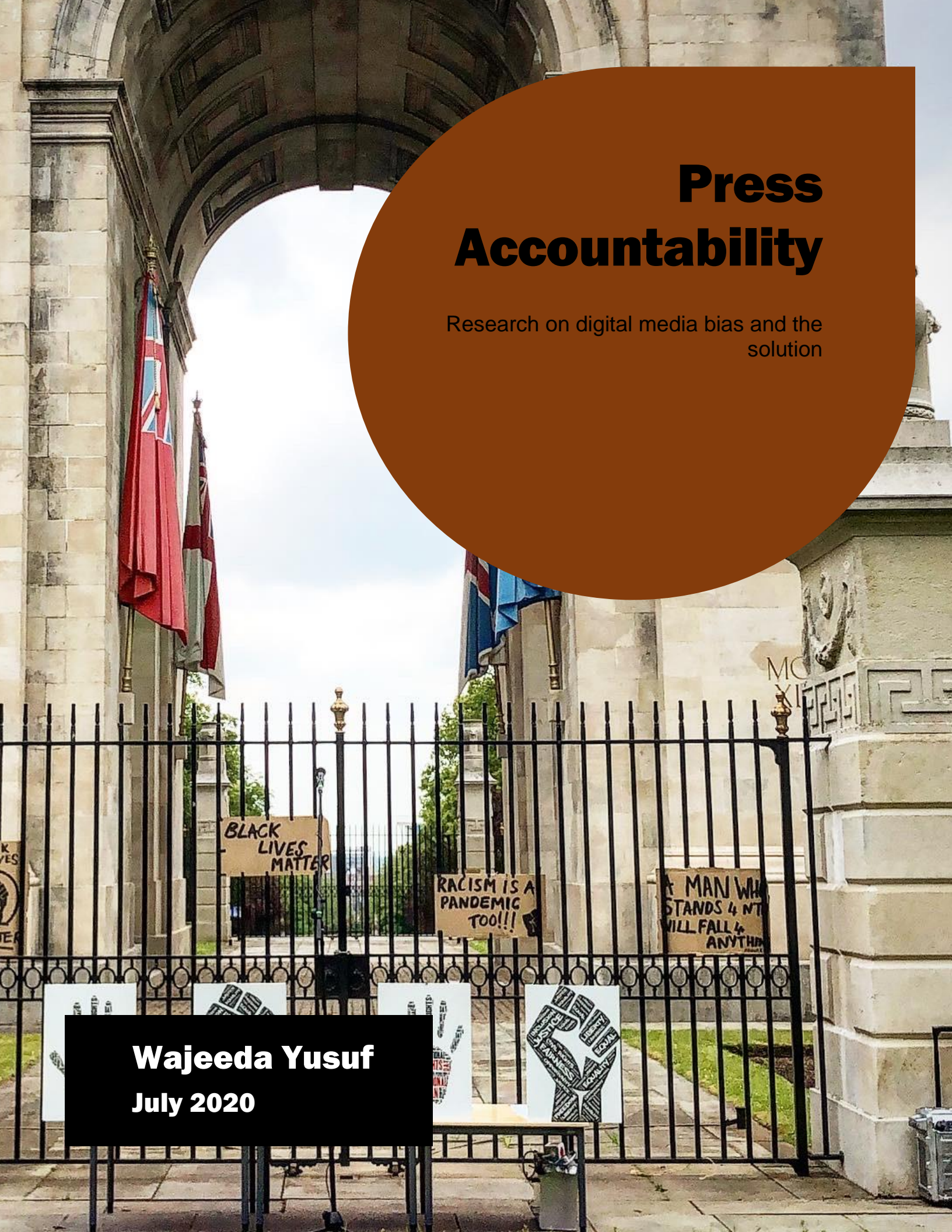# Press Accountability

Research on digital media bias and the solution

Wajeeda Yusuf

July 2020

Press Accountability

Research on digital media bias and the solution

Preamble

I firmly believe that positive change in terms of best practice for online websites, retailers and social media are long overdue, many people socialise, consume news and shop online and the digital footfall is increasing year on year. There has to be an increased pressure on online developers and content creators to ensure websites maintain a strong element of online integrity and this may mean stronger regulation on how people develop and update their website or introduction of key legislations that ensures that best practice is followed by all as a standard.

Many online news websites, blogs, podcasts, vlogs and more have become a source for news and fact for many of their consumers, and like traditional print newspapers many people believe if it is on this website this must be true, with very little fact checking being completed to verify if the news is actually factually true. Depending on the structures of online websites, many organisations can request their team changes content or information on a website with a click of a button, there is a real concern based on examples and evidence in my research that this is not being used ethically or with integrity by all news agencies and this poses a real concern.

Introduction

After the announcement that some areas in Leicester and Leicestershire would be the first to go into a local lockdown the media spotlight was firmly on Leicester for that week and weeks to come. There have been rumours and relentless racial bias that has been plastered across front pages of newspapers, homepages of online news websites, which has resulted in opening the floodgates for many racist comments across comment sections in both local and national press.

This research is a small snapshot of the impact that the press can have on communities including examples of bias which led to online attacks on groups of people and also add fuel to racist, xenophobic and bigoted views that cause distress to communities in Leicester and across the UK.

