CHAPTER 7

Paradigm Repair: Bad Apples and Self-Assertion

The chapter is divided into two major parts. The first part shows how the strategy of individualisation was used to protect the press freedom paradigm as well as repair the “journalist as a crusader” paradigm which had been badly damaged by the phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. The second part, entitled “Self-Assertion: The Journalist as a Crusader”, shows the extent to which journalists affirm their importance in journalistic metadiscourse on media policy debates and the effect this had and was intended to have on the debate on press regulation. This is followed by a discussion on the political economy of the Guardian’s coverage of the phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. I begin by analysing the press’ use of the strategy of individualisation in their coverage of the media policy debate.

One of the paradigms that journalists often seek to protect in the event of a media scandal is the image of the journalist as a crusader, and one way they go about trying to repair this paradigm is by distancing themselves from the offender (Cecil 2002, p. 55). This can be done at different levels or stages of the scandal coverage. The more commonly discussed in journalistic metadiscourse is where an organisation distances itself from the journalist alleged to be at fault (ibid.). Such a journalist is often described as a “rogue” reporter (Dawes 2013, p. 17; Carlson and Berkowitz 2014, p. 403). This ostracising of the “culprit(s)” emerged in the journalistic metadiscourse of the NoTW phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry at their early stages (O’Carroll 2012a). News International (now News UK)
as an organisation distanced itself from *News of the World*’s royal editor Clive Goodman and private investigator Glen Mulcaire, who were both given jail sentences for their role in the scandal (see Chap. 1). The owner Rupert Murdoch denied knowledge and the emanating journalistic metadiscourse described the culprits as rogue reporters: a few bad apples that should not taint the image of a largely good press. For example, *The Sun*’s article stated:

So far as we know, despite the biggest police inquiry in history, the bad and sometimes possibly criminal behaviour that led to the Leveson Inquiry was confined to a tiny number of journalists. The innocent majority have been tarred by the inquiry …. And a tiny number of incidents of grotesque treatment of ordinary people were examined. They should be set against the huge number of cases of ordinary people who have been helped by the papers. Rogues are exposed, injustice reversed, wonderful, inspiring achievements are celebrated every day by papers such as this. (Satchwell 2012, p. 42)

The truth of this claim has since been debunked by revelations few years later that *The Sun* was also involved in phone hacking (Jackson 2016; Waterman 2019). In a public question-and-answer session at Oxford University in 2019, Lord Justice Leveson said he had known newspaper editors were lying to him during the Inquiry. Concerning *The Sun*, he stated:

It is interesting is it not, that *The Sun* newspaper has paid out millions to people who complained that they were hacked by *The Sun*, although we were told [at the Leveson Inquiry] *The Sun* wasn’t involved at all? (Leveson 2019, cited in Evans and Johnson 2019, n.p.)

It can, therefore, be argued that the strategy of individualisation was being used to protect a neoliberal interpretation of press freedom that makes room for the sorts of journalism practice that led to the phone hacking scandal. This agrees with Bennett et al.’s (1985) argument that “journalistic self-criticism protects existing paradigms rather than confronts entrenched deficiencies and contradictions” (cited in Carlson 2015, p. 4). Table 7.1 shows that the strategy of individualisation (also ostracisation or localisation of bad apples) was employed by all newspapers in the study sample. Though it surfaced in only 8.5 per cent of descriptions of phone hacking in the study sample, it was used profusely by *The Sun* newspaper where it appeared in 25.7 per cent of its descriptions of phone
hacking. Despite being owned by the same proprietor as the *News of the World, The Sun* attempted to protect its crusader image and the neoliberal interpretations of press freedom by ostracising the culprits. The paper described the phone hacking scandal and other acts of press misconduct as the failings of a few journalists as discussed earlier and emphasised in this statement: “it is vital for our democracy that a free press is protected, whatever the failings of a few journalists” (Dunn and Well 2012, p. 6).

The strategy of individualisation was used in 16.7 per cent of *Daily Express*; 10.6 per cent of *Guardian;* 6.7 per cent of *Daily Mirror;* 4.2 per cent of *Daily Telegraph* and 3.5 per cent of *Daily Mail* (see Table 7.1).

Though the setting up of the Leveson Inquiry and the mandate given to it to examine the culture, practice and ethics of the press demonstrated that the phone hacking scandal was regarded by policymakers and many outside the press as a synecdoche deviance (extension of deviancy from the individual to the general); synecdoche deviance (Carlson and Berkowitz 2014, p. 392) was contested in the journalistic metadiscourse that followed the phone hacking scandal; and blame was often localised. So, unlike in the case of the media coverage of the demise of two US regional

**Table 7.1** Description of phone hacking: bad apples

| Description                     | Guardian (%) | Daily Mail (%) | Daily Mirror (%) | Daily Telegraph (%) | Daily Express (%) | The Sun (%) | Total (%) |
|---------------------------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------|----------|
| Unavoidable                     | 0.8          | 2.3            | 4.4              | 1.7                 | 0.0               | 2.9         | 1.9      |
| The work of a few bad apples in journalism | 10.6         | 3.5            | 6.7              | 4.2                 | 16.7              | 25.7        | 8.5      |
| Anti-democratic                 | 4.1          | 1.2            | 4.4              | 0.0                 | 0.0               | 2.9         | 2.1      |
| Bad journalism/irresponsible    | 43.1         | 39.5           | 46.7             | 38.1                | 50.0              | 22.9        | 40.0     |
| It is not new to journalism     | 1.6          | 0.0            | 2.2              | 3.4                 | 0.0               | 0.0         | 1.6      |
| Less serious than portrayed     | 21.1         | 4.7            | 0.0              | 0.0                 | 0.0               | 22.9        | 8.9      |
| Criminality                     | 17.9         | 44.2           | 28.9             | 45.8                | 33.3              | 22.9        | 33.2     |
| Demonstrates the importance of a free press. | 0.0          | 4.7            | 6.7              | 5.9                 | 0.0               | 0.0         | 3.3      |
| Other                           | 0.8          | 0.0            | 0.0              | 0.8                 | 0.0               | 0.0         | 0.5      |
| Total                           | 100.0        | 100.0          | 100.0            | 100.0               | 100.0             | 100.0       | 100.0    |
newspapers, *Rocky Mountain News* and the printed *Seattle Post Intelligencer* where the perceived problem of an individual newspaper was interpreted by the press as a reflection of the challenges faced by all newspapers (Carlson 2012, p. 267), here the flaw of the *News of the World* was localised and the journalistic metadiscourse warned that it should not be interpreted as the problem of all newspapers. An example is this headline from the *Daily Express*: “Don’t tar all of the press with the same brush” (Forsyth 2012, p. 17). This raises questions about the self-interestedness of journalistic metadiscourse. This affirms that news is not a mirror of reality but a representation (Hall 1997), a discourse shaped by different interests, and this needs to be considered during the consumption of journalistic metadiscourse.

