Media Consumption and the Future of Public Connection

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Media consumption matters. Media consumption (of old and new media) contributes importantly to people's possibilities for public connection and engagement in the democratic process. Yet important recent research gives limited emphasis to media consumption's specific contribution to democratic engagement. Our diaries illustrate the multiple ways in which media consumption contributes to public connection, while our survey shows news engagement contributes significantly to explaining political interest – itself a major predictor of voting. *Encouraging a broad range of public-oriented media consumption, and the growth of related media literacy, should be central to wider strategies for reversing political disengagement.*

Habits of news engagement. Habits of media consumption and news engagement are heavily stratified by age. The habits of an older generation (watching the evening TV news, reading a daily newspaper) remain important, although less prevalent among those under 30. While using the Internet for news is associated with being younger, it may not generate *habits* of news consumption as stable as those associated with traditional media; Internet use/access remains socially stratified. Yet traditional media's contribution is often ignored in favour of more recent developments. *In considering media's role in reversing political disengagement, traditional media must be given as much weight as new media and habits of news-oriented internet use must be prioritized over general internet use.*

Orientations away from public issues. While media consumption contributes to public connection, it does not ensure it, since many people's practices of media consumption are oriented *away* from public issues. While many diarists followed celebrity- or reality-based media, we found no evidence here of a route into broad public engagement; and cluster analysis of our survey data shows that following celebrity-type issues is associated with low news engagement. *Strategies for reversing political disengagement that concentrate on popularizing politics for such audiences are unlikely to succeed; it would be more productive to focus on why those audiences (who come from all classes but are more likely to be young and female) are disengaged, and how to overcome this.*

Missing Links. Media consumption's contribution to public connection is constrained by wider disarticulations: between talk about public issues and opportunities for acting upon them; between engagement in civic action and disengagement from politics. Our diaries offered disturbing evidence of civically active people who doubted whether their experience was being taken into account by policymakers, while our survey found a gap between being informed about civic issues and feeling able to influence local decisions. *Beyond encouraging media literacy, government, media and political organizations, and other public bodies must create effective face-to-face opportunities for citizen involvement in policy formulation and implementation, where people know that their experience as citizens and literate media consumers will be listened to and taken into account.*

Stratification. Media consumption, political interest, and disengagement are, according to our survey, all to varying degrees stratified by socioeconomic status, age and gender although news engagement is not, suggesting there are many routes to news engagement across classes and genders. *All strategies for reversing political disengagement (whether or not media-related) must take account of this stratification and devise specific means of targeting those who are multiply disadvantaged (lack of economic and social resources; lack of opportunities to act; lack of access to the internet).*

1. Introduction

This report investigates a basic precondition of democratic engagement: that most citizens share a basic orientation towards a public world where matters of common concern are, or should be, played out. We call that basic orientation 'public connection'. Orientation is not the same as continuous attention – everyone's attention rises and falls – but orientation underlies the possibility of attention, and without that basic orientation, there is no point improving the quality of public, including political, communication, because people will already be turned to face the other way.

Our report asks: do people in contemporary Britain have 'public connection', and what are its preconditions? Specifically, what do *media*, and our practices as media consumers, contribute to sustaining public connection?

Our research has been shaped from the outset by the increasingly urgent concerns about the future of democratic engagement in Britain. *First*, long-term declines in electoral turnout, party membership and political trust raise a sharp question: on what will the legitimacy of democratic government be based if turnout falls close to, or below, 50% of the electorate? Such concerns have recently been focused by the Electoral Commission's 2004 'audit' and the Power Report of March 2006,[1] which ask if there is a broader disconnection of citizens from the political process. *Second*, fears of declining engagement are enhanced by concern at the fragmentation of audiences in an age of digital media and the possibility that the number of regular news followers may be irreversibly declining.[2] These intersect with a *third* concern at the decline of community and the need to reconnect communities both to each other and to the civic and political process, as registered in recent government initiatives.[3] 'Public connection', in our specific sense and more broadly, is an important current issue.

Behind these policy concerns lie a range of academic debates which have influenced our research. Political science has investigated for many decades the basis of 'civic culture', and more recently the reasons for declining political engagement in developed democracies, most notably in the debates over Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* thesis; while social theorists have expressed concern at processes of de-socialisation and the declining bridges between public and private realms, as well as the long-term erosion of social bases of citizenship.[4] More ambiguously, some writers have noted the increasing contribution of media and popular culture to extending the limits of what constitutes 'politics'.[5] But there has been less research, we suggest, first, on what it feels like to be a citizen, or not as the case may be, and, second, on how the everyday practice of living with news media contributes to that experience.

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[1] See http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/9273; http://www.powerinquiry.org/report/index.php

[2] See, for example, Pew report (2000)"Internet Sapping Broadcast News Audience"; Pew Report (2000) "The Youth Engagement Initiative" (http://people-press.org/reports); BBC report (2002) "Beyond the Soundbite".

[3] See speech by David Miliband published in the *Guardian*, 21 February 2006: http://www.guardian.co.uk/guardianpolitics/story/0,,1714614,00.html

[4] Alain Touraine (2000) *Can We Live Together?*, Polity; Zygmunt Bauman (1999) *In Search of Politics*, Polity; Bryan Turner, (2001) 'The Erosion of Citizenship', *British Journal of Sociology*, 52(2): 189-209.

[5] J Street (2001) *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy*, Macmillan; M. Delli Carpini and B. Williams (2001) 'Let us infotain you' in L. Bennett and R. Entman (eds) *Mediated Politics*, Cambridge University Press; J. Corner and D. Pels (eds) (2003) *Media and the Restyling of Politics*, Sage.

Specifically we have tested two widely made assumptions about democratic politics:

- First, that in a mature democracy such as Britain, most people share an orientation to a public world where matters of common concern are, or at least should be, addressed (we call this orientation *public connection*);
- Second, that this public connection is principally sustained by a convergence in what media people consume, and through people's practices of media consumption (so people's *public connection* is *mediated*).

In looking for evidence of mediated public connection in people's accounts of their daily lives and habits as media consumers, we have been concerned as much with understanding the varieties of public connection, and the tensions and instabilities which it undergoes, as with confirming, simply, that it exists. Researching political *disengagement* was not our main aim, but we recognize what the Power Report calls its 'profound social, economic and political roots'; we have looked also for evidence of disengagement from media.

One factor we focus on less is trust in media and politics. Not only was trust in politicians low across all social groups in our survey (as it has been historically in the UK for some time), with trust in media, although higher, also being socially uniform; but varying levels of trust and mistrust were not *motivating factors* in our data towards either connection or disengagement.

Many meanings, and many types of distinction between 'public' and 'private', are condensed in the term 'public', but our research prioritises one in particular: the idea that 'public issues' are distinguished from 'private issues' because they are issues of collective interest (about shared resources and our shared way of life) that require to be resolved collectively.[6] 'Public issues' include politics but may go much wider than politics, and particularly traditional definitions of 'politics'. We recognize that definitions of what *should* count as 'public' issues are inherently contestable, but the distinction between public and private issues remains of fundamental importance for democracy and underlies our own idea of 'public connection'.

Media's potential role in sustaining public connection is subtle. It extends far beyond factual news and documentary (important though those are) to many other forms of storytelling and talk, from phone-ins to soap operas, where debates about the substance and principle of collective issues get expressed and debated. Our research registers media's contribution to the public sphere across this broad spectrum, while addressing also a range of factors *beyond media* that may shape the conditions under which our media use can contribute effectively to democratic engagement. This has involved researching the various elements that theories of democratic engagement assume are *articulated together*: orientation, engagement, talk, and public actions (both the actions of citizens and those of governments).

We have tried to research these questions by listening to people's own reflections on their roles as media consumers and citizens. If these questions are difficult for policymakers and researchers, they are difficult for citizens too. We recorded citizens' reflections in two ways: by asking 37 people across England to produce a detailed diary for up to three months during 2004 and then by a nationwide survey conducted in June 2005. This report summarises our findings and, we hope, contributes to the widening debate about the health of British democracy and media's contribution to it.

[6] Cf C. Taylor (2004) *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Duke University Press, chapters 6 and 7.

2. Research Design and Methodology

How did we set about finding evidence of citizens' public connection?

Research design

As already noted, our notion of *public* connection involves an orientation to a space or world where things or issues regarded as of shared concern, not purely private concern, are, or at least should be, discussed or addressed. We do not equate public connection with regular attention to 'politics' in the traditional sense: people's understanding of what constitutes politics may be changing, just as in a digital world the *media* landscape that potentially sustains public connection is also changing.

Our working assumption has been that the public/private boundary remains meaningful in spite of many other levels of disagreement over the content and definition of politics. This working assumption was confirmed in our fieldwork; while the distinction's abstractness may sometimes cause difficulty, all diarists understood how how public issues might be distinguished from private issues. But our treatment of the public/private boundary was not prescriptive. The point of our research has been to ask people: what makes up *their* public world? How are they connected to that world? And how are media involved, or not, in sustaining that connection?

From the beginning we tried to respect the complexity of such questions and of people's reflections about them. We wanted through our fieldwork to approach this from multiple angles. If, as some argue, the current media environment is fragmenting the public sphere into a mass of specialist 'sphericules' that no longer connect as a shared public world, then we need to know not just about people's media habits, but about where and how they discuss what they watch or read, and with what consequences for their actions. We wanted a methodology that could register individual reflections, as they developed over an extended period, while public events and media coverage changed around them.

Methodology

The key methods of our study were as follows:

- We recruited through a market research company, The Field Department, 37 people across England to produce a diary (in written or tape-recorded form) for 3 months during February-June 2004;
- We interviewed those diarists both before and after their diary production, individually and (where possible) also in focus-groups (the diary fieldwork continued until March 2005);
- From the themes of the diary phase fieldwork and our review of the existing survey literature, we designed a nationwide survey (targeted at a sample of 1000 respondents) conducted by ICM Research over the weekend of 3-5 June 2005.

We aimed for a diarist sample evenly split across genders and three age categories (between 18 and 69). Although we had no class quota, we aimed indirectly for a wide socioeconomic range through two strategies: first, by recruiting in 6 contrasting regions (poor inner city London,

mid-income suburban London, poor inner city South of England, prosperous suburbs of two Northern England cities, and a mixed-income rural area in the Midlands); and, second, through recruiting people with varying levels of media access in each region. As a result, we achieved a broad span from single mothers living on limited incomes in inner city council flats to retired financial services executives in wealthy suburbs. Men aged between 30 and 50 were difficult to recruit with the result that (in order to preserve gender balance) men over 50 were somewhat over-represented; both genders in Class D (unskilled manual labour) were, as expected, difficult to recruit, but we achieved a good range of home media access (broadly tracking then current UK national averages). There were nine non-white diarists, an over-representation demographically but important to ensure a range of views in relation to Britain's overwhelmingly white political culture. For more demographic details on our diarists, see Appendix 1.

The diaries were produced weekly for up to three months. We encouraged open reflection and avoided specific signals as to what people were to comment on. Each diarist was interviewed face to face in their home by a member of the research team, before starting their diaries and after their completion, using an open-ended interview schedule focused on their media consumption, daily activities, political and civic interests, social life, membership of local or national groups, and views about the state of British democracy. In addition, half of our diarists agreed also to form part of focus groups at the very end of the fieldwork. Together the diaries, interviews and focus groups gave us an unusually rich and multi-dimensional perspective on people's everyday practice over an extended period.

Informed by this detailed fieldwork, we then designed a nationwide survey which provided data on media consumption, attitudes to media and politics, and public actions, and also the contexts in which all of these occur.

Timing

We wanted through the diary method to gain an insight into people's public connection in a period of 'ordinary' politics, that is outside the special attention demanded, if not necessarily given, to general elections. The news in the diary period was nonetheless marked by some remarkable events: the continued bloody aftermath of the Iraq War 2003, the Madrid bombings and other global security issues, the expansion of the EU to 25 members, the local and European elections, the aftermath of the Soham murders and rumours of an extra-marital affair involving footballer David Beckham.

Our survey, by contrast and for purely practical reasons, took place closer to an election, that is, one month after the UK general election of 2005, and during the same weekend as the French vote on the EU constitution. Iraq continued to feature prominently in the news media, and as with the diary phase there was a then current celebrity scandal (the Michael Jackson trial).

3. The Public Connection Diaries

What is media's role in sustaining public connection, and what factors (not all, perhaps, media-related) limit media's contribution? We quickly found that 'public connection' was registered in everyday experience, and was more than an academic concept. Take for example Jonathan, a 23 year old university administrator, who clearly looked for a world beyond the purely private:

> I'll always watch the news…I'll always watch it. I think the day that I stop watching it, will be the day when I don't know, will be a sad day anyway. (Jonathan, 23, West London suburb)

Jonathan contrasted himself with people who, from a news bulletin 'about war in Iraq or Afghanistan or suicide bombers or terrorism', would talk about the human interest story at the end. Jonathan himself was a very active media user, although his membership of a political party had lapsed. Here therefore we have *mediated* public connection in a pure form: what specific demographic factors are involved, and to what constraints and frustrations is it subject?

3.1 Demographic complexity

Jonathan contradicted any crude stereotype of a younger generation that is disconnected; so too did many other of our diarists. We might alternatively suggest that Jonathan's connection is distinctive of a younger generation - he had a sense of media as always there ('I'm watching the news pretty much constantly') and relied on the Internet as a constant news source alongside television ('I tend to spend at least an hour [at lunch] each day solidly on the Internet') for example to surf BBC and Skynews websites - but this too would mislead. We found examples of the need to keep up to date with the news across generations:

> I need the radio 24 hours. Like regular 24 hours because all the time in car, I listen radio news ... the news all the time, every hour I have to listen to news just to find it out what's happening. (Gundeep, 48, garage manager, West London suburb)

> I'm compulsive, I have to pick up any paper that I see and have a look through it. (Enid, 63, part-time school assistant, West London suburb).

However, if we look for evidence of stable *habits* of news attention rather than simply orientation, Jonathan *is* rather exceptional amongst the under 30s, since his habits involved regular use of both traditional and new media. Another diarist in her 20s web-surfed during her lunch hour but for a purely social reason:

> We like anything light-hearted and diverting to entertain us, especially when we're so busy. I was checking out Courtney Love's latest adventures on nme.com, and she was checking out Ananova for celebrity gossip... . who was wearing what, who has said what, who's done what. We haven't talked about the budget or anything serious. (Beccy, 27, marketing executive, Northern suburb 1)

So if a daily Internet news 'top-up' is associated with younger people, its purpose may vary greatly.

The contrast between Beccy and Jonathan can also be interpreted in terms of gender. As in our nationwide survey (see part 4), we found that gender affects the nature and degree of people's

mediated public connection, regardless of whether or not diarists are active internet users: Andrea was not an internet user while Janet was, but neither saw politics as connected with their media use or their social exchanges at work:

> I'm not very hot on politics, to be honest ... it just seems like it's a little bit of another world. You know, they're supposed to be making decisions on behalf of all of us, but it doesn't generally seem that way. (Andrea, 25, paediatric nurse, Midlands rural)
> I'm not the politics girl unfortunately. (Janet, 29, airport administrator, Northern suburb 2)

Both were oriented *towards* media as a social and collective space, but *away* from politics.

It would be a mistake, however, to see public connection as tied only to politics, or as shaped exclusively by gender (or other demographic factors, such as class). Two diarists, Kylie and Crystal, were in their 20s, both single mothers and unemployed (although Kylie managed to find part-time work after the diary period); they also had scant media resources, neither having access to a computer. But both in different ways sensed the need, indeed obligation, to remain in touch with a world of issues beyond the private:

> I think it is important they make us aware of what's going on otherwise no one's gonna change ... there's no point in putting all nice things in the paper if it's not the truth you know you need to know the truth ... Even if it's hurting and it's horrible you need to know. (Kylie, 24, inner city South London)

> a lot of people around me are very materialistic and [the Iraq war's] just not on their minds ... I'm one of those people, but I also like to concentrate on reality ... but a lot of people ... they don't care about the war ... they just don't make it a part of their lives. (Crystal, 22, inner city South London)

For Kylie, media's connective role was particularly clear, and operated outside of politics. Her social networks were strongly local - she lost interest in using the Internet when she did have work access, because 'you're talking to people that are so far away from you' - but media (newspapers, TV news and especially documentaries) provided a vital connection to a world beyond: 'they just give you different insights into the way people are, the way people live'. She recalled to us how a few years previously a press report in the *Daily Mirror* of an orphaned Chinese child had moved her: 'when I read it, it made me cry, I sobbed for days. And carried this piece of paper around with [me], and everywhere I go, I showed it to people'.

