

A study of balance and impartiality in the BBC's Brexit referendum coverage

*Jason Newman*¹

On Thursday 23rd June 2016 the UK voted to leave the European Union by a margin of 51.9% - 48.1% in a referendum called by then Prime Minister David Cameron. In the wake of this vote, both sides (Leave and Remain) have claimed the supposedly impartial BBC has been biased to their side in how it has reported on key events. The idea that the BBC has been biased has academic precedence, as the work undertaken by Justin Lewis and Cardiff University has shown the BBC was more favourable to the pro-war side during the second Iraq war (Wells, 2003). Research carried out by (Cushion and Lewis, 2016) has shown the BBC to have been relatively even-handed to both sides (when it came to views) in its pre-referendum coverage. However, media watchdog organisations such as *News-watch* have produced reports stating there was an anti-Brexit bias (Keighley, 2017).

For my research project, I undertook a study of the BBC's post-referendum/post-triggering of article 50 coverage of the British withdrawal from the European Union (Brexit). I studied how the BBC has chosen to report on Brexit and Brexit negotiations and whether this reporting has been fair and balanced in accordance with the BBC's own guidelines as a neutral public service broadcaster. The project consisted of a qualitative and quantitative analysis of one of the BBC's flagship current affairs programmes, *Newsnight*. *Newsnight* bills itself as the BBC's flagship current affairs programme. According to a history of the programme on the BBC website, "Newsnight makes sense of the day's news, tries to explain the detail of current events and holds to account those responsible for them" (News.bbc.co.uk, 2009). For my research project, I have presented both sides of the argument (much of which has been played out in the press) by undertaking qualitative research of the relevant literature surrounding post-referendum BBC impartiality and drawing some conclusions.

Impartiality

The Royal charter which establishes the main goals of the BBC defines its mission in the following way:

"To provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them: the BBC should provide duly accurate and impartial news, current affairs and factual programming."

It further states that:

The BBC must be independent in all matters concerning the fulfilment of its Mission and the promotion of the Public Purposes, particularly as regards editorial and creative decisions (Copy of Royal Charter for the continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation, 2017, 4, 5).

Writing in 2010, the then director of BBC News defined a key part of impartiality as "presenters..... holding the powerful to account through fair but tough questioning" (Boaden, 2010).

The BBC is also regulated by The Office of Communications (Ofcom) a government approved organisation that monitors radio and television news in the UK. Under Ofcom's rules news coverage must exercise "due impartiality" in its editorial stance, while this does

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not mean absolute equal time should be given to all views and opinions it does mean that coverage should take into account “the likely expectation of the audience as to content, and the extent to which the content and approach is signalled to the audience” (OFCOM, 2017).

This research seeks to examine to what degree the BBC adhered to this charter and OFCOM’s rules in its post-referendum coverage. What exactly the editorial aims of *Newsnight* are is unclear. However as mentioned above *Newsnight* bills itself as a programme that holds politicians to account, moreover like all BBC news programmes it must exercise “impartiality” therefore it would be expected that the programme would be relatively balanced in how it treats major national issues. Furthermore, given the close nature of the referendum result, the BBC as a public service broadcaster has a duty to fairly represent the citizens who voted to Remain and those who voted to Leave.

A range of quantitative and qualitative methods used in content analysis were employed and used to dissect eight episodes of *Newsnight* in order to find out if the BBC lived up to its own guidelines when it comes to fair and impartial reporting of the news. My primary research will be carried out using content analysis methods used by the School of Journalism at Loughborough University in their analysis of media content and is detailed further in the methodology section of my website. The episodes that were analysed were the Thursday episodes which aired between 09/11/17 – 11/01/18 (there was a break during Christmas during which *Newsnight* did not air). During this time the deadline for the first phase of negotiations to withdraw from the EU was fast approaching and it was unclear whether a deal would be reached. When a deal was partially reached (some areas are still outstanding and will be returned to later) talks then moved onto negotiating a trade deal.

Quantitative analysis

The episodes were analysed under four headings employed by Loughborough University in their pre-referendum analysis. These were “Stopwatch analysis” which records the airtime given to certain individuals or institutions, “Directional balance” which analyses which side or viewpoint the coverage tended to favour if any, “Issue balance” which measures what issues are mentioned the most and given greatest prominence and “Gender balance” which records the gender of contributors (Centre for research in communication and culture; Loughborough University, 2016).

Section 1: Issue Balance

This section deals with measuring what issues have dominated the coverage over the eight episodes.

- The below categories were taken from a report on Brexit balance undertaken by Loughborough University in the weeks leading up to the referendum, some additional categories (that have been placed in *italics*) have also been added to account for the different topics that have arisen post-Brexit.

