

**A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY AND ITS ROLE IN NATIONAL  
NEWSPAPERS**

**INES BULL**

**This dissertation was submitted in part fulfilment of requirements for the  
degree of MSc Information and Library Studies**

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## Abstract

It is no secret that the library has an image problem. It is frequently argued that particularly the way in which the media has historically depicted the library, has contributed to the profession's negative image, as a result of which librarians, for centuries, have complained about the media representation. A significant amount of research exists on the representation of the profession in the media. Previous research however has largely focused on how librarians as opposed to the library itself are represented in the media. No previous academic studies have specifically investigated how the role of the library is represented in the media. Therefore the present study aims to explore and provide an understanding of how the public library and particularly its role are represented in UK national newspapers published between 2000 and 2014.

The researcher analysed 96 articles drawn from four daily national newspapers. The newspaper articles were collected using 'Nexis'. To analyse the data a mixed method approach was adopted in the form of a quantitative content analysis and a qualitative analysis of the data based on grounded theory techniques.

The study found that 93 of the 96 articles made a reference to at least one aspect of the library's role. It was furthermore discovered that all of the roles of the public library the researcher identified prior to the analysis were reflected in the newspaper articles, pointing towards an understanding on the part of the media of the diverse and changing roles the public library assumes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The library's contribution in relation to the promotion of reading and book lending was thereby the aspect, most frequently mentioned in the newspapers over the fifteen-years sample period. Moreover key themes and patterns identified were the media's tendency when writing about the public library to heavily rely on numbers and statistics usually relating to library closures, book issues, costs or visitor numbers as well as a tendency among some commentators to look back to the library of their childhood, frequently in a very passionate and affectionate manner, the implications of which, it was found, are not always positive for the library.

## Acknowledgements

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# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Overview of the study**

The present study is a content analysis of newspaper articles about the public library in the UK published between 2000 and 2014. Its central objective is to explore and provide an understanding of how UK national newspapers represent the public library and its role. The study is structured as follows: the present chapter is followed by the research context and literature review chapter, which aims to place the newspaper articles into the wider context by highlighting some of the key developments that have affected public libraries in recent years. It furthermore intends to contextualize the present study and provide an understanding of how it relates to pre-existing research by discussing and reflecting upon previous academic studies concerning the representation of the profession in the media. The methodology chapter, which follows, will then introduce the research methodology employed in this study, the rationale for doing so as well as the limitations and weaknesses associated with the methodology employed. Having discussed the research methodology, the researcher will present and discuss the findings of the study. The final chapter concludes the study and provides recommendations for future research.

## **1.2 Rationale for the research**

It is no secret that the library has an image problem. It is argued that particularly the way in which the media has historically depicted the library - as a dark and dusty place with not a sound to be heard (Maynard & McKenna, 2005, p. 119) - has contributed to the profession's negative image, as a result of which librarians, for centuries, have complaint about the media representation (Poulin, 2008, p.2). Even though these stereotypical portrayals bear little resemblance to the majority of libraries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they continue to exist.

This is particularly problematic, given that - as has been demonstrated by different studies- people know little about the library profession, the skills it requires or the range of services it provides (Schuman, 1990; Majid & Haider, 2008; Shaw, 2010). Thus, if the public is regularly confronted with negative or inaccurate media representations of the profession, there is little reason for them to question these. Therefore an understanding on the part of the library profession of how it is depicted in the media is important and can function as a stimulus to correct misrepresentations or to promote aspects of the profession that have been neglected. This is of particular importance for a publicly funded institution, like the public library, as decisions concerning the funding for these institutions are influenced by how relevant they are seen by society and by those responsible for the allocation of budgets.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The central objective of this study is to investigate how the public library is represented in UK national newspapers. This is examined through the following research questions:

**RQ 1** What is the nature of the newspaper coverage of the public library?

**RQ 2** What is the extent of newspaper coverage of the role of the library?

**RQ 3** What are the prevailing representations of the role of the public library in national newspapers?

**RQ 4** Has the representation of the role changed over time?

## 2 Research Context and Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction to the chapter

Public libraries, like other organizations, do not operate in a vacuum, but are surrounded by diverse and complex external factors, that influence and shape the services they offer. Therefore, before exploring the extent and the nature of the media's portrayal of the public library and its, it is vital to place the reports into the wider context. The present chapter will do so by outlining the broader economic, political, social as well as technological developments. Thereby, the work does not attempt to provide a complete analysis of the public sector environment within which the public library operates, but rather attempts to highlight some of the key developments that have affected public libraries in recent years. In order to contextualize the present study and provide an understanding of how it relates to pre-existing research, this chapter will furthermore discuss and reflect upon previous academic studies concerning the representation of the profession in the media.

### 2.2 The public library in the UK

Public libraries in the United Kingdom, which have a long history dating back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century (McMenemy, 2009a, p. 5), are publicly funded institutions, relying on tax money as the primary source of income. They are controlled by local authorities, which have a statutory obligation to provide library services (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2015). In England and Wales this legal duty is imposed on local authorities by the "Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964", which came into effect in 1965 (McMenemy, 2009a, pp. 32-33) and requires local governments to *"provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof"* (Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964). Similarly in Scotland, the "Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973" legally obligates local authorities to *"secure the provision of adequate library facilities for all persons resident in their areas"* (Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973). Library services, most of which are free, are delivered through thousands of local service points throughout the country.

Currently there are nearly 4.200 local branches in the UK, of which the Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library is the busiest in terms of issues with a total number of 1,124,406 in 2013-14 (LISU, 2015).

### **2.2.1 Public libraries- the economic context**

The 2008 global recession, which was the deepest since the Great Depression in the 1930s, has confronted the UK with giant debts that have rapidly increased in the aftermath of the financial crisis and, as the latest data suggest, today amount to approximately 1.434 Trillion - or 28,403 per adult in the UK (The Money Charity, 2015, p. 15).

In the face of these deficits, the Conservative-led coalition government that came into power in 2010, introduced swingeing austerity measures, including drastic public spending cuts, tax increases and welfare spending cuts. Thereby, despite David Cameron's assurance that *"...those with broader shoulders should bear a greater load"* (Cameron, 2010 cited in Duffy, 2014, p.2), the citizens disproportionately affected by these policies, were the poorest and most vulnerable members of society (Duffy, 2014, p. 3; Hall et al., 2013, p.9).

The measures had serious consequences in particular for local governments, which saw their budgets cut by 25% between 2007-08 and 2012-13, with this figure expected to increase to 33% by 2015-2016 (Duffy, 2014, p, 9). In response to the budgetary cuts filtered down from the central government, local authorities had to identify unprecedented savings, which public libraries, even though they account for only 1-2 % of local government spending, could not escape (Goulding, 2013, p. 479).

"The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy" reports that the total expenditure on public libraries fell from £ 1,158,834 in 2010-11 to £ 1,025,274 in 2013-14 (CIPFA 2012; CIPFA, 2014).

The impact has been profound- cuts to budgets and to opening hours as well as reductions in staff numbers and library closures have all become common themes for public libraries in recent years.

The number of libraries that are open for ten hours or more per week decreased from 4.773 in 1995 to 4,630 in 2000 and to 4.145 in 2013-14 (Creaser, Maynard & White, 2006; LISU, 2015). Since 2010 alone – the year the Conservative-led government took office – more than 400 libraries have been closed in the UK (Ellis, 2013) and there is little doubt that these measures will be the norm for public services in coming years (Goulding, 2013, p. 478).

## **2.2.2 Public libraries- the political context**

### **2.2.2.1 Neoliberalism**

In the UK context, the emergence of neoliberalism is usually associated with former Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her campaign to bring an end to “Keynesian-style big government” (Steger & Roy, 2010, p. 21), which until then had dominated economic thinking. Neoliberalism, which, it has been suggested, has dominated the world since the 1980s (Hall, Massey & Rustin, 2013, p. 8; Dolphin, 2012) is an economic model, based on the belief in a self-regulating market, free trade and private property rights. State intervention into the economic affairs of the rational citizen, according to the neoliberal doctrine, is undesirable and deemed inefficient. Rather, the role of the government is restricted to providing the appropriate conditions and structures, such as an effective military, defence or legal framework, within which neoliberal ideas can flourish (Harvey, 2007, p.2).

The neoliberal model manifests itself in a number of related policies, such as heavy tax cuts (especially for corporations and the wealthier part of the population); cuts to social services, reduced welfare programs; a downsized government, anti-inflationary measures and trade liberalization (Steger & Roy, 2010, p. 14). This doctrine, since the 1980s, became the overarching principle of the UK’s main political parties (Green & McMenemy, 2012, p. 1).

The result of three decades of neoliberal policies have been summarized by Hall et al.:

*...vast profits for multi-nationals, investment institutions and venture capitalists, and huge accumulations of wealth for the new global super-rich, while grossly increasing the gap between rich and poor and deepening inequalities of income, health and life chances within and between countries, on a scale not seen since before the second world war (Hall et al., 2013, pp. 8-9).*

The neoliberal outlook had a profound impact on the public sector. The language of the “supremacy of the market”, it has been argued, since the 1980s increasingly permeated public sector services, and principles, such as privatization, individualism, and decentralization, which, as Green and McMenemy (2012, p. 2) note, characterize neoliberalism, have become prominent themes in professions such as public librarianship. As stressed by McMenemy:

*...the concept of the primacy of the market has been evident not only in the private sector; the tenets of marketisation have also been major influences in how public sector services and the professions that support them operate. This adoption of the language of the market for the public sector has been questioned by many commentators, but it became the language of the professions serving the public, such as teaching, librarianship, social work and health (McMenemy, 2009, p. 400).*

#### **2.2.2.2 The Labour years**

As publicly funded institutions run by local authorities and overseen by the Secretary of State, public libraries must address and contribute to the government’s objectives at both-the local and the national level (Goulding, 2006, p. 4). Education and lifelong learning as well as tackling social exclusion were among the key priorities of the Labour government, which was in power from 1997 to 2010 and which early on acknowledged the importance of public libraries in contributing to central government objectives (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2003, p. 43).

Therefore the coming into power of the Labour government and the attention the public library received from the new government following Tony Blair's decisive victory at the general election in 1997, was generally welcomed and seen as an opportunity to raise the profile of the public library (McMenemy, 2009a, p.6; Goulding, 2006, pp. 27-28). Yet alongside the aforementioned recognition of the importance of the public library in delivering key policy objectives, such as education and combating social exclusion, was a focus on value for money, efficiency, quantitative performance measurements and a call for the transformation and modernization of the public sector, which public libraries were not spared from (Goulding, 2006, p. 53; McMenemy, 2009a, p. 6). Labour was determined to make the public sector more transparent, cost-effective and relevant to the user. It would therefore *"be churlish"*, as McMenemy (2009a, p. 6) stresses, *"to suggest that the Conservative policies that rankled with the profession for so long were completely forgotten with the introduction of the New Labour administration"*.

Despite making the tackling of inequality and social exclusion a key priority, the gap between rich and poor widened during the thirteen years the Labour party was in office (Levitas, 2012, p. 330). Ultimately Labour's failure and the "economic mess" it left behind, provided the successive Conservative-led government with an alibi for a restructuring of the citizen-state relationship and a series of drastic reforms in line with their "Big Society" philosophy - with serious consequences for the public sector.

### **2.2.2.3 Big Society**

The "Big Society" philosophy, which the then party leader, David Cameron, described as his "great passion" (BBC, 2010) was at the heart of the Conservative Party's 2010 general election campaign. Envisaging a dramatic change in the citizen-state relationship- away from the "Big Government" of the Labour years, the Party's 2010 manifesto defined the "Big Society" as *"a society with much higher levels of personal, professional, civic and corporate responsibility; a society where people come together to solve problems and improve life for themselves and their communities; a society where the leading force for progress is social responsibility, not state control"* (The Conservative Party, 2010, p. 37).

As highlighted by the above definition, responsibility for the wellbeing of the society lies with the communities - not the state. This approach, as Goulding (2013, p. 480) stresses, has been presented by the Conservative Party as an imperative to repair a “broken society”, inherited from the preceding Labour government, by transferring power and responsibility from the state and politicians to the communities to strengthen communities and ultimately society. However, critics have dismissed the “Big Society” as the government’s attempt to reduce public expenditure “*within a discourse of social action, civic renewal and democratic devolution*” (Goulding, 2013, p. 480).

Fundamentally, the Conservative’s commitment to communitarianism has contributed to a growth in the number of volunteers in libraries. While this in itself is not a problem, what makes it problematic however is that, as research by CIPFA (2012) has shown, the growing number of volunteers in recent years was accompanied by a decrease in the number of professional staff working in public libraries. This number has decreased from 24.746 in 2009-10 to 21.780 in 2011-12, while the number of volunteers has increased from 17.550 to 23.397 during the same period (CIPFA, 2012). While volunteers certainly can make valuable contributions to the service, if they are seen as “substitutions” for (and research by CIPFA implicates that they are)- as opposed to a supplement to - librarians and front line staff, this raises questions concerning the quality of service delivery.

### **2.2.3 Public libraries- the technological Context**

Many of the developments taking place in public libraries are driven by technological advances, whereby in particular developments in information and communication technologies (ICT) since the 1990s have dramatically changed the users’ expectations, the nature of the services libraries offer and the ways in which patrons use the public library.

The growth of the Internet made it significantly easier and cheaper to access and share all sorts of information, which means that libraries are no longer the only information provider, but now face fierce competition from, amongst others, search engines such as Google or Yahoo, online bookstores, such as Amazon or online reference services.



In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the library's traditional role as "warehouse of knowledge", as a result of these developments, is constantly questioned (Brophy, 2002, pp. 47-48).

Furthermore, people's behaviour in terms of seeking, accessing and reading information has been greatly affected by developments in information and communication technologies. While books certainly remain important for many, people today increasingly use computers, tablets, mobile devices, and e-book readers to search for, access and read information in electronic formats (Macdonald, 2012, p. 7).

To remain relevant to their users and to improve the way in which services are delivered, public libraries, in recent years have adapted to these developments by embracing innovative technologies. Libraries today provide access to computers, the Internet and e-books. Many have self-service machines and an online presence, through which the user can access the library catalogue and electronic resources or renew loans 24/7 from anywhere in the world. Some public libraries, responding to the explosion of mobile phone usage, have developed mobile apps, which allow users to search the library catalogue, renew items or scan barcodes.

With regard to ICT, perhaps no single development had such a massive impact on public libraries as the "People's Network". The lottery funded government-led project, which was completed in 2002, brought computers and Internet access to all public libraries in the UK. The initiative consisted of two separate projects: one was to equip libraries with ICT facilities, while the other was to provide training for library staff- teaching them how to deliver ICT services (McMenemy, 2009a, p. 113). The programme was a big success- the number of terminals in public libraries with Internet access has increased from 2,167 in 2000 to 36,509 in 2005 (Creaser, Maynard & White, 2006, p. 20). By providing free access to ICT facilities libraries play an important role in bridging the digital divide.

While today a large proportion of the population has their own Internet connection at home, there is still a significant portion of the population who do not, and who without the public library would not be able to access ICT facilities. Research by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has revealed that more than half of the people, who do not have Internet access at home and use it via public space, do so in a public library (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2010, p. 23).

Thus, while new technologies pose many challenges to public libraries, they have also opened up exciting opportunities for public libraries, allowing them to provide new and innovative services to their users. Libraries, in recent years have exploited these opportunities and adopted new technologies to remain relevant to their communities and to respond to changing user needs and expectations.