We understand and respect the need for freedom of press and therefore propose a solution that is more pragmatic which enables clear transparency and a view to encourage ethical digital journalism in order to understand the impact of what news agencies publish.

Is there press bias?

I have highlighted *some* national and local examples of where press bias has affected people from a race, religion and location perspective. While majority of these stories are from Leicester and Leicestershire I felt it is important to highlight some key national stories that have also had similar implications in the past to emphasise this is not a new issue but a continued attack that people from ethnic minority backgrounds have to face while living in the UK.

<u>Local Press</u>

Example 1:

As Leicester went into a local lockdown on Monday 29 June 2020 Leicestershire Live reported this with an image of the BLM protest that happened on Saturday 6 June 2020 more than two weeks before the lockdown and therefore no link with the lockdown story, this image was later changed to an image of social distancing signage around the city.

https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/government-wants-leicester-lockdown-2-4273027
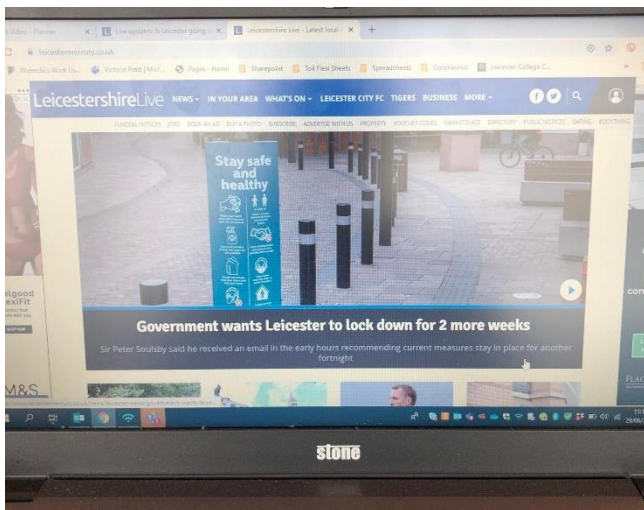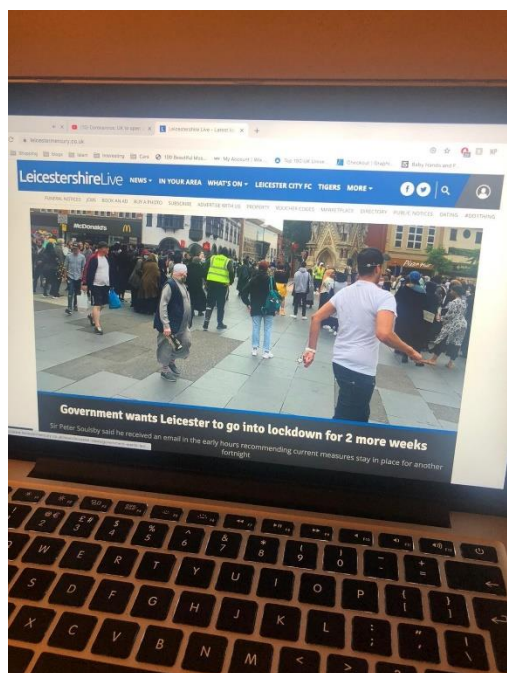
There is also a video attached to this article of City Mayor Sir Peter Soulsby standing in front of a mosque giving an interview in relation to the lockdown. This would also feed into the bias that it is possibly ethnic minorities or a religious group that is the reason for the lockdown. The article was placed online on Monday 29 June 2020 and last updated on Friday 3 July 2020 but there is no way of seeing what these changes were.

The below comment under this article is an example of how the style of reporting feeds into a certain narrative for some people. There were many other comments deleted, which you can tell from the replies they had a racist or Islamophobic stance.
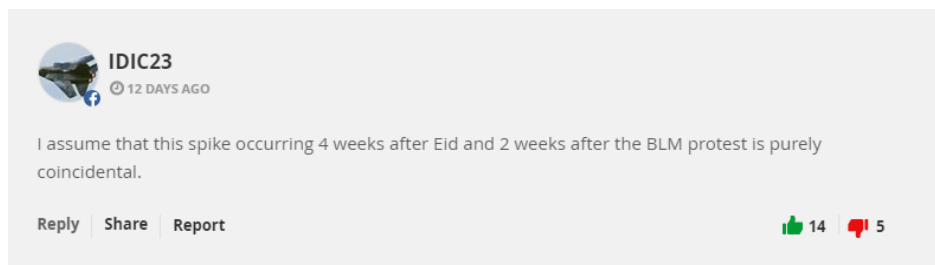
Example 2

On Thursday 9 July 2020 the story with regards to 23 Leicester hotspots where people have been flouting rules was on the front page of the website. The parks and locations were from all around the city and county but the image chosen was of some Asian men playing cricket in Spinney Hill Park a week before Leicester was placed into local lockdown. After a week of comments nationally and locally blaming the immigrant population this image fed into this rhetoric and it was irresponsible of Leicestershire Live to use this image when they already knew that racist comments, which they often do little to monitor or manage, were following this story both on their website and social media.

Revealed: 23 Leicester hotspots where people have been flouting social distancing during lockdown

https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/revealed-23-leicester-hotspots-people-4310043#comments-section

Some comments on this article below but this also resulted in many comments being deleted in the comments sections.

Jimb
⏱ 17 HOURS AGO

Obvious who majority residents living here.