Table 1.1: Total issue balance for all eight episodes

	Total Frequency in episodes
Post-Referendum conduct	2
Economy/ Business	3
Immigration	1
Public opinion and citizens	3
Constitutional/ legal	1
Employment	1
Defence/ military/ security	0
Standards/ corruption	0
Health & health services	0
EU operations and activities	2
Housing	0
Crime/ law and order	0
Social security	0
Devolution in UK	2
Other foreign policy	0
Taxation	0
Public services	0
Agriculture	2
Environment	0
Education	0
All other issues	0

<i>Party politics</i>	4
<i>Culture/Arts</i>	1
<i>Negotiations</i>	6
<i>Second referendum</i>	2
<i>Mind change</i>	3
<i>Irish border</i>	2

Commentary

The negotiating process was significantly discussed in six of the eight episodes during the examined period as the first phase of negotiations reached their final critical stage. Another key issue that dominated the coverage was that of party politics, a significant amount of airtime was given to the implications of Brexit on the inner workings of the Conservative party with particular focus on the divide between Conservative MPs who supported a Leave vote during the referendum and those Conservative MPs who supported a Remain vote. The narrative of many pieces seemed to be that Theresa May would have to please both sides in order to keep her position as Prime Minister. A significant amount of the coverage concerned the prospect of a second referendum and the idea that people may have changed their mind since the referendum. This despite a significant amount of poll data that would suggest opinion is still split right down the middle on the issue almost two years later (The Guardian, 2018). The economy and the impact of Brexit on business was discussed in detail in three separate episodes although it was an overarching issue in many episodes. It would appear to be the case that issues discussed during this period were still very broad in their scope as the final details of a deal were still to be worked out. Therefore contributors were unable to discuss the micro implications for domestic policy in any great detail. This would explain why key areas like education, taxation, housing and crime received no in-depth mention in the coverage.

One of the most noticeable differences in pre vs post-referendum coverage was the drop off in coverage of immigration. Pre-referendum the implications of Brexit to immigration policy was the third most covered issue on television news (Centre for research in communication and culture; Loughborough University, 2016), while post-referendum coverage on *Newsnight* dealt with the issue of immigration in only one episode.

Section 2: Stopwatch Balance

This section examines which individual and organisations received the most coverage and airtime over the eight episodes. Judging a contributor's view on Brexit is not exactly a precise science, pre-referendum affiliation is not enough, for instance, some who favoured a Remain vote pre-referendum have nonetheless accepted the decision. A person's broad view on the prospects of Brexit was judged solely on their comments during a given segment and whether they thought Britain would be better or worse off after Britain's exit. Also taken into consideration was whether or not they viewed the vote as positive, negative, or saw/ gave an opinion that recognised both positives and negatives to the vote or remained relatively neutral in their analysis.

Table 2.1: Contributors for all eight episodes

Position	Name	Affiliation	Number of items in which they appeared	Quote time Min/sec
1	Lord Michael Heseltine	CON	2	4:34
2	Unverified CON MP	CON	1	0:28
3	Christine Ockrent	Journalist	1	2:52
4	Robert Halfon MP	CON	1	3:00
5	Barry Gardiner MP	LAB	1	2:57
6	Maria Caulfield MP	CON	1	1:50
7	Rosie Millard	Journalist	1	2:30
8	Adam Paynter CLLR	LIB DEM	1	0:26
9	Darryl Reburn	BUS	1	0:28
10	Jeremy Best	BUS	1	0:52
11	Tony Martin	BUS	1	0:02
12	Cynthia Martin	BUS	1	0:17
13	Steve Double MP	CON	1	0:19
14	David Aaronovitch	Journalist	1	2:11
15	Nigel Farage MEP	UKIP	1	0:43
16	Alistair Campbell	Editor/commentator	1	0:22
17	Deborah Mattinson	Think Tank	1	0:25
18	Diane James MEP	UKIP	1	2:17
19	Lucy Thomas	Pressure group	1	2:24
20	Jeroen Dijsselbloem	EU organisation	1	1:58

Table: 2.2 Affiliation of contributors for all eight episodes

Role/affiliation	Number of appearances	% Frequency
Conservative	6	28.6%
Labour	1	4.8%
UKIP	2	9.5%
SNP	0	0%
Lib Dems	1	4.8%
Other party	0	0%
Journalist/ media	3	14.3%
Experts	1	4.8%
Business	4	19%
Trade union	0	0%
Citizens	0	0%
Other ref. pressure group	1	4.8%
Government depts/agencies	0	0%
Other UK	1	4.8%
EU organisations	1	4.8%
Other non-UK	0	0%

Commentary

Politicians provided most of the commentary to *Newsnight's* programmes during the examined period making up 47.7% of contributors. The Conservative Party dominated this breakdown providing 28.6% of contributors, while the opposition Labour Party provided just one MP or 4.8% of contributors the same as the significantly smaller Liberal Democrats. Despite not having any representation in the House of Commons UKIP provided 9.5% of contributors. There was also a distinct lack of input from politicians from Northern Ireland despite the border questions being a major point during the negotiation phase occurring during the weeks analysed.