As the Leveson Inquiry progressed, the individualisation of the culprit advanced beyond persons to groups (Mason 2012, p. 10). Ostracising labels such as “sections of the press” and “parts of the media” were used to refer to the tabloid press, especially by the quality press (O’Carroll 2013, n.p.). They were also used by the mid-markets to distance themselves from press bad behaviour:

Indeed, this paper has long shared the public’s distaste over the conduct of some sections of the Press and since the phone hacking scandal (exposed by a newspaper) we have helped draw up plans for a new and much tougher regulatory body. (*Daily Mail* 2012, n.p.)

The phrase “The work of a few bad apples in journalism” in Table 7.1 shows that though the strategy of individualisation of bad apples has been identified by previous studies as a major paradigmatic marker (Cecil 2002) and though it featured in all newspapers in the study sample, the strategy was used only in 8.5 per cent of descriptions of the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and other acts of press misconduct in the journalistic metadiscourse. This does not reflect minimal attributions of blame in the representation of the press reform debate. Table 7.1 shows that blame was also attributed to other institutions in society. To understand the attributions of blame in the journalistic metadiscourse of the media policy debate, it is important to examine its political economy.

Political economy of the media is the critical approach to media analysis that investigates “how media and communication systems and content are shaped by ownership, market structures, commercial support, technologies, labour practices, and government policies” (McChesney 2008, p. 12;
Murdock and Golding 2005, cited in Freedman 2014, p. 24). The key focus of the political economy approach to analysis is to ascertain whether media structures serve to promote or undermine democracy, and to explore and recommend ways of ensuring a media structure that enhances democracy (Hardy 2014). Using the political economy critique as a framework, I examined the attributions of blame in the coverage to see if external factors, such as media ownership, market structures and technology, impacted on the way blame was attributed.

Table 7.2 shows that journalists received the highest amount of blame for press irresponsibility (28.5 per cent). This agrees with the data in Table 7.1 which revealed a high condemnation of press excesses in the journalistic metadiscourse. As explained in Chap. 5, this high amount of blame attributed to journalists in the journalistic metadiscourse did not translate into a high proportion of self-critique, except where the Guardian challenged the neoliberal interpretations of press freedom advanced by The Sun, Daily Mirror, Daily Express, Daily Mail and Daily Telegraph. Interestingly, there were more attributions of blame to journalists in the

| Attribution of blame | Guardian (%) | Daily Mail (%) | Daily Mirror (%) | Daily Telegraph (%) | Daily Express (%) | Sun (%) | Total (%) |
|----------------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------|-----------|
| The Labour government | 0.6          | 0.0            | 3.2              | 2.8                 | 0.0               | 0.0     | 1.2       |
| The Press Complaints Commission | 48.1 | 8.6 | 6.5 | 11.9 | 33.3 | 17.2 | 25.6 |
| Newspaper proprietors | 20.6 | 13.6 | 12.9 | 12.8 | 6.7 | 3.4 | 15.1 |
| Job constraints | 5.0 | 1.2 | 3.2 | 0.9 | 13.3 | 13.8 | 4.0 |
| Technology (e.g. internet) | 2.5 | 4.9 | 0.0 | 6.4 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 3.5 |
| The Conservative government | 0.0 | 0.0 | 9.7 | 4.6 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 1.9 |
| Journalists | 8.1 | 46.9 | 51.6 | 40.4 | 20.0 | 24.1 | 28.5 |
| The criminal justice system | 8.8 | 17.3 | 6.5 | 17.4 | 26.7 | 37.9 | 15.1 |
| Commercialism | 3.8 | 4.9 | 6.5 | 1.8 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 3.3 |
| Other | 2.5 | 2.5 | 0.0 | 0.9 | 0.0 | 3.4 | 1.9 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
discursive sphere comprising *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* than in the *Guardian* newspaper. 51.6 per cent of blame in the *Daily Mirror* was attributed to journalists. In *Daily Mail*, it was 46.9 per cent; 40.4 per cent in *Daily Telegraph*; 24.1 per cent in *The Sun* and 20 per cent in *Daily Express*, as against 8.1 per cent in *Guardian* (see Table 7.2). The reason for this was that while the *Guardian* also advanced discourses that condemned the phone hacking and other press excesses as bad, and while it was also involved in ostracising the culprit, it was not as involved in deflecting the blame to other institutions as the other newspapers.

The Press Complaints Commission (PCC) came second in the hierarchy of attributions of blame receiving 25.6 per cent of blame for press misconduct, the highest coming from *Guardian* (48.1 per cent of its attributions of blame). The PCC was often criticised in the paper for lacking the teeth to ensure good press behaviour. The other newspapers were also critical of the PCC but to a smaller degree: *Daily Express* (33.3 per cent) *The Sun* (17.2 per cent), *Daily Telegraph* (11.9 per cent) and *Daily Mail* (8.6 per cent) (Table 7.2). All newspapers apart from *Guardian* and *Daily Express* were quick to make excuses for the PCC. The journalistic metadiscourse comprised statements such as “the PCC could not do much to prevent some level of press excesses because it lacked the power to do so” (Winnett 2012, p. 18); “what is needed is strengthening of the PCC not a new press law” (Embley 2012, pp. 8–9) and “a new self-regulatory body should be has been set up that makes up for all the weaknesses of the PCC” (Shipman 2013, p. 16).