## **2.2.4 Public libraries the social context**

### **2.2.4.1 Social exclusion**

While there is evidence that since the 1990s unemployment and crime rates have fallen, child poverty could be reduced and the population in general is healthier, the UK is far from being an inclusive and just society. On the contrary, as Goulding stresses:

*...the UK still features near the bottom, if not at the bottom, of many of the European deprivation indicator tables including child poverty, workless households, adult literacy and numeracy, 18 year olds in education , teenage pregnancy, drug use and crime. The UK has one of the highest at-risk of poverty rates in the European Union, above the EU average and the highest rate for children aged under 15 (Goulding, 2006, p.11).*

Inequality in the distribution of wealth and income in the UK continues to increase as has been highlighted by a recent Global Wealth Report, according to which in 2014 the richest ten percent of the population owned 54.1 % of the wealth. This is an increase of over two percent since 2007 (Stierli, Shorrocks, Davies et al., 2014, p. 33).

This picture is confirmed when looking at the other end of the social ladder- 20% of children in the UK live in absolute poverty; 5 million people work in low-paid jobs, a quarter of which remain stuck in these jobs for more than a decade (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014).

#### **2.2.4.2 Demographic trends**

Demographic changes and an increasingly diverse population have added to the complexity of these issues in recent years and make it more and more challenging for the government and public services to tackle them. The UK's population is growing at a fast rate. Since 2001 it rose by around 5 million people (Office for National Statistics, 2014). Furthermore, as a result of a combination of both-improved mortality rates and declining fertility rates, the population of the UK is ageing rapidly. This is reflected on the one hand in the increase of the median age from 35.4 in 1985 to 39.7 in 2010 and on the other hand in the increasing proportion of older persons, whereby the fastest growing segment of the population are those people aged 85 and over (Office for National Statistics, 2012).

A factor that, in particular since 2001, has added to the population growth was inward migration (Office for National Statistics, 2014). To illustrate this- between 2001 and 2011 the population rose by 3.7 million people, whereby more than two million of the new residents were immigrants. Furthermore, Census data taken in 2011 has highlighted that the country is becoming more religiously and ethnically diverse. It showed for instance that the number of people who identify as being of mixed ethnicity has doubled between 2001 and 2011, while the number of Muslims rose from 1.5 million in 2001 to 2.7 million in 2011 (BBC, 2012).

#### **2.2.4.3 Library usage**

A 2010 research report by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council found that 90% of the library users, when asked about the importance of libraries, said that the library was an "essential" or "very important" community service.

Of those who have not used the library in the preceding 12 months, 59 % said that the library was an "essential" or "very important" community service (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, 2010, pp. 58-59).

However looking at the actual library usage, the same survey also found that of those adults asked, only around 39 % have visited the library in the preceding twelve months, whereby women (43%) were more likely than men (36%), and people of black/minority

ethnic background (BME) (50.6%) were more likely than people of white ethnicity (47,2%) to have used the library in the preceding twelve months (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, 2010, pp. 9-11).

Overall, the study found, usage has declined by 8.8 % since 2005/06 (48,2 %). These findings are in line with LISU's UK statistics. While, as LISU reported, the number of library visits increased between 2002 and 2006 (as a result of the implementation of the Peoples' Network), it steadily decreased since 2005-06 from 342,168,484 to 282,322,177 in 2013-14. LISU moreover reports a radical decline of book issues from 430.1 million in 1999-00 to 247,244,723 in 2013-14 (Creaser, Maynard & White, 2006; LISU, 2015). These figures highlight that the importance attached to libraries is not matched by high levels of use. Rather, there is a significant gap between what the population values and the levels of use. It appears that people value the library as a "public good" that is important to the community, as opposed to a service that is valuable to them personally as individual users (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, 2010,p. 58).

## **2.3 The role of the public library**

The environment in which public libraries are operating, as the above overview has shown, is changing at a rapid pace. Shrinking budgets, changing user needs and expectations, developments in ICT and changing political interests are posing serious challenges for public libraries. They find themselves in a position where they constantly have to justify their existence and demonstrate the role they play in the wellbeing of the community.

The library of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as Brophy (2007, p. 35) points out, had three main roles: information, education and entertainment. These have persisted to the present and are still at the core of the public library mission.

In addition however, the public library of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has taken on a variety of new roles and services, reflecting the changing context in which they are operating.

Before looking at a number of government publications and policy reports dealing with the role and mission of the public library, it is interesting to note that - given that public libraries since the early 2000s provide access to ICT facilities - the main reason for people to use the library was book borrowing, as a recent survey by the Museums, Library and Archives Council (2010), has shown. The study revealed that 76% of the respondents go to the library to borrow books for pleasure. This was followed by 44% who visit the library to borrow books for studying. Only 20% of the respondents indicated that their primary reason for using the public library was to access PC's or the Internet (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, 2010, p. 18). The documents that will be examined in this section, have outlined the role and purpose of the public library in much more detail, as will be shown.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) in cooperation with the UNESCO in 2001 published the "*IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for Development*". The report identifies and outlines five key areas in which the public library plays a central role, which are:

**Education:** The public library plays an important role in supporting formal and informal learning by providing access to knowledge in all forms and by helping citizens to access and use these effectively (where possible in cooperation with other education agencies). The public libraries' activities in support of education furthermore include the support of literacy and the provision of study space.

**Information:** It is the library's role not only to provide access to, but also collect, organize and exploit information, including information on the local community and local heritage. Where possible, they are urged to do so in partnership with other organizations.

Libraries should furthermore act as "electronic gateways" by embracing innovative information and communication technologies in addition to traditional print-based information. By doing so, they play a significant role in bridging the divide between the information "haves" and "have-nots".

**Personal development:**

The role of the public library in regard to the personal development of its users covers the support of personal creativity and encouragement of new interests as well as the provision of knowledge and works of imagination. Public libraries fulfil their personal development role moreover through their involvement in basic education, life skills as well as meaningful leisure–time activities.

**Children and young people:**

While public libraries aim to reach all members of the community, this user group is a priority for them. Reaching out to children and encouraging them to read tends to have a positive impact as they grow up and may furthermore encourage parents to use library services.

**Cultural development:**

Public libraries fulfil their cultural role by acting as a centre for artistic and cultural development in the community and by promoting and shaping its cultural identity. The library’s role regarding cultural development should, amongst others, be reflected in its collection, in its cooperation with local and regional institutions and in cultural programs.

**Social Role:**

The library serves as a public space, where the community can meet. This function is particularly vital in areas where such spaces are scarce. The public library should be a place for the community to meet others, to study, to find information or to pursue leisure activities.

(Gill, 2001, pp. 2-7)

In addition to the IFLA/UNESCO statement outlining the role and purpose of the public library, most countries have their own national statements. In the United Kingdom, the national mission statement, shown in Figure 2-1 below, was issued in 1991 by the “Library and Information Services Council” (1991).

The public library is a major community facility whose purpose is to enable and encourage individuals or groups of individuals to gain unbiased access to books, information, knowledge and works of creative imagination which will:

- encourage their active participation in cultural, democratic and economic activities;
- enable them to participate in educational development through formal or informal programmes;
- assist them to make positive use of leisure time;
- promote reading and literacy as basic skills necessary for active involvement in these activities;
- encourage the use of information and an awareness of its value.

**Figure 2-1: UK Public Library Service Mission Statement**

(Source: Library and Information Services Council, 1991)

Similarly to the IFLA/UNESCO document, the UK mission statement highlights the library's role in relation to education, information, culture and its importance as a community space. In addition it makes specific mention of the library's role to "*encourage... economic activities*". Having been published in the early 1990s – ten years earlier than the IFLA/UNESCO guidelines - it makes no reference to the libraries role in regard to technology, but seems to focus on books. However, the role of the library, as has been stressed, has evolved significantly in recent years, going well beyond the provision of print-based materials. This transformation is reflected in numerous later publications dealing with the library's role/mission. Later publications, such as "New Library: the people's network," (1997); "Framework for the Future" or "A blueprint for excellence" (2007), give much more prominence to the impact of ICT and the potential, technology has in supporting services provided by the public library.

The government's long-term vision for the future of public libraries, titled "Framework for the Future" (2003) for instance regards "*access to digital skills and services including e-government*" (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2003, p. 7) as one of the core missions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century public library.

Other areas, which, the government regards as central to the role of the 21st century, as articulated in this report, are:

- “the promotion of reading and informal learning”
- “measures to tackle social exclusion, build community identity and develop citizenship”

(Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2003, p. 7)

That the role of the library in regard to technology looms large on the national agenda can also be seen, looking at the 2007 consultation document “blueprint for excellence”, which aims to outline “*a shared universal understanding of the role of the modern public library and of the core services that the public can expect*” (Dolan, 2007, p. 2) and urges public libraries to move with “... excitement to the digital age” (Dolan, 20007, p. 6). The report identifies three roles of the public library:

1. **Community Place:** a public space for reading, studying and discovery where the community can gather and engage with knowledge and information
2. **Development Agency:** working with partner agencies with the aim of enhancing the knowledge and skills of the community
3. **Digital Library:** provision of universal 24/7 access to online content and expert help

(Dolan, 2007, p. 6)

The role of the modern public library as a community space has been repeatedly emphasized in several other documents, including the UK Public Library Service Mission Statement and the IFLA/UNESCO guidelines. Such spaces, where the community can come together, communicate, share ideas and interests or exchange knowledge, today - in the “digital age” where communication increasingly takes place online rather than face-to-face, are more important than ever. Audunson (2005) refers to these places as “low-intensive meeting-places”.



The importance of these places, Audunson argues, lies in their capacity to allow cross-cultural communication and promote cultural diversity in today's increasingly multicultural and digital society. These places have the potential to promote the communication across cultural and social boundaries and foster the sense of community and tolerance for cultural diversity, which democracy presupposes (Audunson, 2005, p. 433).

The Comedia report "Borrowed time? The future of public libraries in the UK" (1993) moreover found that the public library, in addition to the contribution it makes to cultural enrichment, education, information and social policy, makes an impact on another sphere of public life – that of economic development. The study stresses that the public library serves as a focal point in the city centre, contributing to its vitality, as it is *"used by a wider cross-section of the local population than almost any other public, commercial or retail institution in the town centre"* (Comedia, 1993, p.1).

## **2.4 The library and the media**

A significant amount of research exists investigating the portrayal of the library profession in the media and popular culture, focusing on different sources, including films (Walker & Lawson, 1993; Threatt, 2005), newspapers (Shaw, 2010; Robinson, 2006), Youtube (Poulin, 2008), creative writing (Middleton, 2011), children's fiction (Maynard & McKenna, 2005; Yontz, 2002), comic books (Highsmith, 2003) or obituaries (Dilevko & Gottlieb, 2004). A broad distinction can be drawn between those studies looking at the image of the librarian and those that investigate the portrayal of the library itself.

### **2.4.1 The portrayal of the library in the media**

As part of a larger national research project Greenhalgh, Worpole and Landry (1995) examined press columns and reviews written in response to the 1993 Comedia report *"Borrowed Time: the Future of Public libraries in the UK"* and detected a number of what they believe are very damaging beliefs and perceptions about libraries.

Prevalent perceptions and mythologies included the portrayal of the library as *“a lost world of silence and furniture polish”*, *“a terrifying seedbed of political correctness”* or as a place of *“good old-fashioned books”* (Greenhalgh et al, 1995, pp. 140-141). In the examples cited by the authors, columnists reminisce about the library of their childhood. One columnist remembers the library as *“a haven of peace smelling of Mansion polish with not a sound to be heard except the steady thump-thump-thump of rubber stamp of rubber stamp on flyleaf”* (Waterhouse cited in Greenhalgh et al. 1995, p. 140). Such depictions, as is stressed by the authors, reinforce a mythology of the *“demise of the public library”*, and can have potentially damaging consequences for the profession, which urgently need to be addressed. These findings were mirrored by Goulding (2006) and Fletcher (2011), who both highlighted that the media’s portrayal of the library is informed by a discourse of nostalgia. Goulding (2006, p. 15), analysing the media coverage generated by the Coates Report (2004), which has received significant attention in the media, stressed that commentators, by consistently invoking memories of their childhood library, reinforced the mythology of the *“end of the library”*. In particular she criticized that *“a report focusing on just one aspect of the public library service (the book lending role)...should gain so much media exposure when most of the good work underway in libraries goes unnoticed and unreported”* (Goulding 2006, p. 15). Reports like Tim Coates’ *“Who is in charge”* and the press reactions generated by those reports, Goulding (2006, p. 3) believes, reinforce outdated stereotypes and can prevent libraries from playing a more prominent role in their communities. Similarly, Fletcher (2011) employing a mixed method approach of content analysis and situational analysis examining the extent and the nature of the newspaper coverage sparked by the campaigns against spending cuts, found that the portrayal of public libraries was *“not always positive”*. Fletcher (2011, iii) found that themes of *“nostalgia”* and *“symbolism”*, underpinned by *“perceptions of loss”* characterized the media’s portrayal of the library.

The scholars that have perhaps written most extensively about the portrayal of the library and librarians in popular culture and the media are Gary and Mary Radford. In a 2001 study, employing a Foucaultian approach to discourse, they examined the representation of the library and librarians in a number of novels and the TV show *“Seinfeld”*.

In contrast to the studies discussed, which found that the media tends to reinforce the mythology of the “demise of the library” by consistently reverting to old-fashioned stereotypes of the library, Radford and Radford (2001) observed that the portrayal of libraries and librarians is embedded within a discourse of fear, which, they argue, provides the context for what they found to be stereotypical and negative representations. The study identified a number of themes running through the representations: *“the library as a formidable gatekeeper between order and chaos, the other-wordliness of the library, the library as cathedral, the humiliation of the user, the power of surveillance, and the consequences of disrupting the sacred order of text.”* (Radford & Radford, 2001, p. 299). Through the use of metaphors in popular culture, it is argued, libraries come to be associated not with “happiness” or “joy”, but with “labyrinths”, “ghosts”, “humiliations”, “dust” or “silence” (Radford & Radford, 2001, pp. 324-325).

In contrast to the studies discussed above, Tacheva (2005) rejects the idea that the representation of the library in the media is characterized by a single discourse, such as fear. Rather, the author stresses, the portrayal of the library is fluid and varies depending on the genre, the setting and the subject (Tancheva, 2005, p. 542). Tancheva’s idea that the meaning and the interpretation of a text depends on the context and therefore can change, is grounded in Charles Peirces’s semiotic model, in which signs have no intrinsic meaning, but derive their meaning and value from the context in which they exist (Tancheva, 2005, p. 530).

#### **2.4.2 The portrayal of the librarian in the media**

As has been highlighted by Tancheva (2005, p. 530), the majority of scholars examining the library’s “image problem” focus on the librarian (as opposed to the library). There is a significant amount of research, exploring how the librarian is portrayed in the media, whereby the depictions vary considerably.

Yeagley (1999), analysing 30 images of librarians in movies released between 1989 and 1999, found that the overall depiction of both- physical as well as professional characteristics- of librarians in movies was positive with those in leading roles being

depicted even more positively. Where negative portrayals were identified in the movies, these referred mostly to physical characteristics (Yeagley, 1999, p. 16). Similarly, examining obituaries, Dilevko and Gottlieb (2004), found little evidence of negative depictions based on outdated stereotypes. On the contrary, the obituaries constructed an image of the profession as glamorous, portraying librarians as “global players”. The absence of negative stereotypical representations was confirmed by the findings of Robinson’s study (2006). Robinson, conducting a content analysis, examined how information professionals are depicted in Australian newspapers between 2000 and 2004 and subsequently compared these stereotypes to the actual profile of information professionals. The study revealed that stereotypical representations based on age, gender and physical appearance have virtually disappeared (Robinson, 2006, p. 8). The tone was found to be generally objective and the traits described were “*more positive than negative*” with attitudes and behaviours frequently described as innovative, dedicated and enthusiastic (Robinson, 2006, pp. 10-11).

