

Institution: Goldsmiths, University of London		
Unit of Assessment: 34, Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management.		
Title of case study: Advocating for Media Reform		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
James Curran	Professor of Communications	1983-
Natalie Fenton	Professor of Media & Communications	2005-
Des Freedman	Professor of Media & Communications	2001-
Angela Phillips	Professor of Journalism	1994-2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact <p>Founded by and housed in the Department of Media, Communications & Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths, the Media Reform Coalition (MRC) brings together academic research (from the Department and others in the coalition), civil society groups and media campaigners to advance issues of media reform. The MRC's explicit linking of research and advocacy has: 1) stimulated and informed media policy debate in parliament and political parties; 2) influenced the work of campaign groups, including the National Union for Journalists (NUJ), the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, Hacked Off, We Own It, Avaaz, 38 degrees and Extinction Rebellion; 3) made a high-level contribution to public, political and policy debates on media ownership, local news, tech power, press regulation, public service television and impartiality; 4) been incorporated into the A Level Sociology curriculum and made a compulsory part of it; 5) influenced media industry practices.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>Our research seeks to analyse and respond to the democratic deficits that are shaking the media in the UK: crises of funding, trust, representation, accountability and legitimacy. The research has shown how newspaper and magazine readership is in serious decline as large digital intermediaries gobble up the majority of advertising revenue (R1), while public service broadcasters like the BBC and Channel 4 are presiding over a falling share of total TV revenue (R5). Local news is increasingly under threat, with research that we coordinated with the NUJ (funded by the Political Studies Association) showing that at least 25% of local government areas have no local newspaper at all (R6). These trends significantly undermine the ability of media to act as a 'fourth estate', holding power to account and acting as an independent intermediary between citizens and the state.</p> <p>The rapid growth of digital media is strongly implicated in this changing context, on the one hand precipitating the funding crisis for newspapers and magazines, and on the other looked to as a way of plugging the growing democratic deficits. Yet our research shows that while social media may have helped to extend the range of voices available, they have thus far intensified narrowly partisan behaviour and fostered a combative approach to politics that has little in common with visions of a more expansive and democratic public sphere (R3). Digitalisation – so often seen as an innately democratising force – has indeed fuelled a decentralisation of media practices, but it has simultaneously intensified the concentration and consolidation of media power across different market sectors (R2). Additionally, we are seeing declines in the levels of trust in media, a phenomenon that is particularly acute for those on low incomes, BAME audiences and young people (R4). We believe that this has broad consequences given that social trust is foundational to the functioning of democracy. However, we have argued in our work that repairing the democratic deficits caused by an inadequate media environment requires not just rebuilding trust, but also the creation of a healthy communications environment – one that is not just</p>		

economically robust, but innovative, diverse, independent of vested interests and sensitive to the changing political geography of the nation (R4, R5).

We have sought to address these challenges through a broad series of critical interventions: from single-authored monographs to edited collections, from journal articles to columns in the press, and from freely available research reports to specialised submissions, to official consultations. Our research has interrogated questions of media power and politics, emerging journalism cultures, the rise of elites, the dynamics of digital platforms, the vitality of civil society and the prospects for media reform. This research has underpinned the advocacy work we have coordinated and has been funded by the Open Society Foundations, Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, British Academy/Leverhulme and AHRC Connected Communities in relation to high-level policy debates on press regulation and funding, impartiality, media ownership, tech power, news consumption and the future of public service broadcasting. We see our work as a model of academic praxis in which critical inquiry feeds into and is informed by practical interventions that result in concrete actions for reform.

3. References to the research

- R1. Elvestad, Eiri and Phillips, Angela (2018). *Misunderstanding News Audiences: Seven Myths of the Social Media Era*. London: Routledge. [Book]. Submitted to REF2
- R2. Fenton, Natalie, Freedman, Des, Schlosberg, Justin, Dencik, Lina (2020) *The Media Manifesto*. (Cambridge: Polity) [Book]. Available on Request
- R3. Curran, James, Fenton, Natalie & Freedman, Des (2016), *Misunderstanding the Internet* (London: Routledge). [Book]. Available on Request
- R4. Curran, James P. and Aalberg, Toril, eds. 2013. [How Media Inform Democracy: A Comparative Approach](#). New York: Routledge. [Edited Collection of the findings of an international comparative research project on news consumption and public understanding]. Available on request.
- R5. Freedman, Des & Goblot, Vana (eds) (2018), *A Future for Public Service Television* (London: Goldsmiths Press). [Edited collection of findings of the Puttnam Inquiry into public service television]. Available on Request
- R6. Media Reform Coalition (2019) [Who owns the UK media?](#) (London:MRC/Goldsmiths Leverhulme Media Research Centre). [Report]. Available online

