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Kuo Huang

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The Nature of the News: Is News Determined more by the Organizations in which Journalists Work or by the Sources upon whom Journalists Rely

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Abstract: The paper endeavours to probe into the interrelationship between news organizations and source organizations, and reason that news organizations determine the nature of news exceeding the sources journalists rely. The research is based on a content analysis of four British mainstream newspapers' (The Times, The Guardian, The Independent, and The Daily Telegraph) news coverage in reporting A-level fiasco between September and October, 2002. By imitating the journalists' 'news angle', the paper discusses about what is news, and when, where and how news is constructed, and who produce it, and finally concluded that journalism is a highly regulated and routine process of manufacturing a cultural product on a production line. In stages of planning, gathering, selection and production news is moulded by the demands of composing order and organisations within a daily cycle.

Keywords: Nature of the News, Organizational Approach, News Organizations, News Source Organizations

MANY THEORIES HAVE been put forth about what determines the nature of the news. Although varying with the angle perceiving the substances, the viewpoint of the routinization of news selection is solid. There are mainly four types of theories: journalist-centered theory; event-centered theory; organizational theory and power outside organization domination theory. (Adams 2007, Ericson et al 1987,1989; Fishman,1980; Gans,1980; Hall, 1981; Hanlin,1992; Herman,1986; Herman and Chomsky 1988; Machin 2006; Manning, 2001; Schlesinger, 1992; Tuchman, 1978; White, 1950; Williams, 1974)

The event-centered theory which emphasises 'mirroring the fact' has nearly retreated from the debate; the other three perspectives on news-making are commonly employed. The biographical approach, which expatiates that individuals determine the nature of news, represents that journalists are actively involved in organizing activities: they shape the nature and direction of their own news organization, the news-media institution, and the source organizations and institutions they report on. (Ericson et al 1987:346) Journalists do play an important role in news gathering and drafting, but the aggrandizement of their influence in news production cripples its stringency.

The ideological approach, either emphasizes the constraining force of broad cultural traditions and symbolic systems, or relates the outcome of the news process to the structure of the state and the economy, and to the economic foundation of the news organization. This model stresses the propaganda function of media (Herman,1986; Herman and Chomsky

1988)and tries to explore news producing operation in the whole social environment, (Hanlin,1992). This perspective tends to consider the macro ingredients the determinative force in deciding the news nature regardless of the micro components and it is just those affect the news essence directly and efficiently.

The organizational approach comes primarily out of sociology, especially the study of social organizations, occupations and professions. This perspective tries to understand how journalists' efforts on the job are constrained by organizational and occupational demands. It attests that news is not a product of events in the world or personal inclinations of journalists, but a social and organizational product; and its content reflects society and the workings of specialized organizations. (Fishman, 1980; Schlesinger, 1992; Tuchman, 1978) The evaluative genre argues that a full-scale organizational demonstration should involve source organizations as well as news organizations, because source organizations and news organizations converge on different levels, and are best viewed as 'part of each other'. (Ericson et al 1989)

This paper endeavours to probe into the interrelationship between news organizations and source organizations and reason that news organizations determine the nature of news exceeding the sources journalists rely on in relation to a content analysis practice on news source coverage conducted by author in 2002 (Appendixes 1,2,3,4).

Imitating the journalists' 'news angle', the paper dissertates through what is news; when, where and how news are constructed by whom, and results in



why the news organizations impact the news nature more than sources.

What is News?

There are maybe even more definitions of news than there are journalists. To study it as sociology, it would be much too simple to circumscribe it as 'fresh information'. Perhaps the most frequently quoted attempt at an answer is credited to Gans:

News is information which is transmitted from sources to audiences, with journalists - who are both employees of bureaucratic commercial organizations and members of a profession - summarizing, refining, and altering what becomes available to them from sources in order to make the information suitable for their audiences. (1980:80)

The explanation points out that news is a product, shaped by the community in which it is created and by the organizations and individuals involved in news construction. Therefore it is indispensable to elucidate what news organizations and source organizations are.