While these studies found that the depiction of the librarian was generally positive, Shaw’s content analysis (2010) of 264 UK newspaper articles, revealed a lack of the representation of the duties and skills librarians possess. However, Shaw (2010) stressed that while the representation of skills and duties was rare, where these have been portrayed, the overall representation was positive. In opposition to these studies are a number of studies showing that the profession still suffers from negative and stereotypical media representations. Poulin (2008) for example, conducting a content analysis of Youtube videos, examined how libraries and librarians are depicted in these videos and concluded that nearly all videos portrayed libraries and librarians negatively. He discovered that “*male librarians are as socially-awkward as ever with a new, maniacal and psychotic twist added. Female librarians exist not as information professionals, but rather as objects for the voyeuristic to enjoy*” (Poulin, 2008, p. 7). The perhaps most common (negative) stereotype of librarians is that of the “Old Maid Librarian” (Seale, 2008, p. 2), who is described as physically unattractive, spinsterish, bookish, hiding behind her glasses and “shushing” customers (Adams, 2000; Riccio, 2004).

Riccio (2004, pp.10-11) for instance lists a number of films including “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” and “Forbidden” as well as advertisements, including Bacardi and HP, which portray librarians in such a stereotypical, unflattering way. In her study, Riccio cites the text of the HP advertisement, which paints a picture of the librarian as old-fashioned:

*What the Internet needs is an old-fashioned librarian. Finding what you want on the Web should be as easy as finding a book in a library... So you can spend less time looking for, and more time using, the information you need. Shh. You’re on the Internet*

(Riccio, 2004, p. 11).

As the literature review has shown, a significant body of literature on the representation of libraries and librarians in the media exist. Different studies employed different methodologies (content analysis, literature reviews, situational analysis); focused on different sources (films, newspapers, obituaries, fiction) and examined different aspects of representation (physical characteristics; professional attributes; skills of librarians; the library in general). While some studies found little evidence of a negative and stereotypical portrayal of the profession, others concluded that the profession still suffers from negative depictions.

The vast majority of studies tend to focus on librarians as opposed to the library itself, whereby the depictions of librarians vary significantly. Very few studies have been conducted in which the library itself was subject of the investigation, some of which date back to the 1990s or early 2000s, which is problematic, as the public library has changed considerably since. Furthermore, no previous academic studies have specifically investigated how the role of the library is represented in the media.

### **2.4.3 Mass media theories**

Whilst there is little doubt that the media has the power to influence public perceptions and attitudes, the extent and the nature of the media effect is subject to much debate (Temple, 2008, p. 121). Two of the most prominent mass media theories are explained below:

#### **2.4.3.1 Agenda-setting theory**

At its most basic, agenda setting refers to the mass media's capacity to push individuals into thinking and knowing about certain issues and topics (Williams, 2003, p. 181) by prioritizing selected issues whilst ignoring other issues. Rather than telling readers what to think, the media, according to this perspective, has the capacity to tell individuals what to think about (Cohen, 1963, p. 13). This theory has been verified by the findings of a study into the media's agenda-setting capacity conducted by McCombs and Shaw (1972). McCombs and Shaw (1972) interviewed a sample of undecided voters in Chapel Hill during the 1968 US election, asking them to identify the major topics of the day and simultaneously examined the news media coverage of the election campaigns the voters were exposed to, in order to explore the parallels between the attention the media placed on certain topics and the public's perception of the importance of these topics. The study detected a significant correlation between the news media's emphasis and the public's perception of the importance of certain topics (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, pp. 180-181).

#### **2.4.3.2 Framing**

In a widely cited definition Entman describes framing as follows:

*To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described* (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

The above definition illustrates why framing theory is frequently regarded as being closely related to – and an extension of the agenda setting perspective (Scheufele, 1999, p. 103). What differentiates this perspective of media effects from the agenda-setting hypothesis however is that proponents of the framing theory do not view the media's power as being limited to prioritizing and assigning importance to certain issues and to telling people *what to think about*. According to the framing perspective the media moreover has the capacity to tell people *how* to think about a given issue.

It is based on the assumption that the way in which the media presents a story- through the use (or lack thereof) of particular key words or phrases, metaphors, symbols or information sources - shapes how people interpret a given story, event or actor (Entman, 1991, p. 7).

#### **2.4.4 Relevance of newspapers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

An issue that must be addressed when exploring how newspapers portray the public library and the potential effect such portrayal may have on the public perception is the relevance of the printed press in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Trends have been noted, indicating the decline of UK newspapers: in March 2015 “The Independent” saw a decline of 8.07% year on year, “The Guardian” of 9.46 % and “The Sun” of 10,23. With a decline of “only” 0.88 % “The Times” was the best performing of the daily national newspapers (PressGazette, 2015). Overall daily newspapers in the UK are declining at a rate of over 8% a year with their Sunday counterparts declining even faster (9%) (Greenslade, 2014). Thus there is much evidence that leaves little doubt that the engagement with the print media is falling, which can largely be explained by the availability and rise of alternative news sources, such as radio, TV and- perhaps most importantly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century- the Internet. However, looking at the number of people they do reach, rather than solely focusing on the decline, shows that newspapers still reach a significant number of people. The Times, The Independent, The Daily Mirror and The Daily Mail alone in January 2015 had a combined circulation of over three million copies (PressGazette, 2015).

## **3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction to the chapter**

The central aim of this study is to explore and provide an understanding of how UK national newspapers represent the public library and the role it plays. To do so the present study seeks to address the following related research questions:

**RQ 1** What is the nature of the newspaper coverage of the public library?

**RQ 2** What is the extent of newspaper coverage of the role of the library?

**RQ 3** What are the prevailing representations of the role of the public library in national newspapers?

**RQ 4** Has the representation of the role changed between 2000 and 2014?

The present chapter aims to give an overview and evaluate the research design and the methods employed to address the above questions. The first part of this chapter outlines the process of data collection and the sampling technique employed. The researcher will then introduce the research design employed in this study and the rationale for doing so. The chapter will conclude with a reflection upon the limitations of the methodology employed.

### **3.2 Data Collection**

Daily national newspapers have been chosen as the subject of analysis for the present study. Daily as opposed to regional newspapers were selected because they have higher circulation rates, and therefore, it can be argued, are likely to have a more significant impact on the public perception (Shaw, 2010, p. 558). The newspaper articles were collected using “Nexis”, which is an electronic database that provides full access to a large number of searchable newspapers, including national, regional and international news stories as well as various journals, newswires and magazines.



The main advantage of doing a content analysis using “Nexis” is that pre-existing data can be gathered relatively easily and that other researchers can easily access and collect the same data using this database to replicate the study. For many of the papers the archive dates back twenty years.

Due to the time constraints of this study, not all national newspapers could be examined and articles were drawn from the following four newspapers only:

- The Times
- The Independent
- The Daily Mirror
- The Daily Mail

All of these papers are published daily and nationwide and all have an equivalent Sunday issue – the Mail on Sunday, the Sunday Mirror, the Sunday Times and the Independent on Sunday. The Sunday editions were however not included in order to avoid repetitious coverage. These four papers have been selected for their high circulation rates and for the fact that two of the papers - the Times and the Independent – can be categorized as quality broadsheets, while the “The Daily Mirror” and “The Daily Mail” are traditionally regarded as tabloids, which permits the researcher to investigate whether there are differences in the reporting between these papers. A further distinction of tabloids could have been made between the so-called “red top” or “downmarket” tabloid (Daily Mirror) on the one hand and the “midmarket” tabloid (Daily Mail) on the other hand. However for the purpose of this work, a distinction is only made between broadsheets and tabloids. It has to be noted that in the UK today, many traditional broadsheet papers such as the Independent are now published in tabloid size (Branston & Stafford, 2010, p. 443). Thus these terms no longer necessarily define the physical format of the paper.

Furthermore the four papers represent a wide range with regard to their readership profile. The Times and the Independent, as research by Ipsos MORI (2005) has shown, serve a readership made up mainly of people from higher social classes - 53% of the Times readers and 46 % of the Independent readers belong to the upper and middle social classes, while only 11% of the Daily Mirror readers falls into this group. Instead, a high proportion of Daily Mirror readers (39%) belong to the DE social class.

This is in contrast to only 8 % of the Times readers and 10 % of the Independent readers who fall into this group. With 19% of the Daily Mail readers belonging to the DE social class and 26% to the AB social class, the middle market tabloid can be found somewhere in-between the quality newspapers Independent/Times and the Daily Mirror. What differentiates the Daily Mail from the rest of the newspapers is that it serves a predominantly female readership.

Social Grade classification system		% of population
A	Higher managerial, administrative and professional	4
B	Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional	23
C1	Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional	27
C2	Skilled manual workers	22
D	Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers	16
E	State pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only	9

**Figure 3-1: Social Grade Classification system**  
(Source: National Readership Survey, 2014)

With regard to the age profile, a quarter of the readers of the Daily Mirror and the Daily Mail belong to the group of those aged 65 and over, while only 10% of the readers of the Independent belong to this group. The Times has the highest proportion (22%) of readers in the group of those aged 25-34 (Duffy & Rowden, 2005, pp. 19-21).

Not only do these daily nationals represent a wide range with regard to their readership profiles, but also in terms of their political leanings. The right-leaning Daily Mail traditionally supports the Conservative Party (Bartle, 2005, p. 704). Similarly, the Times, owned by Murdoch, while not as strongly as the Daily Mail, too backs the Conservative Party. The Daily Mirror in contrast is highly supportive of the Labour party, while the support of the Independent is not given to just one party, rather both- Labour (with reservations) and the Liberal Democrats have received moderate support by the Independent (Bartle, 2005, p. 704; BBC, 2009).

### 3.3 Sampling

Given the time constraints of the study, a sample period had to be set to reduce the potential number of newspaper articles to be analysed. Therefore the researcher decided to narrow the focus to 2000 - 2014. This relatively broad time span has been chosen, because, as the literature review has highlighted, it represents a period in which the role of the public library has changed dramatically, mainly due to the changing environment and thus, it was believed, would permit the researcher to investigate changes in the media portrayal over time. In particular in regard to technological developments this time period was characterized by massive changes, which dramatically altered the users' expectations, the nature of the services libraries offer and the ways in which patrons use the public library. Perhaps most notably the government-led project the "People's Network" was completed in 2002. This brought computers and Internet access to all public libraries in the UK. Another dramatic external development during the time period analysed was the 2008 global recession and the swingeing austerity measures, introduced in the face of giant depths, including drastic public spending cuts, tax increases and welfare spending cuts, which, as has been stressed in the previous chapter, disproportionately affected the poorest and most vulnerable members of society. As has been observed by Rooney-Browne (2009), the public library plays a vital role particularly in times of economic decline. She found that during economic downturns *"high demand for services and resources aimed at helping individuals search for and apply for jobs online, create electronic versions of their CVs, set up e-mail accounts to correspond with potential employers, and prepare for job interviews have been noted by several library authorities in the UK and the USA"* (Rooney-Browne, 2009, p. 346). The researcher would expect developments like these to be reflected in the media's representation of the library's role.

Having decided on a time frame, the Nexis database was searched using the search term "public library" OR "public libraries". While it may be the case, that a number of relevant articles were not retrieved using these search phrases (for instance those that talk about a public library, but refer to it only as "library"), the combination of these terms, it was thought, would ensure that the number of irrelevant results yielded, would be low.

The search of the Nexis database using this search phrase for the time period 2000-2014 returned over 2200 results. An examination of a number of those results revealed that many of the retrieved articles were irrelevant for the study, because, while the texts made reference to the search phrase, in many documents the public library was not the subject of the text, but rather an "incidental" mention. In order to exclude such irrelevant articles that made no contribution to the study and to further reduce the body of texts to a manageable amount of (ideally) relevant results, the search was refined to show only results with "three or more mentions" of the search phrase. The search returned 232 articles for the 15-year period. The 207 retrieved articles that remained after duplicate documents were removed from the results, were carefully read in order to screen out those articles in which the "public library" was mentioned only briefly and which were thought to be of no relevance. For instance a story about a thief stealing maps from institutions including public libraries was not considered relevant to the research objective. An additional criterion was that the public library that is subject of the newspaper article could not refer to libraries outside the United Kingdom, as the study is interested solely in exploring how public libraries in the UK are portrayed in the media.

Thus, for instance stories about the New York public library or a public library in St. Petersburg were not coded. This process, it has to be mentioned, while it was applied evenly to all newspaper articles, was a highly subjective endeavour, however, was regarded to be the only way to screen out irrelevant texts, which would otherwise distort the results of the study. This technique of sampling is referred to as relevance sampling, (Krippendorf, 2004, pp. 118-120) or as purposive sampling (Bryman 2012, p. 418). It is a non-probability sampling technique. Cases are sampled strategically rather than randomly, whereby the researcher has the goal of the research in mind and systematically reduces the number of textual units to be analysed (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). The result then is not a corpus of texts representative of the population of documents, but "*the population of relevant texts, excluding the textual units that do not possess relevant information*" (Krippendorf, 2004, p. 119). The researcher can apply other sampling techniques when the exclusion criteria used to lower the number of units considered for analysis are exhausted. However, as the corpus of documents, by employing the described criteria, could be reduced to a manageable amount of 96 documents, the present study did not apply further sampling techniques.

### 3.4 Research Design

#### 3.4.1 Mixed methods approach

The present study has adopted a mixed method approach, which can be defined as involving *“the collection or analysis of both quantitative and/or qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, are given a priority, and involve the integration of the data at one or more stages in the process of research”* (Creswell et al., 2008, p. 165).

It is difficult to draw a clear and unambiguous line between quantitative and qualitative research methods (Bryman, 2012, pp. 35-36), however Cassell and Symon have provided a useful distinction between the two approaches. Positioning it against quantitative research, they describe the key characteristics of qualitative research as follows:

*“a focus on interpretation rather than quantification; an emphasis on subjectivity rather than objectivity; flexibility in the process of conducting research; an orientation towards process rather than outcome; a concern with context—regarding behaviour and situation as inextricably linked in forming experience; and finally, an explicit recognition of the impact of the research process on the research situation”* (Cassell & Symon, 1994, p. 7).

As the above definition shows, Cassell and Symon (1994) have defined qualitative research by positioning its key characteristics against what they believe are the main characteristics of the quantitative approach. However rather than regarding these approaches as competing research approaches, they should be viewed as complementing each other -as every research method has certain limitations and weaknesses associated with it, using multiple methods, it has been suggested, can help the researcher to overcome some of the limitations. Hence it is widely accepted that employing a mixed methods approach can strengthen the research (Jick, 1979, Kohlbacher, 2006).

With this in mind, the present study has employed both – qualitative and quantitative techniques as a method to analyse as well as interpret the data retrieved, whereby content analysis has been adopted as the quantitative method. As relying purely on quantitative content analysis with its emphasis on quantification and frequencies, was thought to be inadequate for a detailed exploration of the data, it was expanded upon

through an in-depth qualitative analysis of the data based on grounded theory techniques. This combination, it was believed would allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of particular issues, trends and relationships that were encountered in the data.

To illustrate this, it is useful to go back to the research questions, which are as follows:

**RQ 1** What is the nature of the newspaper coverage of the public library?

**RQ 2** What is the **extent** of newspaper coverage of the role of the library?

**RQ 3** What are the **prevailing** representations of the role of the public library in national newspapers?

**RQ 4** Has the representation of the role **changed** between 2000 and 2014?

As highlighted by terms like “**extent**” and “**prevailing**”, or “**change**”, these questions can be addressed in a quantitative way- that is by determining the frequency with which certain themes, concepts or words occur and compare these.