There are therefore many forms of mediated public connection across generations, genders, classes, and levels of technological access. For some people it is purely habitual, for others it is information-driven and mainly cognitive; sometimes as with Kylie it is linked to a deeply felt duty of care towards distant others. We explore this variety further in later sections.

3.2 Missing Links

There are constraints to which even clear forms of public connection are subjected. While Jonathan initially showed a more principled orientation to a public world through media than almost any other diarist, his diary showed signs of the associated frustrations:

> Political stories are starting to frustrate me. I find them monotonous and at some times, pointless! ... Having started this diary, I have realised how narrow the reporting in this country

> actually is... . There seems to be a domination of negative journalism ... Although some (possibly most) of the reporting maybe true, it does make you sceptical and, at times, reluctant to update your knowledge and interest in the media.

Jonathan was concerned here with the way media rewarded his engagement, but he felt also that his engagement isolated him from others:

> I've never spoken to anyone about politics. I think that's one of those taboos … sad state of affairs … it's quite scary to see how people are disinterested in it, particularly this generation.

Jonathan found that his interest in politics fitted poorly into his daily work/ social routine, even as he looked for something larger:

> I don't know, going out, going out at the weekend, going on holiday ... I just think to myself, is that all it is? Is that all I'm interested in?

This sense of pointlessness extended to his view of British democracy: 'I've become disenchanted because I've just felt as though well what use is the political system that we're in at the moment'. For him, the decision to go to war in Iraq (which he opposed) was a turning-point in his engagement with politics 'because you kind of feel as though like people are just banging their heads against a brick wall'. While Kylie, in spite of her mediated connection to a public world but like a majority of working-class women in their 20s, saw no point in voting ('can't change anything, can I?').

So it is clear right away (see also 3.5 below) that the experience of mediated public connection in contemporary Britain may be shaped, *even among the most connected*, by the absence of other links – between their own engagement and the apathy of others, between their own attention to public matters and the political system's lack of attention (as they saw it) to them. This means that media consumption, while important, is only one of many factors whose relation to public connection must be understood.

3.3 Overall patterns

We return to our diarists' detailed voices later, but what general patterns emerged?

(1) Media World Connectors v Public World Connectors

A key distinction is between people whose mediated public connection is primarily shaped by a strong pull towards media consumption (valued for its own sake), versus those whose mediated public connection is primarily shaped by a strong pull towards a world of public concern: we call them respectively *media world connectors* and *public world connectors*.

Media world connectors regularly follow public issues through media forms (news, documentary, radio) but lack other means of involvement in those issues; public world connectors, by contrast, while regularly following public issues through media, have other ways of orientating to a public world (for example, as a school governor or through debate in church). Two diarist bring out this contrast. Henry was a voracious media consumer who took great pleasure in media and in how media connected him to a world beyond his own:

> I start off [the day] with Radio 2 ... and I'm reading [the papers] by that stage while I'm breakfasting ... And then because I catch the [bus] into work and there's a local free paper that you get … and read which is the Metro ... and that has just soundbites ... but again – it sets you up.
> *Do you follow up these stories?*
> Some of them yeah ... well a lot of them you catch them ... it's mentioned several times throughout the day ... and it's seeped into your consciousness anyway.
> (Henry, 52, insurance worker, northern suburb 1)

Henry's public world was the world to which he belonged as a listener, viewer and reader, not other public constituencies to which he belonged independently. Whereas Edward enjoyed media for their ability to deliver him facts about a public world he already knew:

> I read the business section [of *The Times*] everyday and I read all of it, partially because I'm interested and there's people who I still know and so forth. But also I still have money invested and I'm interested in how that's doing. And I'm just interested in what happens to the financial world in general, just to see what's developing. And … I'm interested in the country and the politics of the country … And worldwide events. I like to keep up to date and see what's going on. (Edward, 64, retired chief executive, Northern suburb 1)

The public world, for him, was not so much the shared world of a media audience, but the public world to which he had contributed, initially as a businessman and now as a magistrate. We are not saying one type of mediated public connection is better than the other, only that they have different dynamics and, potentially, instabilities. The same contrast emerged more subtly in a working class context: whereas Kylie's public world was mainly accessed through media, Jane, a 52 year-old supermarket assistant from the same region, had an interest in community-based politics which she *brought to* media stories.

For some people, the dynamics of media consumption and public orientation are broadly in balance, since they are engaged to varying degrees in both: we call them *bidirectional connectors*. Still others lack any clear attraction either to a media world or to an independent public world (they could live without both, it seems): we call them *weakly connected* . We can also, by taking the evidence of their diaries and interviews overall, assess diarists in terms of not just the 'direction' but also the strength and stability of their mediated public connection. Combining these two analyses generates Figure 1:

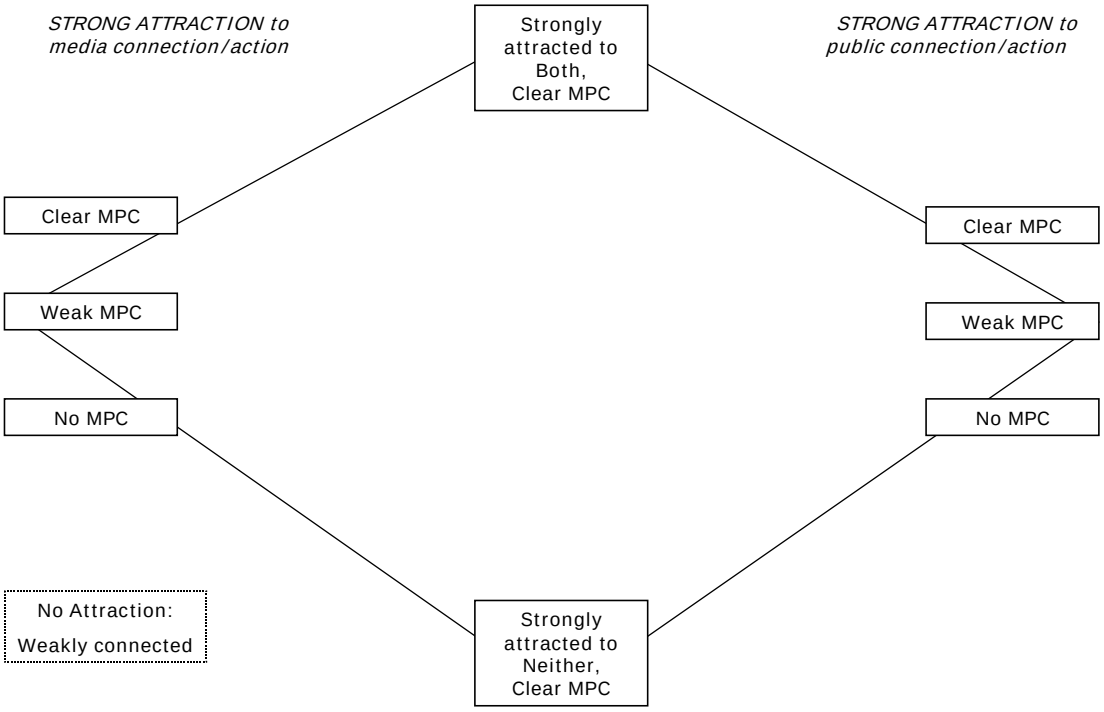

Figure 1: Diarists' Mediated Public Connection (MPC)

Out of 37 diarists, there were 12 media world connectors, 12 public world connectors, 7 bidirectional connectors, and 6 weakly connected. In terms of strength of mediated public connection, 9 lacked mediated public connection (including those weakly connected), 8 had weak mediated public connection, and 20 had clear mediated public connection.

(2) An Alternative Public World?

Our research has recognized throughout the *contestability* of the term 'public'. This goes beyond the important contrast between, say, Edward's view of the public world as basically traditional politics and Kylie's more issue-based and emotive public sphere. For someone might have a clear sense of engagement with a public world through media, but be oriented to something quite different from dominant definitions of 'public concern' (whether traditional politics or broader public issues).

We were particularly keen to look for such diarists, and see if they had an alternative route to public connection. We encouraged diarists to speak about the public world as *they* defined it. In some cases perhaps even our use of the term 'public' automatically carried connotations of the traditional public sphere, particularly politics; but we made every effort to counter this by not linking the project explicitly to politics at any point and by positively encouraging diarists to reflect on sport, music and entertainment, as they thought relevant. We obtained some rich testimony on how media unrelated to public issues resonate in people's lives.

People's enjoyment of media culture may, of course, take many forms. For some diarists, particularly women, celebrity culture was important alongside reality TV and/or soaps. Sometimes this is, effectively, the other side of diarists' complete disengagement from politics (for example Andrea and Janet, already quoted):

> Yeah ... I enjoy reading gossipy stories. Everyone enjoys reading gossipy stories (Andrea)
> I do keep up to date with what's going on... mainly the gossipy side of the media, you know like Heat and Ok magazine, yes I get those every week. What girl isn't in to that really? (Janet)

Big Brother was important here for some diarists. Marie (34, part-time accounts clerk, Midlands Rural) admitted she found doing the diary difficult but regretted that the 2004 season of *Big Brother* started after her diary finished, as she felt she could have written about it. Beccy (quoted earlier) spoke about attending the last night of the 2004 *Big Brother* season in terms that sound almost like political solidarity, although her own comparison was different:

> We went down and we got there half ten in the morning and we queued all day (laughs) to make sure we got in. ... they came out and they gave us chocolate and crisps and water to keep us alive till the end of the day and then they let us in later on and we just got right down the front and made our banners and it was fantastic. It was like these people that go to, I don't know, cup finals or something, just the crowd atmosphere and the sense of, I don't know, camaraderie that was going on, it was fantastic.

Engagement with media culture, while gendered in many of its details, is common among both men and women. Some men (like Henry) took a broad pleasure in media culture, although this tended to include politics in some form, even if as entertainment:

> My hero of the moment is a guy called Boris Johnson (laughter) I think he's an absolute scream ... he stood up in Parliament a few weeks ago ... and he was doing one of his speeches. And all the guys in the Tory rows behind, they were curling up cause he's so funny but he makes a point, you know, in a humorous way which is what appeals to me. (Harry, 69, retired bank information systems manager, West London suburb)

Clearly enjoyment of media culture is fully compatible with mediated public connection. But some have argued that media consumption, particularly 'celebrity culture' (under which we include, for convenience, reality TV) goes further and offers a potential alternative route to engaging directly with public issues. We looked hard for cases where reflections about celebrity culture (in this broad sense) led into reflections about issues that require public resolution ('public issues' as we have defined them). Strikingly, and subject to just two exceptions, *we found no such cases among our diarists.*

One exception was our diarist Ross, a 25 year old design student. His 12-week diary consistently covered only one subject, sport. Strikingly his diary account of sport shared language from dominant versions of the public world, for example the importance of arguing from facts and a sense of what is, and is not, an appropriate subject for that world:

> This week the footballing world is again concentrating on matters that shouldn't be the main focus of sport ...
> I think the Daily Mail and the British press should think more carefully about the relevance and interest levels of what they are writing [about football] ...
> I am slightly biased here because I support Arsenal but when you look at the facts I feel that I am being objective in my claims. (Ross, 25, design student, Urban south)

This alternative definition of the public world must be respected but what is striking, again, is not its potential connection to other types of public issues but the lack of connection.

Another exception was an issue that celebrity culture regularly raised: a concern with the ethics of media's coverage of celebrity's private lives. For a few weeks during the diary period, two major stories vied for press attention: global security issues (the Madrid March 2004 bombings and the security situation in Iraq, including the revelations from Abu Ghraib jail) and allegations that David Beckham had had an extra-marital affair. Many diarists were uneasy that some media gave prominence to the latter over the former. But these are evidence, once more, not of connections between celebrity culture and broader public issues, but of many diarists' sense of the clear *separation* between them:

> Why do we (the public) need to know what the Beckhams do with their private lives? (Lesley, 39, secretary at education college, Midlands rural)

> I don't understand why the private life of the England Coach should have anything to do with anyone but him. Private business is just that – between him and his partner – and so what if it's his secretary? (Josh, 23, architecture student, Northern suburb 2)

Our diary data therefore suggests that media culture may orientate people away from public issues as well as towards them, and that apparent links between celebrity culture and broader public issues are minimal: in Part 4, we find that our survey data points in the same direction.

(3) Dynamics of connection / disconnection

What underlies a strong and stable sense of mediated public connection, or its absence? Specifically, what reinforces or undermines the two components of mediated public connection, regular media consumption and public orientation?

Starting with negative factors, these were more likely to undermine public orientation than media consumption. The reason is that, if diarists had mediated public connection, they almost without exception could achieve the level of media inputs they needed to sustain that connection, whatever their time pressures and reservations about certain media. Our pilot research had led us to expect that time might be a more significant factor constraining people's access to the media, but diarists were, we found, able to adjust, sometimes picking up media information by osmosis from talk with others. Nor was lack of access to media a significant general constraint, although (see Part 4) internet access remains stratified.

More important were factors that undermined public orientation. In addition to political efficacy (the sense that there's nothing you can do about politics, or there's nothing you have to contribute), cynicism and specific political disillusionments, we found two diarists with an alternative sense of what was important in the public world, in both cases focused on the arts and creativity (compare Ross's prioritizing of sport, discussed in the last section).

As to positive factors, we have already discussed the type of engagement with media culture that reinforces media consumption. As to public orientation, various specific factors were important for particular diarists (a family history of working-class political activism, an ethnically-focussed civic community, a church which was civically active), but the most general

encouragement to public orientation was work-related: diarists whose paid work, or post-retirement voluntary work, specifically required a knowledge of the public world.

We also looked for evidence of 'feedback loops' that helped reinforce *the links between* media consumption and public orientation. These could be social (most diarists had opportunities to talk about their media consumption, if not about public issues: see 3.5), but another important feedback loop was internally focused: a sense of individual value, particularly the value of 'keeping up with the news' found, as noted before, across genders, ages and classes.

We also asked how someone's public connection (or lack of it) might fit into their overall orientation to the world. A number of diarists seemed quite relaxed about not following the public world, so it was important to see if, from their perspective, there were positive reasons for this 'turning away'. We traced the overall frame of reference which occurred most prominently in each diarist's account of themselves. There were a number of distinct frames, and some diarists used more than one: *social*, *family* and *work* were the most common, but important also were *education*, *ethnicity*, *the local/civic* and more explicitly public orientations (*politics*, *religion*, and *sport*) and non-social orientations such as personal *routine*.

When we relate this to our preceding type-analysis of diarists' public connection, the results are striking. Taking diarists with weak or no mediated public connection, the majority (7 out of 11) have social and/or family as their orientating frame. As to the 6 diarists who are weakly connected in our overall model, only one was orientated principally to public institutions, but this is not because such diarists were necessarily isolated 'individualists'. For three of the six weakly connected diarists appeared strongly motivated by family. The *nexus of social and family* (which generally would be viewed as positive) emerges, paradoxically, as important in explaining both low mediated public connection and a 'weak connection' to both media and public worlds. By contrast, the *absence* of social and family as principal orientating frames seems associated with a tendency *towards* mediated public connection.

While the complexity of our data makes this analysis necessarily tentative, it suggests there may be important positive reasons (family, social networks) associated with *not* having mediated public connection, while the absence of social networks may sometimes be associated with high mediated public connection (because media consumption compensates). This both complicates any social-capital model of public engagement and rules out seeing the absence of mediated public connection as crudely a 'lack' or 'deficiency'.

3.4 Media literacy

What type of media users were our diarists?

