

A small white rectangular box containing the author's name, Petra Kovačević, positioned above the main title.

Solutions Journalism in Practice: The Tension Between Critical and Compelling Presentation of Solutions in BBC's Social Media Video Stories

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the emerging field of solutions journalism, which strives to report on social issues by highlighting responses to them, while maintaining a critical stance. Specifically, this study investigates how solutions journalism guidelines are understood and implemented in a specific newsroom at the *BBC* that specializes in producing solution-focused social media videos aimed primarily at younger audiences. To this end, the study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining content analysis of the *BBC*'s solutions video stories with semi-structured interviews with editors and journalists. The analysis reveals a significant disparity between the team's understanding of solutions journalism as a practice that thoroughly scrutinizes solutions and the actual content of the stories they produce. Notably, over half of the sample videos fail to include at least one of the following essential elements that ensure the critical presentation of solutions: the identification of the cause of the problem, an acknowledgment of the limitations of the proposed solutions, or the provision of hard evidence of the effectiveness of the solutions. The findings suggest that various factors in the production process hinder the implementation of these guidelines, including the reliance on audience metrics, the need to comply with *Facebook*'s algorithm, and the perceived preferences of social media audiences. The production process is subject to three competing demands: maintaining a predominantly positive tone, creating an interesting story, and presenting a simple narrative. Consequently, the presentation of solutions leaves little room for critical evaluation by the audience.

KEY WORDS

Audience Engagement. *BBC* People Fixing the World. *BBC*. Social Video. Solutions Journalism. Solutions-Focused Journalism. Visual Solutions Journalism.

1 Introduction

The world is not as bad as the news present it – at least according to the practices of constructive journalism and solutions journalism that aim to address the negativity bias in the news and “offer audiences forward-looking perspectives on how they can actively help steer society in desired directions”¹. Their proponents want to tackle some of the biggest issues in journalism today – regain the audiences’ fast-eroding trust² and dispel the main motives for increasing news avoidance³ by changing journalists’ perspectives of what is newsworthy. At the same time, these practices are positioned as “‘necessary’ and ‘trustworthy’ forms of journalism”⁴ that report critically on positive developments, and ultimately help journalism fulfill its mission of informing and educating people so they can act as informed citizens in democratic societies. However, the practice of solutions journalism has a narrower focus as “all solutions journalism is constructive journalism but not all constructive journalism is solutions journalism”⁵. In this way, reporting on responses is only one possible technique of constructive journalism. It is a practically more elaborate approach that has gained momentum and so far has been adapted, at least according to its main proponent, the *Solutions Journalism Network*, “at 1,700 news organisations in more than 187 countries”⁶.

So far, research has been more concerned with audience effects and with how these practices were set up normatively and in the minds of journalists, and less with the point where all the promises are put to the test – the actual journalistic practice. In research, there has been a somewhat taken for granted assumption that when a newsroom does, for example, a solutions story, it is always a piece of “rigorous, compelling coverage”⁷, and that journalists’ interpretations of constructive journalism or solutions journalism are directly translated into practice. But as studies have often shown, the gap between journalists’ role perceptions and their practice can be significant,⁸ and somewhat inevitable because of the hierarchy of influences in the news production process.⁹ For this reason, whether constructive journalism and related practices “can effectively contribute to the renewal of journalism culture and journalism practice is not clear yet”¹⁰, and the reporting practices in specific newsrooms should be studied more.

¹ HAUTAKANGAS, M., AHVA, L.: Introducing a New Form of Socially Responsible Journalism. In *Journalism Practice*, 2018, Vol. 12, No. 6, p. 731.

² HERMANS, L., GYLDENSTED, C.: Elements of Constructive Journalism: Characteristics, Practical Application and Audience Valuation. In *Journalism*, 2019, Vol. 20, No. 4, p. 537.

³ See: SERRANO-PUNCHE, J.: Constructive Journalism: A Response to Users’ Motivations for News Avoidance. In *Cuadernos.info*, 2020, Vol. 46, p. 153-177.

⁴ AITAMURTO, T., VARMA, A.: The Constructive Role of Journalism. In *Journalism Practice*, 2018, Vol. 12, No. 6, p. 12.

⁵ OVERGAARD, C. S. B.: Mitigating the Consequences of Negative News: How Constructive Journalism Enhances Self-efficacy and News Credibility. In *Journalism*, 2021. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849211062738>>.

⁶ *I. Introduction: Welcome. Solutions Journalism Basic Toolkit*. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <<https://learninglab.solutionsjournalism.org/en/courses/basic-toolkit/introduction/welcome>>.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ See: MELLADO, C., VAN DALEN, A.: Between Rhetoric and Practice: Explaining the Gap Between Role Conception and Performance in Journalism. In *Journalism Studies*, 2014, Vol. 15, No. 6, p. 859-878. See also: MELLADO, C.: Professional Roles in News Content: Six Dimensions of Journalistic Role Performance. In *Journalism Studies*, 2015, Vol. 16, No. 4, p. 596-614.

⁹ See: REESE, S. D., SHOEMAKER, P. J.: A Media Sociology for the Networked Public Sphere: The Hierarchy of Influences Model. In *Mass Communication and Society*, 2016, Vol. 19, No. 4, p. 389-410.

¹⁰ HERMANS, L., DROK, N.: Placing Constructive Journalism in Context. In *Journalism Practice*, 2018, Vol. 12, No. 6, p. 687.

In this sense, examining how the *BBC*, “still probably the most prominent and respected”¹¹ public broadcaster, implements a reporting approach that focuses on solutions, is a valuable contribution to the understanding of these practices. Often mentioned alongside *The Guardian*, the *BBC* is highlighted as one of the most prominent ‘players’ in solutions journalism, not just in the UK but in the world as well. It reports on solutions to problems under a slightly different name though: “solutions-focused” journalism. The *BBC* recognises the goals of solutions journalism as being compatible with its public service mission, and positions solutions-focused journalism as a practice that can “give a more accurate picture of the world, inspire those who seek to inform, serve the public good and help fulfill the BBC’s public purposes without jettisoning our commitment to providing accurate, independent and impartial journalism which includes holding power to account”¹². Since 2016, one of its projects called *People Fixing the World* has focused on podcasts, but also on short videos intended for online and social media platforms, and for connecting with particularly younger audience members which have been the *BBC*’s most important target audience.¹³ In this way, the *BBC* is one of the rare media organisations that has a solutions project that focuses specifically on a video format, and that does this for online and social media audiences who are increasingly losing interest in news.¹⁴

The aim of this study is to understand what the main ideas of solutions-focused journalism are and how they are translated into practice in the context of the *BBC*’s most long-standing project and its video team. On the one hand, this study explores the understanding of both critical and compelling presentation of solutions in the mentioned *BBC*’s team. On the other hand, it checks if and how these ideas are reflected in practice and implemented in the context of the video stories that this team produces and that are published on the *BBC*’s website and on the project’s *Facebook* page. This approach allows identifying the factors in production that are decisive for the implementation of those solutions journalism guidelines that ensure a solution is critically or ‘rigorously’ reported on¹⁵ and that have normatively positioned this practice as the one that strives to be “thorough, accurate, fair and transparent”¹⁶, and in this way dedicated to the highest professional standards of journalism.

The findings show that the need to be compelling and win over the audience’s attention on social media is often done at the expense of presenting solutions critically. Important information about three key elements in solutions reporting – the problem, solution effectiveness, or solutions limitations – is often omitted. This raises the question of what the audiences are left with if they are presented with predominantly the positive aspects of a solution, and whether solutions journalism fulfills the purpose of being more socially responsible towards the audiences in the context of the *BBC*.

¹¹ GARDNER, S.: *Public Broadcasting: Its Past and Its Future*. Miami, FL : Knight Foundation, 2017, p. 3. [online]. [2023-02-25]. Available at: <https://kf-site-production.s3.amazonaws.com/media_elements/files/000/000/115/original/Topos_KF_White-Paper_Sue-Gardner_V2.pdf>.

¹² KASRIEL, E.: *Solutions-Focused Journalism: Toolkit*. London : BBC News, 2016, p. 2.