News organizations came to be understood as functioning bureaucracies or factories with given 'inputs' and 'outputs', organizational rhythms, an insatiable appetite for fresh raw material or information of a particular kind, staffed by personnel trained or socialized to work according to standardised rules and practices. (Manning 2001:51)

Source organizations are far more complicated to be clarified. Ericson et al. (1987) documented that although there is an enormous array of sources potentially available, journalists tend to limit themselves to the 'performatives' of news releases and those have a routine, predictable supply of valuable sources in established organizations, namely, the authorized knowers' authoritative versions of reality, (Ericson et al 1989: 3) and to be precise, news wires and news beats. Both of them exist in forms of bureaucratic or commercial organizations. Sources try to construct an organizational order, partial to its interests to negotiate with news organizations through journalists.

In retrospect to the content analysis of four British mainstream newspapers' (The Times, The Guardian, The Independent, and The Daily Telegraph) news coverage in reporting A-level fiasco between September and October, 2002, the source organizations are defined as Governments and- Education department, Opposition Parties, QCA, Examination Boards (OCR, AQA), Independent Inquiries, Schools organizations, Students, Students' parents and others.

When is News Produced?

If the question is arisen as 'when did the event occur?' The answer should be addressed in a totally different way. The stories in news may either happen long time ago but have a fresh influence, or occur recently. Enormous organizations or individuals can be involved in stories, and the more timely the event occurs, the more affective the news is. Reviewing the A-level grading event, the marking result came out far before the reveal of the fact. During this period the relevant organizations struggled to 'cover up' to 'spin' the story. But coming back to the question of 'when is news produced'? The answer should be 'less than twenty-four hours before it appears in the newspaper or on the air'.

More than fifty years ago the first Royal Commission on the Press (the Ross Commission of 1947-9) said that newness is measured in newspaper offices in terms of minutes. Taking television news for example, it is estimated that the aggregate output of British and trans-European television news, including terrestrial channels, together with Sky News, CNN, Euronews, NBC Superchannel, and Live TV, adds up to over 100 hours of news output in any 24-hour period, (MacGregor, 1997:24) and what if we take into account of the afterwards established BBC24 rolling news service and the emergence of online news and mobile news? The fact always seems to be that no sooner are the newspaper columns and broadcast bulletins filled than the process starts all over again, round the clock, day after day, and week after week.

Journalism is characterised by high anxiety under the pressure of daily deadlines. 'It's like riding a bicycle: if you stop to think about it you'll fall off.' so said the deputy editor of BBC Television News during the interview in December 1981. Most journalists and news workers have to meet deadlines as a matter of routine, and they develop a number of techniques and organizational practices in order to accomplish the mission. (Gans 1980: 78)

Sparing no effort to meet the deadline is a routine in producing news. It is the intent of news organizations to routinize the struggling because it is an efficient way to ensure that the fresh supplies of information are fashioned into news copy in time every day to meet the rolling around deadlines.

The production of news every day, every week or on a rolling 24-hour basis, is the routine of news source collection and reproduction. It is the cycle of news deadlines that drives the journalists' routinized work flow within a news organization, and the organizational pressures encourage the routinisation and standardization of news journalism.

The spread of electronic news-gathering means that deadlines for copy are brought forward, as news organizations can publish more editions of papers

and provide more frequent broadcast bulletins. (Manning 2001:79) In this circumstance, opportunities left for anybody outside the news organizations to put his fingers on news production appear to be very much limited (with the exception of news websites inspiring civic reports).

Where is News Produced?

I would once again apply the distinguishability between events and news to the debate. The events may happen everywhere but the news is produced in the newsroom, which located in news organizations.

Source organizations provide potential news. Without enough information supply, there would be lacunae in press or broadcasting. Source organizations decide the basic content of the newspaper columns and broadcast bulletins. But there exists the stretch of news resources. News operations now produce more hours of news without additional resources in order to farm more revenues. (Project for Excellence in Journalism 2004)

Being the last link in the producing chain, news organizations dominate the final appearance of news. The news room is considered as the heart of the news-gathering operation by Harris and Spark, they describe it as follow:

Here the news editor(or chief reporter) presides over the news desk, compiling the diary of jobs, briefing reporters, monitoring the day's (or week's) coverage, checking the finished stories, liaising with the photographers, answering queries signing expenses and briefing the editor and chief sub-editor on the progress of the operation. (1993:6)

Since the flow of news inside the newsroom is so complex, the nature of news is most challenged in news organizations. That is why Ericson et al said: 'It is the rganization of news, not events in the world, that creates news.' (1987:345)

Who Produces News?