4. Details of the impact

Our research is impact-driven. Staff attached to this case study, who founded the Media Reform Coalition (MRC) in September 2011, have played a key role in the campaign group Hacked Off and have been involved extensively in public debate on issues of media, power and democracy. Drawing on theoretical innovations and empirical evidence outlined above, we have leveraged research findings into advocacy and policy work with other academics, civil society groups, industry and politicians to develop and campaign for policies designed to foster democratic change. Founders of MRC included Curran, Fenton (Chair 2017 -), Freedman (Chair 2011-2015) and Phillips; Fenton was Vice-Chair of Hacked Off between 2011 and 2018; Freedman was project lead for the Puttnam Inquiry into the Future of Public Service Television. We have been invited to address select committee inquiries, to meet with senior politicians, to appear on major news outlets and to give keynotes at public and industry events. We organise the annual Media Democracy Festival, a popular space for academics, activists, journalists and politicians to come together to debate and organise around media reform platforms, that has attracted between 600 and 5,000 people since its launch in 2015 [S1]. Impact has been achieved in relation to five main areas.

1. Informing policy debate in parliament and influencing party policy in relation to media ownership, media plurality and press regulation

Goldsmiths' research has identified concentrated ownership as a constraint on democratic expression and diversity (R6). The Open Society Foundations funded us in 2014 to use our research to coordinate a campaign in conjunction with the Trades Union Congress (TUC), National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom. This

was launched in Parliament at an event chaired by Freedman with speakers including MPs Tom Watson, John McDonnell, Caroline Lucas and the NUJ's general secretary Michelle Stanistreet. The MRC's call for a cap on media ownership in order to tackle media concentration was subsequently adopted by both the Labour Party and the Green Party in their 2015 election manifestos [S2]. Research on press regulation post-Leveson inquiry also contributed to the inclusion of media reform in the Liberal Democratic Party, and the Labour Party 2017 election manifestos. Fenton and Freedman worked with Clive Lewis MP to develop supplementary questions to the House of Commons debate relating to the Leveson framework and non-commencement of Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act: (example email 3/3/16: "Just to say how grateful Clive and I are for your help yesterday. Later today you'll be able to view the appropriate bit of Chamber business.")

As a result of our research MRC was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust (2014-16) to campaign around issues of media ownership and produce a draft Bill. The resulting report, *Who owns the UK media?* was featured in the *Guardian*, and its findings were used by Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn in his 2018 Alternative MacTaggart lecture. An updated report was published in March 2019 thanks to a British Academy-Leverhulme grant on 'mapping media ownership'. Associated proposals to introduce a levy on the operations of digital intermediaries to fund independent journalism was covered by the *Guardian* and highlighted in letters by the then leader of the Green Party in the *Financial Times* and the *Guardian* [S4].

Between 2017 and 2018, MRC coordinated opposition to the bid by 21st Century Fox to take over Sky. The *Financial Times* reported that the Culture Secretary's decision to refer the bid to Ofcom was based on MRC evidence while the formal referral document noted that MRC evidence 'informed the Secretary of State's provisional view'. The MRC was a core participant in the subsequent Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) investigation and played a central role in the CMA eventually objecting to the bid on grounds of plurality as evidenced by its provisional report [S5].

As a result of this advocacy work, Fenton was invited by Jon Trickett MP (then shadow Minister for the Cabinet Office and Shadow Lord President of the House of Commons) onto a group helping the Labour Party with policy development to influence a 'future transformational Labour Government'. She also held discussions with the Liberal Democratic party policy working group and the Deputy Leader of the Green Party about their future policy positions on media reform. Curran and Fenton briefed Jeremy Corbyn's office on a further key speech on media policy for the Media Democracy Festival 2020 (cancelled due to covid-19) [S6].