Most of the remaining contributors were taken from the areas of business (19%) and the media (14.3%). This fact demonstrates a common theme throughout the coverage and that is that the voice of ordinary citizens was not heard over the course of eight episodes with contributors coming exclusively from the professional classes or business owners/representatives. This contrasts sharply with pre-referendum coverage which saw ordinary citizens make up 26% of contributors to television coverage and the second biggest provider

of contributors only to the Conservative party (Centre for research in communication and culture; Loughborough University, 2016).

Similar to pre-referendum television coverage, Conservative Party politicians were the most prominent figures in the post-referendum coverage. Again similar to pre-referendum coverage there was a distinct lack of voices from the Labour Party, while smaller parties with the exception of UKIP were largely ignored. It is unclear why contributions from Labour Party politicians were so few, one possibility is that this was an editorial oversight on the part of the producers of *Newsnight*. Another reason may be because of unwillingness on the part of Labour politicians to appear on the programme given the party's unclear position on the Brexit issue and the split between the party's official position on Brexit and the position of the majority of its MPs.

Section 3: Gender Balance

This gender tally relates to items or interviews/discussions featured on each episode that were explicitly about Brexit, significant sound bites that were relevant to the topic under discussion were also counted as a contribution. Quotation time was judged as being the amount of time an individual was speaking for and does not include time spent by the interviewer on interjections or questioning. This breakdown does not include contributions for presenters or political editors.

Chart 3.1: Gender breakdown of contributors

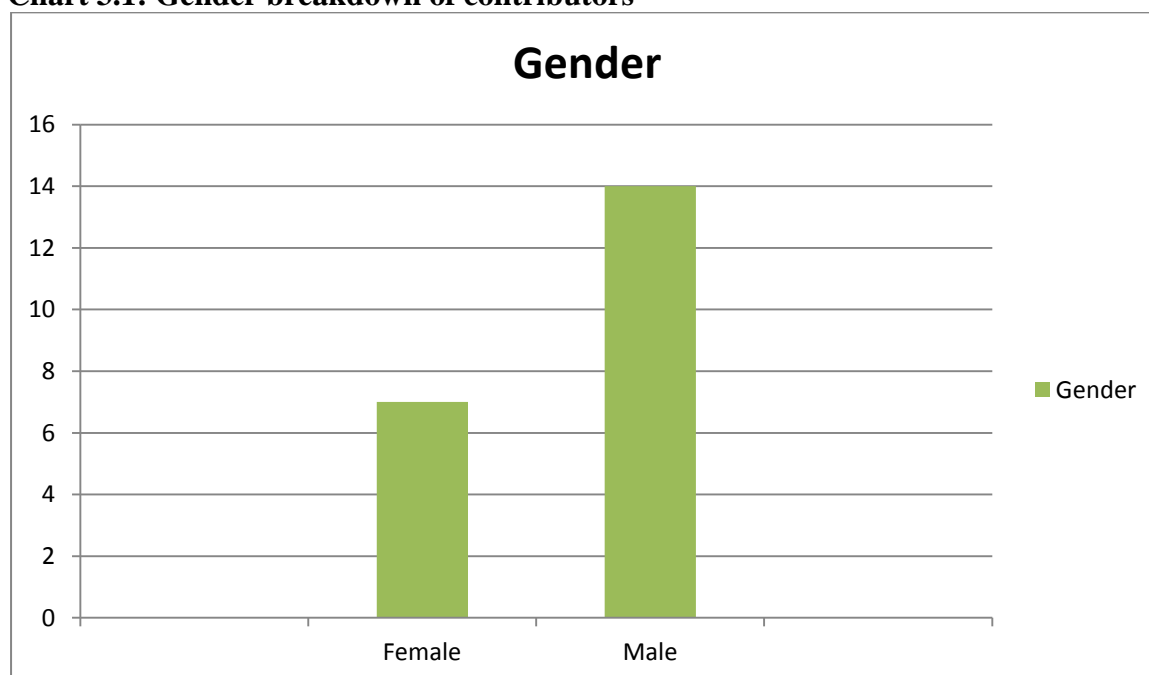
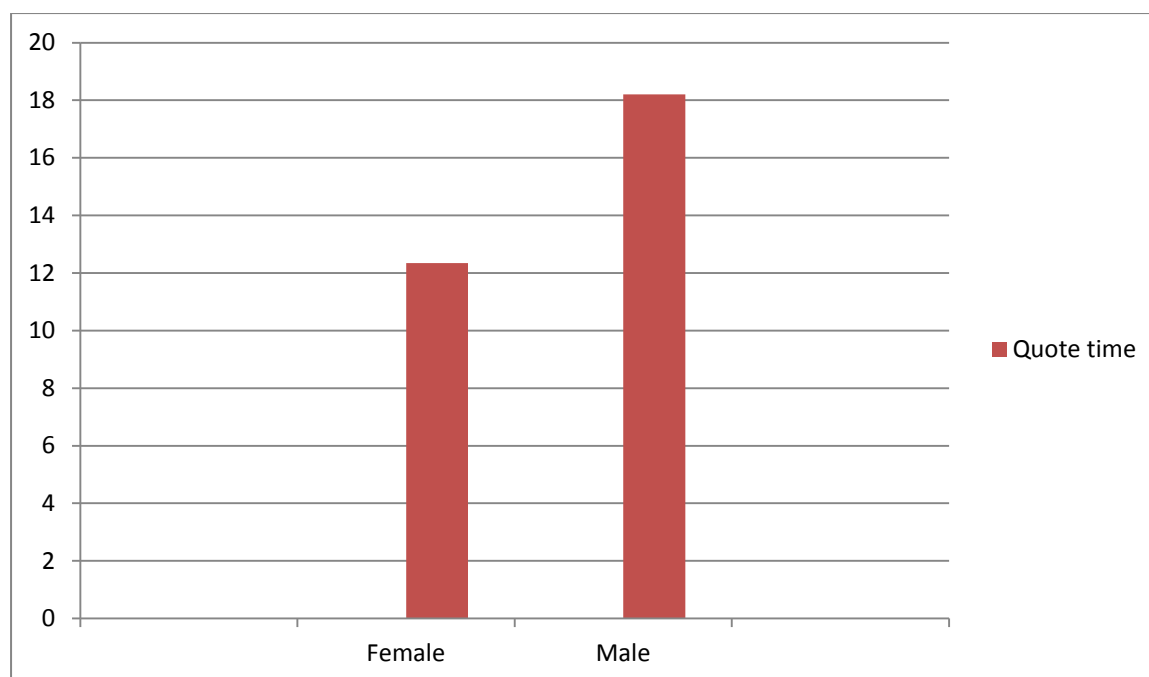


