and right and especially in the digital age where people have got so much more choice then the license fee is increasingly difficult to justify. A lot of people are saying i never watch the BBC I watch Netflix or amazon prime or what ever. I have some sympathy for those arguments especially younger audiences who would normally rarely tune in to the BBC and I hope what we done i havnt looked into the data recently but you probably have i think over the last year we have proved the importance of it and you know that we have provided a comprehensive , trustworthy news service on the biggest story probably of our generation. Weather that will last I dont know, when we are out of the pandemic whether peoples minds will drift and they will forget our importance or they will find something else to criticise us for but I think at the moment we have done pretty well and I think maybe we changed the minds of a few people that think maybe what is the BBC for in the digital age its sort of outdated module that doesn't really fit the twenty first century. Whether will people remember this in the future I don't know but I think certainly its given us a clear argument that if you want to make the case for public service journalism then the pandemic is currently given us that. We have done things pretty well under very difficult circumstance.

Q/ So my last question is what do you think the future of the public service holds?

A/ I wish I knew, I think public service journalism would be smaller, I think one thing that has happened on a number of levels over the last year we have shown that we can do things with less, interviewees on zoom is now no one blinks an eyelid when see another one I am looking at the channel now and there is a guy on zoom in his front room back an eye lid. Even a year ago the thought of putting somebody on air on zoom is ohhh eemmmm iam not sure about that. So i think we will go back to that and the result , the obvious impact of that is cost savings so we proved that we can do not such as much but almost as much with less. I think its focused minds on programmes were scrapped at the start of the pandemic to widen our output will those come back possibly not. I think it's probably proved to us that we need to focus on what we do best and be able to do it with less. And that will sadly mean job cuts and I think its shown us that we just need to be really focused on what is our goal . If people are going to pay 160 pounds a year for the license fee what are we providing them that they cant get anywhere else? And maybe some of the stuff that we have been doing or maybe we shouldn't be doing . I just think that we need to be more focused in our misssion we tired to appeal to all people but still desperately worried about younger audiences, appealing to younger audiences and appealing to differnt demographics and so on and I just think that going forward we are going to have to be very very focused. The last year we have been very focused on what we have been doing we have said This is what is possible, this is what we cant do and I hope some of that stays in place and dont loose some of that focus and we constantly ask ourselves what is the most important thing for our audiences and that's reliable, trusted news and anything else is a bonus . So what will it mean I think it will make it , I think the pandemic will make it more easier to make the case for the public service journalism if people ask what is BBC for you can point to the coverage we have been doing over the last year and we can say this is what it is for and we are not the only ones doing it Sky is doing a great job and they are not public serivce journalism in the same way but I think in some ways in many ways we have proved in a digital age where people have so much choice, where audiences have choices other then the BBC hopefully we proved why the license fee is important, why your 160 pounds a year is important and that will hopefully put us in a strong position when we getting of this.

Q/ excellent do you have anything else to add?

A/ not that I can think of,no.

APPENDIX 4 COLOUR CODING SCHEME

Gathering the News	
Reporting the News	
Crisis comparison	
Interacting with the audience	
Sense of community	
The role of the public service media	
The role of social media	
Tackling fake news	
The future of the public service	