¹³ WATERSON, J.: *BBC at Risk of Losing Young Audiences, According to Ofcom*. [online]. [2023-02-25]. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2019/oct/24/bbc-at-risk-of-losing-young-audiences-according-to-ofcom>>.

¹⁴ NEWMAN, N., FLETCHER, R., ROBERTSON, C. T., EDDY, K., NIELSEN, R. K.: *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022*. Oxford : Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022. [online]. [2023-02-25]. Available at: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/Digital_News-Report_2022.pdf>.

¹⁵ See: MCINTYRE, K. E., LOUGH, K.: Toward a Clearer Conceptualization and Operationalization of Solutions Journalism. In *Journalism*, 2021, Vol. 22, No. 6, p. 1558-1573.

¹⁶ MCINTYRE HOPKINSON, K., DAHMEN, N. S.: Moving Forward: Bringing Clarity to Productive and Socially Responsible Reporting. In MCINTYRE HOPKINSON, K., DAHMEN, N. S. (eds.): *Reporting Beyond the Problem: From Civic Journalism to Solutions Journalism*. New York, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Oxford, Wien : Peter Lang, 2021, p. 172.

1.1 The Struggle Between the Two Roles

Being both compelling and critical in reporting is central to solutions journalism. It is for this reason that within the discourses of its proponents, an inherent “*struggle over normative boundaries*” is identified,¹⁷ as the practice is trying to strike a balance between the two roles – the traditional monitorial role, and the so-called “constructive” role of journalism. On the one hand, the practice normatively nurtures journalism’s ‘traditional’ monitorial role of acting as a watchdog, reporting critically about what is happening, while striving to implement the journalistic ideals of objectivity, accuracy, and transparency.¹⁸ This includes informing citizens about public events, warning the public of wrongdoings, risks, and problems, and acting as the fourth estate.¹⁹ It is the central aspect of how both constructive and solutions journalism are legitimised, particularly in the face of criticisms that the avoidance of negativity may turn journalism “*into a good-news-show that limits the attention for what is going wrong in the world and the exposure of abuse of power*”²⁰. In this sense, one of the most prominent claims that the proponents of constructive and solutions journalism make to position the practices alongside other ‘serious’ journalism is that their stories are distinctive from “superficial and non-solution oriented” positive news stories.²¹

On the other hand, the constructive role is distinctive in the sense that it “*embeds a premise that offering and covering solutions remain within the auspices of journalism*”²². In this way, it pushes the boundaries of journalism as it does not focus solely on what is not working,²³ but aims to be “a constructive force in the society” that serves the audience better by focusing on effective solutions and accelerating social progress.²⁴ Being constructive means not only informing and warning citizens about problems in society but also seeking “*to contribute to society’s best interests*”²⁵. In this sense, solutions journalism is positioned under the umbrella of so-called socially responsible journalism practices that report “*beyond the problem-based narrative*” and aim to strengthen audience engagement, achieve a higher level of collaboration with the audience, and provide more context in reporting so citizens can better understand complex issues and events.²⁶

¹⁷ AITAMURTO, T., VARMA, A.: The Constructive Role of Journalism. In *Journalism Practice*, 2018, Vol. 12, No. 6, p. 14.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 4-5.

¹⁹ CHRISTIANS, C. G. et al.: *Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies*. Champaign, IL : University of Illinois Press, 2009, p. 145-146.

²⁰ HERMANS, L., DROK, N.: Placing Constructive Journalism in Context. In *Journalism Practice*, 2018, Vol. 12, No. 6, p. 687.

²¹ LOWES, M., DEVEREAUX FERGUSON, S.: Solutions Journalism: Strategies for Effecting and Managing Change. In *Canadian Journal of Media Studies*, 2021, Vol. 17, No. 1, p. 64.

²² AITAMURTO, T., VARMA, A.: The Constructive Role of Journalism. In *Journalism Practice*, 2018, Vol. 12, No. 6, p. 4.

²³ WENZEL, A.: *Community-Centered Journalism. Engaging People, Exploring Solutions, and Building Trust*. Champaign, IL : University of Illinois Press, 2020, p. 14.

²⁴ AITAMURTO, T., VARMA, A. The Constructive Role of Journalism. In *Journalism Practice*, 2018, Vol. 12, No. 6, p. 14.

²⁵ HAUTAKANGAS, M., AHVA, L.: Introducing a New Form of Socially Responsible Journalism. In *Journalism Practice*, 2018, Vol. 12, No. 6, p. 731.

²⁶ MCINTYRE HOPKINSON, K., DAHMEN, N. S.: Moving Forward: Bringing Clarity to Productive and Socially Responsible Reporting. In MCINTYRE HOPKINSON, K., DAHMEN, N. S. (eds.): *Reporting Beyond the Problem: From Civic Journalism to Solutions Journalism*. New York, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Oxford, Wien : Peter Lang, 2021, p. 173.

Furthermore, inherent to this practice is the idea that reporting on solutions is more “compelling” for the audience.²⁷ In this sense, audience engagement is an important aspect of how the practice is conceptualised by its proponents.²⁸ First, constructive news stories, including those that are solutions-oriented, should engage the audience by being interesting, uplifting, and make it feel better about the world.²⁹ Second, this would ideally lead to developing “relational or deep engagement”³⁰ that would increase the audience’s trust and inspire them as citizens to become more involved in public issues and conversations in their communities, and also to take concrete actions.³¹ So far, the studies have found that solutions stories as part of constructive news do elicit more positive emotional responses,³² and increase audience interest in the topic and the sense of self-efficacy.³³ However, the findings that support solutions journalism’s “prosocial claims about social transformation” are overall “minimal”.³⁴ While in one study members of stigmatised communities said that they would get locally involved after they read solutions-oriented stories,³⁵ other studies found that solutions stories and constructive stories do not increase the respondents’ willingness to act.³⁶

²⁷ I. Introduction: How Do I Know It's Solutions Journalism? *Solutions Journalism Basic Toolkit*. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <<https://learninglab.solutionsjournalism.org/en/courses/basic-toolkit/introduction/how-do-i-know-its-solutions-journalism>>.

²⁸ AITAMURTO, T., VARMA, A.: The Constructive Role of Journalism. In *Journalism Practice*, 2018, Vol. 12, No. 6, p. 11.

²⁹ See: MCINTYRE, K., GYLDENSTED, C.: Constructive Journalism: Applying Positive Psychology Techniques to News Production. In *The Journal of Media Innovations*, 2017, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 20-34.

³⁰ WENZEL, A.: *Community-Centered Journalism. Engaging People, Exploring Solutions, and Building Trust*. Champaign, IL : University of Illinois Press, 2020, p. 12.

³¹ HERMANS, L., DROK, N.: Placing Constructive Journalism in Context. In *Journalism Practice*, 2018, Vol. 12, No. 6, p. 684-685; THIER, K.: Opportunities and Challenges for Initial Implementation of Solutions Journalism Coursework. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 2016, Vol. 71, No. 3, p. 330.

³² See: MCINTYRE, K., SOBEL, M.: Motivating News Audiences: Shock Them or Provide Them with Solutions? In *Communication & Society*, 2017, Vol. 30, No. 1, p. 39-56. See also: MCINTYRE, K.: Solutions Journalism. In *Journalism Practice*, 2019, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 16-34; MCINTYRE, K.: “Tell Me Something Good”: Testing the Longitudinal Effects of Constructive News Using the Google Assistant. In *Electronic News*, 2020, Vol. 14, No. 1, p. 37-54; HERMANS, L., PRINS, T.: Interest Matters: The Effects of Constructive News Reporting on Millennials’ Emotions and Engagement. In *Journalism*, 2022, Vol. 23, No. 5, p. 1064-1081; OVERGAARD, C. S. B.: Mitigating the Consequences of Negative News: How Constructive Journalism Enhances Self-efficacy and News Credibility. In *Journalism*, 2021. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849211062738>>; RUSCH, R., SIMON, E., OTTO, K., FLINTZ, D.: The Impact of Constructive Television Journalism on the Audience: Results from an Online Study. In *Journalism Practice*, 2021, Vol. 16, No. 10, p. 2221-2241.

