

**UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES**

**A CORPUS-BASED CONTENT ANALYSIS OF
BRITISH RIGHT-WING NEWSPAPERS' REACTION
TO THE BBC**

BA thesis

**MARGE JÄRLIK
SUPERVISOR: ÜLLE TÜRK, MA**

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to study the right-wing newspapers' online versions' reaction to the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) refusal to label Hamas 'terrorists' and instead use the term 'militants'. The analysis examines how the newspapers are using this debate to undermine the BBC's influence in the British public life. This is important because in the increasingly polarised world, these papers question the need for journalistic neutrality and objectivity. The methods and reasons with which the impartiality and the BBC position as the most trusted news provider is tested, should be investigated.

The introduction gives a brief overview of the BBC and its Editorial guidelines. The conservative nature of the British media is also examined. The literature review will demonstrate why newspapers generally oppose the BBC, what are the main accusations against it and what research shows is the British media's (including the BBC's) stance towards Israel. The corpus-assisted content analysis is used to study articles from two newspapers: broadsheet the Telegraph and mid-market the Daily Mail. News pieces from one month period from October 8, 2023, to November 8, 2023 were selected.

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Introduction

On the 7th of October 2023, a Palestinian group Hamas launched an attack on Israel in a continuation of a long and protracted conflict in the Middle East (House of Commons Library 2024: 5). As a response to the initial assault which left over a thousand dead and several hundred hostages taken by Hamas, Israel counterattacked with air strikes within days and with ground forces by the end of October (House of Commons Library 2024: 5). As of May 2024, the conflict is still ongoing.

From the start, there has been massive media coverage of the conflict in the UK. What is important is that as Segev and Miesch (2011: 1948) point out “the coverage of Arab-Israeli conflict...inevitably incorporates various types of biases”. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) initially continued its long-standing practice of avoiding labelling Hamas ‘terrorists’, instead calling them ‘militants’ in order to maintain impartiality. Loughborough report (2006: 53-55) states that the “BBC journalists avoid the use of terms perceived to be contested when describing the Israel-Arab conflict”. When the reporters have used those terms, they are clearly shown to be citing somebody else’s views. Due to the violence of the Hamas’ initial attack, the BBC faced strong criticism and accusations for being biased against both Israel and Palestinians for not naming Hamas ‘terrorists’. In mid-October 2023, in response to the criticism, the BBC decided to start calling Hamas as ‘proscribed terrorist organisation by the British government’ (Turness 2023: para. 18).

The United Kingdom has a relatively complicated media landscape. Cushion et al (2021: 634) call it a ‘hybrid national media system’, where the broadcasters are required to be impartial by law, however the print media is dominated by partisan newspapers that play a vital role in setting the country’s political agenda. In comparison to the United States, for example, the UK public service broadcasters form an important part of the

media landscape, particularly the BBC. The corporation is funded by the public, who own and watch TV, through a mandatory licence fee. Because it is financed by the people directly, the BBC is obliged to ‘serve the public’ (Thomas and Hindman 2011: 573). According to Curran et al (2009: 19, cited in Thomas and Hindman 2011: 574) “public service broadcasters are under enormous pressure to connect to all sections of society in order to justify their continued public funding”. However, as the BBC is the main beneficiary of the licence fee, it also makes the BBC ‘politically vulnerable’ since the BBC is accountable institutionally to the government (Lewis and Cushion 2019: 481).

The BBC’s constitution is the Royal Charter that legitimises its existence, defines its interests and objectives, and determines the plan for its public funding (Gibbons 2017: 32). The latest, 2016 Charter gave the British media regulator Ofcom regulatory powers over the BBC under the Operating Framework, which has been developed specifically for the BBC and regulates its ‘content standards and impact on competition’ (Operating Framework for the BBC 2017: 1). Ofcom requires all broadcasting media to report “news, in whatever form, ... with due accuracy and presented with due impartiality”. It defines impartiality as ‘not favouring one side over another’. The addition of ‘due’ before impartiality means that the topic and theme of specific programmes are respected, and therefore it is not necessary to portray every opinion or agenda when they are not appropriate or necessary for the content. As long as the ‘due impartiality’ is followed the broadcaster is allowed to present the news how they wish (freedom of speech) (Guidance notes 2017: 2-3). The BBC’s own Editorial Standards (2019: 44) also reinforce the concept of ‘due impartiality’. The Standards further elaborate that the coverage must not only be balanced but also inclusive to all widespread or significant points of view. Sambrook and Cushion (2024: 50) describe impartiality as “perhaps better understood as a process, a professional discipline, which seeks to address the problems critics identify...

a professional discipline which acknowledges the risks of personal bias or inappropriate weighting of arguments or groupthink and seeks to elevate journalism above them”. Both Ofcom’s Operating Framework (2017: 1) and the BBC’s Editorial Standards (n.a.: 12) stress the importance of keeping the public’s trust in the BBC. Newton (2021: 719) has pointed out that the BBC is the most trusted broadcaster in the UK and most British turn to the BBC channels in times of national crisis or emergency.

This paper analyses how the BBC’s coverage of the conflict was viewed by two right-wing (conservative) newspapers: a quality newspaper (broadsheet) The Telegraph and the mid-market Daily Mail. The Daily Mail and The Telegraph are both supporters of the Conservative party in the UK (Cushion et al 2018: 171). In fact, according to Cushion et al (2018: 163) “...the majority of best-selling newspapers support the Conservative Party and champion right-wing policies...Only a few newspapers, with a far lower combined readership than right-wing newspapers, openly back the Labour Party and support contrasting leftwing policies.” The Daily Mail and The Telegraph were chosen because they are one of the most read newspapers in the country (Tobitt and Majid 2024: para. 8). The importance of analysing media response to the BBC has perhaps been shown by Thompson and Hindman (2012: 583) who claim that “the BBC is at the center of some extremely important debates regarding media performance, roles, and responsibilities.” The notion of impartiality is a core tenet of the BBC. This has become an issue for the (British) newspapers as the ‘norm of impartiality’, the idea that all journalists should be impartial, is being increasingly challenged by the partisan media and the BBC’s continued emphasis on impartiality makes it an ideal target. According to Thompson and Hindman (2012: 583) there is a school of thought in media communication that “the norm of impartiality prohibits any evolution into a more inclusive, compassionate media model.” The BBC’s questionable ethical and moral

choices that allow criticism ‘from the wolves of free market’ continually weaken its position in the British public sphere (Thompson and Hindman 2012: 584).