Table 3.1: Average quotation time for Women and men in coverage

Women	1min 48seconds
Men	1min 19seconds

Chart 3.2: Total quote time broken down by gender (mins)



Commentary

As can be seen, there were twice as many male (14) contributors as female (7), the amount of quotation time for women was two thirds that of men. However when broken down women were on average quoted for just under thirty seconds more than their male counterparts. This means that while women appeared less than men in the coverage, they received more quotation time than men when they did appear.

Women received greater representation in post-referendum coverage than in the pre-referendum television coverage analysed by Loughborough University. Post-referendum there was one woman for every two male contributors vs. one woman for every three male contributors pre-referendum (Centre for research in communication and culture; Loughborough University, 2016). While average quotation time was almost exactly equal between the sexes in the pre-referendum coverage, women's average quotation time was significantly greater than their male counterparts in post-referendum coverage.

Section 4: Directional Balance Contributors for all eight episodes

- Why a contributor's view was coded in a certain way is detailed further in the appendix.
- Lord Michael Heseltine appeared in two separate episodes and was therefore coded separately as two individuals during the calculation of statistics.

Table 4.1: Views of contributors

Position	Name	Number of items in which	Quote time	View on Brexit within a
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		they appeared	Min/sec	given segment/ Mainly or completely*
1	Lord Michael Heseltine	2	4:34	NEG
2	Unverified CON MP	1	0:28	NEG
3	Christine Ockrent	1	2:52	NEG
4	Robert Halfon MP	1	3:00	NEUTRAL
5	Barry Gardiner MP	1	2:57	NEUTRAL
6	Maria Caulfield MP	1	1:50	POS
7	Rosie Millard	1	2:30	NEG
8	Adam Paynter CLLR	1	0:26	NEG
9	Darryl Reburn	1	0:28	NEG
10	Jeremy Best	1	0:52	NEG
11	Tony Martin	1	0:02	NEUTRAL
12	Cynthia Martin	1	0:17	NEUTRAL
13	Steve Double MP	1	0:19	NEUTRAL
14	David Aaronovitch	1	2:11	NEG
15	Nigel Farage MEP	1	0:43	POS
16	Alistair Campbell	1	0:22	NEG
17	Deborah Mattinson	1	0:25	NEUTRAL
18	Diane James MEP	1	2:17	POS
19	Lucy Thomas	1	2:24	NEUTRAL
20	Jeroen Dijsselbloem	1	1:58	NEG