³³ CURRY, A. L., HAMMONDS, K. H.: *The Power of Solutions Journalism*. Austin, TX : Moody College of Communication at the University of Texas, 2014. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <https://mediaengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/ENP_SJN-report.pdf>; GIELAN, M., FURL, B., JACKSON, J.: *Solution-Focused News Increases Optimism, Empowerment and Connectedness to Community*. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <<http://michellegielan.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Solution-focused-News.pdf>>; OVERGAARD, C. S. B.: Mitigating the Consequences of Negative News: How Constructive Journalism Enhances Self-efficacy and News Credibility. In *Journalism*, 2021. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849211062738>>; ZHAO, X., JACKSON, D., NGUYEN, A.: The Psychological Empowerment Potential of Solutions Journalism: Perspectives from Pandemic News Users in the UK. In *Journalism Studies*, 2022, Vol. 23, No. 3, p. 356-373.

³⁴ THIER, K.: Solutions Journalism: Reporting on the Response Is Just as Newsworthy as Reporting on the Problem. In MCINTYRE HOPKINSON, K., DAHMEN, N. S. (eds.): *Reporting Beyond the Problem*. New York, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Oxford, Wien : Peter Lang, 2021, p. 54.

³⁵ See: WENZEL, A., GERSON, D., MORENO, E., SON, M., MORRISON HAWKINS, B.: Engaging Stigmatized Communities Through Solutions Journalism: Residents of South Los Angeles Respond. In *Journalism*, 2018, Vol. 19, No. 5, p. 649-667.

³⁶ See: MCINTYRE, K., SOBEL, M.: Motivating News Audiences: Shock Them or Provide Them with Solutions? In *Communication & Society*, 2017, Vol. 30, No. 1, p. 39-56; MEIER, K.: How Does the Audience Respond to Constructive Journalism? In *Journalism Practice*, 2018, Vol. 12, No. 6, p. 764-780; MCINTYRE, K.: Solutions Journalism. In *Journalism Practice*, 2019, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 16-34; SCHÄFER, S., GREBER, H., SÜLFLOW, M., LECHLER, S.: A Matter of Perspective: An Experimental Study on Potential of Constructive Journalism for Communicating a Crisis. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2022. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1177/10776990221095751>>.

1.2 The Importance of Presenting the Solution Critically

Even though constructive reporting has an overall “positive tone”,³⁷ the proponents of both constructive and solutions journalism say that, unlike positive news stories, these practices are strongly committed to “traditional journalism’s core functions”.³⁸ In this sense, solutions journalism strives to be defined by its proponents and practitioners as “regular ‘rigorous’ journalism” that is a “parallel form and practice to traditional journalism”³⁹ and, therefore, different than positive news. Reporting critically, “objectively” and “without preferences or values” when selecting stories⁴⁰ is central to how both constructive and solutions journalism are normatively set up. In the first academic conceptualisation of solutions journalism, though only based on interviews with solutions journalists, McIntyre and Lough position it as, again, “rigorous and comprehensive” practice which has the “traditional journalistic norms” at its heart.⁴¹ In this sense, some practitioners even perceive solutions journalism as “an extension of investigative journalism”⁴².

In solutions journalism, reporting critically or ‘rigorously’ means focusing on two questions: “why” and “how” a solution works.⁴³ Other than breaking down the solution, solutions journalism should “balance problem-solving with problem-revealing, acknowledging, and questioning the absence of certain solutions”⁴⁴. In this way, the inclusion of information about both the problem and the solution is equally important for the comprehensive portrayal of solutions, including their visual presentation.⁴⁵ Also, this has the potential to “be more effective at informing audiences about the problems themselves”⁴⁶, while presenting the information about the problem is often not enough to understand it. Identifying both the social problem and its cause in a story is a “fundamental characteristic” that solutions journalism apparently shares with investigative journalism.⁴⁷

Further, McIntyre and Lough offer the first academically operationalised guidelines for solutions journalism.⁴⁸ Other than presenting the problem, its cause, and the solution, they point out that presentation of how the solution is implemented, hard or reliable evidence of its effectiveness, and limitations of the response, particularly contribute to “the rigour of a solutions journalism story”⁴⁹. So far, this is the closest that being critical or ‘rigorous’ has come to being conceptualized in the context of this practice.

³⁷ HERMANS, L., GYLDENSTED, C.: Elements of Constructive Journalism: Characteristics, Practical Application and Audience Valuation. In *Journalism*, 2019, Vol. 20, No. 4, p. 547.

³⁸ MCINTYRE, K.: *Constructive Journalism: The Effects of Positive Emotions and Solution Information in News Stories*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Chapel Hill, NC : University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Graduate School, 2015, p. 15. [online]. [2023-02-25]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.17615/g6sg-8p47>>.

³⁹ AITAMURTO, T., VARMA, A.: The Constructive Role of Journalism. In *Journalism Practice*, 2018, Vol. 12, No. 6, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 14.

⁴¹ MCINTYRE, K. E., LOUGH, K.: Toward a Clearer Conceptualization and Operationalization of Solutions Journalism. In *Journalism*, 2021, Vol. 22, No. 6, p. 1568-1569.

⁴² LI, Y.: Assessing the Role Performance of Solutions Journalism in a Global Pandemic. In *Journalism Practice*, 2021, p. 6. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2021.1990787>>.

⁴³ THIER, K.: Opportunities and Challenges for Initial Implementation of Solutions Journalism Coursework. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 2016, Vol. 71, No. 3, p. 330.

⁴⁴ LI, Y.: Assessing the Role Performance of Solutions Journalism in a Global Pandemic. In *Journalism Practice*, 2021, p. 15. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2021.1990787>>.

⁴⁵ MIDBERRY, J., DAHMEN, N. S.: Visual Solutions Journalism: A Theoretical Framework. In *Journalism Practice*, 2020, Vol. 14, No. 10, p. 1174.

⁴⁶ THIER, K., ABDENOUR, J., WALTH, B., SMITH DAHMEN, N.: A Narrative Solution: The Relationship Between Solutions Journalism, Narrative Transportation, and News Trust. In *Journalism*, 2021, Vol. 22, No. 10, p. 2523.

⁴⁷ WALTH, B., SMITH DAHMEN, N., THIER, K.: A New Reporting Approach for Journalistic Impact. Bringing Together Investigative Reporting and Solutions Journalism. In *Newspaper Research Journal*, 2019, Vol. 40, No. 2, p. 184.

⁴⁸ See: MCINTYRE, K. E., LOUGH, K.: Toward a Clearer Conceptualization and Operationalization of Solutions Journalism. In *Journalism*, 2021, Vol. 22, No. 6, p. 1558-1573.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 1567.

However, whether solutions journalism lives up to the ideals that position it alongside ‘traditional’ journalism, and whether solutions are presented according to the solutions journalism guidelines, has barely been explored in research.⁵⁰ The balance between this dedication to critically inform audiences about solutions, but in a way that is more socially responsible, is particularly interesting in the context of public service broadcasting, especially in Europe where the idea of doing more constructive journalism “has received positive resonance among journalism professionals”⁵¹. These organisations have distinct obligations to their audiences and should know what the public needs in order to participate fully as democratic citizens, while the information they provide is a social or ‘merit’ good that should be accurate, diverse and of high quality.⁵²

1.3 Solutions-Focused Journalism at the BBC

Solutions-focused journalism at the *BBC* has a unique name to show that the *BBC* does not “provide”, but only “covers” solutions.⁵³ It was set up by the *BBC* in 2016. Until now, there have been no studies of this practice, and the information about it has been available in the *BBC*’s documents, articles, and in other publications in the media. According to the *BBC*’s document *Solutions-Focused Journalism: Toolkit*, which used to be publicly available online, solutions-focused journalism – just like solutions journalism – aims to present “rigorous and compelling analyses of responses to problems”⁵⁴. This practice is also careful not to be equated with positive news – “tales with affirming narratives featuring people carrying out inspirational acts of generosity or achievement”⁵⁵. This means asking how a problem can be resolved and how a solution works, finding evidence of its effectiveness, and pointing out its limitations. In this way, solutions-focused journalism shares the same normative dedication to ‘rigorous’ reporting as constructive and solutions journalism, and, within this, “complies strictly with the *BBC* editorial standards”⁵⁶ and uses the *BBC Editorial Guidelines*⁵⁷ as the backbone of critical solutions reporting. Therefore, reporting on solutions should not be “simplistic”, and journalists should take more time to “critically examine the solution”.⁵⁸

Yet, the practice is significantly inspired by the *BBC*’s need to reach younger audiences who show an inherent interest in solutions-focused stories.⁵⁹ Solutions-focused journalism is positioned as a way to achieve better audience engagement, particularly among young people between the ages of 16 and 34 that are listed as the main “key audience challenge”⁶⁰ for this public broadcaster, but at the same time “key to sustainability” at the *BBC*.⁶¹ The *BBC* needs

⁵⁰ LI, Y.: Assessing the Role Performance of Solutions Journalism in a Global Pandemic. In *Journalism Practice*, 2021, p. 10. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2021.1990787>>.