'Most news is not what has happened but what someone says has happened'. But who says it first and who speaks last? Who is more powerful in deciding what news should appear to be?

Hall et al. (1978) defined sources, namely authoritative organizations or individuals pronounced on the happening events, the primary definer; while the media were operating as the secondary definers in exaggerating and amplifying the happening events.

Sources detect news occurrences and interpret them as meaningful events, they operate as 'editors' of socially constructed knowledge in their organizations and provide reporters with press kits, photos;

material resources as tact. In this sense, Sources established the first set of interpretations of events, and define their boundaries.

Sources have various purposes in entering the news encounter, which are not easily susceptible to generalization since they derive from the detail of the situations, but Palmer categorized them as below:

The public right to know (which includes mandatory disclosure); the attempt to modify or improve the profile of an organization; the desire to build credibility with the media; policy development; faction fighting, and damage limitation. (2000:47-52)

Motivated by diverse purposes, sources will use certain techniques to maximize the chances of their intentions being realized and 'influence the process of news communication' (Ericson et al 1989: 2), such as: relevant personnel, public relations techniques, absorption, appealing to journalists' conscience, timing and placing of information release and tailoring information release to particular news values. (Palmer 2000: 52-56)

The quality of source affects news value. But this approach overdraws the power of sources therefore can not stand steadily.

Firstly, it ignores the diversity in source organizations. Sources vary substantially in their needs for secrecy, confidence, censorship, and publicity. (Ericson et al 1989: 390-392) In A-level fiasco reporting, the information from Governments & Education department and Opposition Parties was both influential but came out as dispute thus their announcements were considered partial, and often appeared as quotations in the whole report.

Secondly, it magnifies sources' manipulation in news production. Sources act in the context of a particular situation, all their strategy are used to persuade journalists that their information is appropriate and useful for the journalist's purposes. 'Source organisations need an understanding of the news values which guide journalists in their selection of particular news items and an awareness of the rhythms or routines that characterise the workings of mainstream news organisations.' (Manning, 2001:50) What sources have done to news could be understood as assisting journalist to draft on behalf of both of them.

Thirdly, it underestimates journalists' role in news production. Journalists decide which stories are used and which are left out, and, through the way stories are presented, they decide the significance the public attaches to the world events. (Venables 1993: ix)

Journalists are directly responsible for the news we see and hear on TV and radio and in the newspaper, therefore the quality of news matters more to journalists than to anybody else. One of the most important judge criteria in the view of audiences is the objectivity of news. In achieving the objectivity,

journalists could arm themselves with the tragedies like balance and even-handedness in presenting different sides of an issue; accuracy and realism of reporting; presentation of all main relevant points; separation of facts from opinion, minimizing the in-

fluence of the writer's own attitude, and avoiding slant or devious purpose. (McQuail 1992, p.82) The A-level fiasco source adoption content analysis proves this successfully:

	Source of Quotation	Number	Percent
1	government & educational department	69	29%
2	opposition Parties	23	8%
3	QCA	22	8%
4	examination boards (OCR,AQA)	29	10%
5	Independent inquiries	39	14%
6	schools organizations (HMC,SHA,etc)	41	14%
7	Students	20	7%
8	student's parents	3	1%
9	Others	44	15%

The table above shows that All 290 quotations as sources appearing in 158 coded articles were divided into 9 categories, each stood for a different source organization in A-level grading event. The government and educational department were quoted most

often, followed by undefined quotations, school organization and independent inquiries. On the contrary, the individuals' opinions were least respected and other sources showed resemblance. These statistics reveal how journalists balance source adoptions.

Source of Quotation	The Times	The Guardian	The Independent	The Daily Telegraph
Government & educational department	14	17	13	25
Opposition Parties	7	2	5	9
QCA	6	4	8	4
examination boards (OCR,AQA)	3	12	2	12
Independent inquiries	10	10	9	10
School organizations (HMC,SHA,etc)	12	10	7	12
Students	6	4	4	6
Student's parents	1	0	0	2
Others	15	9	11	19
290	74	68	59	89
	26%	23%	20%	31%

The focus on specific newspapers also exhibits that although differing in proprietors, the press still appears to objective in quoting from sources.

Journalists may make their own news but they do not make it just as they please under conditions chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and determined by the rhythm of the news organization.