The sympathy of *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* newspapers for the PCC can be attributed to the fact that the chief executives or owners of these newspapers were members of PressBoF (The Press Standards Board of Finance), the funding body of the PCC. The then Chairman of PressBoF, Lord Black of Brentwood, was the Executive Director of the Telegraph Media Group; Paul Dacre, the then editor-in-chief of Associated Newspapers, publishers of *Daily Mail*, was a former Chairman of PressBoF and, at the time, one of its directors; Paul Vickers, the then Secretary and Group Legal Director of Trinity Mirror, publishers of *Daily Mirror*, was also one of PressBoF’s directors (Companies House, Press Standards Board of Finance 2014).

*The Sun*’s sympathy towards the PCC was also expected as *The Sun*’s owner, who was also the owner of the defunct *News of the World*, had often been accused of having a powerful influence over the PCC (Davies 2014,
p. 18). The then executive chairman of Rupert Murdoch’s News International, Les Hinton, who was also known as Murdoch’s right-hand man (Guardian 2011), chaired the committee of editors that drew up the PCC Code of Practice for several years (Cole and Harcup 2009). As mentioned in Chap. 2, the then owner of Daily Express titles, Richard Desmond, had pulled his papers out of the PCC following a rebuke from the body in 2008 (Desmond 2015, p. 291) which may have accounted for the high level of condemnation of the PCC in its journalistic metadiscourse. Though Alan Rusbridger, the then editor-in-chief of Guardian newspaper, was also a member of the PCC Code Committee, he resigned following his dissatisfaction with the committee’s handling of the phone hacking scandal allegations (Frost 2015, p. 293). So, though all newspapers in the study sample agreed that the PCC had fallen short in its regulation of the press, the level of attribution of blame reflected each paper’s political and economic relationship with the body. It is, therefore, important that consumers of journalistic metadiscourse consider how political economy may have impacted on the news they consume about media policy. This is important because citizens who employ critical thinking skills in their consumption of journalistic metadiscourse on media reform will be in a better position to support as well as initiate effective media reforms.

Still on attributions of blame, “News proprietors” and ‘The Criminal justice system’ received the same proportion of blame (15.1 per cent each) for press misbehaviour in the journalistic metadiscourse. This makes them third in the hierarchy of recipients of blame for press irresponsibility. This is interesting because “media ownership” appeared as a dominant theme only in 3.4 per cent of the study sample (see Table 7.2). A close look at Table 7.2, however, shows that a high proportion of that blame discourse emanated from Guardian newspaper—20.6 per cent as against 13.6 per cent from Daily Mail, 12.9 per cent from Daily Mirror, 12.8 per cent from Daily Telegraph, 6.7 per cent from Daily Express, and the lowest was from The Sun—3.4 per cent (see Table 7.2). Whether in defence of democracy or for the security of its media economy, the Guardian newspaper attributed much of the blame for press misconduct to news proprietors and used such opportunities to advocate for checks on concentration of media ownership in the UK.

The Murdoch media empire was mostly, though not exclusively, used as an example of the negative consequences of the concentration of media ownership in the Guardian’s opinion sections (Williams 2013, p. 35). The paper’s moral justification for its critique of the concentration of media
ownership was the need to protect democracy by ensuring plurality of views in the public sphere and preventing abuse of media power. Very little was said about the need to ensure healthy competitiveness among newspapers, though that was of primary concern to the *Guardian* as we shall see later in this chapter. The rhetoric was that democracy will be at risk if media ownership concentration is not checked. As can be seen in the headline “Comment: Ownership is the key to the corruption of the media: Murdoch’s grip on British politics was the product of corporate control of the press. Ending it is a democratic necessity”—(Milne 2012, p. 28) and in this statement:

> The present level of media concentration is one of the reasons the phone hacking scandal erupted because the politicians were scared of News International and, as the evidence around phone hacking and Leveson revealed, News International was scared of nobody. (Williams 2013, p. 35)

All other newspapers (*The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*) were different in their representation of the debate on media ownership. They were less critical of media proprietors and less concerned about the concentration of media ownership as shown in Table 7.2. For example, *Daily Mail* newspaper used deflection strategies to redirect focus from newspaper proprietors to the ownership patterns of the BBC and internet news websites as can be seen in the headline: “Google and BBC should face media ownership review rules watchdog” (Thomas 2012, n.p.). The article argued that the real threats are technology, proprietorship of internet news websites and the dominance of the BBC. Arguably, a more in-depth analysis of the impact of the internet on print journalism would have added a more robust angle to the debate.

Unlike the *Guardian* newspaper which urged the Leveson Inquiry to pay more attention to media ownership concentration, *Daily Mail* argued that media ownership is not within the Inquiry’s ambit and it ought not to have strayed into it. The paper stated:

> the inquiry has strayed ‘into issues of policy, such as cross-ownership rules which weren’t really appropriate for a judicial inquiry to determine. Those are policy questions for ministers and Parliament’. (Martin 2012, n.p.)

Similarly, an examination of the context within which the issue of media ownership was discussed in the journalistic metadiscourse revealed that
much of the press adopted an angle of discussion that tactically avoided the issue of concentration of media ownership: talking about media owners but rarely in connection to concentration of media ownership. Let us, for example, examine references to the defunct News of the World’s owner, Rupert Murdoch, by the two discursive publics. While Guardian’s metadiscourse on ownership was very critical of Rupert Murdoch with regard to concentration of media ownership and its consequences, The Sun newspaper reported little on ownership and on Murdoch. It is important to note that The Sun is also owned by Rupert Murdoch (see Chap. 2). The paper’s discourse on its owner was minimal and far from critical.