Reply   Share   Report   👍 1   👎 0

RogerMarlow
⏱ 2 DAYS AGO

Over the Last 2 weeks have Reported No Social Distancing accouring by a boating company on the River Soar (ethnic funerals) concern from local authorities pathetic don't want to know the truth even though a picture can be supplied living here with this can be sheer hell just don't know what's coming to my Village. What ever Happened to Equal Wrights and fairness what his this once Great Country coming to fed up with Being treated by Irresponsible who don't want to do their job Correctly

Reply   Share   Report   👍 9   👎 2

Example 3

On Wednesday 8 July 2020 the following story was published after a letter was sent by Leicester Stand up to Racism with signatures from MPs, organisations and people from across the city.

Comments in this article had to be turned off due to how many offensive comments were placed on this article and the Leicester Mercury were unable to monitor all the comments in real-time.

The article on Leicestershire Live received some interesting comments and the racist undertones are quite apparent. I replied to a comment by Helena Hunt who actually has on her profile that she is a teacher at Leicester Montessori Grammar School for clarification, she did not answer my question, but did go on to 'like' the comments of Andy who was clearly implying that the Asian race is to blame. The article itself was about not blaming a race so to have these comments underneath this post showed how many people did think that race was to blame.

Helena Hunt
Take responsibility 👍😠 14
Like · Reply · 3 d

˄ Hide 17 replies

"Most relevant" is selected, so some replies may have been filtered out.

Wajeeda Yusuf
Who are you asking to take responsibility? The 'vocal minority using the lockdown to spread racist and foul ideas' or general asian population who are not all to blame for the actions of a few who have broken rules, noting that the breaking of rules is not just down to one race group or a group of people. I hope you are not justifying that it is okay for the hateful racist comments?
Like · Reply · 3 d   👍 4

Andy Bowerbank
Wajeeda Yusuf 45 asians living in 1 house hows that for a fact!!!!   ⋯
Like · Reply · 3 d   👍 1

Wajeeda Yusuf
Andy Bowerbank The fact it was totally fake that for a fact!
Like · Reply · 3 d   👍 4

👍 1 Helena Hunt

Andy Bowerbank
Wajeeda Yusuf that is not true i have friends in the police who told me it was true,no need to apologise
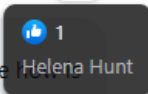Like · Reply · 3 d · Edited   👍 1

Wajeeda Yusuf
Andy Bowerbank So you feel it is okay to blame a whole race for the actions of a few? You think it is okay to spout racist ideas because of a few people? This is justifed to you?
Like · Reply · 3 d   👍 5

Example 4

A group of volunteers from different races and religions got together to produce a video of solidarity, and to say the city will support each other in order to move forward during this difficult lockdown period. There were still comments left on this that were quite hateful, racist and had false information.

https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/watch-we-city-solidarity-leicester-4292244#comments-section

FancyThat
🕓 8 DAYS AGO

Here we go, the usual hollow words of 'solidarity'. The city is in lock down again purely because there is no solidarity. If every citizen had adhered to the guidelines, then we would be reopening the city again tomorrow. With sweat shops, places of worship, certain shops and groups of individuals consistently breaking distancing measures, what did we expect. Leicester is an embarrassment, being the first city to lock down again is no laughing matter. Stop with the silly videos about 'solidarity' and 'we're all one' nonsense and start adhering to the rules!

Reply | Share | Report   👍 12 👎 2

Example 1

This image of a lady in hijab walking down a Leicester street next to a social distance sign was used across several media platforms, websites and social media. If this image was not used other images that were used were similar, featuring someone from an ethnic minority background.

Here are some of the websites this image was used on:

https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-how-do-you-lock-down-a-city-like-leicester-12017622

All the images used on newsontheflipside.com are of people from ethnic minorities, and then where there are white people used it is to show the impact of lockdown almost insinuating that ethnic minorities are the problem and this is who it is affecting:

https://newsontheflipside.com/world-news/leicester-will-stay-in-lockdown-with-schools-non-essential-shops-closed-again-and-pubs-to-stay-shut-for-2-more-weeks/

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8472411/JOHN-NAISH-UKs-deadliest-coronavirus-threat-complacency.html

https://www.marketwatch.com/story/five-things-to-know-about-leicester-the-uk-city-thats-key-to-preventing-a-second-wave-of-coronavirus-2020-06-30

https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/coronavirus-leicester-lockdown-travel-ban-matt-hancock-latest-a9592616.html

https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/11986362/leicester-local-lockdown-coronavirus-schools-shops-shut/

Other articles where images were used that only displayed people of ethnic background attached to story about a Leicester Lockdown:

https://metro.co.uk/2020/06/29/leicester-stay-lockdown-current-level-another-two-weeks-12915545/

https://metro.co.uk/2020/06/30/coronavirus-news-live-uk-death-toll-43575-leicester-back-lockdown-12920229/

https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jun/30/leicester-lockdown-what-are-the-new-covid-19-restrictions

https://www.expressandstar.com/news/uk-news/2020/06/30/what-measures-are-being-imposed-in-the-leicester-lockdown/

The Daily Mail had several articles related to the Leicester Lockdown with similar pictures:

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article-8473173/Coronavirus-Leicester-A-timeline-key-dates-developments.html

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article-8467531/Government-supporting-Leicester-amid-chance-local-lockdown.html

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article-8474217/Targeted-measures-failed-stop-spread-Leicester--Matt-Hancock.html

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-8480259/UK-govt-accused-data-bungles-towns-fear-lockdowns.html

There are many more examples of this and I can't start to possibly cite them all, although I feel this snapshot highlights the key points.