The first contextual point is that the diarist sample mirrored national trends in terms of *access* to different media. Unsurprisingly, all diarists had a television and radio; 57% of our diarists had some form of access to the internet, in line with the 2004 ONS figure of 58%[7]. Of those diarists with internet access, six had broadband access (16% of all diarists). This was a little under the then UK average, which in 2004 passed 40% of those households with internet

[7] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=8&Pos=&ColRank=1&Rank=374

access (23% of overall population), and had reached 50% of houses with internet access by 2005 (32% of overall population).[8]

Levels of media use among the diarists varied considerably, but most diarists had a consistent pattern of consumption. There were 14 diarists who were classified as 'heavy' television consumers, meaning that they watched three or more hours per day on average. At the other end of the spectrum, there were 11 diarists classified as 'light' television consumers, watching less than an hour per day. Of 21 active internet user diarists, 13 used it principally for *personal* information and only 8 (22% of overall sample) used it at all as a news source or site of debate: there was only one diarist (Josh, quoted above) for whom the internet was the *principal* news source.[9] For our 2004 diarist sample at least the traditional media – television, radio and the press – were overwhelmingly the key means of sustaining mediated public connection, even though the sample had broadly typical levels of online access.

Turning to quality of media use (which we were able to track extensively from diaries and follow-up questions in interviews), an important distinction was between people who use media in a *directed* way (either having a general purpose in mind - to get information about certain broad areas - or a specific purpose - to find out about a particular issue) and those who use media in a *non-directed* way, absorbing whatever media material reaches them and reacting to it. Directed use may be implicit, guided by a preexisting interest in, and position on, issues or (more rarely) it may be explicit as here:

> If I see something at a glance, then I might go on the Guardian site and see if the story's been headlined on there, find the names or the key words and there's somebody else on-line's probably reported it, I can chase it from there. Usually Reuters have got stuff on it. Yahoo, I think they link quite closely with Reuters so if you follow a story, chances are that's where it came from cause I guess they're the biggest news agency. (Josh)

But explicitly directed media use requires time and also a specific motivation, and so in the everyday run of things is relatively rare.

The less-directed media user is ready to follow whatever the media throws up and such use is generally too habitual to be commented upon. Beccy was unusual in reflecting on the non-directed nature of her media use:

> I log on to BBC news and I get distracted by something that looks a bit more entertaining or a bit more like something I would read, from the local or the business section, or shamefully, from the entertainment section, and then I think I've been on the Internet too much and I go back off to do some work again.

Non-directed diarists were subject to two contesting pressures. First, the 'pull' of exceptional news events when their use became, as they recalled it, more directed (the start of the 2003 Iraq war, the Madrid bombing of March 2004, the Soham murder case): 'when the Iraq war started that was the first thing I did every morning, was put the telly on for the news' (Jane). Second, the 'push' of events which become too painful or tedious to watch or read. Many diarists, male and female, found daily coverage in 2004 of the aftermath of the Iraq War

[8] Office of National Statistics, June 2005 (www.statistics.gov.uk)

[9] This contrasts with a recent US survey in which 24% of people name the internet as a principal news source. See Pew report "Public More Critical of Press, But Goodwill Persists", June 2005 (http://people-press.org/reports)

difficult to keep following, while some felt the same also about the Beckham allegations:

> Not listened to Radio 4 today, but had [name] our local radio station on instead, many because the world news is too depressing. So I had daft and light entertainment today. (Christine, 46, events coordinator, Northern suburb 2)

> Have avoided newspapers, because as I predicted they are full of the Beckhams and real news is taking a back seat! (Abby, 45, local government officer, Urban South London)

For some diarists, this caused them to switch off from news media more generally during the diary process, while for others it was a temporary factor that did not destabilise their mediated public connection overall.

Already implicit in such reactions is a reflexive attitude towards media which is part of media literacy, even if not fully articulated. We were interested in finding among in our diarists detailed evidence of media literacy that went beyond the common but clichéd response ('don't trust anything I read in the paper'). Here it is important to distinguish between different levels of questioning, some widespread, others rarer.

First, many diarists questioned media's news values. We have already noted one example (Beckham or global security issues?) which became a theme for a number of diarists (seven) and where questioning of media was often pointed:

> Interestingly as I write this diary, 3 days after the [Madrid March 2004] blast, the only 2 mentions of the tragedy in The Mail on Sunday is a single page report on page 8 and a sports item on page 122 involving David Beckham and how matters affect the Real Madrid team. Amazing considering the enormity of the crime and also that this is also the day that Spain goes to the Polls!! (Henry)

Second, and less common, were cases where diarists specifically questioned the facts of media stories, either drawing on personal knowledge or in comparisons noticed across media outlets:

> There was an article the other day when the banner headlines in the newspaper were the fact that ... a dentist from Belgium had come over to set up practice in Scarborough and it was taking NHS patients and it said thousands queued ... when we saw the local news, there were 300 hundred initially. I mean and when you see things like that, 300 to 2,000, you think if they'll do something like that on a small story, how are they interpreting some of the other big things you know? (Stuart, 61, retired bank manager, Northern suburb 1)

> I do not feel that by reading the Times I am getting a balanced view of this argument [debate about whether voting age should be reduced to 16] (Angela, 29, secondary school teacher, West London suburb)

Also relatively rare were cases where diarists reflected on media practice more broadly. We have already quoted Jonathan's reservations about media balance which led him to become disenchanted with media. One diarist, Kathleen, imagined a better life without media:

> The media is here to stay, love it or leave it, but I can't help wondering whether it was better to live in an age when you only knew what was happening in the next street or maybe village. We seem to live in an age now when we thrive on listening to other's misfortunes. (Kathleen, 34, mother with 2 young children, training as teaching assistant, Urban south)

It is worth here looking more closely at two particular diarists who reflected on media in much greater detail than any other.

Sheila and Bill both came from our Midlands rural region. Sheila was 47 and worked as a senior public health nurse, a role in which, as she put it, she had 'come up literally against media',[10] whereas Bill, aged 61, was a retired managing director with considerable experience of working abroad, who had constructed a post-retirement career in many roles including magistrate and school governor.

Both became troubled by the standards of media in covering important news. Bill was concerned at the intersection between media and processes of government, for example cases where a newspaper's news priorities might work to suit particular political interests:

> when [media] becomes actively involved in pursuing a particular policy, a particular agenda, to me, it's starting to smell of a corrupt society. It's getting a bit ... pravda like.

Sheila's critique of media drew directly on her work experience. Not only did she have to deal on a regular basis with the consequences of media reporting of health issues (as relayed to her by anxious patients and parents, for example in relation to the MMR vaccine scare) but she also began to assess media's evidence standards in terms of those prevailing in medicine:

> I think they should have the responsibility of the truth. I say they should have cause I don't think that they do and I think sometimes they knowingly tell untruths. But that's very difficult for me to say that that's right... . But I suppose at that time [of the diary] I thought, well yeah, I guess that's how it is but I don't know. I don't have evidence of that and coming from an evidence-based area of work, I like to see the evidence before I can pass a comment if you like. But for me, the media ... should be truthful and honest and trustworthy. Sadly, I don't think that they are ... (Sheila, 47, senior health protection nurse, Midlands rural)

Both Bill and Sheila had mediated public connection, but their practice as citizens/media consumers was in some tension, because of their doubts about media.

For Sheila the doubts became acute as she wrote the diary, which she stopped after 6 weeks. The point at which she stopped writing, she reflected later, was the point at which she could no longer resolve the tension between her doubts about media and her sense of dependency upon media, particularly in relation to the dangerous but distant events in Iraq.

Our diarists then exhibited a wide range of media literacy, which at times, in the particular context created by the diary process, developed into sophisticated reflections on media's relationship to democracy. We come back to these reflections at the end of this Part.

3.5 Talk and Action

It is clear, then, from our diary data that for many people media consumption is an important means for sustaining their orientation to a public world: this applies across all ages, classes, genders and ethnicities and covers many distinct forms of mediated public connection, some more driven by media consumption than by an independent involvement in a public world,

[10] For the importance of personal experience in transforming media literacy, see the work of the Glasgow Media Group, for example: G. Philo (1990) *Seeing and Believing*, Routledge.

some oriented to traditional politics and others not. In only two cases was diarists' public orientation *unconnected* to their media consumption.

We wanted however to go further and explore how mediated public connection was linked both to everyday contexts of talk and to possibilities for action on public issues. Most accounts of civic culture, after all, are premised on at least the possibility that an orientation to the public world is articulated to both deliberation and action.

All but four of our diarists indicated at some point that they had talked about the types of issues raised in their diary, although perhaps surprisingly in only one case were these discussions online:

> I take part in a number of Internet discussion forums, where people from any part of the world can meet in what some call 'cyberspace' to discuss matters of mutual interest ... When I take a short break from work I can get a cup of coffee, check what's happening in one or two forums and if there's something I find interesting or important chip in with a comment or a question. A great way to learn from other people (Eric, 47, computer analyst and lay preacher, Urban South London)

This sparse evidence of online discussion calls into question the everyday relevance for most citizens of online forums, let alone blogging (to which there was not a single reference by any diarist), however much their significance is predicted in academic and journalistic debate.

Nonetheless talk by diarists about public issues was subject to various constraints.[11] Sometimes this is the strict gendering of talk about news issues, with men taking up a dominant role, as here:

> No, I mean as soon as I sit down to read the paper, like I say, my partner reads it at work and he'll come in flipping pages and say, look at that story and drives you mad cause I just sat down to try and read it myself and he'll say look at that. (Andrea)

At other times, there was evidence of the often-noted taboo against introducing serious news issues in social or work contexts. Some work-related contexts however provided a more open forum for discussing personal, media and public issues, as in this account by the South Asian owner of a newsagents shop:

> It's like a small village shop ... I've got no competition; mine is only shop on the road. So they all come and talk to me. They all [tell] what happened in their house and where they went and what they did and which cinema they been to or what theatre or what show they been, they always ask me - and how you are and how was your day. So it [is] like ... in a small community, small town shop. (Pavarti, 51, newsagent, West London suburb)

For a privileged few, their work itself provides a direct link into public issues: we have already discussed Sheila, the senior nurse and the same applied to Edward and Bill, two diarists who in retirement sat as magistrates.

Nor were such constraints on talk, while present, enough to close off our diarists' opportunities for debate. While some people, men in particular (like Jonathan, quoted at the beginning of Part 3), found it difficult to debate politics as they would have liked with friends

[11] Cf the important research by Nina Eliasoph (1999) *Avoiding Politics*, Cambridge University Press.

and family, many others reported lively debate. Enid was one of the main organisers of a local women's group in West London while once or twice a year held a discussion evening based on the newspapers people brought in:

> We have a discussion night. We do it twice a year ... you're all in your little groups of maybe eight people, here are all the papers and you're supposed to have a good look and say ... did you think that in this story that was right, that was wrong and you discuss it

Two of our research team were able to attend one of these sessions; to be clear their purpose was principally social, as there was no intention of communicating any conclusions from the meeting. As part of an informal public sphere, however, such discussions are notable.

On balance, then, our diary data does not support the conclusion either that a spiral of silence (in Noelle-Neumann's term)[12] closes down debate on public issues or that people lack general opportunities for discussion (compare our survey data on talk discussed in Part 4). While not everyone has such opportunities, it remains the case that, when they occur, such opportunities can be valuable in reinforcing mediated public connection.

What was striking however is *the almost complete absence in our data of evidence of a connection between talk and action*: we only once found evidence of discussion leading to action, when Christine reported resolving with her friends at a party to start a local recycling drive. This is certainly not because diarists lacked opinions or were broadly apathetic. The key issue therefore may be not so much constraints on talk as the usual absence of any practical context that might *articulate* talk *to* action. Yet political science generally sees public engagement, deliberation and practical involvement as mutually reinforcing. Do we have instead here signs, if only negatively, of the same decline in genuine deliberation and political consultation in the UK that the authors of a recent study of citizenship in Britain[13] fear?

A similar disarticulation emerged when we analysed the types of public action in which diarists were involved. Excluding the minimal and highly infrequent action of voting in elections (32 of our diarists said they usually voted, a higher figure than either the 61% that voted in the 2005 election or than as registered in our survey), the most common actions undertaken by diarists at any point in their lives were attending local council consultation meetings (seven diarists), other local community events and meetings (eight diarists), contacting their MP (five diarists), party political involvement (six diarists) contributing to or working with charities (five diarists), signing a petition (five diarists) and work-related public actions (six diarists). Our definition of public action here was broad and under this definition only a few diarists (five) diarists were involved in no action at all. However, if we exclude one action which involves very limited time or resources – signing a petition – then the number of diarists for whom we have no evidence of action rises considerably. Indeed, *when judged in terms of 'collective' actions and actions aimed at or against institutions, very few diarists would be classified as active*. And in terms of motivations, only seven invoke broader principles when explaining the value of a public action:

> yes, I'm still actively involved in you know basically just trying to see the way forward for the community. I mean there's so much that can be done for so little amount of money and I think it's just raising awareness really. Most people are just too busy or choose to be busy

[12] E. Noelle-Neumann (1984), *The Spiral of Silence : Public Opinion, Our Social Skin*, University of Chicago Press.
[13] C. Pattie P. Seyd and P. Whiteley (2004), *Citizenship in Britain*. Cambridge University Press, p. 278.

> ... whereas ... I'm very involved in my mum's neighbourhood. (Christine, 46, business events coordinator, Northern suburb 2)

In expressing this activist value so explicitly, Christine was exceptional in our sample.

The reasons why people justify action or inaction are complex and may, of course, involve a considerable element of rationalization. Once again, however, two *absences* were striking:

- First, there were only limited traces of online communication providing an action context, even among our younger diarists: one diarist used web-sourced information to base her campaign against an unwanted tree in her street but Eric's online discussions appeared unlinked to opportunities or mobilization for action.

- Second, we found few, if any, traces of the local civic sphere as a context enabling action. The only exception was Christine's environmental activism at street level, and Christine was exceptional also in having a worked out rationale for action. One apparent counter-example, Abby who enjoyed taking part in a Citizens Forum in her South London borough, made no link to any action opportunities.

Not only did we find almost no signs of a supportive context for public action - whether locally or nationally -[14] but even those already active in one important respect – that is, *civically* active – could draw a sharp line between this and any active involvement in *politics*.

Here we should return to Edward who was one of the most civically active of our diarists, serving as a local magistrate in his retirement. For all his cynicism about politicians, his principal concern was not so much with not being listened to by politicians, but that the active experience of him and others 'on the ground' in an area crucial to government policy was not being taken into account in the formulation of government policy. The latter from his perspective (rightly or wrongly) was too concerned with matters of short-term presentation

> It's all a top thing – it's not at the bottom at all. The reality at the bottom is still totally different. You still have the courts clogged up with police witnesses who have to wait forever in court for cases which don't go through for one reason or another... . You'll probably never see all of this, of course: nobody does. But it happens all the time. But that's of no concern to politicians. What the politicians are concerned with is that very top layer of presentation through the media of one sort or another to the public. (Edward)

Such disjunctures - between talk and opportunities for action, between individuals' practices of civic action and any effective link to policymaking or politics – are troubling since they suggest that, while media's contribution to public connection may be both stable and important for many people, *the context in which mediated public connection occurs* is fractured in other ways.

To close this part of our report, we want to turn in a little more detail to some of the voices of particular diarists which take these reflections further.

[14] The only exception was Christine; Jane had a strong local personal network, but it was not linked to any civic or public action.

3.6 Satisfied distance or troubled closeness?

Mediated public connection (whether present or absent) is, we acknowledge, only one dimension of people's lives, whatever arguments we may make for its importance as a precondition of democratic engagement. We have tried throughout our research to be sensitive both to the varieties of public connection and also to the possibility that mediated public connection may matter much less to some diarists than to us as researchers! This is why we have paid attention also to the category of 'weakly connected', and argued earlier that the absence of mediated public connection may from some perspectives be associated with positive values (friends, family), rather than being a 'lack' to be remedied.

On the one hand, some diarists, like Jonathan with whom we began Part 3, found it difficult to imagine not being following closely a world of public issues, for example Josh:

> I don't like being uninformed … I don't know whether it's just because I don't like being in the situation like – where I was asked about the Euro and I didn't know. I felt stupid, although, you know, it's one thing out of many things that I get asked about. Um, and I just hated, to not know. And I think that's the answer. I just don't like not knowing.

It was difficult for Josh to understand those who felt differently:

> even down to my girlfriend actually and I can try and explain things to her not because I want her to think the same way as me but ... because I try to form these opinions that are informed by fact not just because that's the way I feel when she doesn't listen to me, or because she doesn't care, or she hates me watching the news, it bores her to tears ...it frustrates me that people don't care what's going on around them.

This concern was reflected by a number of both younger and older diarists (Crystal, Bill, Edward). As Bill put it: 'I do think there are a growing number of people and not unintelligent people who do distance themselves from the media'.