Chart 4.1: Quotation time given to contributions

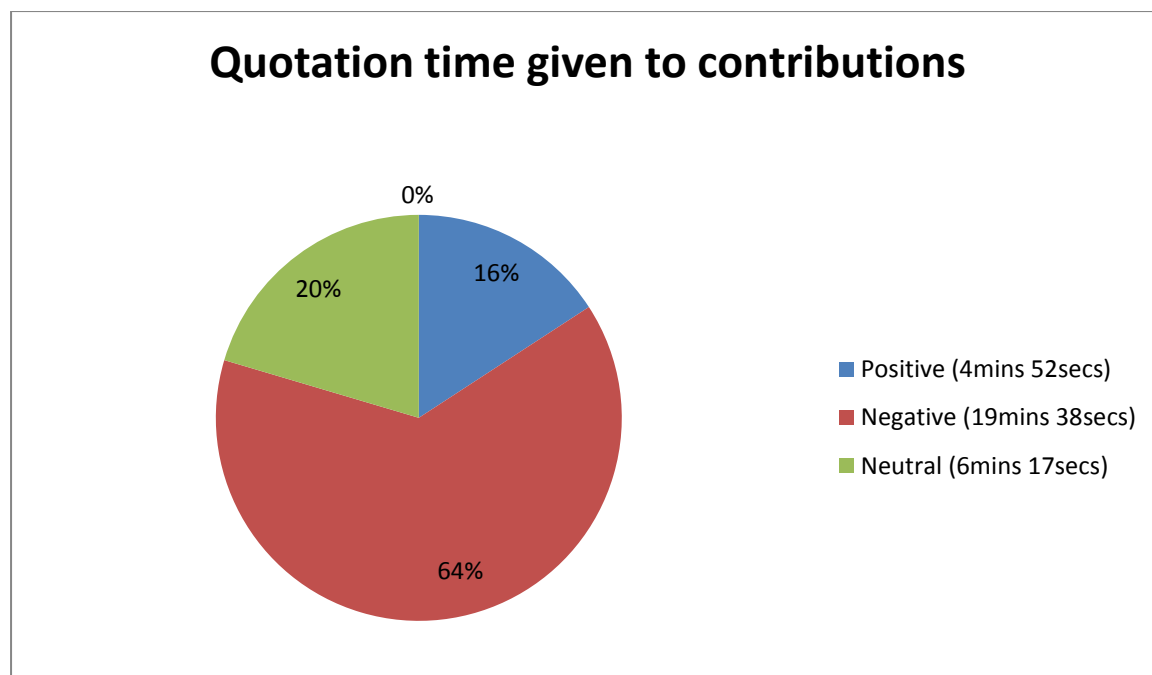
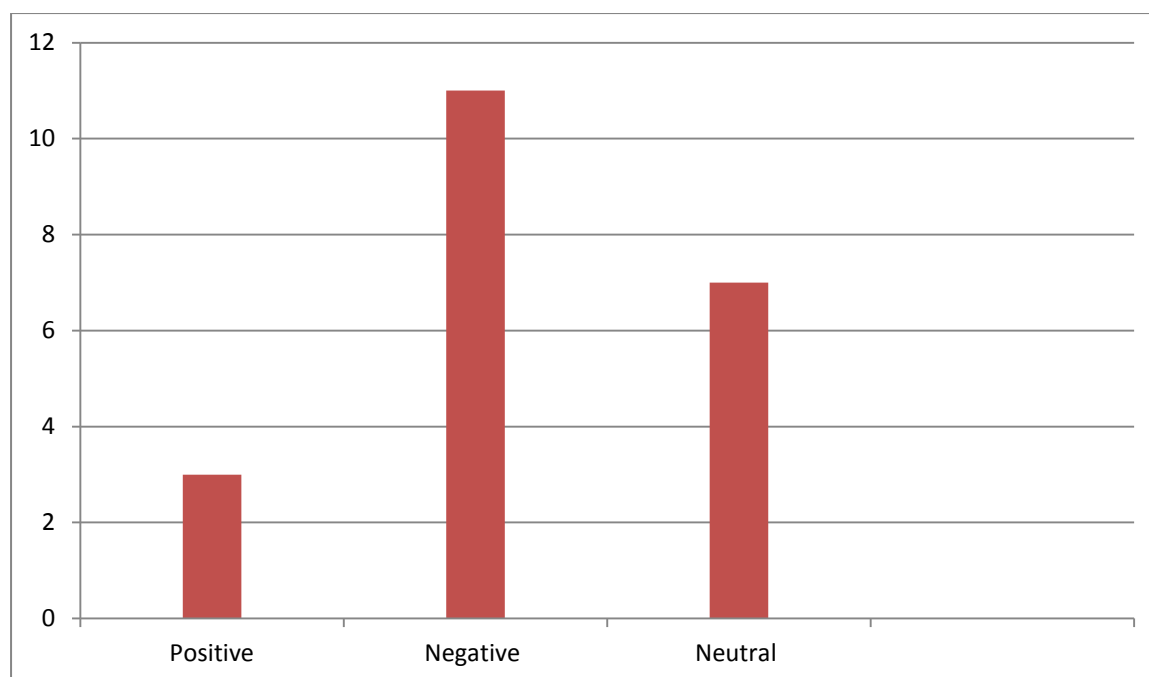