Example 2

Although I have predominantly showed press bias in terms of Leicester being locked down, I wanted to also highlight general bias that adds fuel to this and it is something that has an effect on society on a daily basis.

After the horrific attack in a Reading park where people sadly lost their lives. The story broke on social media and various sites. I followed the story closely on Sky News.

About 8pm Saturday 20 June 2020 I started to see this story breaking across Twitter. One of the first tweets I came across was a Sky News tweet at exactly 8.43pm saying "Police dealing with 'serious incident' after Black Lives Matters protest in Reading" with a big yellow BREAKING NEWS box across the front this was the first tweet the news agency had put out there in regards to the incident. This prompted people who had racist views and those who are opposing the BLM movement to come out in force against the BLM movement in order to discredit the peaceful protest that had happened there TWO hours before this incident, there was no evidence at this stage the BLM movement had anything to do with the attack.

At 8.48pm a tweet including the video clip of what was broadcasted on the news channel was shared. This broadcast also emphasised the fact that the **#blacklivesmatter** earlier in the day had taken place in that particular park.

At 9.21pm this rhetoric was updated to say "Police are dealing with a "serious incident" at a park in Reading" and the association with the BLM movement was removed from the headline, 38 min to do damage and enable people to bash innocent people using this disgusting attack. Until 9.30pm BBC were also mentioning the BLM protests that had finished earlier in their reporting of the incident.

As of 6.10am on Sunday 21 June 2020 the first Tweet including BLM had 1.6k retweets and 1.3k likes and the 'correction' removing the connection had 188 retweets and 266 likes. This shows that all those people that had already been given the impression these were someway related have not been reached to change the rhetoric and this can leave a lasting impression against innocent people.

At 10.38pm a tweet by Sky News read "BREAKING: A source has told Sky News they believe the multiple stabbing incident in Reading is terror-related." This time with a video from the Sky Newsroom of a journalist highlighting that someone has confirmed this is the case. This now ignites the same group of people to start bashing Muslims even though nothing was said about the identity of said 'terrorist'.

At 10.59pm the same is put out to say it is terror-related. At 11.17pm it is still being said it is terror-related, at 12.12am in the final tweet relating to this incident Sky News still maintained the 'terror-related' rhetoric, despite their own report highlighting the below from the police:
Detective Chief Superintendent Ian Hunter, of Thames Valley Police, said: "We have made one arrest and at this stage we are not looking for any other people in connection with this incident.
"There is no intelligence to suggest that there is any further danger to the public, however we urge people to remain vigilant and report anything suspicious by calling police.

"This is not currently being treated as a terrorism incident, however officers are keeping an open mind as to the motivation for the incident and are being supported by colleagues from Counter Terrorism Policing South East."

The groups of people demonised by this incident straight away without waiting to get the full story that first impression made by the story will very quickly leave a mark on those who are already waiting to pounce on a whole community of people.

The article attached must have been changed numerous times in the course of the night with the last edit Sunday 21 June 2020 at 11.34am.

As of Saturday 11 July 2020 the URL still holds the link to the BLM protest as seen below even though the article has since been changed, no citations have been made or retractions issued.
https://news.sky.com/story/police-dealing-with-serious-incident-after-black-lives-matter-protest-in-reading-12011506?fbclid=IwAR3w5hdHwQh1rfZpNtACFK0YqpXJh4iClhPcdn-uIizMyGzCrBkA_27upeg

You can see below the tweets that were tweeted by Sky News at this time as well as the engagement levels at the time. As of Saturday 11 July 2020 both of these tweets have been deleted but the legacy link is still there.

Example 3

Student Mariam Issa who studied Media and Communications at De Montfort University included information in her dissertation about The Daily Mail's reporting on a terror incident which led to Tommy Robinson being able to go on national TV and use false statistics. Daily Mail published a small retraction but the damage had been done.

Extract from the dissertation:

Over recent years, there has been a pattern in the difference of reporting violent and criminal acts when the perpetrator is white and when the preparator is an ethnic minority, thus suggesting a media bias in crime reporting and coverage by the news. Seide (2015), cited by Colburn and Melander (2018) found evidence that two separate crimes were similar: one consisted of white suspects and the other featured ethnic minority suspects.

It was established that the reporting and framing of the news articles differed. The white suspects' pictures were featured but showcased them academically by their yearbook photos, therefore connoting them to be educated and civilised. In contrast, the ethnic minority suspects had their mugshots on display for the readers to see immediately. This framework and agenda can be seen through the case studies of the New Zealand mass shooting in 2019 and the Finsbury Park attack in 2017.

The Finsbury Park attack took place on June the 19th 2017, was a terror attack carried out by a white male perpetrator, where he ran over Muslim worshippers coming out of their place of worship with his van. This attack resulted in one man dying and nine other worshippers left seriously injured. The attack took place during the Muslim holy month, Ramadan, which is a time where Muslims increase their time spiritually and charitably for those less fortunate and emphasise the spirit of community, by attending the mosque.