For instance, The Sun’s report on Rupert Murdoch’s appearance at the Leveson Inquiry was like a narrative (not critical) and a letter of apology from Rupert Murdoch (Grant 2012, p. 12), while Guardian’s report on the same event was very critical of the media magnate and accused him of “selective amnesia” (Greenslade 2012). The closest The Sun got to critiquing its owner was an acknowledgement by Rupert Murdoch that he had failed. To make the aforementioned story more sympathetic, the age of Rupert Murdoch was juxtaposed with his apology: “Mr Murdoch, 81, admitted that he failed to personally probe the scandal, adding: “I’m very sorry” (Grant 2012, p. 12). It can be argued that The Sun’s report was constructed to avert the anger of the public against the Murdoch Empire in order to regain their patronage. Considering the paper’s tone of language towards the failings of other persons (and institutions), such as politicians and celebrities, it can be argued that The Sun’s representation of Murdoch and its minimal discussion on media ownership in the debate were the result of conflict of interests. This may have accounted for the minimal attribution of blame to newspaper proprietors in The Sun’s metadiscourse (see Table 7.2).

Not all newspapers in the sub-interpretive sphere to which The Sun belongs were as sympathetic as The Sun towards Rupert Murdoch in their metadiscourse, though they were not as critical of the media magnate as the Guardian. Most of them gave minimal attention to concentration of media ownership, preferring to discuss Murdoch in relation to sensational issues such as Murdoch’s chief Rebekah Brooks’ love affair with another of his former staff, Andy Coulson which spanned two pages (1371 words—Nexis UK) in the Daily Mirror (Shaw 2013, pp. 4–5). Rupert Murdoch was also mentioned by newspapers in this sub-interpretive sphere in relation to the unfolding of the scandal, the amount of trouble he was in and so on, but rarely in connection to an analysis of the consequences of
concentration of media ownership (Flanagan 2012, p. 4; McTague 2012, pp. 10–11).

There were sympathies for Rupert Murdoch and even for the defunct News of the World in some of the newspapers in sub-interpretive sphere comprising The Sun, Daily Mirror, Daily Express, Daily Mail and Daily Telegraph (Glover 2013, n.p.). Of all the remaining four papers in this sphere (apart from The Sun), Daily Mail was more sympathetic towards the media mogul and his titles, at times defending him and criticising attacks on him by politicians, Guardian and the BBC (Slack and Doyle 2013). The Daily Telegraph was closest to Guardian in writing critical comments about Rupert Murdoch. In all, The Sun’s coverage of ownership and its owner agrees with arguments in previous studies that media organisations downplay and give limited coverage to views that are critical of their owners (McChesney 2008). This is a type of silent strategy, as if to say, “just don’t discuss it” or “give minimal coverage to the issue that is not perceived to be in your best interest”.

As Bachrach and Barataz (1962, p. 948, cited in Freedman 2014, p. 66) rightly noted, the exercise of power also involves “the ability to prevent potentially dangerous ideas from being raised” (cited in Freedman 2014, p. 66). Congruently, all newspapers apart from Guardian used their agenda-setting and gatekeeping powers to keep out from the public sphere discussions on concentration of media ownership. Freedman (2014, pp. 72–73) stressed the need to identify forces that are responsible for silences that permeate media policy. Though some may argue that media ownership did not take a prime place in the Leveson Report and as such it may not be out of place to talk less about it in the press, but as Hackett (2005, p. 90) observed, the media should not stop at transmitting debates but should also initiate relevant subjects for discussion. The Guardian newspaper did this when it critiqued the sparse treatment of the issue of media ownership at the Leveson Inquiry (Evans 2012, p. 47). As we shall discuss later in this chapter, the Guardian’s coverage of the issue is also not free from query.

The way the press covered the issue of concentration of media ownership during the debate may be connected to their ownership patterns. As discussed in Chap. 2, all newspapers in the sub-interpretive sphere to which The Sun belongs are commercially owned and are involved in varying degrees of concentration of media ownership (Cole and Harcup 2009; News UK 2015; DMG Media 2017; Telegraph Media Group 2017). The Guardian also has a stake in media ownership; this will be explained later in this chapter. Some proprietors of newspaper also have publications in
large and small quantities outside the UK (see Chap. 2). That possibly explains why even though only three companies (News UK, Daily Mail Group and Reach) dominate 83 per cent of Britain’s national newspapers (Media Reform Coalition 2019), media ownership emerged as a dominant theme in only 3.4 per cent of the journalistic metadiscourse on the press reform debate that followed the News of the World phone hacking scandal (see Table 7.2).

It can be argued that commercial interests influenced the interpretations and discourses advanced by the press on the issue of media ownership. This confirms that media organisations give minimal coverage to arguments that they perceive are not in their interest (Stiegler 2013, p. 137). The consequence of this for democracy is that it removes from public debates the issue of concentration of media ownership, thus preventing opportunities for deliberations that can lead to the creation of policies to guarantee plurality of views and media ownership. It gives the press enormous powers that can be exploited for commercial gain to the detriment of larger society. Such powers can mean that citizens are at the mercy of media owners, and that includes their privacy and the information they receive because nothing against media owners is tabled for discussion in the public sphere. Freedman (2014, p. 73) described such silences “as a socially constructed phenomenon that reflects the unequal distribution of power in society”. Jansen (1991, p. 134, cited in Freedman 2014, p. 73) argues that “media policy silences” are constructing forces that attempt to “render the system of control of industrial capitalism extremely resistant to criticism”. Such information hoarding can also reduce trust between the media and the public, especially when the public get to know of such omissions. It can also leave media owners unchecked and create in them a culture of impunity.

As previously stated, Table 7.2 also shows that “the criminal justice system” received as much blame for press irresponsibility as “News proprietors” (15.1 per cent). The quantity of attributions of blame to the criminal justice system were more in the sub-interpretive sphere made up of The Sun, Daily Express, Daily Mail and Daily Telegraph than in Guardian. The Sun contained the highest percentage of blame for the criminal justice system than any other newspaper in the study sample (37.9 per cent). Daily Express followed with 26.7 per cent, Daily Telegraph with 17.4 per cent and Daily Mail with 17.3 per cent. Attributions of blame to the criminal justice system were also found in 8.8 per cent of Guardian newspaper and in 6.5 per cent of Daily Mirror’s. An examination of the context
within which these attributions of blame to the criminal justice system were made revealed that they functioned differently in each of the discursive spheres.