⁵¹ AHVA, L., HAUTAKANGAS, M.: Why Do We Suddenly Talk So Much About Constructiveness? In *Journalism Practice*, 2018, Vol. 12, No. 6, p. 657.

⁵² See: BRANTS, K.: Auditing Public Broadcasting Performance: Its Theory and Practice. In *Javnost – The Public*, 2003, Vol. 10, No. 3, p. 5-11.

⁵³ KASRIEL, E.: *Why We Need Solutions-Focused Journalism*. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/academy/entries/be8991c7-c1c7-42e6-a371-f40278838fa2>>.

⁵⁴ KASRIEL, E.: *Solutions-Focused Journalism: Toolkit*. London : BBC News, 2016, p. 4.

⁵⁵ Ibidem.

⁵⁶ KASRIEL, E.: *Why We Need Solutions-Focused Journalism*. [online]. [2023-02-2025]. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/academy/entries/be8991c7-c1c7-42e6-a371-f40278838fa2>>.

⁵⁷ *BBC Editorial Guidelines*. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <[bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines](https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines)>.

⁵⁸ KASRIEL, E.: *Why We Need Solutions-Focused Journalism*. [online]. [2023-02-2025]. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/academy/entries/be8991c7-c1c7-42e6-a371-f40278838fa2>>.

⁵⁹ KASRIEL, E.: *Solutions-Focused Journalism: Toolkit*. London : BBC News, 2016, p. 6.

⁶⁰ *BBC Annual Plan 2021/22*. London : BBC, p. 44. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <<http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/reports/annualplan/annual-plan-2021-22.pdf>>.

⁶¹ OFCOM: *Ofcom’s Annual Report on the BBC 2019*. London : Ofcom, 2019, p. 8. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0026/173735/second-bbc-annual-report.pdf>.

to make content that young people will find both relevant and interesting, or it will risk “a lost generation of viewers”⁶². Other public broadcasters are facing the same challenge as they try to stay relevant within “the market dominance of streaming giants, internet platforms, and other large commercial players in the digital age”⁶³. In pre-interviews for this study, the editor of the BBC’s *People Fixing the World* project confirmed that video was the main format intended for reaching young audiences globally, and therefore the team invested their efforts primarily in crafting engaging solutions-focused video stories. The key video-sharing platform used by the project until July 2020 was Facebook. Now the stories are published on the BBC World Service social media accounts.

In this sense, the BBC’s project is an opportunity to explore the ideas of solutions reporting, and if and how they are actually implemented in content, all in the context of a particular newsroom at the BBC whose “broader principles” were a model for other public broadcasters around the world,⁶⁴ with editorial standards and practices which remain an international role model to this day. Additionally, solutions reporting in videos has not been explored at all, even though the combination of moving images and text that can create nuanced meanings and understandings. Even though videos have been considered in the development of the first theoretical framework for visual solutions journalism,⁶⁵ the framework itself focused primarily on photographs, the only visual format studied so far in the context of solutions reporting.⁶⁶ As “the visual message presented in a news story may have a greater effect on the reader than the text”⁶⁷, examining how solutions are reported on in video stories is a vital contribution to the field of visual solutions journalism.

2 Methodology

The study explored the following three research questions:

1. What are the key ideas present in journalists’ and editors’ understandings of solutions-focused journalism in the BBC’s *People Fixing the World* team?
2. 2) Are the solutions journalism guidelines related to the critical presentation of solutions implemented in the BBC’s solutions-focused video stories?
3. 3) What are the main factors in the production process that determine the way solutions-focused video stories are made?

⁶² OFCOM: *Ofcom’s Annual Report on the BBC 2019*. London : Ofcom, 2019, p. 10. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0026/173735/second-bbc-annual-report.pdf>.

⁶³ *EBU News Report 2021-22. What’s Next? Public Service Journalism in the Age of Distraction, Opinion & Information Abundance*. Geneva : European Broadcasting Union, 2021, p. 6. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <https://www.ebu.ch/files/live/sites/ebu/files/Publications/strategic/open/News_report_2021.pdf>.

⁶⁴ HODKINSON, P.: *Media, Culture and Society*. London : Sage Publication, 2017, p. 141.

⁶⁵ See: MIDBERRY, J., DAHMEN, N. S.: Visual Solutions Journalism: A Theoretical Framework. In *Journalism Practice*, 2020, Vol. 14, No. 10, p. 1159-1178.

⁶⁶ See: LOUGH, K., MCINTYRE, K.: Visualizing the Solution: An Analysis of the Images That Accompany Solutions-Oriented News Stories. In *Journalism*, 2019, Vol. 20, No. 4, p. 583-599. See also: MCINTYRE, K., LOUGH, K., MANZANARES, K.: Solutions in the Shadows: The Effects of Incongruent Visual Messaging in Solutions Journalism News Stories. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2018, Vol. 95, No. 4, p. 971-989; DAHMEN, N. S., THIER, K., WALTH, B.: Creating Engagement with Solutions Visuals: Testing the Effects of Problem-Oriented Versus Solution-Oriented Photojournalism. In *Visual Communication*, 2019, Vol. 20, No. 2, p. 271-288; LI, Y.: The Synergistic Effects of Solutions Journalism and Corporate Social Responsibility Advertising. In *Digital Journalism*, 2021, Vol. 9, No. 3, p. 336-363.

⁶⁷ LOUGH, K., MCINTYRE, K.: Visualizing the Solution: An Analysis of the Images That Accompany Solutions-oriented News Stories. In *Journalism*, 2019, Vol. 20, No. 4, p. 596.

In terms of the solutions journalism guidelines, this study used the ones operationalised by McIntyre and Lough as a guarantee that a solutions story will 'rigorously' or critically present all the aspects of the solution and the problem-solving process.⁶⁸ The four guidelines are:

- Presentation and explanation of the problem and its cause.
- Explanation of how the solution is implemented (how it works).
- Presentation and explanation of hard evidence of solution effectiveness.
- Presentation and explanation of solution limitations.

Each guideline was operationalised as a set of variables that examined if they are both textually and visually presented in each solutions-focused video story. Additionally, one variable explored the topics of BBC's solutions-focused stories. The last three listed guidelines can also be found in the BBC's *Solutions-Focused Journalism Toolkit*.⁶⁹ Checking if they are implemented, along with journalists' and editors' understandings of these guidelines, contributes to a clearer conceptualisation of solutions-focused journalism at the BBC (Appendix 1).

In order to explore the three questions, this study was conducted in two research phases. First, I analysed 119 solutions-focused video stories published by the BBC's *People Fixing the World* both on its website and its Facebook page. For this, I used content analysis as it enabled me to systematically operationalise and check if a specific solutions journalism guideline is implemented. The sample included all the stories published from the beginning of the project in November 2016 until March 2019 when I started coding. The textual presentation meant looking at any information in either the voiceover, captions, or soundbites. There were altogether 16 variables in the coding frame. The analysis was conducted by one coder in April and May 2019 and previously checked for inter-coder reliability in the pilot study. The ICR test showed a consistently high level of agreement across all variables (0.84 KA).