Lastly, the gatekeepers (White1950) may discard any news material according to various reasons in reducing the quantity of news arriving each day in the newsrooms or news organizations (Schudson, 1989) actually, Mr 'Gates' rejected nine-tenth of

wire copies. (White1950) so the first definition seems to be too flimsy in facing the second definition.

How is the News Produced?

A hierarchical structure is the most creditable model to portray the news production process.

Planning Stage

The news diary represents a schedule of forthcoming events that will warrant reporting in the near future, it is a bureaucratized form and is central to the running of every news organization. This allows jour-

alists to be allocated to particular stories, the key news aspects of the event to be agreed, and item space or time provisionally allotted. It will be composed from a variety of sources—press releases and briefing documents sent to the newsroom, an editorial review of the future political calendar, clippings and notes about previous patterns of coverage, suggestions made at editorial conferences – and it will offer several time horizons simultaneously, including a weekly, monthly and even an annual perspective. (Manning 2001:57) at the BBC in London, for example, the Future Event Unit now operates as a specialized department, performing the functions of the news diary for all sections of BBC news. (MacGregor, 1997:192) The well organized routinization of the news organization ensures that the news manufactured would achieve the required standard.

Gathering Stage

One way of building certainty and control into the news production process is to establish stable relationships with outside institutions and agencies which can be relied upon to provide the kind of information that can easily be fashioned into news copy.

Dunne said: ‘The only important tool of the reporter is his news sources and how he uses them.’ (1969:41) Sources and journalists are involved in a struggle over the control of accounts. (Ericson et al 1989: 377) Journalists generally base their choice and treatment of news on two criteria: what is the political, social, economic and human importance of the event? And will it interest, excite and entertain our audience? (Hetherington 1985: P21) to detail them, journalists should consider the impact, proximity, timeliness, prominence, novelty, conflict of the events and the hunt for consumer loyalty is related both to short term success and long term survival. (Wallis and Baran 1990:217)

The second way is to turn to the news agencies which supply news copy as a commodity. (Manning 2001:55) The four dominant global news agencies at present are Agence France-Presse, World Television News, Associated Press and Reuters. (Boyd-Barrett, 1998:19) On one hand, this will encourage a homogeneity in foreign news reporting and even some aspects of domestic news as well, (Gurevitch et al., 1991; Patterson, 1998) but on the other hand, the middle-ranking agencies and some ‘retail outlets’, including CNN, Sky News and NBC, provided significant competition, and most importantly, the big four agencies have to meet the needs of their customers. (Patterson, 1998:83)

Selection Stage

Negrine asserts that it is not the quality of the event itself which makes it news but rather that the event

is recognized as newsworthy because it conforms to certain criteria of newsworthiness. (1994:123) This reveals the value of news: the importance, or significance, of a news story, assessed either in terms of its potential impact on the audience, or its attraction for the journalist. (Venables 1993: 77)

Galtung and Ruge tries first to commentate them in twelve criteria: events become news to the extent that they satisfy the conditions of frequency, threshold (absolute intensity; intensity increase), unambiguity, meaningfulness (cultural proximity, relevance), consonance (predictability, demand), unexpectedness (unpredictability, scarcity), continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons and reference to something negative. (1981:69-70)

Applying it to A-level fiasco, it attracts attention because it is ‘bad’ news and splitting, it concerns both elites and mass public and it is developing during a certain period which guarantees the rolling presentation.

A one week research did in July 1983 by Hetherington (1985:63-65) and his group unfurled news priorities. It starts scarcely a month after the general election that put Mrs Thatcher back in power with a big majority of Conservative MPs. It was a week when the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, unexpectedly, proclaimed a package of economies—although the Conservatives had campaigned with promised to protect the NHS. The summarised conclusion of the research was that on some days there was almost unanimity about news priorities, on the others there was not. All three television bulletins (the Nine o’clock News, News at Ten and Channel Four News) led with the same topic on the evening of Thursday 7 July—the £1 billion economies announced by the Chancellor. The following morning, three of the four newspapers (Daily Mail, Guardian and The Times) also led with the Chancellor’s cut, while the Mirror concentrated on Len Fairclough leaving Coronation Street, a more entertainment topic and its favour was shared by the Sun, Britain’s most popular daily.