In the sphere comprising The Sun, Daily Mirror, Daily Express, Daily Mail and Daily Telegraph, the press used deflection strategies to re-direct blame for press misbehaviour to the criminal justice system, thereby exonerating themselves from blame and protecting their crusader and press freedom paradigm. These papers advanced the argument that phone hacking is a criminal offence that can be checked by existing laws. Ironically, newspapers in this sub-interpretive sphere were at the forefront of arguments against the second phase of the Leveson Inquiry which was to focus on the relationship between the press and the police (Bond 2017). A possible reason could be that more investigation into the scandal may further incriminate the press. Howbeit, their trend of discourse accounted for the high proportion of descriptions of phone hacking as “criminal” in Table 7.1, and it culminated in claims that the failure of the police to reveal the extent of the phone hacking scandal revealed failings on the part of the criminal justice system rather than failings on the part of the press (McKinstry 2012, p. 14; Luckhurst 2012, p. 25), and that it was a vibrant press that exposed the extent of the scandal, not the criminal justice system. An article written by a former editor of the Daily Telegraph and the Evening Standard and published by the Daily Mail stated:

Somewhere, Leveson lost his way in the course of his inquiry, which he allowed to roam untethered across the landscape for many months in a fashion quite unworthy of a competent judge. Above all, he fails to understand that the central issue, that illegal phone-hacking and thus gross breaches of privacy reflected not a lapse of Press ethics, but large-scale criminality. The only organisation that ever was, or ever will be, capable of investigating such behaviour is the police. It was Scotland Yard’s failure to probe misconduct at News International properly in its review of the investigation in 2009 that allowed wrongdoing to continue for so long. (Hastings 2012, n.p.)

The papers in this sphere said that based on these arguments, there is no need to change the status quo of press self-regulation, neither was there any need for the Leveson Inquiry (this was before the setting up of the “Leveson-compliant” IPSO). The Daily Express stated:
THE absurdity of the entire Leveson business is that we never needed the expensive inquiry in the first place, for the behaviour of a minority of journalists was already against the law. The problem was not an absence of state regulation but an initial failure of enforcement by the police. (McKinstry 2012, p. 14)

As previously stated, arguments relating to the criminal justice system featured in 8.8 per cent of articles in Guardian newspaper but was interpreted differently. The Guardian used its editorial pages to critique the other newspapers’ blame on the criminal justice system. It attempted to redirect blame back to the press by pointing out that the failure of the police force to reveal that phone hacking was widespread at News of the World was the result of an unhealthy relationship between the police force and the media (Guardian 2013, p. 34).

It is worthy of note that the discursive public comprising all newspapers except Guardian did not totally absolve themselves of all blame. It was largely accepted in the journalistic metadiscourse of the debate that followed the NoTW phone hacking scandal that the media had behaved badly and that there was a need for press regulatory reform. For instance, in one of its opinion articles, Daily Mirror stated that “the excesses and criminal behaviour of parts of the media over the past few years created an unanswerable case for reform” (Daily Mirror 2013, p. 8). This was before it was discovered that Daily Mirror was also involved in phone hacking (Trinity Mirror 2015). A similar article from Daily Telegraph stated:

Regulation could not have prevented the hacking scandal; this was a criminal not a regulatory matter, but the PCC failed to draw attention to it after the event. So, no change is not an option. There must be effective regulation of the press. A new self-regulatory system must have powers to investigate wrongdoing and to summon journalists and their editors to give evidence …. Above all, it must be independent from government, Parliament and state. (Luckhurst 2012, p. 25)

However, there was to a small degree the discourse of total exoneration. This discourse absolved the press of all blame in the phone hacking scandal and argued that there was no need for press reform. Those who advanced such views argued that a little privacy invasion is the hazard of a free press (Hume 2013, p. 32). It is important for consumers of journalistic metadiscourse to understand that the purpose of these self-exoneration
strategies (individualisation, bad apples, localisation, ostracisation or deflection) was to repair the “journalist as a crusader” and “press freedom” paradigms, which had come into question as a result of the phone hacking scandal. In sum, blame was first accepted and then deflected to others including other journalists (a few bad journalists), other media organisations (sections of the press) and other institutions (criminal justice system). This made the wide acknowledgement of wrongdoing in the journalistic metadiscourse, and especially the high attribution of blame to journalists, appear hypocritical. This affirms that journalistic metadiscourse is highly defensive and characterised by a lack of self-critique (Haas 2006, cited in Carlson 2015, p. 9).

The lack of self-critique in the coverage of media policy can be attributed to the prioritisation profit, including power of influence, over the public interest. It is worthy of note that newspaper proprietors do not only seek financial profit but also influence (Freedman 2014). Ownership of newspapers give the owners enormous amount of influence, especially when they have a high readership. Control of the representation of issues to many readers empowers them to make demands of politicians in exchange for favourable coverage (ibid.). As both financial gain and power of influence can be directly or indirectly achieved through high readership, gaining a good image before the readership through self-defence and lack of self-critique becomes important to the press. In this regard, journalism is treated as a commodity.

“Journalism as a commodity” implies that everyone of its coverage will be weighed against its ability to generate profit for the company. Any representation that would not generate profit for the newspaper must be done away with. In this perspective, sustaining democracy is secondary. Democracy can be enhanced only if it generates profit (be it financial or clout) for the paper. This agrees with Habermas’ (1989, pp. 189–193) conceptualisation of a degenerated public sphere where commercial interest merged with the interests of policymakers to turn the public sphere from a democratic forum for public debate into a capitalist haven where prioritisation of profit and readership became the order of the day.

Congruently, “commercialism” and political leaders (Labour and Conservative governments) received only minor attributions of blame in the coverage. Table 7.2 shows that political leaders received only 3.1 per cent of the blame for press irresponsibility; of that amount 1.9 per cent was attributed to the Conservatives (the government in power at the time of the NoTW phone hacking scandal) and 1.2 per cent to the Labour
government (the opposition party). Commercialism received only 3.3 per cent of attributions of blame. No blame was attributed to commercialism in *The Sun* and *Daily Express* newspapers, and it was blamed for press irresponsibility in only 6.5 per cent of *Daily Mirror*, 4.9 per cent of *Daily Mail*, 3.8 per cent of *Guardian* and 1.8 per cent of *Daily Telegraph* (see Table 7.2). This appears to be very much like the silent treatment given to the issue of media ownership.