The BBC’s refusal to call Hamas ‘terrorists’ after their attack on Israeli civilians on October 7, 2023 in the name of impartiality is yet another ‘morally and ethically questionable’ decision that has such given right-wing newspapers as the Daily Mail and The Telegraph ammunition to attack the BBC, its core principles and privileges, and undermine its position in the British public sphere. It is important to study and highlight the right-wing mainstream media criticism of the BBC as it emphasises the desire to move from a more traditional media (of which the BBC is a primary example) where journalistic neutrality in media coverage is the standard to a norm where partisanship in journalism is expected. Secondly, there are significantly more right-wing newspapers in the UK and their news and reports reach a large part of the population; therefore, it can lessen public support for the BBC.

This paper only studies the response of two conservative right-wing newspapers. As such, no liberal or left-wing papers were analysed. Furthermore, the analysis is only about the reaction to the BBC not labelling Hamas ‘terrorists’ and not of the conflict coverage itself by either the BBC or the newspapers. Also, there is a time limit of one month from the start of the war, while the conflict (and therefore media coverage of the conflict and reaction to it) was still ongoing.

This paper consists of introduction, two chapters and a conclusion. The theoretical chapter discusses the BBC position in the UK media landscape, the criticisms it faces from the competition and the studies done on the BBC content. The second part of the literature review looks at the research on the UK coverage of the Israel-Arab conflicts. It focuses on the coverage of the conservative papers and the BBC. The chapter ends with previous analyses of newspapers’ reaction to the BBC coverage. The second

chapter consists of methodology and analysis which is divided into three parts. The first part analyses the overall attitude towards the BBC, Hamas and Israel in the articles. The second and third parts who are the main actors and what are the main accusations against the BBC in the articles.

The BBC's impartiality and Israel-Arab conflicts in the UK media

The BBC is often not only under journalists' watchful eye but also the researchers'. This literature review looks at the studies done on the BBC's impartiality and what has been identified as problematic aspects that the BBC faces in maintaining its impartiality. It will also discuss what the literature has shown are the main criticisms the BBC has faced from the UK media, especially from conservative papers. The second part of the review focuses on the studies that have been done on the UK media coverage of the Israeli-Arab conflicts.

The BBC and impartiality

Nowadays all media are very strongly connected to each other while competing against one another. In this landscape, the BBC which is required to demonstrate 'due impartiality', is constantly struggling to enforce it and defend itself. Lewis and Cushion (2019: 481) identify three main problems broadcasters (mostly the BBC) today face that continuously threaten the impartiality of their content: firstly, increasingly aggressive attacks and accusations of bias from the partisan media and politicians, and, secondly, the agenda of the broadcasters being often set by the newspapers and other media, which do not fall under the Ofcom's Broadcasting Code. The third threat that stems from the fact that broadcasters and their journalist are a part of a larger ecosystem which includes all media and are, thus, inevitably connected and influenced by other media.

Despite the BBC being a rival of all media in the UK (and abroad) it is the conservative media who opposes and criticises it the most. According to the BBC Annual Report 2022/2023 (2023: 3), the BBC is the most trusted media brand in the UK and globally, the BBC creates more original UK content than other media company in the UK and over three quarters of British people think that the BBC is the most relevant news

source in the UK. Newton (2021: 719), Barnett and Seaton (2010: 327) and Gibbons (2017: 30) all state that the BBC is the main competitor of all commercial media in the UK. As Newton (2021: 722) points out “three quarters of the adult population in 2019 used BBC TV news...”. Barnett and Seaton (2012: 327) add that commercial competitors view the BBC as ‘a barrier towards their own advancement’ and, according to Gibbons (2017: 30) rivals have accused the BBC of taking over the whole industry and ‘crowding them out’. According to Barnett and Seaton (2012: 327) politicians and partisan media have had issues with the BBC since its inception as the BBC has over time criticised all parties and refuses to show partisanship. They and Wahl-Jorgenson et al (2017: 793) add that because of the licence fee the BBC faces increased public scrutiny and accusations of political bias, especially from right-wing politicians. Lewis and Cushion (2019: 494), in their turn, argue that there exists a general opposition to public service broadcasting among the conservative newspapers for ‘both commercial and ideological reasons’. They further point out that there is no such pressure or criticism from the left-wing newspapers.

Newspapers which do not fall under Ofcom and are almost always partisan, are often seen as the trendsetters of future news content. This can lead to partiality in the news content. Wahl-Jorgensen et al (2017: 792-793) state that the BBC being under constant conservative accusations of being too liberal has led the BBC to become more conservative as a defence mechanism. The BBC news broadcasters are constantly anxious of being accused of being too leftist; thus, in response they use more conservative sources as a way to defend and protect themselves from criticism.