This major event in the UK was reported by many news outlets and differed in terms of framing when analysing the research material. The right-wing press, such as The Sun, indicated their agenda of justification through their official social media account promoting their article on the event with the description 'Shocking scenes from last night's suspected revenge terror attack carried out in #FinsburyPark.'. The choice of grammar, such as the verb 'revenge', may have been used to imply that those Muslim victims are, in fact, the same terrorists who are responsible for terrorist attacks in the UK.

Arguably it can be seen as creating an association of Muslims being linked to terrorism and violence, thus reinforcing the framework that Poole (2002) investigated within the British press in the 90s. Therefore, this highlights the notion that the narrative and representation of Muslims being dangerous and violent is a characterisation that is still growing. A similar framework of justification can arguably be seen by The Daily Mail, who reported on this event and used terms such as 'white van man' and 'dad-of-four'. The absent word 'terrorist' is missing in the headlines, the framing of the article promotes the perpetrator in a humane mannerism, it explains that he had split up from his partner and was living in a tent.

By disclosing his personal situation, it creates a sense of empathy and sympathy for the perpetrator whilst disregarding the violent and damaging attack that he had committed. The Daily Mail article also showcases images of the perpetrator, smiling and with friends, rather than his mugshot. Images of Dan Osbourne's family are featured, such as his mother and his partner. Thus, reinforcing the framing and message that the perpetrator comes from a loving family. The article uses statements from family members who state they have never heard Mr. Osbourne being racist or bad-mouthing Muslims. The report also stated in their headline the attack took place outside the mosque 'where hate cleric Abu Hamza once preached.' This phrase from the headline has now been removed due to complaints that were highlighted. For instance, Miqdaad Versi, media spokesperson for Muslim Council of Britain and a known activist who combats and brings awareness to Islamophobic discourse.

This problematic statement was reported on the front page of The Daily Mail as it appeared to victim-blame the mosque and linked an association between a known radical and a place of worship. However, The Daily Mail apologised and amended their headline. The issue is that it had already been published, circulated and distributed, readers of The Daily Mail possibly had seen the headline already due to the wide circulation the company has, consisting of 1,132,908 according to Audit Bureau of Circulation (2020).

Furthermore, Tommy Robinson, a known far-right and former leader of the English Defence League cited this article on Good Morning Britain. He used it to justify his standpoint on Muslims in Britain. An important notion to add is that media outlets give figures such as Mr. Robinson a platform to express hate speech, despite his high number of convictions and previous implication of hooliganism. Thus, it can be argued that the media may accept negative speech about Muslims. Therefore, it can be argued that framing and wording of articles can fuel anti-Muslim ideologies.

This highlights where press has been used incorrectly and the damage and effect that it can have before a retraction has been published.

Example 4

This double standard of reporting has also extended into football and celebrity culture. The below shows evidence where the same action is reported very differently when the footballer is white and the footballer is black as highlighted by Raheem Sterling, a Manchester City footballer after being racially taunted by Chelsea fans while on the pitch.

An extract from a news story published by Martenzie Johnson on the website The Undefeated looked into this issue in more detail.

Read here: https://theundefeated.com/features/raheem-sterling-manchester-city-chelsea-and-the-racist-media-coverage-of-black-athletes/

A day after the match, Sterling took to his personal Instagram account to address the incident. The 24-year-old said he laughed off the racist taunts at the time because "I don't expect no better," but then he turned his attention to the British media, which he finds culpable of racially stereotypical coverage of black and white athletes.

Raheem went on to be continually vilified by the national price see below:

There are more examples but these are a few cited and researched over the course of the last week. I think based on this evidence we are able to say that there is a definite media bias when reporting matters that concern ethnic minorities.

What is the impact?

Talking to people around Leicester City and including myself it has had a profound mental health impact seeing the news and many comments talking about the city and my local community. It has caused anger and upset amongst the local people living in the area that have been demonised but also created divisions between different areas of Leicester. People have displayed feeling of bitterness and blame towards particular race or religious groups thinking that they are responsible for them being locked down. This has been evident in the comment sections where people have been extremely vocal in highlighting this. This does not help movements such as 'Black Lives Matter' which is seeking equality in society. This also feeds into young people who consume social media on a daily basis and can shape the way they think about each other as they grow up which can then continue into adult life and add to the systemic racism that is evidently deep rooted in society today. This is evidenced below:

On Sunday 12 July 2020 the BBC reported that a 12 year old has been arrested after sending racist messages over social media to footballer Wilfried Zaha who currently plays for Crystal Palace. It is very scary to read that a 12 year has been able to go on social media and felt comfortable enough to send racist messages to someone. This shows the impact media and social media are having on even young people.

You can read the full article here: https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/53381586

Is there accountability?

After researching the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) closed in 2014 and regulation was passed to independent regulator Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO).

http://www.pcc.org.uk/

https://www.ipso.co.uk/

It is highlighted under this page here https://www.ipso.co.uk/complain/ the complaints the organisation handles. This does not highlight anywhere anything in relation to the social media accounts of the press organisations.

The IPSO has said it handles the below note the obvious dismissal of social media platforms. The comments section of their website comes under this but not social media accounts as it is believed that this comes under the regulations of the social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.

IPSO handle complaints about

IPSO consider complaints about newspapers or magazines (and their websites) which are members of IPSO. To see if a publication is an IPSO member, you can check here, or call us for advice. IPSO can only consider complaints which are made under the Editors' Code.