Presentation Stage

Each news organisation has a specific editorial policy which labels his news products and attracts certain type of audiences.

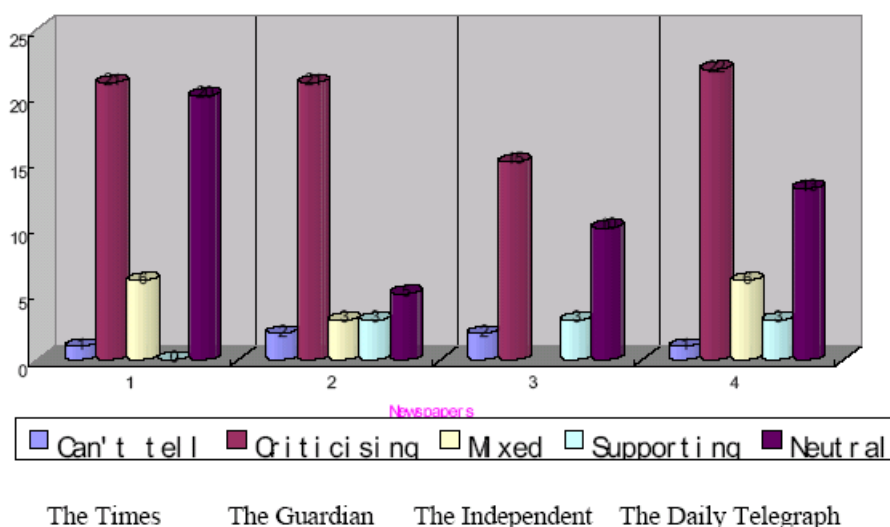
The format in which news is packaged makes an important difference to the kind of output that emerges from the news organization, and the construction of a particular news format will, in turn, involve a complex series of decisions in which journalists and editors draw upon their understanding of particular audience needs and also upon their skills in relation news genres to those needs. (Manning 2001:53)

Cottle (1995) distinguishes the 'expensive', 'the limited' and the 'restricted' news. The 'restricted' format involves the newsdesk report delivered by a journalist with little or no input from alternative 'voices' and thus reproduces a version of events framed exclusively in terms of the journalist's values. The 'limited' format may include pre-recorded video clips of interviews with other 'voices' but it is only

in the studio interview of 'expansive' format that there are to be found significant opportunities for alternative or critical voices to contribute to a discursive treatment of news issues.

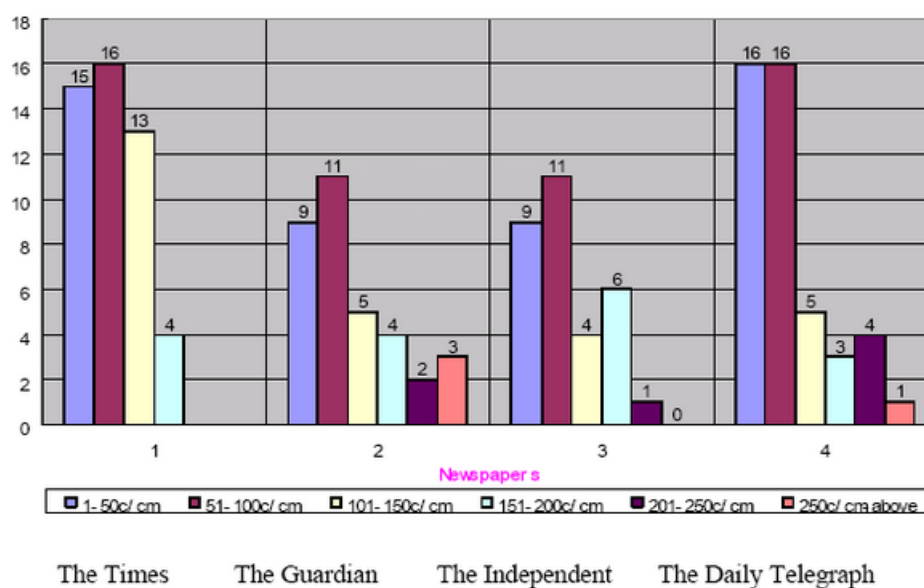
The next three charts illustrate the different editor policies in the four newspapers regarding to A-level fiasco reporting, they testified further how news organizations determine the nature of news.