On the other hand, some diarists were clearly at ease in their distance from a world of public issues. Andrea enjoyed what she called 'trashy' magazines and soaps, but also took in news on a regular basis; her diary responded to issues of the moment but without any longer term consideration of issues. She expressed more explicitly than any other diarist a sense of traditional politics being remote from her life:

> Yeah, I think it just seems like it's a little bit of another world. You know, they're supposed to be making decisions on behalf of all of us but it doesn't generally seem that way. You know, they make the decisions, it doesn't matter you know, obviously they consider the consequences but other things sometimes generally happen. So and it seems like we're a long way away from it you know, and if you are going to reap any benefits, it takes a long time for it come through so yeah, I don't generally have much faith or anything in the government really. (Andrea)

This disconnection, as noted earlier, had a clear gendered context and was in conscious contrast to both her partner and her father. She also sustained her distance from public action at work.

> Yeah, I am in a [nursing] union but I wouldn't ... I suppose if everyone had the same view as me, then nothing would happen anyway but I wouldn't generally go along to a meeting cause ... I've always kind of been in that mind, don't get involved ... if I did, I don't feel it would make any difference. Cause ... there's a wider issue there you know, with money and the government ...

> all relating back to political issues. (Andrea)

She could imagine possibly getting more involved in local issue as she got older, but for now she saw democracy as being distant and largely irrelevant, even if she retained a sense that this distance was something she held in common with a large section of the 'public'.

Beccy also expressed her distance from a world of public issues but from different, more explicitly individualistic perspective:

> I think there's a hell of a lot of choice out there and I think ... it's up to me to go and find out and be informed. ... I think everybody would have their own line. My cynical friend would say that you know everybody should be obligated to know about politics and everybody should use their vote responsibly because he's really into that ... Whereas me, ... I don't know where my line would be because I know I look at a lot of celebrity news but that's not important and I wouldn't say people were obliged to know about that at all. But certain things in my head I think I should be obliged to know about I'm not.

The result was a natural limit on how far she would use media for public connection;

> You need to be able to turn the tv off, as awful as it is ... you do, in life you do have to do what you've got to do and if you've had a bad day at work you've got to do whatever ... it takes ... to make you go back there the next day, you've got to go to the gym and help you wake up, you've got to come home, eat loads of ice creams and things ... you can't feel obliged to sit down and watch the news if it's gonna depress you if you're already a bit stressed. I think you've got a responsibility to yourself to sort of pick yourself up but I don't know if that's right or not.

Here she refers to responsibility, but it is an individualized responsibility to get back into work the next day, a responsibility defined *against* what is public. At the same time she expressed an unresolved cynicism about whether democracy was real: 'it is democratic, but a lot of it is just - it's all about the pretence of us living in a democracy. Whether or not we actually do is quite a worrying question I think'.

Other diarists were less at ease with their personal relationship to democracy. Samantha, who ran a beauty parlour, had in some ways similar interests to Beccy (fashion, music, celebrity and reality TV). But during her diary a major tension emerged that was quite different from Beccy's fluent reflexivity. As the European elections of June 2004 approached, Samantha came to feel that she should know more about what was at stake but had very little idea of where to turn for information. Her frustration was sometimes expressed in a sense of being abandoned, which went beyond a general cynicism at politics:

> We don't seem to ... be aware of everything we need, I don't think the message is put across. I think we're sometimes fed what people want you to hear, what people want you to see ... obviously if you're only seeing bad things, that's the opinion you get in your head unless you make the effort to research the other stuff... Why should I have all these unanswered questions, I live in this country and what Tony Blair decides to do does affect me so therefore I should have the information. (Samantha, 33, Urban south)

This sense of a troubled closeness to the public world and dependency on media echoes Sheila's misgivings about media and democracy, if from a different class position.

3.7 Doubting Democracy

We want to end Part 3 of our report by turning to a discussion in our Midlands Rural focus group where two diarists quoted previously, Bill and Sheila, found that their misgivings about the current state of British democracy overlapped.

We do not claim any statistical relevance for these reflections of two individual diarists, even if they were among our most reflexive diarists. But when those as civically active and engaged with the world of public issues as Bill and Sheila show such concern at the workings of British democracy, it is surely important to listen to what they say:

> I suspect as a nation we're probably the society we want ... because if we wanted it to be different we would have changed some of it, we would have done something different and we don't appear as a nation to want to be any different. We want to be entertained, we don't want aircraft flying over our backyard and we're happy to do something about that, um, but we're not as a national I don't think really interested in correcting in what to me are some of the greater evils like this too cosy relationship between government and the media ... There's an alarming degree of apathy I suspect and I don't see it getting any better. (Bill)

> We do live in a democracy in principle but sometimes it can verge on dictatorship ... I used to be quite a believer in democracy. I'm not so sure these days and I'm probably as suspicious of politicians as I am of the media I think. I think a lot of it is a game. (Sheila)

4. The Public Connection Survey: Key Findings

In this section of the report, we review the key findings of the Public Connection Survey conducted on our behalf by ICM Research over the weekend of 3-5 June 2005. First, we summarise in sections 4.1-4.2 the main findings under three headings (public connection; media consumption; and linking public connection and media consumption) before turning (in sections 4.3-4.4) to the results of our more detailed analysis (multiple regressions and cluster analysis). Full details of our survey findings (with tables) as well as details of the survey questions, key variables and sampling methodology are set out in Appendices 2-5. Where there are significant variations by age, gender and class, they are listed below. Ethnicity and geographic region is not included in this discussion, as no variables varied significantly according to these factors. All percentages are weighted.

Our survey was distinctive for its detailed attention both to levels of consumption across a range of media and to the diversity of people's orientations to, and use of, media, including uses *not* oriented towards politics (whether as traditionally defined or in a broader sense). We also, however, for comparability with other survey literature included questions both on orientations to politics and the public world (trust, efficacy, interest and action) and on social capital, enabling us to make links between the media and political/civic domains that have been largely absent from the survey literature on democratic engagement.

4.1 Public connection

Political engagement

- The majority (82%) say they generally vote in national elections (especially older and middle class people).
- Two thirds (65%) say they are interested in politics (especially men and middle class people
- A third of the population (35%) claims some involvement in political protests.
- Interestingly, people are divided over the appropriateness of discussing political issues with others – 49% do and 41% don't.
- Turning to local involvement or social capital, 1 in 5 report (18%) playing an active role in local, voluntary or political organisations, and a quarter (28% - more for older people) say they are involved in voluntary work.

Political trust and efficacy

- Trust in politicians is low – only 45% trust politicians to deal with the things that matter and only 21% trust them to tell the truth (similarly only 43% trust the government to do what is right).
- There is a notable gap between civic information (with 81% saying they know where to get the information they need – more older and middle class people) and political efficacy (with only 39% saying they can influence decisions in their area, and 55% feeling that 'people like us' have no say in what the government does), though 68% feel they could make a difference if they really got involved.
- Thus, three quarters (73%) say they sometimes feel strongly about something but don't know what to do about it, suggesting opportunity structures for action are lacking.

Orientation to the public world

- Asked what they 'generally follow or keep up to date with', the most common answers were the environment (70%), crime (67%), health (66%) and events in Iraq (63%) (up to 3 responses were permitted). One in 5 (21%) named Big Brother or other reality television programmes, more than named trade union politics (17%).
- Men tend to follow Iraq, the UK economy, sports, Europe, international politics, Westminster politics and trade union politics more than women, who are more likely to follow issues relating to health, fashion, celebrity and reality television.
- Older people are more likely to follow the environment, crime, Iraq, third world poverty, the UK economy, funding for local services, local council politics, and Westminster politics. Younger people, on the other hand, are more likely to follow issues relating to fashion, celebrity, reality television and popular music.
- Issues also vary by socioeconomic status. 50% of middle class respondents follow international politics compared to 28% of working class respondents; middle class respondents are also more likely to follow issues relating to health, the UK economy, Europe and Westminster politics.
- Just over half the population (especially younger and middle class people) talk to others (mainly friends, then family and, for around half, people at work) about the issues that matter to them. However, nearly half rarely if ever do so.

What's on people's minds?

- When asked, in an open ended question, to identify a recent issue of particular importance to them, 72% of people named an issue, the top issues being Iraq (13%), crime (12%), health (7%), the election (5%), Europe (5%), and poverty (4%).
- Women were more likely to identify health, education and poverty; men were more likely to name Iraq, Europe and the environment.
- Predictably, younger people followed education more, and older people pensions.
- Middle class people were more likely to name Europe, working class people taxes.
- Nearly half said they considered the issue they named to be of national importance. 38% said it was an international issue, while 12% said it was of local importance.
- For the most part, they got their information about this issue from television (65%), though the press (50%), local paper (27%), radio (24%), other people (24%), personal experience (22%) and the internet (21%) also played a role.

From interest to action?

- For the issue of importance to them, the survey asked whether they had taken any action. Of those who named an issue 55% had taken some form of action. Those who did not blamed lack of time, the perception that it would not make any difference, and the view that they are 'not that kind of person'.
- Nearly a third (31%) of those who named an issue had signed a petition, 21% had contacted an MP or councillor (higher among those 55+), 19% had gone to a local meeting, 11% had made a personal protest (such as boycotting a company), and 10% had joined a local group.

4.2 Media consumption

Overall media consumption

- Television is the most widely engaged with medium (watched each day by 96% of the population). It is also the most time-consuming medium (occupying, on average, 1-3 hours of people's daily leisure time).
- Radio, though listened to by 4 in 5 people, takes up just half an hour, a similar amount of time being spent on newspapers (by 3 in 4 people) and reading for leisure (by 2 in 3 people).
- However, media use is strongly stratified, with television watched more by older and working class people. Middle class people report spending more time with radio and reading books.
- Reading (but not broadcasting) is also stratified by gender, with men spending longer reading newspapers and women spending longer reading books for leisure.
- Despite widespread attention to the participatory potential of the internet, half the population does not access it at all, and those who do are much more likely to be younger and middle class.
- Of those who do go online (in their own time), most spend between half an hour and one hour, with men spending slightly longer online than women.
- The media are used for multiple purposes, with the most popular forms of entertainment being documentaries (more older people), comedy (especially men and younger people), and music (especially women and younger people), closely followed by sport (mainly men) and drama (more women).
- News is ranked sixth in genre preference, just ahead of – in rank order - soaps, history, action-adventure, sci-fi, crime and reality television.

News consumption

- When it comes to specifically seeking out the news, television is again the most common news source (89%), though 71% listen to radio news (higher for men, and middle class people), 61% read the national paper (higher for men and older people) and over half (56%) read their local newspaper.
- Only 23% use the internet to access the news, and this is strongly stratified – more men, younger and middle class people.
- Although men report having more disposable leisure time, as do older and working class people, this seems an unlikely explanation for these differences.
- 70% of the population considers it a duty to keep up with what's going on in the world, especially older and middle class people.
- Indeed, 81% claim a pretty good understanding of the main issues facing the country (more men and middle class people).
- On the other hand, 23% (more older and working class people) consider there's no point watching the news as it deals with things they can do nothing about, and 61% feel that politics is so complicated they can't really understand what's going on (more women and working class people) or that it doesn't matter which party is in power since things go on much the same (55%).

- Social expectations are important, though they vary. More than half consider that their friends (66%) and people at work (54%) expect them to know what's going on in the world – men and older people particularly experience such expectations.
- Further, most people say that they follow the news both to understand what's going on in the world (90%) and to know what other people are talking about (76%).
- Thus most people (80%) have made watching the news a regular part of their day, even though nearly half the population (44%) considers that politics has little connection with their own life.

Media trust and literacy

- People can be not only disengaged from politics but also from the media – 40% said the things the media cover have little to do with their lives, although 66% trust the media to cover the things that matter to them.
- For the most part, however, people are fairly trusting of news reporting – on television (69%), press (40%), and online (36%).
- Working class people tend to be both more disengaged but also more trusting, while middle class people are more likely to be critical (or media literate).
- Thus, middle class people are more likely to say that difference sources of news tend to give different accounts (85% middle class vs 75% working class).
- However, there are no SES differences in the practice of comparing across news sources (59% overall, though men report this more than women).

4.3 Linking public connection / media consumption (key regressions)

Research strategy

A range of factors have been hypothesised as possible explanations of political participation, and this itself can be framed and measured in different ways. The Public Connection survey asked a range of questions (see Appendices 2 and 4), designed to mirror those asked in other national and international surveys (for comparability) while also linking these to questions about media consumption (the present focus). While often neglected as irrelevant to public connection, there is increasing interest in research and policy debates regarding the positive or negative role of the media (particularly the debates growing out of aspects of Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* thesis). Usually treated generically (as 'the media'), their role has been hypothesised as distracting (time displacement), undermining (dumbing down) or iniquitous (knowledge gap). To enhance understanding of the media's role, the survey disaggregated media consumption, news consumption, news engagement; it also asked separate questions about television, press, radio, internet.

The findings from a series of multiple regression analyses are briefly summarised below: further information is given in appendix 3, section 8, and for a full analysis see Chapter 7 of Couldry, Livingstone and Markham *Media Consumption and Public Engagement: Beyond the Presumption of Attention* (Palgrave, forthcoming, 2007).

What predicts voting?

- Age (older) and SES (higher).
- Also those who are higher in political interest, political trust, social capital and political efficacy.
- In sum, voting is explained both by structural (age and class), social (social capital/local involvement) and socio-motivational factors (interest, trust, efficacy).

What predicts interest?

- Age (older) and SES (higher) – as above.
- Also social capital, political efficacy, social expectations (unlike for voting), but not trust.
- As expected by the research literature, political interest derives from a particular mix of structural (age and class), social (social capital/local involvement, social expectations) and socio-motivational factors (efficacy).

Does media consumption make a difference?

- Findings show each type of consumption is not necessarily correlated with others; hence they need to be examined separately. Particularly, overall media consumption does not translate automatically into news consumption.
- Nor does time spent watching television correlate with time spent with other media – we found no overall high-low media consumption measure.
- Those already advantaged by gender, age and class are the most likely to seek out – and presumably benefit from – the news. In short, media use, and news consumption, is stratified, as proposed by the knowledge gap (or 'virtuous circle') hypothesis.This suggests, in turn, that mediated public connection is also stratified.
- We found no overall correlation between television viewing or newspaper reading and voting. But political interest is correlated with media and news consumption.
- Interestingly, the relation between television consumption and political interest is curvilinear. So, for light viewers: more viewing is associated with more interest, but for heavy viewers: more viewing is associated with less interest.
- This suggests that for light television viewers (and the majority of average viewers), Putnam's time displacement hypothesis is not supported, although it is supported in the specific case of heavy television viewers (who are also more likely both to be disengaged and to be of lower socioeconomic status).

4.4 *The role of other media factors (further regressions)*

News engagement

- When we add media *use* into the multiple regressions predicting voting and political interest, the findings show that news engagement, reading newspaper (a negative influence, suggesting a 'tabloid effect') and listening to radio each make a modest addition to predicting voting, controlling for other factors.
- The composite variable (news engagement) is crucial here; details of its components are given in Appendix 3, section 8B. Consistently with the project's overall approach to the

term 'public', this variable tracks orientations to a range of public issues and is not limited to traditional politics.

- The composite variable of news engagement as well as the specific variables of reading the paper, listening to radio news and accessing online news all add more substantially (and positively) to predicting political interest (with the media variables replacing political efficacy as predictors of political interest).
- Note that in neither case does overall television consumption plays any role. Different kinds of media consumption play different roles, and it is newspapers, radio and internet (not television) that seem to make the difference to political participation. However, news engagement – a strong predictor of political interest - is associated with television news consumption (though not with overall television consumption).
- Importantly, therefore, *political interest and news engagement go hand in hand* i.e. political interest is mediated. And different media mediate political interest in different ways.
- News engagement is not only associated with news consumption. It is also positively correlated with media trust and media literacy. Those who are more engaged by the news are also more likely to think that different sources give different accounts, and are more likely to compare across sites. They are also more likely to see media coverage as relevant to their lives.
- So, a positive interest in the news agenda and a literate approach to judging sources (and so, informed trust in media) go together, contributing positively to both political interest and voting. This seems to counter the dumbing down thesis of news consumption.
- Again, this suggests that multiple factors make a moderate contribution to explaining voting and political interest, with the media – especially the news – as part of the picture.