Studies that have analysed the BBC’s content have actually demonstrated that the BBC tends to offer more conservative content than liberal. This difference comes forth in many various levels of the BBC. The BBC Trust funded study by Cardiff University found more conservative content than liberal in the BBC (Berry 2013: 1-3). The Cardiff

university study researched the BBC coverage focusing on multiple subjects, including the Israel-Palestine conflict, and found that Conservative party members received more airtime than Labour, in some instances nearly twice as much. The study also compared the BBC content from different years (2007 and 2012) and found that the governing party usually gets more airtime. This is also supported by Lewis and Cushion (2019: 485-486) who also point to this “incumbency bonus”. They note that while this is common occurrence is many countries that the party in power gets more coverage, in the case of the UK “the ideological balance of party political coverage favoured the Conservative Party when they were in power and granted them equitable status with the ruling party when they were in opposition.” (Lewis and Cushion 2019: 486) However, this imbalance of sources in coverage is not the same across all BBC channels. Lewis and Cushion (2019: 486) found that in 2015 BBC Four was the most balanced channel, while BBC One, its most popular channel, used mostly centrist or impartial sources and was only slightly less right leaning than the BBC News. The current news section on the BBC Two, however, had a clear right-wing bias. Lewis and Cushion (2019: 486) noted that overall, all the channels demonstrated some level of right-wing bias. Still, a more recent Cardiff University study (analysed articles and news pieces from 2018 and 2019) found that when comparing the BBC to other British public broadcasters “most BBC outlets featured a harder news agenda and supplied a higher level of policy information and analysis than many commercial news providers.” (Cushion n.a: 3) This suggests that despite BBC’s in-house Editorial Guidelines and Ofcom’s higher regulatory power over it, the BBC is leaning towards right-wing in content.

While the BBC prides itself over its impartiality, this has also led to a long-time criticism of it being too impartial. Tumber (2012: 14) states that the BBC has been criticised by the Conservative party for ‘lack of patriotism’ in its coverage of the Suez

crisis, Falklands War, and other conflicts. In this view, the BBC placed impartiality above national interest. Engelbert and McCurdy (2012: 114) also found that the broadcaster placed impartiality above ‘moral and ethical perspective’ when the BBC refused to air the appeal by the Disasters Emergency Committee (DMC) to raise money for refugees in Gaza in 2009. They conclude that the BBC let their ‘brand’, the thing which they are probably most known for – impartiality, took precedence over human suffering in Gaza. Therefore, the issue of remaining impartial can have a positive and negative impact, depending on what is relevant at the moment.

The coverage of the Israel-Arab conflict in the UK media

There are mixed findings regarding the UK media coverage of the Israel-Arab conflicts. Segev and Miesch (2011) analysed news stories published in five countries, including the UK, about the Israeli-Arab conflicts and compared positive and negative words/phrases used. They found that the UK news, represented by The Guardian and The Daily Telegraph a liberal and a conservative paper, were the most critical about Israel out of all countries analysed, yet the public opinion in the UK was more positive, placed in the middle of the spectrum (Segev and Miesch 2011: 1957, 1960). They theorized that this might be due to the mixed emotions and possibly the need to avoid responsibility the British about the situation because of their colonial legacy and the part they played in the creation of the Jewish state. In contrast, Philo and Berry (2004, cited in Neureiter 2017: 68-69) found that generally the UK media is more biased against Palestinians. They studied Israeli-Palestinian conflict coverage from 2000 to 2002 and point out that in the UK, the conflict has been covered quite comprehensively and, therefore the public awareness of it is likely higher than in many other countries. However, their research has shown that likely because of the pro-Israel lobby, Israeli sources and views are reported more often and information that could favour the Palestinian cause is being ignored. The

news in the UK have, in general, been found to be both positive and negative towards Israel.

The right-wing papers, on the other hand, have historically been pro-Israel. When for instance Neureiter (2017: 76) found that conservative papers are less anti-Israel than liberal papers and that political ideology of the newspaper is the main determining factor. Based on political ideologies, “reasons for conservative support of Israel include anti-revolutionary and *pro-status-quo* sentiments, religious motives, and democratic solidarity” (Neureiter 2017: 70). He analysed the reaction to the 2010 Gaza flotilla raid in four British newspapers, including the Daily Mail and The Telegraph and concluded that liberal newspapers in Britain are more likely to publish negative or critical news about Israel than conservative ones (Neureiter 2017: 72, 76). In addition, he (Neureiter 2017: 77) also found that right-wing newspapers are less likely to select anti-Israel sources.

Kaposi (2019: 80) looked at the conflict in 2005 and claims that liberal/progressive newspapers condemned Israeli actions and sought for negotiations, whereas conservative papers justified Israeli actions. Parry’s (2010: 80) study into newspapers’ (The Times and The Guardian) imagery of the Israeli-Lebanon conflict in 2006 showed The Guardian pictures more supportive of the Lebanese while The Times had a balanced representation of Lebanese and Israeli supporting content. The Guardian also used pictures to accuse Israel of military actions, while The Times offered images that depicted Israeli soldiers as “heroic”. Kaposi (2016: 285-286) also analysed the conservative papers (The Times) response to the Israel’s use of white phosphorus in the first Gaza war. He found that while The Times was initially somewhat critical of the use of white phosphorus by the Israeli military, their attitude changed quickly when Israel

started to face direct criticism. The Times ultimately refused to be critical of the use of white phosphorus by Israel.

Thus, it can be concluded that the attitude towards and reporting of the conflict or Israel itself is more often politically and ideologically motivated than the factual circumstances. The conservative media is more likely to be pro-Israel than the left-wing media.

While the BBC attempts to remain impartial in its coverage of the Israeli-Arab/Palestine conflicts, there is a definite lean towards pro-Israel bias which it shares with conservative media. Gaber et al (2009: 256) analysed the BBC-s coverage of Israeli-Hezbollah war in 2006 and found that there was a slight bias towards Israel in terms of the percentage of time given to Israeli officials' direct speech and when talking about of damages and casualties of the war. They theorized that this might be due to Israeli officials being more accessible and willing to do interviews rather than deliberate action by the BBC (Gaber et al 2009: 246). Another important factor Gaber et al (2009: 257) pointed out was the role of the BBC Middle East editor who was based in Lebanon for the majority of the war. While the editor's coverage was deemed unbiased, the photos and videos he shared often showed the damage mostly done by the Israelis which can give an imbalanced view of the conflict.

The BBC News' reaction to the Palestinian female suicide bombers during the Second Intifada (2000-2005) was analysed by Kirk (2022: 319) who found that the BBC News portrayed Palestinian motherhood as 'unnatural' and opposed it to Israeli motherhood. The Palestinian female bombers political agenda was downplayed in favour of emphasising their womanhood and motherhood. According to Kirk (2022: 319-320), this can be argued to be anti-Palestinian as it delegitimises the actions of the female suicide bombers.

