

# News in Lockdown

## Research Project:

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Broadcast Journalism Training Council



Teaching  
Excellence  
Framework



# Researchers

- **Gail Mellors:** Senior Lecturer at Nottingham Trent University. Course Leader for BA Broadcast Journalism
- **Industry experience:** News reporter, presenter and producer for ITV, beforehand reported for regional and national newspapers
- **Raj Shukla:** Senior Lecturer at Nottingham Trent University.
- **Industry experience:** News reporter, presenter and producer for ITV, previously a presenter and reporter for commercial radio stations.

# Scope of research

- 20+ in-depth questionnaires gathered from reporters, camera operators, producers, news editors and Heads of News at ITV, BBC and Sky (half of those approached have so far responded)
- Covering working practices and safety measures
- Engagement with audience and impact on news agenda
  
- 20+ programmes broadcast by national and regional services reviewed from March, April, May and June

# Trends within programming

- One issue dominated the programming for many months
- Changes to working were implemented almost immediately on lockdown
- Home working for the majority of staff, equipment sent to allow reporters to work from home



# Programming



- Single handed presentation – regional news programmes normally have two presenters, ITV regional opts dropped
- Lots of Skype style lives into programmes
- Lots of Skype style interview clips in packages
- Use of helicopter/ drone footage to show empty city centres, beaches, streets

# Programming



- Set-ups illustrating reporters social distancing
- Set-ups illustrating reporters using laptops for remote interviewing
- Filming in gardens, parks, locations empty of others
- Fewer location lives (more as lives)

# Programming

- Whole packages built around User Generated Content
- Some fears of not being able to get stories from people who lacked technology
- Packages started to look predictable



# Trends within feedback from reporters (negatives)

- Frustration at the limitations on filming sequences and illustrating stories
- Limitations on locations and places in which to do this
- Time needed to choreograph interviews to allow for social distancing
- Difficulties caused by need to distance from colleagues





# Trends within feedback from reporters (negatives)



- Unpredictability of members of the public
- Awareness of limitations on reaching/covering the stories of those less IT literate or technologically equipped
- Frustrations at speed of change and need to adapt to new technologies in an instant

# Trends within feedback from reporters (positives)

- Less travelling long distances and so more time to research
- More UCG and time to dig it out
- People-rich packages and stories told from personal perspectives
- Single issue has dominated news agenda so scope to examine impact from many perspectives, using different voices
- Championing the NHS and telling uplifting stories



# Trends within feedback from crews (negatives)

- Unpredictability of members of the public
- Frustration at being in firing line when so many were safe at home
- Used to working remotely so no real change to daily pattern or working hours



Time and care needed to keep equipment clean  
Wearing face masks all day long

# Trends within feedback from managers (positives)

- Initial fears of 'rip and read' TV unfounded
- New technologies found (NoMachine) and adapted to quickly (Skype, Zoom)
- Cost-savings in travel and time
- More time for and input to virtual planning meetings from reporters
- People-rich stories
- Interaction with and appreciation from the public



**Viewing figures up:** 50% for national lunchtime news, 26% for News at Ten, 20% for regional services

Source: ITV

# Trends within feedback from managers (negatives)



- Need to risk assess every job and every aspect of operation
- Huge responsibility to and fears for health and safety of staff
- Recognition that live studio-based interviews are more dynamic than those conducted via a screen and remote-link.
- Fears that newsgathering will become harder during the winter months

# Future implications for industry

- More remote working likely for most news organisations
- Use of Skype/ Zoom much more acceptable especially where access is hard
- Crews will no longer travel across the region for a guest or quick clip