Another area that received less mention than I expected was attribution of blame to job constraints of print journalism, especially the constraints brought about by the emergence of digital technology. Table 7.2 shows that “job constraint” and “technology” received only 4 per cent and 3.5 per cent of attributions of blame, respectively. Considering the decline in the sale of newspapers due to the flow of traffic of both readers and advertisers to online platforms following the emergence of the internet (Allan 2006, pp. 1–4) and 24-hour news which is arguably a major cause of press irresponsibility, one would have expected a sizeable proportion of blame to go to technology and the impact of job constraints on print journalism. This demonstrates that the debate could have been more robust.

Fenton (2011, n.p.) argues that ethics get thrown to the wind when the market comes under pressure. The debate that emerged from the phone hacking and the Leveson Inquiry would have been a veritable platform to discuss possible ways of tackling this and other challenges, but the focus of the debate was too narrow—a zero-sum game of statutory or no statutory underpinning of a new press regulator; most other arguments, including the warnings of threat to press freedom, emanated from these. Thus, very little room was left for deliberation on other issues of concern. Carlson (2012, p. 267) spoke of instances where rather than brainstorm on a future business model for the printed press, perceived threat to the printed press paradigm was “repaired” by re-asserting the “importance and superiority” of the printed press over other forms, especially forms of online news. The strategy of self-assertion is another way the media tried to protect news paradigms in their coverage of the debate that followed the *NoTW* phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. How it went about doing this is the focus of the next section.
Self-Assertion: The Journalist as a Crusader

Previous chapters have shown how the press used the paradigm strategies of “historicisation”, “threat to the paradigm” and “individualisation” to cover the debate that arose from the News of the World phone hacking scandal and the Leveson Inquiry. This chapter discusses how the paradigm strategy of self-assertion was used to repair the “press freedom” and “journalist as a crusader” paradigms and the implication of this type of coverage. The strategy of self-assertion refers to a trend in journalistic metadiscourse where the press repairs its paradigm by asserting its importance without taking steps to evaluate or make changes to the paradigm where necessary (Thomas and Finneman 2014, p. 172).

Table 7.3 (an excerpt from Table 6.1) shows that the strategy of self-assertion (written as press achievements) was used by all newspapers in the study sample but emerged as the dominant theme in only 2.4 per cent of the coverage: Daily Express (7.1 per cent), Daily Mail (6.9 per cent), Daily Telegraph (1.5 per cent), Daily Mirror (2.0 per cent), The Sun (1.0 per cent) and Guardian (0.6 per cent). A look at the context of usage revealed that in most cases, the strategy of self-assertion was a sub-theme (not a

| Dominant theme                                      | Guardian (%) | Daily Mail (%) | Daily Mirror (%) | Daily Telegraph (%) | Daily Express (%) | Sun (%) | Total (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|---------------------|-------------------|--------|-----------|
| Threat to press freedom                             | 11.5         | 13.3           | 25.5             | 18.1                | 35.7              | 62.5   | 20.6      |
| Support for new press’ own regulatory system        | 1.5          | 4.6            | 3.9              | 2.5                 | 3.6               | 4.2    | 2.9       |
| Against politicians’ Royal Charter                  | 2.8          | 4.0            | 3.0              |                     | 3.1               | 3.1    | 2.9       |
| Against press law/statutory underpinning            | 4.0          | 12.7           | 9.8              | 6.0                 | 10.7              | 5.2    | 6.9       |
| Press achievements                                  | 0.6          | 6.9            | 2.0              | 1.5                 | 7.1               | 1.0    | 2.4       |
| Against self-regulation of the press                | 0.9          | 0.6            |                  |                     |                   |        | 0.5       |
| Support for Leveson Inquiry                         | 10.5         | 7.8            | 2.5              | 7.1                 | 3.1               | 3.1    | 5.5       |
dominant theme), used as a means to an end. In the sub-interpretive sphere consisting of The Sun, Daily Mirror, Daily Express, Daily Mail and Daily Telegraph, it was often used to warn that the press would no longer be able to fulfil its crusader role if it was regulated by statute and that this would pose a risk to press freedom and ultimately endanger democracy. Such stories had “threat to press freedom” or arguments “against statutory underpinning” as the dominant theme.

For example, Daily Mirror used the strategy of self-assertion to accentuate the importance of a free press. In an article headlined “The key to a fair and free press is the difference between two Royal Charters”, the paper wrote:

The Daily Mirror is committed to high-quality journalism in the public interest giving the working people of Britain a voice in the corridors of power. We are proud that the Mirror, by breaking the alibi of club doorman Levi Bellfield, helped put the killer of Surrey schoolgirl Milly Dowler behind bars. (Daily Mirror 2013, p. 8)

By asserting its worth and stressing the importance of a free press, Daily Mirror attempted to garner support for the newspapers’ plan for a Royal Charter for press regulation which was later rejected by the government (BBC News 2013), while condemning the cross-party Royal Charter on press regulation because it was underpinned by statute. As previously stated, all newspapers apart from Guardian interpreted any regulation underpinned by statute as an impediment to investigative journalism and, as such, a threat to press freedom. They argued that the achievements of the press would not have been possible under a regulatory system underpinned by statute. This article from Daily Express states this clearly:

His [Leveson] mission was not to ban hacking. It was to procure the end of investigative journalism (I will call it IJ) …. Needless to say the establishment loathes IJ with a passion and has lusted for years after a way of crippling it. Leveson, a pillar of the establishment like all judges, delivered the methodology. (Forsyth 2013, p. 17)

As with other discourses advanced by The Sun, Daily Mirror, Daily Express, Daily Mail and Daily Telegraph, Guardian countered the arguments these newspapers made with the use of the strategy of self-affirmation (O’Carroll 2012b) and then used the same strategy to repair its crusader
paradigm. The *Guardian* newspaper attempted to repair its crusader image that had received a dent due to the revelation at the Leveson Inquiry that the *News of the World* did not delete Milly Dowler’s voicemail messages as the paper had claimed in its publication. The report to correct that mistake began by praising *Guardian* newspaper as can be seen in the headline “Leveson report: Judge addresses *Guardian*’s story on hacking of Milly Dowler’s phone: Report praises paper’s public interest journalism, NoW probably did not delete voicemail messages” (Booth 2012, p. 15). The correction was only a sub-theme in that story. Predominantly, the story highlighted the bravado of *Guardian* in exposing the extent of the scandal, how correct the bulk of the story was and other heroic acts achieved by *Guardian* newspaper in the past.