Segev and Miesch (2011: 1959) point out that while BBC's own internal and commissioned reports tend to consider the BBC coverage 'relatively neutral', the external analyses appear to prove pro-Israeli bias in the corporations reporting. This conclusion does not seem applicable to the 2006 BBC Board of Governors commissioned study from the University of Loughborough Communications Research Centre that analysed the BBC content of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from August 1, 2005, to January 31, 2006. The report (2006: 53) extensively analysed BBC content, including the broadcasters use of such keywords as 'terrorist' and 'militant'. It demonstrates that the BBC reporters avoided using 'controversial' terms when describing the actors in the conflict. However, there exists an inconsistency in the BBC coverage in regard to the use of the term 'terrorist' across various conflicts, for example the 2005 London bombings were called 'terror attacks' (Loughborough University 2006: 57). Additionally, the report states that there exists a disparity in favour of Israel in the BBC coverage as a whole. This can be seen in the uneven numbers of Israeli versus Palestinian actors or sources. (Loughborough University 2006: 87) Despite criticism of bias from both sides of the conflict, the BBC has been rather consistently shown to publish more pro-Israel content than pro-Palestine.

In 2009, the BBC chose not to air an appeal by the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) to raise money for refugees in Gaza when most other broadcasters and other media outlets chose to do so. The internal process that led to this decision was analysed by Engelbert and McCurdy (2012) while the British newspapers' reaction to this was studied by Thompson and Hindman (2012). Whereas Engelbert and McCurdy (2012: 114) concluded that the BBC let the 'journalistic impartiality...take precedence', Thompson and Hindman (2012: 577) found that in addition to 'the BBC demonstrating blatant disregard for human life', the newspapers accused the BBC of 'taking sides' and

debating whether the BBC has ever been impartial. This criticism came from mostly right-wing newspapers.

As Groves (2017: 332) points out “...the British broadcast and newspaper coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an ideologically charged arena, which lacks balance and critical judgement.” The media often follows pre-approved approaches that suit their beliefs in their coverage and while the BBC tries to remain impartial the linked character of modern media systems and the contentious nature of Israel-Arab conflict means that it is often found to be more pro-Israel in content.

A study of two UK newspapers' discussion of the BBC

This chapter of the study analyses the articles of two newspapers: The Telegraph and the Daily Mail with the purpose of identifying common actors and accusatory aspects in relation to the BBC. It consists of the methodology and the analysis. The methodology section starts with a description of what criteria was used on the selection of the articles and how the corpora were formed using the Sketch Engine tool, which is a corpus management webpage that is a suitable way for analysing large amounts of text (Sketch Engine n.a). Next, it explains which research method was used and, lastly, it gives an overview of how the analysis was formed. The analysis consists of three parts with each focusing on the different aspect of the study. The first part of the analysis describes the general attitude towards the BBC, Hamas and Israel in the articles. The second section focuses on the actors who are the main contributors in these articles, and the third, what are the main accusations against the BBC.

Methodology

The article search was done on the newspapers' homepage search page and external search engines were not used. In The Telegraph, filter option was used to show 'News' articles only. In the Daily Mail, the internal search engine used the filter news 'channel' which appears to be similar The Telegraph's 'News' option. Also, in the Daily Mail search engine "article" as the content type was chosen. Other options were "Video" and "Fact Box". No other filters were used.

The primary search keywords were "BBC" and "Hamas" and/or "Israel" and several searches were conducted at different times. This study analyses published over one month: from the 8th of October 2023 to the 8th of November 2023 (included). This time period was chosen in order to cover the immediate reaction in the BBC coverage to

Hamas's attack and because this was the period during which the topic was most written about. Only the articles that discussed the BBC and its decision to not call Hamas a terrorist organisation were selected, other news regarding the Israel-Hamas conflict were discarded. The corpus consists of 89 articles: 36 articles from The Telegraph and 53 articles from The Daily Mail.

The articles were analysed using conventional qualitative content analysis. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005: 1278) "...qualitative content analysis is defined as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns." In the conventional qualitative analysis, the codes (keywords) are collected during data analysis process and are derived from the data (Hsieh and Shannon 2005: 1286). The focus is on the text and not on pictures or other article components.

Following these guidelines, the first step was reading the articles and selecting/identifying most commonly appearing keywords that can be used to most clearly demonstrate the stance (carry the most common sentiment) of these newspapers on the notion that the BBC does not call Hamas a 'terrorist organisation'. The keywords chosen were prejudice, immoral, unfair, indifferent, inaccurate, standard and impartiality. The keyword "immoral" is used; however, the word itself is never used in the articles. Instead "moral" is frequently used but with a negative/opposite connotation. For example, a headline in The Telegraph: *BBC's moral cowardice is shocking* (Heffer 2023). Thus, "moral" was used in the corpus concordance search instead. The same was done with the words "fair" and "unfair". Keyword is 'unfair'; however, the (concordance) search was done using "fair".

In order to widen the scope and potential use of the keywords, the English Web 2021 corpus in Sketch Engine was used to find 10 synonyms for each keyword. This

corpus contains over 52 billion words collected from the Internet in October to December 2021 and therefore it can be used to demonstrate the various ways the sentiment the keywords carry is being expressed. (Sketch Engine n.a.) The synonyms were found using the thesaurus in Sketch Engine with the top 10 results being used.

The main analysis was done using the Sketch Engine where all the articles from both newspapers were uploaded and formed into two corpora: The Telegraph corpus and Daily Mail corpus. The Telegraph corpus contains 25,242 words and the Mail Online corpus has 59,468 words.

