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Scotland's Propaganda War: The Media and the 2014 Independence Referendum



*How biased were the Scottish and UK Media?
Why they were biased?
Why did it matter in 2014?
Why will it matter less next time?*

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Professor John Robertson, of University of the West of Scotland, provides a detailed account of the role the Scottish and UK media played in the Scottish Referendum Campaign. The book is based on his own research, which triggered a heated dispute with BBC Scotland, a summons to the Scottish Parliament and a storm of debate in social media. It also presents research by other academics and gives explanations for the findings from prominent theorists such as Noam Chomsky.



Originally contracted to Welsh Academic Press in September 2014, the book is now released into the public domain after several infuriating delays and barriers of an inexplicable nature.

This account of media bias in the coverage of the Scottish Referendum campaign goes beyond more journalistic impressions, from practitioners within the industry, to explain *why* it was so. It does this by revealing the true nature of influences on our media which are the result of unequal access to education and the interlocking of the resultant elites in finance, in ownership, in commercial directorships, in media directorships, in senior post-holders in journalism, in university leadership including professors, and, uniquely in Scotland, in the elites leading the Scottish and UK Labour parties.

With love for Scotland and all its people and places - *John Robertson, 24th August 2015.*

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To Bernadette

Chapter 1: Introduction: *The Scottish Independence Referendum and the Media*

‘The establishment is a dirty, dangerous beast and the BBC is a mouthpiece for that.’ (Ken Stott, Actor in the *Radio Times*, 30/11/14)

‘How the media shafted the people of Scotland.’ (George Monbiot, *The Guardian*, 16/9/18)

‘The leader of the Yes campaign has said he did not believe the BBC showed bias in its coverage of the independence referendum.’ on Blair Jenkins, *STV*, 30/9/14)

‘I’m not really laying this charge at BBC Scotland. I just think metropolitan BBC has found this whole thing extraordinarily difficult, to separate their own view of the world from their view in reporting Scotland.’ (Alex Salmond, First Minister of Scotland, in the *Independent*, 14/9/14)

It’s strange. The SNP leader and the Yes campaign’s chief executive hold back from attacking BBC bias directly, while an English journalist (George Monbiot) names the guilty and a popular actor (Ken Stott of *The Missing*, BBC 1, 2014) punches as hard as

he can against perceived collusion between the UK establishment and its formerly revered public service broadcaster. The story of Scotland's first independence referendum in 2014 and the UK and Scottish media is a complex, messy but fascinating one.

Why did the leaders of the Independence movement refrain from attacking what others saw as the primary manufacturer of their defeat? Why did an otherwise politically inactive actor, often employed by the BBC, in starring roles, burst with indignation and strike hard at the injustice he saw in the BBC's coverage? Why was an intellectual English writer known for his environmentalism and human rights activism sufficiently moved to urge the Scots, a fairly affluent northern European people with a benign and fruitful environment, to break free from London?

The following six chapters will answer the above and those questions posed on the front cover, after the title, of this book by tackling these six important questions:

1. *What evidence was there of bias in the Scottish and UK broadcast (TV and radio) coverage?*
2. *What evidence was there of bias in the Scottish and UK press coverage?*
3. *What role did social media in Scotland play in the Yes/No campaigns?*
4. *Was coverage of the Scottish Referendum, 'What the Public Wanted' or Propaganda?*
5. *How Much Were the Voters Influenced?*

6. *What will Scottish Politics and Media become after September 2014? Will we create a more democratic Scotland?*

First, and only in this Chapter, there's my personal experience as an academic who walked unwittingly into a storm of media activity around the Scottish Referendum in February 2014 and who changed almost instantly from a back-room researcher and teacher into one of the Yes campaign's favourite professors and one of the media establishment's pariah figure. If you've heard it before or if you're not that interested in this kind of personal thing, skip to Chapter 2. To paraphrase the *Grateful Dead* (60's acid/hippy band): 'Lately, it occurs to me what a [not very] long strange trip it's been.'

On the 21st January, 2014, *BBC Scotland's* Head of Policy and Corporate Affairs wrote to me to criticise severely my recent research report of imbalance and bias in TV coverage of the Scottish Referendum debate in 2012/2013. He copied in my University Principal on the basis of alerting the latter to damage to both institutions' 'corporate image':

Dear Dr Robertson

I read with interest your report on BBC and STV news output, relative to the reporting of the Scottish referendum campaign.

On the basis of the document, as published by the University of the West of Scotland (http://issuu.com/creative_futur/docs/robertson2014fairnessinthefirstyear), we have a number of serious concerns with the methodology applied, with the factual accuracy of a significant number of the contentions contained within the report and with the language used in the report itself.

As it stands, many of the conclusions you draw are, on the evidence you provide, unsubstantiated and/or of questionable legitimacy.

The BBC, as outlined within its Editorial Guidelines, is committed to accurate and impartial reporting, a commitment that lies at the heart of the public service we

offer to audiences. The independence referendum is the most important constitutional issue of recent times and our duty to provide fair and balanced reporting of that referendum is paramount.

Based on what you have published, your report offers a highly subjective and questionable analysis of our news output. Can I ask if you intend to publish the data to which you refer in the report, given that the report itself contains no footnotes or appendices to allow further analysis or consideration? Or, failing that, would you supply the data to us to allow assessment of the information which has underpinned your findings?

I await your response.

Yours

The above email was leaked online, by a colleague, leading to a flurry of internet activity largely attacking the BBC. The scale of the internet phenomenon is difficult to gauge accurately but insiders estimated that combined *Facebook* and *Twitter* activity may have reached 250 000 messages by the end of January.

By going straight to my Principal, the Head of Policy and Corporate Affairs had bypassed my Head of School and then my Dean of Faculty. What had triggered him to write in such aggressive terms and to report me to his employer is unclear though it may be a simple consequence of the BBC's charter which requires it to be impartial. For some at the BBC, the charter has long required impartiality and because of all the years in which that impartiality has not been challenged, they have come to think of it as a given – we say we're impartial so we must be impartial. At a later meeting of the Holyrood Education and Culture Committee, the Head of BBC Scotland admitted they had never carried out a similar investigation into any research study forwarded to them. Based on rumour only, I must admit, there is a suggestion that a team of

graduate researchers, newly appointed to improve actual coverage of the Referendum, were 'set on' my report, told to watch every second I had covered and to find errors. They found some. I had wrongly typed a date putting it out one day. I had mistaken one BT leader for another. This kind of error amongst more than 600 hours of transcripts is of course, unforgivable, if you've never done research before. More worrying at first sight for me, was their accusation that I had coded reports as being about the Referendum when, for the BBC, they were not. Most notable of these was my coding of Eleanor Bradford's reports on the Scottish NHS containing, often, comparisons with an apparently superior English situation, as a negative for the Yes campaign. This literalist approach is the kind of reasoning popular in the very young and amongst those older but otherwise already defeated.

Though absent in mainstream media reporting, the research had received massive interest online and especially in Yes campaign blogs. *Newsnetscotland.com* reported 10 000 hits in the first day. Online traffic referring to the research across blogs, news agencies, *Twitter* and Facebook has been estimated at c250 000 messages. I received more than 100 personal emails with most of these copied to my Principal and with pleas to take care of a researcher who would soon be engaged, they anticipated, in an unequal struggle. Within UWS, I received support at all levels for his academic right to ask questions of power. Taken by surprise by this *cyberstorm* of messages, I was slow to notice a set of accompanying silences, throughout January, February and early March 2014, which once reflected upon were to form a greater daily presence and then to a realization that I was to experience directly, thought control in a democracy facilitated by behaviour patterns amongst elites and their dependent groups.

Dramatically, I was now to experience it in a country I had naively thought better equipped to expose elite collusions than many others - Scotland.

A telephone call from BBC 2's *Newsnight Scotland*, on 23rd January 2014, made a provisional offer of a place to debate my research. The caller clearly knew nothing of the complaint. Later in the day the offer was withdrawn with no explanation. This suggested editorial interference of a kind banned by the BBC's own standards. As far as I can see it was the first example since the BBC top brass cancelled a *Newsnight* Special on Jimmy Savile as it would have negatively affected another higher profile broadcast celebrating 1970's BBC celebrities including the soon to be publically announced multiple rapist's charity work. The same day an offer to speak on *Radio Scotland* arrived. On Saturday 25th January, around 8am, for 8 minutes, I was interviewed on *Radio Scotland*, for eight minutes, by a friendly interviewer who seemed to know little of the research. The broadcast was kept on the *BBC* site for a few days then withdrawn. It is still available on *YouTube*. The interview triggered a further flurry of online activity.

On 5th February, *Early Day Motion 1052* was tabled to the UK House of Commons requesting: 'That this House encourages the BBC and other television broadcasters named in the interim report by Dr John Robertson of the University of the West of Scotland, titled, *Fairness in the First Year?*, about political balance in broadcasting to at least cover the report on television so that viewers may be informed about views and concerns on the broadcasting balance and impartiality in the run up to the Scottish Independence referendum on 18 September 2014'. The *BBC* reported on neither the motion nor the research. Since then two of my younger UWS colleagues have reported

being warned to disassociate themselves from me, during visits to BBC HQ. They cannot be identified obviously.

On 21st February, Professor Roy Greenslade, in his *Guardian blog*, summarised my research. There were 206 comments by readers of which 197 can be read as critical of the BBC. By 23rd February, however, Greenslade had published a response entirely from the BBC perspective and casting doubt on the integrity of the research. There were 42 comments from readers of which 37 were again critical of the *BBC* but also many were critical of Greenslade's apparent willingness to submit to BBC pressure.

Then, with only two days' notice, I was asked to give evidence, to the Scottish Parliament's *Education & Culture Committee*, on March 11th. Subsequent to this televised event, all of the mainstream Scottish press and *STV* but not *BBC*, reported on the evidence and one, only, prominent academic of the left sent a personal email of sympathy. The *BBC* remained silent despite their actual presence at the same committee and in the face of attempts by callers to radio debates and audience members on TV debate to raise the 'UWS study'. At the Scottish Government Committee, the *BBC* chiefs made clear that they did not count and categorise complaints nor would they in the future, as their attendance at a Scottish Government Committee had only been a temporary 'politeness' pressed upon them by *BBC* HQ in London.

Another piece of evidence of the widespread anti-independence bias in Scottish elites arrived in August. I was invited to speak at the *5 Million Questions* conference at Dundee University on 13/14 September. After sending my outline, I received this:

Dear John,

Thank you for sending your title and blurb. We were wondering if we could edit the second last sentence slightly, to read "*What, on the basis of media coverage, seems to have been the experience of academics in Scotland, during the current referendum?*"

It is just because Prof Chris Whatley chairs the 5MQ steering group and we'd like to be mindful of that situation. I hope this is ok?

I was being asked to change the content of my presentation to accommodate the feelings of the host! Professor Whatley had been criticised by an SNP minister and in numerous mainstream media reports characterised as evidence of Scottish government bullying of academics. When I refused to change my summary to include Whatley in my experience, they suggested moving me from the Saturday (main event) to the Sunday. I refused that and wrote this below:

On reflection, I wish to withdraw. My reasons are below:

1. I question Professor Whatley's impartiality and therefore suitability to chair your steering group.
2. I believe your request that I change my content, reflects pressure from Professor Whatley, constrains freedom of speech and, insultingly, attempts to equate his experience with mine (see below for detail).
3. I believe your suggestion that I now move to the Sunday is an attempt to hide my views or to avoid critical debate that might embarrass Professor Whatley.

Professor Robertson's experience:

1. Reported to his employer for bringing his university and the BBC into corporate disrepute.
2. His research fully suppressed by the mainstream media including the BBC.
3. An absence of support from his peer group and this ignored.
4. Producing findings unwelcome to the unionist hegemony in the Scottish HE and Media establishment.
5. Emerging from a 'new' university not familiar to the members of the HE and Media professionals elites.

Professor Whatley's Experience:

1. Reported to his employer, not by a powerful media institution capable of massive influence, but by a single minister in an administration powerless to defend itself against unionist mainstream media bias.
2. His comments widely disseminated and supported in the mainstream media.
3. Strong support from his peers and this reported widely.
4. Producing ideas utterly complicit with the unionist hegemony in the Scottish HE and Media establishment.
5. Emerging from an 'old' university familiar to the members of the HE and Media professional elites.

Here's a link to Prof Whatley's 'bullying' experience:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/10445073/SNP-ministers-waging-dangerous-campaign-to-gag-university-academics.html>

Well, that's enough of me but, in my defence, my experience has much in common with that of the Yes Campaign as a whole. For more specific details, read on.

Chapter 2: Evidence of Bias in the Scottish and UK Broadcast Coverage

Academic blasts coverage of research into referendum 'media bias'



An academic who released research claiming "evidence of bias" in STV and BBC coverage of the referendum has hit out at the media for ignoring his work.

Professor John Robertson of the University of the West of Scotland said there had been collusion among Scotland's mainstream media and he condemned fellow academics for not supporting his work, saying it amounted to "thought control" in a democracy.

<http://news.stv.tv/politics/268054-john-robertson-blasts-coverage-of-research-into-referendum-media-bias/>

Figure 1: STV News: Tuesday 12th March 2014

'The BBC, as outlined within its Editorial Guidelines, is committed to accurate and impartial reporting, a commitment that lies at the heart of the public service we offer to audiences. The independence referendum is the most important constitutional issue of recent times and our duty to provide fair and balanced reporting of that referendum is paramount.' (From the Head of Policy and Corporate Affairs, BBC Scotland, in an email to me, in January 2014).

‘Not since Iraq have I seen BBC News working at propaganda strength like this. So glad I’m out of there.’ Paul Mason (former BBC Economics Editor, in the *Spectator* 12th September 2014).

‘The most effective propaganda is found not in the *Sun* or on *Fox News* but beneath a liberal halo’. John Pilger in *counterpunch*, 5th December 2014.

The BBC has ‘previous’ as law-enforcers say. In September 2012, Oliver Huitson reported on the BBC’s coverage of the NHS Reform Bill and concluded:

‘In the two years building up to the government’s NHS reform bill, the BBC appears to have categorically failed to uphold its remit of impartiality, parroting government spin as uncontested fact, whilst reporting only a narrow, shallow view of opposition to the bill. In addition, key news appears to have been censored. The following in-depth investigation provides a shocking testimony of the extent to which the BBC abandoned the NHS.’ (Huitson, 2012)

The notion that the BBC’s impartiality could not be taken for granted and that it was complicit in the government’s undermining of the NHS, still shocks. For many people the BBC remains a trusted institution by contrast with, say, political parties, corporations or newspapers. Needless to say, this research attracted little media attention, none from the BBC itself, and only the stock response that the BBC was impartial in all matters so the research must be flawed. Huitson’s experience was soon to be repeated for me.

From September 2012 to September 2013, I carried out a year-long content analysis of evening news (6-7pm on both BBC and ITV). In February 2014, I reviewed the coverage in the light of an my, and the BBC's, attendance at a Scottish Government committee. In April 2014, I did a one- month intensive (6 days a week) study of BBC Scotland's extended 'flagship' politics show, *Good Morning Scotland*. Then in August, I briefly tackled the difficult are of bias by omission. Finally, I did two one-day studies of BBC coverage of two key events just before and just after the vote in September.

The results of these studies are presented here but attempts to explain why they are as they are, is reserved for a later chapter on the nature of propaganda.

Fairness was my chosen concept from the start. Fairness is aspirational. Perfect balance or perfect impartiality is not attainable. Fairness requires only the continuing application of reflective and consistent methods to maximise the levels, within single broadcasts and over longer periods. The crude numerical balance of quantities of statements identifiable as supportive of different sides in a debate is reasonably important but less so than other factors. When broadcasts begin too often with bad news for one side this is unfair. Where one side commonly leads off while the other has to react, this is unfair. Where bad news is repeated with high frequency in one broadcast, this is unfair. Where interviewers are not consistent in their approaches regarding tone, difficulty or tendency to interrupt, this is unfair. Where witnesses of clear bias or incompetence or where evidence of dubious validity are used to support one side consistently against the other, this is unfair, unprofessional and perhaps corrupt. Where there is no procedure at editorial level to monitor fairness within

single broadcasts and over longer periods, this is, similarly, unfair, unprofessional and, is perhaps, corrupt.

Fairness in the First Year? *BBC and ITV Coverage of the Scottish Referendum Campaign from September 2012 to September 2013*

The 'Phase 1' survey of TV coverage of the referendum campaigns covers the period from 17th September 2012 to 18th September 2013 including every weekday evening (6-7pm) broadcast by *BBC 1, Reporting Scotland, ITV* and *STV*, and shorter weekend broadcasts in that period. A total, therefore, of approximately 640 hours, minus advertising breaks in ITV and STV broadcasts, was watched, transcribed and coded. The evening TV broadcasts were chosen as the news media communications with the largest audiences in Scotland and in the UK. The distribution and quantity of messages of different types is presented in a tabular format with selected text examples to illustrate types of message.

The key questions:

1. How prevalent were referendum topics in the first year of the campaigns?
2. What was the relative balance of statements given to the views of Yes and No, representatives, arguments and evidence?
3. What was the relative balance of independent, scientific or academic evidence presented in support on the Yes and No campaigns?
4. To what extent did No arguments precede the Yes and vice versa?

5. What was the ratio of arguments finishing broadcasts unchallenged in favour of the Yes and No campaigns?
6. To what extent were arguments equated with the apparently personal wishes of political personalities rather than as collective positions?
7. What was the relative balance of offensive statements made to Yes and No campaigners and broadcast?
8. What forms of evidence dominated the discourse – economic, political or social?
9. Overall and to what extent, did reporting favour the Yes or No campaign.

Methods:

A content analysis of the relative presence of types of political message contained within broadcasts in the first year of the Scottish Independence Referendum campaigns applied the coding categories in the table below. More detail for those interested in methods can be found in the original version in the chapter bibliography).

Results:

Code	RepSc	STV	BBC1	ITV	RepSc+BBC1	STV+ITV
<i>Reports</i>	141	141	51	11	192	152
<i>About/ Descriptive</i>	85	79	24	3	109	82
<i>Pro-independence/ SNP</i>	171	172	40	7	211	179
<i>Anti-independence/ SNP</i>	262	255	55	10	317	265
<i>Pro-Ind/Sci/Acad Evidence</i>	4	7	0	0	4	7
<i>Anti-Ind/Sci/Acad Evidence</i>	22	20	1	0	23	20
<i>Anti-Pro Order</i>	66	61	13	1	79	62
<i>Pro-Anti Order</i>	24	53	19	3	43	56
<i>Personalisation of ideas as AS</i>	28	32	7	2	35	34
<i>Personalisation of ideas as BT individuals</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Abusive of Pro-independence figures</i>	18	18	1	0	19	18
<i>Abusive of Anti-independence figures</i>	3	3	0	0	3	3
<i>Economic evidence</i>	38	23	9	3	47	26
<i>Social evidence</i>	18	10	7	0	25	10
<i>Political evidence</i>	14	9	15	2	29	11
<i>Finishing with Pro evidence unchallenged</i>	8	17	2	0	10	17
<i>Finishing with Anti evidence unchallenged</i>	28	34	12	0	40	34
Coded items	789	793	205	31	994	824

Table 1: Number of statements for each coded category

News reports relating to the referendum were fairly regular occurrences on the two Scottish channels over the twelve months. In sharp contrast the UK-wide broadcasts rarely reported on this topic. The *BBC1* figures are inflated by the *Reporting Scotland* headline alerts which followed the ‘national’ headlines and which were only seen in Scotland. This apparent disinterest in a major constitutional challenge to the very existence of the UK, by its two dominant news programmes, is the first observation to be taken from the above data.

The simple numerical preponderance of anti-independence statements over pro-independence statements by a ratio of c3:2 on *Reporting Scotland* and on *STV*, is also clear. One obvious explanation lies in the editorial decision to allow all three anti-independence parties to respond to each SNP statement creating an unavoidable

predominance of statements from the former even when these were kept short. Anti-independence statements were heavily concentrated on economic affairs such as alleged increased unemployment or closures after independence, such as:

- On 20/5/13 in *STV at 6*, the presenter announced ‘Scots’ savers and financial institutions might be at risk if country votes for independence
- On 29/10/12 in *Reporting Scotland*, an extensive piece on Trident and on Scotland’s defence forces after independence offers some space for SNP response but is driven by a weight of one-sided and unchallenged evidence and commentary – unnamed economic advisers are allowed to suggest 6500 jobs lost if Trident goes and an overall cost of £20bn while the report finishes ominously with ‘Whitehall could play hardball’.
- On 11/12/12, in *Reporting Scotland*, the programme opens with ‘Row over independence could lead to higher electricity bills’ then runs through a series of negative sound bites interspersed with SNP protest – ‘questions mount over independence’, ‘UK government claims cost could rise’, ‘Could Scots customers have to pay more?’, ‘Labour spokesman – danger’ before allowing the evidence of Scottish over-production, renewables and a captive market in England to cast serious doubt on the motivation for the initial headline ‘scare’.

Health-related matters were the other dominant theme. For example, on 27/9/12 the case of a Scottish patient seeking free care only available in England was highlighted and linked to the relative lack of GP control in Scotland. This began a mini-series of reports that day on alleged failings in the Scottish NHS by *Reporting Scotland* reporters and by Labour spokespersons. No balancing cases were reported of a flow in the other direction although such did appear in the popular press ('Now English asthma patients are denied life-changing drug offered to Scots', *Daily Mail*, 9/11/12). The use of single cases to suggest wider concerns is of course problematic.

Less typical but of interest in this evaluation of editorial decision making was:

- On 24/6/13 in *STV at 6*, the presenter, referring to a report from the 'Scottish Institute' offers unchallenged the notion that the Scottish armed forces 'might have trouble recruiting due to lack of adventure'! The possibility of the reverse trend is not considered.

The use of evidence from sources other than the parties themselves and which might be presented as 'independent', 'academic' or 'scientific' is a measure of quality in political debate. Notably, there was very little use of such evidence in the reporting overall and, where there was, there was clear tendency to use anti-independence over pro-independence evidence. Though a rare phenomenon overall, reporting tended to link pro-independence evidence from Scottish Government sponsored committees to their sponsorship while UK advisory groups such as the *Office for Budget Responsibility*, *The Institute for Fiscal Studies* and several Parliamentary, Treasury, or

House of Lords committees were typically treated as independent despite linkages to UK government and other government departments or units with a vested interest in the union. Indeed the IFS was referred to as a 'well-respected think tank' (*Reporting Scotland*, 19/11/12) whereas a Glasgow University academic was 'outed' as having been 'bought' by the Yes campaign to support the independence case (*Reporting Scotland*, 22/8/13).

The sequence of statements whereby anti-independence arguments preceded pro-independence responses as opposed to the reverse order is of interest. There was a clear majority (66:24) of the former, on *Reporting Scotland* where 'bad news' about independence came first and obliged a defensive response from a pro-independence spokesperson but a much narrower majority (61:53) on *STV News*. The *Reporting Scotland* imbalance tends to normalise the No/anti-independence position and put the onus of the Yes/pro-independence position to justify itself.

Personalisation of political issues is long-established strategy to weaken arguments, shifting focus from collective reasoning or shared values to supposed personal desires and personality traits. Historically, this tendency or strategy has been used to demonise and to undermine numerous political figures in the UK including Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock. In the above data, the repeated association of the Yes/pro-independence campaign with the personal desires of Alex Salmond was regular and frequent. No such equation between No/anti-independence figures' personal drives and the No campaign was made. Likewise the broadcasting of personally insulting comments by anti-independence representatives (especially Johann Lamont) aimed at

Alex Salmond, almost entirely, was predominant though a few counter-jibes by Salmond against Lamont and the Labour Party did also occur. Notably the use of insults aimed at Salmond declined and had become less common in the second six months of the survey. The tendency by opposition politicians to attempt to undermine the Yes campaign by labelling its ambitions as Alex Salmond's desires is, in part, beyond the editorial role, however, it was common for reporters and presenters to adopt the same style:

- On 23/10/12, in *Reporting Scotland*, 'Alex Salmond under pressure!'
- On 23/10/12, in *Reporting Scotland*, Willie Rennie (Lib Dem) 'challenged Alex Salmond's policy'.
- On 12/9/12, in *STV at 6*, 'Alex Salmond would say that the Westminster...'
- On 3/9/13, in *STV at 6*, 'Alex's agenda!'
- On 25/10/12, in *Reporting Scotland*, Salmond is described by Johann Lamont (Labour) as 'straight as a corkscrew' and then compared by Ruth Davidson (Con) to bent salesman 'Delboy'.

The distillation of the debate over independence into a largely economic debate was also clear. Particularly notable is the role, here, of political editors in framing the debate in this way, telling the viewer that the debate over living standards, employment and taxation was the only debate anyone cared about. No evidence for this view was given.

The closing statements in reports might be felt to leave a lingering impression and thus carry more weight than some others. In many cases, reporters would round-off with a compromise assessment so as to leave the two campaigns in a kind of balance. Quite often, however, a statement strongly supportive of one side would be left hanging as the final thought. This was more likely, especially on *Reporting Scotland*, to be an anti-independence statement such as:

- On 27/9/12, in *Reporting Scotland*, a piece on the changes to the NHS in England was used to suggest that the Scottish system's reluctance to change 'is bad news for Scotland' and finishes with the unsubstantiated suggestion that GPs and patients might be 'planning to move to England'.
- On 5/10/12, in *Reporting Scotland*, the Scottish Government's commitment to universal benefits was immediately followed by a reference to 'spending watchdog chief Robert Black who has questioned whether such benefits are affordable' and reinforced by reference to Black's cv – 'few people are better placed to understand the challenges'.
- On 26/4/13, in *Reporting Scotland*, a generally negative assessment of the future of insurance companies after independence finished with the Labour spokesperson's assertion of 'billions in costs' and 'potential closures'.