Both sub-interpretive spheres (*Guardian* versus *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*) employed the strategy of self-assertion (also self-affirmation or self-justification) as sub-themes aimed at repairing the “journalist as a crusader” paradigm. It can be argued that this quest to repair the crusader paradigm was more in the interest of the press than for the selfless purpose of comforting and reassuring the public that they have in the press, a defender, and a protector of democracy. In this light, the quest of *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* to repair their crusader paradigm may not be unrelated to a desire to protect their commercial interests. As stated earlier, all the newspapers in this sub-interpretive sphere are commercially owned. Commercial newspapers need high readership figures to attract advertisers (Klaehn 2010, p. 28). Repairing this paradigm helps to retain the patronage of their readers, thereby enabling high readership figures which will secure the profit they make from the sale of the newspapers as well as preserve their power of influence and the patronage of advertisers (ibid.). Unlike the other newspapers, the ownership structure of the *Guardian* is different; it is funded by the Scott Trust Ltd (Guardian Media Group 2015). The question this raises is, “could it be that ownership and funding patterns are the determining factor of how debates on media policy are represented”? The next section attempts to initiate a debate on this by exploring the political economy of *Guardian*’s coverage of the press reform debate.
As explained earlier, political economy is a media analysis critique that investigates “how media and communication systems and content are shaped by” ownership structures, government policies and technology, amongst others (Murdock and Golding 2005, cited in Freedman 2014, p. 24). I investigated the political economy of Guardian newspaper by examining the paper’s ownership structure. Guardian newspaper is a subsidiary of Guardian Media Group (GMG) which is owned by Scott Trust Ltd, formerly Scott Trust until 2008 (Guardian Media Group 2015, n.p.). Unlike other newspapers in my study sample, the Scott Trust is the only shareholder of Guardian Media Group (Forgan 2016). The Scott Trust does not distribute dividends; its profits are ploughed back into journalism (Forgan 2016). Though Scott Trust Ltd is responsible for appointing the editor of the Guardian, it has a policy of not interfering with the newspaper’s content. The paper claims to safeguard journalistic independence and liberal values and argues that its ownership structure (having no shareholder order than the Scott Trust) makes the paper more accountable to its readers (ibid.). One line of argument is that the ownership structure of the Guardian facilitated, amongst others, the role the paper played in exposing the extent of the phone hacking scandal. This argument is strengthened by the fact that it welcomed external intervention in press regulation exemplified by its support for statutory underpinning of a new press regulator, its support for the Leveson Inquiry, its support for victims of the scandal and its advancement of the arguments of victims’ campaigners.

Comparing the journalistic metadiscourse of the two spheres, it appears Guardian’s coverage of the press reform debate fits better into the image of “the journalist as a crusader” and a selfless protector of that paradigm. However, that view is contestable. A different line of argument is that Guardian newspaper is not a selfless protector of the crusader paradigm for three main reasons. Firstly, Guardian newspaper is not as completely free of corporate interests as it appears (Klaehn 2010; Guardian Media Group 2015). The steps it took to expose the extent of the scandal and deflect blame for press bad behaviour may have been premised on its need to sustain readership (and power of influence) and take up a powerful position in the media market. As Klaehn (2010, p. 28) argued, Guardian “is very much part of the business world and establishment .... It is part of
the competitive media industry and plays politics to gain clout and readership” (ibid.).

As previously stated, Scott Trust Ltd, funders of Guardian, is the owner of Guardian Media Group (GMG), a business enterprise (Ahmed, cited in Cook 2015). Their portfolio of investments includes Ascential plc, “a global business-to-business media company listed on the London Stock Exchange” (Ascential 2017). Though the company claims that its investments are there “to secure the financial and editorial independence of the Guardian” (Cole and Harcup 2009, p. 77; Scott Trust 2016), it can be argued that Guardian may have felt threatened by Rupert Murdoch’s media empire and the likelihood of it winning the bid for the remaining 60.9 per cent of shares in BskyB (it already owned 39.1 per cent of the shares) (BBC News 2010) and the detrimental effect that would have on their paper’s power and popularity. Guardian’s publication of the News of the World’s hacking of Millie Dowler’s voicemail was done at the peak of negotiations on the bids. The paper’s fears about its place in the media market can be confirmed from its publication headlined “BskyB bid: Cautious Hunt set to reject approach from Murdoch”. The article stated:

At issue is whether News Corporation’s buyout of BSkyB would lead to the creation of a media company that with £7.5bn of UK turnover is so large that rival newspapers and broadcasters are progressively unable to compete. Objectors to the deal include an unlikely alliance of the owners of Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, Daily Telegraph and Guardian, who argue that the tie-up would lead to a loss of “media plurality” in the UK. (Sabbagh 2010, n.p.)

Let me pause here to mention that the focus of this analysis is not to give a moral judgement on whether or not it was right for Rupert Murdoch to bid for complete ownership of BskyB, but to show that it is possible that Guardian’s coverage of the NoTW phone hacking scandal and the debate that followed it could have been inspired by a neoliberal ideology (to protect its business from market failure) rather than a quest to liberate the masses and protect democracy. That may explain why the Guardian newspaper did not sign up to the regulatory body underpinned by statute (as of 2020) even though the paper advocated for the press to sign up to it in its journalistic metadiscourse. It may also be that though other newspapers such as the Daily Mail, Daily Mirror and Daily Telegraph were not in support of the deal, they could not adopt the “the crusader role” employed by the Guardian because they may have been practising the
same dark arts as *News of the World* (as has been revealed in the case of Trinity Mirror and *The Sun*), or because it could affect their profit in some other ways.