The main analysis consists of three parts. The first part examines how the two newspapers regard the BBC, Hamas and Israel in general. Sketch Engine Word Sketch tool on the lemma 'BBC' was used and the results were examined. From all the options available, 'Verbs with BBC as an object' was selected to demonstrate the general attitude towards the BBC. This was done because other options either did not give enough results to form an assessment or were too inconclusive. In order to compare Israel and Hamas, Word Sketch Difference tool was chosen. For the best comparison 'verbs with Israel/Hamas as subjects' was chosen. Again, this was chosen for similar reasons, either not enough results or they were too inconclusive to make conclusions.

The second part of the analysis focuses on the use of the keywords and their synonyms in the articles. Sketch Engine Concordance page was used to establish the number of times the keywords and their synonyms were used in the articles in both corpora. Analysing the most commonly occurring keywords and their synonyms in the concordance list and observing the context in which they were used and by who allowed to determine what are the most prominent accusations against the BBC and who are main accusers. Some of these actors are the writers of the articles but many are contributors whose quotes and opinions are being expressed.

Analysis of the sentiment, actors and arguments in The Telegraph and Daily Mail articles

Depiction of Hamas, Israel and BBC

The newspapers' attitude towards Hamas and the BBC seems to be more negative than towards Israel, which can be seen as more neutral. The two charts below depict the verbs that were used with Israel/Hamas as subjects in both newspapers. The ones in the middle have been used with both 'Hamas' and 'Israel'. The size of the words in the figures and/or how close they are to the edge demonstrate how often they have been used. The larger the word the more it has been used. For example, 'be' is larger in both figures than other verbs but is in the middle for it has been used many times with both 'Israel' and 'Hamas'. At the same time, in The Telegraph figure 'blame' is slightly closer to the margin than other verbs, this means 'blame' has been used more than others with 'Hamas' but not with 'Israel'.

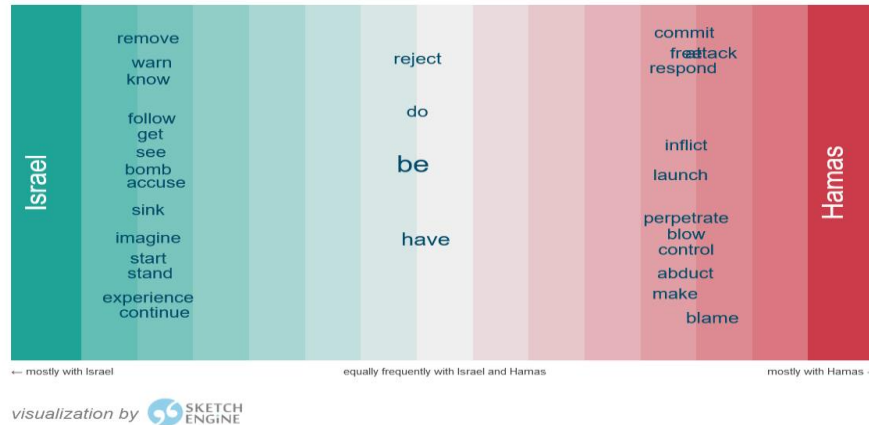


Figure 1. The Telegraph corpus Word Sketch Difference with 'verbs with Israel/Hamas as subjects'.

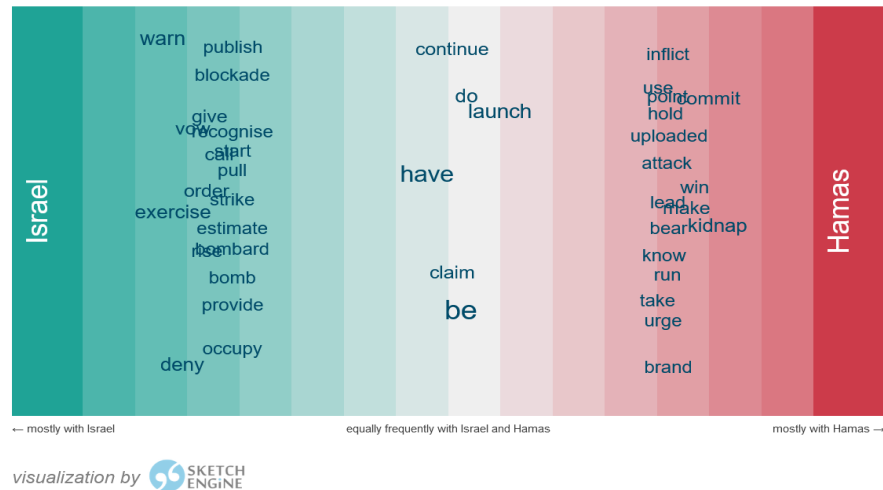


Figure 2. The Daily Mail corpus Word Sketch Difference with ‘verbs with Israel/Hamas as subjects’.

The figures show that most verbs have only been used with either Hamas or Israel. Most common verbs following ‘Hamas’ in the Daily Mail corpus are ‘win’, ‘commit’ and ‘kidnap’, while ‘Israel’ is followed by ‘warn’, ‘exercise’ and ‘deny’. Although, ‘win’ can be seen as a positive, ‘commit’ and ‘kidnap’ leave strong negative impression of Hamas’ actions. In The Telegraph corpus, the most common verbs before ‘Hamas’ are ‘inflict’, ‘attack’ and ‘blame’ all of which carry negative connotations, whereas the verbs following ‘Israel’ are ‘experience’, ‘sink’ and ‘bomb’ are more neutral, although not positive in attitude. When observing all the words in both figures, similar picture emerges. The verbs following ‘Hamas’ tend to be more negative while ‘Israel’ is followed less negative and more neutral verbs. These support the previous literature (Neureiter 2016: 70; Wahl-Jorgensen et al 2017: 784) that the conservative media (including Telegraph and Daily Mail) appear to be more pro-Israel than pro-Palestine.

Secondly, Word Sketch tool on Sketch Engine was used with the BBC as the lemma and ‘verbs with BBC as object’ was chosen as part of analysis because this gives an idea of actions and stances directed towards the BBC. The figure below lists the verbs

before ‘BBC’ in descending order with the most often appearing word at the top under the newspaper title.