Linking private and public worlds

- In one's day to day life, following, or keeping up to date with, such single issue concerns as the environment, poverty, health or local issues makes a slight contribution to voting but a larger contribution to political interest.
- Following celebrity matters, however, has no influence on voting and it has a negative influence on political interest.
- So, while single issue politics may stimulate interest in politics more widely, not all kinds of public orientation support each other. Notably, celebrity interest seems to be associated with lower levels of political interest.
- Further, frequency of talking to others about issues one follows makes no difference to voting, and has only marginal influence on political interest.
- As noted above, for some people, talking about politics is stimulating, for others it is judged inappropriate or unnecessary. However, whether people talk about issues or not makes little difference to participation.

Linking interests and action

- Having asked whether people act on issues 'of importance to you', the survey found that over half (55%) took some kind of action, the remainder did not.
- Those who were low in political interest and political efficacy, and those who had low social expectations on them to 'keep up', were less likely to take an action.
- Those who did not act were also higher in political and media trust, and lower in media literacy. Trust, therefore, seems passivising rather than encouraging of action.

- Further, the more one is middle class, politically interested, politically distrustful and politically efficacious, the more actions one takes.
- So, media consumption plays no role in predicting the amount of action, but it does play a role in predicting whether or not one takes action, with media literacy associated with action and media trust associated with inaction.
- Particularly, those who did not act were also more likely to watch television news, but less likely to listen to the radio or read, showing again how different kinds of media consumption encourage or undermine political participation, some therefore displacing or distracting people from effective practices of public connection.

Sources of disconnection

- Using a scale to measure how disengaged people are (for details, see appendix 3, section 8D), those who are more disengaged are lower in socioeconomic status, older, and lower in political interest and political efficacy.
- Media consumption also contributes a little to disengagement, this being associated with more reading of the local paper and less reading of books. The more disengaged, the more people watch television also.
- In sum, some media are more associated with engagement (reading books and, correlated with this, the internet, radio and the national press) and others are more associated with disengagement (reading the local newspaper and, correlated with this, watching television).

Summary of regressions

Of the hypotheses outlined earlier on possible relations between public connection and media consumption, the findings show that media consumption does contribute to public connection and so should be included in future research surveying various forms of political participation among the population.

However, different media contribute to different forms of public connection in different ways, making a simple summary of 'the media's role' inappropriate. There are some signs that particular types of media consumption (heavy television viewing) are associated with lower news engagement and public participation, giving limited support to the 'media malaise' thesis, although socioeconomic status may be an important underlying explanation here. There are also some signs that certain types of news consumption may reduce participation – through a possible tabloid effect of the press, and for those who are low in media literacy (or too trusting of media coverage).

There are more signs, however, of the ways in which the media, particularly the news media, support and stimulate participation – this including television news, itself closely related to news engagement, radio and online media sources. Those more engaged by the news are more likely to vote and, particularly, more likely to be interested in politics. This finding seems to hold both for the mainstream political news agenda and for single issue politics, but not for celebrity or popular items on the news agenda.

News engagement – though, importantly, unrelated to socioeconomic status or gender, suggesting that there are *many* routes to news engagement available across classes and genders – seems to contribute to a virtuous circle by which the already engaged become more

informed, engaged and active; the other side of this however is a vicious circle by which the less engaged become more disengaged and inactive. Certain media – notably the internet – may, because their use is heavily stratified, contribute to, rather than close, the knowledge gap.

The importance of political efficacy, social expectations and media literacy in stimulating political action (and, the association of low levels of these variables with inaction) suggests that the opportunity structures for some people enable participation, but that others lack the structures that can mediate between interest and action.

A number of factors play a role in mediating participation for some but not others – talking about issues and trust in media, for example, are for some part of the process of political engagement, while for others they are unrelated to engagement.

4.5 ***Life contexts (cluster analysis)***

To get a sense of how this range of factors might be tracked in the lives of specific groups of people, we did a cluster analysis based on the types of theme (from an offered set of 20 ranging across traditional politics, broad public issues, entertainment, sport and fashion) people said they followed.

The analysis identified four distinct groups within the population, as shown in figure 2; these groups can, as explained below, be distinguished demographically and in terms of public connection, news engagement and other key variables.

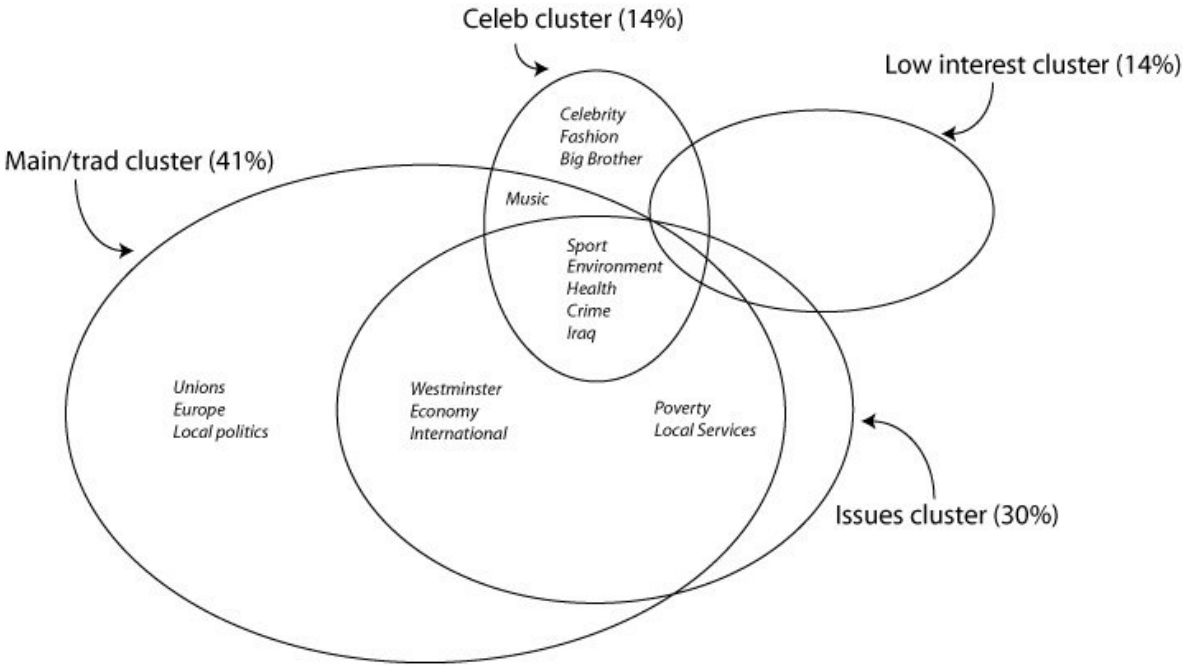

Figure 2: Survey respondents clustered by themes they named

Our cluster analysis allows people to be grouped according to the types of theme that they tend to follow. Identifying clusters is initially difficult because there are some issues that everyone apart from those with low interest is likely to follow to some extent, including health, the environment, crime, sport and events in Iraq. Other themes, however, mark some groups of people as distinct from others in what they track. The cluster analysis identified four distinct groups:

- Traditional: these people follow the mainstream issues mentioned above, but also more specialist topics such as European affairs, local politics and trade union issues, as well as the 'issues' topics mentioned below. They are more likely to be male (57% are), they are older than the other clusters (average age 43 years) and are more likely to be middle class. They have higher social capital, higher levels of efficacy, and spend more time with newspapers, radio and books. They tend to use a broad range of media, and have more leisure time to do so. Their news engagement, unsurprisingly, is high.

- Issues: this group has slightly more women than men, and close to average class and age. They tend to follow issues such as third world poverty and funding for local services as well as the mainstream themes. Interestingly, they tend to have low trust in the media, and consider the media to be irrelevant to their lives – reflecting their narrower agenda. They are the most time-pressured group of people identified.

- Celebrity: this group has almost three times as many women as men, is the youngest cluster (average age 32), and are the least likely to vote; interestingly, however, this group, like the issues group, are close to average class. They follow music, fashion, celebrity gossip and reality television, but may well also follow the headline issues of the day. Their social capital tends to be low, but their media trust is comparatively high.

- Low interest: This cluster is lowest in SES, but about average in gender and age. Their media consumption overall is low, as is their likelihood to vote, interest in politics, efficacy and social expectation to know what's going on in the world. They are the most likely to find the media irrelevant, and tend not to use a broad range of media.

5. Overall Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

We want finally to pull together the main findings of the diary- and survey-based phases of our research, and to draw out some policy recommendations. The latter are aimed particularly at policymakers concerned to reverse the apparent disengagement with democratic politics in Britain - the most urgent context in which we write.

5.1 Media consumption matters

Our research has established that media consumption (both old and new media) contributes importantly to people's possibilities for public connection and engagement in the democratic process. Long-established news forms (the television news bulletin, the daily newspaper) remain important, as do non-news forms in traditional media such as the television documentary or the radio phone-in. Our diaries illustrate the multiple forms of mediated public connection, while our survey shows news engagement contributes significantly to explaining political interest, which in turn is a major predictor of voting.

This argues for a greater emphasis in debates about political disengagement on understanding the quality of people's uses of not just the main news media but also media that contribute to the formulation and expression of public issues in other ways. Yet even important recent research (the Power Report, the Electoral Commission's 2004 Audit) gives only limited consideration to the everyday realities of people's media consumption.

Related policy recommendation: Media consumption plays a subtle role in shaping both engagement with, and disengagement from, a public world. Encouraging a broad range of public-oriented media consumption, and the growth of related media literacy, should be central to wider strategies for reversing political disengagement.

5.2 Habits of news engagement

Habits of media consumption, particularly habits of news consumption and news engagement, are heavily stratified by age. The habits of an older generation (watching the evening TV news, regular radio updates, reading a daily newspaper) remain important, although less prevalent among those under 30, as suggested by our diary research and confirmed by our survey data.

Indeed we would argue for the *continuing* importance of traditional media in sustaining public connection, notwithstanding recent claims[15] that we are already spending more time on the Internet than watching television – aggregate time spent on particular media is a poor comparative measure where one medium (but not another) is used for both work and leisure, and then for a range of leisure purposes, some as limited as checking a train time - unless we adjust for such complexities. By contrast, while using the internet for news is associated with being younger, it is unclear whether the internet will generate *habits* of news consumption as stable as those associated with traditional media. In addition, as our survey has brought out, internet use and access remains socially stratified; and the same probably applies to internet literacy (use of and knowledge about the internet).[16]

[15] See recent research commissioned by Google reported, the *Guardian* 8 March 2006.
[16] Ofcom (2006) *Media Literacy Audit: Report on adult media literacy*. Available from www.ofcom.co.uk.

Related policy recommendation: In considering media's role in reversing political disengagement, traditional media must be given as much weight as new media, particularly media formats associated with habits of news consumption that have been stable and socially recognised for a long time.

In addition, habits of news-oriented internet use must be prioritized over general internet use. Public service and civic uses of online information sources should be promoted, and contexts encouraged where new and stable habits of public information consumption are likely to develop - not just in the home but also in places of work and at points of service delivery.

5.3 Orientations away from public issues

While media consumption contributes to public connection, it does not ensure it, since many people's practices of media consumption are oriented *away* from public issues. While many diarists followed celebrity- or reality-based media, we found no significant evidence here of a route into broad engagement with the public sphere; and cluster analysis of our survey data shows that following celebrity-type issues is associated with low news engagement and a reduced likelihood of belonging to local organizations or doing voluntary work.

This is not to deny that some of the mechanisms of interactive participation popularised in such media (such as voting by text message) are potentially useful indicators of what *mechanisms* may be useful for involving people in other settings (as the Power report suggests).[17] But it is to deny that we can draw any simple conclusions from the rise in popularity of participative media formats to the role of such formats in enhancing either civic or public involvement. Instead, we need to understand better why those involved in the former may remain orientated away from the latter.

Related policy recommendation: Strategies for reversing political disengagement that concentrate on popularizing politics for audiences of celebrity- and reality-based media are unlikely to succeed; it would be more productive to focus on why those who particularly follow such media (who come from all classes but are more likely to be young and female) are disengaged, and how to overcome this.

5.4 Missing links

Media consumption matters for public connection, but to what extent may depend on the presence, or absence, of wider links. We have found from our diary research that there is a disarticulation between people's talk about public issues and people's practice of (perhaps also opportunities for) acting upon them. In addition, amongst even our most civically engaged diarists, there is a disarticulation between their engagement in civic action and their disengagement from, or disillusionment with, politics. In some cases this extended to a disillusionment with media's influence over politics.

[17] Power Report, 2006, pp 247-248.

Our diaries offered disturbing evidence of civically active people who doubted whether their experience was being taken into account by policymakers, while our survey found a gap between people's sense of being informed about civic issues and their sense that they were able to influence local decisions. Important here is not just the well-known point about political efficacy, but a more subtle point about how efficacy in one (civic) setting does not translate into efficacy in another setting (the political). This suggests that mediated public connection will in itself be of limited value unless *the wider context* in which, as citizens, we follow the public world through media is transformed.

This means, recalling Leon Mayhew (1997, *The New Public*, Cambridge University Press) that citizens need regular opportunities where the day-to-day trust they are required to place in public representatives (particularly politicians but also perhaps media professionals) can be 'redeemed', as Mayhew puts it, through face-to-face questioning and dialogue that, in turn, is seen to feed back into the processes of making policy and making media. As our diaries brought out, many citizens have a great deal to say about the conduct of public life and their voices must be listened to and seen to be taken into account; yet chances to redeem such trust as they have in politics or media (trust in politicians remains particularly low) are rare.

It is crucial that such opportunities are often face-to-face. There is, as yet, no evidence that interactivity online, while it may be useful for other purposes, is sufficient to restore trust. Broadcasters (the Power Report suggests something similar: pp. 247-8) can play a constructive role in providing context and support for such opportunities.

Related policy recommendation: Beyond encouraging media literacy, government, political and media organizations, as well as other public bodies, must create effective opportunities for citizen involvement in policy formulation and implementation - that is, situations where people know that their experience as citizens and literate media consumers will be listened to and taken into account. These opportunities must often be face-to-face (online 'interactivity' is not enough); but broadcast media can contribute importantly by sponsoring and helping contextualize such opportunities.

5.5. Stratification

Media consumption, political interest, and disengagement are, according to our survey data, all stratified in varying ways by socioeconomic status age and gender, meaning that there are class- and gender-specific routes to disengagement. The stratification of internet use is particularly strong, suggesting that the increasing spread of the internet may intensify, not diminish, such stratification: the recent Ofcom report on internet literacy points in the same direction. By contrast, we found that diarists from all classes and genders have mediated public connection, while in our survey news engagement was not socially stratified. This suggests that, in spite of such broader stratifications, there are many routes to public connection and news engagement.

Related policy recommendation: All strategies for reversing political disengagement must take account of this stratification and devise specific means of targeting those who are multiply disadvantaged (lack of economic and social resources; lack of opportunities to act; lack of access to the internet).