However, while quantitative content analysis with its emphasis on quantification is well suited to explore these questions, in order to explain the trends that have been observed, the relationships between different variables that occurred, and to provide explanations/interpretations as to why these have emerged an in-depth qualitative analysis of the content was required. Both methods will be explained in greater detail below.

### **3.4.2 Quantitative Content Analysis**

For the quantitative part of the analysis stage a content analysis was conducted, which can be described as a research technique used to systematically analyze the content of written or otherwise recorded text. Thereby researchers make sense of data by quantifying content into themes (Bryman, 2012, pp. 289-290). With a robust coding scheme in place and consistency in the coding procedure, content analysis is transparent, objective and replicable (Bryman, 2012, p. 289).

The rationale for using quantitative content analysis for this study was that this research approach, by reducing texts into quantifiable and analyzable themes and categories, allows the researcher to unobtrusively investigate patterns of representation across large volumes of data. This is particularly important considering the fairly broad time frame of the study. It is furthermore a valuable approach as it provides a means by which to investigate trends in the media portrayal over a long time (Bryman, 2004, p. 195).

Babbie (2010, p. 383) stresses that content analysis is “*essentially a coding operation*” and goes on to define coding as “*the process of transforming raw data into a standardized form*”. For this purpose a coding manual (See Appendix B) and coding schedule (See Appendix C) were devised with the former outlining the coding instructions, providing a list of the dimensions, categories within these dimensions as well as the symbols corresponding to the categories and an explanation for some of the categories. The coding schedule incorporated factual variables (date, article number etc.) and descriptive categories (roles performed by the library). A pilot study using 10 articles was conducted to test the dimensions and categories established. The coding of the articles was a multi-stage process. Data was coded manually. This process was supported by Nvivo. The software allowed the coder, amongst others to organize and code the data more efficiently and to take memos and notes.

For the present study the unit of analysis were newspaper articles, which were analysed for basic information and themes concerning the role of the public library. During the first stage of the content analysis, the following basic information of the article were recorded in the coding table:

- Number of article (each article will be assigned a number)
- Type of article (columns, editorial, news story)
- Date of publication
- Prominence of newspaper article (where it is placed in the newspaper)
- Source quoted in the article
- Main topic of the article

During the second stage of the content analysis, which required a closer reading of the data, the following information were captured and recorded:

- Role performed by the public library (for examples of how the researcher coded the documents see Appendix D)

Coding the texts in line with these pre-determined categories allowed the researcher to explore frequencies, themes and trends in relation to the public library and its role and additionally provided valuable statistical data. The dimensions, such as “sources quoted”, “type of article” or “role performed”, as well as the categories within these dimensions are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

There are a number of limitations associated with quantitative content analysis. In particular content analysis has been criticized for unconditionally assuming a relationship between the frequency with which a particular word or concept occurs and the meaning (Titscher et al., 2000, pp. 60-61). It has furthermore been criticized for being descriptive and neglecting the context of the data that is being analyzed, the latent structures and things that are not said in the document (Kohlbacher, 2006). Mayring (2005, p. 6) goes as far as arguing that content analysis is *“a superficial analysis without respecting latent contents and contexts, working with simplifying and distorting quantification”*.

Therefore the researcher felt that relying solely on quantitative content analysis and the pre-determined classification of the texts associated with this research paradigm would be too restrictive. Thus in order to overcome these concerns and the limitations outlined, the researcher, in addition to the content analysis incorporated qualitative techniques based on grounded theory in the data analysis and interpretation stage.

### **3.4.3 Qualitative Analysis**

The qualitative form of content analysis differs from the above-discussed quantitative form in a number of respects. While content analysis is based on a deductive approach—that is it uses a set of pre-determined themes, finalized before the coding stage



(Wildemuth, 2009, p. 298), the qualitative analysis of content is based on an inductive approach - that is it is less driven by theory, but allows themes to emerge from the text.

This permits researchers to “immerse” themselves in the data and to discover themes throughout the data analysis. It is an approach, which, as Bryman highlights,

*... emphasizes the role of the investigator in the construction of the meaning of and in texts... There is an emphasis on allowing categories to emerge out of data and on recognizing the significance for understanding meaning in the context in which an item being analysed (and the categories derived from it) appeared (Bryman, 2012, p. 291).*

Bryman highlights the role of the researcher in the qualitative approach to the analysis of content. This is one of the issues associated with quantitative content analysis and inductive coding - it does not give sufficient emphasis to the role of the investigator, rather data is viewed as speaking for itself (Willig, 2013, p. 78). This focus on the context as well as its flexibility make it a valuable supplement to the content analysis in the present study. There are a number of different analytic approaches to the qualitative analysis of data. The present work will employ qualitative techniques associated with the Grounded Theory Method (GTM).

#### **3.4.3.1 Grounded Theory techniques**

Grounded theory, which was introduced by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, is a qualitative technique to analysing data, which takes an inductive approach whereby theories and categories are derived from an analysis of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 1). Unlike quantitative research, it does not impose preconceived codes and meanings on the text, but lets categories and theories emerge from the data.

These emergent themes and categories are shaped by the researcher’s interpretation of the text (Bryman, 2012, p. 568). This makes it a more open, dynamic and flexible approach to coding, allowing the researcher to respond to the text.

Thus, in this study categories were developed using a combination of inductive as well as deductive coding.

In addition to looking for manifestations of particular pre-established codes, the author, in line with the Grounded Theory Method, added an inductive element to the data analysis stage and allowed categories and patterns to emerge from the data.

Furthermore, to facilitate the document analysis, this work, in line with the Grounded Theory Method, has employed the constant comparison “tactic”, originally developed by Glaser and Strauss, according to which there should be a constant comparison of new data, codes and categories with those that have already been established. This is a continuous process in which the researcher has to move back and forth between new and existing codes and concepts. Once data has been coded it is not “finished with”, rather it is continuously integrated and compared with new data and emergent themes (Jupp, 2006, p. 37). Established theories or categories can be confirmed, improved or discarded as the result of new categories and concepts emerging from new data. Glaser (1965, p. 439) has identified four stages involved in the constant comparison technique:

- “comparing incidents applicable to each category”
- “integrating categories and their properties”
- “delimiting the theory”
- “writing the theory”

Another important technique associated with the Grounded Theory Method, which has been adopted in this study is “memoing”. During the process of collecting, coding as well as analyzing data, the researcher has continuously taken theoretical notes (memos). They served as a means of capturing ideas, defining concepts and categories and documenting the emergence and development of categories and themes as well as the relationships between them. Taking memos was furthermore useful in helping the researcher to clarify what has been observed in the data and to evaluate the codes that have been applied.

Glaser (1978, p. 83) stresses the importance of writing memos, arguing that it is *“the core stage in the process of generating grounded theory. If the researcher skips this stage by going directly to sorting or writing up, after coding, she is not doing grounded theory”*.

### **3.5 Validity and Reliability**

The issue of reliability and validity is of crucial importance - If reliability is not established, a content analysis is simply of no value (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 141). Therefore the researcher has employed a number of measures to establish validity. Before the researcher started coding the data, all categories used for the content analysis were defined (See chapter 4). This, as is stressed by Riffe, Lacy and Fico (2005, pp. 124-125), is crucial to ensure transparency as well as replicability in the process of assigning the content to the pre-established categories. The language used was kept simple and clear to avoid ambiguity and confusion.

Furthermore to test the reliability of the coding process, an intercoder reliability test was conducted. Intercoder reliability is commonly regarded as a fundamental criterion to establish validity and reliability and is therefore widely advocated (Neuendorf, 2002, p.141). To assess intercoder reliability a second coder was asked to code a number of documents using the coding scheme the researcher has developed. Ideally all articles would have been coded by a second coder, however, due to the scope of the study and the time constraints, this was not feasible. Those articles were selected to be coded by a second person, which, the researcher believed, involved a significant degree of subjectivity when coding it according to the predetermined categories. The second coder was introduced to the study and to the categories and their definitions. By having a second coder, who obtained similar results, it could be demonstrated that the coding manual can be used by more than one person and that the results are not the outcome of the subjective judgment of a single coder, as is recommended by Neuendorf (2002, p. 141).

### **3.6 Limitations of the methodology**

As is the case with any methodology, there are a number of weaknesses associated with the research design and the methods employed in this study. In addition to the limitations associated with quantitative content analysis, which have been discussed earlier in this chapter, there are a number of other limitations that have to be noted here.

As has been briefly mentioned earlier, ideally this study would have examined all national newspapers published in the UK, however due to the time constraints not all newspapers could be included. The study can therefore not claim to offer a complete picture of the portrayal of the public library and its role in the UK press.

Furthermore, the process of both- establishing categories and coding the data is a highly subjective endeavour. Devising the coding manuals and coding the texts accordingly, it is almost impossible to completely eradicate bias from the researcher (Bryman, 2012, p. 306). However, as has been outlined, measures have been taken to minimize this.

## 4 Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Introduction to the chapter

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the data analysis, reporting three sets of results. The first part will present the findings of the content analysis relating to the newspaper coverage of the public library in general between 2000 and 2014, providing an initial understanding and a broad picture of the nature of newspaper coverage. This part will address the following research question:

**RQ 1** What is the nature of the newspaper coverage of the public library?

To address this question, the researcher, in addition to noting down basic information of the article, such as the article number and the date, coded the text in relation to the following key variables:

- the prominence of the article
- the type of article
- the type of sources quoted
- the topic of the article

The second part will then look at the role of the library more specifically, presenting the findings of the content analysis relating to the newspaper coverage of the role of the library. This section seeks to address the following research questions:

**RQ 2** What is the extent of newspaper coverage of the role of the library

**RQ 3** What are the dominant representations of the role of the public library in national newspapers?

**RQ 4** Has the representation of the role changed over time?

Lastly, this chapter will present and discuss the patterns and themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis of the data.

Throughout this chapter, but in particular in the last part of the present chapter the researcher will refer to specific articles and present extracts from the documents.

Thereby the number in brackets following the extracts is the article number. For a list of all articles analysed see Appendix A.

## 4.2 Key Findings

### 4.2.1 Volume of coverage

**Table 4-1: Volume of coverage by newspaper**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Number of articles</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>The Times</b>	48	50 %
<b>The Independent</b>	27	28.1 %
<b>The Daily Mail</b>	15	16.6 %
<b>The Daily Mirror</b>	6	6.3%

Across all four newspapers a total of 96 relevant articles about the public library was identified. As highlighted in the above table, the number of articles retrieved for each of the four newspapers using the outlined criteria, varied greatly. The Times with 48 articles carried the largest number of articles in this sample. This was followed by the Independent, which contributed 27 articles representing 28.1 % of the total number, while 16.6% of the articles analysed came from the Daily Mail. The popular tabloid Daily Mirror with only six articles featured the lowest number of articles in the sample.

As Figure 4-1 below shows, broadsheet newspapers contributed a considerably higher number of newspaper stories to the study than tabloid newspapers, with 78 % of the total number of articles appearing within the broadsheets Times and Independent. Newspaper articles from the tabloid papers made up only 22% of the sample analysed.

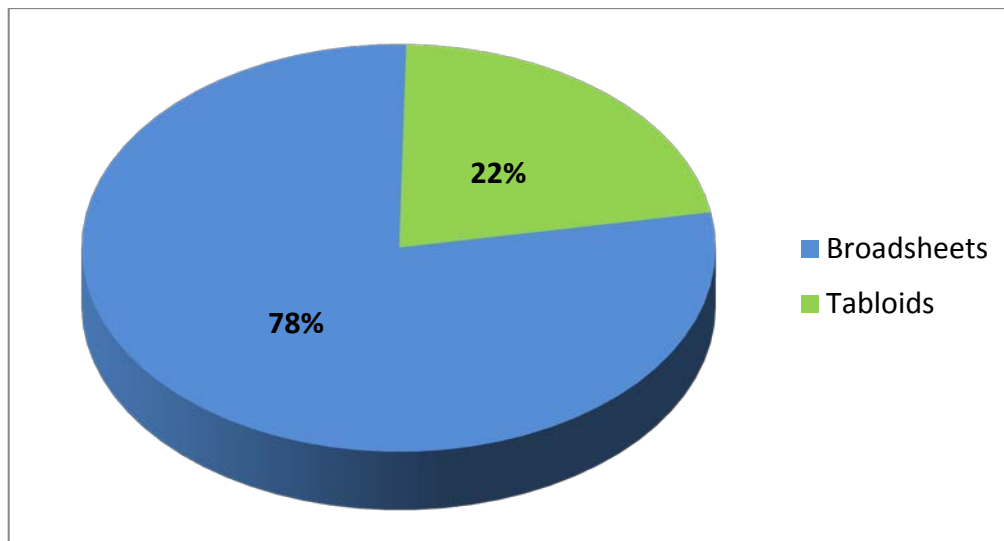
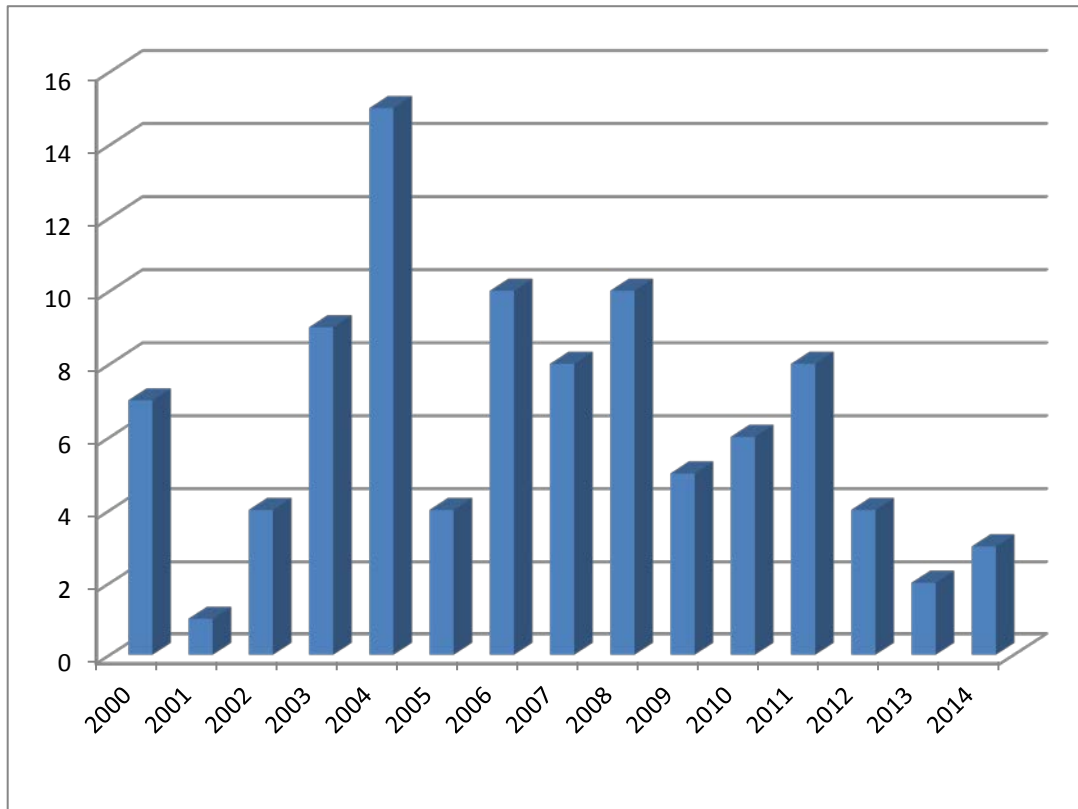
**Distribution of coverage: broadsheets vs. tabloids (n=96)****Figure 4-1: Distribution of coverage between broadsheets and tabloids**

Figure 4-2, which shows the number of articles according to year, reveals a significant variation in the amount of coverage each year. The 96 articles that met the inclusion criteria for this study were published between 29 January 2000 and 18 December 2014, which corresponds to an average of 6.4 articles per year. The extent of coverage between 2000 and 2014 however varied considerably, ranging from as low as one article in 2000 to 15 articles in 2004. The second highest number – 10 articles- was recorded for the years 2006 and 2008.