Telegraph	Daily Mail
urge	accuse
say	understand
accuse	prevent
contact	do
bias	blast
tell	slam
criticise	stop
	expect
	say
	criticise
	include
	urge
	tell
	condemn

Figure 3. Telegraph corpus and Daily Mail corpus on ‘verbs with BBC as object’.

There were fewer results with The Telegraph corpus, which may at least partly be due to the fact The Telegraph corpus contained considerably fewer words than the Daily Mail corpus. However, The Telegraph corpus is slightly less accusatory and negative than the Daily Mail articles. The most common verb before “BBC” in the Daily Mail corpus is ‘accuse’ while in The Telegraph corpus they are ‘say’ and ‘urge’. Also, the Daily Mail corpus contains verbs like ‘blast’, ‘slam’ and ‘condemn’ indicating a strongly negative attitude towards the BBC.

The most prominent actors

The two newspapers have repeatedly used the same sources for their articles. In both of them, the letter by ‘Britain’s top four lawyers’ to Ofcom accusing the Corporation of ‘abandoning impartiality’ was featured several times. It was in the Daily Mail six times and in all of them with almost identical wording. For example, in Bazaraa et al (2023, para. 6): “accusing the BBC of failing to show impartiality beyond doubt”. The Telegraph featured the letter twice in a similar pattern.

Another action towards the BBC's decision that received a reaction from both newspapers was the letter by seven former Conservative Culture Secretaries to the Director-General of the BBC Tim Davie. In the letter, they claimed: "The BBC's commitment is to impartiality, not indifference." (Reynolds 2023: para. 2) In the same letter the former Culture Secretaries also charged the BBC with 'blurring its impartiality'. This phrase was used in the Daily Mail two times and The Telegraph five times. For example, Charles Hymas (2023: para. 1) reports for The Telegraph: "The BBC's refusal to brand Hamas 'terrorists' risks blurring its impartiality...". Both newspapers often have used the same sources as examples to portray the public's discontent with the BBC's decision, however the Daily Mail has repeatedly used the same quotes and phrases in different articles while the Telegraph has paraphrased more.

The response by several British Cabinet members and Conservative MPs were repeatedly reported by both newspapers. The Daily Mail claims: "Prime Minister Rishi Sunak blasted the BBC for refusing to call the Hamas terrorists..." (Goodkind 2023: para. 36). They also reported that the British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's spokesperson claimed that using the word 'terrorist' would not "breach the BBC's impartiality rules" (Young 2023: para. 35). The Telegraph reported that Sunak "insisted that the BBC call it out for what it is" (Bullen and Simpson 2023: para. 3). Both the Telegraph and Daily Mail also covered the reactions of Defence Minister Grant Schapps, who in the Daily Mail labelled the BBC's approach 'verging on disgraceful' (Woodland 2023: para. 5) and Immigration Minister Robert Jenrick ("British Jews had lost confidence in the BBC' and 'BBC coverage has never been so disappointing" (Riley-Smith 2023: para. 3 and 1)). Also, mentioned numerous times are Culture Secretary Lucy Frazer and Foreign Secretary James Cleverly. The broadsheet accounted Cleverly's position on the BBC's principle of not choosing sides. "...I fundamentally disagree with that." (Bullen et al

2023: para. 23) In general, Conservative politicians were frequently mentioned and in almost all cases their view on the BBC and its policies was negative.

In addition to the Conservative politicians, another group whose views and opinions were often quoted were representatives of British Jewish groups and Israeli officials. Most published is probably Israeli president Isaac Herzog's reaction ("BBC policy is 'atrocious'"). (Greenhill and Lisbona 2023: para. 3)). Another charge by a former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, also reported by the Daily Mail, attacked the BBC for 'lacking moral clarity' (Salvoni 2023: para. 1).

UK's Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis opinion has been added to multiple articles by both newspapers. For instance, Amanda Platell in the Daily Mail reports: "Our own Chief Rabbi declared his disgust when he accused the BBC of trying to 'wilfully mislead' its audience by failing to use the word terrorist." (Platell 2023: para. 6). British 'Jewish groups' as they are referred to by The Telegraph, appear also quite numerous. Often mentioned and quoted 'Jewish groups' in the newspapers are Campaign Against Anti-Semitism, Board of Deputies of British Jews and The Simon Wiesenthal Center. Their response to the BBC is almost always negative with accusations of BBC having 'double standards' and being 'anti-Semitic' (Hymas and Simpson 2023: para. 17-20). In general, both newspapers often used same actors as their sources.

Main arguments against the BBC

The third part of the paper analyses the most prominent themes that have arisen from the analysis the articles. The most recurring accusations against the BBC are that the corporation is being too impartial, and, conversely, that the BBC is 'institutionally biased' against Israel to the point it is increasing anti-Semitism in Britain. Furthermore, the corporation's employees in Britain and overseas, are contributing to this prejudice.

One of the main accusations against the BBC is that it is trying to be too impartial. The Telegraph reported that Ofcom had no issue with Hamas being called ‘terrorist’ and all broadcasters are allowed to do so (Ward 2023: para. 13). Neither is it restricted by the Government or Downing Street (Ward 2023: para. 13-15). Similarly, in the Daily Mail, the majority of times ‘rule’ is used in connection to Ofcom having not a regulation that forbids calling Hamas terrorists. Daily Mail also published comments from Downing Street (No. 10) and ‘senior Tories’ that confirmed the Ofcom’s stance on the matter (Tapsfield et al 2023: para. 6,8 and 16-18). Furthermore, the Daily Mail reported seven times that other broadcasters have ‘no fixed policy’ but made their decision on a ‘case-by-case basis’ (Tingle 2023b: para. 6). Moreover, the tabloid mentioned four times that a rival broadcaster ITV does use the term and even have made a ‘veiled swipe’ at the BBC: “We very clearly call them ‘terrorists’”. (Tapsfield 2023a: para. 34) Both newspapers are trying to demonstrate that the BBC is alone in its decision to label Hamas ‘militants’ and only the broadcaster views calling them ‘terrorists’ as taking sides.