Appendix 1: The Public Connection Diarists

Number	Pseudonym	Region	Age	Gender	Family Status	Profile (SES)	Ethnic	Diary Medium
1	**Harry**	Suburban London West	69	M	Married, Adult children	Retired Bank Information Systems Manager (B)	White	Written
2	**[Non-Completer]**							
3	**Pavarti**	Suburban London West	51	F	Married, Teenage Children	Shop Owner (C2)	Asian	Written
4	**Jonathan**	Suburban London West	23	M	Lives With Parents	University administrator (C1)	White	Email
5	**Angela**	Suburban London West	29	F	Married, no children	Teacher (B)	White	Email
6	**Gundeep**	Suburban London West	48	M	Married, Adult Children	Garage Manager (C2)	Asian	Tape
7	**Kylie**	Inner City South London	24	F	Single Mother	Unemployed (E)	White	Written
8	**Eric**	Inner City South London	47	M	Married, Teenage Children	Computer Analyst (C1)	Black	Email
9	**[Non-Completer]**							
10	**Sherryl**	Inner City South London	39	F	Single	Unemployed (E)	Black	Written/Tape
11	**Crystal**	Inner City South London	22	F	Single Mother	Unemployed (E)	Black	Tape
12	**Abby**	Inner City South London	45	F	Married, Teenage Children	Admin Officer (C1)	Mixed	Email
13	**Nigel**	Rural Midlands	54	M	Married, Adult Children	Premises Officer School (C2)	White	Email
14	**Marie**	Rural Midlands	34	F	Married, Young Child	Accounts Clerk (Part-Time) (C1)	White	Written
15	**Lesley**	Rural Midlands	39	F		Secretary Education (B)	White	Written/Tape
16	**[Non-Completer]**							
17	**Andrea**	Rural Midlands	25	F	Married	Children's Nurse (C2)	White	Written
18	**Paul**	Rural Midlands	55	M	Married, Teenage Children	Company Secretary (C1)	White	Written/Tape
19	**Mary**	Northern Suburb 1	18	F	Lives With Parents/University	Student (B)	White	Written
20	**Edward**	Northern Suburb 1	64	M	Married, Adult children	Retired Chief Exec, Financial Services (A)	White	Email
21	**Lisa**	Northern Suburb 1	30	F	Cohab, No Children	Teacher (B)	White	Email
22	**Henry**	Northern Suburb 1	52	M	Married, Teenage Children	Insurance Underwriter (B)	Black	Email
23	**Stuart**	Northern Suburb 1	61	M	Married, Adult children	Retired Bank Manager (B)	White	Written
24	**Beccy**	Northern Suburb 1	27	F	Cohab, No Children	Marketing Executive (C1)	White	Email
25	**Frank**	Northern Suburb 2	37	M	Cohab	Catering Manager (C1)	White	Email/Written
26	**Susan**	Northern Suburb 2	62	F	Divorced	Office Manager For A Retirement Home (C1)	White	Written
27	**Alfred**	Northern Suburb 2	67	M	Married, Adult Children	Retired Printer (C2)	White	Email
28	**Christine**	Northern Suburb 2	46	F	Divorced	Events co-ordinator (C1)	White	Email/Written
29	**Janet**	Northern Suburb 2	29	F	Single	Pre-Ops Controller (B)	White	Email
30	**[Non-Completer]**							
31	**Jane**	Urban City South	52	F	Divorced	Supermarket assistant (part-time) (D)	White	Written
32	**[Non-Completer]**							
33	**Kathleen**	Urban City South	34	F	Married, Young Children	Mature Student Part-Time (C1)	White	Written
34	**Patrick**	Urban City South	52	M	Married, Adult Children	Warehouse Manager (C2)	White	Written
35	**Samantha**	Urban City South	33	F	Married, No Children	Beautician - Manager Of Shop (C2)	White	Written
36	**Ross**	Urban City South	25	M	Single	Student, Graphic Design (C1)	White	Written
37	**Bill**	Rural Midlands	61	M	Married, Adult Children	Retired Managing Director (A)	White	Email
38	**Sheila**	Rural Midlands	47	F	Divorced	Senior Health Protection Nurse (B)	White	Written
39	**Tyrrone**	Urban London Southeast	23	M	Single	Musician (C1)	Black	Tape
40	**Enid**	Suburban London West	63	F	Married, Adult Children	P/T Assistant At Local School (C2)	White	Written
41	**Josh**	Northern Suburb 2	23	M	Single	Architecture Student (C1)	White	Email
42	**Arvind**	Urban City South	40	M	Married, Teenage Children	Disabled, Former Bakery Worker (E)	Asian	Written

Appendix 2: Survey questions

Q1 *In a normal day, on average, how many hours do you spend doing each of the following? Watching TV, Listening to the radio, Reading a newspaper, Reading a book for leisure, On the internet or sending emails for yourself rather than for work.*
Response values: 1: No time, 2: Less than 15 minutes, 3: 15-30 mins, 4: 30 mins – 1 hour, 5: 1-3 hours, 6: 3-6 hours, 7: 6-12 hours, 8: More than 12 hours

Q2 *Do you do any of these things at least 3 times a week on average? Read a local newspaper, Read a national newspaper, Listen to the radio news, Watch the television news, Go onto the internet for news*

Q3 *In a normal day, on average, how many hours would you say you have for yourself? By 'time for yourself' we mean leisure time you can spend as you want.*
Response variable values: 1: No time, 2: Less than 15 minutes, 3: 15-30 mins, 4: 30 mins – 1 hour, 5: 1-3 hours, 6: 3-6 hours, 7: 6-12 hours, 8: More than 12 hours

Q4 *Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements: You generally have enough time to do what you want in the day; In general you are satisfied with your life at the moment*
Responses: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

Q5 *How safe do you feel living in the neighbourhood you live in now?*
Responses: 1=not at all safe, 2=not very safe, 3=fairly safe, 4=very safe

Q6 *To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?*
You play an active role in one or more voluntary, local or political organizations; Most of your friends live nearby; You don't like to discuss politics with other people; Being involved in your neighbourhood is important to you; You don't get involved in political protests; You generally vote in national elections; You are involved in voluntary work; You are generally interested in what's going on in politics.
Responses: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

Q7 *Which of the following are your top 3 favourite types of entertainment?*
News, Sport, Soaps, Celebrities, Documentary, History, Religion, Drama, Action-Adventure, Comedy, Music, Reality TV, Science Fiction, Arts, Romance, Crime, Science

Q8 *Which of the following things, if any, do you generally follow or keep up to date with?*
Trade union politics, What's number one in the charts, Sports news, International politics, The latest celebrity gossip, What's happening in Iraq, Ups and downs of the UK economy, Religious questions or debates, Information on health and nutrition

Q9 *And which of these things, if any, do you generally follow or keep up to date with?*
The latest fashion in clothes, Local council politics/elections, Events in Westminster, Crime and policing Big Brother (or other major reality TV shows), Funding for local services, Protecting the environment, Poverty in developing countries, Debates about Europe

Q10 *Taking these things that matter to you, by this I mean the things you have just mentioned - how often do you tend to talk to others about these kinds of things?*
Responses: 1=not at all, 2=not very often, 3=quite often, 4=all the time

Q11 *Do the people you tend to talk to about these issues tend to be…?*
People at work, Friends, Family, Other

Q12 *To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?*
People at work would expect you to know what's going on in the world; You follow the news to understand what's going on in the world; You follow the news to know what other people are talking about; Your friends would expect you to know what's going on in the world; It's your duty to keep up with what's going on in the world; There's no point in watching the

news, because it deals with things you can do nothing about; It's a regular part of your day to catch up with the news; Politics has little connection with your life; You have a pretty good understanding of the main issues facing our country; It doesn't really matter which party is in power, in the end things go on pretty much the same; Sometimes politics seems so complicated that you can't really understand what's going on; You often feel that there's too much media, so you need to switch off
Responses: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

Q13 *To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the media? By media, we mean television, newspapers, radio, internet, etc.*
The things the media cover have little to do with your life; Different sources of news tend to give different accounts of what's going on; You trust the television to report the news fairly; You trust the press to report the news fairly; You trust the internet to report the news fairly; You trust the media to cover the things that matter to you; You generally compare the news on different channels, newspapers or websites
Responses: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

Q14 *Now thinking about politics, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?*
You feel that you can influence decisions in your area; You know where to go to find out information that you need; People like us have no say in what the government does; You trust politicians to tell the truth; You trust politicians to deal with the things that matter; You can affect things by getting involved in issues you care about; You trust the government to do what is right; Sometimes you feel strongly about an issue, but don't know what to do about it
Responses: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

Q15 *Which public issue has been particularly important to you over the past 3 months - this needn't be an issue covered in the media, but can be any issue you think of general importance?*

Q16 *Would you describe this issue as:* local, national, international

Q17 *For that issue, where have you got your information about it from?*
TV news, Other TV, Radio, National newspaper, Local newspaper, Magazine, Internet, Personal experiences, Other people, University, Friends/family/colleagues, Local government, Media, Church

Q18 *And which of these sources was MOST useful in providing you with relevant information ?*
TV news, Other TV, Radio, National newspaper, Local newspaper, Magazine, Internet, Personal experiences, Other people, University, Friends/family/colleagues, Local government, Media, Church

Q19 *To what extent would you agree or disagree that you were satisfied with the media coverage of this issue?*
Responses: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

Q20 *Still thinking about the issue you have just mentioned, have you done any of these things in relation to it?*
Joined a national interest or campaign group; Joined a political party; Joined a local group or organization; in a strike; Contacted an MP, councillor, etc; Got in touch with a newspaper/TV/radio station (e.g. letter to the editor, phoned a talk show, sent an email or text to a programme); Contributed to an online discussion; Gone on a public protest; Contributed to/created a public message (e.g. website, newsletter, video, etc); A personal protest (e.g. boycotted a product, worn a slogan, left a meeting); Contributed to them financially; Researched the topic; Discussed with family/friends/colleagues

Q21 *If not, why have you not taken any of these actions regarding the issue?* No time; Don't know anyone who has; It won't make a difference; Not interested; Not that kind of person

Q22 *Still on that issue, have you talked about it to other people?*
Not talked about it, Talked to people at work, Talked to Friends, Talked to Family, Other

In addition, standard demographics questions (including socioeconomic status, gender, age, last full time education, ethnicity, religion) were asked plus additional questions concerning home ownership of digital TV or computer and internet access.

Appendix 3: Detailed Findings from the Public Connection Survey

1. Political Engagement

Table 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
(5 point scale from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

	Gender		Age			SES		All
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
You play an active role in one or more voluntary, local or political organisations	2.19	2.23	2.19	2.19	2.34	2.24	2.17	2.21
Most of your friends live nearby	3.39	3.45	3.50**	3.24**	3.56**	3.30**	3.57**	3.42
You don't like to discuss politics with other people	2.83	2.98	2.86	2.93	2.91	2.78	3.07	2.91
Being involved in your neighbourhood is important to you	3.49	3.62	3.35**	3.59**	3.70**	3.54	3.59	3.56
You don't get involved in political protests	3.50	3.36	3.28	3.44	3.53	3.47	3.38	3.42
You generally vote in national elections	4.08	4.16	3.62**	4.13**	4.52**	4.20**	4.02**	4.12
You are involved in voluntary work	2.47	2.61	2.41**	2.50**	2.71**	2.61	2.46	2.55
You are generally interested in what's going on in politics	3.69**	3.45**	3.41**	3.37**	3.89**	3.71**	3.36**	3.56

Base: N=1017. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

- 82% of people say they generally vote in national elections
- 65% say they are interested in politics

18% of people said that they play an active role in local, voluntary or political organisations, while 28% said that they were involved in volunteer work – a figure that rises to 33% for those over 55. 61% said that most of their friends lived nearby, though the figure is slightly lower for those aged 35-54 (56%) and for middle class respondents (58%). The question of discussing politics with other people divided the respondents, with 41% saying they didn't like to, and 49% disagreeing. When it came to political protests, 60% said that they don't get involved, while 35% disagreed.

Most people agreed that being involved in their neighbourhood was important to them – 62% either agreed or strongly agreed overall, and those over 55 were particularly likely to agree. The vast majority (82%) of people said that they generally vote in national elections, and the figure is even higher for

those aged over 55: 89%, compared with 67% of those under 35. Middle class respondents are also more likely to vote than working class respondents. While 65% of people said that they are generally interested in politics, more men than women said that they were, and more middle class than working class. Older people are the most interested (75% agreeing or strongly agreeing).

2. Political Trust and Efficacy

Table 2: Now thinking about politics, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (5 point scale from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

	Gender		Age			SES		All
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
You feel that you can influence decisions in your area (N=1013)	2.84	2.78	2.76	2.87	2.78	2.87	2.84	2.81
You know where to go to find out information that you need (N=1011)	3.92	3.81	3.67**	3.90**	3.98**	3.91**	3.79**	3.86
People like us have no say in what the government does (N=1013)	3.19	3.32	3.0*	3.27*	3.41*	3.10**	3.45**	3.26
You trust politicians to tell the truth (N=1011)	2.22	2.22	2.16	2.24	2.24	2.18	2.26	2.22
You trust politicians to deal with the things that matter (N=1009)	2.92	2.91	2.89	2.90	2.95	2.87	2.97	2.92
You can affect things by getting involved in issues you care about (N=1006)	3.62	3.53	3.68	3.59	3.47	3.64	3.49	3.58
You trust the government to do what is right (N=1010)	2.87	2.93	2.94	2.91	2.84	2.80*	3.02*	2.90
Sometimes you feel strongly about an issue, but don't know what to do about it (N=1012)	3.65	3.72	3.67	3.65	3.75	3.60	3.80	3.69

Base: N=1017. *=significant at $p<0.05$; **=significant at $p<0.01$

- 81% of people say they know where to find the information they need
- 39% say they can influence decisions in their area
- 21% of people trust politicians to tell the truth

While 81% of people said that they know where to go to get the information that they need, only 39% said that they could influence decisions in their area. However, 68% agreed that they could affect things by getting involved in issues they care about. This is perhaps reflected in the fact that 73% of people sometimes feel strongly about an issue, but don't know what to do about it. Trust in politicians is low: 45% trust politicians to deal with the things that matter, and only 21% trust politicians to tell the truth. 43% trust the government to do what is right, while 55% agree that 'people like us' have no say in what the government does. Older people and middle class respondents are significantly more likely to feel that they know where to go to find relevant information. Older people (and working class respondents) are also, however, more likely to say that 'people like us' have no say in what the government does.

3. Public Orientation

Table 3A: Which of the following things, if any, do you generally follow or keep up to date with? (%)

	Gender		Age			SES		All
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
Protecting the environment	69	71	58**	69**	80**	71	69	70
Crime and policing	67	68	61**	65**	75**	68	66	67
Information on health and nutrition	56**	76**	65	68	65	69**	62**	66
What's happening in Iraq	67**	60**	64*	58*	69*	65	61	63
Poverty in developing countries	56	60	57**	52**	66**	59	57	58
Ups and downs of the UK economy	62**	48**	43**	57**	63**	61**	47**	55
Sports news	67**	34**	48	50	51	51	47	50
Funding for local services	46	49	41**	48**	52**	50	45	48
Debates about Europe	55**	38**	43	45	49	52**	38**	46
Local council politics/elections	42	43	32**	39**	56**	42	43	43
International politics	50**	31**	36	39	44	50**	28**	40
Events in Westminster	49**	29**	26**	37**	51**	44**	31**	39
Religious questions or debates	24	28	26	24	28	29*	22*	26
The latest fashion in clothes	13**	36**	38**	23**	16**	26	24	25
The latest celebrity gossip	14**	31**	38**	21**	13**	25	21	23
Big Brother (or other reality TV)	16**	25**	38**	19**	8**	22	19	21
What's number one in the charts	16	19	38**	15**	4**	19	17	18
Trade union politics	23**	13**	17	19	16	19	15	17

Base: N=1017. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

- Most commonly followed issues are the environment, crime, health and Iraq

In terms of types of issue, the most common issues that people follow are the environment (70%), crime (67%), health (66%) and events in Iraq (63%). By contrast, only 21% named Big Brother or other reality television programmes, and 17% followed trade union politics. Men tend to follow Iraq, the UK economy, sports, Europe, international politics, Westminster politics and trade union politics more than women, who are more likely to follow issues relating to health, fashion, celebrity and reality television.

Older people are likely to follow a greater number of issues than younger people, including the environment, crime, Iraq, third world poverty, the UK economy, funding for local services, local council politics, and Westminster politics. Younger people, on the other hand, are more likely to follow issues relating to fashion, celebrity, reality television and popular music. Issues followed also vary according to class. 50% of middle class respondents follow international politics compared to 28% of

working class respondents; middle class respondents are also more likely to follow issues relating to health, the UK economy, Europe and Westminster politics.

Table 3B: Taking these things that matter to you, how often do you tend to talk to others about these kinds of things? (4 point scale from 1=never to 4=all the time)

	Gender		Age			SES		All
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
How often do you tend to talk to others about these kinds of things?	2.53	2.61	2.69**	2.54**	2.57**	2.66**	2.47**	2.57

Base: N=1017. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

55% of people talk about the issues that matter to them either all the time or quite often. Young people tend to talk about issues more than those over 35. 61% of middle class respondents talk to others about issues at least quite often, compared to 49% of working class respondents.

Table 3C: Do the people you tend to talk to about these issues tend to be…? (%)

	Gender		Age			SES		All
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
People at work	57**	45**	56**	69**	24**	56**	43**	50
Friends	83	87	88	83	85	86	84	85
Family	68**	76**	72	73	73	72	73	73

Base: N=960. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

Excluding the 5% of people who said they don't talk about issues to others at all, friends are the most common people to talk to (85% of respondents). 73% talk to their family about issues, while half talk to work colleagues. Men are more likely to talk to people at work, while more women talk to family members. A significantly higher number of middle class than working class respondents talk to colleagues about the issues that interest them.