IPSO deal with complaints about editorial material in publications. This includes:

- articles
- images and videos
- readers' letters
- user comments on websites which the publication has moderated
- the behaviour of journalists.

On Wednesday 12 February 2020 BBC News published an article about regulating social media, headlined 'Social Media: How do other governments regulate it?' found here https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-47135058

The government was highlighted in the article as giving 'new powers to the media regulator Ofcome to police social media'. Saying that 'Ofcom is supposed to make the companies protect users from content involving things like violence, terrorism, cyber-bullying and child abuse', hate-crime was not mentioned in this list but if it is not there it should be added on. Upon checking Ofcom's website https://www.ofcom.org.uk/complaints social media is not listed as an avenue to complain about. This suggests that IPSO and Ofcom are void of any responsibility to take these complaints on even though there are clear outlines to say this will fall under Ofcom's remit, it clearly is not taken seriously. Nearly 4 months later it seems there is no advancement on this, yet the rate of social media hate comments have risen locally in Leicester.

After Leicester Against Racism contacted Leicestershire Live to discuss the standard of moderation of their comments both on social media and on their website, the response was that they have a lack of resource and currently only one person being able to monitor the comments. I would say if there is a lack of resource to monitor comments the newspaper should be mindful of the imagery they attach to articles and not further fuel the narrative that particular races or areas in Leicester are to blame for lockdown.

Currently Editors' follow a code that can be found here: http://www.editorscode.org.uk/the_code.php when this is not followed the members of public are able to complain and hold the press agency to account. Currently this does not cover any code relation to social media specifically and there is a brief outline for website but does not include the technicalities that can have implications online such as the legacy link connecting Reading to BLM protest above.

What is Leicestershire Live currently doing?

I have noted that in the footer of the Leicestershire Live website they do say that they are IPSO regulated and also have a section where you can email the editor for corrections and clarifications (although this email is currently not working as the editor has left) but feel more needs to be done for transparency and ensuring journalist integrity.

Lara Husain from Leicester Against Racism contacted Leicestershire Live in July 2020 to ask why comments with racist undertones were being left on social media and the website. Lara was advised by journalist Amy Orton that it is very hard to monitor all comments and they only have one person currently being able to carry out this responsibility.

I think after the examples highlighted above Leicestershire Live need to take an active step in looking at the monitoring procedure after certain content is published and I think it is part of the journalist's code of integrity they do this.

As I write this report a news story about a family raising funds for Rainbow Hospice was shared on the Leicestershire Live Facebook page and a comment with racist, xenophobic undertones were published under the article within the hour. Inevitably due the family being South-Asian and therefore not being regarded as English. This comment should not be allowed to remain on the page for a length of time not only causing distress to the family potentially but also other members of the public. As of 10:05pm on Sunday 12 July 2020 the post was totally removed from the Leicestershire Live Facebook page, which is a real shame as this means the family trying to raise money will not get the PR reach it set out to achieve due to comments from one person in relation to the family being from an ethnic minority background. I contacted the Leicester Mercury directly about its removal and was given the following response by David Harrison of Trinity Mirror

"The article was removed from Facebook because we were unable to constantly monitor some of the comments it was receiving ....comments which had been pointed out to one of our reporters by Rainbows......" (sic)

I replied thanking David for a prompt reply but also requested that if this article has been removed due to one comment that could pose issues why have the other articles highlighted remained on the newspapers social media sites. I am still waiting for a response. I also reiterated the need for a meeting with the editor.

What is the solution?

Social Media

Certain social media platforms have enabled the ability to switch off commenting when you post articles but unfortunately Facebook has not adopted this approach on their groups or 'like' page and this is incredibly irresponsible. While many people actually consume news on social media not everything requires commentary from the general public. Newspapers turn off commentary on certain articles which may be a criminal case or sensitive nature and Facebook must enable this function for public groups or 'like' pages in order to provide discriminatory comments to plague certain news posts.

Twitter also needs to consider having the option to turn off retweeting where news is not entirely accurate or a knee-jerk reaction to be the first to break news, by not having this option it can be problematic as the Reading attack showcases the first inaccurate Tweet was retweeting far more times than the amended one not long later. The option to edit a Tweet needs to be available with a button to cite the changes made to the original Tweet. This will then enforce media agencies to amend the original Tweet that was shared more but also be transparent in what was shared with a comment under the Tweet to say why this was changed. This will not only make news agencies think twice about what they put out but also consider the accuracy of the information which they already have put out and have the obligation to ensure according to the editors' code.

All press agencies should be monitoring not only their own website comments but also comments on comments put out on their social media platforms. Saying that this is the responsibility of the social media companies is unfair as they are very aware which articles encourages the most comments as you are able to get this information from the analytics of individual pages, when articles of a sensitive nature are put out it should be obligatory for the press agency to keep an eye on the comments sections and delete comments that cause offence or are discriminatory against a group of people.

A news article published in 2013 on Journalism.co.uk which covered points by Editor of the **Regret the Error** blog, which is now run on the **Poynter Institute** website, **Craig Silverman** gave advice for journalists on online corrections highlighted the following point in terms of Social Media including a link to verifying content shared:

Issuing social media corrections

A how-to guide by Journalism.co.uk last, on verifying content shared on social media platforms, included a look at issuing corrections on social media when mistakes have been made.