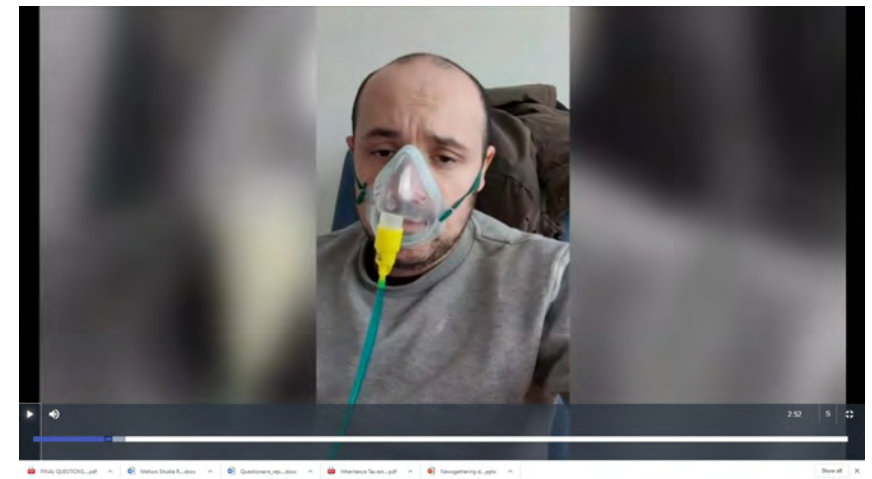
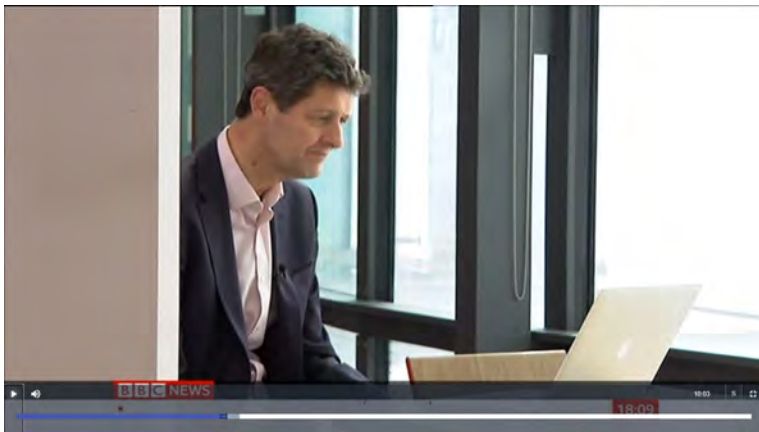
# Future implications for industry



- Sweeping cuts to BBC regional output announced mid-pandemic
- Seven of the 20 presenters of regional 6.30 news programmes and online teams will be cut
- 'Inside Out' to be replaced by new programme so weekly current affairs programmes will no longer be made in Salford, Nottingham, Plymouth, Southampton or Tunbridge Wells

# Implications for staff and viewers

- Unease over less creative and quality content
- Slimmed down newsrooms may lead to reporters having less time to film and edit
- More reliance on UGC and remote interviewing
- Inclusivity – will this only apply to people with access to technology





# Implications for teaching

- Do digital natives have any appreciation of how different the 'new normal' is to how things were done before?
- The importance of professionally filmed and edited footage?



# Curation vs. generation

Points to consider:

- The large amount of UGC on social media
- Directing users remotely to film content themselves
- Digital natives happy with Zoom/ Skype etc quality
- How do we show/teach students that professionally filmed and edited footage lets them be more creative and looks better on screen?
- Do we teach them professional methods first and then show them shortcuts or show them what is currently being done on-screen?

# Health and Safety

- Major concern: Journalists key workers but difficult to argue same imperative for students
- Are we being responsible asking them to newsgather during the pandemic?
- Taking lead from industry, risk assessments for every job and activity
- Extra sessions devised to cover industry practice, protocols and guidance
- Online quiz which has to be passed before students can borrow equipment

# Inclusivity

- To ensure fairness of access and involvement for all:
- Laptops powerful enough to run remote edit softwares and ensure reliable connectivity to newsroom activities
- Some students will be disadvantage in their ability to participate in learning and complete assessments having profound and long-lasting impact on their futures
- Different universities have differing approaches
- Where does that leave front-line educators?

# Cost implications

- Huge cost implications, therefore, for departments
- At a time when (international) recruitment has fallen
- Already we have seen job losses
- In our institution, fearing a significant funding shortfall, extreme caution around budgets
- Yet we have recruited 30% above target across UG courses (an extra 45 students)
- Now scramble to accommodate, timetable and staff sessions for these extra students – workload falls inevitably on front-line staff

# Changing industry, changing practices

- Educated guesses as how industry will change following the pandemic recognising the importance of monitoring this
- Importance of attracting and enthusing young talent in face of publicised job cuts and notions of an industry in decline
- But as PR of Politics shift and social media dominates, journalism has never been more important for our democracy
- Challenges aren't new but are amplified

# Implications for tutors in the year ahead

- Huge increase in workload and responsibility
- Limited time to secure adequate staffing and equipment
- No extra time or subject-specific support
- Importance of organisations like this, pulling together as colleagues and making use of industry contacts