Another way of attacking the BBC’s stance of impartiality is accusing it of being unethical and immoral. The commentators for both newspapers clearly thought that impartiality should not be enforced in this occasion. Simon Heffer (2023: para. 7) for The Telegraph claims that “if the BBC does not change its approach, any claim it makes to moral conduct is bogus”. More importantly, in The Telegraph, the BBC ex-director of television Danny Cohen (2023b: subtitle) accused the BBC coverage of being “a failure of journalistic credibility and public duty”. Cohen (2023a) paints a vivid picture of Hamas actions on the 7th of October and implies that media should not stay impartial in this situation but express their contempt openly.

The second charge against the BBC is that the broadcaster has long-term ‘institutional bias’ against Israel. Both newspapers highlighted the fact that according to

their research, while the broadcaster has for years refused to name Hamas ‘terrorist’, it has named other groups or attacks ‘terrorism’ or similarly worded terms. As Rayner and Bullen (2023: para. 4) report: “Separately, the Telegraph has discovered more than 20 instances of the BBC referring to individuals or groups as terrorists in recent years, further undermining its claim that it avoids using the word in order to maintain impartiality.” Furthermore, both papers scorn the broadcaster for having a Hamas spokesperson on air. For instance, in the Telegraph View (2023a: para. 7), the BBC was scorned: “Newsnight and the Today programme do not feel obliged to offer a regular slot to a Kremlin representative in the name of neutrality.” The corporation is being accused of double standards for trying not to favour one side over another in the Israel-Hamas conflict while clearly choosing the Ukraine’s side in the Ukraine-Russia war. Additionally, The Telegraph published two Ofcom rulings where the broadcaster breached its impartiality rules in connection with Jewish people (Cohen 2023b). These are used to portray deep anti-Semitic bias in the BBC. As Cohen (2023b: para.10) writes: “The thing is mistakes happen once, maybe twice. When they happen multiple times they are not mistakes. They are institutional fault lines which reveal bias and deep-rooted prejudice.” Danny Cohen’s comments were also published in the Daily Mail (Prosser 2023).

In The Telegraph, use of ‘bias’ is most commonly modified with ‘institutional’, ‘left-wing’, ‘liberal worldview’ and ‘anti-Israel’. One article reported that the BBC director-general Tim Davie had to appear before the Conservative 1922 Committee to answer whether there exists a ‘left-wing bias’ in the BBC (Simpson and Riley-Smith 2023: para. 5). Similarly, in the Daily Mail, Stephen Glover (2023a: para. 27) wrote: “Bias continues to flourish at our all-powerful national broadcaster in a number of ways. Sometimes it’s explicit, as when Gary Lineker unleashes his latest anti-Tory diatribe.”

The BBC and its employers are portrayed with either anti-Semitic and/or left-wing and anti-Conservative sympathies.

This comes forward with the reaction to BBC Arabic coverage of the war. On several occasions, both newspapers accused the BBC Arabic journalists of being supportive of Hamas' actions. The Daily Mail reported that BBC Arabic journalists have been accused of anti-Israel bias (Strudwick 2023). This was reported by The Telegraph as well with the claims that "Reporters at BBC News Arabic endorsed comments likening Hamas, which is a designated terrorist group, to freedom fighters, as well as describing the October 7 atrocity as a 'morning of hope'." (Bodkin 2023: para. 3) Both papers have alleged that some BBC employees who should be impartial in their personal views alongside the broadcaster have violated the BBC standards.

There were many similarities in both newspapers from using the same sources to having similar arguments. Most of these sources appeared to be either conservative or Jewish. This is supported by Neureiter (2017: 72, 76) who also noted that conservative papers are less likely to use Palestinian sources. Additionally, while they several times cited one another, there was not much content from other newspapers.

The main criticisms examined in this article are similar to the ones mentioned in the first chapter by Wahl-Jorgensen et al (2017: 792-793) and Engelbert and McCurdy (2012: 114). The conclusions from the analysis are also quite comparable with the results of Thompson and Hindman (2012) whose research also analysed newspaper reaction to the BBC in relation to Israeli-Arab conflict. This shows that accusations against the BBC this analysis highlighted are not new; however, neither the motivation nor the strength of these accusations does not appear to have changed in the last couple of decades.

Conclusion

The BBC is the most trusted and widely known broadcaster in the UK and most likely in many parts of the world. In the UK, has been under the attack from privately owned media for a long time. In recent years, the criticism appears to have only increased. One of the main aggressors is the conservative right-wing media and the research has shown that there are several reasons why the BBC is constantly under attack, such as ideological reasons, the BBC being their main competitor, or the BBC being biased towards the Left. It appears that every BBC's questionable decision may lead to further criticism. Yet, the BBC has been shown to offer more right-wing content than left-wing. This, however, has not stopped the critique. The corporation's decision not to label Hamas as 'terrorists' after 7th of October 2023 caused heavy criticism from the right-wing newspapers.

In their coverage of Israel-Arab wars, the UK media has many pre-conceived notions that can often prohibit the conflicts objective coverage. The conservative media has historically been pro-Israel and recent studies have shown that this is mostly true about the BBC as well. At the same time, while literature has demonstrated some bias in the BBC's coverage of the Israeli-Arab conflicts, it is usually unintentional and maybe due to various factors.

This paper analysed the right-wing mainstream newspapers the Daily Mail and the Telegraph reaction to the BBC decision not to call Hamas a 'terrorist organisation' but refer to them as 'militants' instead. The analysed articles were published from 8th October to 8th of November 2023. Two corpora were formed, one for each newspaper in the Sketch Engine website in order to be able to compare the two. Using conventional content analysis, the first part of the analysis looked at how the BBC, Israel and Hamas are portrayed by the newspapers. While the coverage of Israel was relatively neutral, even in

some cases positive, the reaction to the BBC and Hamas was mainly antagonistic. This can be seen from the second part of the analysis which demonstrated that both newspapers have a very unfavourable stance towards the BBC. The Daily Mail and The Telegraph articles accused the BBC of long-term bias against Israel because while it has named other groups or attack 'terrorism', while the broadcaster has for years refused to do so in the Israel-Arab conflicts. In connection to this, they claim that BBC Arabic journalists, current and former, have repeatedly demonstrated anti-Semitic behaviour and support of Hamas. Observations from newspaper articles appear to show that most critical sources are British 'Jewish groups' or British Conservative members of Government or Parliament. Additionally, both newspapers used frequently the same sources and cited each other.