Table 4.2: Overall Directional angle of episodes

Directional angles	% episodes
Solely/ mainly orientated to positive view of Brexit	10%
Solely/ mainly orientated to negative view of Brexit	50%
Balanced/ neutral view of Brexit	40%

Chart 4.2: Breakdown of contributors



Commentary

There were almost four times as many contributions that were negative about the prospects of Brexit as there were positive about the prospect of Brexit. A third of contributors held a position that was fairly neutral on Brexit (could see positives and negatives or did not mention in any great detail what they felt the results of Brexit would be). When this is broken into quotation times the disparity becomes stark, just under two thirds of the quotes on Brexit angled towards a negative viewpoint, while only 16% of quotation time angled towards viewpoints that were positive. A fifth of the quotation time was judged to be broadly neutral. Moreover, when contributions, analysis by political editors and the general tone of the episodes were considered half of the episodes were judged to have given a negative impression of Brexit, 40% gave the impression that there would be both positives and negatives while just 10% were upbeat about Brexit and the negotiation process.

This post-referendum analysis found significant differences with pre-referendum coverage when it came to Directional balance. According to research carried out by Loughborough University, 81.9% of pre-referendum television coverage was balanced (covering multiple news channels) (Centre for research in communication and culture; Loughborough University, 2016), while this analysis found that only 40% of post-referendum coverage at the BBC was balanced/neutral in its editorial angle.

Pre-referendum analysis by Loughborough found that just under 12% of coverage favoured Remain in its editorial slant (Centre for research in communication and culture; Loughborough University, 2016), while this analysis found that half of the news items presented by *Newsnight* were negative in their portrayal of the prospects of Brexit while only 10% of news items had an editorial slant that portrayed Brexit positively vs. 6.2% of news coverage favouring Leave in its editorial slant pre-referendum.

Qualitative data

In terms of the overall qualitative analysis, some broad categories emerged from closely observing the programme and reading the transcripts. These were not mutually exclusive: some speakers overlapped two or even three of the categories.

Second referendum

The first category was the suggestion that either the referendum should be re-run or that public opinion had shifted to such a degree that were the referendum to be re-run a Remain

vote would emerge as the largest. This despite numerous polls (with 3% margins for error) that put the difference between Remain and Leave support at between 1%-2%, either way, depending on which polls are consulted. Despite clear evidence that showed there was little appetite or grounds for such claims this theme emerged again and again over the eight episodes (What UK Thinks: EU, 2018).

In episode 1 *Newsnight's* political editor Nick Watt stated that the author of article 50 (the article to be triggered if a country decides to leave the EU) Lord Kerr was due to announce that despite the UK having already triggered article 50 "we can change our mind at any stage during the process." When a later contributor Christine Ockrent is asked for her opinion on this she states that France's President Macron has said something similar in a recent speech. Later on, while interviewing the Conservative MP Robert Halfon the presenter Kirsty Wark asks him his opinion on the matter to which he states that Brexit was passed by a democratic vote. Wark further pushes the point stating that Lord Kerr's view is that once people "get in tune with the facts" because a lot of people felt they weren't given the full facts beforehand, they are entitled to change their minds.

In an interview between Emily Matlis and the Conservative peer Michael Heseltine, Heseltine made a number of unchallenged assertions such as "as Brexit becomes unpopular", in his interview with Nick Watt on the program a week earlier he stated that he can envisage and believes a situation will occur whereby "public opinion shifts" and the only supporters of Brexit left are the right-wing of the Conservative party.

In episode 7 the journalist David Aaronovitch presents an opinion piece whereby he argues the democratic mandate for Brexit is fading. He begins by emphatically stating that "The Brexit generation is dying out." He argues that given the age profile of those that voted Leave and those that voted Remain by the time Britain leaves the EU in 2020 a large enough proportion of those that voted Leave will have died, and enough new young Remain voters will have become eligible to vote for there to be a situation in which there would be a 51%-49% majority in favour of Remain.