<p>from Gathering the News</p>	<p>trying to find stories that were going to break through beside from covid was very difficult.</p> <p>the first thing was we had to think how are we going to cover foreign news without actually travelling.</p> <p>There is a quite steeping curve for the correspondents as well. They suddenly had to get to grips with the technical side of things . Learning to use the apps that we use, learning the kit that we use to get on air very quickly</p> <p>We couldn't go out on stories the way that we worked was complete different.</p> <p>everything is much much more complicated we had to think about a whole range of safety things that we haven't thought about before</p> <p>the days of right lets just get into a car and go interview somebody that was not possible anymore.</p> <p>going to take time if we were going to a shoot, it will take longer to set up equipment safely to sanitise it afterwards and so on.</p> <p>my colleagues in the early months were doing lots and lots of online training. Zoom training for people who have never considered the possibility that they might have to work from home and currently from home for so long.</p> <p>It feels overwhelming that we spent all day writing about and reporting what was happening</p> <p>There was stories that we wanted to tell but we just couldn't due to the limitations that we were working under. It was very very difficult at the start when everybody cleared out of the news room and started working from home I did think my god how are we going to keep the channels on.</p> <p>that in the last year all in our lives the personal and the professional the boundaries have completely blurred. We are working at home surrounded by the impact of the pandemic, we are reporting on the impact of the pandemic but when your home becomes your office its very difficult to switch off.</p>
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<p>Reporting the News</p>	<p>we realised early on in some ways there is no point trying to hard in getting those stories on air because given the news agenda it was so dominated by Covid.</p> <p>some of the output is a little bit boring that we did spend a lot of time answering basic questions</p> <p>There was in terms of the story decisions there was an understanding that we could not just give people bad news from our end. That everybody as we discussed the people are struggling and suffering and they needed to have some hope that there was a way out of it. Now that's not the job of the news organisation to give people hope but we were aware that we couldn't just give them a diet of bad news , bad news. So if you think of Captain sir Tom moor story it just went crazy , i think that's a good example of a story that almost by accident it gave people some hope. And made people smiled and people thought actually there is some good things going around in the world and people are getting through this on their own way.</p> <p>we did look for stories that weren't just bad news stories, stories the elements to the pandemic people are doing other things to help people, to keep their spirits up or to help the community and I think that was really important. Because there was an awareness that this diet of constant bad news was not healthy for peoples w</p> <p>One criticism that I might have weather we asked enough questions to the government at the start. I dont know weather we did or not.</p> <p>I think there was a strong feeling that our job was not to scare people.</p> <p>try to focus on what we can prove. Just the basics journalism</p> <p>we have to be even more regress with our facts, the people are watching us and challenging us, conspiracy theorists as they always have will always find something in the BBC that they object to</p>
<p>Crisis comparison</p>	<p>journalist who work in hostile environments do they hostile environment course but the kind of threats and dangers safety stuff that we have to think about in a hostile environment course are very different from a pandemic.</p> <p>the stories that I do I am used to dealing with trauma , I am use to dealing with personal stresses and stresses that are affecting other people but those are distance things, you go to a story, you go to a war zone and you cover a story and those stresses are being felt by the subjects you are reporting on</p>

	<p>because I have worked in difficult places, how to look after my mental health and well-being. But for other people it was completely new and I think they found it more difficult to adapt .</p> <p>There really has been only one news story in the daily agenda day after day after day. And I dont think short of a world war , i cant think of a same story that has had the same impact on people and that is not surprising because its did everybody’s daily lives.</p>
<p>Interacting with the audience</p>	<p>people were listening to us you can see from the percentage of the number of people come to the BBC for news about the pandemic. We had a great responsibility to to respond to that.</p> <p>We do think a lot of our audience , we never use to think about the ways things are going now we are aware that we cant stand on the roof form our audience we need to be engaging with our audience in a conversation and we need to be on the level with them. So i think we could identify with them more closely</p> <p>bbc local stations were doing which is much more reaching their community on a daily level, iam sure they were doing a lot of stuff to feel part of the community, I think we were aware that people were looking to us. That specially in the early days there was a lot of uncertainly , there was a lot of confusion, a lot of fear, and we sort of had a job to answer that and just to give people the information they were looking for as simply as we could and to answer peoples questions.</p> <p>that distance between the audience and the reporters narrowed because what ever they told us about and going through then you were probably going through it as well.</p> <p>We were getting a lot of feedback from audiences on what there questions were, what there concerns were and we were able to respond to that</p>
<p>Sense of community</p>	<p>I think the difference with this is that everybody was affected by it. And there is no escape from it. Suddenly we find ourselves in a situation where we have to keep the output going but also dealing with home schooling, illness to parents and loved ones . I think that thing that everybody has been feeling not just in journalism is that there is no escape from it the trauma is all around you, that is what I noticed most is that I got an understanding of</p>