- On 9/1/13, in *STV News*, after an extended and mostly negative report on the SNP's 'antinuclear stance' the presenter finishes by suggesting that the latter 'will lead to economic disaster'.

Comparing *Reporting Scotland* with *STV News*, the former seems less balanced and fair to the Yes campaign if only in the tendency to give pro-independence statements a greater frequency of opening and closing debates. Overall, however, both feature a preponderance of anti-independence statements, a majority of anti-independence evidence and a heavy personalisation of the debate around the character of Alex Salmond with the latter often portrayed as selfish and undemocratic. However, If we characterise viewers as likely to watch both *BBC 1* and *Reporting Scotland* or both *STV* and *ITV News*, in succession, the two experiences diverge further than is apparent in comparing one programme with another. The *BBC1*, *Reporting Scotland* alerts are commonly short and punchy with an attack, typically a Westminster scare story, on the Yes campaign, mostly left unanswered and unchallenged.

So, on the objective evidence presented here, the mainstream TV coverage of the first year of the independence referendum campaigns was not fair or balanced. Taken together, we have evidence of coverage which seems likely to have damaged the Yes campaign. Many other shorter and more journalistic pieces appeared at the same time. One notable example, a list which suggested a wider tendency to launch stories with a 'warning' to potential Yes

voters, was that from Craig Murray, former UK Ambassador to Uzbekistan who blogged under the heading: 'BBC the New Hammer of the Scots':

"Scottish independence: Pension shortfall warning"

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-22314646>

"UK Treasury warning that an SNP plan for a currency union after independence"

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-22246176>

"Scottish independence: Warning over 'weakened military'"

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-21776602>

"Scottish independence: 'Havoc' warning from pensions firm"

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-business-20562203>

"Scottish independence: Luxembourg warns against 'going separate ways'"

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-21664450>

"Scottish independence: Barroso warning on EU membership"

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-20666146>

"Scottish independence: Michael Moore issues warning over vote question"

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-21016047>

"Scottish independence: 'Border checks' warning from home secretary"

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-17505302>

'By contrast, there are no BBC headlines in this period that promote positive claims about Scottish Independence. You will look in vain for headlines that say "Yes campaign says independent Scotland will be

eighth richest country in the world” or “Official GERS report shows Scotland’s public finances much healthier than those of the UK”. Such headlines just do not exist. Reporting Scotland or Newsnight Scotland has never, never been led by a positive story about independence. It has been led on dozens of occasions by the negative.’ (Murray, C., 2014) <http://www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2013/04/bbc-the-new-hammer-of-the-scots/>

Other comparatively short, less scientific surveys and reports of bias were numerous on the websites *NewsnetScotland.com*, *Bella Caledonia* and *Wings Over Scotland*.

After the researcher is ‘summoned’ to appear before the Education & Culture Committee of the Scottish Parliament, followed in by four senior BBC figures, on March 11th 2014, the mainstream media begin to show interest with many reporting the event, if briefly. The phenomenon on social media becomes massive with the video of the meeting going viral and being re-tweeted by one sympathetic celebrity to 1.5 million followers. The BBC attempt to ‘ride the storm’ and having made an earlier mistake in attacking the researcher (see Introduction and later chapter The Nature of Propaganda), pull up the barricades, denying recognition to the research and repeating the same assertions of impartiality to all critics. However, there is much online attention in late January and February, topped with a some mainstream media

attention after I am called to attend the Education & Culture Committee, in Holyrood, on the 11th of March 2014. The BBC and others have wind of this summons as it applies to them to, in early February. Think about this, perhaps with newfound sense of importance, I decide to look at the coverage in February using the same criteria as before. Despite my best efforts, I wonder if the anecdotal deluge of complaint (they will not answer the committee as to how many they have had) following my research findings will change their behaviour. It seems to have!

Fairness in February? *BBC and ITV Coverage of the Scottish Referendum Campaign in February 2014*

The February 2014 results represent the period immediately after the controversy surrounding, especially, *BBC Scotland's* response to the first report. *BBC Scotland* rejected the report out-of-hand and *STV* ignored it. Online media exploded with traffic (c 2 000 000 messages in blogs, *Facebook* and *Twitter*) amongst, especially, Yes campaigners and sympathisers. BBC Scotland and I were called to give evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Education and Culture Committee on March 11th. On March 13th, comedian Frankie Boyle 're-tweeted' a link to the research for his 1.5 million followers.

News reports relating to the referendum were fairly regular occurrences on the two Scottish channels over the first twelve months. In sharp contrast the UK-wide broadcasts rarely reported on this topic. The *BBC1* figures are inflated by the *Reporting Scotland* headline alerts which followed the 'national' headlines and which were only seen in Scotland. This apparent disinterest in a major constitutional challenge to the

very existence of the UK, by its two dominant news programmes, was the first observation to be taken from the above data. However, in February 2014, the two ‘national’, UK-wide, programmes had considerably increased reporting with *BBC 1* actually exceeding the *Reporting Scotland* coverage. This awakening closer to the Referendum date is to be expected. Less predictable was the content.

Using the same methods, research questions and criteria for coding, the results for February 2014, only, were as below:

Results:

Code	RepSc	STV	BBC1	ITV	RepSc+	
					BBC1	STV+ITV
<i>Reports</i>	13	22	15	8	28	30
<i>About/ Descriptive</i>	10	11	28	13	38	24
<i>Pro-independence/ SNP</i>	24	27	34	19	58	46
<i>Anti-independence/ SNP</i>	27	39	56	33	83	72
<i>Pro-Ind/Sci/Acad Evidence</i>	3	3	2	0	5	3
<i>Anti-Ind/Sci/Acad Evidence</i>	4	5	5	3	9	8
<i>Anti-Pro Order</i>	4	9	10	7	14	16
<i>Pro-Anti Order</i>	6	6	2	1	8	7
<i>Personalisation of ideas as AS</i>	2	1	2	6	8	7
<i>Personalisation of ideas as BT individuals</i>	0	1	0	0	0	1
<i>Abusive of Pro-independence figures</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Abusive of Anti-independence figures</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Economic evidence</i>	19	17	17	10	36	27
<i>Social evidence</i>	3	5	2	2	5	7
<i>Political evidence</i>	5	6	6	5	11	11
<i>Finishing with Pro evidence unchallenged</i>	2	3	3	0	5	3
<i>Finishing with Anti evidence unchallenged</i>	5	3	5	2	10	5
Coded items	118	136	172	101	290	237

Table 2: Total and average figures for each coded category in February 2014

In Year 1, the simple numerical preponderance of anti-independence statements over pro-independence statements by a ratio of c3:2 on *Reporting Scotland* and on *STV*, is clear. In February 2014, the ratio for *Reporting Scotland* was almost 1:1 and for *STV* was 11:8. This is an almost perfect, crude, balance and therefore suggests a form of impartiality of the kind so dear to the *BBC*'s mission. *BBC Scotland* had rejected the Year 1 study as of no value to them yet their behaviour, for that month, seems to have changed. The same might be said of the less reactive *STV*.

Equally interesting are the results for *BBC1* and *ITV*, national, broadcasts. Both have dramatically increased coverage and both are marked by a notable imbalance between statements favouring the *Yes Campaign* and those favouring the *No Campaign* of approaching 2:1. This is a notably stronger indicator of bias than the circa 3:2 overall ratio found in Year 1.

A more thorough examination of the *Reporting Scotland* and *STV* figures for February 2014 reveals, also, the disappearance of more subtle forms of bias that had been apparent in Year 1 but their replacement by similar phenomena in the February 2014 results for the 'national' *BBC 1* and *ITV* broadcasts:

1. a tendency to more frequent use of expert advice favouring the No campaign;
2. a tendency for bad news about independence to precede any good news;
3. the continuing personalisation of the debate in Alex Salmond, but only on *ITV*;

4. the continuation of a dogmatic assertion that the economy was the only game in town.

The emphasis on the importance of economic evidence over other forms relating to justice, welfare and the constitution persists across all four programmes despite evidence from a survey by the Church of Scotland and in more anecdotal evidence from journalists and audience participation debates.

This 'snapshot' report for February 2014, is clearly limited by the length of its census period but its continuation of an intensive methodology, as opposed to one based on sampling, allows some confidence in its representation of a key phases in the TV coverage of the Scottish Referendum campaign.

Good Morning Scotland? *Fairness in Radio Reporting the Scottish Referendum Debate in April 2014*

Introduction

Fairness in the First Year, described at the beginning of this chapter, triggered both a 'cyberstorm', after *NewsnetScotland.com* and other websites reported on it, and a brief end to the repressed silence in the mainstream media, leading to the researcher and to the BBC management being called to the Scottish Parliament on March 11th. The second study, *Fairness in February*, suggested that balanced coverage was possible and raises the question of a possible effect of negative publicity on the BBC

Scotland news editors, in January and throughout February 2014. As with the two previous studies, a thorough account of the methodology adopted can be found in the full research reports.

Results:

Code / Date	Total
Negative About Yes	376
Negative About BT	147
Positive About Yes	306
Responses from Yes	283
Positive About BT	70
Responses from BT	176
Challenging Questions to Yes	44
Challenging Questions to BT	34
Good News First	8
Bad News First	15
Interrupt of Yes	24
Attempted Interrupt of Yes	5
In Quick on Yes	5
Total Interrupts Against Yes	34
Interrupt of BT	10
Attempted Interrupt of BT	1
In Quick on BT	0
Total Interrupts Against BT	11
Problems with Evidence Against Yes	30
Problems with Evidence Against BT	3

Table 3: Good Morning Scotland: April 2014: Overall Frequency of Coded Categories

Discussion:

No imbalance in the crude number of statements favourable to the Yes campaign and of those favourable to the Better Together (BT) campaign is evident in these results. Indeed if we add positive statements about Yes to responses from Yes plus negatives about No (736) and compare this total to the total of positive statements about BT and responses from BT plus negatives about no (622) we get a ratio favouring the Yes campaign by 7:6. This is different from the results in the earlier study of evening news coverage which revealed a 3:2 ratio favouring BT. However, this crude measure ignores the fact that many of the positive statements about Yes were reactive and made in response to the quite large number of opening, negative, statements about the Yes campaign (376) while opening negative statements about BT were much fewer (147). So, we have a situation where statements favouring Yes are numerous but commonly reactive and overshadowed at times by large numbers of negative statements about Yes positioned ahead of the former (obviously). Though the potency of statements in terms of impact on the listener is not part of this study, earlier research referred to above does suggest greater impact of bad news especially on themes such as the economy which dominate the examples in these broadcasts. With fifteen broadcasts opening with bad news for the Yes campaign as opposed to eight beginning with good news for the Yes campaign, there is a clear imbalance which may be combining with the large overall number of negative statements about Yes to create a fairly regular (1 in 2) climate unfavourable to the Yes campaign.

Interviewing Techniques:

A further piece of evidence emerging from these broadcast transcripts which seems clearly to favour BT was the tendency of interviewers and interviewees to interrupt, almost interrupt and to cut in quickly to break flow of statements in support of the Yes campaign. The totals give a ratio of almost exactly 3:1 in favour of BT.

The most marked case of aggressive interviewing was James Naughtie's interview of DFM Nicola Sturgeon on 24th, on the subject of pensions and welfare in post-independent Scotland, where Naughtie made seven full interruptions and one failed interruption while Sturgeon attempted only two later in the interview. At one point Naughtie delivered four interruptions in close sequence, two questions which flirted with offense rather than professional challenge and a concluding comment which flirted with patronising dismissal – 'Carry on get back to the point, yah'. Interestingly, Sturgeon's earlier interview (8th April) with Gary Robertson responding to George Robertson's speech on Scotland and NATO was marked by quite aggressive interviewing too with eight interrupts, attempts or cut-ins for two by Sturgeon. The contrast with Naughtie's very passive interview of former NATO chief Lord George Robertson, also on the 8th, was marked. Lord Robertson's doom-laden predictions were met with no interrupts or quick cut-ins and only the most polite of suggestions that the former's language was a bit over-the-top. The former's batting aside of this suggestion and further dramatic claims attracted only a quiet thank you from Naughtie who had travelled to the US for this. Naughtie was to repeat this approach interviewing former (1960/80's) Pentagon adviser on nuclear weapons strategy, Frank Miller, on April 11th, where the latter's commitment to mutually assured destruction

(MAD) and 1960s cold warrior tough-talking was not challenged at all. The repeated treatment of Sturgeon with multiple interruptions and irritable tones is notable and worthy of reflection. No accusation of deliberate discriminatory practice is suggested but this form of aggressive interviewing directed at a confident and articulate woman and not matched with male equivalents such as Lord Robertson or the former Pentagon advisor is unsettling.

A similar contrast can be found in Hayley Miller's interviewing of Weir Group CE, Keith Cochrane, on 3rd, on Weir Group's commissioned research highlighting serious problems ahead for Scotland and her interviewing pro-independence businessman, Kenny Anderson on a Bank of Scotland research report full of very positive news for Scotland's oil industry. With the Weir Group CE, Miller made no challenging questions at all. Indeed she was more likely to try to draw more negative information from him – 'Taxation-wise do you see higher costs or is it hard to know what might happen?' and 'What're the findings on pensions? Do you have concerns on that front?'. With Anderson she probed with 6 negative suggestions like – 'But on the other hand other companies have been expressing concerns. Earlier in the year we had a couple of the majors, BP and Shell, questioning very much what would happen with independence' and 'The problem in a way that we've seen in the past the fluctuations in the oil price and the way that can hit investment in the industry so hard'. Less aggressive approaches, by Gillian Marrs and by Douglas Fraser respectively, to questioning was experienced by Bank of Scotland researcher, Stuart White, on 4th April whose report had been very optimistic about the future of Scotland's oil industry – 'I wonder if they're behind the curve on that' and 'it can only get worse' and by *Business for*

Scotland representative Brandon Malone who faced eight challenges and two interrupts. Further, Fraser's questions to Malone, went so far as to enhance the CBI's own defence of its error by going further than the CBI DG to insist: 'they have been speaking to their members and so have had consultations.....and they've been very upfront about that' despite clear evidence from other CBI members that they had not been consulted and from CBI DG Cridland, himself, that even the CBI board had not expected the decision to join the BT campaign formally.

White's experience contrasts markedly with the deferential non-questioning of the Weir Group Chief Exec (above). Malone's similarly, is in sharp contrast, to Fraser's remarkably restrained and respectful tolerance of very long, repetitive and evasive answers by CBI DG, John Cridland. On several occasions, Cridland was able to make answers with more than ten statements in them, without interruption. SNP minister Fergus Ewing faced three interrupts from Nina Spence on April 9th though, to be fair, his answers stretched out like those of CBI DG John Cridland. SNP MEP, Ian Hudgeton, faced similar levels of probing questions and three interrupts, from Hayley Miller, on 30th April.

There was 'tough' interviewing of two Better Together supporters, shadow PM, Ed Milliband and LibDem minister, Ed Davey, both Westminster figures. Ed Davey, interviewed by Gary Robertson had to deal with eleven quite challenging questions, four interrupts with only one return interrupt from Davey. Robertson did provoke Davey with challenges to his reasoning, on energy markets, such as: 'So you would make a political choice to disadvantage Scotland?' In a similar way, James Naughtie

grilled Ed Milliband quite thoroughly with thirteen questions, three interrupts by Naughtie but four interrupts of Naughtie by Milliband. Naughtie certainly did not behave with the kind of undue respect accorded by him and others to Cridland, Lord Robertson or former Pentagon adviser, Miller. When Milliband promised a better future when he became PM, Naughtie replied quickly – ‘You’re not exactly miles ahead in the polls’.

Taken together, we have evidence of tough professional journalism directed at both sides, but with seven tough interviews of those offering evidence of a positive nature re Scotland’s future (Sturgeon (2), White, Malone, Hudgeton, Ewing), only two grillings of Better Together supporters (Milliband, Davey) and four very soft interviews of those bringing bad news for Yes voters (Robertson, Cochrane, Cridland, Miller). If you add the seven tough interviews of Yes supporters, or evidence-givers, to the four soft interviews of BT supporters and compare these with the two tough interviews of BT supporters, you get a 9:2 ratio which can only be interpreted as a manifestation of some form of underlying bias. See below for explanatory discussion of bias.

Later in the campaign, Brian MacIver, a Sales Consultant who uses Behavioural Analysis, on a Daily basis to 'audit' Sales people's verbal behaviour performance wrote to me on the same matter:

‘I became extremely concerned at the behaviour of Many BBC presenters. In particular, in the case of Louise White of BBC Scotland, I measured the number of times she 'interrupted' the speaker pro-

independence versus pro-union. It was 4:1. The flow of thought was broken, and pro-Independence speakers were distracted from their points. I measured 'talk time', and pro-union speakers were given twice as much talk time, pro-indy speakers were thanked and cut-off. White made 'supportive' statements, or agreement, frequently with Pro-union callers, and often left a question in-the-air after Pro-indy speaker had finished.'

Repetition:

Repetition research in brand-name advertising, demonstrates the effectiveness of short headline-type statements over longer reports in reaching undecided and non-supporters and resulting in the subconscious internalisation of messages directed at voting behaviour (Biocca, 2014). *Good Morning Scotland's* format features regular news summaries, alerts to stories 'coming up later' and newspaper headlines. These are all quite short items of the size commonly used in advertising aimed at subconscious internalisation. It is, of course, not suggested that *GMS* sets out deliberately to achieve such effects. What is suggested by the evidence gathered here is a heavy pattern of over-emphasis in the repetition of bad news for Yes supporters.

On April 2nd, the claim of the SNP's alleged failure to stand up to the big power companies over prices, though contested in a few places, was repeated four times in the space of one hour. On 3rd April, the Weir Group's sponsored research report featuring worries for the Yes campaign was repeated four times in 1.5 hours. On 8th April, one of the more extreme examples can be found. Lord George Robertson's

prediction of disaster if nuclear weapons were moved from the Clyde was repeated in thirteen discrete time slots over three hours. Leaving aside the extended nature of some of these, this means listeners heard what can fairly be called a 'scare story' every 13 or 14 minutes or so. The following day, 9th, the report from Environment Minister, Ed Davey, Lib Dem, suggesting energy bills in Scotland would 'rocket' after independence were repeated eight times over three hours, around the more balanced grilling of Fergus Ewing and Ed Davey himself. Similarly repetitious to the Lord Robertson statements on nuclear weapons on the 8th, the combined comments of First Sealdor Sambalas and Defence Secretary Phillip Hammond on the 15th were to produce a degree of repetition that was hypnotic if not comedic. On thirteen occasions, different announcers or quotes referred uncritically to threats of danger or of ostracising for Scotland. Likewise, on the 22nd, former PM, Gordon Brown's leaking of Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) figures suggesting Scotland would be unable to meet the cost of pensions were repeated eight times over three hours. The DWP figures were returned to on the 24th and the story was repeated eight times.

The repetition of good news for yes supporters did occur. On the 4th, the Bank of Scotland report of promising prospects for the Scottish oil industry featured seven times but around extended and aggressive questioning of those speaking for the report. The SNP conference and the call for labour voters to support the Yes campaign attracted five repeated announcements with limited criticism on the 12th. On the 23rd the FM's speech in Carlisle, making a positive case for an ongoing social union with, especially, the north of England was uncritically repeated six times. FM Salmond, again, featured extensively on the 28th as he prepared to speak in Brussels on Scotland

in the EU. However the eleven separate announcements were mostly followed by criticism from the BT perspective. Finally, on the 30th SNP optimism about the European Elections was given considerable space over the three hours with seven separate items though, again, commonly followed by contradiction from a BT source.

The repetition of bad news for Better together also featured. On the 21st, the first part of the CBI drama attracted four items of coverage, then, on the 26th the CBI DG, John Cridland's attempted recovery of dignity for the group featured six times.

So we have seven days featuring sometimes very high frequency of repetition of negative reports for the Yes campaign, five days of repeated good news for the Yes campaign and two days when the CBI's attempted entry then withdrawal from the field drew much attention though little hard critique from interviewers.

Overall, this suggests less evidence of imbalance though the intensity of the reporting of Lord George Robertson, the First Sealord, Defence Secretary Hammond, Gordon Brown and Environment Minister Davey combined with complete absence of critique other than for Davey increases the inequality of the treatment of the two sides in favour of Better Together.

Examples of evidence worthy of critique:

Quite a marked imbalance of 30:3 or 10:1 in favour of BT, in the relative use of evidence favourable to BT yet subject to critique of its quality is perhaps the clearest marker of underlying bias in the broadcasts. Note , it is not suggested here that this

derives from conscious conspiracy on the part of editors, reporters or interviewers but rather that this derives often from a subconscious internalisation of establishment perspectives and values. See below for further discussion on how content patterning might be explained.

On 4th April, the repeated association of Kenny Anderson of *Anderson Construction* with *Business for Scotland* reminded the researcher of the highly respectful and uncritical treatment of another business man, Keith Cochrane of *Weir Group plc*, the previous day when his BT alignment, reported elsewhere in the media was not mentioned. This is a clear example, perhaps accidental and perhaps intentional, to enable the portrayal of one set of evidence, favouring BT, as untainted by ideology and the other as clearly biased in favour of the Yes campaign even though the report had come from the Bank of Scotland and not the yes campaign.

Weir's research study was produced by *Oxford Economics* and characterised by *Weir Group's* CE as 'independent'. Miller reminds us that *Weir Group* is a FTSE 100 company. How this measure of size translates to credibility is interesting in that she does not remind that us that the *Weir Group plc* group had only weeks before been fined by the Scottish Judiciary, £3 million, after they pled guilty to breaching sanctions in terms of the *Iraq (United Nations Sanction) Order 2000* thus compromising the future of the *Oil For Food Programme (OFFP)* and, consequently, contributing to the deaths of thousands of Iraqi children. The lead researcher is currently chair of a research ethics committee which pays particular attention to sponsorship where the ethical standards and interests of the sponsor are hidden, unlike this study openly

acknowledged as sponsored by a Yes-supporting group. No *Weir Group* executives were punished for this behaviour (<http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/home-news/the-bribe-1.1075337>) which corresponds clearly to a form of treason. As for the *Oxford Economics* consultancy, their independence and competence requires confirmation. Their report on the advantages of outsourcing social housing is described by the *Red Brick Housing Policy* blog as containing lack of definition of key terms, basic errors and, overall, revealing 'economic illiteracy' (<http://redbrickblog.wordpress.com/2012/09/24/mickeymouseconomics>).

Further, the group is accused, in a report by the no doubt equally 'independent', *Center for Economic and Policy Research*, in Washington DC, of making a forecast, which is 'completely misleading, and relies on a basic misunderstanding of widely accepted methods of comparing international standards of living' (Schmitt & Rosnick, 2008). Having the word 'Oxford' in the title does not mean the critical faculties of journalists and editors can be put on standby any more than '*University of the West of Scotland*' can justify switching them to dismissive. The passive, complicit (?) and completely uncritical interviewing of the above *Weir Group* representative and unthinking acceptance of one research paper of clearly market-oriented bias, suggests a very low level of editorial or journalistic competence.

More common throughout are examples like that, also on the 4th when Labour MP, Frank Doran, is able to refer to a '**massive** skills shortage', companies '**cutting each other's throats** to recruit' rare staff and of 'problems for **every** company' with no evidence offered or demanded for such dramatic assertions. Similarly, the interview

of Lord Robertson by James Naughtie on the 8th allows the former to make a number of confident predictions authenticated only by his previous experience and unchallenged by Naughtie. On the 11th, Naughtie goes on to interview former Pentagon adviser, Frank Miller, whose equally negative views are simply accepted with none of the background on Miller one would expect from a journalist. A quick internet search reveals, in a peer-reviewed source (Sauer, 2005: 22), Miller as a bullish, superannuated, cold warrior still thinking fondly of how his championing of mutually assured destruction had won against more nuanced defence strategies in his time in the Pentagon in the 1960s to 1980s, thirty years ago. On the same day, Naughtie himself, claims that the wider world is watching Scotland based, one must assume, on his interviews with two defence hawks now detached from current realities in NATO. Also on the same day, Glen Campbell refers to only a 'slight' narrowing of the polls despite evidence of a gap which according to a New Statesman report in April, has narrowed from 24 to 8.

Retired professors, often 'emeritus' and 'visiting', like retired government advisers and ministers, are often found on TV and radio enthusiastically sharing their views with respectful interviewers. Visiting professors in media-related areas are often professionals who bring a particular kind of vocational authenticity to professional/skills-based programmes. The value of this is not disputed but the problem arises when these individuals, perhaps forgetting their limitations find that the title inflates their actual value and widens their apparent competence to speak. Combine this inflated value with easy availability and we get such people pontificating, evidence-free. Coincidentally, the Head of Corporate Affairs at BBC Scotland, who

found such flaws in the first report that he felt obliged to report it to the researcher's employer, is a visiting professor with no apparent evidence of research expertise in the cv, not even a PhD.

One of the most marked examples was that on 12th April where David Hutcheson, Visiting Professor in Media Policy at Glasgow Caledonian University was interviewed by Graham Stewart on Scottish broadcasting after independence. The interview followed on from an exchange with the current DG of Irish broadcaster RTE, Kevin Backhurst. Backhurst had given a very informative fact-based and contemporary account of RTE's self-sufficiency and quite limited need to buy from BBC – only Eastenders! Stewart's questioning fairly presented the Scottish Government's position, from the White Paper, on a future relationship with the BBC and refrained from the aggressive, interrupting style of some of his colleagues. Hutcheson's responses, however, were long, one-sided, more polemical than academic and doom-laden for Scottish audiences but devoid of evidence despite predicting confidently with numbers. Referring twice to the need to 'do the sums' without ever offering the elements of these sums, Hutcheson went on to assure Scots that they would be paying up to £250 as opposed to the current £150 for a TV licence – 'it's gonna cost us a lot more'.