**Figure 4-2: Number of articles by year**

#### **4.2.2 Type of Coverage**

To investigate in how far stories about the public library were seen as “newsworthy” by the newspapers, the researcher analysed the prominence of newspaper articles within each of the four newspapers, the results of which are detailed below (the number in brackets gives the number of articles citing a particular source as a percentage of the total number of articles of that particular newspaper).



**Table 4-2: prominence of articles by publication**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2-10</b>	<b>11-20</b>	<b>&gt;20</b>	<b>other</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Times</b>	1 (2%)	8 (16.7%)	11 (22.9%)	24 (50%)	4 (8.3%)	48
<b>Independent</b>	2 (7.4%)	6 (22.2 %)	6 (22.2%)	12 (44.4%)	1 (3.7%)	27
<b>Daily Mail</b>	0	2 (13.3%)	5 (33.3%)	8 (53.3%)	0	15
<b>Daily Mirror</b>	0	5 (83.3%)	0	1 (16.7%)	0	6
<b>Total</b>	3 (3.1%)	21 (21.9%)	22 (22.9%)	45 (46.9 %)	5 (5.2%)	96

As table 4-2 shows, out of 96 stories about the public library only three (3.1%) made the first page, all of which were articles from broadsheets – two from the Independent and one from the Times. Almost one in two articles (46.9%) appeared after page 20, which was the most common category. The number of stories that appeared between page 11 and 20 accounted for 22.9%, while 21 articles, representing 21.9 percent of the sample, occupied the pages between 2 and 10, which was the category ranked third. The Daily Mirror was the only publication in which articles featured most frequently between the pages 2 and 10.

The researcher furthermore categorized the articles in terms of the format they took. Thereby a distinction was made between the following four categories:

**News story:** factual report informing readers about current events and issues in the world (or their local area).

**Comment/opinion:** text expressing an (often strong) opinion on a particular subject. This includes regularly produced columns.

**Editorial:** a text expressing the editor's opinion on various topics.

**Letter:** letters written by readers (often members of the public) to the newspaper.

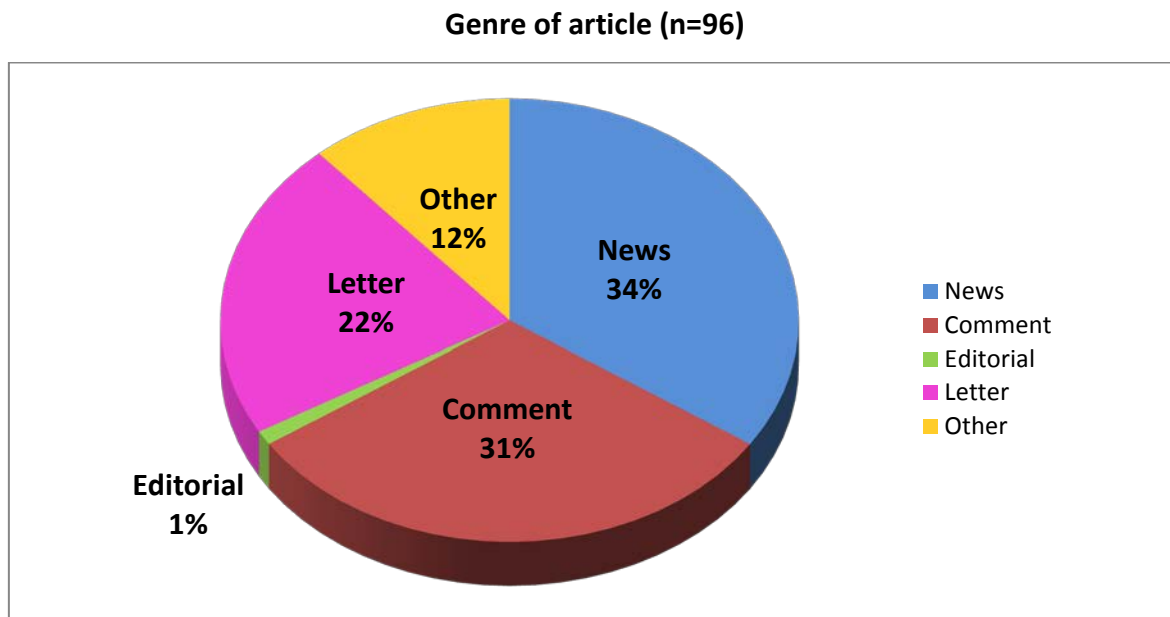
**Other:** any article that cannot be assigned to the above categories.

Table 4-3 details the distribution of articles according to the genre of article. This is furthermore graphically represented in figure 4-3 below.

**Table 4-3: Genre of article by newspaper**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>News</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Editorial</b>	<b>Letter</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Times</b>	14 (29.2%)	10 (20.8)	0	14 (29.2)	10 (20.8)	48
<b>Independent</b>	7 (25.9%)	11 (40.7)	1 (3.7)	7 (25.9)	1 (3.7)	27
<b>Daily Mail</b>	9 (60 %)	6 (40)	0	0	0	15
<b>Daily Mirror</b>	3 (50%)	3 (50 %)	0	0	0	6
<b>Total</b>	33 (34.4%)	30 (31.3%)	1 (1%)	21 (21.9%)	11 (11.5%)	96

33 of the 96 or 34.4 % of all articles were assigned to the news category, which was the largest category. This however was closely followed by comments, which made up 30 of the 96 articles (31.3%). The coverage of public libraries furthermore included 21 letters representing 21.9% of the total newspaper coverage, whereby the Times featured two thirds (n=14) of the 21 letters. It is noteworthy that there were no letters or comments in the Daily Mail or the Daily Mirror. The editorial was the least common type of article comprising only one article.



**Figure 4-3: Genre of article**

The articles that were assigned to the 'other' category included eight feature stories (#18; #23; #27; #33; #58; #78; #79; #93), which are articles on a particular event or issue that tend to be longer and more in-depth than straight news (Pape & Featherstone, 2005, p. 202); two "vox populi" (#85; #86) and one article that can be described as a "question and answer" (#44) article.

In terms of the tabloid/broadsheet distinction, it is interesting to note that more than one in two articles (57,1%) coming from tabloids take the form of a news report. Tabloids in this sample are more than twice as likely to take the form of a news report than broadsheets (28%). Broadsheet titles in terms of the genre of article were much more evenly spread with news reports, comments and letters representing 28% respectively.

### 4.2.3 Sources quoted

The study furthermore investigated the sources quoted within the newspaper articles, whereby each quote was assigned to one of the following categories:

**Government official (Gov):** a government official in this work was defined as any person working for the government (regardless of the level), for government agencies or government departments as well as for companies controlled or owned by the government. The category includes political parties and members and officials associated with them

**Library Professionals (Lib):** This category included library/information professionals as well as professional bodies representing these disciplines such as the ALA or CILIP and individuals associated with them.

**Public (Pub):** This category includes members of the public (including library users). This group did not include members of the public/ library users who could have been assigned to any other category. Thus for instance a library campaigner, who in the article was also described as library user, was assigned to the “campaigner” category.

**Campaigner (Cam):** This category included representatives of library campaigns as well as individuals described as being actively involved in library campaigns in the articles.

**Celebrities (Cel):** a celebrity for the purpose of this study was defined as an individual widely known among members of the public.

**Non-governmental organizations (NGO):** for the purpose of this work a non governmental organization was defined as an organization (and people associated with it) that is independent from the government and whose objectives are not primarily of commercial nature.

**Business (Bus):** A business organization in this study is defined as an organization (and people associated with this organization) existing primarily for commercial purposes.

**Other:** Sources that cannot be assigned to any of the above categories.

**Table 4-4: Number of articles quoting a source, by publication**

<b>News paper</b>	<b>Gov</b>	<b>Lib</b>	<b>Pub</b>	<b>Cam</b>	<b>Cel</b>	<b>NGO</b>	<b>Bus</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>no source</b>
<b>The Times</b>	8 (16.7%)	6 (12.5)	1 (2.1)	3 (6.3)	6 (12.5)	3 (6.3)	2 (4.2)	0	30
<b>Indep.</b>	9 (33.3)	7 (25.9)	2 (7.4)	5 (18.5)	6 (22.2)	1 (3.7)	2 (7.4)	2 (7.4)	11
<b>Daily Mail</b>	7 (46.7)	4 (26.7)	2 (13.3)	3 (20%)	3 (20%)	2 (13.3%)	0	0	5
<b>Daily Mirror</b>	2 (33.3%)	0	0	1 (16.7%)	1 (16.7)	0	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b> <b>(27.1)</b>	<b>17</b> <b>(17.7)</b>	<b>5</b> <b>(5.2%)</b>	<b>12</b> <b>(12.5%)</b>	<b>16</b> <b>(16.7%)</b>	<b>6</b> <b>(6.3%)</b>	<b>4</b> <b>(4.2%)</b>	<b>2</b> <b>(2.1%)</b>	<b>48</b> <b>(50%)</b>

Table 4-4 shows that of the 96 articles that have been analyzed, sources have been quoted in 48 articles, representing 50% of the total number of articles. Those articles that included a quote, frequently quoted more than one source. If an article quoted more than one sources of the same category, this was counted as one instance. However if an article quoted more than one source of different categories, each of those sources were recorded. Government officials were the group most frequently quoted, with 27.1 % of all articles analyzed, quoting at least one government official.

This was followed by the groups “Library professionals” and “Celebrities”, which were quoted in 17 and 16 articles respectively. In addition to these “main” sources, a number of diverse organizations and individuals have been quoted, such as the Carnegie Trust or the Reading Agency, which have been assigned to the category “non-governmental organizations” or the then chief executive of Macmillan Richard Charkin, who has been grouped under “Business”. The two sources that have been assigned to the ‘other’ category were: Professor Rose, who is expert on the history of books and Peter Allenson, who is national organizer of the trade union ‘Unite’.

As table 4-4 shows, tabloids in this study were more likely to include a quotation than broadsheet newspapers and relied even more heavily on government officials as source than did broadsheets. Over 40% (n=9) of the articles appearing within tabloid newspapers quoted a government official, compared to 22.6 % (n=17) within broadsheet newspapers.

#### 4.2.4 Topics

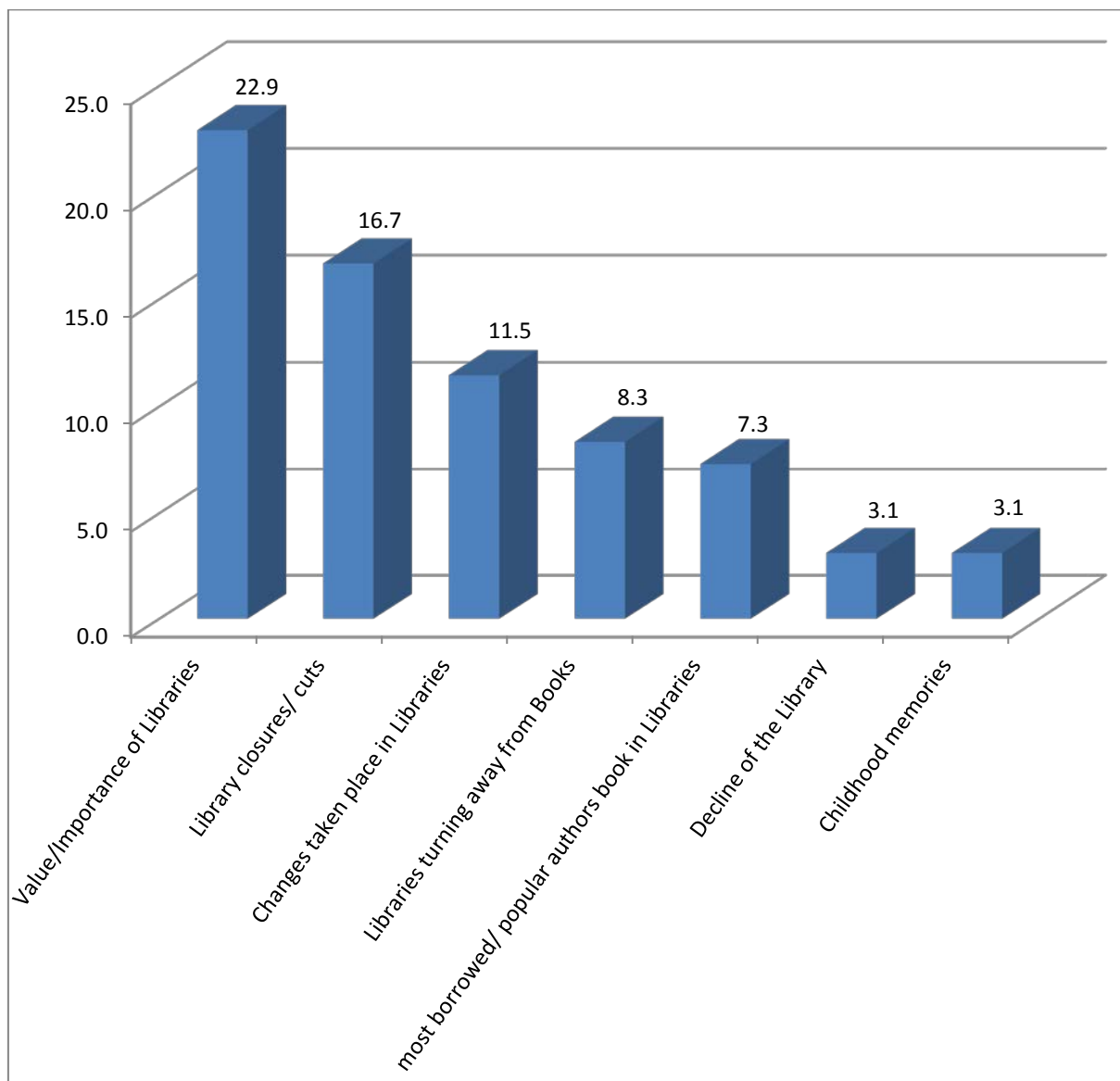


Figure 4-4: Topics of articles (as percentage of total coverage)

Figure 4-4 details the topics, the newspaper articles were most frequently concerned with, whereby only those topics were displayed that were identified as the topic of three or more articles. As is shown in figure 4-4, a careful analysis of the data revealed that, overall, stories about the value/importance of the library dominated the newspaper coverage. These articles comprised nearly 23% (n=22) of the total coverage. This is followed by articles relating to library closures/cuts, which made up about 17% percent of the sample (n=16).

Stories on the changes taking place in the library ranked third with eleven articles, representing 11.5% of the sample, followed by articles on the decline of books and the most borrowed books/authors in libraries representing 8.3% and 7.3 % of the total coverage respectively. However having established that the value and importance of libraries is the most dominant topic in the sample- this topic was rarely addressed in the new reports. On the contrary- of the 22 articles concerned with this topic- only one was a news report. Instead the topic was raised overwhelmingly in comments (n=9) and letters to the editor (n=11). News reports showed different concerns: the library closures/cuts were the most dominant topic among news reports.