Headline Evaluation



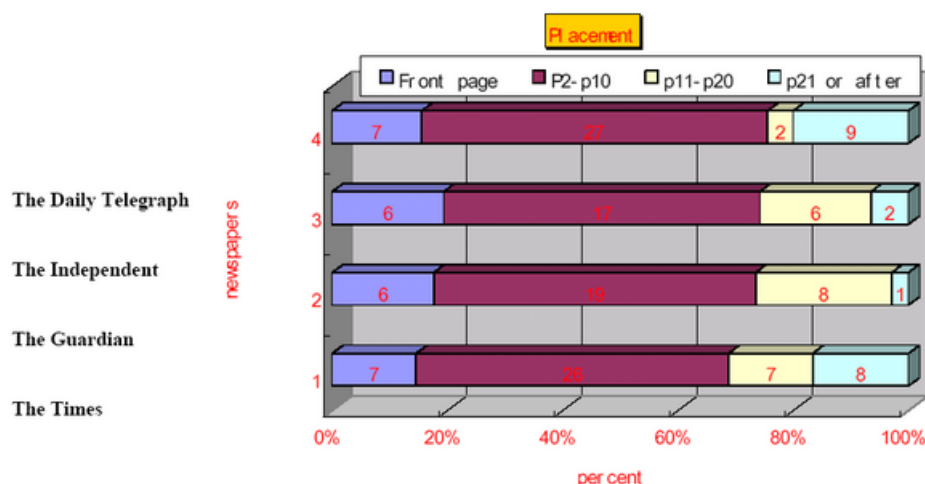
The leading tones of the four newspapers were either criticizing or neutral, with the implication of being objective and 'expensive'.

Article Length



All the four newspapers prefer short and medium articles to the long ones, which guarantees more news pieces available and more spaces for advertisers. The

chart also discloses that The Times has never released long articles, which is the distinction from the other three.



The four newspapers happen to have the same view in placing most news reports between page 2 to page 10 with almost the same amount of front-page coverage. It unfolds that A-level grading event is the hot-pot topic during the selected period and each newspaper reacted similarly in editing it. There is significant difference which reflects the editing policy that the Times and Daily Telegraph both have some articles covering pages 21 or after, which means they make some comments regarding to the event.

In a word, to gather, select and present the news requires a team of journalists. Each member of the team must take a series of individual decisions during the day's or night's work – the news editor on where to send his or her reporters and what suggestions to make to his or her specialists; the reporter or specialist on what questions to ask, what aspect of the event to put first in his/her account of it and how much to write or record; the sub-editor or scriptwriter on whether to insert any news agency material or revise the copy or videotape; and the night editor or programme editor on any final instructions to reporters and writers, on any changes in manner of presentation and on the final order of priorities. Within parallel frameworks groups will be working on the home news, foreign news, pictures, sport, finance and features. For television the cameraman, sound recordist, film editor and videotape editor are also taking individual decisions that affect the way the news is presented—camera angle, lighting, what to cut and whether to use library film. All these individual decisions affect the nature of news, and they are made upon routinized experience which was fostered by the news organization in which journalists are embodied.

Why News Organizations Determine the Nature of News?

There has always been a critic that the production line analogy is rather to describe than to explain. (MacGregor 1997:71). Assisted by the content analysis, this paper strives to provide a sound answer that news organizations determine the nature of the news.

The argument suggests that news is not a veridical account of reality, but a social and cultural construction of journalists and their sources. (Schlesinger, 1992; Tuchman, 1978; Fishman, 1980)

In negotiating with journalists, sources use strategies and tactics to control how their organizations and activities are visualized in the news, but 'sources are aware that news does not mirror images they help to construct.' (Ericson et al 1989:396) therefore their influence on the nature of news is rather restricted.

Jamieson (1997) states that news is gathered, written, edited, produced and disseminated by individuals, who are part of an organization and who have beliefs and values. But 'news changes very little when the individuals who make it are changed.' (Golding and Elliott, 1979:207) because journalists are placed in institutions in order to guarantee a regular supply of news.

Journalism is a highly regulated and routine process of manufacturing a cultural product on a production line. In stages of planning, gathering, selection and production news is moulded by the demands of producing procedure and organisations within a daily cycle.