In phase two, I explored the understanding of solutions-focused journalism and what factors shape the implementation of these ideas in actual practice. I conducted semi-structured interviews with two editors and seven journalists on the team identified as makers of the solutions-focused video stories that I had analysed. This was a highly targeted sample of journalists and editors exclusively related to the project. Each interviewee was personally contacted through e-mail. The interview consisted of two parts. The interviewees were first asked to share their understanding of the BBC's solutions-focused journalism. Then they were presented with the findings of content analysis and asked to comment on the results. The interviews were conducted via video calls in September and October of 2020 and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, with the exception of one interview that lasted 90 minutes. The interview data was analysed using the method of thematic analysis to identify "*what is common to the way a topic is talked or written about and of making sense of those commonalities*"⁷⁰. This included looking at evident and intricate aspects of what the interviewees say, and the meanings they create about their own understanding of the practice. I analysed the interviews and extracted the codes and, subsequently, the themes manually, without using any qualitative analysis software. This is because many of the questions in the interviews I conducted were open-ended and designed in such a way to reveal different nuanced approaches that ultimately gave shape to this practice within the team.

The choice of methods used in this study was guided by the following strategy: "*to attack the research problem with an arsenal of methods that have non-overlapping weaknesses*"⁷¹, and to gain an in-depth understanding of solutions-focused journalism in the BBC's *People Fixing*

⁶⁸ MCINTYRE, K. E., LOUGH, K.: Toward a Clearer Conceptualization and Operationalization of Solutions Journalism. In *Journalism*, 2021, Vol. 22, No. 6, p. 1567.

⁶⁹ KASRIEL, E.: *Solutions-Focused Journalism: Toolkit*. London : BBC News, 2016, p. 4.

⁷⁰ BRAUN, V., CLARKE, V.: *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*. London : Sage Publication, 2013, p. 57.

⁷¹ BREWER, J., HUNTER, A.: *Foundations of Multimethod Research: Synthesizing Styles*. Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage Publications, 2006, p. 4.

the *World* team by examining both sides of the production process. Incorporating qualitative and quantitative methods, interviews and thematic analysis, together with content analysis, is particularly helpful in research when the aim is to expand the understanding of a complex phenomenon;⁷² in this case, the nuances of a particular journalistic practice and the potential gap between what is said and what is done.

3 Results

3.1 In Practice: Implementation of Solutions Journalism Guidelines in the BBC's Video Stories

The findings demonstrate a disparity between journalists' and editors' ideas and the practice of solutions reporting. There is a clear tension between what the members of this team feel 'rigorous' reporting about solutions should be, and the need to adapt both the reporting and the format to the audience and the social media platform. This is reflected in the solutions-focused video stories. Three out of four guidelines of solutions journalism are implemented in less than half of the video stories in the sample. It shows that the responsibility of solutions journalists "to bring to audiences the complete story"⁷³ is predominantly not fulfilled in the BBC's solutions-focused stories.

3.1.1 The Problem and Its Cause

In solutions-focused stories, journalists need to "encapsulate the problem", but do not need to present it in detail, especially if the audience is already aware of it.⁷⁴ The findings show that this is exactly what is done in the solutions-focused video stories, and subsequently, the cause of the problem is for the most part disregarded. As presented in Table 1, 96.6% of stories in the sample do present the problem, and the problem is visually represented in 73.9% of them. There is an apparent effort made by the team of journalists to dedicate a specific place in their solutions stories to this information. However, 43.7% of stories present and explain the cause of that problem, while 55.8% of those stories that mention the cause of the problem textually, present it also visually.

Is the problem presented?	Yes: 96.6% (N=115)
	No: 3.4% (N=4)
Is the problem visually represented?	Yes: 73.9% (N=85)
	No: 26.1% (N=30)
Is the cause of the problem and the context within which it arose presented?	Yes: 43.7% (N=52)
	No: 56.3% (N=67)
Is the cause of the problem visually represented?	Yes: 55.8% (N=29)
	No: 44.2% (N=23)

TABLE 1: *Presentation of the problem and its cause*

Source: own processing, 2023

⁷² WIMMER, R., DOMINICK, J.: *Mass Media Research: An Introduction*. Belmont, CA : Thomson Wadsworth, 2006, p. 117.

⁷³ THIER, K.: Solutions Journalism: Reporting on the Response Is Just as Newsworthy as Reporting on the Problem. In MCINTYRE HOPKINSON, K., DAHMEN, N. S. (eds.): *Reporting Beyond the Problem*. New York, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Oxford, Wien : Peter Lang, 2021, p. 47.

⁷⁴ KASRIEL, E.: *Solutions-Focused Journalism: Toolkit*. London : BBC News, 2016, p. 9.

3.1.2 Solution Implementation – How It Works

Furthermore, the importance of explaining how the solution works is central in the *BBC*'s solutions-focused video stories and, therefore, this is the only guideline that was followed in almost all the stories. As shown in Table 2, 98.3% of the stories include details about how a certain response is implemented, while 92.4% of the stories present solutions used in real life. Additionally, a tangible solution is presented in 94.1% of the stories. This is no surprise because video is a highly visual medium and the solution that is reported should be implemented and tangible so it can be recorded.

Does the story include details on how the solution is implemented?	Yes: 98.3% (N=117) No: 1.7% (N=2)
Is the solution tangible or hypothetical?	Tangible: 94.1% (N=112) Hypothetical: 5.9% (N=7)
Is the solution implemented in real life?	Yes: 92.4% (N=110) No: 7.6% (N=9)
Is the solution implementation visually represented?	Yes: 98.3% (N=117) No: 1.7% (N=2)

TABLE 2: Presentation of solution implementation

Source: own processing, 2023

It is also worth considering the fact that the most covered solutions topics are environment, health, and children's well-being. Other topics that were identified are presented in Table 3. While it is not fair to assess what problems and responses are more important than others, it is important to note that the *BBC*'s solutions stories in the sample rarely cover topics related to conflict, including political and governance issues. Therefore, there is a tendency to disregard the topics that have an inherent negativity bias.

The topic of the solutions-focused story	N=119
Environment and sustainability	27.7% (N=33)
Health	13.4% (N=16)
Children's well-being	9.2% (N=11)
Mental health	6.7% (N=8)
Planning and development	5.9% (N=7)
People with disabilities and their well-being	5.0% (N=6)
Community building	4.2% (N=5)
Transport and traffic	4.2% (N=5)
Gender equality	3.4% (N=4)
Peacebuilding	2.5% (N=3)
Crime	2.5% (N=3)
Refugees	2.5% (N=3)
Poverty	1.7% (N=2)
Third age	1.7% (N=2)
Agriculture and farming	1.7% (N=2)
Corruption	0.8% (N=1)
Police	0.8% (N=1)
Housing	0.8% (N=1)
Media	0.8% (N=1)

Language	0.8% (N=1)
Animals	0.8% (N=1)
Cyber security	0.8% (N=1)
Consumer issues	0.8% (N=1)
Anti-radicalisation	0.8% (N=1)

TABLE 3: *Topics of solutions-focused stories*

Source: own processing, 2023

3.1.3 Hard Evidence That a Solution Works

Furthermore, the guideline stating that a solutions story must include hard evidence or reliable data that prove the impact of solution implementation is adhered to in 49.6% of the stories (Table 4). Therefore, in 50.4% of the stories, no hard evidence of the solution's effectiveness is presented. Either no evidence is presented, or the evidence is purely anecdotal.

Is there hard evidence or reliable data that show the impact of solution implementation?	Yes: 49.6% (N=59)
	No: 50.4% (N=60)
If yes, what is it?	Numerical data (statistics): 66.1% (N=39)
	Qualitative data: 33.9% (N=20)
If yes, who presents the evidence?	Journalist: 88.1% (N=52)
	Solution inventor: 5.1% (N=3)
	Solution provider: 3.4% (N=2)
	Solution receiver: 1.7% (N=1)
	Journalist and solution inventor: 1.7% (N=1)

TABLE 4: *Hard evidence of solution effectiveness*

Source: own processing, 2023

Hard evidence is presented predominantly by the journalist (88.1%), either through numerical data (66.1%) or qualitative data (33.9%) about solution effectiveness. The sources of evidence are academic journals, official reports, or other sources, including the solution inventors. However, often the source of evidence is not attributed and, instead, phrases like “studies show” or “initial studies suggest” are used by the journalist. Among the stories that do not present any hard evidence, only four stories in the sample clearly state that the journalist searched for hard evidence, but without success.