### **4.3 Discussion**

The analysis has shown that broadsheets accounted for an overwhelming proportion of articles analyzed in this study- 78% of the total number of articles appeared within the broadsheets. This disparity between the amount of broadsheet and tabloid coverage, the study found, confirms the nature of both- broadsheets and tabloids, the latter of which are known for their sensationalist news style and a news agenda frequently revolving around popular culture and entertainment. Broadsheets on the other hand tend to focus on the so-called hard news-a category, which stories about the public library would fall into and, it can be argued, tend to serve a readership more interested in culture. In contrast to tabloids, they tend to present solid facts and serious topics. However, in the light of the fact that the Daily Mail and the Daily Mirror have the highest circulation of the four publications by a great margin, as is detailed in table 4-5 below, the lack of coverage is considered a negative finding.

**Table 4-5: Circulation figures 2010-2014 by publication (for January each year)**

Newspaper	1/2010	1/2011	1/2012	2013	1/2014
<b>Times</b>	508.250	457.250	397.549	399.339	384.304
<b>Independent</b>	185.815	185.035	105.106	76.802	66.576
<b>Daily Mail</b>	2.120.347	2.136.568	1.945.496	1.863.151	1.780.565
<b>Daily Mirror</b>	1.218.425	1.194.097	1.102.810	1.058.488	992.256

Sources: PressGazette, 2010a; 2010b; 2011; 2012; The Guardian, 2014

Articles analysed in this study were published between 29 January 2000 and 18 December 2014. During the 15-year period, the extent of coverage varied significantly. The highest number of articles was recorded for 2004, where the search yielded 15 results. In contrast, the search phrase “public library” OR “public libraries” retrieved only one relevant result for 2001. Peak coverage occurred on 28 April 2004, when four articles were retrieved. This can be seen as a direct result of Libri’s report “*Who’s in Charge: Responsibility for the public Library Service*”. The report, which is widely known as “Coates report” after the former Waterstone’s director Tim Coates, was published a day earlier. Among other suggestions the report recommended that the expenditure on reading material should be dramatically increased, that opening hours of libraries should be extended and library buildings redecorated and refurbished (Goulding, 2006, p. 15). Unless drastic changes occur, the report alerts, libraries may be obsolete within 15 years. Three (#67; #68; #70) of the four articles published that day, can be seen as a direct response to the report. It is interesting to note that only one of these articles (# 68), questions the fact that the report focuses on only one aspect- that is the library’s role in book lending, while none of the articles questions the fact that the findings of the report were based on an examination of only one authority – namely Hampshire Library service. The finding that it was this report and its depiction of the “end of the library” that provoked the ‘peak coverage’ in this study is certainly concerning for the library.

An analysis of the genre of article found that the format, which articles took was relatively evenly spread. News and Comments represented 34.4% and 30% respectively, while letters made up 22% of all articles. Comments, and letters - both are formats, which allow the author- frequently a member of the public to express his/her opinion.



It is noteworthy that these two formats combined outnumbered the news reports, which in contrast to comments and letters, are assumed not to incorporate the authors view. The proportion between letters and comments on the one hand and news reports on the other hand, it can be argued, suggest that there is a great deal of interest among the public, willing to share their opinion regarding the public library. However, the relatively modest-and lower than expected- number of news reports among the results, also indicates that the public library is not seen as particularly newsworthy on the part of the newspapers.

This is furthermore confirmed looking at the position of articles within the newspapers. As the placement of an article by the newspaper is usually dependent upon how newsworthy it is seen, the fact that only three of 96 articles appeared on the front page, would suggest that articles about the public library are not regarded as particularly newsworthy. The positioning of an article is immensely important as it can potentially determine how likely an article is seen and ultimately read. A news item that appears on the front page or close to it, is more likely to be discovered and read than one that appears on page 40 for example. Thus, the fact that nearly one in two articles (46.9%) appear after page 20 may have serious implication for the public library.

The researcher also noted the topics of the articles and found that the value and importance of public libraries is the most common topic of the news articles analyzed for this study, representing 23% of the total coverage. This certainly is a positive finding, indicating that a positive picture of the profession is being represented in the national print media. As the title “value and importance of the library”, which has been chosen by the researcher to represent this category, might suggest, these articles took a very positive and enthusiastic tone about the profession, frequently emphasizing the usefulness and the indispensability of the service. The frequency with which this topic occurred in comments and letters indicates not only that there is substantial interest in the public library on the part of the public, but also that it is seen as a vital institution.

Articles concerned with library closures and cuts featured in 17% of the articles and consequently ranked second. This finding was highly surprising given the climate in which libraries have been operating during the time period under analysis and in particular since 2008- the onset of the global economic recession and the resulting budgetary cuts filtered

down from the central government, as a consequence of which local authorities had to identify unprecedented savings. Since 2010 alone more than 400 libraries have been closed in the UK (Ellis, 2013). In the light of these events, the researcher would have expected that articles relating to the cuts and library closures would by some margin be the most frequently found subject in the sample. While overall, articles on the value of the library outnumbered other topics, these overwhelmingly took the format of letters and comments. 91% (n=20) of these articles were either comments or letters from the public. Looking at news reports in isolation, the researcher found that these had very different concerns – namely the library closures and cuts, which comprised more than a third of all news reports (36.4%) indicating that this is seen as the most newsworthy topic by the newspaper. By focusing on the closure of libraries, newspapers paint a picture of the public library as an institution in distress facing a bleak future. This is concerning for the profession- as has been outlined in the literature review, several studies have demonstrated the agenda-setting potential of the media, which by prioritizing selected issues, has the capacity to tell people what to think about and how much importance to assign to particular issues. Thus a focus on closures and cuts might increase the potential that this is perceived as a salient issue by the public.

The researcher has furthermore coded the sources quoted in the articles. The analysis shows that government officials by some margin were the most frequently quoted type of source. Overall more than one in four articles (27.1%) included a quote of a government official. In the Daily Mail this amounted to almost one in two articles. While this finding indicates that government officials are in a particularly powerful position to define the public debate surrounding the library and can be seen as what Stuart Hall refers to as “primary definers”-that is individuals that are given privileged access to media channels, overall a range of diverse organizations and individuals, including celebrities and campaigners, have been quoted, pointing towards a certain balance in the choice of sources. The fact that government officials and library experts were the types of sources most frequently quoted, is not surprising, seeing that they tend to be seen as more credible and qualified sources than sources that are little known.

However, while the most frequent type of source were government officials, a significant number of articles, representing 17.7% of the sample, quoted library professionals/experts, which were ranked second. The fact that frequently the voices of individuals who are experts in the field and who tend to have a positive attitude towards the profession, are heard, can certainly be considered a positive finding.

#### **4.4 The role of the public library**

The quantitative content analysis consisted of two stages. In the second stage, the results of which are presented below, the researcher recorded information concerning the role of the public library, coding the texts in line with the predetermined categories that were established based on an in depth literature review as well as the researchers pre-existing knowledge of the topic. Table 4-6 below outlines the categories relating to the role as well as what each category entails:

**Table 4-6: Categories- role of the library**

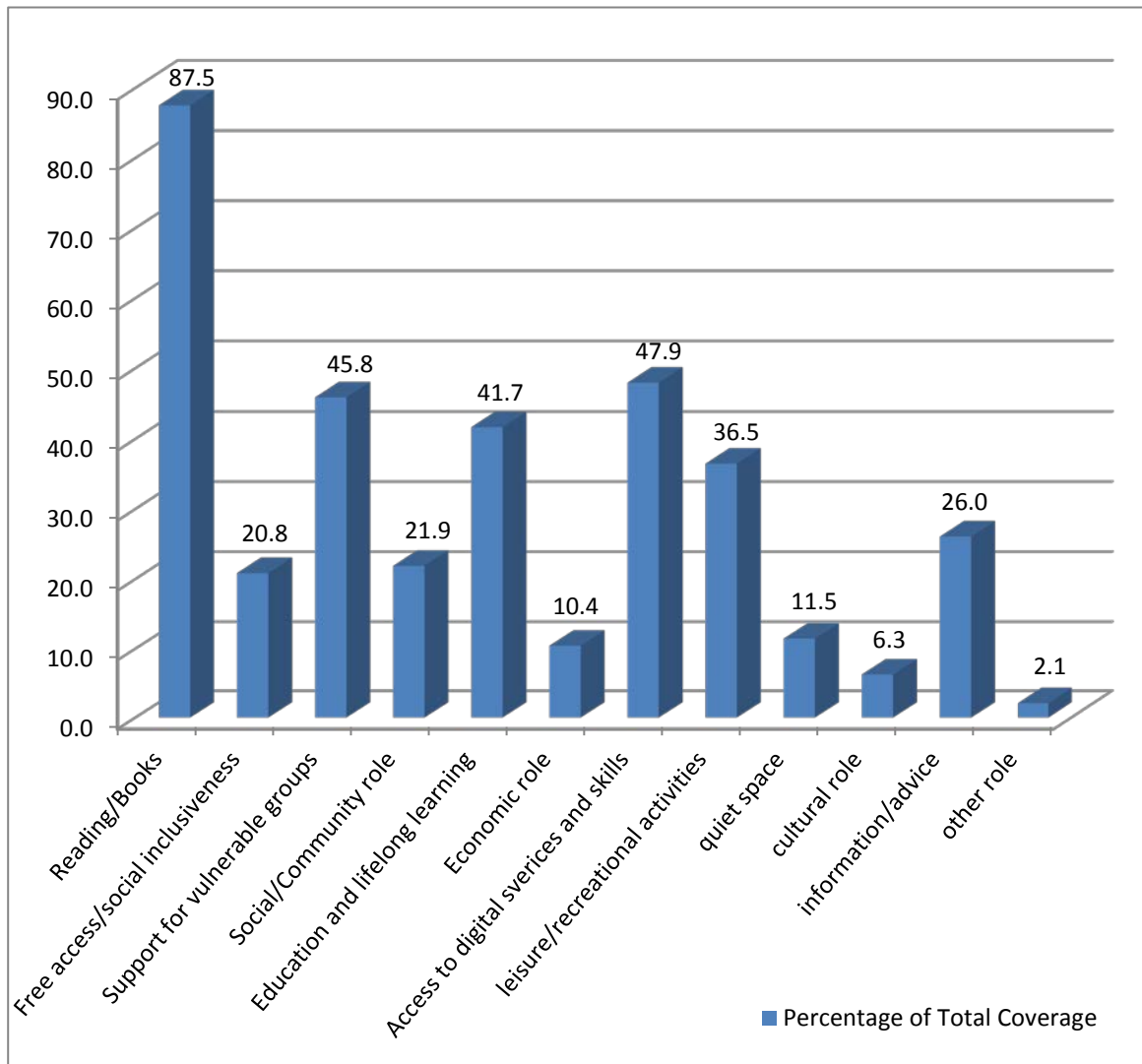
<b>Role of library mentioned</b>	<b>Explanation of category</b>
Not mentioned	
Promotion of reading/ lending books	Housing books; reading groups, poetry classes, reader development
Free access for all/ social inclusiveness	Universal access; free services; tackling social exclusion
Support for vulnerable/disadvantaged groups	Library as a place for unemployed, children, elderly, disabled, ethnic minorities; people from rural/deprived areas
Social/ Community role	Library as a social community hub; place to meet others; build community identity/cohesion; promote cultural diversity/tolerance; foster cross-cultural dialog; well-being of the community
Education and lifelong learning	Support of formal and informal education; providing study space; literacy/numeracy classes; access to knowledge and skills incl. basic life skills; self improvement
Economic role	Support in job seeking; job training; business information; contribution to social/economic mobility
Access to digital services and skills	Access to technologies: computer, Internet, wifi; e-books; e-government; bridging the digital gap; creating digital collections
Support of leisure and recreational activities	Provision of DVD, video, music, (computer) games, films; lounging areas; coffee bars, dancing/swimming classes; personal creativity
Library as a quiet space	Place of peace; rule of silence
Cultural role	Organization of cultural programmes; collecting, preserving and promoting awareness of cultural artefacts/heritage; services/materials reflecting cultural diversity of community; historical documents
Access to information and advice	Provision of access to local information, local history, newspapers, reference enquiries, reference books, genealogy; collecting and organizing of information
Other role	

The researcher coded words, phrases and themes associated with the roles outlined above. For instance if the word “book” (if used in the context of the library) is mentioned, this would be coded as 1 (=Promotion of reading/lending books). Similarly if the phrase “access to wifi” is mentioned, this would be coded as 7 (=access to digital services and skills). Within a text, the researcher coded for the existence of particular words, phrases and themes as opposed to the frequency with which these occurred in a single article. This means that if an article referred to the same role more than once, this was recorded as one mention.

In line with the quantitative paradigm, the total number of articles that mentioned a particular role would then serve as indicator of the relative salience of that particular role. Thus, the analysis is based on the assumption that those categories that are referred to most frequently (by most articles) are those of the greatest importance. Furthermore, the researcher coded words, phrases and themes that explicitly as well as implicitly made a reference to one of the roles outlined above. This means that if a word or a sentence implied a certain role, this was coded. Thus for instance a sentence, which reads “library closures and cuts affect in particular those that do not have Internet at home”, would imply that it is the library’s role to provide access to the Internet. It would thus be given the code 7 (=access to digital skills/services).

#### 4.4.1 Findings- the role of the public library

Figure 4-5 below details the findings of the quantitative analysis, conducted to examine the representation of the library's role in the newspapers:



**Figure 4-5: The role of the library-findings**

The analysis revealed that 93 of 96 articles made a reference to at least one of the roles, which were identified prior to the analysis, representing 96.9% of the total coverage. Of those 93 articles, 80 mentioned more than one role. The library's contribution in relation to the promotion of reading and book lending was the aspect, by far most heavily emphasized by the newspapers, as is highlighted in Figure 4-5. 87.5 % of all articles made a reference to the library's role relating to the promotion of reading and the lending of books. This means that almost nine in ten articles mentioned this aspect.

This was followed by references to the role the library plays in the provision of access to digital services and skills and its role regarding the support of vulnerable groups, which were mentioned in 47.9% (n=46) and 45.8% (n=44) of the articles respectively. The contributions the library makes to education and lifelong learning was ranked fourth with 41.7% (n=40) of all articles in the sample mentioning this aspect, while the category “support of leisure and recreational activities” ranked fifth with 36.5 % (n=35). 26% (n=25) of all articles made reference to the library’s role in regard to the provision of access to information and advice followed by 21.9% (n=21), which mentioned the library’s social and community role. The three roles that have been considerably less emphasized by newspapers are the library’s economic role (10.4%); its cultural role (6.3%) and its role to provide a quiet space (11.5%). The appearances in the “other role” category stem from two articles (#61; #65), which have highlighted the libraries importance in regard to the environment.

**Table 4-7: Roles of the library by year (as percentage of the total yearly coverage)**

	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14
Reading/ Books	100	100	100	89	100	50	80	100	100	80	100	75	50	50	67
Support for vulnerable groups	57	0	75	44	60	50	20	25	30	40	67	63	50	50	33
Access to digital services and skills	57	0	25	67	47	50	10	63	70	40	50	50	50	0	67
Education and lifelong learning	71	0	25	22	40	50	30	50	50	40	50	50	25	0	67
Leisure/ recreational role	14	0	50	44	27	25	10	38	80	20	50	50	25	0	67
Soc/Com role	43	0	25	22	20	0	0	25	30	20	50	0	25	50	33
Info/ advice	29	0	50	22	40	0	30	13	40	20	33	13	0	0	33
Free access	29	0	0	22	20	25	20	25	20	20	33	25	0	50	0
Quiet space	0	0	0	33	0	0	0	0	20	20	17	25	0	0	67
Economic role	0	0	0	33	7	0	0	0	20	0	0	25	25	0	33
Cultural role	14	0	25	0	7	0	0	13	0	20	17	0	0	0	0

Table 4-7 presents the representation of the library's different roles over time. This is presented as a percentage of the total coverage each year. Thus, for instance the library's role in terms of providing access to digital services and skills featured in 47% of the 15 articles published in 2004. The perhaps most striking finding, as the table shows, was that the library's role in relation to the promotion of reading/book lending was the dominant role across the fifteen-year sample period. Similarly- with some fluctuations- the library's role in regard to supporting vulnerable/disadvantaged groups and its role in providing access to digital skills and services remained at the upper end of the table.