This line of argument is further strengthened by the *Guardian*’s support for the cancellation of the second phase of the Leveson Inquiry which was to investigate the relationship between the press and the police (*Guardian 2018*). Having played the crusader role in its coverage of the first part of the Leveson Inquiry, many expected the *Guardian* to advocate for Leveson 2 to take place, but the paper disappointed many including campaigners for media reform, some victims of press abuse and several academics when it published its position in an opinion article, headlined “The Guardian view on Leveson part two: look ahead, not behind”. In this article, the paper supported the government’s position that the culture, practice and ethics of the press can be improved and journalism in the public interest can be promoted without recourse to the second part of the Leveson Inquiry (*Guardian 2018*). This decision of the *Guardian* was tagged an act of betrayal by campaigners of media reform including some academics (*Jukes 2016; Cathcart 2018; Guardian 2018b*).

But was that an act of betrayal or another phase of *Guardian*’s continued tactics to promote its media economy? By using the word “betrayal”, the critics of *Guardian*’s position on Leveson 2 assume the paper had played the crusader role in its coverage of Leveson 1. Maybe it did that to an extent, but my investigation reveals some cracks in this image of the *Guardian* as the crusader. The paper’s underlying concern appears to be the protection of its media economy. This concern resurfaced during *Guardian*’s defence of its position on Leveson 2. Employing the strategy of threat to press freedom in a way that it had previously condemned, the paper highlighted what it believed should be the government’s focus in the place of Leveson 2:

> The concentration of power in the hands of a few tech and press barons is a menace to society. Media plurality rules should be used to defuse this threat. Journalists must be responsible for standards and ethics but it is wrong to think a state body should hold the exercise of power by the press to account. (*Guardian 2018*, n.p.)

By 2018, the *Guardian* had begun to use the rhetoric it condemned in the past to protect its media economy. Note also that a problem to the press was again represented as a problem to the public, a menace to society.
Though it can be argued that the change in the paper’s editorial position was the result of a change in the editor-in-chief of the paper—Alan Rusbridger was replaced by Katharine Viner in 2015 (Guardian 2015)—there are still reasons to suspect that the Guardian may not have been a selfless crusader in the media reform debate. It can, therefore, be argued that in both interpretive spheres, the underlying motivation was neither a defence for democracy nor a reassurance to the public that, in journalism, they have a crusader who is there to protect them from opportunistic politicians but rather that the motivation was market-driven, a move to secure their media economy. In this neoliberal setting, profit is primary; democracy may or may not be a by-product (it could be if it generates profit). This raises serious questions about the capability of the media to serve as a democratic public sphere in debates about media reform. Some form of external intervention, free of such levels of self-interest, would be needed to ensure that the media serves as a democratic public sphere in debates about their policy.

**Conclusion**

The way the strategies of individualisation and self-assertion were used in the coverage of the press reform debate that followed the NoTW phone hacking scandal reveals that the media highly value the paradigm of the “the journalist as a crusader” (the voice of the voiceless; the hero who fights for the good of the less privileged). The reason being the ability of the crusader persona to earn the press high patronage which is essential for both political and commercial power. This explains why much effort was put into protecting this image. Although there are times when journalists fulfil this role (Bernstein and Woodward 1974; BBC News 2011), in the coverage of the media policy debate, claims to this status was more of an act of image laundry; the strategy of self-assertion is the tool used to achieve this. The two sub-interpretive spheres (Guardian versus other newspapers examined) examined used it for that purpose. It is important for consumers of journalistic metadiscourse to bear this in mind when they consume debates about media policy especially when such debates follow a scandal involving the media.

Another important finding was that the journalistic metadiscourse featured high acknowledgement of guilt which did not translate into self-critique. It can, therefore, be argued that the high acknowledgement of guilt in the journalistic metadiscourse was a Public Relations (PR) stunt.
Acknowledgement of guilt is used as a PR technique when offence is obvious and the offender attempts to attract mercy by playing the role of “the repentant sinner”. Number 6 of Forbes’ 13 golden rule of PR crisis management says, “first apologise, then take action”. For more on how acceptance of guilt is used as a crisis management strategy, see Moon and Rhee (2012; Hearit 2006). So, when consuming journalistic metadiscourse, it is important to be aware of the fact that attributions of blame could be a crisis management strategy; whether or not the apologies are sincere can be deciphered from the action that follows. In the case of the journalistic metadiscourse on the debate that followed the NoTW phone hacking scandal, apologies were followed by deflection of the blame to others including to other new organisations, other journalists and other institutions. The strategy of individualisation (also ostracisation) was used to achieve this. A culprit is identified and condemned as a bad apple who should not be allowed to tarnish the crusader image of journalists; usually the good journalists are the group to which the writer belongs or supports. As stated earlier, individualising labels such as “parts of the media”, “sections of the press” or “rogue reporter” were used by the different newspapers to distance themselves from the culprit(s) as part of efforts to protect the crusader image and argue against stringent press reform.

This book argues that while the acknowledgement of guilt is a welcomed response, deflection of blame should be replaced by media self-critique. The action that follows such acknowledgement of guilt needs to be significant enough to ensure high press standards. However, the fear of losing economic and political power has kept the media from submitting itself to any significant action that will lead to change. While in PR crisis management strategy the action needs to be significant enough to convince their customers that the crisis would not repeat itself, in the case of media misconduct, individualisation is used to convince the readers that there is need for only little or no change, giving the impression that the change does not have to be significant because the bad egg has been removed or taken care of. What the public need to realise is that this performance of the press is to gain their patronage—they are the ones being courted. Failure to understand this can lead to public patronage of press arguments on media policy that can wreck their lives. In Chap. 8, I expand on how the public can play a role in media reform. The next chapter shows us more of how the media cover debates about themselves using the strategy of minimisation.
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