3.1.4 Solution Limitations

In terms of presenting the downsides of the solution or obstacles to its implementation, at least one limitation is presented in 43.7% of the stories in the sample (Table 5). Therefore, in 56.3% of the stories, the solution is presented as impeccable and flawless. Among the stories that do present it, in 69.2% of them only one limitation is mentioned. Moreover, when a limitation is textually presented in a story, it is visually represented in 48.1% of the cases. In other stories, limitations are accompanied by visuals of the solution and how it works, which can mitigate the significance or the severity of the limitation for the audience.

Are there any reported solution limitations?	Yes: 43.7% (N=52)
	No: 56.3% (N=67)
If yes, how many limitations are reported?	One limitation: 69.2% (N=36)
	Two limitations: 28.9% (N=15)
	Three or more limitations: 1.9% (N=1)
Is the limitation visually presented in the story?	Yes: 48.1% (N=25)
	No: 51.9% (N=27)

TABLE 5: *Solution limitations*

Source: own processing, 2023

3.2 Journalists and Editors: What Solutions-Focused Video Stories Should Be

Before getting into journalists' and editors' reasons behind the results of the content analysis, it is first important to identify their notions of solutions-focused journalism at the *BBC* and how they think solutions should be reported on. Interviews confirm what is reflected in the solutions-focused video stories – that the members of this team are stuck between the two worlds: the need to protect their journalistic integrity, and the need to please the perceived expectations of their target audience – young people on social media. First, the interviewees position it as a 'rigorous' journalistic practice by conceptualising the *BBC*'s solutions-focused journalism in opposition to positive news.

3.2.1 'Not Positive News'

In the interviews, there is a clear tendency to present solutions-focused journalism as a serious journalistic practice within the *BBC* that does more than just present solutions. One member of the team sums it up: *"There's a desire not to be, to differentiate yourself from just good news in order to be taken seriously [...] and because it's not what we're doing. Granny loves to juggle. Dog surfing. We're not that. There are a lot of serious hard journalists at the BBC. Any sense that we're choosing nice happy stories to make you feel good [...] it's important to make it clear that we're not doing that."* (Interviewee 7)

In this way, solutions-focused stories are described as the opposite of positive news or good news stories which, according to the interviewees, lack the necessary journalistic 'rigour' and context. This is in line with the proponents of solutions journalism who say that *"the solution is not to produce more positive news but to create more knowledge, to truly understand how the world works"*⁷⁵. One of the editors (Interviewee 8) clarifies that positive news and the *BBC*'s solutions-focused news stories still have one thing in common – a promise that the story is going to have an overall "positive tone".

3.2.2 Journalistic 'Rigour' in Solutions-Focused Journalism

Furthermore, before journalists and editors were presented with the findings of the content analysis, what stood out in their understanding of solutions-focused journalism is the tenacity to rigorously pick apart any solution and present it truthfully to the audience. The journalists and editors pointed out the same three out of four solutions journalism guidelines as the key elements of 'rigour' in their solutions-focused video stories: explaining how a solution works, presenting the limitations of solutions, and assessing all the available evidence about its effectiveness. However, they did not address the cause of the problem.

⁷⁵ SILLESEN, L. B.: *Good News Is Good Business, but Not a Cure-All for Journalism*. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <http://archives.cjr.org/behind_the_news/good_news_is_good_business_but.php>.

Above all, this team at the *BBC* cares strongly about maintaining their journalistic and editorial integrity in solutions reporting, which they relate to supporting their organisation's role and reputation as an internationally recognised public broadcaster. For them, doing solutions-focused journalism implies a higher level of responsibility expected of the *BBC*. Although solutions-focused stories help the audience to understand the world better, journalists should not act as advocates or endorse solutions.

3.2.3 Why These Aspirations Are Seldom Realised

However, the need to rigorously pick apart every solution in practice is obstructed by multiple factors. As the editors pointed out, this team is faced with the challenge of keeping a balance between its journalistic responsibility and making this project a success in terms of audience metrics. This is apparent from the reasons journalists and editors gave when they were presented with the results of the content analysis. The initial surprise was followed by explanations. One of the editors said: *"I should be taking this as a problem. To answer that directly... The craft was difficult. And we learnt to get better at it with time. [...] In my team, I hired some of the best VJs and radio journalists I could find. [...] My video makers were confronting a very difficult balance. How do you keep the thing compelling, and video is an emotional medium... It is more difficult to do this form of journalism in short-form video than any other format. I think we got there in most of the cases, and I'm proud that we did. But I won't pretend that every video we made in the first six months was absolutely on balance."* (Interviewee 8)

The focus on young audiences and publishing on social media raised distinct concerns for this solutions-focused team, e.g. finding ways of sparking audience interest and inspiring engagement in the form of likes, comments and shares; as well as addressing the audience's short attention span and tuning into their expectations of social video stories in terms of narrative and length. Within this, I identify three distinct demands imposed on the way solutions-focused video stories are made and told.

1) To be positive

First, a solutions-focused video story for a social audience needs to be positive and report on a brilliant, workable solution that makes the world 'a better place'. It should be 'uplifting' and leave the audience inspired and hopeful about the world, their own lives, and the future. They want to reach the audience, strike a similarly positive tone, but again attract young, solution-oriented people.

However, for journalists, the need to be positive also means not dwelling too much on the problem or the negative aspects of the solution. They feel that the audience on social media loses interest when the content is overly negative, while positivity is more engaging. A former video journalist on the team identifies an established approach in the way the problem is presented in the *BBC*'s solutions videos: *"Keep it positive. Leave the problem and go back to the positive."* (Interviewee 3)

As another video journalist (Interviewee 1) explains, the audience already knows what the problem is, and the most important thing is to *"recap"* it and *"make them care"* about it. This is one of the reasons why the cause of the problem is often omitted. However, I identify stories in the sample where the cause of the problem is not presented, even though it could be considered complex. For example, in a story about an initiative that unites young Israelis and Palestinians, the conflict is mentioned in the video, but no additional resources are presented to explain the cause of it. Keeping a positive tone is also the reason why limitations or drawbacks of the solution are often not mentioned as they may break *"the spell of a journey you're going on."* (Interviewee 1)

2) To be interesting

Second, a solutions video story also needs to be interesting, which depends on the solution itself, as well as storytelling. This team feels a solution needs to make the audience curious by being either, or both, surprising and innovative. Here, the power of the idea of the solution

is seen as the main ‘force’ that makes a solutions-focused story compelling. Journalists also added that they pitch ideas to cover only those solutions that are visually captivating for the audience. In terms of the findings which show that the *BBC*’s stories report on solutions that belong to ‘softer’ domains and avoid ‘hard’ news topics, the editors disagreed that there are certain topics that are more likely to be chosen, while the journalists said they suggest those that are more in line with the audiences’ preferences on social media.

3) To be simple

Third, not fulfilling the three solutions journalism guidelines is explained by the need to simplify the video story. On the one hand, journalists fear that the inclusion of criticism may change the positive tone of the story and that these ‘details’ have the potential to make the story complicated, boring, and off-putting for the audience. On the other hand, the simplified way in which the solutions and problems are presented is also due to the social media platform where the videos are published. Journalists kept pointing out the need to play along with *Facebook*’s algorithm and pack everything into a format that is ‘supported’ by this platform. This means taking into consideration the overall length of the video, which should be short. The journalists say they assess the amount of information that the audience can take in and simplify the story accordingly, which means that not all information that a journalist gathers about a solution is ultimately included in the video.

One journalist (Interviewee 5) said that in video there is “a very limited amount of time to engage the audience”, and added that not including a limitation “may happen”, but that the team is still “careful not to present it [solution] as a magic bullet”. Another journalist (Interviewee 3) justified the results of the content analysis by saying that in social videos the aim is not to “create a rounded picture that you would in a news package”, but that it should be primarily a way of “creating a starting point for a conversation”.

Additionally, both editors and journalists pointed out that each solutions story is told in two formats – the video, which is on average 3 minutes long, and the 24-minute podcast. In the podcast, there is more time to discuss the solution, unlike in the video for social media. However, the editors said no clear strategy was developed to guide the audience from *Facebook* to the *BBC*’s webpage where the podcasts are published.