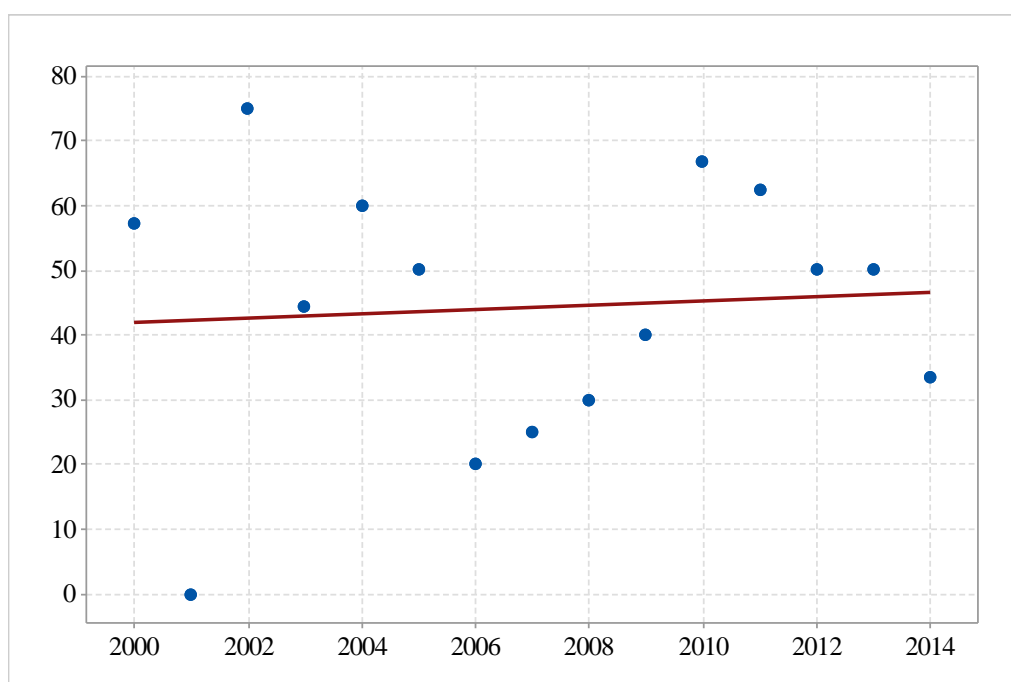


Looking at the other end of the table- the economic and the cultural role- again with some fluctuations- were mentioned very infrequently across the whole sample period.

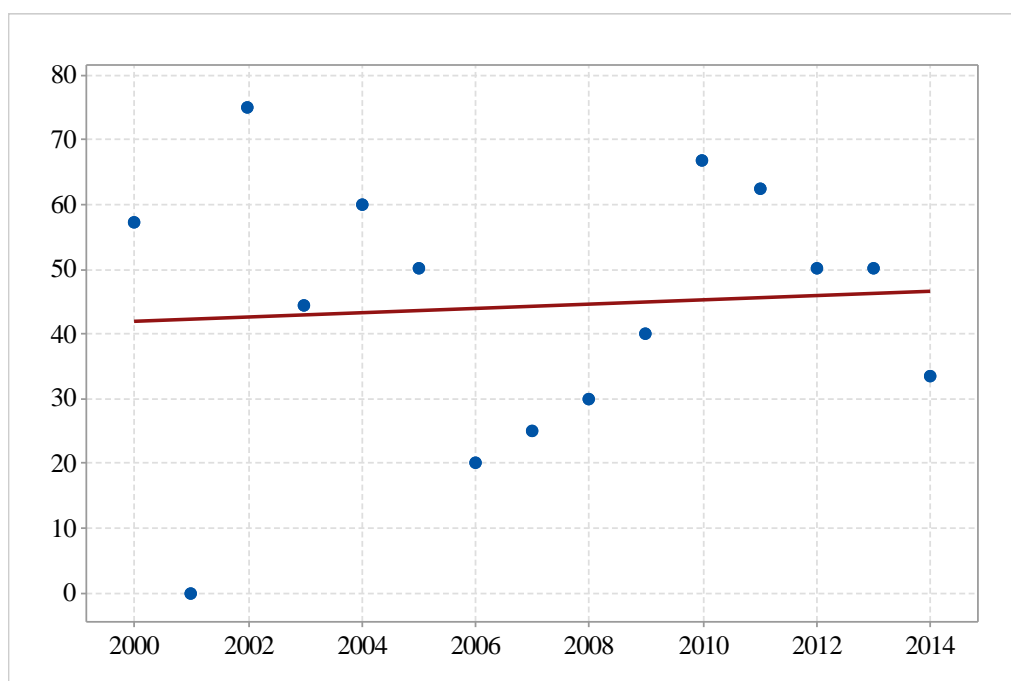
The data was controlled for statistical significance in order to identify whether there are statistically significant trends over time. As table 4-8 shows- apart from the “promotion of reading/book-lending” role, where a moderate negative correlation was found - no statically significant trends were found between 2000 and 2014. This is furthermore graphically illustrated in Figure 4-6 and 4-7 using two examples.

**Table 4-8: Correlation: roles over time**

<b>Role</b>	<b>Spearman's Correlation r</b>	<b>p-Value</b>
<b>Reading/Books</b>	-0.619	p<0.05
<b>Free access/social inclusiveness</b>	0.084	p>0.05
<b>Support for vulnerable groups</b>	0.007	p>0.05
<b>Social/Community role</b>	0.321	p>0.05
<b>Education and lifelong learning</b>	0.122	p>0.05
<b>Economic role</b>	0.351	p>0.05
<b>Access to digital services and skills</b>	0.117	p>0.05
<b>Leisure/recreational activities</b>	0.257	p>0.05
<b>Quiet space</b>	0.405	p>0.05
<b>Cultural role</b>	-0.29	p>0.05
<b>Information/advice</b>	-0.175	p>0.05



**Figure 4-6: Scatterplot: Access to digital skills/services over time**



**Figure 4-7: Scatterplot: Support for vulnerable/disadvantaged groups over time**

#### **4.4.2 Discussion- the role of the public library**

The perhaps most striking finding the data analysis has revealed is the overwhelming proportion of articles that do mention the role of the public library. The extent to which it is represented in the newspaper articles is certainly a positive finding - 93 of the 96 articles made a reference to at least one aspect of the role and 80 of those 93 articles mentioned two or more roles of the library. Shaw in her 2010 study pointed towards the tendency of the media to acknowledge and portray the value of the media, stating that *"the usefulness and relevance of those depicted are overshadowed by the reported value of libraries"* (Shaw, 2010, p. 554). The findings of the present study certainly confirm this tendency. It was moreover positive to discover that all of the eleven roles that the researcher identified prior to the analysis were reflected in the articles analysed. These findings indicate that there is an understanding and awareness on the part of the media of what it is the library does, of the diverse and changing roles it assumes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well as an appreciation of its value and importance in contemporary society. This in turn can be understood as an indication of the success with which the profession in recent years has promoted its work. Given the position, the public library currently finds itself in- that is one in which it constantly needs to justify its existence and prove the contribution it makes, this is extremely important.

The top three roles emphasized in the articles were: "Promotion of reading/lending books"; "Access to digital services and skills" and "Support for vulnerable/disadvantaged groups", whereby the "Promotion of reading and book-lending" function of the library was mentioned most frequently, with appearances in 87.5% of the articles in the sample. As the analysis has shown this was the dominant role over the fifteen-years sample period. While this heavy emphasis on reading and the book-lending function on the part of the newspapers could be interpreted as evidence that the media promotes a stereotypical and outdated image of the library, such claim, the researcher argues, would not accurately reflect the newspapers' representation- particularly seeing that almost half of all articles in the sample referred to the library's role in regard to access to digital services and over a third of all articles mentioned the libraries role in regard to leisure and recreational activities, which frequently included references to the DVD lending function, computer games or coffee lounges- services not traditionally associated with the library.

The following statements exemplify this:

*There are learning zones, a community room (which can be hired out), as well as the latest fiction and a good range of non-fiction; there are DVDs, CDs, video games, talking books and internet access. Many skills are taught here and there is always an attractive exhibition of local talent. Useful items, such as specs and cards are on sale, as are tea and coffee. (#19)*

*Teenagers who apparently like to be called 'young people' can borrow CDs, like books, after trying them out on a player in what used to be the reference room. There is often a queue at the free internet screens. (#37)*

Thus to suggest that by emphasizing the traditional role of books and reading, newspapers promote an outdated picture of the institution, would be misleading. Moreover there is evidence that even in the so-called “information age”, the provision of books and the promotion of reading is still one of the most important- if not *the*- most important role of the library. Not only has it been frequently highlighted in government documents, such as the “Framework for the future”, which regards “the “promotion of reading and informal learning” (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2003, p. 7) as one of the core missions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century public library or the “blueprint for excellence”, which emphasizes the libraries role as a public space for reading, studying and discovery (Dolan, 2007, p.6), but there is also evidence that the public regards this as the most important role of the library. A 2010 survey by the MLA, as has been discussed earlier, revealed that the main reason for people to use the library was book borrowing. It found that 76% of the respondents go to the library to borrow books for pleasure. Therefore it was not surprising that this role of the library received most attention.

The role that was ranked second in terms of the frequency with which it has been mentioned, was “Access to digital skills and services”, which was referred to in 47.9 % of the texts. Given the timeframe this study looked at, this was not surprising either.

However, it was observed that, while this role was referred to in almost one in two articles, it was not always regarded as a positive development with some commentators appearing very dismissive of this modern role of the library, as is illustrated by the following extracts:

*The trend for libraries to have coffee shops, DVD rentals and internet access is a diversion from their primary purpose - providing books. "Libraries are the bedrock of literate culture. It's bad the way libraries are forced to compete with Waterstones and Borders with cafes and DVD rentals. (#41)*

*Today, local government, needlessly craving glamour, seems besotted by hi-tech equipment, forgetting that computers, like television, will soon be within every family's reach. Yet as people live in smaller and smaller houses, they have less and less space for books...To master a book can create a more astute and individual mind than all of Google's gobbets. (#78)*

Thus, as these statements indicate, while some journalists and commentators seem reluctant to embrace this “modern” role of the library- frequently regarding it as a threat to traditional roles such as book lending- an analysis of the 46 articles that referred to the library’s role in relation to digital services and skills, suggests that these are in the minority. The researcher found that 36 of the 46 articles (78.2%) mentioning this role took either a positive or neutral view towards it, while only ten were found to hold negative views. Overall this would suggest that this is seen as a positive development. An increase of the proportion of articles mentioning this role was not observed. Throughout the sample period, it was overshadowed by the role of the library in regard to reading and book lending, which, as has been argued reflects the continuing importance of this role of the library. Given the installation of the people’s network in 2002, which brought computers and Internet access to all public libraries in the country and the increase in the usage of these facilities, following the completion of the government-led program, the researcher would have expected that the frequency with which this role is referred to, would increase over time. However the study found no trend over time.

While this lottery funded project was completed in 2002, the significant role the library could play in the “information age” has been acknowledged before 2002. The Library and Information Commission’s report ‘New Library: The People’s Network’, which was presented in 1997, for instance stressed that *“Tomorrow’s new library will be a key agent in enabling people of all ages to prosper in the information society - helping them acquire new skills for employment, use information creatively, and improve the quality of their lives...”* (Library and Information Commission, 1997). Thus, the early acknowledgement of the library’s potential to be an important player in the information age, could explain why the popularity was relatively high across the whole sample period (with some fluctuations).

45.8 % of all articles made a reference to the library’s role in supporting vulnerable/disadvantaged groups. Thereby in particular the frequency, with which the user group of children and young people has been mentioned, was notable. 39 (88.6%) of the 44 articles mentioning the role of the library in supporting vulnerable/disadvantaged members of the society have mentioned children and young people. As McMenemy (2009a, p. 52) argues the services libraries provide to this user group *“are some of the most vital provided by public library services...”* In recent years libraries have made great efforts to reach out to this user group, as is demonstrated by initiatives such as “Chatterbooks” or the “Summer Reading Challenge”, suggesting that this age group is a priority for them. To see this reflected in the media to this extent can be seen as a positive result.

The data analysis has revealed that the library’s economic (10.4%) and cultural role (6.3%) were the least frequently mentioned roles. As was outlined in the previous chapter, research has shown that the library plays a vital role particularly in times of economic decline. Thus, given the time period analysed and the economic climate, particularly since 2008, the economic role of the library featured in considerably fewer newspaper articles than could have been expected and did not change over time, but remained at the bottom of the list in terms of the frequency with which it has been mentioned over the whole sample period. This result must be a concern for the profession, particularly in the present climate, where the library constantly needs to prove the contributions it makes.

The finding indicates that the library's potential to make significant contributions in these areas needs to be raised considerably.

## **4.5 Qualitative Analysis- Findings and Discussion**

As discussed in the previous chapter, in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the data, the quantitative content analysis of the newspaper articles was expanded upon by a qualitative analysis of the data based on grounded theory techniques. This enabled the researcher to discover emerging patterns and themes, which are presented and discussed below. Due to space constraints this section will focus on two themes that emerged: "the tyranny of numbers" and "the childhood library".

### **4.5.1 The Tyranny of numbers**

The perhaps most noticeable theme that emerged analysing the newspaper articles was the "tyranny of numbers"- that is the flood of numbers and statistics that frequently pervaded newspaper articles about the public library, usually relating to library closures, book issues, costs, visitor numbers or active users. A number of articles relying on numbers and statistics interpreted these very positively – utilizing them as an indication of the continuing relevance and popularity of the service. For instance one correspondent writes:

*"... more than 34 million people (58 per cent of the population) had library membership: each year, there were some 356 million visits to public libraries . About 480 million books were issued. In fact, last year's social trends study for the Office for National Statistics found that visiting the library was the fourth most popular pastime after the pub, restaurants and fast-food outlet." (#94)*

However, such accounts were found to be the exception- outnumbered by articles reporting these figures to emphasize a downward trend, as is illustrated by the following extracts:

*“...the annual statistics for 2002/3 showed that there were 15,843,000 borrowers across the country, which by 2007/8, had dropped by 20 per cent to 12,608,000... Attendance is dropping too, with the number of visits to libraries down by 2.6 per cent in 2007/8 when compared to the previous year and bookstock has faced an 11 per cent fall.” (#26)*

*“...taxpayer funding for libraries has gone up by 39 per cent but visitor numbers have gone down by around 20 per cent and the number of books borrowed has fallen by 35 per cent...” (#67)*

These are just two of a multitude of articles that could have been quoted here. Relying on such quantitative measures is not only extremely simplistic and fails to take into account the outcome of the library usage- i.e what did each of these 15.8 million individuals get from this experience- but a focus on such figures moreover depicts the library as an intrinsically inefficient service- one that is in decline and in desperate need of modernization. Such statistics are frequently accompanied by terms and phrases such as “decline”; “died out”; “outmoded practices” (#67) or “gloomy” (#26), reinforcing this notion.