The news is made, and like any other product it carries the marks of the technical and organisational structure from which it emerges. (Golding and Elliott, 1979:137) The ways in which news organizations manage the processes through which information is

gathered and transformed into news encourage journalists to follow familiar patterns of newsmaking.

Although the extent of exposure to commercial market signals, the pressures generated by organisational imperatives and deadlines, the level of managerial supervision, and interaction within routine

sources of news all vary in ways dependent upon particular empirical circumstances, the news published in the press or on the air shares kindred nature because the news organizations which produce it are hierarchically and bureaucratically organized so as to manage the flow of news.

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Appendix 1

The News Source Analysis of the Press Coverage of the A Levels Fiasco

This is a sound content analysis group project on the coverage of A-level grading fiasco in four British national broadsheets under the direction of Dr Anita Hill in the University of Westminster. The project quantizes and analyzes the sources adoption in news reporting. The group contains 6 members with multinational background, and the project lasts from September 1 to November 11, 2002.

The finding of the project comes after analyzing the total 158 coded articles relating to A-level fiasco appearing on four broadsheets (the Times, the Guardian, the Independent and the Daily Telegraph) within the selected time period (19, 20, 22, 27, 28 in September and 1, 3, 10, 14, 15, 16, 24 in October).

The peak-time sample selection process follows the 3 steps procedures:

1. Locating all the articles published in the four papers within the time frame: from 14th September to 24th October, 2002, which were naturally occurred coherent with the event development;
2. Figuring out the sum of relevant articles of each day in all the four newspapers;
3. Peaking the 12 days of the largest sum of collective reportage.

Headline Evaluation

title of each article and its evaluation is judged by coders as:

1. Criticising (conspicuous hostility)
2. Mixed (criticising but providing excuse for government)
3. Supporting (giving excuses and explanations)
4. Neutral (providing information and not showing preference) 0 can't tell (anything other than 1-4)

Placement

1. Front page 2 P2-P10 3 P11-P20 4 P21 or after

Article Length (c/cm)

1. 1-50
2. 51-100
3. 101-150
4. 151-200
5. 201-250
6. 251 and above

Rationale for measuring column cms—c/cm

An 8-column grid: article height X columns

A 7-column grid: article height X columns x 8/7

A 6 -column grid: article height X columns x 8/6

Appendix 2

Timeline: A-Level Grading Row on BBC NEWS Education Contents Thursday, 31 October, 2002, 17:28 GMT

The former chairman of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) plans to sue the government for wrongful dismissal in the wake of the A-level fiasco. Sir William Stubbs was sacked by former Education Secretary Estelle Morris over the row about A-level grades. BBC News Online details the extraordinary events that surround his departure from the post.

12 March 2002: Sir William Stubbs meets the chiefs of the three English exam boards - OCR, AQA and Edexcel. One of the topics discussed is the coming summer's A-level exams, the first under the new Curriculum 2000 system.

22 March: Chief executive of AQA Kathleen Tattersall - in her capacity as chair of the management committee of the boards' umbrella group, the Joint Council for General Qualifications - writes to Sir Wil-

liam. She asks for clarification that he was not asking the boards to disregard candidates' actual performance as part of efforts to ensure standards of difficulty remained the same as last year.

19 April: Sir William replies, saying grades can only be determined "using a combination of professional judgement". To constrain awards would be contrary to the code of practice and disadvantage students, he adds. He also says he expects last year's A-level results to provide a "very strong guide" to this year's outcomes.

26 July: Sir William and the three exam chiefs meet again. Exam boards realise the pass rate is set to go up by 2-4%.

29 July: Sir William contacts Education Secretary Estelle Morris and tells her of the improved pass rate, warning that this could inflame allegations that exams are getting easier. He suggests a review of the causes of these statistical changes to establish that there has been "no dilution of standards".

15 August: Results day. Pass rate reaches a record 94.3%, up 4.5 percentage points on 2001.

1 September: The Observer runs a story claiming thousands of pupils may have had their grades "fixed" (most notably by OCR) and had missed out on university places as a result. Department for Education and QCA express concerns and promise an investigation.

8 September: Independent schools are reported to have withheld publication of their results for fear of errors in the marking process.

12 September: Ken Boston, the Australian educationist, takes over as the QCA's new chief executive.

13 September: QCA launches an inquiry into claims examiners awarded more unclassified (U) grades in coursework in 2001/02 to prove A-levels were not getting easier.