At the time Silverman outlined his recommended approach to issuing "networked" corrections, and the role of the journalist to not just put the correction out on all platforms the error was sent to, but to also actively encourage those who may have tweeted the original article to help circulate the correction also.

Buttry also recommended this approach, adding that while it is "impossible to un-ring the bell" journalists can "identify who else has re-rung the bell" and try and get their help in spreading the correction.

"If I make an error in a tweet and realise that, I can go back and delete the tweet so nobody sees the original one. I can send out another tweet with the correct information and a tweet acknowledging that I had it incorrect and saying what the error was, but we have an ability to track some of the people who have seen things.

"So I encourage, where you can't un-ring the bell you can identify who else has re-rung the bell, you can see who's retweeted you and I think you should direct message them or tweet at them saying 'hey, I hope you saw the correction, please, since you retweeted the original, send this along'.

"And there will be some people who saw the original retweet but won't see the correction, I get that, but I think credibility is so important that corrections have to be one of the things we take most seriously. I think we want to be diligent about it and transparent about it."

Reference: https://www.journalism.co.uk/news/how-to-handle-online-news-corrections/s2/a551784/

https://www.journalism.co.uk/news-features/how-to-verify-content-from-social-media/s5/a548645/

Website

It is important that substantive changes and alterations to articles or news published on websites should be cited clearly or the option to revert back to the original article should be made available.

In 2015 Anthony De Rosa covered this for the Los Angeles Times and although this is written in the US it is still relevant to how media is handled in the UK.

Anthony said:

In the digital realm, there are no hard deadlines. Editors can tweak a story and reporters can update it at any moment. The ability to revise without limit – virtually instantaneously – has, of course, revolutionized journalism. But most publications still haven't figured out a good way to alert readers to substantive changes and alterations. If there's an error of fact, publications may amend the digital text and add a correction, usually at the bottom of the Web page. Editors often put through non-factual changes without bothering to notify readers at all. Rarely do corrections or clarifications carry any kind of explanation: how the reporter got the wrong vote count for an important bill; why the editor decided that the penultimate paragraph wasn't really necessary. There's a stunning lack of transparency.

You can read the full article here: https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-derosa-corrections-online-20150825-story.html

In the US the Society of Professional Journalists has a set of code of ethics to follow that also highlight some good practices that could be adopted by journalists in the UK.

https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp

Key points that need to be adopted that are highlighted by the article on Journalism.co.uk are:

Remembering a cross-platform approach

For news outlets publishing across multiple platforms, it is key for them to remember to ensure that corrections also reach those platforms and audiences.

'Report the error' buttons and forms

One approach taken by news outlets to try and aid the process for the audience when it comes to reporting errors is to provide 'report the error' buttons on articles, or online correction forms, so they can easily raise awareness of a possible mistake.
The Washington Post, for example, offers a corrections button which then links through to a general contact page online. Interestingly, the Post last week sought to clarify their approach to corrections, as outlined by this Poynter post by Silverman.

Unpublishing articles

Silverman in the article talks about his feelings on the unpublishing of articles.

"Unpublishing is really important because I think there are times, particularly when it's an egregious error or when something includes plagiarised or fabricated content, the first instinct is 'oh my god, let's get this off our site'."

But he said this can risk sending a message to the reader that "oh, we're trying to hide this, we're trying to remove it and pretend like nothing ever happened".

"So what I advocate instead of just killing the URL itself is to go in and update that piece of content". He said that might mean adding a correction, or maybe "a detailed editor's note" explaining what the article was which previously appeared at that link and why it was removed.

But overall he said he would "really lean and recommend against unpublishing".

"Most of the times it's done it just creates this aura of 'oh, we're trying to hide something' or 'nothing to see here, please just move along'".

As highlighted here: https://www.journalism.co.uk/news-features/how-to-verify-content-from-social-media/s5/a548645/

Conclusion

There has to be clear policies and guidelines put into place for journalism online including other agencies who are responsible for news online. There has to be accuracy in breaking news stories and attention paid to the detail of the language used, including pictures and imagery to compliment stories. What is reported affects people's mindset and therefore has an effect on the comments sections but it also dictates societal bias towards people which can be more dangerous. There is a moral and ethical responsibility in online journalism that I feel is falling through the cracks. The way technology is used requires considered thought, accountability and transparency especially because changes can be made quickly and in real-time, many articles or social media posts from news agencies with large followings can gain quick traction in seconds and can become viral very quickly. Not completing due diligence on the stories that are put out just to break a story quickly can cause extreme distress to the parties involved but also portray a false narrative to the audience. Not having transparent and clear corrections can leave false impressions and result in fake news spreading. This was demonstrated clearly when The Mirror (parent company of Leicestershire Live) ran a story they found on a football parody website stating that Manchester United players Pogba and Fernandes had been injured. This was tweeted and ran as a story on their website only to find they had not completed due diligence and a retraction had to be issues only after football fans held them to account online. This should not have been published in the first place and if clear guidelines are in place and checks are completed before things are published online and on social media this issue can be avoided.

Headlines published online will be historical references of the future, if these headlines are not accurate then this can result in a distorted picture of what actually happened in the moment. Not only does the lack of accuracy or transparency of changes impact societies of today but it can rewrite history books too which can prove to be extremely dangerous.