The BBC is a publicly funded corporation and heavily dependent on not only public trust but also on the government who approves its Royal Charter. Therefore, the negativity the BBC faces from not only this particular case but from others as well can have a serious impact on the BBC's independence and on the notion of 'impartiality'. The critique and its possible effects should be further studied.

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Appendix

Mentions of keywords and their synonyms in the two corpora (only those synonyms are showed that had results).

	Telegraph	Daily Mail
Immoral:	0	0
Moral	15	26
Irresponsible	0	1
Shameful	1	0
Disgusting	0	1
Impartiality:	33	58
Objectivity	0	1
Fairness	0	1
Decency	0	4
Neutrality	3	2
Inaccurate:	6	6
Incorrect	0	1
Erroneous	1	0
Unreliable	0	1
Absurd	0	1
Inappropriate	0	1
Confusing	2	0
False	5	4
Indifferent:	0	0
Hostile	3	5
Blind	2	3
Ignorant	3	1
Contrary	1	0
Prejudice:	5	5
Bias	35	22
Racism	4	2
Discrimination	1	0
Hatred	4	5
Ignorance	4	0
Bigotry	1	0
Hate	3	11
Standard:	17	12
Requirement	1	1
Rule	11	37
Practice	3	14
Approach	11	23
Policy	10	57
Quality	1	0
Method	1	0
Measure	1	3
Unfair:	0	0
Unacceptable	2	0
Inappropriate	0	1
Absurd	0	1
Fair	6	5
Incorrect	0	1
Inaccurate	6	6

Resümee

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Marge Järlik

**Corpus-based Content Analysis of British Right-Wing Newspapers' Reaction to the BBC.
Korpusuuring Briti parempoolsete ajalehtede suhtumisest BBC'sse.**

bakalaureusetöö

2024

Lehekülgede arv: 44

Annotatsioon:

Selle töö eesmärk on analüüsida, kuidas parempoolsed Briti ajalehed Daily Mail ja The Telegraph kajastavad Briti avalik-õigusliku ringhäälingu BBC (inglise keeles British Broadcasting Corporation) otsust mitte kirjeldada Palestiina rühmitust Hamas kui „terroriorganisatsioon“, vaid kui militaarorganisatsioon. See töö selgitab välja, mis on peamised argumendid BBC vastu ja kes neid on esitanud.

Töö koosneb sissejuhatausest, kahest peatükist, kokkuvõttest ja bibliograafiast. Sissejuhatuses tutvustatakse BBC'd ja selle peamist põhimõtet „erapooletus“. Samuti tuuakse välja, miks on oluline uurida konservatiivsete ajalehtede arvamust BBC'sse ja käesoleva töö piirangud. Esimene peatükk on kirjanduse ülevaade, mis tutvustab, mis on peamised ohud, miks BBC'l võib olla raskusi erapooletuks jäämisel. Samuti, mis on Briti meediaorganisatsioonide peamised kriitikad BBC vastu. Esimese peatüki teine osa vaatleb, mida varasem uurimus kirjutab Briti meedia suhtumisest Iisraeli. Teine peatükk moodustab metodoloogia ja analüüsi. Metodoloogia kirjeldab analüüsi tüüpi, artiklite valikut ja korpuste loomist Sketch Engine'is. Korpusepõhine analüüs esmalt vaatleb, kuidas artiklites on üldiselt suhtutud BBC'sse, Hamasi ja Iisraeli. Analüüsi teine osa kasutab Sketch Engine'i Concordance võimalust, et välja tuua peamised argumendid ja nende tegijad artiklites. Kokkuvõtte võtab töö peamised tulemused kokku.

Korpusepõhine sisuanalüüs hõlmas 36 artiklit Telegraphi ja 53 artiklit Daily Maili internetilehekülgedelt. Nendest moodustati kaks korpust Sketch Engine'is. Analüüsi esimene osa kasutas Word Sketch ja Word Sketch Difference võimalusi Sketch Engine'i kodulehel, et tuua välja üldine suhtumine BBC'sse ja võrrelda arvamust Iisraeli ja Hamasi.

Iisraeli ja Hamasi vaheline konflikt algas 8. oktoobril 2023. BBC jätkas oma traditsioonilist suhtumist ja keeldus kutsumast Hamasi terroriorganisatsiooniks märkides vajadust säilitada erapooletus, kui peamine põhjus. See otsus sai kohe suure vastukaja osaliseks Briti konservatiivses meedias. Kirjanduse ülevaade näitab, et BBC on tundlik konservatiivse meedia erapoolikusele. Samuti on BBC varasemaid konflikte Lähis-Idas kajastades olnud pigem Iisraeli poole kallutatud. Artiklite analüüs näitab, et suhtumine nendes ajalehtedes on pigem negatiivne nii BBC kui ka Hamasi suhtes, samas neutraalsem Iisraeli suhtes. Seda kinnitavad ka varasemad uurimused. Peamised argumendid, mis artiklitest välja tulid on need, et BBC'd süüdistatakse olemast erapoolik Iisraeli vastu, BBC erinevad kanalid ei ole alati ühesuguse sisuga ning BBC on liiga erapoolik Iisraeli-Palestiina konflikti kajastades. Lisaks ilmnes, et peamised BBC süüdistajad on konservatiivsed poliitikud, Briti juudiorganisatsioonid või Iisraeli poliitikud.

Märksõnad: BBC, Iisrael, Hamas, ajakirjandus, erapooletus.

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