3.2.4 ‘Some’ Evidence May Be Enough

Along with the three demands, another point that came up in the interviews concerns the evidence about solution effectiveness. According to the journalists, working on a solutions story includes a lot of reading of scientific journals and speaking with experts to understand the actual impact of a solution. They added that it is already expected that the *BBC* would not choose to report on “just any solution”.

However, they explain the results of the content analysis by pointing out that “hard” evidence is not always crucial in story selection. Sometimes, if the solution itself is assessed as “interesting” and there is “some” evidence of its effectiveness, it still may be reported on. One of the editors (Interviewee 9) explains that the team makes a distinction between two levels of evidence – scientific research and anecdotal evidence, both of which are considered relevant in terms of choosing what solution to report on, but as one editor adds, “when you don’t have evidence, we need to be clear what level of evidence we’re talking about”. Therefore, by pointing out that anecdotal or soft evidence is sometimes sufficient for the solution to be reported on, the team loosens up the understanding of solutions journalists interviewed by McIntyre and Lough who say that the rigour of a story is based on reliable “hard” evidence.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ See: MCINTYRE, K. E., LOUGH, K.: Toward a Clearer Conceptualization and Operationalization of Solutions Journalism. In *Journalism*, 2021, Vol. 22, No. 6, p. 1558-1573.

4 Discussion and Conclusions

While journalists and editors on the team understand solutions-focused journalism as a 'rigorous', but also engaging practice, the *BBC*'s stipulation that "*all the relevant facts and information should be weighed to get at the truth*"⁷⁷ is not always reflected in the *BBC*'s solutions-focused video stories. The cause of the problem, solution limitations, or reliable evidence of solution effectiveness that ensure a journalisticly 'rigorous' approach to solution presentation are left out in more than half of the stories analysed. In this way, the stories present solutions in a positive tone, but without any apparent critical perspective. Therefore, reporting about solutions in this case study proves to be significantly different from both its advocates' and the *BBC* solutions-focused team's intentions to meticulously investigate solutions.

I identify solutions-focused journalism at the *BBC* set up primarily as a strategy of boosting audience metrics, at least in the context of video content intended for social media. The team does not measure the success of the project so much by checking the quality of journalism, even though its members deem it important, but primarily through "*quantifying popularity*"⁷⁸. While audience metrics can be valuable for solutions reporting if positioned within a framework that is meaningful for achieving the ideals of solutions journalism,⁷⁹ the way solutions reporting is conceptualised and practised in the *BBC* team is significantly detached from the ideal of engaging audiences in ways that would inspire them to become more active citizens committed to social progress.

Furthermore, the uncritical presentation of solutions in many of the *BBC*'s video stories refutes the notion that solutions stories "*are not positive news, or journalism aimed at uplifting audiences, although they may invoke positive emotions*"⁸⁰. The debate that constructive journalism, including solutions reporting, can become an object of "*ill-informed or derisory interpretations reducing the notion to 'uncritical reporting' or simply 'happy news'*"⁸¹ seems to extend to the *BBC*'s practice.

According to the journalists and editors, *Facebook* shapes the audience's preferences for certain topics and stories that are more positive, while the platform's algorithm imposes demands on these video stories in terms of their length. Even though the members of the *BBC*'s *People Fixing the World* team do it rather reluctantly, counting likes and views on *Facebook* led to adapting a softer reporting approach, common for news stories shared on *Facebook*.⁸² This is also reflected in accepting anecdotal evidence as being enough for the solution to be reported on. In this way, presenting solutions-focused journalism strictly as a rigorous journalistic practice⁸³ is inaccurate.

Moreover, the uncritical presentation of solutions is not in line with this broadcaster's public purpose of providing accurate and impartial news "*to help people understand and engage with the world around them*"⁸⁴. Even though engagement in newsrooms is often positioned as "*a means to an end of more financially sustainable journalism*", rather than "*a means to an end of*

⁷⁷ *BBC Editorial Guidelines*. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <[bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines](https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines)>.

⁷⁸ COSTERA MEIJER, I.: What Is Valuable Journalism? Three Key Experiences and Their Challenges for Journalism Scholars and Practitioners. In *Digital Journalism*, 2022, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 232.

⁷⁹ WENZEL, A.: *Community-Centered Journalism. Engaging People, Exploring Solutions, and Building Trust*. Champaign, IL : University of Illinois Press, 2020, p. 153-154.

⁸⁰ THIER, K.: Solutions Journalism: Reporting on the Response is Just as Newsworthy as Reporting on the Problem. In MCINTYRE HOPKINSON, K., DAHMEN, N. S. (eds.): *Reporting Beyond the Problem*. New York, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Oxford, Wien : Peter Lang, 2021, p. 49.

⁸¹ MAST, J., COESEMANS, R., TEMMERMAN, M.: Constructive Journalism: Concepts, Practices, and Discourses. In *Journalism*, 2019, Vol. 20, No. 4, p. 496.

⁸² See: LAMOT, K.: What the Metrics Say. The Softening of News on the Facebook Pages of Mainstream Media Outlets. In *Digital Journalism*, 2022, Vol. 10, No. 4, p. 517-536.

⁸³ See: KASRIEL, E.: *Solutions-Focused Journalism: Toolkit*. London : BBC News, 2016.

⁸⁴ *BBC Mission, Values and Public Purposes*. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/aboutthebbc/governance/mission#:~:text=Our%20mission%20is%20%22to%20act,inform%2C%20educate%20and%20entertain%22>>.

community and civic engagement”⁸⁵; at the BBC, the engagement with solutions-focused video stories is positioned primarily as a way to “renew the appeal of public service broadcasting”⁸⁶, particularly in the context of connecting with younger audiences worldwide. The BBC, like other newsrooms, seeks to become distinguishable and competitive in “journalism’s current market information regime”⁸⁷, by focusing on audience size and growth reflected in metrics, rather than exploring if and how the audience truly engages with the solutions presented. With the plan to abolish the BBC license fee in 2027, the question remains if the focus on audience metrics will help the public broadcaster to remain distinguishable in the market and dedicated to “delivering distinctive and impartial content”⁸⁸. Also, presenting only the bright side of a solution may not contribute to the public broadcasters’ mission of “helping children and young audiences to become well-informed citizens”⁸⁹.

Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that many of the stories in the sample still do follow the four solutions journalism guidelines and are proof that a solutions-focused video story can present the solution more comprehensively, and still be interesting and positive. But the need to simplify the story needs to be reconsidered, as it often means omitting some crucial information about the solution, which does not allow the audience to critically evaluate it.

Additionally, even though the video is a far more complex format in terms of engaging readers than a news article⁹⁰, the findings enhance the significance of Midberry and Dahmen’s study of visuals in solutions articles in which many “fell short of including rigorous visual reporting”⁹¹. The visual representation of the examined elements of solutions reporting in the BBC’s video stories significantly digresses from the importance of comprehensive and precise visual coverage of problems and responses pointed out in the authors’ theoretical framework for visual solutions journalism.

However, this study has several limitations. First, it focused on those aspects of solutions reporting pointed out in the research as the indication of journalistic ‘rigour’,⁹² while it excluded those that the proponents of solutions journalism also find important, e.g. conveying an insight or a teachable lesson. Second, this study applied the only academically operationalised notion of ‘rigour’,⁹³ but I argue that the fluidity of this concept remains an open issue in constructive and solutions journalism. Third, this is a small case study which focused on one team of BBC journalists and editors and, therefore, conclusions cannot be made about the solutions reporting at the BBC. However, the findings are still indicative of potential obstacles for other newsrooms and news organisations that choose to implement solutions reporting.

⁸⁵ WENZEL, A.: *Community-Centered Journalism. Engaging People, Exploring Solutions, and Building Trust*. Champaign, IL : University of Illinois Press, 2020, p. 12.

⁸⁶ BELAIR-GAGNON, V., NELSON, J. L., LEWIS, S. C.: Audience Engagement, Reciprocity, and the Pursuit of Community Connectedness in Public Media Journalism. In *Journalism Practice*, 2019, Vol. 13, No. 5, p. 562.

⁸⁷ NELSON, J. L.: The Elusive Engagement Metric. In *Digital Journalism*, 2018, Vol. 6, No. 4, p. 529.