	<p>trauma and the way that trauma affects people currently it was affecting everybody in the</p> <p>there was an understanding that everybody is in this together or that everybody is going through this. Often the stories that we cover are cite distance from us, we are talking about people experiences that we cant necessarily relate to . If you are reporting from the Middle East or the West Bank then that person experience is very different to my experience. But suddenly everybody was living through it together , everybody asking the same questions, everybody had the same uncertainties.</p> <p>I think that was different , i think probably that distance between the audience and the journalist probably got smaller because we understood what people are gong through . And possibly is more difficult to turn off at the end of the day.</p> <p>I think it's partially the fact that on the day to day basis not during the pandemic you can often feel distant from people they watch the news but that doesn't apply to my life i dont need to know that, why do i care to what is happening is Scotland or what ever. But obviously during the pandemic it was affecting everybody and the audiences figure are driven by peoples genuine desire for reliable information.</p>
<p>The role of the public service media</p>	<p>for an organisation like the BBC there was there is a strong understanding that the people looking to us as an organisation to provide reliable comprehensive news coverage to answer basic questions.</p> <p>Because of the BBCs position in public life that we have a real duty to provide the information that people want and need. This is not a time for speculation, this is not a time for guess work. We needed to provide very solid public service journalism.</p> <p>But i think that's the role of the BBC in the pandemic is to answer the questions that people are asking without too much speculation, without too much window dressing, you know that is what we are there for at a time like this.</p> <p>I think we just focused on what our job was , which was give the best of information at any time to update people regularly to make sure our news was comprehensive as possible.</p> <p>The main focus was keep it simple, give people the information they need and to be a trusted source of news peoples can come to us</p> <p>and i think thankfully the BBC still has that role in public life that people as a whole trust us to give them the facts</p>

<p>The role of social media</p>	<p>think we all know that social media and a blessing and a curse</p> <p>So i think in some ways people were seeing in our social media what they want to see but I do think that we did have a responsibility which I hope we rose to the challenge of challenging that disinformation and misinformation.</p>
<p>Tackling fake news</p>	<p>In some ways I don't its our job to challenge every crazy conspiracy theory we can say its out there and what some people think and the highlight the fact its out there, but I think our job is not necessarily to challenge it but just to be an alternative to it.</p> <p>all we can do is provide the information that allows people to trust us and encourages people to trust</p> <p>fake news that disinformation is always going to be out there sadly and i think the best way we could respond to it is just to take a separate path and not necessarily engage with it too much.</p> <p>the best way to challenge fake news is to provide not fake news provide accurate news.It's not going to make the fake news go away because for some reasons some people will always going to believe that</p>
<p>The future of the public service</p>	<p>We are aware that the BBC is coming under challenges from the public and from the government from other media sources, from the digital age and the license fee is coming under question from some people and I think we realised during the pandemic that if ever there was a time for the BBC its now</p> <p>n many ways you can argue its too early to say , its could have been the savour of public service journalism in the UK because we proved there is a need for it and that there is a market for it.</p> <p>we are an easy target for left and right and especially in the digital age where people have got so much more choice then the license fee is increasingly difficult to justify. A lot of people are saying i never watch the BBC I watch Netflix or amazon prime or what ever. I have some sympathy for those arguments especially younger audiences who would normally rarely tune in to the BBC and I hope what we don</p>