Though mentioned only once in 'Headlines', on the 23rd, Professor Emerita in History at Edinburgh University, Gill Stevenson, on the front page of *The Times*, rejected Alex Salmond's attempt to reach out to friends in England as 'a fig leaf to hide anti-British sentiments' and without any sense of irony, accused Salmond of making the 'usual

assertion backed by no evidence'. Stevenson is an authority on Nazi Germany with no evidence in her cv of research into Scottish politics or history. If her intention was to associate the racist, genocidal, nationalism of the Nazis with the civic, social democratic and inclusive nationalism of the SNP leader, then this is both embarrassingly, for her, ill-informed and insulting to Scottish civic society.

On defence matters, retired military officers redesigned as consultant emerge. Again the value of the first-hand experience of military affairs does not necessarily translate into insight into matters of national policy on defence in periods after retirement. We have seen already the archaic, cold-warrior mentality of former Pentagon and NATO personnel. Retired Lieutenant Colonel, Stuart Crawford, currently a consultant on corporate communications strategy, was interviewed on the 15th on the matter of Scotland's relationship with NATO, following on from the warnings on the same issue from Lord George Robertson and the First Sealord and Defence Secretary Hammond, Crawford sings 'from the same song sheet' describing the Scottish Government's position as 'contradictory at best and disingenuous at worst' and warns that 'removal of Trident from the Clyde is demanding, in effect, the unilateral disarmament of the UK'. The latter claim also made by Lord Robertson is not probed despite the clear need to do so in the public interest. Crawford goes on to tell us 'the Americans have been quite clear on this. I've spoken to them and they have stated that if an independent Scottish Government were to demand the removal of Trident from the Clyde, that same independent Scotland's accession to NATO would be either blocked or delayed for a very long time'. The Obama administration's view of Scottish independence is clear – 'We'll stay neutral' (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics->

21535425). The only expressions of concern have come from Lord Robertson and a retired Pentagon adviser who is no longer in the reference current political or military leaders. As for NATO, there is clear evidence of the acceptability of the membership of small non-nuclear members in the appointment of Norwegian and Danish politicians to leadership of the alliance in recent years, referred to by DFM Sturgeon in her interview with James Naughtie.

So, overall we have eight quite marked examples of the expert witness or evidence of dubious value to the debate, supporting the BT campaign, and no balancing examples the other way.

Some weeks later, a Facebook contact sent me the link (<http://pinkindustry.wordpress.com/>) to a particularly shocking expose of unethical practice but with the evidence generated being treated with respect by MSM. This concerned the delightfully named 'Carrington Dean Scottish Teen Money Survey Scam'. Carrington Dean, a 'combine all your debts' company with connections in the Scottish media undertook a survey via *SurveyMonkey* asking questions about personal debt, which is acceptable, but adding questions about respondents' confidence in their financial future after independence. The latter were badly designed question in the sense of prompting negative emotional responses. *PinkIndustry's* anonymous reporter wrote:

The survey was also used to attack independence in the Times, May 19, 2014 which used possibly the most ridiculous headline of all: "Young voters set to say

‘no’; Yes camp has not won economic argument, poll shows Economic doubts set young ones against independence.”

And:

‘[This survey is} what the Times called “the most comprehensive undertaken into teenage attitudes” which demonstrates a contempt for their readers typical of the Times. This is a Facebook poll, conducted via Facebook by ‘Your Debt Expert’ (another one of Peter Dean’s companies) with Carrington Dean providing prizes for the teenagers who rushed through the questions to win a Playstation. The survey simply used ‘Survey Monkey’ to determine its findings: there’s no real survey design here.

Summary:

Taken together we have the marked imbalance in interviewing approaches applied to Yes and BT supporters/evidence, favouring BT by 9:2. In terms of repetition of negative news/warnings, the picture is less clear but still favours BT over Yes due to the highly intense repetition of the warnings from George Robertson, the First Sealord and Phillip Hammond, on defence, and from Gordon Brown on pensions and welfare. Finally, there is the most marked imbalance in the use of evidence of dubious validity to strengthen BT arguments on a ratio of at least 8:0 in the more serious cases.

August 2014: BBC Bias by Omission

When my research revealing BBC Bias against the Yes campaign was published, several people correctly identified that I had not exposed the way good news stories about Scottish independence were often ignored by the BBC. At the time, I knew that to do so would make it easy for critics to accuse me of selection bias. It's more objective to simply look at what is broadcast and find what is there in the editorial selection and in presentation so that is what I did. But my critics were correct in that bias by omission is a very important form of bias. So, I thought I'd point to examples of it now in the last few weeks before the vote and disseminate them as widely as I can. I set up a Facebook page (at my age!) and invited friends to contribute. I was already indebted to the very well-informed Cindie Reiter who sent me the very useful Adam Smith Institute piece below and to *newsnetscotland.com* which on a daily basis provides a powerful counterbalance to BBC Scotland's bias. In only two days, three excellent examples emerged, countering the criticism of alleged weaknesses in the Yes campaign – currency, the banks, detail – and from high status 'establishment' sources which former chancellors will be hard placed to contradict. It's a pity FM Salmond didn't make much of them in his debate with Alistair Darling. BBC Scotland ignored them all.

On Tuesday 5th August, former RBS Chief Executive and Chairman Sir George Mathewson in the Financial Times of 4th August, 2014, wrote: 'A split from the UK would not threaten Scottish banks. Ignore the unionists' scaremongering about the

financial sector.' <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/ecd409fc-1b37-11e4-b64900144feabdc0.html?siteedition=uk#axzz39WsfLS8j>

On Wednesday 6th August, in a press release from the Adam Smith Institute, champion of liberal capitalism and no friend to the Social Democracy apparently favoured by Scots, Kate Andrews, Research Director, demolishes Better Together's suggestion that the SNP's lack of a plan B matters so much. She writes: "An independent Scotland could flourish either by using the pound sterling without the permission of the rUK (or by setting up a "ScotPound" pegged to sterling through a currency board, which would achieve a similar end). This 'sterlingization' would emulate a number of Latin American countries that use the US Dollar without an official agreement with the US government. Because Scottish banks would not have access to a currency-printing lender of last resort, they would have to make their own provisions for illiquidity, and would necessarily act more prudently.

"Scotland actually had this system of 'free banking' during the 18th and 19th centuries, during which time its economy boomed relative to England's and its banks were remarkably secure. And Panama, which uses the US Dollar in this way, has the seventh most stable financial system in the world. Everyone says Mr Salmond needs a Plan B if the rUK does not agree to a currency union with Scotland. But unilateral adoption should be Plan A, making Scotland's economy more stable and secure. The UK's obstinacy would be Scotland's opportunity."

<http://www.adamsmith.org/news/press-release-an-independent-scotland-should-keep-the-pound-without-ruks-permission/>

On Wednesday 6th August - What exactly happens if you vote no? We've heard repeated calls for the Yes campaign to provide more information on currency, the EU and pensions. BBC commentators have encouraged viewers to see these as areas of failure by, especially, Alex Salmond. Yet we hear no real criticism of the No campaign's failure to explain exactly what voting No would mean. So much for balance? Ian Bell of the Glasgow Herald wrote beginning with this: 'If the long argument over independence has had a sub-text, it has been the demand for information. To hear it told, there's a national shortage. Nervous voters are asked to make a leap into the forbidding dark without so much as a few flimsy parachutes of facts. So the No side would have it, at any rate. Yet where the future is concerned they don't stock many facts themselves because that is not, it seems, their job. Will David Cameron and Nick Clegg be offering another coalition if we vote No? Will Scotland remain in membership of the European Union beyond 2017? Which coalition deeds - which deeds specifically - will be undone if Ed Miliband wins office?...

'September 11th 2014: The Day of the Three Leaders: BBC News favours the No Campaign by a ratio of more than 2 to 1

Using again the same methods as in *Fairness in the First Year* and looking first at the total number of statements by presenters, politicians, business people and citizens, I counted 33 supportive of the No Campaign or attacking the Yes Campaign. By contrast

only 16 statements supported the Yes Campaign or attacked the No Campaign. This ratio of slightly more than 2 to 1 is more biased in favour of No than I had found in February. In February I had also found a tendency for anti-Yes statements to precede pro-Yes statements forcing the latter onto the defensive. This time in only one of six identifiable blocks of discourse did pro-Yes statements precede pro-No statements. This clearly presents the No argument as somehow 'normal' and requires the Yes argument to justify itself.

Again, in February, I had drawn attention a regular tendency for the Yes Campaign to be conflated with the personal wishes of Alex Salmond. Through a process, mainly used by opposition politicians then adopted uncritically by many presenters, the First Minister was demonised and the Yes Campaign was, by association with him only, undermined. In the year-long study published in February this had only happened 35 times in total. In 30 minutes, on 11th September, BBC 1 made 15 references to Alex Salmond 'accusing', 'launching', 'knowing' and so on. The Yes campaign was mentioned only once by a student 23 minutes into the broadcast. Ed Miliband was mentioned only once, 'being drowned out' and the other leaders not at all. The effect is surely to portray the Yes Campaign as a one-man band despite a signed up support of over 1 million.

In February, I reported a 22 to 4 ratio of evidence favouring allegedly impartial sources attacking the Yes Campaign over a period, again, of a complete year. On Thursday 11th, there were 7 cases of evidence being used inaccurately to support the No campaign with none supporting the Yes Campaign. In every case criticism of the Yes position was

answered by a quote from Alex Salmond simply rejecting the evidence without offering counter-evidence. Sometimes the inaccurate use of evidence was by politicians and left unquestioned by reporters and presenters. Sometimes it was made by the latter. For example, Alistair Darling appeared twice suggesting that ‘every’ Scottish bank would move ‘business’ south of the border and was not contradicted despite the fact that only three banks had talked of moving their registered office and that none had suggested loss of jobs or business in Scotland. Also Darling stated inaccurately that ASDA stores had announced that prices would go up after independence when they had only suggested they might go up or down depending on arrangements. Most notable, however, was reporter Nick Robinson’s assertion that Salmond had not answered his question at the press conference. Salmond’s extended corrections and put-down of the reporter had already been circulated around the Internet and can be found on Youtube.

Later, reporter Kemal Ahmed warned of banks moving to England yet failed to remind us that none of these banks are, in any meaningful way, Scottish banks, but are already owned by UK (Lloyds, TSB) and Australian (Clydesdale) companies or by the UK government in the case of RBS. Kemal then goes on to introduce Owen Kelly of Scottish Financial Enterprise as ‘the man who speaks for the industry north of the border’ and who worries about our reputation as a ‘stable place to do business’ if large companies do not register here. Yet minutes later, Ahmed introduces Martin Gilbert, of Aberdeen Asset Management, flatly contradicting this view.

Bias by omission is difficult to demonstrate as objectively as bias by insertion and distortion. With the latter, the evidence is before your eyes while with the former you can be accused of cherry-picking to suit your argument. So, with some reservation, here is evidence that the BBC 1 broadcast omitted and which would have helped with balance. First and most important for the viewers and the subsequent referendum voting, is the evidence that the 'additional powers' being offered by Gordon Brown, encouraged by the three unionist parties, seem unlikely to be offered after a No vote. Not only did the Calman Commission reject additional taxation powers as unworkable and the Edinburgh Agreement make the offer, at this stage, illegal, but only one day before the broadcast, House of Commons Leader, William Hague, made clear, in the Herald, that the offer of additional powers was 'not government policy' and only 'akin to a statement in a general election campaign' ie breakable. The widespread hostility, evidenced in opinion polls, to any preferential treatment for Scotland is apparent from a quick browse of the Daily Mail or Telegraph. That a No vote is more likely to lead to punishment rather than to reward is completely absent from BBC reporting.

With regard to threats of increased prices from supermarkets with HQs in England, BBC reporters missed the rather obvious question. How do Aldi and Lidl operate so successfully and cheaply so far from their HQs in Germany? These stores are currently eating into the markets of the bigger chains. Will the latter impose higher prices than in the rest of the UK, or compete as we understand companies typically do.

It was coverage of the above kind that was to prompt English reporter Paul Mason to write 'Not since Iraq have I seen BBC News working at propaganda strength like this. So glad I'm out of there.'

September 19th, 2014, BBC Scotland Look the Other Way as the Ugly Face of Better Together Appears in Glasgow's George Square

As groups of men wearing BT badges and with both BT banners and Union flags, entered George Square from opposite ends, surrounding mixed groups of Yes campaigners BBC reports on BBC's Reporting Scotland at 6.30pm referred to 'News is coming in of some disruption and scuffles.' Social media reports, as it happened, described a coordinated attack by Better Together supporters on Yes supporters, showed a dominance of Union Flags and the dominating presence of aggressive adult and teenage males. This was presented as scuffles involving both sides.



The reporter on the scene talks of a change of atmosphere twice but does not explain how this came about. He talks briefly of more union flags and a loyalist element as if this disconnects them from the continuum of Better Together support (see the images above). The same disconnect had not been made for the Yes campaign when the latter group was accused of 'turning ugly' after eggs were thrown at MP Jim Murphy.

Again, the BBC reporter mentioned 'people' leaving after the 'loyalist element' came into the square as the 'loyalists' charged straight into the 'crowd'. This might that have been more accurately reported as 'BT supporting fascists (see images) charge straight into formerly peaceful Yes supporters?'.

In the studio, *Reporting Scotland* presenter Jackie Bird and two unionist politicians note that 'we don't want that on our streets' but there is no acknowledgement of where the blame lies for the attack. The next day (Saturday 20th), the BBC website persisted with 'Scottish referendum: Police separate rival groups in Glasgow' (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-29288249>), suggesting comparable violence by 'both sides' quite contrary to the evidence flooding social media. Those attacking Yes supporters are characterised by the BBC as 'people waving union jacks' or 'Union supporters' despite the widespread wearing and carrying of Better Together symbols evident in the images above. The BT association is missed. If egg-throwing is part of the behavioural continuum of the Yes campaign's ideology, a yobbish element, then why are the fascists not part of the BT continuum?

<http://blog.independencelive.net/the-bbcs-even-hand/>

The Dirty Dozen: The Case Against BBC Scotland: GA Ponsonby

One of the major contributors to the critique of the BBC, with numerous pieces mainly on *newsnetscotland.com*'s website, was GA Ponsonby. Particularly devastating but, as usual, ignored by mainstream media, was the catalogue of twelve examples of major 'manipulation that has destroyed the BBC's reputation'. Ponsonby lists these in no particular but suggests that the last is the worst. Here is an extract but readers are strongly recommended to check out the full version online with the audio and video inserts which capture the manipulation graphically:

Number Twelve - Any Questions

The show, broadcast on Friday 20th August, heard Baroness Deech claim that Scots lived off of benefits paid for by English subsidies and that the release of Abdelbaset Al Megrahi had embarrassed the rest of the UK. The comments, from both guests, were met with enthusiastic loud applause and howls of laughter from the audience in Harvest Fields Centre in Sutton Coldfield.'

Number Eleven - The Salmond/Swinney manipulated video

On November 24th 2010, a debate took place in the Holyrood chamber. BBC Scotland's Reporting Scotland ran a news item that evening in which they showed the First Minister apparently shaking his head in mocking fashion following a parliamentary statement by John Swinney. However, when Newsnet Scotland viewed the actual footage supplied by official Holyrood cameras we were shocked to find the footage aired by the BBC had been manipulated and was not in fact what had taken place. As can be seen, Salmond wasn't mocking John Swinney at all, he was in fact mocking the then Scottish Lib Dem leader Tavish Scott.

Number Ten – The Pre-election Poll

Prior to the 2011 Scottish elections BBC Scotland conducted a survey to find out what policy area the Scottish public deemed the most important. A Labour policy on health waiting times 'won'. The broadcaster had initially claimed that it would survey the public on the manifesto commitments from each party. However it later emerged that the survey had been carried out after the Labour party manifesto launch and before the SNP manifesto launch. The BBC poll came close to breaking the corporation's own guidelines on conducting polls in the midst of election campaigns. The reason for this guideline was reinforced when almost as soon as the BBC headlined the poll, Scottish Labour altered their campaign thrust and began highlighting their waiting time pledge, the one the BBC had said 'won' the popularity poll.

Number Nine - Montenegro and ethnic cleansing

In January 2011 a diplomatic row erupted after the then Scottish Labour leader Iain Gray attempted to link the independence of Montenegro with ethnic cleansing and war crimes. Montenegro reacted to the slur with fury, firing off official letters of complaint to Labour leader Ed Miliband and Iain Gray. Marijana Zivkovic, chargé d'affaires at Montenegro's British embassy, expressed her "deep regret" at the Scottish Labour leader's comments. Ms Zivkovic pointed out that their nation was the only former Yugoslav republic to stay out of the Balkan conflict and actually provided shelter to hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing the bloodshed. The diplomatic row made front page headlines and was carried by newspapers in Scotland and England. However, in a move that provoked controversy, BBC Scotland adopted a news blackout and refused to report the story.

Number Eight – The Fabricated Survey

The 2011 Scottish election campaign wasn't the first to witness questionable coverage on the part of the BBC. The 2007 election, the first won by the SNP, saw a quite blatant attempt by the BBC to mislead the Scottish electorate in the run-up to the vote. In 2007 during the campaign for the Scottish election the BBC hosted a live TV debate, a Newsnight special 'Act of Disunion,' which was shown on January 16. Quizzing Alex Salmond on the prospects for businesses in an independent Scotland, host Jeremy Paxman confronted the SNP leader with what he claimed were results from a survey carried out by the BBC. According to the BBC presenter not one of fifty companies the corporation had questioned supported the SNP's independence plans....However an alert viewer became suspicious of the claims broadcast by the BBC and endeavoured to try to find out if they were indeed accurate. It subsequently emerged that the BBC had manufactured the poll result and only seven firms had replied to the BBC questionnaire. Contrary to Paxman's claims, a majority had declined to express a view 'one way or the other', two had declared 'neutrality' and one leading business said 'it didn't care.'

Number Seven - Banks and the misleading headline

One of the early issues being promoted by those who opposed independence was an idea that an independent Scotland could not have withstood the financial crisis.... The Saturday Morning interview was a typical format with viewer's questions being read out by BBC Scotland's political editor Brian Taylor and Ms Sturgeon answering them. Mr Taylor asked a question on the banking crisis and how an independent Scotland would have coped. Nicola Sturgeon replied that an independent Scotland would have worked with the rest of the UK in order to ensure the difficulties experienced by RBS and HBOS were addressed.... The

answer, whether you agree with it or not, was clear, Scotland could have coped with the banking crisis and would have worked with the rest of the UK to avert catastrophe, the same way as other countries had cooperated with one another when banks that crossed their jurisdictions....There was another point contained in Ms Sturgeon's answer, the fact that America, Australia and Europe all contributed to the saving of RBS. Indeed, the US Federal Reserve contributed a total of \$600 billion to the bailout of both RBS and HBOS. However, here is how BBC Scotland reported Nicola Sturgeon's answer: 'Sturgeon says an independent Scotland would have relied on UK for RBS bailout.'

Number Six - The EU and Foreign Officials

In April 2013 the independence campaign was in its relative infancy. Both sides were just one year old and neither had yet established themselves in the minds of the electorate. The debate, as it was, wasn't inspired and even the so-called Project Fear had not truly left the ground....However one issue was moving centre stage - the EU membership of a newly independent Scotland. A narrative, promoted by Unionist politicians and media commentators, was taking shape that suggested Scotland would find it difficult to remain inside the European Union in the event of independence. The issue hovered around the fringes of debate for a while until one morning a BBC reporter called Glenn Campbell filed a report that suggested at least one current EU member was against Scottish independence. An item broadcast on Radio Scotland in March heard Campbell's colleague Gary Robertson tell listeners that the Government of Luxembourg had "broken the mould" and had come out against a Yes vote....Within days of the item appearing on the BBC, Luxembourg officials complained that they had been misrepresented.....According to the Luxembourg's English speaking news organisation Wort, the phrase 'going separate ways' was not a reference to Scottish independence but was in fact a reference to the UK Government's anti-EU European stance.

No correction or apology was ever issued by BBC Scotland. The BBC would later find itself in hot water over its reporting of the the issue of the EU, as we will find out later.

Number Five: The Doctored Photographs

One of the key battlegrounds in the independence debate has been the traditional working class vote. This sector of Scottish society has historically given its loyalty to the Labour party....In early 2013 a new movement was emerging from within the Scottish Labour party....Scottish Labour for Independence ...However back in the early part of 2013 the Labour party was still arguing that claims of significant support for Yes amongst its members was all but non-existent. The party was - and still to some extent is - claiming that Labour for Independence was a front set up by the SNP....A BBC Scotland online article written by reporter Glenn Campbell contained an image which had come from the official No campaign group 'Better Together'. The image had been altered to include the phrase 'SNP Cllr' beside three men who were pictured holding an Labour For lindependence banner which proclaimed - 'Yes is the future!'...The images distributed by Better Together - and published by the BBC - had in fact been cropped in order to remove other individuals who were holding a Yes Scotland banner. In the images, far from trying to present themselves as members of Labour for Independence, the SNP councillors had simply joined LFI members in a joint photograph showing all of the group. The two sets of Yes groups had been attending a pro-Yes event.

Number Four: The 'anti-English' phone-in

One of the most repugnant claims levelled against supporters of independence is that they are motivated by feelings of anti-Englishness. It has been a recurring theme throughout this current

independence debate and has been thrown around by a succession of elected Unionist politicians.....On December 12th an official Scottish government report showed that racist attacks against a group describing themselves as 'white British' had increased by twenty four per cent in the last year....The statistic resulted in newspaper headlines suggesting, or in the case of one newspaper asserting, that attacks on English people was on the increase....That day, listeners to Radio Scotland's morning news programme Good Morning Scotland heard presenters reading out the aforementioned newspaper headlines. This was followed by the host of *Call Kaye*, Kaye Adams, who in a trailer for her own phone in show said: "So, are we seeing a rise of anti-English sentiment in Scotland; up fifty percent apparently over the last seven years."....However what listeners to the show were unaware of was that further analysis of the official figures was indeed carried out and showed that anti-English attacks in Scotland had actually **decreased** by 17%. The whole BBC Scotland radio show had been based on a lie, and a very dangerous one at that.

Number Three: Trimble and Northern Ireland

Another tactic, although mercifully rare, adopted by opponents of Scottish independence is to somehow try to link the drive for a Yes vote to the situation in Northern Ireland. When it raises its head the usual claim is that independence for Scotland will somehow lead to a resurgence in violence in the province....In a news report in May this year, BBC Scotland did exactly that. The corporation misreported comments from a former Northern Ireland First Minister claiming he said a Yes vote would threaten peace in the province. ...In its broadcast and online news reports on comments from Lord Trimble, the broadcaster said the politician viewed Scottish independence as "the biggest threat to peace in Northern Ireland"....However, claims by the BBC that Lord Trimble had said Scottish independence would lead to a return to violence in the province were challenged by the former First

Minister himself who accused the BBC of attributing views to him that he did not hold.

Number Two: NHS Hospital Infections

The NHS has become one of the key issues of the independence referendum. It's not difficult to see why as the institution remains one of the most revered of all public services....Over the last twelve months BBC Scotland been at the centre of several controversies involving its reporting of NHS waiting times. BBC Scotland's health correspondent Eleanor Bradford has been taken to task by this site for appearing to deliberately exaggerate some figures and/or apply a political agenda to some of her reports.....However probably the worst example of deliberate false reporting by BBC Scotland on the issue of the NHS took place in early January 2012 when in several BBC broadcasts a Labour MSP was allowed to accuse the SNP Government of having left Scottish hospitals so poorly maintained that they were the most infected in Europe.... Newsnet Scotland was able to reveal that the claims were entirely false, the data used by the Labour MSP was in fact collated in 2005/6, at a time when her own party was in power at Holyrood.

Number One: Guilty - The Creighton Scandal

The BBC in Scotland is not answerable to any organisation in Scotland. Incredible as it may seem, Freedom of Information laws do not apply nor does the Scottish Government have any power over the institution north of the border....In order to seek redress, people living in Scotland have only one course of action - a complaint to the corporation's own watchdog. The BBC Trust is notoriously loathe to find against the broadcaster, however one incident from 2013 was so outrageous that the Trust found against BBC Scotland....Raymond Buchanan had been sent to Ireland to cover a trip by Deputy First Minister Nicola Sturgeon. The trip to Dublin would normally have

garnered some positive publicity for the Scottish Government....While there, Buchanan was to interview a little known politician named Lucinda Creighton. Ms Creighton was Ireland's European Affairs Minister and the country was about to take up its EU Presidency role. On January 25th 2013, an item appeared on flagship news programme Reporting Scotland....When the interview aired on that evening a careful edit and not so careful voiceover by Mr Buchanan appeared to apply a wholly different emphasis to the Irish Minister's unedited interview....The Irish Minister and UK Government Minister Michael Moore, we were told, shared the same view.

Unionists seized on the BBC broadcast and began attacking Scotland's Deputy First Minister Nicola Sturgeon who had insisted Scotland could negotiate the continuation of its EU membership from within the EU....It was an open and shut case. The BBC had misled viewers into believing Ms Creighton held views that she clearly did not. A complaint was lodged against the BBC on February 2nd. Despite the Irish Minister distancing herself from the claims being made by the BBC and very clearly stating her views were in line with those of the Scottish Government, the BBC refused to report her statement in any news broadcasts.

In December 2013, Newsnet Scotland learned that the BBC Trust had finally come to a decision on the complaint made almost one year earlier. It found BBC Scotland guilty of having breached editorial guidelines on accuracy. In a damning verdict, the Trust said the item on Reporting Scotland had "misled" viewers.