⁸⁸ *BBC License Fee to Be Frozen at £159 for Two Years, Government Confirms*. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-60027436>>.

⁸⁹ *The Value of PSM: Young Audiences. Strategy Unit & Media Intelligence Service*. Geneva : European Broadcasting Union, 2020, p. 2. [online]. [2023-01-07]. Available at: <https://www.ebu.ch/files/live/sites/ebu/files/Publications/strategic/login_only/EBU-C2S-The_Value_of_PSM-Casebook-Young_Audiences-Public_version.pdf>.

⁹⁰ See: FILAK, V. F.: Structure and Storytelling. In FILAK, V. F. (ed.): *Convergent Journalism Writing and Producing Across Media*. 2nd Edition. Hoboken, NJ : Taylor and Francis, 2014, p. 48-58.

⁹¹ MIDBERRY, J., DAHMEN, N. S.: Visual Solutions Journalism: A Theoretical Framework. In *Journalism Practice*, 2020, Vol. 14, No. 10, p. 1174.

⁹² See: THIER, K.: Opportunities and Challenges for Initial Implementation of Solutions Journalism Coursework. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 2016, Vol. 71, No. 3, p. 329-343. See also: MIDBERRY, J., DAHMEN, N. S.: Visual Solutions Journalism: A Theoretical Framework. In *Journalism Practice*, 2020, Vol. 14, No. 10, p. 1159-1178; MCINTYRE, K. E., LOUGH, K.: Toward a Clearer Conceptualization and Operationalization of Solutions Journalism. In *Journalism*, 2021, Vol. 22, No. 6, p. 1558-1573.

⁹³ See: MCINTYRE, K. E., LOUGH, K.: Toward a Clearer Conceptualization and Operationalization of Solutions Journalism. In *Journalism*, 2021, Vol. 22, No. 6, p. 1558-1573.

The way newsrooms understand audience engagement in the context of solutions reporting may play an important role in the way this practice is interpreted, and its stories are told. Future studies should examine solutions reporting practices in the context of newsrooms to identify other factors that may mitigate both the understanding and implementation of solutions journalism ideals. Additionally, the production side of visual solutions journalism should be given more scholarly attention, particularly video. How the need to be both informative and compelling is visually realised, and if and how this is congruent with what is said, can reveal more about the complexities of how solutions are presented, and therefore strengthen both the visual and the conceptual framework for solutions reporting.

Most importantly, this study reopens the controversial debate that the ideas of solutions journalism and similar practices that want to report on positive developments in society can become a fertile ground for news stories that have little to do with austere journalism standards. Telling a solutions story means taking into consideration the publishing platform, the format, the audience, but also the goals of the organisation. The findings also demonstrate how news organisations are “*re-negotiating news values in the digital age*”⁹⁴, with audience metrics or “*expected reception*” on digital platforms evolving into a news value. This, as this study showed, has the potential to seriously erode the very foundations of solutions journalism and similar practices – particularly their adherence to the notions of being “*thorough, accurate, fair, and transparent*”⁹⁵, which particularly the BBC as a public broadcaster should care most about.

Appendix 1: Operationalisation of Variables for Content Analysis

PROBLEM AND CAUSE

1. Is the problem presented?

1 – Yes, 0 – No

The problem is directly addressed in the story, either in text or in visuals (or both).

2. Is the cause of the problem and the context within which it arose presented?

1 – Yes, 0 – No

The story presents the reasons why the problem happens and what causes it - either in text or in visuals (or both).

3. Is the problem visually represented?

1 – Yes, 0 – No

This includes visuals in which the problem that is described is explicitly shown, and the audience is visually presented with information on how the problem is manifested. This does not include visuals that do not represent the problem at all but are used while the problem is presented. For example, if the theme of the story is pollution, and the journalist in the voice-over is presenting the problem, if the visuals feature a bridge and a river, or the sky, or visuals of the city – without visually showing what pollution looks like or what it causes – then the problem is not visually represented.

4. Is the cause of the problem visually represented?

1 – Yes, 0 – No

This refers to visuals which represent the cause of the problem, but at times the same visuals may represent both the problem and its cause. For example, if a story is about elderly people being lonely, a visual that shows a person who is alone and who observes the people passing by, may be seen as both a visual of the problem – the people are lonely, and of the cause of the problem – they do not have family, or they do not live close enough to visit them.

⁹⁴ KRISTENSEN, L. M.: Audience Metrics: Operationalizing News Value for the Digital Newsroom. In *Journalism Practice*, 2021, Vol. 17, No. 5, p. 1005.

⁹⁵ MCINTYRE HOPKINSON, K., DAHMEN, N. S.: Moving Forward: Bringing Clarity to Productive and Socially Responsible Reporting. In MCINTYRE HOPKINSON, K., DAHMEN, N. S. (eds.): *Reporting Beyond the Problem: From Civic Journalism to Solutions Journalism*. New York, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Oxford, Wien : Peter Lang, 2021, p. 172.

SOLUTION IMPLEMENTATION

5. Does the story include details on how the solution is implemented?

1 – Yes, 0 – No

Information about the ways this solution works, the ways it is or can be used, and how it manifests in real-life situations. This also includes hypothetical solutions in trial test runs that are not yet implemented in real life, but the audience is presented with details how the solution works and what its effects should be if it is applied.

6. Is the solution tangible or hypothetical?

1 – Yes, 0 – No

If the solution is tangible, it means that it exists and is used in the physical reality. This includes solutions that are in the trial period. If it is an object, it is produced and used. If it is an event, it took place and people were aware of it. If it is a concept (for example, a special type of a school), it is implemented daily (classes are held). A hypothetical solution is only an idea or a theory that has not been in any way tested, implemented, or made tangible in real life situations. However, this does not mean that the idea cannot be visually demonstrated, for example, with the use of animated graphics.

7. Is the solution implemented in real life?

1 – Yes, 0 – No

The solution is used and applied outside of testing or experimental conditions, in real life situations and environment in which people, animals, plants or places are benefiting from this solution or can reach it.

8. Is solution implementation visually represented?

1 – Yes, 0 – No

Visuals of how the solution works, and in what way it responds to the problem.

EVIDENCE OF SOLUTION EFFECTIVENESS

9. Is hard evidence or reliable data that show the impact of solution implementation presented?

1 – Yes, 0 – No

Hard evidence is reliable data about solution effectiveness that has been collected independently, scientifically, and by a reliable source. It can be numerical data, but also qualitative data from an independent report or academic research. This does not include anecdotal information.

10. If yes, what is it?

1 – Numerical data, 2 – Qualitative data

Numerical data refers to any statistics, concrete numbers that prove the effect of the solution. For example, it can be the number or the percentage of people who have received the solution; a study that numerically proves the effectiveness of the solution, etc. Qualitative data is reliable evidence – for example, a descriptive report that confirms or disapproves the effectiveness of the solution.

11. Who presents the evidence?

1 – Journalists, 2 – the person who invented the solution, 3 – the person who provides the solution, 4 – the person who implements the solution, 5 – Other (state who)

1 – journalist telling the story in the voiceover/piece to camera/text on the screen

2 – the person presented as the one who came up with the idea or concept for the solution

3 – for example, if the solution is a special type of school, the teacher working in the school provides the solution. If the solution is a special coffee shop, the waiter/server who works there provides the solution.

4 – the person/more people/group/animals that receive and benefit from the solution, use it in their lives, have personal experience of implementing the solution.

5 – it could be someone that criticizes a solution, perhaps an expert in this topic; or someone who is not involved in the process of solution invention, provision, or implementation.

SOLUTION LIMITATIONS

12. Are there solution limitations presented in the story?

1 – Yes, 0 – No

Presentation of downsides of a solution or obstacles to solution implementation. It does not have to be directly referred to as a limitation. Instead, it can be mentioned or described in a soundbite as part of the solution description. Additionally, if a journalist questions the scale of the solution, but does not establish if it can scale or not, this is not considered a limitation.

13. If yes, how many limitations are reported?

1 – 1, 2 – 2, 3 – 3 or more

14. Is/are the limitation/s visually represented in the story?

1 – Yes, 0 – No

The aspect of the solution or solution limitation that does not work or encounters obstacles is visually represented.

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