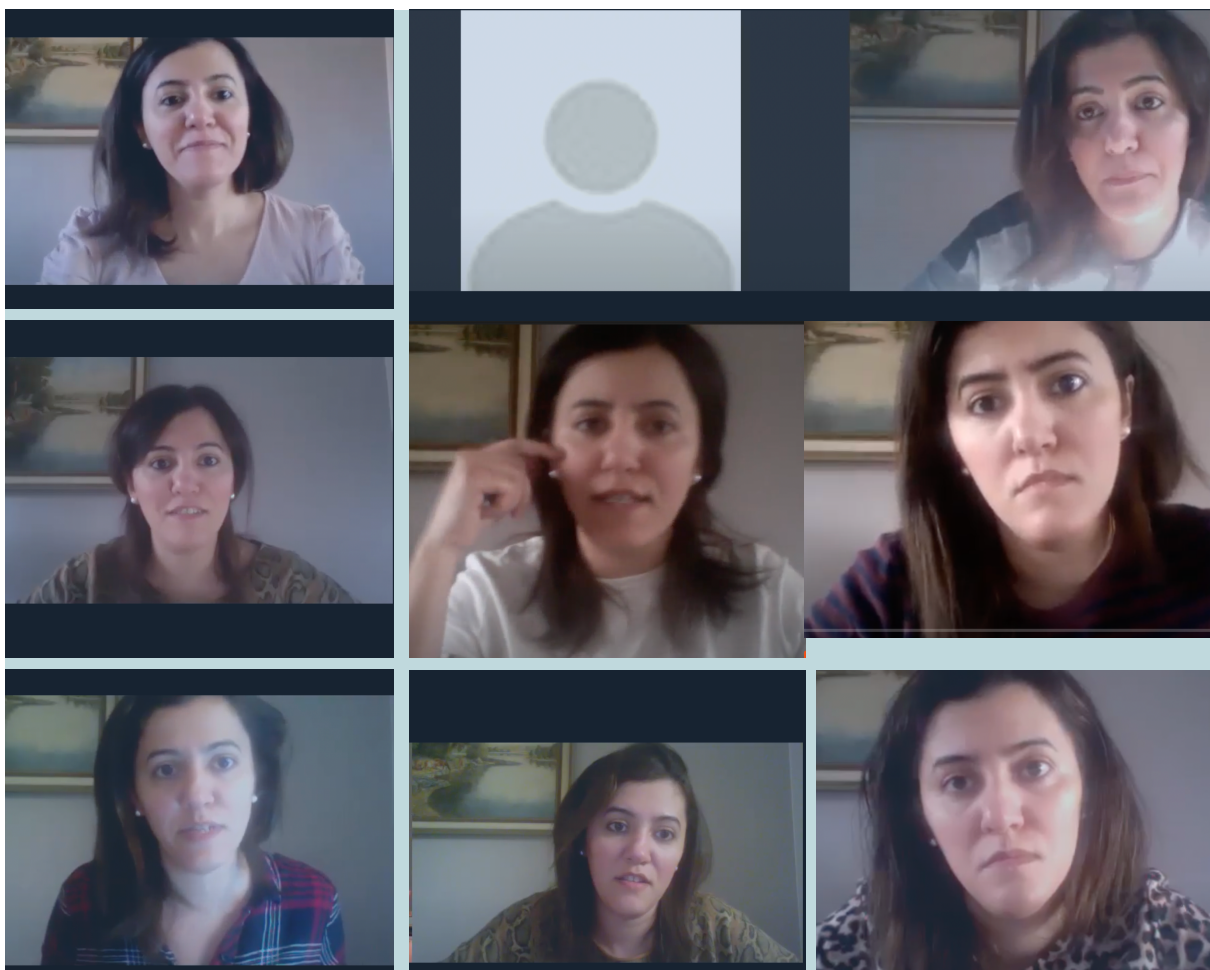
i think over the last year we have proved the importance of it and you know that we have provided a comprehensive , trustworthy news service on the biggest story probably of our generation. Weather that will last I dont know, when we are out of the pandemic whether peoples minds will drift and they will forget our importance or they will find something else to criticise us for but I think at the moment we have done pretty well and I think maybe we changed the minds of a few people that think maybe what is the BBC for in the digital age its sort of outdated module that doesn't really fit the twenty first century.

its given us a clear argument that if you want to make the case for public service journalism then the pandemic is currently given us that. We have done things pretty well under very difficult circumstance.

the obvious impact of that is cost savings so we proved that we can do not such as much but almost as much with less. I

i think the pandemic will make it more easier to make the case for the public service journalism if people ask what is BBC for you can point to the coverage we have been doing over the last year and we can say this is what it is for and we are not the only ones doing it Sky is doing a great job and they are not public serivce journalism in the same way but I think in some ways in many ways we have proved in a digital age where people have so much choice, where audiences have choices other then the BBC hopefully we proved why the license fee is important, why your 160 pounds a year is important and that will hopefully put us in a strong position when we getting of this.

APPENDIX 6: SOME IMAGES OF ME WHILE CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEWS VIA ZOOM.





Followed by a private message via twitter, then another email sent with more details and the consent form. We then agreed on a date and time that suited that individual to conduct the interview via zoom.