<http://www.newsnetScotland.scot/index.php/affairs-scotland/8932-the-dirty-dozen-the-case-against-bbc-scotland-part-1>

<http://www.newsnetscotland.scot/index.php/affairs-scotland/9619-the-dirty-dozen-the-case-against-bbc-scotland-part-2>

Concluding Thoughts:

All of the above evidence is only a small part of that which could have been gathered and presented here. A multitude of blogs, Facebook pages and Twitter threads presented evidence spotted by the army of unpaid researchers. Many wrote directly to me after my appearance at Holyrood. They were energised and angry and determined to share with others in a way that would have delighted the philosophers of democracy dead before the advent of social media. Many offered clear evidence of mainstream media neglect and bias and of determined but mechanistic denial from complaints departments. Taken together, there is clear evidence of overwhelming, as it turned out, bias in the broadcasting of the news about independence, on television and radio in Scotland, in the two years before the actual vote. The role of the print media and of social media, follows.

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Chapter 3: Evidence of Bias in the Scottish and UK Press Coverage



Figure 2: *Daily Record* Front-page on Tuesday 16th September 2014

While the Scottish and UK broadcasters have a formal requirement of impartiality in matters of politics, the press do not. Two days before the vote, the *Daily Record*, Scotland's second-biggest seller (after the *Scottish Sun*) at around 200 000, played what some commentators and politicians saw as the winning card for Better Together. Evidence for this view comes from a poll (*lordashcrofthpolls.com*, 2014) suggesting 25%

felt it was the promise of new powers for the devolved Scottish Parliament that led them to vote NO.

The risks of becoming independent looked too great when it came to things like the currency, EU membership, the economy, jobs and prices.	47%
A strong attachment to the UK and its shared history, culture and traditions.	27%
A NO vote would still mean extra powers for the Scottish Parliament together with the security of remaining part of the UK, giving the best of both worlds.	25%

Table 4: Extra Powers Perceptions

<http://lordashcrofthpolls.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Lord-Ashcroft-Polls-Referendum-day-poll-summary-1409191.pdf>

Apparently signing up all three Westminster party leaders to a guaranteed promise of considerable additional powers, along the lines of the ‘devomax’ option, ‘The Vow’ appealed to the large numbers of voters thought to have favoured the devomax option two years before. Over-confident of victory, in 2012, without giving anything away to the Yes campaign, David Cameron had rejected its inclusion in the ballot. With opinion polls closing in 2014, and one suggesting a Yes victory, Better Together had panicked and resurrected devomax in the last few weeks. To do this was, of course, breaking the terms, especially the ‘purdah’ period, of the Edinburgh Agreement which like other referendum treaties forbade changes to the terms of the question in the last 28 days. The UK government insisted it had not broken the purdah rule because the BT campaign itself, not the government, had made the offer of devomax. Given that the BT campaign could not, itself, actually guarantee any offer of additional powers and that only the UK government could offer them if it were not barred by the purdah rule

suggests quite a dishonest move. Even more disturbing was the suggestion that the actual Vow had been written by *Daily Record* staff and not politicians. There was no official document, only the *Daily Record* mock-up.

Looking simply at the stance on independence and circulation figures of the bigger Scottish Newspapers, the imbalance in favour of BT is clear and unmistakeable. Only the, one-day-a-week, *Sunday Herald*, with a circulation of only around 25 000, openly supported independence and then, only explicitly from May 2014. It had featured some independence-supporting material earlier. After 'coming-out' it's sales doubled to around 50 000. However, the *Sunday Post* and *Scotland on Sunday*, said vote No. The UK Sundays - *Sunday Times*, *Sunday Telegraph*, *Mail on Sunday* and *Sunday Express* urged their readers to vote No and all warned their readers about the economic and political dangers of independence. The *Scotsman*, *Guardian* and the *Financial Times* did the same. So, we have around 10 big circulation newspapers openly telling their readers to vote No. You might argue the *Scottish Sun* and the *Glasgow Herald* held back but did not support independence.

What can we say about impact here? I think, some. I've already argued for a degree of influence for broadcasters as they are held in higher general esteem than newspaper reporters. Even in the case of broadcasters, I've only argued for impact where they report bad news on the economy. So, in the particular case of the Scottish Referendum campaign, where the broadcasters covered economic issues heavily and, indeed, might have been responsible for the idea that such was the only issue that concerned voters, we can probably attribute to broadcasting a role in winning the No vote. Though I have no empirical evidence comparable to my own studies of TV and

radio, my long experience of media analysis and reading about it suggests that newspapers tend only to reinforce existing viewpoints in the readers who mostly buy that newspaper because they already agree with it on key issues. Perhaps newspapers will scare readers into being sure they turn out and support their preferences in elections but it seems doubtful that they will, often, change voting patterns.

The only really thorough piece of empirical research into the press coverage of the Referendum campaign was that by Dr David Patrick, Scots-born Research Fellow in the International Studies Group at the University of the Free State, South Africa. There's an interesting resonance between the name of his university and the Scottish independence campaign. The as-yet unpublished report 'Bought and Sold or Hype in Bold: Newspaper Framing of the Scottish Independence Debate' is summarised at the SCFF blog (Patrick, 2014).

<http://www.scottishconstitutionalfutures.org/OpinionandAnalysis/ViewBlogPost/tabid/1767/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/4255/David-Patrick-Bought-and-Sold-or-Hype-in-Bold-Newspaper-Framing-of-the-Scottish-Independence-Debate.aspx>

Patrick did a survey of eight UK and Scottish-based newspapers – *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Scottish Sun*, *The Daily Record*, *The Scottish Daily Express*, *The Scottish Daily Mail*, *The Scotsman* and *The Herald* – from 18th September 2013 until 31 March 2014. Focusing on 380 front-page articles, 386 editorials and 822 comment or op-ed pieces this sample produces a study with a high level of representativeness of the debate in the press at this key time. The general findings were clear in revealing a marked degree of imbalance.

Title	Reports	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Daily Record	13	(3) 23.1%	(3) 23.1%	(7) 53.8%
Scotsman	61	(4) 6.6%	(21) 34.1%	(36) 59%
Herald	82	(15) 18.3%	(28) 34.1%	(39) 47.6%
Sun	20	(8) 40%	(6) 30%	(6) 30%
Scottish Sub-total	176	(30) 17%	(58) 32.9%	(88) 50%
Daily Express	21	0	(16) 76.2%	(5) 23.8%
Daily Mail	34	0	(23) 67.6%	(11) 32.4%
Times	62	(2) 3.2%	(38) 61.3%	(22) 35.5%
Telegraph	87	0	(50) 57.5%	(37) 42.5%
English Sub-total	204	(2) 0.98%	(127) 62.3%	(75) 36.8%
Total	380	(32) 8.4%	(185) 48.7%	(163) 42.9%

Figure 5: UK Newspapers Headlines Referendum Coverage from Patrick, 2014

Looking first at headlines, which we know are consumed by a higher percentage of readers than the rest of the article, there was an almost 6:1 bias against the Yes campaign and in favour of BT across the full sample. It was more than 60:1 against Yes in the English-based Newspapers and even in the Scottish-based press it was nearly 2:1. While it is important to note that 42.9% of headlines revealed no bias this does not weaken the argument but means that the actual number of Yes-favouring headlines across all of these titles was less than 30 across eight newspapers over more than six months. For some readers, this meant they were unlikely to ever read such a headline. Patrick then makes an interesting comment which might relate to newspapers readers but also to the much larger number who don't, yet who may pass a news-stand. On a typical day in the period studied, they would pass a cluster of negative stories about independence and rarely if ever see one supportive. I'm not aware of any research into media effects of news-stand arrays of headlines and those who absorb the messages but intuitively, it seems likely they would have some consequence on attitudes. Some of the front-page headlines used as examples by

Patrick illustrate just how threatening and one-sided some of the messages from that camp were:

‘Salmond likened to North Korea dictator’ *The Times*

‘Salmond’s Paperclip Economics in Tatters’ *Scottish Daily Mail*

‘Salmond’s Black Wednesday’ *Scottish Daily Express*

‘Salmond crushing criticism’ *Scottish Daily Mail*

‘Scottish split could see a run on the banks within hours’ *The Daily Telegraph*

‘Mortgages up £1600 is Scots vote Yes’, *The Scotsman*

‘Beware SNP’s pensions con’ *Scottish Daily Mail*

‘Vote yes for higher prices’ *Scottish Daily Express*

Looking at each newspaper, the *Daily Record*’s front page performance looks fair and balanced (before ‘the Vow’) and the *Herald*, you might say, gives the Yes campaign some voice. The *Sun* actually looked to have favoured the Yes campaign by a small degree. There were rumours when Rupert Murdoch visited Scotland only a few weeks before the vote that he might instruct the *Sun* to support Yes but this did not happen. It was the *Scotsman* which was least balanced despite the claims of its former editor, John McLennan. The English-based press surveyed by Patrick, as can be seen above, were markedly imbalanced against the Yes campaign with only 2 headlines out of 204 suggesting a positive argument for independence. I spoke to the author of the research about his decision not to include the *Independent* or the *Guardian* where I had read several reports favourable to the Yes campaign, especially George Monbiot’s eye-catching headlines suggesting that voting No was ‘like self-harm’ and that the

media had ‘shafted’ the Scottish voters. Patrick’s justification had been simply the low sales figures of these two titles in Scotland.

Title	Reports	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Daily Record	52	6 (11.5%)	26 (50%)	20 (38.5%)
Scotsman	50	6 (12%)	8 (16%)	36 (72%)
Herald	59	7 (11.9%)	13 (22%)	39 (66.1%)
Sun	58	6 (10.3%)	13 (22.4%)	39 (67.2%)
Scottish Sub-total	219	25 (11.4%)	60 (27.4%)	134 (61.2%)
Daily Express	69	0	62 (89.9%)	7 (10.1%)
Daily Mail	65	0	51 (78.5%)	14 (21.5%)
Times	13	0	9 (69.2%)	4 (30.8%)
Telegraph	10	0	6 (60%)	4 (40%)
English Sub-total	157	0	128 (81.5%)	29 (18.5%)
All Eight Titles	376	25 (6.6%)	188 (50%)	163 (43.4%)

Table 6: UK Newspapers Editorials Referendum Coverage from Patrick, 2014

With regard to the 386 editorials, the picture for Yes was stark with the English titles never printing a single editorial with a positive slant on independence and between 60% and 89% of editorials being clearly anti-independence in the stance. In the Scottish press only between 10% and 12% of editorials carried pro-independence arguments. The Scotsman was, according to Patrick’s analysis the most balanced, with the majority, 36 reports, showing no bias, 8 being pro-union and 6 broadly pro-independence. This latter piece of data was grasped quickly by the former editor of the *Scotsman*, John McLellan (2014) to argue that the *Scotsman* had been the most balanced newspaper and, quite mistakenly, that the overall report had vindicated the Scottish Press as-a-whole. In the *Daily Record*, the dominance of anti-independence editorials by a ratio of between 4/5 to 1 was the most marked in the Scottish press and suggests, more than the front-pages do, clear evidence explaining the Yes campaign’s hostility to it.

When he looked at the 822 comment pieces, Patrick found nearly 50% were neutral but that among the remaining 50% there was a 2:1 ratio favouring the No campaign. However, there was marked variation between the titles. In the traditionally Conservative and Unionist *Daily Express*, only 3 out of 101 comments could be read as favouring some aspect of independence, 60 were clearly biased against it. Only two, the Glasgow-based *Daily Record* and *Herald* allowed anything approaching a balanced debate in comments with ratios of 33:19 and 65:46 in favour of No respectively.

In my own research on bias in broadcasting the issue of the demonising of the First Minister and of conflating the Yes campaign with his personal wishes, to the detriment of the campaign, was to my mind, very important. It also drew the most ridicule from the press. My own research found a quite heavy tendency to do so and Patrick's found something similar. Out of 362 cases where a personal name was used in a headline, a remarkable 207 mentioned the First Minister, Alex Salmond. David Cameron, the PM, appeared only 38 times and the actual leaders of the campaigns, Nicola Sturgeon and Alistair Darling made it only 8 and 7 times respectively.

Remembering the widespread references to Salmond being a divisive figure and, particularly unpopular with women, this pattern seems at the very least, an attempt to weaken the Yes campaign. When we think of the opportunities to caricature Darling, were there the will to do so, this looks like clear bias. Darling after all was the leader of the BT campaign. Why did his name not appear somewhere close to the 207 times 'Salmond' did. The 7 occurrences of 'Darling' in headlines suggest he was not really in charge. Again there was variation and the Herald did this least (33% of all relevant

headlines) the already mentioned Daily Express did it in 88.9% of its referendum coverage mentioning names.

So, overall, using Patrick's findings along with the earlier discussion, including those from *lordashcroftpolls.com* we say that the UK press as-a whole was very heavily biased against the Yes campaign and that that bias is likely to have been a factor in influencing around 25% of the No vote to do so. While we can note that the Scottish-based press were markedly less biased than their English-based equivalents, they were still clearly imbalanced in that direction. By contrast with the broadcasting coverage looked at in the previous chapter, the press were even less balanced and also at times prone to quite irrational, threatening and insulting language.

Alongside the above negative tendency in the Scottish and 'Scottish' (London) press were two notable examples of more individualistic commentary, one for and one against the Yes campaign but both, coincidentally from 'Bells'.

Most surprising to me, in 2013 to 2014 were the cartoons of Steve Bell, attacking the Yes campaign via rather explicit caricaturing of Alex Salmond. I've already mentioned that the *Guardian* (his host) and the *Independent* did give space to reports favouring independence, most notably those of George Monbiot. Bell, renowned for his witty and perceptive political cartoons from a distinctively left-of-centre and anti-imperialist perspective and much admired by me over the years, seemed to completely

misunderstand the Yes campaign and to have developed a vitriolic hatred of Salmond.

Here are two from several examples:



It's interesting the *Guardian's* editor saw no problem in these, especially the wholly offensive first example. I wrote to Bell, mentioning my long-term admiration for his work and asked him politely to stop insulting Scots with these. In a quick and astonishing reply, he reminded me that he was 'a half-breed' who had the right to attack 'Salmond' and that I was 'a fatuous nationalist dupe' who could stick his research 'up his airse'. A more blunt assessment of my research than I had been used to not to mention the naff spelling of what should be 'erse'.

The other Bell, Ian, was an all-too-rare example of the Scottish journalist reflecting more fairly his readership. The writing of Bell, of the *Herald* and *Sunday Herald*, over a long period, had been a breath of air for Yes-supporters. As early as 26 June 2012, he wrote in the *Herald*: 'Independence is risky, but Union is even scarier.' On 23 April 2013, Bell wrote: 'Osborne's threat shows independence is viable'. There were other reports, mostly in the *Sunday Herald*, which for long periods were the only alternatives to an overwhelming No consensus in the Scottish press.

Though newspaper readerships are small compared to TV news audiences, we have seen that they can matter. In the context of the Scottish Independence Referendum campaign of 2012 to 2014, it's hard to disagree with George Monbiot that the Scottish Press shafted the Scottish people with very partial and sometimes deceitful accounts.

References and Further Reading:

McLellan, J. (2014) Newspapers balanced in referendum' , *Edinburgh Evening News*,

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Patrick, David (2014) 'Bought and Sold or Hype in Bold? Newspaper Framing of the

Scottish Independence Debate' Summary in *Scottish Constitutional Futures*

Forum, *SCFF Blog* at:

<http://www.scottishconstitutionalfutures.org/OpinionandAnalysis/ViewBlogPost/tabid/1767/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/4255/David-Patrick-Bought-and-Sold-or-Hype-in-Bold-Newspaper-Framing-of-the-Scottish-Independence-Debate.aspx>

Chapter 4: Social Media in Scotland and the Yes/No Campaigns



Topic Originator: Bertiesback

Date: Mon 3 Feb 12:20

I think he was quite clear on his methods.

The only way to challenge the findings would be to present the programmes to another neutral academic body to use grounded theory to go through the same process. It can't be done by somehow checking the original process as that would not be linear or even true to the context of grounded theory methods.

Topic Originator: Oompar Par

Date: Mon 3 Feb 13:20

I'm not sure Grounded Theory is the best approach, Bandy. Call me a traditionalist but I like to start with a hypothesis and test it. Grounded Theory falls down because although it starts with no hypothesis, the researchers still decide on the 'emerging' hypothesis.

A few days after my research into TV news coverage of the Referendum Campaign had been published on *newsnetscotland.com*, the report had more than 100 000 views or 'hits'. Months later, I discovered that at least one of these had been 'eagle glen', a member of the Dunfermline Athletic Football Club (Scottish second-tier professional club) supporters' chatroom *DAFC.net*. Eagle glen posted a link to my research and began a debate about its value amongst ten others who then posted between them 30 comments producing a discourse, akin to the quotes above, of more than 3 000 words. Some of the comments were three or four times longer than

the above. They were all civilised with only light teasing humour. Had it been one of my university-level seminars, I'd have been delighted.

Much has been written of the wonders of the Yes campaign, especially its online aspect. The above was for me frankly eye-opening. Before and after, I saw many more examples of anonymous contributors engaging with ideas of research, of politics and of ethics at a level that would have charmed the first champions of democracy in Ancient Greece or later in Enlightenment Europe.

My own Facebook page, linked to hundreds of pages of a similar nature, throbbed with the excited sharing of evidence, mutual encouragement and light banter. Presumably, my 400 plus friends were friends with hundreds more and those with more still. Estimates of Facebook usage in the UK suggest at least of 50% of the total population. The odd visit from a 'troll' led to very little anger as they were spotted and ribbed before commonly giving up. There was a notable presence of women, initiating debate and organising action as the Yes campaign's wider messages of justice, care for all and the rejection of brutal market-oriented economics resonated across formerly apolitical individuals. As I write this in December 2014, 'Lillian' sends me a report on the disastrous Alberta Tar Sands. On November 6th, 'Ross' sent me a video, to share, concerning a Floridan 90 year-old arrested for feeding the homeless. On 14th October, 'Tony' sent me a research report on Press Bias in the Referendum coverage. Before that and since 'Lynsey', 'Lucy', 'Pat', 'Karen' and 'Cindie' and others too many to mention here sent me more useful links than I can count and 'Moira' forced me off my lazy butt to attend protests. I don't know who's got degrees and

who hasn't. In this place what matters is what you have to say and lots of people in this little country have lots to say.

In 2014, the Scottish Referendum was the most talked about *Facebook* topic in the UK, ahead of the World Cup. During the last five weeks before the vote, there were more than 10 million posts and 'likes'. (Wilson, 2014)

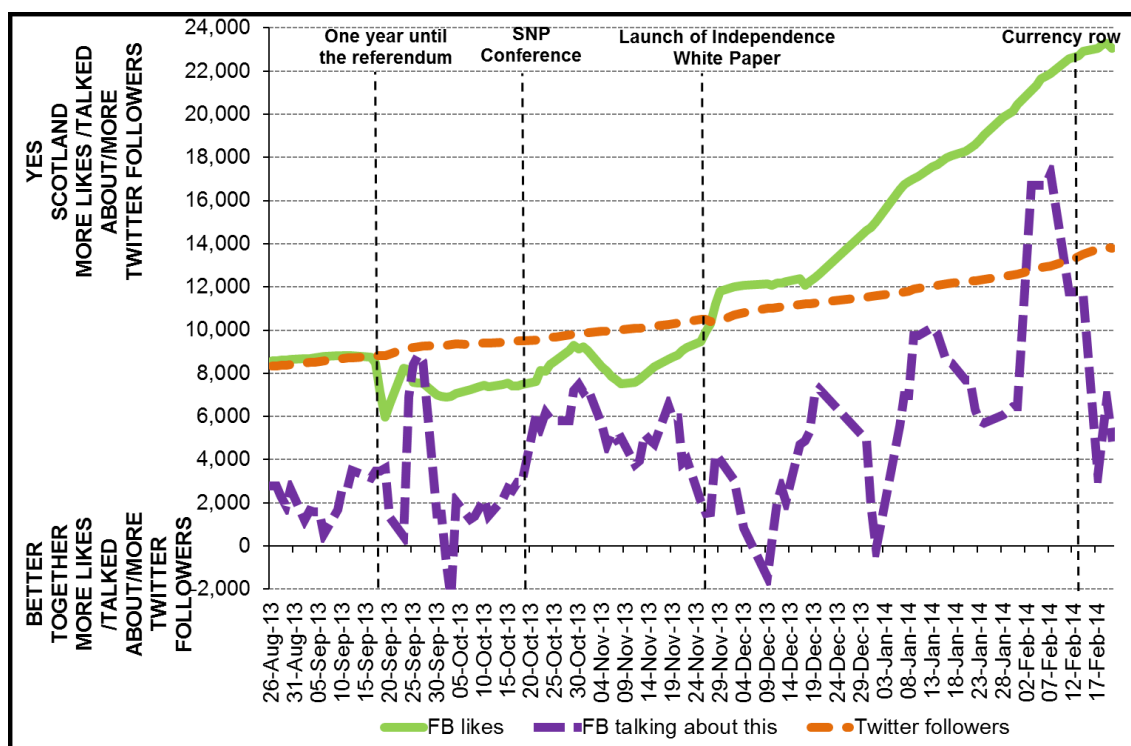
Away from Facebook, in the aftermath of my summons to Holyrood and the failed interrogation of BBC Scotland's 'Gang of Four' (senior executives), simple email seriously enhanced my world as folk from all over Scotland and other parts emailed their encouragement, copying in my Principal and choking his inbox, so to speak. The effect this had on my courage was considerable.

Social media and the Referendum became the biggest story, if you were on it of course. Today, 10th December, on Breakfast TV we hear that *#indyref* though largely a Scottish phenomenon was the biggest *Twitter* trend in politics in 2014. Previously, you wouldn't have known any of this from the UK TV or the Press.

The above evidence of the presence of social media in the Referendum discourse, is, of course, largely individual. However, there is early evidence of more empirical and reliable form.

Fortunately, an early start was made, in late 2013, to research the use of social media in the debate about independence by a group based at AQMeN and Strathclyde

University, funded by a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council of the UK Government. On 21st February 2014, the group posted an update on online activity on the non-partisan *What Scotland Thinks* titled ‘Racing Ahead Online: Catching Up Offline?’ (<http://blog.whatscotlandthinks.org/2014/02/racing-ahead-online-catching-up-offline/>). Based on data from end of August 2013, the team were able to suggest: ‘that the Yes Scotland campaign has solidified its lead over the Better Together campaign in terms of activity and interest on social media.’



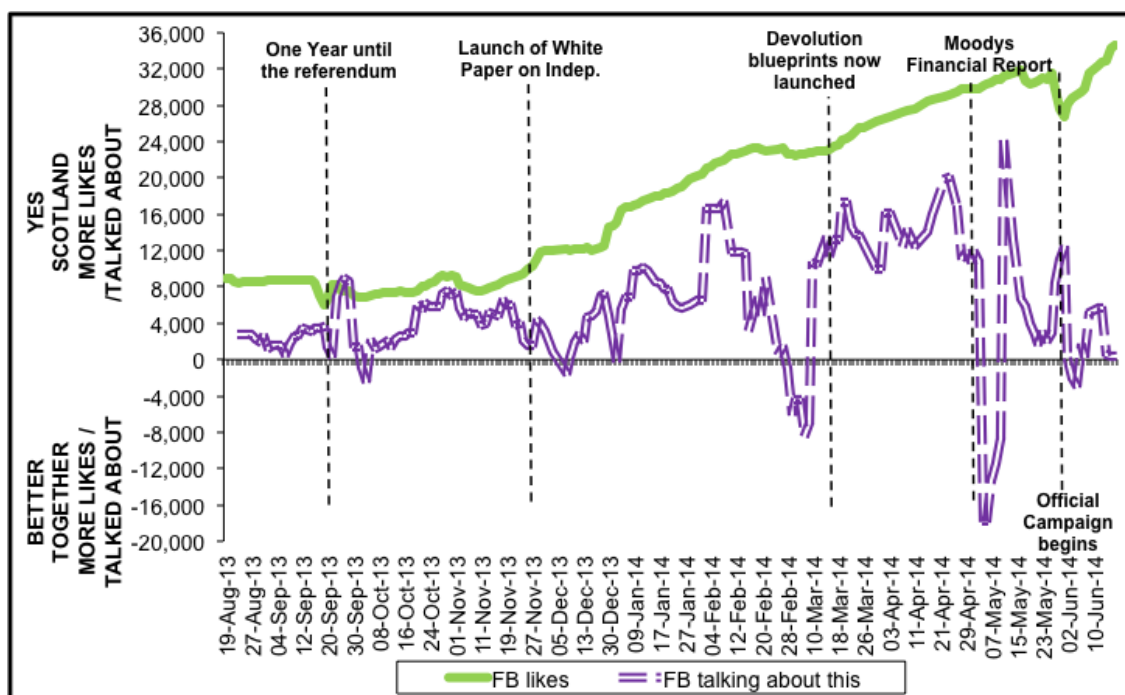
‘Figure 1. This shows ‘Yes Scotland’ (YS) total numbers minus ‘Better Together’ (BT) total numbers for three social media indicators over time. In each case, a positive score indicates that the YS campaign scored more highly and a negative score that the BT campaign scored more highly. (The direction of the scoring is purely arbitrary.) ESRC/AQMeN, 2014.’