It is important that freedom of press is maintained but at the same time it is also important for the journalists to have a moral obligation to its audience to not incite hate for any group of people. I think it is important to have the technical guidelines in place in order to push the journalists to ensure they put accurate content out in the first instance because changes cannot be made easily once the information has been published but also to complete some due diligence about the impact it will have on comments sections and the audience as a whole.

Next Steps

As highlighted, the issue of press bias is not just a local Leicester issue but also a national issue in the UK, but we recognise the importance of making changes locally first by having these difficult conversations in order to see if this is a model that can be adopted by media across the UK. We are proposing the following as a short term plan:

- We would like some time to discuss this report with the local Leicester MPs in order to explain anything that needs clarifying and what we would like to see change.
- Organise a meeting with the Leicestershire Live editor to discuss local changes to the way news is published online and on social media including the policing of comments made on both social media and the Leicestershire Live website. In relation to this, an email has been sent to Amy Orton by Lara Husain from Leicester Against Racism to request a meeting. A response was received to say the editor was leaving so it may be difficult at this moment in time but we have pushed back and said that we need a meeting with the acting editor as soon as viably possible. We would like the support and attendance of local MPs Claudia Webbe and Liz Kendall as offered in the meeting held on Friday 10 July 2020.
- We would like to use this meeting to request changes on how things are reported and the way things are published online including corrections on both the website and on social media. If these changes are implemented successfully at a local level, we would like the support of the local Leicester MP's to take this and speak to other MPs across the UK to address issues in other areas in order to start addressing the issues nationally.
- Actively see a change in the way content is published online and on social media by Leicestershire Live. There is extensive analytics available via Google Analytics and Facebook Insights to evidence that certain images and language has an adverse reaction to certain races and religions. The need for 'hits' and 'shares' should not be put above the moral responsibility of the publication. Example 1 shows how Leicestershire Live has used this time of reporting but to be fair to the publication more recently the example below showed that being mindful of the imagery not showing a race or religion against a story of this nature can lead to more neutral commentary. Ensuring this level of reporting continues is important.

A recent Covid-19 article published online and on social media dated Sunday 12 July 2020 had a more generic image not showcasing a particular race and/or religion had comments turned off on the website and due to the image change had far less race and/or religious hate comments. Example below:
https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/uk-world-news/20-places-listed-risk-new-4318828
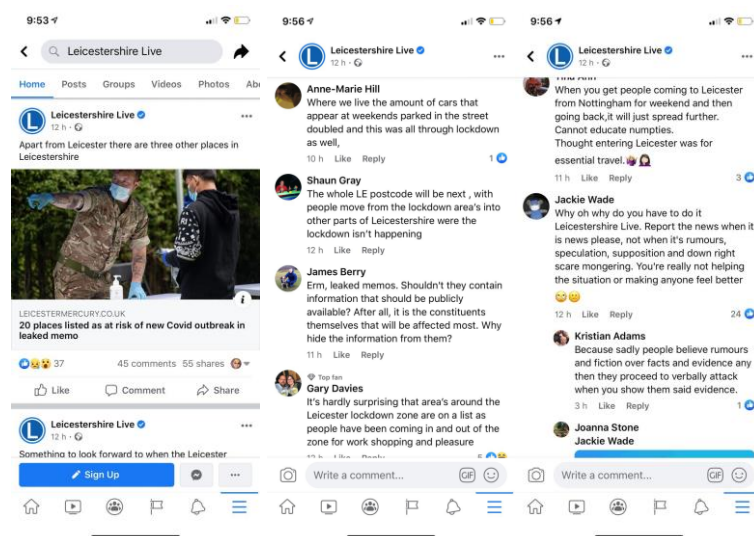
- Further meetings to be scheduled to see what has been done following initial discussions to ensure some accountability and change is being implemented.

Finally, on Thursday 9 July 2020, The Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) published a report looking at the ways in which extremists have sought to exploit the current pandemic. As part of the recommendations from this report, it has been highlighted that the strategy should include 'Plans to work with researchers and practitioners to build a better understanding of 'what works' in relation to counter extremism online and offline.' I would like to highlight that this research is already a start into the research required to counter extremism and would recommend that it is included as part of any further research completed.

You can find the full report here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-how-hateful-extremists-are-exploiting-the-pandemic

Research completed July 2020 by

Wajeeda Yusuf

Joint organisor of the BLM Solidarity Vigil on Monday 8 June 2020, Affiliate member of The Race Equality Centre Leicester, member of the What's Next Leicester BLM Group and, Digital and Events Team Leader at Leicester College.

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the support and help from the following organisations and people.

Iris Lightfoote from The Race Equality Centre Leicester

Tara Munroe from Opal 22 Arts and Edutainment

Lara Husain and Stefan Turner from Leicester Against Racism

Brian Simmonds from First Contact 2.0

Kenneth Lebbi and Huda Bouh from The Black Bloom

Mariam Issa recent Media and Communications graduate from De Montfort University

Hannah Georg Marketing and Communications Manager at Leicester College

Imran Haji and Maryam Mirza-Haji for their moral support and help with research

Yusuf family for being patient while I have been working on the research

Aamenah Patel for her moral support

Dr Deborah Sangster Leicester Councillor

Where excerpts from websites have been used these have been cited in the main body of the research.