In episode 8 a sound bite of Nigel Farage stating he is "warming" to the idea of a second referendum believing Leave would win with an even bigger majority is played. A further sound bite of Alistair Campbell (former Labour communications director and now editor of the Remain supporting *New European Magazine*) states that as people start to realise the detail, and "the cost and the chaos [of Brexit]" they will want to think again and they will give a very different answer. This was in part balanced by Deborah Mattinson of *Britain thinks* a polling organisation who asserted that polls show no real change in attitudes towards Brexit but this could change if young people who voted in the general election in record numbers voted in a second referendum. Matlis asks the political editor Nick Watt to put these claims in context Watt cites a snap poll by *The Mirror* which shows a minority support a second referendum but a majority of that minority would vote Remain. He then cites a poll by YouGov which states opinions are still quite even with Remain just edging it. Over the eight episodes, this is the only instance in which context is given to the numerous claims that there is a change in public opinion or a public appetite for a second referendum.

Persistent unchallenged negative remarks

Another theme that was quite apparent throughout the analysis was the taken for granted nature on the part of the presenters that Brexit would have negative results, to such an extent that contributors were not asked to back up their assertions or were unchallenged after predicting great economic difficulty. An example of this can be seen in episode 1 in an exchange between Wark and the Conservative MP Robert Halfon:

Halfon: "We'll always have Brexit"

(Wark laughs repeating “we’ll always have Brexit”)

Halfon continues “.....it’s one of the biggest challenges facing our time, there’s nothing we can do about that, and it’s very important.

Apart from the fact Wark did not challenge Halfon as to why Brexit was a “challenge” and not an opportunity, she appears to be derisive of Brexit seeing it as something to be bemoaned and laughed at (or at least Halfon’s apparent resignation is something to be laughed at).

In episode 2 when Emily Matlis interviews Michael Heseltine he states that Brexit is heading towards a “calamitous outcome.” Matlis plays devil’s advocate while discussing trade posing the statement “the bet is of course that they need the UK as much as we need their trade.” Heseltine states “that is simply not true.” Matlis moves on without pressing further or asking him for evidence to back up this assertion.

At the end of the interview when asked by Matlis what happens next regarding Brexit he states that “That’s her [Theresa May’s] problem, and it’s Britain’s problem and it’s our Children’s problem.” This too goes unchallenged.

In episode 3 Evan Davis conducts an interview with Rosie Millard from *The Creative Industries Federation*. He begins the piece by stating that there is “more disappointing Brexit news.” Millard then goes on to say during the interview that research carried out by *The Creative Industries Federation* shows that a hard Brexit “would hit the creative industries very hard, because a lot of creative British people live and work in the UK.” This statement goes unchallenged by Davis, who does not seek qualification as to what she means by this.

In episode 8 a sound bite is played of Alistair Campbell who states that Brexit will result in “cost and chaos” for the country. Later on after this sound bite Jeroen Dijsselbloem (head of the Eurogroup) makes the unchallenged assertion that “look it’s going to be a bad situation it’s a bad decision, the German car industry is right it’s a bad decision.” But now “we must concentrate on minimising the damage and getting a good outcome.” Much like the above statements this too goes unchallenged by presenter Emily Matlis.

Overt bias in Cornwall piece

The piece concerning Cornwall from episode 5 typifies the overall editorial attitude towards Brexit and is quite representative of the tone of most pieces and therefore requires examination. Presenter Evan Davis introduces the piece by stating that many regions in the UK have toyed with the idea of a “regional opt-out” approach to Brexit whereby certain regions would be able to formulate their own certain Brexit policy. He then states they have sent their business editor Helen Thomas to Cornwall an area with “particular worries” about the effects of Brexit on the migrant labour it relies on.

The piece begins with sombre piano music that plays intermittently throughout, overall the piece contained three negative contributors and three neutral contributors. Interviews with a local councillor and two local businessmen painted Brexit as having disastrous effects in Cornwall with talk of local industries becoming “devastated.” There is also talk of “crippling” Labour shortages with Thomas stating the end of free movement would see the end to easy access to European workers before posing the question “could that leave some parts of the country rather empty?”

None of these claims are investigated further nor are the claimants asked to provide any evidence for their assertions. Two small Business owners Tony and Cynthia Martin (who were judged to have given a neutral opinion on Brexit) are quoted for 19 seconds in which Cynthia Martin states that they’ve always found people to work and have employed two foreign girls, who were “marvellous”, but they have great staff at the minute and all of them are local, Tony Martin describes them as “hardworking and conscientious.” This is the only part of the whole piece in which an attempt to balance out the negative opinions are made.

The piece ends again with sombre piano music and footage of Thomas walking on a dreary Cornish beach making her closing remarks.