Table 3D: Which public issue has been particularly important to you over the past 3 months - this needn't be an issue covered in the media, but can be any issue you think of general importance? (%)

	Gender		Age			SES		All
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
Iraq conflict	16**	11**	12	12	15	15	11	13
Crime/ law and order/	13	11	12	11	13	13	11	12
Hospitals/ NHS/ health	6	8	8	7	7	7	7	7
Election	5	5	6	6	4	6	4	5
Europe/ the Euro	7	3	4	6	5	7**	2**	5
Poverty	2**	7**	4	4	5	5	4	4
Education/schools	3**	6**	7*	5*	2*	4	4	4
Immigration/ asylum	5	3	4	5	4	4	4	4
Pensions/ benefits	2	4	1**	2**	6**	3	3	3
Taxes/ taxation	3	2	1	2	3	1**	3**	2
Environment issues	3	1	2	1	2	2	1	2
No issue named	24**	32**	30	28	27	24**	34**	28

Base: N=1017. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

- Most commonly named single issues were Iraq and crime.

When asked to name a single issue important to them over the previous three months, the most common responses were Iraq (13%), crime (12%) and health (7%). The survey was carried out a month after the 2005 general election and at the time of the French referendum on the EU constitution, and each of these issues were mentioned by 5% of respondents. Men were more likely to name Iraq, while more women named poverty and education as the single most important issue to them. Older respondents were more likely to name pensions, while younger respondents were more likely to name education. Middle class respondents were more likely to mention Europe, while a greater proportion of women and working class respondents named no issue at all.

Table 3E: Would you describe this issue as…? (%)

	Gender		Age			SES		All
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
Local	12	11	11	12	12	10	13	12
National	46	48	46	45	50	48	46	47
International	41	36	39	41	35	39	36	38

Base: N=789. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

Nearly half of people said that the issue they named was of national importance. 38% said it was an international issue, while 12 % said it was local. There was little variation by demographics.

Table 3F: Still thinking about the issue you have just mentioned, have you done any of these things in relation to it? (%)

	Gender		Age			SES		All
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
Signed a petition	31	31	30	34	28	32	29	31
Contacted an MP, councillor, etc	21	22	15*	21*	28*	21	23	21
Gone to a local meeting	21	18	18	21	19	21	18	19
A personal protest(e.g. boycotted product, worn a slogan, left a meeting)	12	11	12	12	10	13	8	11
Joined a local group or organisation	10	9	8	10	11	10	10	10
Contributed to an online discussion	10	7	19**	5**	4**	9	8	9
Got in touch with newspaper/TV/radio	11**	5**	9	7	9	9	7	8
Contributed to/created a public message (e.g. website, newsletter, video, etc)	10	7	11	8	7	9	7	8
Joined a national interest or campaign group	8	6	10	7	5	7	6	7
Gone on a public protest	7	6	8	7	5	8	5	7
Joined a political party	5	5	6	3	7	5	5	5
Took part in a strike	6**	2**	4	4	3	3	4	4
Joined an international group (e.g. Amnesty, Greenpeace)	3	3	6	2	3	3	3	3
None	44	46	42	46	47	45	46	45

Base: N=789. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

- Most common actions were signing a petition, contacting MP and going to a local meeting

Of those who named a specific issue that was important to them, 55% of respondents said that they had taken some form of action in relation to it. Nearly a third (31%) had signed a petition, 21 % had contacted an MP or councillor, 19% had gone to a local meeting, 11% had made a personal protest (such as boycotting a company), and 10% had joined a local group. Those over 55 are much more likely to have contacted an MP or councillor: 28%, compared to 10% of those under 25. Nearly one in five of those under 35 had contributed to an online discussion, while for those over 35 the figure falls to 5%. Men are twice as likely as women to have written to a newspaper or contacted a radio station in relation to the issue they named, and three times more likely to have taken part in a strike. Interestingly, no demographic group is significantly more or less likely not to have taken any action.

Table 3G: If not, why have you not taken any of these actions regarding the issue?

	Gender		Age			SES		All
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
No time	28**	19**	35**	26**	12**	26*	20*	23
It won't make a difference	25	21	23**	21**	26**	22**	24**	23
Not that kind of person	11	7	2**	14**	8**	10	8	9
Don't know anyone who has	4	9	8	6	7	7	6	7
Not interested	7	8	4	8	9	7	8	7
Other reason	30	35	33	26	40	33	31	33
Don't know	5	10	10	5	9	5	12	8

Base: N=351. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

- People who did not take any action most commonly cited a lack of time or the feeling that it would not make a difference if they did

When asked why they did not take any action in relation to the issue named, the most common identifiable reasons were a lack of time and the opinion that it would not make any difference (each 23%). Men and young and middle class respondents were more likely to cite a lack of time, while older and working class people were more likely to say it was because it would not make any difference. Those aged 35-54 were the most likely to say they didn't act because they are 'not that kind of person'.

Table 3H: Still on that issue, have you talked about it to other people?
Percentage of respondents who named an issue

	Gender		Age			SES		All
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
Not talked about it	10	8	6	11	9	8	10	9
People at work	57**	46**	64**	64**	25**	58**	41**	51**
Friends	78	77	83	76	76	80	74	78
Family	72	75	78	73	71	75	71	73

Base: N=789. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

- Of those who named an issue, most said that they had talked about it to others.

78% of those who had named an issue had spoken to friends, 73% to family members and 51% to work colleagues. The most significant variation by demographics was in how many had spoken to people at work, but this is explicable by demographic patterns of people in full-time employment. Only 9% of people said they had not talked to others about the issue they named.

4. Media Consumption

Table 4A: In a normal day, on average, how many hours do you spend watching TV? (%)

		Gender		Age**			SES**		All
Variable value and option		Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
1	No time	3	4	4	4	3	3	4	4
2	Less than 15 minutes	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2
3	15-30 mins	3	3	2	5	1	4	2	3
4	30 mins - 1 hour	13	15	18	18	7	17	10	14
5	1-3 hours	57	47	56	55	45	54	49	52
6	3-6 hours	20	25	16	16	35	18	29	23
7	6-12 hours	2	4	2	1	7	2	5	3
8	More than 12 hours	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0

Base: N=1012. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

- 52% of people say they watch between 1-3 hours of television per day

The majority of people said that they watch between 1 and 3 hours of television a day, though nearly a quarter watch more than three hours. Less than 10% of people said that they watched half an hour or less. Television viewing varies most significantly by age, with those over 55 more than twice as likely to watch in excess of than three hours a day than those under 55. A greater proportion of working class respondents said that they watch more than three hours of television a day, while middle class respondents were more likely to watch less than an hour.

Table 4B: In a normal day, on average, how many hours do you spend listening to the radio? (%)

		Gender		Age			SES		All
Variable value and option		Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
1	No time	19	24	21	20	24	18	26	22
2	Less than 15 minutes	4	5	6	3	4	6	3	5
3	15-30 mins	9	8	12	10	5	12	6	9
4	30 mins - 1 hour	21	17	21	22	15	21	17	19
5	1-3 hours	26	27	28	26	27	31	22	27
6	3-6 hours	11	11	7	9	15	7	15	11
7	6-12 hours	8	6	5	7	8	6	8	7
8	More than 12 hours	1	2	1	2	2	1	3	2

Base: N=1011. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

- 64% of people said they listen to more than half an hour of radio daily

78% of people said that they listen to the radio daily. While there was no significant variation by gender or age, middle class respondents are more likely to listen to a moderate amount (30 minutes to 3 hours), while working class people are more likely either to listen for a large amount of time or not at all. It is possible that radio use as a secondary activity is under-reported.

Table 4C: In a normal day, on average, how many hours do you spend reading a newspaper? (%)

		Gender**		Age**			SES		All
		Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
1	No time	19	30	29	28	18	23	26	25
2	Less than 15 minutes	12	11	14	14	7	11	12	11
3	15-30 mins	26	22	29	26	18	29	18	24
4	30 mins - 1 hour	29	27	23	25	35	26	30	28
5	1-3 hours	14	9	4	7	22	11	12	11
6	3-6 hours	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1
7	6-12 hours	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
8	More than 12 hours	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

Base: N=1006. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

- Three quarters of respondents said that they read a newspaper daily.

Of these, two-thirds said that they read for between 15 minutes and an hour a day. Overall, 11% of people said that they read a newspaper for more than an hour daily. Men spend significantly longer reading newspapers than women, 30% of whom do not read a newspaper at all. 82% of those over 55 read a paper on a daily basis, and 28% of those who do say they spend more than an hour a day.

Table 4D: In a normal day, on average, how many hours do you spend reading a book for leisure? (%)

		Gender**		Age**			SES**		All
		Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
1	No time	41	24	37	32	29	25	40	32
2	Less than 15 minutes	6	6	8	6	5	6	6	6
3	15-30 mins	16	13	17	18	9	18	10	15
4	30 mins - 1 hour	19	28	21	25	24	29	17	23
5	1-3 hours	17	23	16	16	27	19	21	20
6	3-6 hours	1	5	2	2	6	2	4	3
7	6-12 hours	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1
8	More than 12 hours	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Base: N=1009. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

- Over two-thirds of respondents said that they read a book for leisure on a daily basis.
- Of these, over a third spend more than an hour a day reading.

Men on average read significantly less than women, and 41% of men said that they do not read daily. 40% of working class respondents said that they do not read books daily, compared with 25% of middle class respondents. In terms of age, more young people said that they do not read, while those over 55 were both more likely to read and to spend more time doing so.

Table 4E: In a normal day, on average, how many hours do you spend on the internet or sending emails for yourself rather than for work? (%)

		Gender**		Age**			SES**		All
		Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
1	No time	45	55	28	43	76	36	66	50
2	Less than 15 minutes	9	9	8	14	5	11	7	9
3	15-30 mins	14	9	14	14	7	16	7	11
4	30 mins - 1 hour	16	16	25	18	6	21	10	16
5	1-3 hours	12	8	19	9	4	12	7	10
6	3-6 hours	3	2	4	2	1	3	2	2
7	6-12 hours	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1
8	More than 12 hours	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0

Base: N=1005. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

- 50% of respondents said that they daily go online for personal use.

13% do so for more than an hour a day. Two-thirds of working class respondents do not use the internet daily, compared with 36% of middle class respondents. There is a similarly significant age gap, with 72% of people under 35 going online daily, but 74% of those over 55 not using the internet for personal use at all on a daily basis. Men on average spend slightly more time on the internet than women.

Table 4F: Which of the following are your top 3 favourite types of entertainment? (%)

	Gender		Age			SES		All
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
Documentary	33	37	26**	35**	43**	34	36	35
Comedy	41**	28**	48**	33**	24**	37	31	34
Music	26*	33*	37**	26**	27**	30*	28*	29
Sport	40**	16**	30	26	27	29	25	27
Drama	16**	37**	28*	25*	28*	28	26	27
News	19	16	9**	19**	24**	19	15	18
Soaps	7**	27**	15	19	18	13**	23**	17
History	21**	12**	7**	16**	23**	14	19	16
Action	20**	11**	22**	17**	8**	15	16	15
Science Fiction	21**	10**	16*	19*	9*	15	14	15
Crime	9**	16**	14	15	11	14	12	13
Reality TV	7**	12**	16**	8**	6**	10	9	10

Base: N=1017. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

- Documentaries and comedy are the most popular type of entertainment, with more than a third of people naming them among their top three.

Those over 55 are much more likely to watch documentaries, while younger people prefer comedies. Men (41%) are also more likely than women (28%) to prefer comedies. The next most popular types of entertainment are music, sport and drama. Music was named by more women and younger respondents, while men were more than twice as likely as women to name sports as one of their favourite forms of entertainment. Men were also more likely to prefer history, action and science fiction, while more women than men prefer drama, crime and reality television. Younger respondents were more likely to name reality television and action, while more older respondents named news and history. A significantly higher number of working class respondents named soaps among their top three – 23%, versus 13% for middle class respondents.

5. News Consumption

Table 5A: Do you do any of these things at least 3 times a week on average? If so, which ones? (%)

	Gender		Age			SES		All
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
Read a local newspaper	58	55	54	57	59	55	58	56
Read a national newspaper	68**	55**	54**	57**	71**	62	60	61
Listen to the radio news	77**	66**	70**	77**	67**	74**	68**	71
Watch the television news	89	89	87	88	92	89	89	89
Go onto the internet for news	28**	18**	40**	25**	7**	31**	14**	23

Base: N=1017. *=significant at $p<0.05$; **=significant at $p<0.01$

- 89% of people watch TV news at least 3 times a week
- 61% read a national newspaper
- 23% use the internet for news

When respondents were asked about their news consumption, a majority said that they use all sources apart from the internet, which only 23% of people used at least three times a week as a news source. Television was by far the most common news source, with 89% of people watching it at least three times a week. 71% said that they listen to radio news, while 56% read their local newspaper. Local newspapers and television news were spread evenly according to gender, age and class.

Men on average are more likely to read a national newspaper, listen to radio news and go online for news; by contrast, only 18% of women read news on the internet regularly. Those over 55 are considerably more likely to read a national newspaper – 71% compared to 54% of those under 35, but 93% of older people said they do not go online for news. Middle class respondents are more likely both to listen to radio news and go on the internet for news than working class respondents.

Table 5B: (In relation to the single issue named by respondents – see Table 3D) For that issue, where have you got your information about it from? (%)

	Gender		Age			SES		All
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
TV news	67	64	68	63	66	67	62	65
National newspaper	55**	45**	48	49	52	54*	44*	50
Local newspaper	27	28	25	26	31	27	27	27
Radio	25	22	17*	27*	26*	27	20	24
Other people	24	24	24	24	25	26	22	24
Personal experiences	24	21	23	20	25	22	22	22
Internet	26**	17**	35**	24**	7**	27**	14**	21
Other TV	18	13	11	17	18	15	16	16
Magazine	8	7	6	8	7	9	5	7
Friends/family/leagues	3	5	4	5	3	3	5	4
Local government	4	3	3	4	3	3	3	3

Base: N=789. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

- 65% of people said that they got information about the issues they named as important from television

Television news is comfortably the most common source of information about the specific issue named by the respondent, with 65% of people naming it as a source. Half of the respondents said they got their information from a national newspaper, 27% from a local newspaper, 24% from the radio and 24% from other people. Men and middle class respondents were more likely to name national newspapers as a source. The internet is the most widely varying by demographics: more men, young and middle class respondents named the internet as a source than women, older and working class respondents.

Table 5C: And which of these sources was MOST useful in providing you with relevant information? (%)

	Gender		Age			SES		All
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
TV news	34	30	32	33	32	29	37	32
National newspaper	17	16	13	16	19	19	13	16
Personal experiences	11	10	12	9	12	12	10	11
Internet	10*	7*	17**	10**	1**	10	6	9
Other people	5	8	7	6	7	8	5	7
Local newspaper	5	6	5	5	6	5	7	6
Radio	5	4	1	6	6	5	4	5
Other TV	1	3	1	2	3	1	3	2
Magazine	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Friends/family/colleagues	1*	3*	3	3	1	2	2	2
Local government	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	2

Base: N=789. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

- Television is the single most useful source of information for almost a third of respondents, followed by a national newspaper (16%) and personal experiences (11%). Men and young people were more likely to name the internet as the most useful source of information.

Table 5D: To what extent would you agree or disagree that you were satisfied with the media coverage of this issue? (5 point scale from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

Gender		Age			SES		All
Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
3.49	3.39	3.37	3.48	3.45	3.40	3.51	3.44

Base: N=789. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

- 62% of people either agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the media coverage of the specific issue they mentioned, while 25% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. There was little variation in this level by demographics.