Assuming the above diagram needs a little explanation, these coloured lines represent the difference between the No activity (less) and the Yes activity (more). For example on the first date, 26th August 2013, Facebook ‘likes’ for the ‘Yes Scotland’ site were

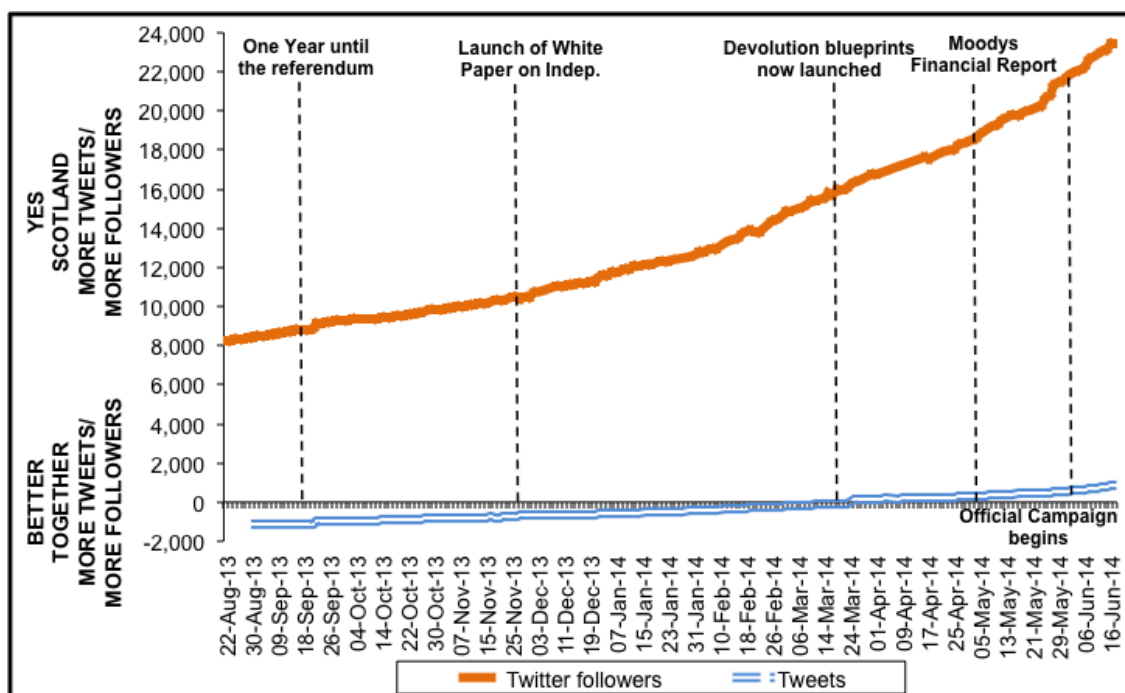
more than 8 000 higher than for BT on that day alone. Twitter following on the same day was only slightly lower. With regard to Facebook discussion of the Yes campaign this was nearly 3 000 higher than for BT on that day alone. By February 2014, this diagram shows the Yes campaign pulling away quite dramatically on all three measures. The author writes:

‘Our data show that the YS campaign has consistently received more likes than the BT campaign. Furthermore, since the launch of the White Paper on independence on 26 November, the gap between them has increased. On average, before the White Paper was launched, the YS Facebook page had been liked on around 8,000 more occasions than the BT campaign. Since the launch of the White Paper on 26 November, that average gap has grown to about 17,000. At the time of writing, the YS Facebook page had been liked on no less than 23,000 more times than its BT counterpart.’ (ESRC/AQMeN, 2014)

Explaining the above pattern, the researchers suggest the younger age profile and consequent familiarity with *Facebook* and *Twitter*, of Yes supporters, but stress that online success is unlikely to be enough to generate a victory at the polls. By 19th June 2014, the group were reporting: ‘Yes Side Maintains Advantage in The Online Campaign Battle’ (<http://blog.whatscotlandthinks.org/2014/06/yes-side-maintains-advantage-in-the-online-campaign-battle/>) and posting two diagrams:



‘Figure 1 ‘Yes Scotland’ (YS) score minus the ‘Better Together’ (BT) score for two Facebook indicators over time. *ESRC/AQMeN, 2014.*’



‘Figure 2 ‘Yes Scotland’ (YS) score minus the ‘Better Together’ (BT) score for two Twitter indicators over time. *ESRC/AQMeN, 2014.*’

The above two diagrams show YS activity online further widening its lead over BT. Having earlier speculated on the explanatory value of age as a factor in differential uptake of social media by the younger YS over the older BT, the researchers also offer:

‘It could be that those backing Yes side are simply more engaged in their campaign than are No supporters. Consequently, Yes supporters may be more likely than No supporters to express their views in a public forum.’ (ESRC/AQMeN, 2014)

Finally, just before the vote, on 16th September 2014, lead researcher Mark Shephard, posted ‘Is The ‘Yes’ Online Tsunami Finally Paying Dividends?’ (<http://blog.whatscotlandthinks.org/2014/09/yes-online-tsunami-finally-paying-dividends/>). Shephard notes further dramatic increases in online activity, especially in the previous three weeks.

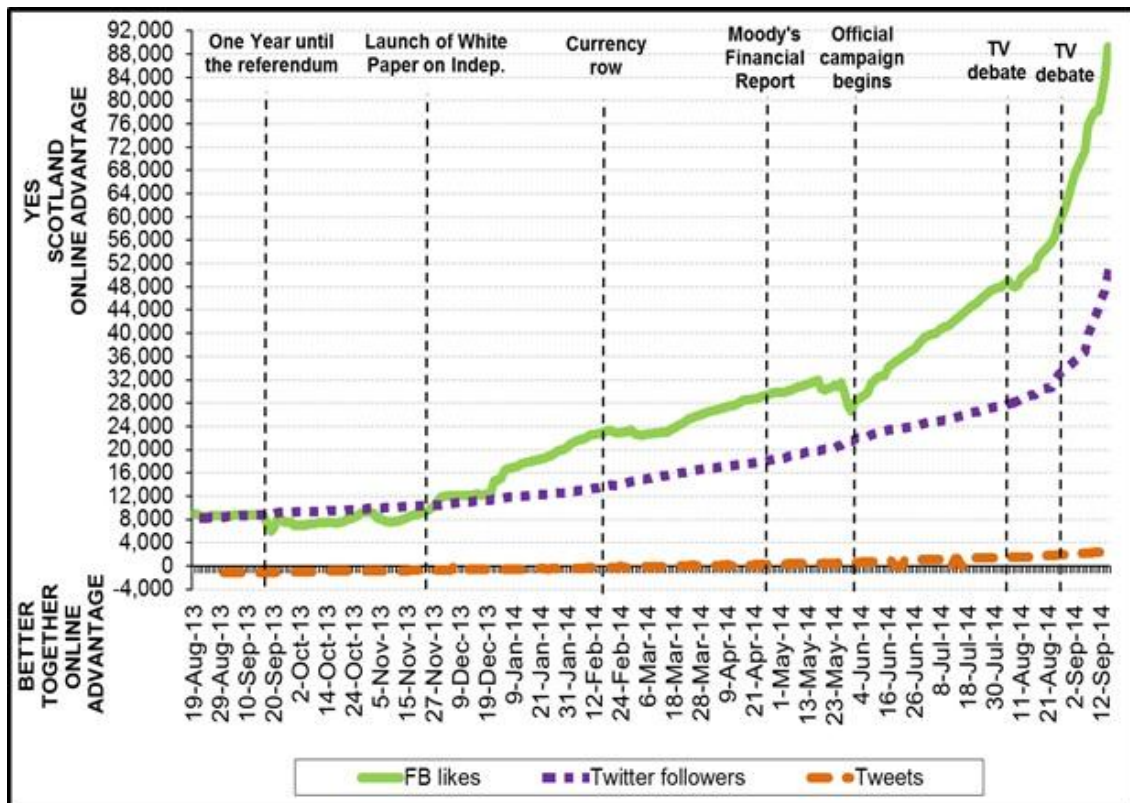


Figure 1 'Yes Scotland' (YS) score minus the 'Better Together' (BT) score for two Facebook indicators over time. *ESRC/AQMeN*, 2014.

It's worth noting that these dramatic slopes might indicate gathering strength in numbers of followers or, perhaps, simply more activity amongst a comparable-sized population with the latter simply more excited and active as the poll approaches. There are limits to what we can know from numbers of this kind no matter how big and impressive the numbers are.

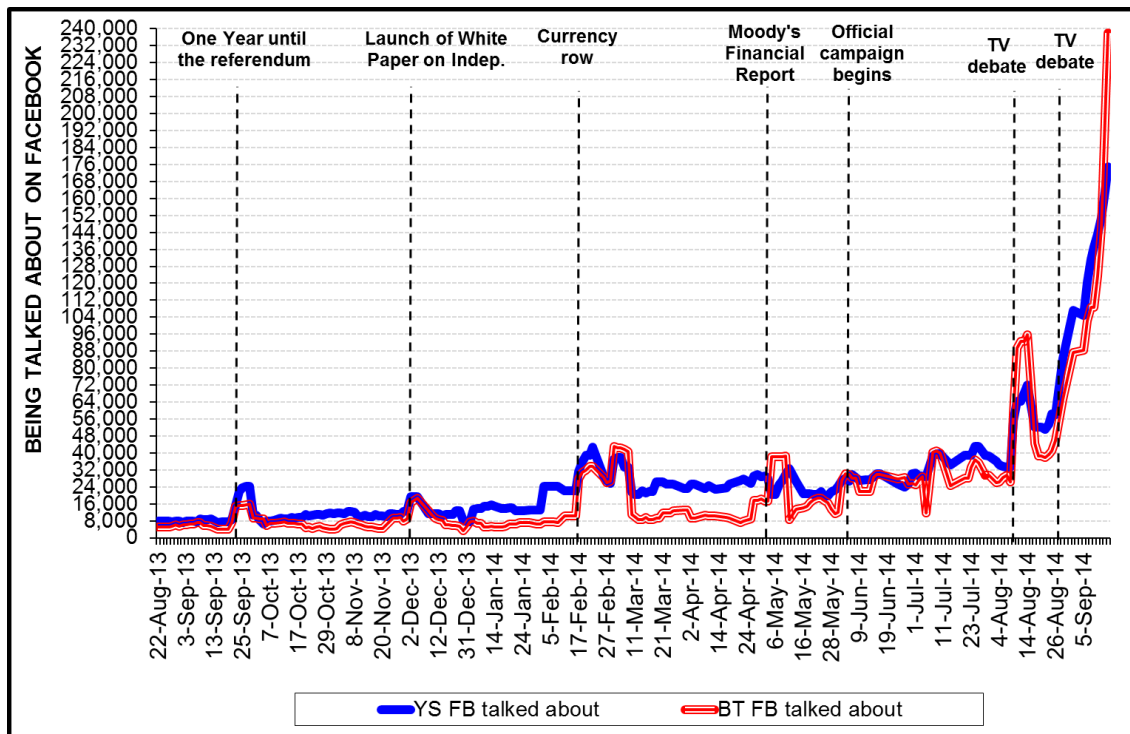


Figure 2 'Yes Scotland' (YS) and 'Better Together' (BT) score for Facebook being talked about, August 2013-September 2014, *ESRC/AQMeN*, 2014.

The above figure seems to tell a different story from earlier graphs, for the two campaigns, with discussion about BT catching and exceeding YS in the last month before the vote.

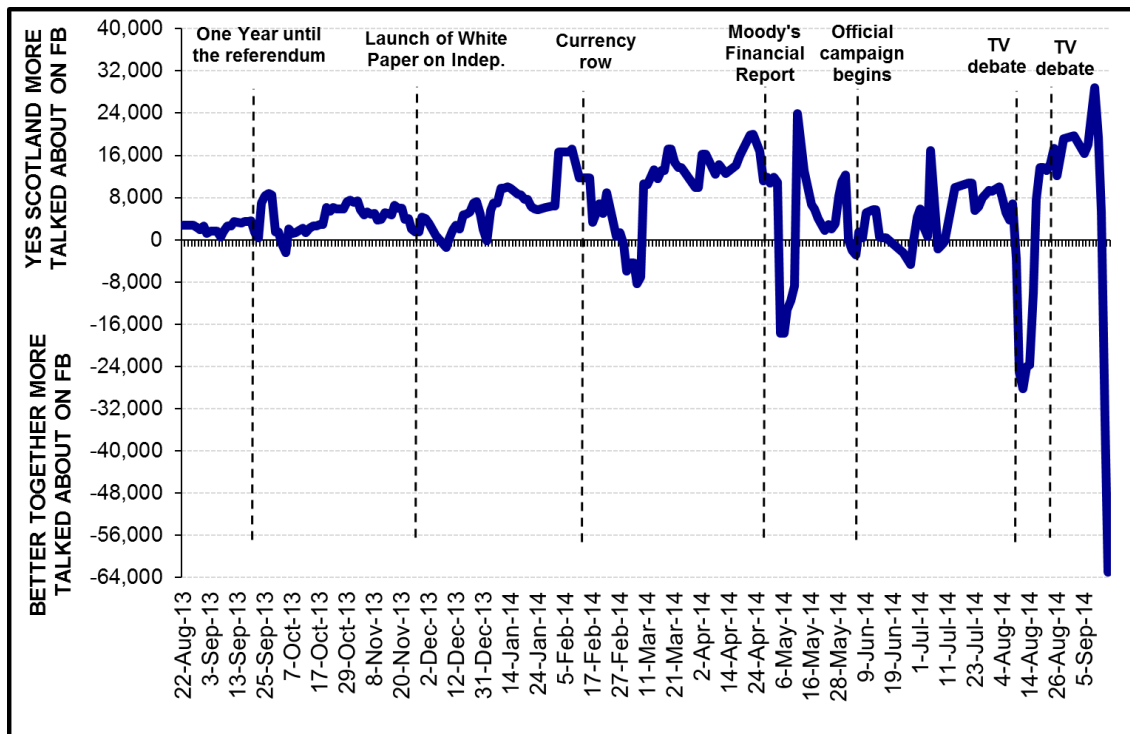


Figure 3 'Yes Scotland' (YS) score minus the 'Better Together' (BT) score for Facebook being talked about, August 2013-September 2014, *ESRC/AQMeN*, 2014.

Figure 3 above and Figure 2, before, show BT mostly leading in online activity but, in the few weeks before the vote, a surge in BT-related activity which the researchers link tentatively to events on the ground in that period such as: 'the last minute dash to Scotland of the Westminster leaders and the interventions of several industry players on the allegedly adverse consequences of independence for jobs and the economy in Scotland.' (*ESRC/AQMeN*, 2014)

The researchers conclude, with considerable reservations, which I share, on the extent to which their findings reveal likely voting patterns:

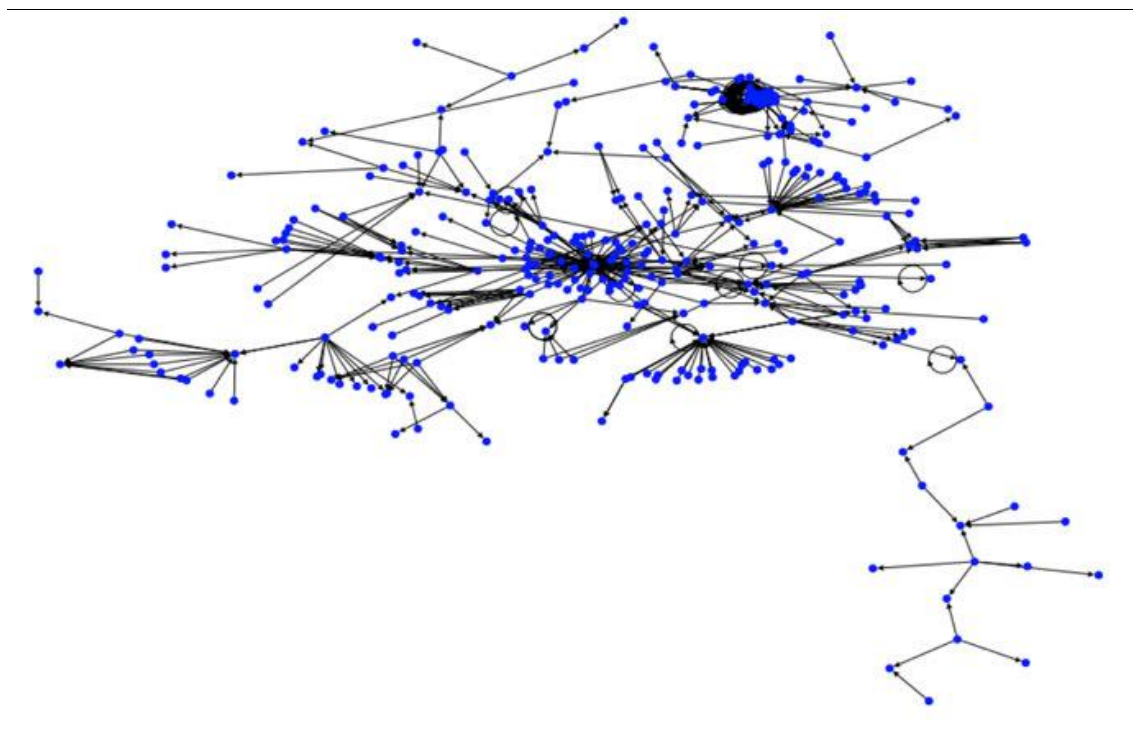
'Whilst it is impossible to infer any form of causation without taking into account a multitude of other factors, it is at least noteworthy that increased online activity has sometimes coincided with increased Yes

support. It is therefore at least possible that the YS campaign has succeeded in translating what could be considered a winning social media campaign into support on the doorsteps of Scotland.’ (*ESRC/AQMeN*, 2014)

In this, the researchers were, as we now know, wrong.

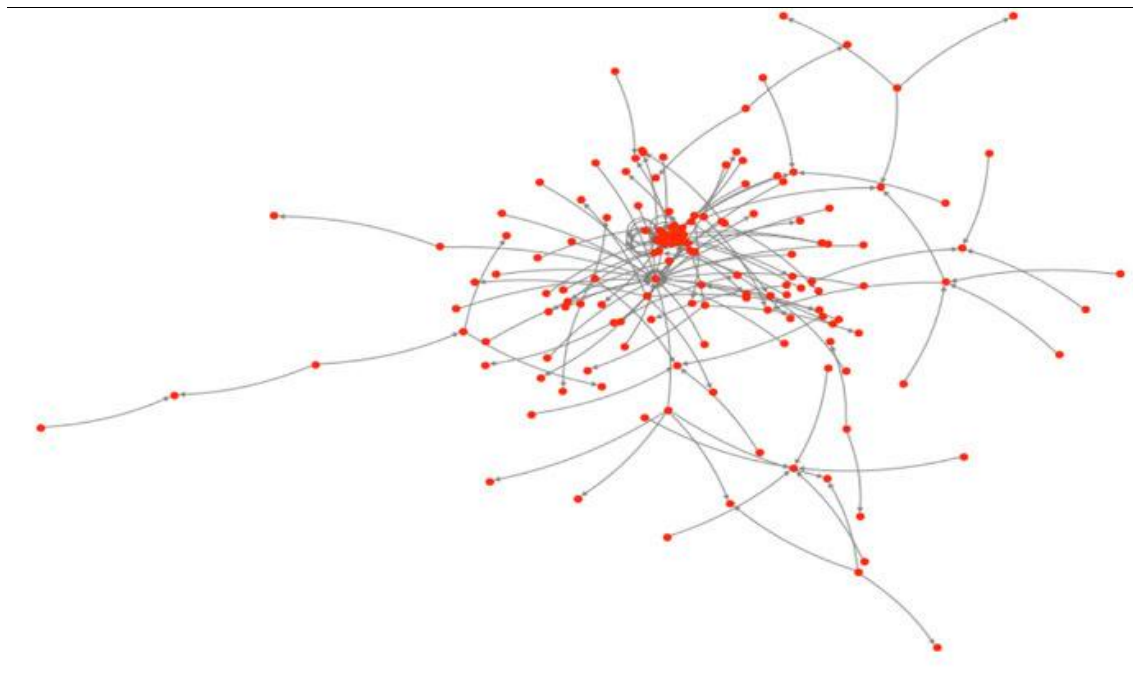
Further evidence of a difference between the two campaigns online was revealed by a team at *RT* (*Russia Today* as was). *RT*’s researchers used spreadsheet software to generate visual representations of how information was disseminated via Twitter.

Hashtag *#voteyes* looked like this:



Twitter visualization showing networks using *#voteyes* hashtag (*RT*, 2014)

The above suggests not only a very high level of activity overall but also that these users are engaging frequently with others in other parts of social media.



Twitter visualization showing networks using #voteno hashtag (RT, 2014)

By contrast with the *#voteeyes* distribution, the *#voteno* users were less likely to engage with others in social media. So, although there are clusters of intense activity, no campaigners were less likely to share content or to re-tweet *#voteno* content to others. Like the ESRC research above this suggest less engagement overall by the No campaign with social media.

Lots of activity then, measured in millions of messages via blogs, Twitter and Facebook but did it matter in the way that I've argued the broadcasting and press imbalances did in favour of BT? Looking at the above evidence, the presence of YS in the campaigns in social media has clearly exceeded that of BT but the impact is less clear. We don't know if, for example, much of the online activity was just a big conversation amongst already committed, like-minds or if there was a great deal of conversion going on. My own experience in *Facebook* suggests the former interpretation. Mostly, I experienced a kind of incubation and reinforcement as posts offered more and more evidence to

think, as you already were, of voting Yes. That will have undoubtedly helped convince those already tending that way but more hardened No supporters are unlikely to have spent any time on these pages. As with wider thinking about media effects, the latter tend to be in the form of strengthening pre-existing tendencies to behave one way or another. Elizabeth Linder, *Facebook's* Politics and Government adviser for Europe told *Business Times*: 'Studies show that when people see their Facebook friends talking about voting they are more likely to vote themselves' (Stone, 2014). The studies are not named so we must remain hesitant to accept this claim.

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<http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/scottish-referendum-tops-facebook-chart-4776968>

Chapter 5: Covering the Scottish Referendum: 'What the Public Wanted' or Propaganda?

'How the media shafted the people of Scotland: Journalists in their gilded circles are woefully out of touch with popular sentiment and shamefully slur any desire for change.' (George Monbiot in *The Guardian* 16.09.14)

'Don't blame the Beeb: It's the nature of news, not bias, that influenced referendum coverage.' (David Graves, <http://claritynews.co.uk/>, 22.09.14)

There is, I'd argue quite clearly, enough evidence presented in chapters 1, 2 and 3, to say the UK and Scottish media were biased during the Referendum campaign. If we accept that then the questions becomes why were they so? Below and based heavily on the thinking of Ed Herman and Noam Chomsky, is my answer.

There are two ways of thinking about the media which dominate popular and academic debate. Both are useful for argument in the Scottish Referendum context too. First is the idea, popular with journalists like Graves above and establishment figures, but not George Monbiot, that the media represent a range of opinion matching the wider population with all of its constituent groups fairly represented. This 'liberal-pluralist' idea is often referred to as the theory of 'News Values'. News Values assumes a consensual democracy where all pressure groups compete, using rational argument, on an even playing field to have their views heard in a media which

needs to satisfy its readers. The opposite view is that the power differentials between competing groups in democratic capitalist societies – owners, professionals, manual and service workers, women, the unemployed, ethnic minorities, the disabled, the unwell and others - are so great as to mean that media favour the interests of the more powerful against those of the less powerful. In this latter case, media messages are mostly propaganda designed to perpetuate the exploitation of the majority, by a small elite. Because the large numbers of the less-powerful and less-affluent could outvote the elite groups in elections, it becomes necessary for the elite media to propagandise news, especially on the economy, to persuade the former to vote for parties which favour the latter.

Because both of these theories arise from the history of class struggle over the economy, their direct relevance to an independence referendum requires explanation. Put simply, for them to be useful, we must begin with agreement that the Yes campaign was broadly leftist, promoting equality, justice, welfare, healthcare and that the No campaign represented an acceptance (conscious or otherwise) of the status quo in the UK, under the Coalition, of the values of economic prudence, constraints on welfare and healthcare and the retention of military power. This is, of course, to oversimplify the thinking of many No voters.

News Values

A liberal-pluralist approach to politics and thus to the media is characterized by a largely optimistic view of the operation of free-market democracies. Most neglected in

this model are issues, mentioned earlier, related to power-differentials. Though interested in citizenship and the role of the media in promoting or failing to promote the healthy operation of representative democracy (eg McQuail, 1992; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995) and at times concerned about the health of democracy as the media, allegedly, comes to dominate and produce a 'crisis' in political debate (disrespect for politicians, for example). Writers in this school of thought tend to downplay the effects of structured forms of inequality and power: 'in favour of an implicitly optimistic notion of society as a level playing ground where different interest groups fight (through access to the mainstream media) for their interests' (Hesmondhalgh, 2007: 30). In the Scottish context, we might imagine, the political parties, the trades unions, business, the churches, minority groups and others competing fairly to produce a public sphere (in TV, radio, newspapers and social media, in which none are denied a fair say. My research and that of others calls this seriously into question.

Sharing this broadly optimistic view of the relationship between social groups and mass media with a fairly level playing field of competing pressure groups such as parents' associations, employers, trades unionists, churches, professionals etc., is the body of research described as *New Values* (Galtung and Ruge, 1981; Allan, 2004) and which is most like the professional values supposedly held by most journalists. Put simply, this is the public getting what the public already wants. However, the omission or at least the neglect of stories relevant to the interests of the poor, of radical ideas like independence, ethnic or religious minorities and of women does at least suggest an political process operating through the news selection and presentation processes

adopted by a predominantly middle-class, white and male media elite (see BBC Scotland in 2014). This view is unlikely to be acceptable to many editors and senior journalists. As Stuart Hall argued more than thirty years ago, 'Journalists speak of 'the news' as if events select themselves' (1981: 234). The features by which media professionals recognise what is 'newsworthy' have been characterised as 'news values'. Hall noted that although most journalists feel they are known instinctively, few can define them. However, a great deal of research has been undertaken since Galtung and Ruge's (1981) work in the 1960's, with a view to exposing them. A set of eleven, 'unspoken and informal' news values is mentioned by Allan (2004: 57-58):

1. Conflict – stories with two sides (for example wars, **Yes/No referenda**, and employment disputes) are newsworthy and create the opportunity for 'objectivity'
2. Relevance – stories relevant to readers' lives and experience (**prices, healthcare, school results**)
3. Timeliness – recent events are favoured as they can be monitored as they unfold (**referendum campaigns**)
4. Simplification – stories that are not overcomplicated can easily be made sense of by the public (**yes/no votes, right/left in the 1940s top 1960s**)
5. Personalisation – stories with an emphasis on a 'human' perspective over a faceless institution for example (**charismatic leaders like Salmond or Brown**)
6. Unexpectedness – Events out of the ordinary such as terrorist acts or **last-minute pledges**.