Lack of positive contributions

One of the most striking trends apparent in the analysis is the complete lack of Positive contributions/contributors on Brexit. Only one contributor UKIP MEP Diane James gave a contribution that saw Brexit as a positive move for the UK, she claimed that the UK had saved itself from having its parliamentary sovereignty further eroded. Of the other two contributors coded as being positive towards Brexit Nigel Farage MEP and Maria Caulfield MP, Nigel Farage's contribution was limited to a 19 second sound bite claiming Leave would win a second referendum, while Maria Caulfield's appearance consisted of a defence of the government's negotiation strategy. While plenty of airtime was given to those who thought Brexit would have negative effects very little was given to those who wished to make a positive case for Brexit and indeed the breakdown of contributors and their opinions show that very few contributors invited onto the programme had a positive view of Brexit.

Impartial Political editor

Although BBC presenters left much to be desired in their handling of claims made by contributors *Newsnight's* political editor Nick Watt (who appeared in seven of the episodes analysed) was generally impartial in how he analysed the negotiation process rarely straying into conjecture or opinion when asked to comment or give context by presenters.

Commentary

The idea that there would be, could be or should be a second referendum on EU membership, and that public opinion called for this was persistent throughout the coverage analysed. Except for the instance cited in Episode 8 this was not challenged by *Newsnight* presenters by asking those claiming this for any evidence to substantiate their claims. There also seemed to be a persistent bias throughout in which presenters and indeed guests took it for granted that Brexit would have negative effects, rarely was this challenged or indeed rarely was a pro-Brexit supporter brought on to offer an alternative to this opinion. This was aptly showcased in the piece presented by Helen Thomas in which the coverage given was extremely bias towards the prospects of Brexit and little attempt was made to balance the claims being made. Furthermore, the sombre music played throughout coupled with the dreary miserable settings of Helen Thomas's piece to camera left it quite clear how the audience was supposed to feel about the topic under discussion.

Conclusion

The qualitative data gathered clearly shows a disparity in the Directional balance of the *Newsnight* programmes analysed. There were almost four times as many contributors who were negative towards the prospect of Brexit as positive. Negative contributions received 64% of the quotation time while positive contributions received just 16%. Furthermore, 50% of episodes overall were deemed to have been mostly Negative about Brexit, while just 10% were deemed to have been mostly positive.

Of course it may indeed be a fact that Brexit will have disastrous implications, however there are many groups from many different sectors formed in the lead up to the referendum who would take issue with this assertion, they were not given the opportunity to put forward their arguments to counter the many negative arguments aired on *Newsnight*. There does not seem to have been any obvious attempt to achieve a broad balance of opinion when it came to picking contributors, this would mean the BBC failed to live up to its obligation to be independent in its "editorial and its creative decisions" as mandated in its

royal charter. The OFCOM regulations covering the BBC state that coverage should take into account “the likely expectation of the audience as to content, and the extent to which the content and approach is signalled to the audience” (OFCOM, 2017), while the royal charter states it should be “duly impartial” (Copy of Royal Charter for the continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation, 2017, 4, 5). Given that over half of those that voted in the referendum felt that the potential positives of Brexit outweighed the potential negatives it would not be unreasonable to expect that some of the potential positive effects/ those who felt Brexit would have positive effects would be present in the coverage of a public service broadcaster.

Furthermore, the range of professions from which *Newsnight* drew its contributors was quite narrow, contributors were overwhelmingly taken from the professional classes and did not stray beyond journalists, politicians or business owners. Over the eight episodes not one ordinary citizen appeared, this contrasts with pre-referendum television coverage which saw ordinary citizens making up 26% of contributions the second largest group second only to the Conservative party. Viewers were twice as likely to see a male contributor as they were a female contributor and female contributors received two thirds the amount of speaking time of their male counterparts.

As has been demonstrated in the qualitative data above negative remarks by contributors about Brexit were consistently let go unchallenged or without any request for evidence on the presenter's behalf. Helen Boaden the then director of BBC News writing in 2010 defined a key part of impartiality as “presenters..... holding the powerful to account through fair but tough questioning.” Time and time again in the episodes of *Newsnight* that were analysed this failed to take place. Similarly as can also be observed in the qualitative data numerous claims were made that the public were going to want a second referendum despite considerable evidence to suggest this was not the case, yet with the exception of Episode 8 contributors were never pulled up on this by presenters.

Overall having surveyed both the qualitative and quantitative data gathered over eight weeks it can be concluded that the BBC did not exercise a sufficient level of impartiality or indeed “due impartiality” in how it covered post-Brexit events in line with its own royal charter or the broadcasting guidelines set out by OFCOM. An editorial bias that favoured the opinion that Brexit would be detrimental to the economic and national interests of the UK can be observed in much of the coverage analysed.

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