Table 5E: News Engagement - To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (5 point scale from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

	Gender		Age			SES		
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
People at work would expect you to know what's going on in the world (N=949)	3.44	3.31	3.22*	3.42*	3.47*	3.43	3.29	3.38
You follow the news to understand what's going on in the world (N=1012)	4.19	4.16	4.05**	4.15**	4.32**	4.21*	4.13*	4.17
You follow the news to know what other people are talking about (N=1015)	3.76	3.79	3.51**	3.78**	3.99**	3.72	3.84	3.77
Your friends would expect you to know what's going on in the world (N=1012)	3.66**	3.46**	3.24**	3.58**	3.80**	3.59	3.52	3.56
It's your duty to keep up with what's going on in the world (N=1015)	3.66	3.64	3.53**	3.57**	3.85**	3.74*	3.55*	3.65
There's no point in watching the news, because it deals with things you can do nothing about (N=1011)	2.22	2.24	2.10**	2.16**	2.42**	1.98**	2.54**	2.23
It's a regular part of your day to catch up with the news (N=1014)	3.98	3.95	3.73**	3.90**	4.23**	4.01**	3.91**	3.97
Politics has little connection with your life (N=1013)	2.83	2.97	2.75	2.89	3.04	2.78*	3.05*	2.90
You have a pretty good understanding of the main issues facing our country (N=1014)	4.07**	3.76**	3.59	3.91	4.15	3.93**	3.87**	3.91
It doesn't really matter which party is in power, in the end things go on pretty much the same (N=1007)	3.18	3.19	3.10	3.22	3.21	3.06**	3.34**	3.19
Sometimes politics seems so complicated that you can't really understand what's going on (N=1016)	3.08**	3.55**	3.49	3.28	3.23	3.10**	3.61**	3.32
You often feel that there's too much media, so you need to switch off (N=1012)	3.60	3.70	3.57*	3.57*	3.81*	3.58	3.74	3.65

*=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

- 70% say they have a duty to keep up with what's going on in the world
- 81% claim good knowledge of issues facing the country
- 44% consider that politics has little connection with their lives

The majority of people (54%) agree that people at work would expect them to know what's going on in the world, while 66% say that their friends would expect them to know what's going on. Men and older people are more agree to this, , with 72% of those over 55 saying their friends would expect them to know what's going on. 90% of people say they follow the news to understand what's going on in the world, while 76% say that they follow the news to know what other people are talking about. Again, those over 55 are more likely to follow the news for these reasons, and they are also more likely to report a duty to keep up with what's going on in the world.

This is reflected in regular news consumption: 88% of those over 55 say it is a regular part of their day to keep up with the news, compared with an overall average of 80%. While there is no overall clear variation by class, a more subtle examination reveals significant differences. In particular, those in socioeconomic categories C1 and C2 are least likely to catch up with the news regularly, but the figures are still relatively high at 75% and 75% respectively. 81% of people feel they have a good understanding of the main issues facing the country; this figure rises to 86% for men and 85% for AB respondents. The question of whether politics has little connection with their life divides respondents: 44% agree, 49% disagree – and working class respondents are more likely to agree. Working class respondents are also more likely to say that it makes no difference which political party is in power (60% against mean of 54%), and that politics is too complicated (69% against mean of 61%). 70% of people overall often feel that there is too much media, a figure that rises to 76% for those over 55.

6. Media Trust and literacy

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the media? By media, we mean television, newspapers, radio, internet, etc.
(5 point scale from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

	Gender		Age			SES		
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
The things the media cover have little to do with your life (N=1007)	2.80	2.85	2.48	2.77	2.93	2.71**	2.96**	2.83
Different sources of news tend to give different accounts of what's going on (N=1005)	3.93	3.80	3.84	3.86	3.88	3.96**	3.74**	3.86
You trust the television to report the news fairly (N=1009)	3.50	3.62	3.43	3.54	3.69	3.47*	3.67*	3.56
You trust the press to report the news fairly (N=1010)	2.84	2.85	2.86	2.82	2.86	2.75*	2.97*	2.85
You trust the internet to report the news fairly (N=821)	3.15	3.08	3.14	3.12	3.07	3.09	3.16	3.12
You trust the media to cover the things that matter to you (N=1011)	3.51	3.49	3.38	3.57	3.51	3.45	3.55	3.50
You generally compare the news on different channels, newspapers or websites (N=1006)	3.48**	3.24**	3.24	3.34	3.47	3.34	3.37	3.35

*=significant at $p<0.05$; **=significant at $p<0.01$

- 40% say that the things the media cover have little to do with their lives

When asked about their attitudes to the media, 40% of people said that the things the media cover had little to do with their lives, while 51% disagreed or disagreed strongly. 79% agreed that different sources of news give different accounts of events, while 59% actively compared different sources. More people trust television to report the news fairly than any other media: 68%, versus 40% for the press, and 36% for the internet. Working class respondents are more likely to find the media irrelevant to their lives, while middle class respondents are more likely to agree that different sources of news give different accounts. Men tend to compare sources more than women.

7. Other findings

Table 7A: In a normal day, on average, how many hours would you say you have for yourself? (%)

		Gender**		Age**			SES**		All
		Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
1	No time	3	7	6	6	2	5	4	5
2	Less than 15 mins	1	1	2	0	0	1	1	1
3	15-30 mins	2	3	3	2	2	3	2	2
4	30 mins - 1 hour	6	11	7	14	4	9	8	9
5	1-3 hours	27	33	34	37	21	34	27	30
6	3-6 hours	36	29	34	33	31	33	32	33
7	6-12 hours	16	7	11	6	17	10	12	11
8	More than 12 hours	11	9	3	3	23	7	14	10

Base: N=1009. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

83% of people said that they have at least an hour's leisure per day, and 54% have more than three hours. Men were more likely than women to have more than three hours for themselves, while 21% of women said that they had less than an hour of leisure a day. Middle-aged people are significantly less likely to have more than 6 hours a day, while 23% of those over 55 said that they have more than 12 hours free a day. Middle class respondents were more likely to have less than three hours to themselves a day, while twice as many working class than middle class respondents said they had more than 12 hours.

Table 7B: You generally have enough time to do what you want in the day;
In general you are satisfied with your life at the moment (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

	Gender		Age			SES		All
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
You generally have enough time to do what you want in the day	3.54**	3.36**	3.17**	3.18**	3.99**	3.31**	3.63**	3.45**
In general you are satisfied with your life at the moment	4.01	4.02	3.95**	3.90**	4.20**	4.06	3.96	4.02

Base: N=1017. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

Mirroring the overall number of hours that respondents said they had to themselves, more men than women, more older than younger, and more working class than middle class respondents said they have enough time for themselves. Overall, 64% of people thought that they had enough time, while 32% did not. When asked if they were satisfied with their lives at present, 82% either agreed or strongly agreed, while 13% disagreed. 89% of those over 55 said they are satisfied, compared with 79% of those under 35.

Table 7C: How safe do you feel living in the neighbourhood you live in now?
(4 point scale from 1=not at all safe to 4=very safe)

Gender		Age			SES		All
Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	
3.33	3.31	3.26	3.35	3.34	3.36**	3.25**	3.32

Base: N=1017. *=significant at p<0.05; **=significant at p<0.01

91% of people said that they felt either very or fairly safe in their neighbourhoods, and there was little variation by demographic. The groups most likely to feel unsafe were those in the C1 socioeconomic category (14%) and those aged 18-24.

8. Regression Analysis of Key Drivers: Voting and Interest in Politics

Table 8A: Regression equation, predicting voting and political interest

	Voting	Political interest
Political interest	.243 ***	N/A
Age	.286 ***	n.s.
Political trust	.085 ***	n.s.
Social capital (local involvement)	.060 *	.102 ***
SES	-.059 *	-.117 ***
News engagement	.091 **	0.371***
'You know where to go to get the information you need'	.066 *	n.s.
Time spent reading a newspaper	-.077 **	.093 ***
Time spent listening to the radio	.060 *	n.s.
Whether listen to radio news regularly	n.s.	.075 **
Whether access the news online regularly	n.s.	.062 *

Note: *Public Connection Survey* (2005) of UK adults aged 18+ (N=996). Asterisks indicate the level of statistical significance of the coefficients with p<0.05*, p<0.01**, p<0.005***.

- Multiple factors influence propensity to vote and interest in politics: demographics, social capital and media attitudes and use.
- Different media influence voting and interest in politics in different ways.
- Key driving factors of propensity to vote are age, interest in politics, political trust and news engagement
- Key driving factors of interest in politics are news engagement, high socioeconomic status, social capital and time spent reading a newspaper
- Overall television consumption plays no significant role

A series of regressions was carried out in order to establish the 'key drivers' of people's propensity to vote and their interest in politics. In the first instance demographic variables only were used to predict

these dependent variables. Age (older) and socioeconomic status (higher) predicted 10% of the variance in voting – gender played no part. Age (older), SES (higher) and gender (male) accounted for 7% of the variance in interest in politics.

In the next step, measures of trust, efficacy and social capital were added to the equation, and political interest was added to the predicting factors for voting. This doubled the variance for predicting likelihood to vote: higher political trust, interest in politics and social capital are all key driving factors in people's propensity to vote. Social capital also predicts interest in politics, but, interestingly, political trust plays no role.

Finally, a regression was carried out to see whether, beyond these variables, media attitudes and consumption played an explanatory role. Media variables added an extra 2% to the explained variance in voting, and 10% to that of interest in politics. People's news engagement, which is explained below, was a significant driving factor for both voting and interest in politics. Time spent listening to the radio influences voting (positively), as does the sense that someone knows where to find the information they need; also listening to news on the radio is a significant indicator of political interest. Interestingly, more time spent reading newspapers predicts lower levels of voting, but predicts higher levels of interest in politics. This may be because, while the reading of most newspapers is motivated by political interest, there is a residual category of newspapers whose reading is associated with other factors such as entertainment which (once political interest has been taken into account) are not associated with being likely to vote.

8B: News Engagement

- News engagement is predicted by social expectation to follow the news, interest in politics, local efficacy, age (older), social capital and political trust. It is also positively correlated with level of television news consumption

- News engagement is not predicted for by socioeconomic status and gender, suggesting that it may take various forms across genders and classes, rather than being associated with one gender or class (by contrast with disengagement)

- Those who are more engaged with the news are more likely to be media literate (comparing sources or agreeing that different sources of news give different versions of events) and have higher levels of media trust.

People's news engagement plays a significant role in their propensity to vote and interest in politics. The variable was constructed upon responses to five questions: (1) It's a regular part of my day to catch up with the news, (2) I follow the news to understand what's going on in the world, (3) I follow the news to know what other people are talking about, (4) It's my duty to keep up with what's going on in the world, and (5) I have a pretty good understanding of the main issues facing our country. The Cronbach's alpha for the composite scale is 0.71.

8C: Interests and Actions

- Those who were low in political interest and political efficacy, and those who experienced low social expectations on them to 'keep up', were less likely to take an action.
- Non-actors were higher in political/media trust, and lower in media literacy.
- Further, the more one is middle class, politically interested, politically distrustful and politically efficacious, the more actions one takes.

- Binary Logistic, predicting for action taken in regard to issue named:

	Social expectation	Media Trust	Political Trust	Radio overall	Reading books	Television news	'You can affect things by getting involved'	'You know where to find the information you need'	Interest in politics	Compare news sources
B	0.199	-0.251	-0.196	0.08	0.12	-0.573	0.142	0.17	0.205	0.181
Sig.	0.007	0.008	0.008	0.029	0.006	0.012	0.037	0.018	0.001	0.002

8D: Disengagement scale

- Using a scale to measure how disengaged people are, those who are more disengaged are lower in socioeconomic status, older, and lower in political interest and political efficacy.*

- Media consumption also contributes a little to disengagement, this being associated with more reading of the local paper and less reading of books. The more disengaged, the more people watch television also.*

The disengagement scale was constructed from a variety of variables, each using a scale from 1=disagree to 5=agree: 'You don't like to discuss politics with other people', 'You don't get involved in political protests', 'There's no point in watching the news, because it deals with things you can do nothing about', 'Politics has little connection with your life', 'It doesn't really matter which party is in power, in the end things go on pretty much the same', 'Sometimes politics seems so complicated that you can't really understand what's going on', 'You often feel that there's too much media, so you need to switch off', 'People like us have no say in what the government does', 'Sometimes you feel strongly about an issue, but don't know what to do about it'. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale is 0.59, which suggests that its correlations should be interpreted as indicative rather than conclusive. Separate media and political disengagement scales were found to be *less* reliable, suggesting that media and political factors overlap in determining disengagement.

* The correlations in the bulleted points above are all significant at $p<0.05$,, as follows: socioeconomic status ($r=0.228$), age ($r=0.102$), political interest ($r=-0.328$), 'you can affect things by getting involved' ($r=-0.179$), local newspaper ($r=0.090$), reading books ($r=-0.086$), television viewing ($r=0.148$)

Appendix 4: Measures used in the survey analysis

A range of factors has been identified by the research literature as possible explanations of political participation – including political interest, trust, efficacy, social capital and social norms. The Public Connection survey found that these are themselves all interrelated in complex ways. Additionally, the survey measured media consumption (hours per day), regularity of news consumption, and a range of other media-related variables.

The key variables were measured in the survey as follows (overall findings and main demographic differences have already been noted above).

Factor	Question	% pop
Voting	You generally vote in national elections	82
Political interest	You are generally interested in what's going on in politics	65
Political trust	You trust politicians to tell the truth	21
	You trust politicians to deal with the things that matter	45
	You trust the government to do what is right	43
Social capital	You play an active role in one or more voluntary, local or political organisations	18
	You are involved in voluntary work	28
	Being involved in your neighbourhood is important to you	62
Media literacy	You know where to go to get the information that you need	82
	Different sources of news tend to give different accounts of what's going on	79
	You generally compare the news on different channels, newspapers or websites	59
News engage -ment	You follow the news to understand what's going on in the world	90
	You follow the news to know what other people are talking about	76
	Its your duty to keep up with what's going on in the world	70
	Its a regular part of your day to keep up with the news	80
	You have a pretty good understanding of the main issues facing our country	81
Media trust	You trust the television to report the news fairly	68
	You trust the press to report the news fairly	40
	You trust the internet to report the news fairly	36
	You trust the media to cover the things that matter to you	65

Appendix 5: Sampling and Survey Methodology

Recruitment

On our behalf, ICM carried out a national (GB) quota survey of 1017 people by telephone during the weekend of 3-5 June 2005, which asked questions about media consumption, media attitudes, political attitudes, local involvement or efficacy, specific issues currently being followed by respondents and actions taken in relation to these issues. The context was one month after the UK general election, the same weekend as the French vote on the EU constitution, and with Iraq continuing to feature prominently in the news media. As with the diary phase there was a current celebrity scandal (the Michael Jackson trial).

Demographics

The demographic breakdown of the survey population is as follows:

	Gender		Age						Class				
	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	D	E
N	488	529	112	173	203	173	152	203	254	295	213	85	170
%	48	52	11	17	20	17	15	20	25	29	21	8	17

Comparison of the survey sample against the 2001 Census demonstrates that the sample is statistically representative for age and gender, though there is a slight socioeconomic bias built into it. Specifically, the sample population over-represents the AB socioeconomic category, and under-represents the C1 and D groups, to a statistically significant level by chi-square analysis at $p<0.01$. Rim weighting was applied to correct for this imbalance. The sample is representative in terms of ethnic make-up and residential status. There is a slight under-representation of the Christian demographic and a slight over-representation of employed persons in terms of working status. The ICM sample was again rim-weighted to redress these small imbalances. Such small divergences from the most recent census are of the same order as those in comparable surveys.

Appendix 6 Where to find out more about the Public Connection Project

The project's website is

www.publicconnection.org

This contains recent papers and the texts of public presentations of project results.

A full book-length report on the project's findings will be published by Palgrave in 2007 as:

> Nick Couldry, Sonia Livingstone and Tim Markham, *Media Consumption and Public Engagement: Beyond the Presumption of Attention.*

Published and forthcoming journal articles and book chapters on the project include:

> Nick Couldry, Sonia Livingstone and Tim Markham (2006, forthcoming) 'Connection or Disconnection? Tracking the Mediated Public Sphere in Everyday Life' in R. Butsch (ed) *Media and the Public Sphere.* Palgrave.
>
> Nick Couldry and Tim Markham (2006, forthcoming) 'Public Connection through Media Consumption: Between Oversocialization and Desocialization?' in P. Simonson (ed) *Politics, Social Networks and the History of Mass Communications Research*. Sage/ Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science.
>
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Anyone wishing to inquire further about the project and its detailed results is very welcome to email the report's authors:

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More information about the ESRC/AHRC-funded Cultures of Consumption programme (Director, Dr Frank Trentmann) can be found at www.consume.bbk.ac.uk