7. Continuity – Stories which can ‘fit in’ with the schedule (**two years**)
8. Composition – a mixture of news must appear for example local, international, business and thus stories can appear purely to provide balance in categorization (**Scotland and immigration or taxation**)
9. Reference to elite nations or persons – UK/US/first world events and people (politicians and famous people such as royalty and celebrities) are deemed more newsworthy than ‘ordinary’ people or third world countries (**EU leaders, Obama, Queen, celebrities**)
10. Cultural specificity – stories culturally relevant to the reader and journalist are favoured at the expense of other cultures, creating an ‘us and them’ mentality (**Hollywood and Westminster or the EU**).
11. Negativity – bad news is always more newsworthy than good news – (**oil prices, pensions, border controls**)

Interviews with eight press and TV news editors on the decisions they made about covering the hostage Kenneth Bigley in Iraq (Vass, 2004: 8) would seem to support the above argument though there was also evidence of politically motivated decisions aimed at exposing or shielding the UK Prime Minister. Looking at the results of this study, these characteristics seem evident although the question of relevance is a matter for debate. So, are the reporters and editors of the news outlets surveyed here simply acting in pursuit of a set of professional values with no obvious political bias? The match between these values and much of the data presented in the submitted papers is, at first sight, attractive but it is important to look past this to ask **why** is

there such a strong apparent match and, most important, to ask why media professionals, in liberal market democracies, are socialized to be predisposed to certain kinds of stories and certain ways of telling them. None of the transparently political arguments which follow suggest an explicitly coercive relationship between elites and media professionals (NUJ leaders asserted that no one told any BBC Scotland journalist directly what to write) but rather they draw our attention to more subtle influence leading to self-censorship. The regular use by media professionals of the notion of newsworthiness may push the self-censorship into the semiconscious or even the subconscious realms (So BBC journalists sense what those above them expect and work to that) but it does not conceal from analysis the underpinning political ideas that have driven its evolution. Allan's list does go beyond the kind of features which might be described as non-ideological to embrace two rather obviously ideological values – *reference to elite nations* (praising the Union) and *reference to elite persons* (fawning to Gordon Brown) – and, in subsequent discussion, he goes on to deconstruct *news values* in ideological terms and to reveal them as operating to make what is political seem 'natural' (Vass: 58).

My pre-Referendum research demonstrated the political bias apparent in the content of TV news and in one case (Robertson 2010) reveals the narrow and unrepresentative social background of leading journalists but cannot claim to have exposed any causal link. We cannot say private schooling and Oxbridge make you, always, favour elite interests over other groups but there is strong evidence of repeated correlation of the two. A very thorough piece of research with 270 Canadian journalists and 800 other

citizens (Miljan & Cooper, 2003) suggests a very strong relationship between the political orientation of journalists and their reporting of political issues. Further, this research suggests, as in Robertson (2010), that elite journalists are unrepresentative of the general population.

The Propaganda Model

The Propaganda Model, is a movement within Media, Communications and Cultural Studies. It is committed to the pursuit of social justice and is fundamentally critical of market capitalism, the military industrial complex and the consequent corruption of media independence to produce, in many cases, ‘thought control in democratic societies’ (Chomsky, 1989: Title).

‘There is another sector of the media, the elite media, sometimes called the agenda-setting media because they are the ones with the big resources, they set the framework in which everyone else operates. The *New York Times* and *CBS*, that kind of thing. Their audience is mostly privileged people. The people who read the *New York Times*—people who are wealthy or part of what is sometimes called the political class—they are actually involved in the political system in an ongoing fashion. They are basically managers of one sort or another. They can be political managers, business managers (like corporate executives or that sort of thing), doctoral managers (like university professors), or other journalists who are involved in organizing the way people think and look at things.’ (Chomsky, 1997: 1)

Chomsky spends little time defining the terms 'class' or 'elite' though these are important in understanding and using the *PM*. Rather, he gives examples like those above in an effort to communicate an understanding of complex and shifting groups. With regard to class, there are difficulties of definition. As Therborn (2002: 222) suggests:

'Class as a tool for analyzing the sociology of capitalist economies is intrinsically aggregating trades and occupations...How far this commonality (of interests) may go...is an empirical question.'

Differences between Scotland and rUK make the concept of class even more subjective. Much more so than the latter, Scots of all backgrounds, are as likely to self-report as 'working –class:

'The Scottish Election Survey of 1979 and the Scottish Social Attitudes survey of 1999 on self-perceived class backs this up. First, overall, Scots think of themselves as slightly more working class in 1999 compared with 1979. Second, even the Scots professional and managerial group, who felt themselves more middle class than working class in 1979, now see themselves by a majority as working class. Scotland now sees itself as such a working-class country.' (Demos, 2014)

Responding to the increasing tendency to use occupation as a key class membership condition, Therborn notes that in Swedish statistics (2002: 223) there are 2 893 occupations listed(!) and writes that there is an important: 'trade-off between detail and graspable overview' (2002: 223). Put simply, he means too few categories and you oversimplify things or too many categories and you cannot keep them all in your head. This last point is important and suggests that Chomsky's admittedly partial but descriptive, exemplifying, approach is more workable in practice. As for the term 'elite', again, Chomsky spends little time debating what this might mean. A useful classification of elites and an illustration of attributes and behaviour are provided by Scott (2008: 32-33). He goes on to identify four types of elite in western liberal democracies- *Coercive*, *Commanding*, *Inducing* and *Expert*. *Coercive elites* have almost total access to control of state violence and are exemplified by the police, armed and security forces. *Commanding elites* occupy the heights of administration and management of state departments and dominate by reference to authority and status. *Inducing elites* have access to economic resources in large financial, service or industrial corporations. *Expert elites* have preferential, or in certain contexts complete, access to resources of persuasion in, for example, the media, professional associations in medicine or the law. Scott reminds that members of these categories may, perhaps often, operate in more than one context, such as media and politics, and are, as a result, difficult to distinguish. This latter point harks back to the *PM*'s key notion of interlocking elites and in the Scottish context, the BBC and the Labour Party.

Herman and Chomsky's *Propaganda Model (PM)* (1988) argues that members of elites including, critically, media elites, 'interlock' in the context of education, work,

recreation and cultural pursuits, creating a class (of admittedly shifting and permeable boundaries) with members acting through self-interest in the interests of the class. In the Scottish context, this would take the at first more egalitarian form of Labour Party affiliation in one of the ancient Scottish universities after attendance at high-status city high schools or, sometimes, private schools. The Depute Leader of the Scottish Labour Party until the referendum sending his son to a private school while, at the same time, championing other 'Labour Values' is a recent example. The failure of the Scottish MSM to question this clear example of inconsistency is revealing. This is by no means a new or especially controversial idea in the social sciences. Referring to the earlier and, like Herman & Chomsky, fairly neglected (beyond Canada) theorizing of Harold Innis (1894-1952), Babe (2009: 1) suggests that:

'This system of mutual support, whereby political-economic power rewards knowledge/culture workers for justifying, normalizing and aggrandizing elite power through symbolic artifacts, has existed throughout human history, Innis claimed: from ancient Greece, Mesopotamia and Egypt, to contemporary western civilization. According to Innis, moreover, success at creating or maintaining a compliant public enables physical, coercive force to recede to the background; indeed, people come to mistake indoctrination as press freedom, and misconstrue elite control of media (the means of persuasion) as democracy'.

Similarly, in the UK business sector, Scott (2009: 37) identifies:

‘the bases on which interlocking directorships and other forms of inter-corporate association are established as the bases through which individuals may be able to exercise power within two or more organizations. In these circumstances, the overlap of personnel is such that the overall economic or corporate elite is more than, simply, a collection of separate company-level elites’.

This interlocking and mutually supportive grouping then compromises the independence of media elites and results in a form of self-censorship operating in the interests of their careers and lifestyles and consequently of their class. Silvio Berlusconi, his political party (Forza Italia) and his ownership of various media would be the epitome of this tendency (Mazzoleni, 1995). Rupert Murdoch and the drift of the Sunday Times (UK), after his purchase, from a broadly centre-liberal to a Thatcherite stance is another clear example (Curran, 1990). In 21st Century UK, the board-membership and major shareholding of politicians in private healthcare and energy companies adopting shale-fracking, with the latter escaping proper media scrutiny by the BBC/ITV, is a further example. Several critics have questioned the universal applicability or definitive nature of *PM* (Corner, 2003; Lang & Lang, 2004, Sparks, 2006) while others have asserted a particular relevance in this time of narrowing corporate ownership of the media, powerful right-wing pressure groups, the dominance of shallow advertising values in news production (Klaehn, 2002; Klaehn, 2003) and critically the drive by governments to pursue a war agenda against public opinion (Miller, 2003).

The PM suggests five filters which ensure the production of news output that is conducive to government and corporate elite interests. The filters are:

1. The size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms.
2. Advertising as the primary income source of the mass media.
3. The reliance of the media on information provided by government and business, and "experts" funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power.
4. Flak as a means of disciplining the media.
5. Anticommunism or, now, Anti-Islam, as a national religion and control mechanism.

(from Herman, 1996)

These five elements interact with and reinforce one another to manufacture the effect of a consensus favourable to elites in business, in the military, and in government. The relationship between the five filters and their operation in practice is important. As Zollmann (2009: 114) points out:

‘...the Propaganda Model emphasizes a set of dynamic ‘filters’: if one ‘filter’, let’s say the sourcing filter, is weaker, or if coverage over a certain issue becomes more open, flak, PR, corporate demands and ideological devices pressure the media to reinforce the dominant agenda. Hence cases which provide examples of diverse media do not simply refute the validity of the Propaganda Model.’

Evidence of the usefulness of *PM* may be seen in, for example, the almost complete absence in the media of debate on the distribution of wealth in the UK (Philo & Miller, 2000: 835; Robertson, 2010), the similar absence of corporate crime (*Media Mouse* and *Corporate Watch*) or the suppression of reporting on civilian casualties of NATO (Serbia) and Coalition (Iraq) bombing (Edwards 2004: 15; Hoijer, 2004: 515). Apparent contradiction of *PM* and perhaps support for Corner's assertion of a distinction between US and European media (2003) can be found in the diversity of UK news reporting on the Iraq War (Lewis, 2003; Robertson, 2004) with, for example, *Channel 4 News*, the *Independent*, the *Daily Mirror* (England) and the *Herald/Sunday Herald* (Scotland), all of which adopted quite consistent anti-war positions. However, the overwhelming weight of media coverage of the Iraq war, in terms of viewing and reading figures, operated in support of the war agenda (Lewis, 2003).

‘We pulled every dirty trick in the book; we made it [industrial action in the Winter of 1978/1979] look like it was general, universal and eternal when it was in reality scattered, here and there, and no great problem’ (*Channel 4*, 1998).

Talking quite openly in a *Channel 4* documentary, twenty years after the ‘Winter of Discontent’, then editor of *The Daily Express*, Derek Jamieson, made the above admission and agreed that the purpose had been to assist the electoral success of the Conservative Party by undermining the Labour government of Jim Callaghan. It’s an extremely rare, evidenced, example of the kind of dirty tricks many on the political left suspect elite journalists make a habit of but are unable to prove. We await the first

Scottish editor to make a similar admission to that of Jamieson – my money's on someone from the *Daily Record*. Sparks goes on to criticise the *PM* in some detail. I've quoted and responded to him below.

'These obvious facts, which are well known to Herman, have a logical corollary, of which he is almost certainly aware but which he does not discuss at any length: the commercial media are owned by the elite but most of the time they are not directed at the elite. On the contrary, for most media the bulk of their audience is made up of working class people, since this group forms the overwhelming majority in a developed capitalist society.' (Sparks, 2007: 75)

This is, potentially, an important criticism of the completeness of the *PM*. If elite-to-mass communication can be shown to be fragmented and lacking in a coherent narrative favouring elites, then the *PM* is perhaps weakened. Did the presence of one Scottish newspaper, a Sunday-only at that, favouring independence mean fragmentation? Sparks does make this criticism and suggests at the very least there is a diversity aimed at differing readerships that is contrary to the 'central formulations' (Sparks: 76) of the *PM*. In this, he has the support of writers such as Hesmondhalgh (2007). It would be interesting to see what Sparks would make of the lack of diversity in the Scottish MSM before the Referendum. However, the mostly shallow, consumerist nature of communications (product advertising) between elite media and, say, manual workers, women, ethnic groups or gays seems unlikely to offer any fundamental challenge to capitalist economics. More important, however, is an

assessment of the extent to which elite-to-mass communication, by contrast with elite-to elite communication has any measurable impact.

In the USA, psychologists are in little doubt about mass-media effects with regard to sexual and violent media and consequent changes in the behaviour of children and young adults. On the basis of numerous *correlational* studies, they have been prepared to take the leap from correlation to causality. European media theorists have been largely dismissive of these findings and after more than 50 years of research, there is little empirical evidence of elite-mass media effects (Gauntlett, 2004) other than those identified by the Glasgow University Media Group with regard to perceptions of trades unions (Eldridge, 1976), of Palestinians (Philo & Berry: 2004) and of those with mental health problems (Philo, 1990; Philo, 1999). All of these topics point to the effects of bad news on audiences. More on media effects follows in the next chapter.

The *PM* does neglect elite-mass communications and a definitive meta-narrative (a theory explaining everything) would require that completeness but the authors of the *PM* do not make a claim for completeness. Rather, they make a claim for exemption:

‘We never claimed that the propaganda model explained everything or that it illustrated media omnipotence and complete effectiveness in manufacturing consent. It is a model of media *behavior and performance*, not of media *effects*.’ (Herman, 2000: 103)

So, the *PM* is not intended as a definitive explanation of all media-audience relationships and the area of weakness identified by Sparks is one which, in itself, lacks any evidence of simple effects even if the patterning could be argued to, at times, *not* favour elite interests.

‘...there are always many competing capitalists, and they each individually have different, indeed conflicting, interests. The owners of pharmaceutical companies want high prices for prescription drugs, for example, because that will improve their profit margins, while the owners of US car companies want those prices driven down, not because they are charitable but because health cover for unionised workers is a burden on their profit margins. On the grounds of economic theory, we would expect capitalist-owned media to be united in opposition to threats from the working class, but deeply divided in terms of the interests of different groups of capitalists. (Sparks, 2007: 73)

Sparks makes clear that the *PM* does not make a claim to absolute uniformity in elite communications but he does argue for a degree of disunity of interests amongst elites which might be expected to generate a degree of dispute which goes beyond the ‘tactical’ questioning of issues to the ‘strategic’ questioning of policy and gives the above example. While the notion of car manufacturers actually lobbying against high drug prices does not convince me, in the absence of evidence, elite conflict can be observed in varied media responses to the Iraq war (Lewis *et al*, 2006) or in the *Daily Mail*’s campaign against the MMR vaccine and the NHS (Robertson, 2009). Less

apparent, is elite conflict in the key arena of the economy (Robertson, 2010; Thompson, 2009) and in the Scottish Referendum campaign it was the economy which UK elites including MSM chose as the ground on which to fight. On issues such as immigration, gender and race equality at work or alternatives in the debate over power generation, splits in elites are to be expected and, given, that they do not threaten the overall economic system, can be reasonably described as 'tactical'. This cohesion in mainstream media (TV News) representations of the economy (free-market capitalism is the only way), is revealed in my earlier research (Robertson, 2010: 12) where, in the period around the UK Budget of 2008, non-free-market economic models (Keynesian or Marxian) were almost entirely absent. This latter description, 'almost entirely absent', is sufficient for a defence of the *PM* which, as already mentioned, does not need absolute conformity around elite preferences to be accurate. Indeed, the opening pages of *Manufacturing Consent* make clear that the model does not require that news media be: 'a solid monolith on all issues' (Herman & Chomsky). Think of the *Sunday Herald* and social media against the MSM in Scotland's Referendum.

The case Sparks (2007) makes mostly strongly as an example of a strategic split between elites is the Iraq war:

'If outright opposition to participation in the most reckless imperialist adventure since Suez is recuperable into the PM's concept of 'tactical' there is little to argue about at this level, but such a term is probably better used to describe differences over issues like whether the invasion

required a separate UN resolution authorising it rather than something as fundamental as the launching of a major war. Such issues, surely, are better conceived of in terms of 'strategy'?

Though I agree strongly with Sparks' assessment of the Iraq campaign as a 'reckless imperialist adventure', the split between elites remains tactical rather than strategic in that dissenting elites in journalism, politics and in religion rarely made much of the underlying economic exploitation of the region (Robertson, 2004), were mostly drawn to support 'our boys' and to moderate their dissent once the campaign was underway. Freedman (2009: 71) makes a similar case for the temporary weakness of the PM in times of crisis, 'when normal relations are disturbed' using evidence from the reporting of the Iraq War in the *The Daily Mirror*. Certainly that reporting was explicitly anti-war but this was a short interruption to what Herman & Chomsky recognize as an incomplete effect and, as with other coverage (Robertson, 2004) was to be found in outlets with smaller audiences or readership. A powerful sense of anger and of injustice in Sparks' comments is shared by me but, in itself, there is no evidence, here, of an elite split which seriously threatens economic structures. The breaking ranks of the *Sunday Herald* in the last weeks before the Referendum in Scotland was welcomed by the Yes campaign but posed no real threat to established politics. It's persistent refusal to criticise BBC journalists and insistence on 'balance' helped retain its essentially bourgeois status as simply a business responding to market demand and serving the purpose of polishing corporate UK's mask of political neutrality. Next, Sparks points to a tendency in the PM to oversimplify the political structures of capitalist democracies.

‘Internally, however, the US is a capitalist democracy. It is characteristic of such societies that there is legitimised public debate about policy between different sections of the elite that are more or less autonomous of each other....the range of debate about issues of domestic policy tends to be rather wider than is accounted for by the classical iteration of the PM. Even in the USA, while the coverage of internal disputes between capital and labour is usually, but not always, uncritically on the side of big business, there are exceptions where the voice of labour has been given a substantial hearing in the mainstream press (Kumar 2007). We would expect to find, therefore, that the political realities of a capitalist democracy entailed a much wider and far-ranging set of arguments in the media than simply in-house disputes between different wings of the capitalist class.’ (Sparks, 2007: 73-74)

This is a point closely related to the above criticism that the *PM* does not take sufficient account of the splits between elites. Sparks argues that the ‘classical iteration’ of the *PM* does not take account for the range of debate. Though he acknowledges that in the US, coverage of capital vs labour disputes tends to favour the former, Sparks suggests the presence of exceptions. Kumar’s study of the success of The International Brotherhood of Teamsters’ 1997 industrial and, crucially, media campaign against the United Parcel Service is, however, the only example he gives. To be fair, there is evidence that organised labour in the US might have had greater success in challenging capital had it not been for the malign presence or influence of the mafia in union leadership throughout the 20th Century (Jacobs, 2006). In the

author's own recent study (2009) of UK coverage, only one case of media sympathy to labour came in the form of a coast guard strike. 'Exception', it can be argued, is the key word here. Exceptions give the appearance of diversity and perhaps justice but if too rare they can be seen for what they are, exceptions to the norm. Ed Herman finds: 'a notable illustration' (2003: 8) of the *PM* in Tasini's (1990: 7-9) comparison of the coverage of miners' strikes in the US and in Russia. The 1988 strike in Russia drew considerable and sympathetic reporting in the US press while the long Pittson miners' strike, in the same year in the US, drew very little coverage in the same newspapers.

In considering the operation of capitalism in the UK, by contrast with the US, some academics will draw attention to the unique role of public sector broadcasting in making more complex the structure of UK media and insist, on this basis, that it ensures a breadth of ideologies in reporting. This is a position held by Professor Paddy Scannell who characterizes the *BBC* as: 'helping in the creation of an informed and enlightened democracy' (Scannell, 1990: 14). My own research into the reporting of economic issues on UK TV (Robertson, 2010) and the earlier reporting by Lewis et al (2006) on the BBC coverage of the Iraq war cast serious doubt on the accuracy of Scannell's views.

The survival of a discourse which problematises workers and trades unions and which implicitly adopts management and shareholder perspectives, seems evident in the coverage of recent disputes in the Royal Mail, in BA, in Railtrack and in Glasgow Council's Museums and Galleries. Though by no means comparable to my study of the UK budget coverage, an initial survey finds, for example, in the 'centre-left' *Observer*:

‘Britain's private postal operators have made substantial inroads into Royal Mail's customer base **as a result of the strikes** at the end of the year, and any further upheaval will accelerate the process, warns a significant player in the industry’ (Macalister, 2010).

In the similarly centre-left *Glasgow Herald*, we can read: ‘**Strike** over pay cuts **may close city museums**’ (Braiden, 2010). In these two articles, the headlines associate the word ‘strike’ or ‘strikes’ with the determining effect of closure and/or loss of business. In a search of both of these centre-left newspapers, headlines presenting the issue from the point of view of workers or trades unions could not be found. Alternative headlines could, for example, have read: ‘Management imposition of increased workload provokes action by staff’ or ‘Management imposition of reduced salaries provokes action by staff’.

Sparks then highlights a failure in the PM to recognise the extent of differences between the US and, especially, European contexts.

‘If the PM is to sustain the general status its progenitors make for it, then it must be able to account for the performance of the mass media elsewhere than in the USA, at the very least in societies where circumstances are similar.... In the European media, we can identify two distinctive features which are not present in the contemporary US case. The first is the obvious centrality of ‘public service’ media to the broadcasting environments of major countries. A public service organisation like the BBC or ARD has a radically different place in the

media landscape than does PSB in the USA. The news arms of these organisations are large and relatively well-resourced. They usually command a large audience for a news agenda which differs markedly from those of the mass circulation press. They are central to any discussion of news in the societies in which they function' (Sparks, 2007: 76-77)

This is the most common criticism of the *PM* by European media academics. Corner's (2003) reply to Klaehn's (2002) defence of the *PM* is perhaps the most recent and best-articulated. The idea that public sector broadcasting radically distinguishes UK TV from US TV is, however, much older (Scannell, 1990). Relying on the best-known example of a 'difference which makes a difference', the coverage of the build-up (only) to the Iraq War does suggest a visible contrast between the relatively diverse, but clustered in low audience and readership outlets, UK coverage and the almost entirely 'patriotic' and uncritical coverage by US TV and press (Robertson, 2004; Lewis, 2006). *The New York Times'* after-the-event apology (2004) to its readers serves only to highlight the contrast with the UK where *Channel 4 News* along with the *Independent*, *Daily Mirror* and *Glasgow Herald* newspapers presented a quite oppositional narrative, at least in the build-up phase. These are, however, news outlets with amongst the lowest audiences and readerships in the UK. Nevertheless, this a reasonably favourable comparison between the UK and US news media and it is all the more remarkable if the determined efforts by the UK government to spin and to bully the media over this are taken into account. Indeed, it was the *BBC*, contrary to Sparks' suggestion regarding PSB above, which most readily gave in to government pressures

and which was largely uncritical of the war plans (Lewis, 2006). My own research into TV coverage of economic issues (Robertson, 2010) suggests a fairly hegemonic dominance of right-of-centre free-market theory which differs little from that in the USA. Likewise, UK news coverage of war and political conflict shows a heavy dominance of pro-UK/US perspectives and sources (Robertson, 2006). In parts of mainland Europe and beyond, by contrast, considerable public opposition to the Iraq war (Pew Research Center, 2004) made oppositional coverage possible (Hafez, 2004; MIT Communications Forum, 2003). It is by contrast with the media behaviour of Europe, the Middle East and beyond, **rather than with the UK**, that the PM's limitations may be greatest and most in need of qualification but it will be necessary to pay continuing attention to emerging research reports which further moderate the conclusions. For example, published at the end of 2009, is Hearn's-Branaman's study of China (2009: 119), using the *PM*, which suggests that the capitalist base in both China and the USA and Europe have caused 'many commonalities' between them in terms of media behaviour.

When Sparks refers to an over-reliance in the PM on the routines of journalism and on the socialization of journalists in explaining media conformity with elite interests, the evidence from the UK and Scottish contexts, favouring the *PM* is considerable.

'...but the main thrust of the model is to concentrate on two structural factors – the routines of newsgathering and the socialisation of journalists – to explain the voluntary conformity of the media. Both of these factors are clearly important, but it is

questionable whether they will quite bear the weight that the *PM* places upon them.’ (Sparks, 2007: 78)

This is another point relating to the notion of divided elites discussed earlier. Sparks does express a great deal of agreement with the *PM*’s identification of journalists’ reliance on at-hand source material and the ways in which the high pressure routines of production encourage such reliance. Where he disagrees with the *PM* is in its insistence on the overwhelming dominance of sources operating in the interests of business and of governments. He is correct to draw attention to the fairly common presence of sources such as Amnesty and Greenpeace. He also suggests a presence for trades unions and a wider political spectrum than in the USA. With particular regard to the UK political spectrum, however, it is difficult to see this as a wide-ranging spectrum in the dominant political parties on key issues such as the economy. Though there is some evidence of the Liberal Democrats warning of impending financial collapse, all three parties were, before the banking crash and after, allied to free-market principles (Robertson, 2010). With particular regard to my recent research on the Referendum coverage, the reliance on establishment, thus unionist, sources such as the Office for Budget Responsibility, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the Treasury and others, was heavy to the considerable disadvantage of the Yes campaign.