15 September: The Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC), which represents many independent schools, says it will back legal action against the examiners if the claims are proved correct.

16 September: Conservatives say the government may have intervened in the fixing of grades.

17 September: Edward Gould, chair of the HMC, claims the QCA has been "co-ordinating" the move to mark some students down.

18 September: Liberal Democrats call for the setting up of a single awarding body for England and Wales. The HMC, the Secondary Heads Association and the Girls School Association calls for results to be re-issued and call for an independent inquiry.

19 September Estelle Morris announces an independent inquiry into the row, headed by Mike Tomlinson, the former chief inspector of schools. Chris Woodhead, his predecessor as chief inspector, claims there had been political knowledge of what had happened.

20 September: The QCA review of grading clears the exam boards of wrong-doing and puts the blame on poor teaching, saying there was no evidence to back claims that coursework had been down-graded unfairly. Head teachers are angry.

22 September: Heads say they have fresh evidence of QCA involvement in downgrading.

23 September: Heads meet Mr Tomlinson to give their evidence - but do not disclose details.

25 September: Mr Tomlinson meets Sir William, before meeting Ms Morris and School Standards Minister David Miliband. That night, Sir William accuses Ms Morris of "meddling" in the Tomlinson inquiry after finding out her officials contacted the boards about contingency plans should Mr Tomlinson recommend a complete re-grade.

26 September: Mr Tomlinson moves to quell fears his inquiry has been compromised. Ms Morris and Sir William are in the media spotlight, putting their sides of the story. Sir William says he is the victim of a "whispering campaign" by the government.

27 September: Mr Tomlinson publishes the first part of his inquiry. He recommends students' marked work in some A2 units in some subjects be re-graded and their overall A-level results be adjusted if necessary. He concludes the exam board chief executives "acted with integrity" and that the QCA behaved properly - clearing Sir William of any wrongdoing. Later that afternoon Ms Morris sacks Sir William as chairman of the QCA "to restore public confidence" in the organisation.

4 October: The exam board at the centre of the grading controversy - OCR - says it will only reconsider 63 of the 97 exam units about which Mr Tomlinson had raised concerns.

10 October: QCA chief executive Ken Boston says the testing system needs overhauling, with teachers being trusted to do more assessment themselves. He promises a new "examinations taskforce" to set out in detail how exams should be delivered.

15 October: The deadline for the boards to issue any revised results to students, schools and colleges. Only 1,220 A-level and 733 AS-level students have their results improved. Ms Morris makes an apology in the House of Commons about the grading debacle. Angry e-mails to BBC News Online describe the whole affair as a "whitewash".

28 October: Giving evidence to a Commons education select committee inquiry into the QCA, chief executive of the OCR board Ron McLone suggests some schools did not fully commit themselves to Curriculum 2000. Ken Boston tells the inquiry there could be further “strife” in the A-level exams next year and admits he has “no magic wand”.

31 October: Sir William says he will sue the government for wrongful dismissal unless he receives a public apology from the government for being sacked as chairman of the QCA.

Appendix 3

Content Analysis Coding Schedule

A-LEVEL GRADING FIASCO COVERAGE IN FOUR UK NATIONAL DAILY BROADSHEET

Coder Identity No.	
Coding Card No.	

A) NEWSPAPER (main section)

1 The Times	1
2 The Guardian	2
3 The Independent	3
4 The Daily Telegraph	4

B) DATE-MONTH-YEAR DAY OF THE WEEK

C) SOURCE OF QUOTATION

If no quotation, please skip to section D

1 Government & educational department	1	
2 Opposition Parties	2	
3 QCA	3	
4 Examination Boards (OCR, AQA, etc)	4	
5 Independent Inquiries	5	
6 Schools Organizations (HMC, SHA, etc)	6	
7 Students	7	
8 Students' parents	8	
9 Others	9	

D) PLACEMENT

1 Front page	
2 P2-P10	
3 P11-P20	
4 P21 or after	

(P)

E) ARTICLE LENGTH (c/cms)

1. 1-50	
2. 51-100	
3. 101-150	
4. 151-200	
5. 201-250	
6. 251 and above	
HEADLINE (copy verbatim)	

-
0. cannot tell
1. criticising
2. mixed
3. supporting
4. neutral

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