2. Influencing the work of civil society groups including the NUJ, Hacked Off, We Own It, Avaaz, 38 degrees and Extinction Rebellion

Journalism and power: Our research has highlighted the failure of existing business models to support a viable fourth estate function for the press. In 2017, the MRC partnered with the National Union of Journalists for its 'Local News Matters' campaign. MRC research on the crisis in local newspapers has been widely reported and the data was provided as a justification for the Culture Secretary's decision in February 2018 to launch the Cairncross Inquiry into the future of news. The report from the Cairncross Inquiry cited our research 12 times [S7]. Our research into alleged Conservative bias during the 2016 London Mayoral Election was covered in the *Guardian*, *Press Gazette* and the *Spectator* while our report on media bias against Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn was carried exclusively by *Huffington Post* and shared tens of thousands of times. Curran & Freedman organised an event on broadcast impartiality in May 2017, supported by the Media Communication and Cultural Studies Association, that brought together academics, broadcasters and editors. Subsequently, they organised a delegation of academics to meet with the BBC's head of news in October 2017 and were encouraged to develop research in this area [S8].

In relation to research on journalism and power, Fenton has also advised the Alzheimer's Society on how to best influence media coverage of people with Alzheimers: "Thank you again

for all your help it has been invaluable in understanding how to engage and support the sector.” (Emma Bould, Alzheimer’s Society)

Media ownership: In response to research on media ownership and the advocacy work we co-ordinated over the Fox/Sky take-over bid. We influenced the work of the online campaign organisation Avaaz (with over 1.5 million members in the UK) who ran an online campaign and took up a legal challenge over potential risks to media plurality with Karen Bradley the then secretary of state for media, culture and sport; the NUJ; 38 degrees who undertook some YouGov polling on the issue; Hacked Off who worked with Tom Watson, the Shadow culture secretary to raise the issue in a House of Commons debate in relation to phone hacking and corporate governance failures. Extinction Rebellion used our research on media ownership to underpin their action blockading distribution of the Murdoch Press in September 2020 [S7].

Future of the BBC: We advised and influenced a public campaign on the Future of the BBC co-ordinated by We Own It in June 2020 [S8].

3. Making a high-level and effective contribution to public, political and policy debates on media ownership, local news, tech power, press regulation, public service television and impartiality

The future of public service media: We initiated a major public inquiry into the future of public service television that was chaired by the film producer and Labour peer David Puttnam with Prof Freedman as project lead. The inquiry a) made a high-profile contribution to media debates on public service broadcasting (PSB) as demonstrated by the volume of coverage in both trade and national press; b) organised a programme of public events involving leading figures from the broadcasting that generated further media coverage and stakeholder participation; c) helped to shape the outcome of Charter Review and the future of Channel 4 through meetings with policymakers, regulators and diversity activists; d) contributed to policy debate through giving evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee on Communications in relation to video on demand services and the future of PSB; e) produced a range of publicly available resources including a website (containing all the submissions to the Inquiry), a Report (distributed to MPs and featured on BBC’s *The Media Show*) and an edited collection, *A Future for Public Service Television* that includes a chapter by Mark Thompson, former BBC director general and current CEO of the New York Times Company [S9]. Freedman has given oral evidence to two inquiries of the House of Lords Communications Committee: on BBC Charter Renewal (2015) and PSB in the Age of Video-on-Demand (2019).

Press regulation: The MRC made a substantive submission to the Cairncross Review. Prof Phillips met with Frances Cairncross to discuss the review and Fenton and Freedman met with a panel member, Matt Rogerson of the *Guardian*, to discuss relevant research. The MRC submission was cited extensively in the final Cairncross Report [S7]. After publication of the report, Fenton was invited onto an Independent Publishers Taskforce advisory group run by the press regulator IMPRESS to help strengthen independent public interest journalism in the UK.

4. Informing the A Level curriculum

Our research on media ownership is now featured in both AQA’s A Level Sociology and OCR’s A Level Media Studies (David Bown et al (2016) *AQA A-level Sociology 2* (London: Hodder Education); Louisa Cunningham (2019) *OCR A Level Media Studies Student Guide 1: Media Messages* (London: Hodder Education)).