The most telling evidence of UK media elites’ complicity with political and economic elites comes not from peer-reviewed research output but from the continuous flow of evidence appearing in the online alerts of *Media Lens* (2010). This Internet-based news-site, edited by Cromwell and Edwards, describes itself thus:

‘Media Lens is a response based on our conviction that mainstream newspapers and broadcasters provide a profoundly distorted picture of our world. We are convinced that the increasingly centralised, corporate nature of the media means that it acts as a de facto propaganda system for corporate and other establishment interests. The costs incurred as a result of this propaganda, in terms of human suffering and environmental degradation, are incalculable.’

With more than 200 alerts on the Chilcot Inquiry in 2009, *Media Lens* provided numerous examples of bias in reporting and, critically, the fascinating and revealing responses of mainstream journalists and editors. The latter reveals with sometimes startling clarity the consequences of socialization in journalistic environments. A revealing example featured BBC Washington Correspondent, Justin Webb. *Media Lens* (2009) emailed Justin regarding his piece in the *Mail on Sunday* on October 4th 2009, headed: ‘Why my pal Stan has a terrorist false arm on his wall’. Webb’s ‘pal’ is US General Stanley McChrystal, the man in charge of NATO strategy in Afghanistan. Webb describes him thus:

‘Stanley McChrystal is a character. In some respects he is straight is out of central casting: big, with fierce eyes and weather-beaten skin. He looks every bit as fit as a Hollywood version of a Special Forces soldier. Yet he eats only one meal a day.’

When asked to comment, Webb wrote:

‘I certainly don't agree that the piece supported any war or any individual -- merely pointed out that he is a character, which he is. I expressed no personal view on the Afghan conflict, nor could you guess from the piece what my personal view is!’

Webb highlighted here his either subconscious or, if conscious, uncritical relationship with the dominant NATO narrative. In particular, the strengthened use of the term ‘character’ can be easily read as admiring and either unaware or insensitive to the known consequences of ‘character’ in this military leader in terms of civilian deaths.

As for the presence of trades union opinion as commonly used journalistic sources, there is little evidence. Davis (2000: 39) points to the: ‘rapidly growing influence of professional public relations practitioners on the process of news production in Britain’. Though these professionals are used by a wider range of organisations including trades unions and environmental pressure groups, Davis warns us not to imagine: ‘a new-found liberal pluralism in the public sphere,’ and reminds us: ‘that the majority of PR resources are used by those with the greater economic and political resources,’ (Ibid 54). The consequences of such an imbalance are fairly clear in what Freedman calls a: ‘close ideological conformity with the broad interests of one constituency – that of business,’ (2006: 921). Again, this author’s empirical work reinforces the evidence for ‘ideological conformity’ in TV coverage of economic issues (Robertson, 2010).

Most controversial and of unique for in Scotland is the evidence against Spark's claim of a mistaken assessment in the PM of the class positioning and loyalties of the majority of journalists.

‘While the owners of the media are capitalists, and while the senior journalists are closely related to them and other elites through a thousand channels, the bulk of journalists, even in elite media, have a very different social situation. They are subordinates in a hierarchical division of labour and their activities are directed by their superiors. Their wages and conditions are not princely, and they are subject to severe pressures by the very nature of their job. The bulk of journalists are not, as the PM sometimes has it, ‘middle class.’ They are, in a phrase, wage workers engaged in alienated labour.’ (Sparks, 2007: 79)

The UK average hourly rate for journalists in 2004 was £16.83 or roughly £35 000 per annum. For plumbers, it was £10.62 per hour or roughly £22 000 per year (ESRC, 2008). Given that some journalists are paid much more (see below) than this average, other journalists will be paid even less than the above figure. If Herman stills holds to his 1982 statement that media staff are: ‘predominantly middle class’ (Herman, 1982: 149) he is then open to empirical refutation. The author could not find a more recent confirmation or qualification of this quite dated statement. There is no mention of the issue in Herman's most recent ‘retrospective’ (2000).

A similar assertion of the class status of most journalists can be found in Australia:

‘On any meaningful notion of 'class' as a concept related to the social relations deriving from the system of production in a Capitalist society like ours, journalists are not 'middle class' ... they are not particularly well paid, their union and their industrial actions are, for all intents and purposes, the same as any other group of unionists.’ (Windschuttle, 1998: 351).

Windschuttle’s assessment is based on an assessment of the whole journalistic profession in Australia. In Canada, by contrast, Miljan & Cooper (2003) studied only elite journalists and characterized them as typically distanced from the general public in terms of their political orientation.

Returning to a focus on the UK context, however, there is quite strong empirical evidence of the middle-class origins of journalists. The UK Government’s Cabinet Office Report, *Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions*, in 2009, produced the following findings regarding access to careers in journalism:

1. Between the 1958 and the 1970 birth cohorts, the biggest decline in social mobility occurred in the professions of journalism and accountancy (page 19).
2. Evidence shows that for some professions, such as journalism or veterinary science, students are now highly unlikely to be able to progress into the

profession without a minimum amount of (unpaid) relevant work experience.

(page 101)

3. The National Union of Journalists' (NUJ's) submission to the Panel stated that the largest-ever independent survey of people entering the journalism profession (conducted by the Journalism Training Forum in 2002) indicated that under 10% of new entrants came from working-class backgrounds, with just 3% coming from homes headed by semi-skilled or unskilled workers (page 101).

So, in the UK, on the basis of the above research, the majority of journalists do not have working-class backgrounds. This does not, of course, mean that they are all part of an elite group sharing the income and interests of other elite-members of the judiciary, banking, government or industry. Herman's assertion of middle-class identity for most journalists needs to be put in context. The term middle-class is unclear and commonly used in varying and inconsistent ways. The important distinction here, is between elites and wage-workers whether we describe the latter as middle or working-class

Two important questions, however, follow. First, does professional socialisation further change the class identification of journalists, from working or middle-class backgrounds? Second and perhaps more significant, are journalistic elites, especially in TV news, so dominant in the construction of political realities that their small number does not seriously impede the creation of an elite-oriented hegemony?

Perhaps deciding to enter a career like journalism suggests a predisposition to be more open and/or sympathetic to elite perspectives? A study by Richardson (2007: 1), in the UK, seems to undermine this thesis. He writes:

‘I’ve taught trainee journalists at University, and while they did have differing reasons for entering into journalism, not one entered into the profession to disseminate ruling class ideology; most wanted to help inform the public, to educate, to play a role in the democratic system.’

Sparks points to the less than complete or permanent effects of socialisation (2007: 79) though he offers no evidence of this. This may not be surprising as it seems most unlikely that any social science research into the impact and/or the permanence of socialisation could be conclusive. So, giving Sparks the benefit of the doubt on this, professional socialisation cannot be demonstrated to be transforming in its impact of the thinking and behaviour of journalists. If this is true, the presence of journalists of working class origins in positions of media influence should seriously undermine the *PM*. Evidence, however, suggests a different picture with the top UK journalists and TV news presenters coming from a quite unrepresentative elite background.

In a report from the Sutton Trust (2006) on the educational backgrounds of leading UK journalists, it emerged that only 7% of the general population was educated in independent schools in 2006, as opposed to 54% of the top 100 journalists. This latter figure represented an increase from 49% in 1986. Only 12% of these top journalists were educated in state comprehensive schools, which currently educate 90% of pupils,

while the remaining 34% attended the selective-entry state schools, formerly known as Grammar schools. Of those who attended university, 56% attended either Oxford or Cambridge and 72% attended one of the 13 top-ranked UK universities. The authors of the report ask:

‘Is news coverage preoccupied with the issues and interests of the social elite that journalists represent? Should the profession not better reflect the broader social make-up of the audiences it serves?’ (Sutton Trust, 2006: 3-6).

In 2008, an illustrative example emerged. The *BBC* economics editor, Evan Davies, resigned and was replaced almost instantly by Stephanie Flanders. Both had private school educations, both took first degrees at Oxford, both went on to Harvard for postgraduate study and both had early appointments at the Institute for Fiscal Studies. On the *BBC* website, Davies is described as: ‘outspoken but apolitical’ (Oliver, 2008) yet in 1998 he published a book arguing for the privatisation of public services (Davies, 1998).

Further, the presence of elite journalists in TV news, as exemplified above, puts them in a very powerful position: ‘Television is [...] the central vehicle where people are able to access current affairs and political debate and it is trusted more than any other media.’ (Ward, 2004: 4). Surveys across Europe have highlighted the continuing significance of television news, especially when produced by public service providers,

as the most widely accessed and the most trusted source of current affairs information (Towler, 2002: 36-38; Ward, 2004: 3-5).

An interesting alternative, a Giddensian 'third way' perhaps, is offered by Hirst (2002) when he suggests : '....the concept of *grey collar journalists*, which I define as a cohort of newswriters who occupy a contradictory class location..[characterised by] ambivalent emotional attitudes'. Peter Wilby, highly experienced journalist and former editor of the *New Statesman* offers another label: 'journalism needs a social class category all to itself. It is not a profession (no esoteric knowledge) nor a skill (many – hacks, including me, don't have shorthand) nor a working-class occupation (no manual labour). I would call it *unskilled middle-class*' (Wilby, 2008).

Now, to the fascinating Scottish situation – surely Scottish journalists, even senior ones, are not predominantly from fee-paying school and elite university backgrounds? There is little evidence of this among the editorship of Scottish newspapers, TV or radio programmes. However, don't be deceived by this apparent egalitarianism. In Scotland the political and media elites are not dominated by private schools and Oxbridge but by the Labour Party in its Blairite, neo-liberal and Atlanticist (US admiring) form. Built on more than 40 years of utter electoral dominance of Scottish politics, at all levels, yet managed from the London office and producing generations of loyal apparatchiks to consolidate policy preferences in political representation, in senior media positions, in academia and in the professions, it forms a peculiarly Scottish elite, not explicitly class-based but sufficiently right-wing as to interlock smoothly with the London Labour elite. One of the consequences of the seamless

articulation with London Labour is the potential reward of high status posts in the UK – Brown, Darling, Alexander, Robertson, Reid...and finally, in the House of Lords. So, even though the Scottish Labour elite has different origins from London Labour, the Conservatives or Liberal Democrats, its alignment with neo-liberal economics, NATO and, of course, the Union, allows it to interlock equally well.

The hard evidence of the above, like that of the UK media domination by Oxbridge, is not widely reported but is clearly there to be found. In 2005, a report appeared in the *Independent* newspaper, of *BBC Newsnight* presenter, Kirsty Wark and her husband, on holiday in her Majorca villa, with Scottish First Minister Jack McConnell and his wife. Recently an anonymous Internet piece titled 'Oh What a Tangled Web', offers around twenty examples of how the Labour party is interlocked with the Scottish media through marriage, work experience, party membership and so on.

So, most journalists are clearly not middle class and perhaps they are a grouping that is difficult to categorise satisfactorily but if we accept the above argument of elite domination of TV news, this fact makes little difference in determining the class interests best represented in dominant media.

Finally, there is the growing importance of the *PM* at this point in history.

'Given the globalizing economy and the ever-increasing power, reach and influence of large, transnational corporate and financial institutions – in the face of growing poverty and powerlessness

amongst the vast majority of the world's population – we would suggest that the *PM* is even more relevant today than when it was initially advanced.'

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Chapter 6: *Media Effects: How Much Were the Voters Influenced?*

Did the media coverage's heavy anti Yes bias matter?

'As the dominant source of political information for citizens there seems to be little question that the media matter as providers of information in politics in general and in elections in particular. But another aspect to this relationship is whether media influence political attitudes and behaviour: researchers have been hard pressed to demonstrate media effects.' (Mondak 1995)

In a highly polarised [Scottish] referendum campaign in which only a narrow gap separates supporters of the Yes and No sides, succeeding in convincing even a handful of voters can prove essential for winning.....Within this context, the 'information weapon' becomes extremely relevant, especially since politicians and political parties play a weaker and more ambiguous role in referendum campaigns compared to general election campaign.....the present study has attempted to demonstrate the occurrence of such effects in the context of the Scottish independence referendum. Results at the group level confirm that **provision of information does affect voting intentions** mainly by a) reducing indecision, especially when individuals are able to select which arguments to read, and b) increasing the likelihood to vote Yes,

especially when a balanced set of arguments is presented. (Morisi, 2014: 20)

This is a much contested area into which Morisi (2014, above) has dropped quite a big bomb and remarkably, at this time, a bomb guided directly onto the Scottish Referendum debate! In the broader and historical debate on media effects, since the 1960s, we had some 'experts' convinced of general and widespread media effects and others convinced of the resilience of audiences to resist those influences. Interestingly, it tended to psychologists and caring professions, especially in the USA, on the pessimistic side and sociologists, media researchers (like me) and the less-caring professions, especially in Europe, on the skeptical side. I'll come back to the particular field of political information provision and consequent voting behaviour after an introduction to the background and to the wider debate which I think helps in talking about the former.

American Psychology and the 'End of Debate'

'The debate is over...the research evidence pointed overwhelmingly to a *causal connection* between media violence and aggressive behavior.'

American Psychological Association, in Rich (2001: 1-2)

'Follow me and do exactly what the song says: Smoke weed, take pills, drop outta school, kill people and drink.' (EMINEM, *Stan*, 2001)

The highly influential, upon teachers, social workers and legislators, American Psychological Association (APA), has dominated research into media effects in the USA. Much of the work has been focused on children and young adults and their tendency toward precocious sexual or violent behaviour. An enormous body of research studies was characterized by Huesmann et al, in 2003, in the following terms:

‘Over the past 40 years, a body of literature has emerged that strongly supports the notion that media-violence viewing is *one factor* contributing to the development of aggression. The majority of empirical studies have focused on the effects of watching dramatic violence on TV and film. Numerous experimental studies, many static observational studies, and a few longitudinal studies all indicate that exposure to dramatic violence on TV and in the movies is *related to* violent behavior.’
(201)

Note the restrained and academic use of vocabulary (‘one factor’) in this quote from a paper published in the APA’s ‘house’ journal, *Developmental Psychology*, and contrast it with the more certain language used above in testimony by the APA to the US Senate. ‘One factor’ and ‘related to’ become a ‘causal connection between media violence and aggressive behaviour’. The APA has sponsored a very large body of research studies (Huesmann, 1994, 1997, 2003), which translate correlational evidence into cause and effect. When the results are communicated to a lay audience, including politicians, this unjustified move can result in oversimplified explanations and popular anxiety of the kind, described by Cohen (1973), as a ‘moral panic’. Earlier

experimental research by Albert Bandura in the 1960s, which has largely been discredited by other researchers as artificial and impossible to replicate because of contemporary legislation protecting research subjects from abuse, is nevertheless brought to light and used with lay audiences. Perhaps the best example is Bandura's widely discredited experiments still being used to influence lay audiences, more than 40 years later. In the UK BBC TV series 'Child of Our Time', presented by Professor Robert Winston, Bandura's filmed record (1963, 1963a) of young children (4-5) beating a Bobo (Weeble) doll with a hammer after watching adults do the same was presented as convincing evidence of cause and effect and given a prominent place in the case being made for media violence effects on young children. The Bandura research is used in the TV broadcast (BBC, 2006) and referred to in a BBC website piece by Dr Robin Banerjee but has disappeared from a companion page listing the 'very latest research' (BBC, 2006a) used in the series.

A similar sleight of hand with correlational studies becoming causal conclusions can be found in research into the effects of viewing TV wrestling on young viewers' behaviour. A review of 73 research reports (Quinn, 2010: 130) reveals a similar trick where:

'in the absence of an ultimate causation for the imitation of professional wrestling, the majority of the existing academic literature on the topic, has, rather tendentiously, made the consumption of wrestling text, the proximate cause of imitation, stressing correlation without dependence'.

European Skepticism and the Weak Media Effects Model

Many contemporary, especially European, researchers have abandoned the notion of trying to identify simple and determinate links between media messages and human thought or action. This sensible move is due to the complex and shifting interpenetration of influencing factors in everyday life and surrounding culture. In addition there are the sometimes 'active', or 'resistant', responses, of each individual (Blumler & McQuail, 1968; Gauntlett, 2004). David Gauntlett's succinct demolition of the 'strong', mass effects model promoted by the APA and other *moral guardians* (Cohen, 1972) in the USA and the UK, makes a useful summary of its weakness:

1. The effects model tackles social problems 'backwards'

Researchers start with an hypothesis about the prior existence of media effects and then search for patterns of media consumption in groups already identified as deviant as opposed to starting with the media consumption of a broader sample then allowing patterns of distribution to emerge from the data.

2. The effects model treats children as inadequate

Researchers start from an assumed but not empirically proven notion of an inability, in children, to consume media rationally or critically. Children are presumed to be cultural dupes.

3. Assumptions within the effects model are characterised by barely-concealed conservative ideology

Relatively non-violent, non-sexual media output is often objected to because of a perceived challenge to an imaginary conservative moral consensus or political status quo.

4. The effects model inadequately defines its own objects of study

Taken for granted rather than relativistic definitions of media material - 'antisocial' and 'prosocial' programming or 'antisocial' and 'prosocial' action – are used. For example, throwing a book is coded 'anti-social' regardless of the content of the book or tearing down a poster is coded 'anti-social' regardless of the content of the poster.

5. The effects model is often based on artificial studies

Careful studies require time and money; there have been very few. These have been outnumbered by smaller, more artificial, studies in a laboratory or in a 'natural' setting such as a classroom but with a conspicuous researcher.

6. The effects model is often based on studies with misapplied methodology

Some researchers apply methods wrongly or draw inappropriate conclusions. For example, correlational data will be used to suggest effects.

7. The effects model is selective in its criticisms of media depictions of violence

For example, antisocial acts shown in drama series and films are suggested to have an effect on behaviour though these acts are almost always punished while anti-social activities in the news are suggested to have no effect on behaviour though frequently the latter are not punished.

8. The effects model assumes superiority to the general public

Researchers suggest that exposure to media violence may cause other people to engage in antisocial behaviour yet those same researchers, in regular contact with the supposedly corrupting material, are unconcerned for their own well-being.

9. The effects model makes no attempt to understand meanings of the media

Researchers will make arguments based upon simplifications, unjustified stereotypes and the double deception that the media present a singular and clear-cut 'message'. Effects model researchers seem sure that they are in a good position to identify what that message is.

10. The effects model is not grounded in theory

No theoretical reasoning beyond the bald assertions that particular kinds of effects will be produced by the media is offered. Why the media should induce people to imitate has never been adequately tackled, beyond the simple idea that particular actions are 'glamourised'. How merely seeing an activity in the media would be translated into an actual motive is just as unresolved.

David Gauntlett's critique above, the earlier '*Uses & Gratifications*' model (Blumler & McQuail, 1968) which was popular from the 1960s, and the *Active audiences* model popularized first by Schramm (1971, 1997) are, still common in the teaching of media studies in schools and in HE and do, helpfully, remind us not to worry too much about younger audiences and their use of violent or sexualised media products.

One of my earlier studies identifies a general lack of apparent interest in mediated sex and violence by Scots 10-14 year-olds and a much stronger and more common interest in humour (Robertson et al, 2005). Also, in these findings, there was little evidence of interest in pornographic websites. With regard to perceived influence from media (including sport) celebrities, there was strong evidence of a tendency to identify family and local community figures rather than the celebrities. This finding has since been

replicated in a large (3022 pupils) and more recent (Hardy, 2010) study of 8 to 14 year olds. The latter study found that:

‘Despite the celebrity dominated environment that this group has grown up in, they have strong family values and aspire to traditional vocations rather than the pursuit of fame – The five most popular future professions are vet, teacher, footballer, doctor and police officer - Topping the poll in every single country as the person they admire most in the world is mum at 43%, with dad coming second at 30%’ (1).

The considerable popularity of TV soaps with this group, especially of *Eastenders* (BBC1), is revealed to be more positive than some *moral guardians* such as the APA propose. This group of children seemed to consciously recognize and to be able to reflect on the value of moral dilemma narratives in guiding them to do **not** what the actors did and to, in effect, learn from characters’ mistakes. This most convincingly undermines the mass, strong, negative, media effects model of the kind championed by the APA.

Mass media messages causing violent attacks or childhood sexualisation are nowhere to be found in credible research. Indeed, influencing audience members to do something they would not otherwise do is largely devoid of evidence. By contrast, encouraging people to think or to do something they are already predisposed to do may be a different matter and is returned to below. While agreeing that exposure to mediated scenes of violence and/or sex cannot convincingly be used to demonstrate

mass media effects, the impact of focused mediated messages about, for example, mental health, industrial disputes, pro-war propaganda and, of particular interest here, bad news about the economy, turns out to be quite different.

The Glasgow University Media Group and a Stronger Media Effects Model

Herman & Chomsky's *Propaganda Model* has the central place in the research described in this book although the peculiar nature of elites in Scotland, penetrated by the Labour Party as much as private schooling, is a challenge. The published research of the *Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG)*, has had a longer and greater presence in media, communications and cultural studies in the UK. From *Bad News* (Eldridge, 1976) and *Really Bad News* (GUMG, 1982) to *Bad News from Israel* in 2004 (Philo and Berry) and on to *Thinker, Faker, Spinner, Spy: Corporate PR and the Assault on Democracy*, (Dinan and Miller, 2007) this group has challenged mainstream and establishment accounts and, with strong evidence, has exposed the role of the UK media in distorting news in the interests of dominant elites. Further, the *GUMG* goes beyond the scope of the *PM* in that the latter does not concern itself with the need to prove effects of media consumption in the attitudes or behaviour of audiences. By carefully focusing the data collection and interpretation on fairly discrete areas such as attitudes toward mental health patients, toward the participants in industrial disputes or toward the protagonists in Palestine/Israel, GUMG researchers have demonstrated quite strong effects in these more focused contexts.

From the outset, the *GUMG* research drew heavy criticism from broadcasters (Quinn, 2006: 459-460) and, in 1985, drew a very rare attempt to undermine their findings on methodological grounds (Harrison, 1985). Harrison's criticisms, though popular with some broadcasters (Quinn, 2006: 460), was, however, to be quickly discredited when the former's data, provided by *ITN*, was shown to be significantly different from the *actual* broadcasts used by the *GUMG*. Despite this rebuttal and despite the continuing reinforcement of the *GUMG* position by further projects undertaken by them, over the years after Harrison's research, his book continues to be championed by academics hostile to the original research. As with Herman & Chomsky, the *GUMG* make no claim to absolute domination of media messages by elites. Absolute domination is not required, indeed its absence may help to effectively close off debate and undermine critical perspectives by suggesting greater diversity than is there and satisfying audiences which take reassurance from the presence of even a small group of alternative voices.

In *Media and Mental Distress*, Philo (1996) and the other writers in this edited collection, demonstrate the impact of negative portrayals of those with mental health problems on the attitudes of participants in focus groups. Later writers such as Harper (2005) criticize the *GUMG* for a tendency to over-generalize the nature of stigmatizing in different media – children's cartoons, teenage drama, soaps and film - and for too readily accepting the popular notion that the correlation of mental illness and violence is a myth. With regard to the latter point, Harper writes: 'a correlation between some mental health problems and violence has been demonstrated in several studies'. The major problem with this whole debate is generalization of mental illness. Overall, as

Harper recognizes, the correlation between mental illness and violence is statistically there but it is not very significant. However, where the diagnosis is Paranoid Schizophrenia, the link is stronger and significantly stronger than in the general population. Further, and not discussed by Harper, is the violence associated with diagnoses such as Psychopathy or Sociopathy.

In *Bad News from Israel*, (2004), Philo and Berry report on the tendency of UK participants in their interviews and focus groups to report that, *contrary to the historical and statistical facts*, more Israelis than Palestinians are killed and that the Israelis are the indigenous group under attack from immigrant and aggressive Palestinian groups. With particular relevance for the Scottish Referendum campaign, Soroka (2006) points to evidence connecting media coverage of economic issues with actual voting behaviour and, in particular, the greater impact of negative information. Perhaps underpinning this, Tiffany et al (1998) suggest that human beings possess an evolved and automatic 'negativity bias' and that: 'once attended, negative information (threats to pensions, for example) has a greater impact [on brain and social responses] than equally positive information (higher GDP in Scotland, for example). This focused and evidence-based approach makes a strong case for media impact *in certain contexts* and voting in a referendum dominated by the economy seems likely to be a good example.

Elite-on-Elite Media Effects

Most research has been about the effects of media messages on wider population or, commonly, the young. The effects of media messages produced by elite groups upon

other elite groups has been less common but might be equally interesting in the context of market-oriented societies such as the UK and Scotland. Further developing the notion of relatively strong media effects in the kind of specific contexts studied by the *GUMG*, there is a body of opinion (Zaller, 1997; Miller and Krosnick, 1997; Chomsky, 1987; Davis, 2003) which indicates that *elites* are, as Davis (2003: 672-673) suggests: 'themselves very susceptible to media influence and 'dominant ideologies'. The effects of information flowing from London-based sources such as the Treasury, the Office for Budget Responsibility, the Institute for Fiscal Studies or the 'independent', Oxford Economics, upon Scottish political, media and commercial elites would make an intriguing study. My study of *Good Morning Scotland*, BBC Scotland's 'flagship' news forum, in Chapter 2, raises some ideas about this. Could it be that reporters like Glenn Campbell or Hayleigh Miller were more likely to be duped by Westminster propaganda than the average citizen because of their pressurised, 'need-to-know-all-the-time and quickly', occupations. Of course, I have no hard evidence of any such thing. This is not a recent idea but, rather, has been discussed since the 1950s and 1960s. In the context of US government influence on 'intellectuals' (Mills, 1956; Ellul, 1965) and of executive influence on policy-makers (Cohen, 1963) a particular vulnerability to propaganda, due to a need for information, amongst these groups, is suggested. Further, there are now specific accounts of elites' decision-making being influenced by elite media campaigns (Manheim, 1994; Davis, 2000). A recent potential example of a powerful elite-elite media effect is that of the banks and the business schools. James (2009) describes the tendency emerging after the 2008 crash, by some banking executives, to blame academic economists for leading them astray with ideas. An example in the field of medicine, of elite-elite effects, can be

observed in this author's study (Robertson, 2009) of the UK newspaper reporting of the increase in autism diagnoses and, in particular, the role of the MMR vaccine in potentially triggering it. Quite dominant in the reporting, especially in the serious broadsheets, were the views of mainstream academics and health professionals and of a tendency to attribute causality to genetic factors. More political explanations such as the decision to combine three vaccines in one (MMR) or levels of pollution in urban areas were rarely considered. Further, the possibility that milder forms of autism could be characterized as positive and that the deviance associated with the label was, in a classic *social constructivist* or *interactionist* sense (Becker, 1963; 1964), in the popular perceptions rather than in the behaviour itself. This was evident in the focus, in the reporting, almost exclusively on the problems faced by parents rather than the viewpoint of autistics themselves (Robertson, 2009: 23).

Media Effects: Conclusions

I make no simple or direct claims about a *mass* or generalized impact on audiences except where the communication reinforces already existing predispositions toward anxiety. So, the heavy use of scaremongering regarding the Scottish economy's prospects may have shifted a considerable number of voters. The post-referendum surge in support for independence might suggest the temporary nature of the effect of such scares on some of the population. However, with the *GUMG* writers, I commend the value of research which exposes power and inequality in the functioning of the media because they can be shown to be important means by which current social and economic exploitation is maintained. Further, with Davis (2003), I take as clearly

demonstrable, the elite-elite effects in contexts such as the behaviour of speculators in money markets and so, probable, comparable, effects on media and other elites in Scotland in 2014. Between these extremes of largely unsubstantiated *mass* media effects with regard to sex and violence and elite-elite communication in the financial sector, there is a range of contexts of varying impact. Where news concerns existential threats, already important in the minds of audiences, such as negative news about the economy or about those with mental health problems living in the community, about the presence of paedophiles or about 'extreme' weather events and consequent shortages of fuel or food, then stronger effects are demonstrable in protest marches and queues.

Media Effects and the Scottish Referendum:

So, in the context of the Scottish Referendum vote, the above research suggests that, in part, voters were quite resistant to media messages except where these were negative messages about the economy. The recent study by Morisi (2014) in the specific contexts of referenda rather than multi-party elections and of the Scottish Independence Referendum of 2014 suggests further evidence that media coverage does matter here. We know how prevalent media bias was (see Chapters 2, 3 and 4) so we can, reasonably assume, some considerable impact on the vote, in favour of No. An earlier more typical Yougov survey for News UK, seems at first sight further evidence of media impact on voting behaviour but needs to be read carefully. A headline on The Scottish Statesman site suggests 'Mainstream media called the shots in the referendum' and opens with 'A majority of Scots allowed mainstream media to influence their decision' followed by '60% of those surveyed said that they had been

influenced by newspapers'. On closer examination, however, we see that the actual question only asked respondents where they 'got information from'. Clearly these headlines make a leap which cannot be reliably made. Unlike the Morisi study, the Yougov survey, like many before it, only hints at possible effects without being able to demonstrate them in a scientific way.

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Chapter 7: Scottish Politics and Media after September 2014: *Creating a More Democratic Scotland?*



© Rich Welsh: Anti-fracking Protest Grangemouth, Scotland

‘Post the Referendum, what the Yes Campaign seems to be doing here...it’s not fragmenting....like an organism it’s pulsing in different directions and now many of the Yes campaigners have become almost obsessed with fracking and TTIP or some other aspect [of social justice] which is to do with control. It’s to do with the extent to which the people of Scotland can control their land or their resources or their environment.’ (The author speaking at an Anti-fracking Protest in Grangemouth, Scotland on December 7th 2014)

‘It is impossible to have visited Scotland in recent days (September 2014) and not to have been exhilarated by the sheer vigour of democratic engagement. Scotland at the moment is what a democracy is supposed to be: a buzzing hive of argument and involvement, most

of it civil, respectful and deeply intelligent. This energy has been unleashed not by atavistic tribal passions but by a simple realisation: for once, the people have some power.’ (O’Toole, 2014)

‘I think he was quite clear on his methods. The only way to challenge the findings would be to present the programmes to another neutral academic body to use grounded theory to go through the same process. It can't be done by somehow checking the original process as that would not be linear or even true to the context of grounded theory methods. The BBC were quite rightly refused and imo the reason they have not employed a similar study to present their argument is because they know fine the results would be the same. They need to stop digging on this one. Personally I don't agree with the Dr Robertson. I think editorial bias is sent down from the top.’

(Topic Originator: Bertiesback <http://dafc.info/forum/> Date: 3/2/14)

Writing in the Guardian on 12th September 2014, days before the Scottish Independence Referendum poll, Fintan O’Toole, caught the flavour of what many of us felt. The second quote by ‘Bertiesback’ is one of 77 in a thread about my research on the forum for the supporters of Scottish football club, Dunfermline Athletic. What must the fans of Hamilton Academicals have been discussing? Some of the other comments were even longer and even more academic in style. This seems a remarkable example of the scale of the presence of the Scottish Independence Referendum debate on social media across Scotland in 2014. As a long term student of

democracy and lamenter of its limitations in the UK, I could hardly believe what I was seeing. My own research was re-tweeted to millions, a low-cost but quality video ('The Bigger the Lie', by Alan McMaster, *Phantom Power Film Production* at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ajd4R-9BEIw>) outlining the nature of thought control in democracies, based on Herman & Chomsky, achieved more than 100 000 hits....for an academic! I joined Facebook and my page was soon linked to hundreds like it. They presumably are linked to hundreds beyond. More than a million Scots use Facebook. My Facebook page, like many of the others, was soon a hive of evidence posting and intelligent commentary. People of all educational backgrounds were talking economics, law and cultural policy, sharing research papers and forensically examining media output. It was, and is, like a university.

At the end of 2014, as I write, it looks good. It looks really good, doesn't it? Is Scotland becoming the 'best little democracy' in the world with a consequent confidence in its wider political awareness and an ability to see through corporate and establishment propaganda? Next time, it can be argued on this basis, that a majority of the electorate will not be frightened and deceived to the same extent. There is already evidence of a tendency of this kind in recent (December 2014) opinion polls suggesting a Yes majority. Before getting carried away, I suggest we look a little more carefully at the ideas around just what makes a democracy. The most influential writer on this is probably Jurgen Habermas who argues that the quality of the 'public sphere', the space in which citizens can debate policy, is what matters.

Defining the Public Sphere

A basis for judging the quality of discourse, deriving initially from the ideas of Jurgen Habermas, but updated with more recent thinking, follows.

In 1983 (1990: 87-89, in English), Habermas revisited and summarised the necessary conditions for rational discourse. The conditions, of particular interest for this study of online behaviour and those 'most discussed and well known are those at the process level', (Ross and Chiasson, 2011: 128):

- '3.1 Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse.
- 3.2
 - a. Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever.
 - b. Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse.
 - c Everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires and needs.
- 3.3 No speaker may be prevented by, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down in (3.1) and (3.2).' (Habermas, 1990: 89)

At first sight, you can see the role local meetings and online debate, of the kind and the intensity we had in Scotland in 2013-2014, might have in meeting these criteria.

More recent contributions to the debate originating in Habermas, are considered with a view to informing the development of criteria for measuring the quality of democracy. One of the most influential attempts to update Habermas and make his

ideas 'capable of theorizing the limits of actually existing democracy' (in the late 20th Century) comes from Nancy Fraser (1990). Fraser makes four main criticisms of what she describes as Habermas's *bourgeois* (middle-class, male) conception of the public sphere and insists that it now requires rejection of:

1. the assumption that it is possible for participants in a public sphere to hide status differentials and to communicate "as if" they were social equals; the assumption, therefore, that societal equality is not a necessary condition for political democracy;
(Remember, Fraser, too is writing before the flowering of social media.)
2. the assumption that the proliferation of a multiplicity of competing publics is necessarily a step away from, rather than toward, greater democracy, and that a single, comprehensive public sphere is always preferable to a nexus of multiple publics;
3. the assumption that discourse in public spheres should be restricted to deliberation about the common good, and that the appearance of "private interests" and "private issues" is always undesirable;
4. the assumption that a functioning democratic public sphere requires a sharp separation between civil society and the state
(Fraser, 1990: 62-63).

Fraser wants to improve and update Habermas to remedy those aspects of an essentially *bourgeois, masculinist* public sphere, which she sees in Habermas's writing,

that can make it appear to be 'an instrument of domination or a utopian idea'. Fraser does not, to be fair, go so far as to insist on this completely damning criticism. She does, however, insist that, in public discourse (pre-internet), status differentials cannot be simply bracketed and participants then expected to debate as if they were equals. The extent to which online discourse helps to overcome this constraint is returned to in this paper and is clearly very important for the Scottish public sphere in 2014. Second, she is clearly disputing Habermas's contention that a multiplicity of public spheres weakens democracy by dissipating effects and, indeed, argues that a multiplicity is better for democracy. Against this view, and returning in part to Habermas, Young (1996) argues for the importance of an overarching public sphere over multiple publics which enables the flow of opinion and influence across and between groups and which strengthens them against already dominant publics such as government or professional associations. Again, this point is returned to in the context of the internet age and, in particular, the massive diversity and devolved cellular nature of the debate in the Scottish regions and in the multitude of blogs and Facebook pages. Finally, Fraser questions the Habermasian insistence on the sharp separation of civil society and the state. In this, Habermas sought to protect liberalism from laissez-faire capitalism and, in particular, the latter's tendency to corrupt public debate with private interests.

The Public Sphere in the Age of the Internet

The swell of optimism about the role of the internet in political ‘awakenings’ like the Arab Spring and the Scottish Independence Referendum is quite recent. Writing in 2013, Antje Gimmmler gives us a useful starting point for a comparative review of the potential of online discourse to enhance the public sphere. Beginning with a response to the earlier and strongly negative views (in German) of Buchstein (1996 in Gimmmler, 2013: 30-31), Gimmmler goes on to offer a range of more optimistic alternatives.

Buchstein had argued that the internet actually damages democracy and offered three justifications for this view. First, he suggested, writing in 1996 admittedly, that those who use the internet lack the competence and creativity needed to interact with the technology in ways comparable to those expected by Habermas. Gimmmler responds by doubting the evidence for this claim while suggesting the need for educational initiatives to explicitly teach the skills needed for engagement with politics, on or offline (Gimmmler, 2013: 31). Second, Buchstein questioned the extent of access to the internet by disadvantaged groups. Again, Gimmmler offers evidence (from 1998) to suggest Buchstein is too pessimistic (18% access in Germany). Mid-2012 figures are now available and suggest access in Germany stood then at 82.7% of the total population while, in the UK, they stood at 84.1% in 2013 (*New Media Trendwatch*, 2013). While these figures reveal dramatic growth for a technological adoption, it must be remembered that they also clearly indicate major residual pockets of exclusion of the order of millions of, arguably, the poorest members of society in both countries and, thus, significant in any Habermasian evaluation of their contribution to the public sphere. Scotland has particular problems of poverty and that combined with

major pockets of educational under-achievement suggests we should remember not to be too confident in the inclusiveness of the referendum debate online. Buchstein may have been pessimistic about growth in the 1990s but it can also be argued that Gimmler is perhaps complacent about more recent developments. Buchstein's third criticism echoes Habermas's concern about the ambivalent nature of electronic mass communication and the need for at least some face-to-face discourse to guarantee authenticity and responsibility. Gimmler, once more adopts a more optimistic view of the extent to which, in his liberal pluralist view of western democracies, decision makers in parliamentary spheres can be trusted to respond to rational expressions of opinion from other groups (Gimmler, 2013: 31). Gimmler had clearly never investigated the record of the typical representative of the Labour/ Conservative/ Liberal elite in the UK and Scotland or he might have been less relaxed about trusting them.

As will become more apparent, context emerges as a significant factor in the quality of discourse found online. Discourses around, say, human genome research, paedophilia, capital punishment, economics, foreign affairs, feminism or the Scottish Independence Referendum will attract quite different behaviour and produce quite varying levels of satisfaction of criteria.

Evidence Against The Emergence of New Public Spheres Online

Much of the popular discourse around the potential in social media stresses the positive. Social media connect people otherwise too distant or too different from the

majority to be viable communities. I couldn't miss the fact that the Facebook-organised campaigns against BBC Bias and shale gas fracking, that I've been asked to speak at, were all organised by women. Many of the interviews I've done have been with women and a great deal of the social media exchanges I've had have been with women. Social media flatten out inequalities in status, class, ethnicity and, it seems, in Scotland especially, gender. There is however some evidence to the contrary and this is discussed here.

In a large study of online and print-based debate around human genome research, in Germany and the USA, Gerhards & Schafer (2010: 143) found that 'internet communication did not differ significantly from the offline debate in the print media'. Though discourse here was largely polite and troll-free, this was portrayed as largely negative for the authors, in that members of political and scientific elites dominated in both media and that the discourse was not 'heterogeneous; rather the scientific-medical frame dominates', (Gerhards & Schafer, 2010: 155). Negative, in quite a different way, were the conclusions of Lynch (2002) in her study of pro-death penalty discourse on the internet in the USA. Where Gerhards & Schafer found elite dominance and supremacy of scientific discourse, she finds a turning away from any comparable 'civilizing' pattern of the kind favoured by political and judicial elites in the USA and evidence of a powerful desire to 'unleash punishment from its institutional restraints' (Lynch, 2002: 213). What Lynch means by this are death and rape threats.

More evidence of cyber-bullying and, in particular, sexist abuse was found by Susan Herring and her co-researchers (2002: 371). She stresses the vulnerability of a number of groups and the consequent potential for psychological damage by trolls:

‘Moreover, the relative anonymity of the Internet can make people feel safe talking about issues that might be considered sensitive, inappropriate or dangerous in face-to-face public conversation. These properties make online forums especially attractive to individuals seeking support for suffering from disease or abuse, and to members of minority social and political groups such as homosexuals, racial minorities, and feminists. Such groups can be considered vulnerable populations, in that they tend to be stigmatized and discriminated against by mainstream society.’

The seriousness of this particular form of trolling is made clear by Jane (2012: 12) who argues that ‘hyperbolic vitriol – often involving rape and death threats – has become a lingua franca in many sectors of cyberspace [and that] the result is a form of textual sadism [that] may result in withdrawal from the public sphere’. She goes on to suggest that such behaviour is ‘threatening the realization of broad ideals such as civil discourse, social inclusivity and democratic engagement’ (Ibid: 12). I saw little evidence of this in Referendum-based social media other than some teasing of strong women leaders by male followers and accomplices.

With an emphasis on tensions of an ethno-religious nature but with elements of gender-based discrimination, a study of, on the surface, Muslim-Christian tensions in

Egypt (el-Nawawy & Khamis, 2011: 248) found discourse characterised by ‘bipolarity, strategic action, venting angry emotions and the absence of the middle ground of negotiation and rational-critical deliberations’. Again, context seems to be emerging as fundamental in assessing online discourse. Noting the potential differences between Egyptian and Northern European cultures, the focus of the Egyptian blogs on the alleged rape of a Muslim child by a Coptic Christian will have seriously challenged the possibility of rational-critical deliberation. There was, despite this, some rational discourse (Ibid: 241). Scottish society is, of course, heavily scarred by sectarianism mixed with football rivalry but I saw little evidence of explicitly sectarian comments between Yes and No supporters online. Both groups were perhaps aware of the damage such commentary might attract to their respective positions. The exception in this context was the occasional suggestion, inaccurate, that all Glasgow Rangers fans were No-supporters.

Evidence In Favour of the Emergence of New Public Spheres Online

The Scottish Referendum campaign via social media was in one sense, enormous and in the other, wonderful. On the one hand, millions of tweets and posts and on the other, content often of high quality, using evidence to make rational arguments in a complex social, cultural, economic and historical context.

In what might be seen as the, admittedly patriarchal, white and middle-class - ‘mainstream’ of political discourse – economy, law, foreign affairs – most studies so far have focused on the blog producers themselves and on the relationships between

bloggers and the public sphere. With particular regard to those who comment on newspaper columnists blogging, the picture is, not surprisingly, less polarized than in the contexts of gender, ethnicity or sexuality discussed above.

Gimmler (2001), whose quite early review begins with a balanced assessment of the potential for enhancement or regeneration of the public sphere via online discourse, goes on to develop a more positive view of the future. In particular he points quite strongly to those features of internet-based discourse which can 'actually strengthen deliberative democracy' (Gimmler, 2001: 31):

'This is possible because the model (internet) places such emphasis on raising issues of a social and political sort within a sphere composed of deliberating citizens. At this point, two firm conclusions can be drawn. First in the deliberative process, information plays a central role along with achieving equality of access to it. Equality of access to information and an unrestricted means of access are fundamental to a more ambitious practice of discourse. This is supported by internet technology. Second, the opportunity for interaction which the internet facilitates satisfies another prerequisite of deliberative practice. As a means of promoting interaction, the internet has a positive and direct contribution to make.

Gimmler's optimism does, of course, need to be considered in the light of the limited, often zero level of internet access of around 15% of those living in western

democracies (*New Media Trend Watch*, 2013). Gimmler's particular interest in the value of 'interaction' is repeated in Beyers (2004: 12) where he reminds us that 'Interactivity (and its lack) was an important issue in communication studies long before it became a buzzword on the internet' (11) and concludes that it 'provides online journalism with a potential to empower the audience' (12). In his survey of discussion boards in the Flemish language, *De Standaard Online*, he found that each unique poster of a comment received, on average, 10.7 comments (14). This suggests quite an engaged and satisfying exchange of ideas. Similarly, Tucher (1997) and Deuze & Paulussen (2002) identify interactivity as the distinctive and the most valued of the characteristics of online discourse.

Perhaps more surprising, thinking back to the Muslim-Christian tensions reported earlier by el-Nawawy & Khamis (2011) and again of particular interest for the results reported later in this paper, are the conclusions of a Russian study that 'a Russian language 'flamewar' contributes to sociability both on the micro level, by building alliances through the face threatening 'snub the other' strategy and, on the macro level, by renewing the participants' sense of belonging to a loosely defined blogging community', (Perelmutter, 2012: 74). The Russian language and cultural context may limit comparability with European and US studies but my own recent experience of Unionist trolls in Yes campaign Facebook pages suggest otherwise. Here 'trolls' were recognised, identified and subjected to quite gentle teasing rather than venomous attacks of the kind found elsewhere and mentioned earlier. Perelmutter does suggest that within Russian language blogs, 'that flamewars are ubiquitous, predictable and develop according to highly recognizable scenarios', (78). So, as in the Scottish

experience, the participants are familiar with the ritual and quite restrained in their reactions. In some cases, I observed, a kind of mutual respect seemed to emerge and exchange with the visiting but familiar troll took the form of banter. I know 'banter' is often used as a cover for what is really bullying but that does not mean that it does not exist at all. Notably, Perelmutter makes no reference to trolling. Whether this means that he sees flaming as the same kind of phenomenon is not clear but reading of the examples he gives does suggest so.

More predictably and similarly of particular interest here, van Es *et al* (2004: 171) highlight the advantages of internet-based, over face-to-face, negotiations around ethical issues:

'Precisely because there is only verbal communication, subjects need to pay special attention to careful reading and writing, interpreting and paraphrasing. In delicate moral matters, internet negotiation tended to lead to more agreeable solutions in less statement exchanges.'

Attempting to explain the above differences, van Es *et al* attribute major importance to the asynchronous nature of the discourse online and the consequent sense of time to reflect and to prepare constructive responses. By contrast, during face-to-face negotiations there is little time to revise strategies during the process (169). The selected context of ethical and legal issues surrounding war crimes, reported later in

this paper, suggests interesting possibilities for the presence or absence of similar behaviour.

One of the most compelling pieces of evidence for the potential in online discussion boards to develop into fairly substantial and high quality public spheres is *openDemocracy.net* which has operated for around ten years, presented original, independent and intelligent journalism from professional writers and from non-journalist participants in important events, from the Arab Spring to the Occupy movement in Western cities, and attracted informed and passionate comment from others around the world. Latterly, *oD*'s leading writers have begun to debate, self-consciously, its emerging nature and characterising it as a 'commons':

'*oD* is not a magazine like a commodity you buy or pay to have sent by mail. It is a gift of a space created by its editors and contributors, an invitation to share in something that is both open and protected. In a word, a commons.' (Barnett, 2013: 2)

Though this study does not seek to empirically assess the quality of *oD*, here, browsing the site will quickly demonstrate its very high quality in terms of openness, interactivity, substance and so on. However, this impressive space suffers from a rather serious flaw – lack of comments by readers. The above contribution by the *oD* founder and journalist, Anthony Barnett, drew only two comments; one praising the writing and one from Anthony expressing gratitude for the praise with, in total, only four words. Looking at the 'front page' six

stories on 21st August 2013, none had more than three replying comments.

That less open, sometimes lower quality, journalism in the online versions of established, commercially-driven newspapers (see this study's results), can attract as many as 1000 comments in one or two days tells us something about what may be the best routes to the development of public spheres. The same may be said of the vibrant, messy nature of Facebook discourse but its richness, inclusiveness and sustainability make it a truly convincing public sphere.

The Importance of Context

The above review of recent research into the quality of online discourse, offers evidence both for and against the idea that the internet offers a new opportunity to deliver a public sphere more akin to Habermas's hopes. However, what seems evident at this point is that success seems to depend at least in part upon the topic of debate and, perhaps, upon the audience for the starter blog. The Scottish Referendum campaign looks like being the most dramatic example of this and is dealt with separately below. That feminist blogs and blogs about a mixed ethno-religious community attract vitriol and ignorance (Herring *et al*, 2002; Jane, 2012; el-Nawaway &Khami, 2011) is a regrettable fact. That a scientific blog is dominated by establishment thinking and that comments ridicule 'alternative' perspectives is bad news for those hoping for new public spheres online (Gerhards & Schafer, 2010). That flaming can be shown to be constructive in a debate on the internet in Russian is unexpected and optimistic while the emergence of interactivity as a perceived prime

value could have been predicted. Though the authors do not suggest so, directly, perhaps flaming is just a kind of interactivity (Perelmutter, 2012)?

Context: The Scottish Referendum

What is the evidence in these results for the emergence of a healthy public sphere in Scotland to match the expectations of Habermas and of later writers such as Fraser?

First, *‘Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse’* is fairly well-satisfied in social media. Acknowledging, of course, the less than 100% access to the Internet in the UK, these sites require no subscription and require only the most minimal requests of identity confirmation – a verifiable email address is needed but other details are purely optional. With regard to broadcasting and printing, however, we have a quite unsatisfactory situation with the great majority of both favouring one side in a referendum, with a refusal on the part of the public service broadcaster (BBC) to fulfil its charter by reporting fully on the complaints it receives and in the case of the newspapers, stubborn attachment to right-of-centre, establishment perspectives despite plummeting sales.

Second, *‘Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever’* was well-satisfied in social media with no evidence of arguments being moderated as long as polite in format. We can assume that Habermas’s ‘whatever’ applied to ideological range and not to abusive language. *‘Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse’* was no less well satisfied here.

That *'Everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires and needs'* also seemed well-satisfied in social media though Habermas's wording does suggest a kind of naïve optimism. Again, the contrast between social media and mainstream media was stark in Scotland in 2014. My own experience of quiet suppression of criticism by journalistic elites was profoundly undemocratic. Who knows how many similar voices were stonewalled by the complaints departments in the BBC, STV and the Scottish press?

Finally, that *'No speaker may be prevented by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights'* is beyond the possible contribution that online discourses can guarantee. While it can be argued that the enhanced privacy possible in the Internet, and the level of freedom from physical constraint offered by the laptop computer wirelessly connected to the Internet are clearly greater, thus more free of coercion, than earlier fora such as meetings, there is still some scope for state/security agencies to make such connection very difficult. While there is no hard evidence of *agent provocateurs* operating to troll the Yes campaign, there was much anecdotal muttering amongst activists who suspected the motivations of some of the more zealous and aggressive nationalist contributors to their blogs and Facebook pages and who then investigated the homepages of the latter to find little evidence of wider engagement with the Yes campaign.

While we can, correctly, direct most of our enthusiasm at the democracy enhancing nature of the social media explosion and applaud the mass grass-roots activity around the key events, there are also positive indicators in the areas of broadcasting and the press. The mainstream broadcasters and the press have been a force for stagnation

but, out of social media, have emerged the seeds of new media more rooted in the aspirations and needs of the wider community in Scotland. Starting, often, as little more than text and photograph-based blogs, around 2012, several of these have begun to sprout new limbs of TV, radio and wiki-like form. Already, *newsnetscotland.com* with Derek Bateman, *Bella Caledonia* and *Wings Over Scotland* pose serious challenges to the declining mainstream operators. It will be important, of course, that these new media do not fall into the same bad habits of those they replace. Active elected boards and built-in, maintained, auditing of ideological content are essential if they are not to repeat the mistakes exposed in, especially, BBC Scotland.

The people of Scotland, in 2014, were educated in political awareness in a way many had never been before. The longstanding history curriculum of glorious British Imperialism and uncritical admiration of the emergence of supposedly admired democratic institutions has hammered the benefits of the Union deep into the minds of generations of Scots. Combine that inertia with a fully complicit media and the 45% vote becomes an amazing achievement. However, in 2014 and after, the further growth of political activity in social media, the learning of hard lessons by mainstream media if they wish to survive, the emergence of new independent media and the growth in membership of the pro-independence political parties suggest that the shift in Scottish opinion and voting toward support for independence had only begun in 2014. We have, next time, much to be hopeful of with regard to a fairer, balanced fully democratic environment.

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