5. Changing industry practices

As a result of Phillips’ research on news consumption Vodafone blocked advertising of their brand on hate speech and fake news outlets world wide: “You have played a direct role in making this happen as a result of our discussions earlier this year. Thank you again for prompting me to look into this issue when we met at Goldsmiths in January.” (Matt Peacock, Group Director of Corporate Affairs, Vodafone, email, 6 June 2017 [S10]).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1. See, [Media Reform UK Facebook](#) for a video round-up of the 2019 Festival which featured Clive Lewis MP, Owen Jones, Ash Sarkar and many others and see [MRC blog](#) (2020) for videos of the 2020 Media Democracy Festival, 27 May. The *New Internationalist* post (2018): [A Better Media is Possible](#), 1st June, discusses the significance of the MRC Festival. [Article]

Informing policy debate

S2. Matthew Gilley (2016) 'Labour's Media Plurality Pledge: Campaigners want 30% ownership cap which would hit News UK', *Press Gazette*, 15 April; Media Reform Coalition (2015) ['Green Party deputy leader promises manifesto commitment on media ownership reform'](#), 19th March. [Report]

S3. Mark Sweney (2015) ['UK media plurality threatened by dominant group of large firms – report'](#), *Guardian*, 21 October. [Newspaper Article]

S4. Roy Greenslade (2016) ['Make Google and Facebook pay for public service news reporting'](#), *Guardian*, 8 November, Natalie Bennett (2017) ['Use Google tax to support local and regional media'](#), letter to *Financial Times*, 28 July. [Grouped Source]

S5. David Bond (2017), ['Fox hits back at minister Bradley's Sky deal'](#), *Financial Times*, 8 March; Department for Culture, Media & Sport (2017) [Letter to 21st Century Fox](#), 3 March, ['Murdoch's 21st Century Fox bid for Sky should be rejected, minister told'](#) *The Guardian*, 1 March.

Competition and Markets Authority (2018) ['Anticipated Acquisition of 21st Century Fox of Sky Plc: Provisional Findings'](#), 23 January. See Pages: 141, 163, 175, 176, 197, 198. [Grouped Source]

S6. Private email correspondence between Fenton, Curran, Labour Party, the Green Party and the Liberal Democrat Party. [Testimony]

Influencing the work of civil society groups

S7. Jasper Cox (2016) ['New research: Some 198 UK local newspapers have closed since 2005'](#), *Press Gazette*, 19 December;; Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (2018) ['New review launched of press sustainability in the UK'](#), 6 February; Frances Cairncross (2019) [The Cairncross Review: A Sustainable Future for Journalism](#) (see pages: 50, 129, 130, 133, 134, 135, 137, 138, 141, 142, 143, 156) and private email correspondence with Extinction Rebellion Oxford Organiser, September 2020. [Grouped Source]

Making a high-level and effective contribution to public, political and policy debates

S8. Private email correspondence between Curran and others organising meeting with James Harding; Des Freedman (2017) [Time to take sides on impartiality?](#) *Three-D*, Meccsa journal, 3 June. [Grouped Source]

S9. See [Future of TV.org news](#) for a full list of press reports and [Future of TV.org public events](#) for a full list of events that featured a range of senior figures from the broadcasting and media worlds including Tony Hall, BBC director general, David Abraham, chief executive of Channel 4, former BBC director general Greg Dyke, Sir Lenny Henry, Ken Loach, Dawn Foster, Brian Eno and Jay Hunt, former chief creative officer of Channel 4. For evidence of its contribution to diversity debates, see tweet from Marcus Ryder, chief international editor at China Global Television Network and former editor, BBC Scotland and chair of the RTS Diversity Committee, 3 July 2016. For evidence of impact on Charter Review and the future of Channel 4, see email from Ray Gallagher, special adviser to the Culture secretary, who attended several Inquiry meetings and confirmed to the Inquiry team that he was 'looking forward to following the work on the Inquiry' and, later, thanked the Chair for the 'helpful feedback' provided. For evidence of Inquiry's impact on a new Scottish channel, see journalist Lesley Riddoch's comments on BBC's [The Media Show](#), 27 February 2019. [Grouped Source]

Changing industry practices

S10. Email from Group Director of Corporate Affairs, Vodafone, to Phillips, 6 June 2017. [Testimony]