The emphasis placed on quantitative data, which depicts the library as a service that lacks efficiency, may not only decrease the confidence in the service on the part of the public, but also puts pressure on libraries as recipients of tax money, to constantly justify their activities to the tax payer and be accountable to the public and policy makers. The notions of efficiency, costs and performance measurement that can be found in these articles, are part of the wider “culture of measurement”, which has developed in the UK since the 1980s under the Conservative government and was sustained by subsequent governments (Usherwood, 2007, p. 47). The emphasis placed on performance measurement criteria, such as the number of books issued or visits to the library and on cost-efficiency, is based on a neoliberal rationality, outlined in the research context and literature review section of this work.



Neoliberalism, Brown (2005, pp. 39-40) stresses, “is not only about facilitating free trade, maximizing corporate profits, and challenging welfarism...” but “*involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action*”- including the public library. In the context of the public library, this for instance involved, as is highlighted in the above quotes, the notion that the value and contribution the library makes is reduced to- and can be assessed in terms of a number quantitative performance measurement criteria as well as an emphasis on efficiency and accountability (Huzar, 2014, p. 4). These are notions usually associated with the private sector, which, as has been discussed earlier, have permeated the public sector environment since the 1980s, with public libraries being no exception. As can be seen in these examples, this discourse is frequently employed to criticize “inefficient” and “outdated” public services. Such language is not “neutral” (Greene & McMenemy, 2012, p. 18). It has the capacity to serve as a justification for measures aimed at transforming and modernizing public services- as Greene and McMenemy (2012, p. 18) stress- it is used to “introduce reform and more radical public service restructuring”.

Thus, the persistent focus on such statistics relating to books issues or visits to the library on the part of the press can have potentially serious implications for the profession. By consistently emphasizing quantitative data, the press may play an important role in convincing the public of the necessity to transform the service and to justify the measures undertaken.

#### **4.5.2 The childhood library**

Another key theme that emerged from the qualitative analysis of the data was the tendency among commentators to look back to the library of their childhood or youth. Thereby some commentators tended to be extremely passionate and affectionate when reminiscing about the library of their past and reflecting upon experiences as a child, as is illustrated by the following extracts:

*My mother used to take me to the public library years before I could read. She'd find a quiet corner of the children's section and tell me the stories, pointing to the pictures. I couldn't even pronounce the word - I used to say we were going to the "labrador". My mother says I've been going to the dogs ever since. (#9)*

*If there was one building, during my childhood, that I truly adored, it was Motherwell Library. For me, its very walls were suffused with all the grandest ideals that civilisation cherished... Its entrance was elegant and imposing, with its motto above the open, welcoming, double doors, picked out in gold: "Let there be light." Inside, there was light, which streamed brightly through tall Victorian windows. Large, plush, peaceful, dignified, the library was an oasis of lush possibility in a tough little town. (#61)*

Other commentators described how these childhood experiences have inspired and supported their later career:

*I would not be a writer if it were not for public libraries. Books were a luxury we couldn't afford when I was growing up, but the working-class culture of my time and place was that education was the way you escaped your history. And education came courtesy of books. (#9)*

*I spent hour after hour in that reading room. Every periodical was stacked neatly in its racks, ranging from the short story magazine Argosy to the Yachting Monthly... I think I learned a great deal about my future job poring over those acres of print. (#28)*

*When I was little, my librarian introduced me to the Moomintroll family, Just William, the Borrowers and a host of others who became my friends and without whom I would probably never have been a writer. (#16)*

This tendency on the part of some commentators and journalists to consistently invoke memories of their childhood, when writing about the library, has been observed in earlier studies. As has been outlined in the literature review, Greenhalgh et al. (1995), analysing press columns and reviews, discovered that the media frequently relies on nostalgic

representations of the public library. These findings were later mirrored by Goulding (2006) as well as Fletcher (2011), who found that the media's portrayal of the library is informed by a discourse of nostalgia.

Frequently these accounts are very positive, describing the public library as a source of education and knowledge, inspiration and entertainment-as a place that is *"a passport to the world"* (#16), *"a palace of knowledge"* (#40) or a place that *"remained a home from home"* (#94). By frequently recounting the joy and excitement they experienced as children, when reminiscing about the library of their childhood, and portraying it as a safe and peaceful place for children, these commentators and journalists, it can be argued, promote a highly positive image of the public library. Often, such memories and experiences, it appears, are recalled to defend the library in the light of recent closures and cuts, illustrating the damage, which library closures and insufficient funding can cause- in particular to the youngest and most vulnerable members of society. This is reflected in the following extracts:

*"For a child, a library needs to be round the corner. And if we lose local libraries it is children who will suffer."* (#10)

*Libraries make the world fairer. They are the place where a child with no books at home can go to discover, learn and dream... We must work to save them now from the slash and burn of this temporary Government.* (#16)

Thus in so far as these accounts promote a positive image of the library, depicting it as valuable and indispensable institution- especially for children, they can be regarded as positive. However, as Fletcher (2011) asserts, such nostalgic representations, albeit well-intentioned, may be potentially counter-productive. By focusing on childhood memories and on what libraries used to be there is a danger that commentators neglect what libraries are now or could be in the years to come. This may lead to an outdated image of the library being promoted.

This can be extremely damaging, particularly in the current environment in which libraries constantly have to prove their value and the contributions they make, to the public and to those who allocate scarce financial resources.

While some commentators, as outlined above, reflected upon the library of their childhood to illustrate the importance of the public library and to demonstrate that the loss of these institutions would be tragic, especially for children, other childhood accounts were less well-meaning. The following extracts illustrate this:

*Perhaps it can, but it doesn't say a lot for the morale of our old public libraries. On that last visit of mine, I found the meticulous card index cabinets replaced by yards of printout paper sprawling all over the floor, and flickering screens -- some working, some not -- occupying corners that used to be crammed with books (#28).*

Now, in answer to your question, a bored youth will direct you to a computer terminal set among racks of CDs and videos. Books are shunted away and, if you do manage to find one, it will be tatty and you will know the last user had vinegar on their chips. (#75)

*My mother had made our weekly trips to the library into a wonderful and special pilgrimage. But when I took my son to our own local library, the outings felt desultory, with the books no match for what was available at school or at home, and the ambience depressing when compared to a browse - no purchase necessary - though the children's section of a bookshop. The visits gradually ceased. (#61)*

As these extracts highlight, accounts of the commentators' childhood library use and experiences are not always positive and well-intentioned. At times these serve to contrast the "good old library" with the modern appearance of the library, which, as the above statements show, is regarded as inferior in comparison to its former self. Looking back to their childhood library, commentators are mourning about what they perceive is a loss of the library's traditional services, such as its book lending function. They complain about the present state of the public library- one, it is argued, where books have given way to computers, printers, CD's, DVD's and other sources of entertainment.

However, public libraries today, as the literature review and research context has outlined, operate in an environment, which is completely different from that of their earlier years described by these commentators, and is still changing at a rapid pace. Therefore, to remain relevant to their users, the library has repositioned itself.

Its role and the services it offers have evolved in recent decades responding to changing user needs and expectations, developments in ICT, changing political interests and shrinking budgets. These developments, which a number of commentators lament, it can be argued, simply reflect the changing context in which libraries operate. Therefore the researcher argues that such complaints and attempts to preserve the Victorian model that were observed in some of the articles, are misplaced and potentially damaging.

These findings are in contrast to Fletcher's (2011) observations, who found no evidence to claim that commentators, by looking back to the library of their childhood, were mourning the loss of the traditional model, but argued that these accounts were generally well-intentioned, consistently attaching value to the institution and served as advocacy for the public library in the light of recent spending cuts.

## 5 Conclusion and recommendations

### 5.1 Introduction to the chapter

The present chapter will conclude this study. Following this short introduction, a summary of the main findings of the research will be presented. This will be done by revisiting the research questions outlined earlier in this work. The researcher will furthermore provide a number of recommendations for future research.

### 5.2 Conclusions

The central aim of this study was to explore and provide an understanding of how UK national newspapers represent the public library and its role. In order to investigate the representation of the public library, a content analysis of newspaper articles was conducted. The 96 articles drawn from four national newspapers, which met the inclusion criteria outlined in the methodology chapter, were coded in line with the pre-established categories. This study design enabled the researcher to address the following research questions:

#### **RQ 1 What is the nature of the newspaper coverage of the public library?**

The study found that broadsheet newspapers contributed a considerably higher number of newspaper stories to the study than tabloid newspapers, whereby the Times carried the largest number of articles in the sample analyzed. The extent of coverage between 2000 and 2014 varied considerably. Peak coverage during the sample period occurred on 28 April 2004, which was found to be a direct result of the publication of Libri's report *"Who's in Charge: Responsibility for the public Library Service"*. An analysis of the prominence of articles revealed that almost half of all articles appeared after page 20. Only three of the 96 articles appeared on the front page, indicating that articles about the public library are not regarded as particularly newsworthy by the press.

While the articles most frequently took the form of news reports, a relatively high proportion of comments and letters was observed, which combined outnumbered news

reports- pointing towards a great deal of interest among the public, who are willing to share their opinion regarding the public library. An analysis of the sources quoted within the newspaper articles suggested that government officials are given privileged access to media channels and are in a particularly powerful position to define the public debate surrounding the public library.

Lastly, concerning the topics of articles, the study found that overall, stories about the value/importance of the library, which generally took a very positive and enthusiastic tone, dominated the newspaper coverage, suggesting that a positive image about the library is promoted. However an examination of news reports in isolation found that articles on library closures and cuts dominated the news, which, given the economic climate in which libraries have been operating during the period analyzed, was not surprising.

### **RQ 2 What is the extent of newspaper coverage of the role of the library?**

The study found that an overwhelming majority of the articles analyzed, mentioned the role of the public library. Almost 97% of the newspaper articles made a reference to at least one of the aspects identified prior to the analysis. Of those 93 articles mentioning a role, 80 mentioned more than one aspect. The study furthermore found that all of the roles of the public library the researcher identified prior to the analysis were reflected in the newspaper articles. The researcher considered these findings extremely positive, pointing towards an understanding and awareness on the part of the press of the diverse and changing roles the library of the 21<sup>st</sup> century assumes.

### **RQ 3 What are the prevailing representations of the role of the public library in national newspapers?**

A quantitative content analysis of the newspaper articles has revealed that the roles most frequently mentioned in the sample of national newspapers were: *“Promotion of reading/lending books”*; *“Access to digital services and skills”* and *“Support for vulnerable/disadvantaged groups”*. Thereby the reading and book lending function of the library was by far the most frequently reported role in the newspapers, with appearances in 87.5% of all articles.

Moreover, given the timeframe this study looked at, it was not surprising that almost one in two articles made a reference to the library's role in regard to providing access to digital services and skills, which ranked second. This was closely followed by the library's efforts to reach out to vulnerable/disadvantaged groups, which were referred to in 45.8% of all articles. Thereby, the study found that in particular the importance of the library to children was emphasized by the media.

#### **RQ 4 Has the representation of the role changed over time?**

The study found no significant changes over time. The library's role in relation to the promotion of reading/book lending was the dominant role across the fifteen-year sample period. Similarly- with some fluctuations- the library's role in regard to supporting vulnerable/disadvantaged groups and its role in providing access to digital skills and services remained at the upper end of the table across the sample period. The researcher would have expected an increase of the proportion of articles referring to the library's role regarding digital services and skills. However such trend could not be observed. Throughout the sample period this role was overshadowed by the role of the library in regard to reading and book lending, which can be understood as a reflection of the continuing importance of this role in the digital age.

Additionally, qualitative techniques based on the Grounded Theory Method have been employed, the findings of which were reported and discussed in the previous chapter. Key themes identified were: *"the tyranny of numbers"*- that is the media's tendency when writing about the public library to heavily rely on numbers and statistics usually relating to library closures, book issues, costs, visitor numbers or active users, as well as *"the childhood library"*- that is tendency among some commentators to look back to the library of their childhood or youth, frequently in a very passionate and affectionate manner, the implications of which, as has been argued, are not always positive for the library.



### **5.3 Recommendations for future research**

The topic of the representation of the library in the media offers much scope for future research. The researcher has found no studies investigating the media representation of the role of the library. Therefore the present study was exploratory in nature and more research into the representation of the library's role is necessary. Potential areas for further research include:

- The researcher believes that further research could be conducted to investigate how the library and its role are represented in other media. By focusing solely on newspapers there could be a risk that the population of the study is limited to older people. It would therefore be interesting to look at how social networking sites such as Twitter, (which, it could be argued tend to have younger users) represent the library.
- Furthermore, geographically the scope of the present study was limited to public libraries in the UK. Future studies could investigate the media representation of the library in other countries. A cross-national study would allow researchers to contrast the way in which media in different countries represent the library.
- The study did not find significant changes of the representation of the library's role over time. A larger sample of articles published over a more extended period of time might provide valuable insights of how the representation has changed. A computerized search of keywords relating to the role of the library using specialist software as opposed to coding the data manually, it can be argued, is less time-consuming and would allow the researcher to examine a significantly larger sample.

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## Appendix A - LIST OF ARTICLES ANALYSED

1	Clark, N. (2014). "The great British library betrayal". The Independent, 18 December, 1.
2	Swerling, G. (2014). "Could the librarians please shush?". The Times, 8 November, 7.
3	Times editor. (2014). "Shhhh ...; Libraries should preserve dedicated spaces for private study". The Times, 8 November, 30.
4	Burnham, S. (2013). "On the shelf". The Times, 8 July, 21.
5	Burgess, K. (2013). "Children's champion calls for dual-language school books". The Times, 5 June, 25.
6	Lyons, J. (2012). "1-in-5 libraries are threatened by cuts". Daily Mirror, 31 July, 8.
7	Morris, N. (2012). "Revealed: the full cost of the cull of public libraries". The Independent, 31 July, 1.
8	Scotland Staff (2012). "Libraries are seen as vital". The Independent, 8 May, 13.
9	McDermid, V. (2012). "Libraries lifted me into new". The Mirror, 3 February, 10.
10	Bennett, A. (2011). "Eccentrics, Miscreants and Hissing Assistants". The Mirror, 5 September, 8.
11	Bennion, F. (2011). "Public libraries 'are protected by law'". The Times, 16 August, 21.
12	Searle, I. (2011). "The age of uncertainty". The Independent, 16 June, 46.
13	Dutta, K. (2011). "Ssshhh! The noisy US revolution coming to British libraries". The Independent, 7 March, 8.
14	Horowitz, A. (2011). "We writers are fighting for the wrong libraries". The Times, 3 March, 26.
15	Times Reporter (2011). "'Save libraries' legal bid". The Times, 2 March, 4.
16	Myall, S. (2011). "Essential Reading; Why libraries must be saved". The Daily Mirror, 7 February, 8.
17	Cooper, G. (2011). "Libraries are the cornerstone of our culture". The Times, 1 January, 21.
18	Arnold, D. (2010). "Birmingham's new central library is less about books". The Times, 27 December, 25.
19	Barnes, H. (2010). "Reading the future". The Times, 27 December, 52.
20	Skinner, F. (2010). "Sorry, the demise of the library is well overdue". The Times, 27 August, 28.
21	Blacker, T. (2010). "What's green about cutting recycling?". The Independent, 7 August, 28.
22	Times Reader (2010). "Community asset". The Times, 1 April, 32.

23	Clee, N. (2010). "Fascinating new figures from our libraries reveal the authors that we can't resist". The Times, 13 February, 8.
24	Harding, G. (2009). "Pinter and libraries". The Times, 17 December, 35.
25	Chynoweth, C. (2009). "Let children read their way ahead in life". The Times, 20 November, 81.
26	Akbar, A. (2009). "How are public libraries changing, and what does their future hold?". The Independent, 29 September, 32.
27	Morrison, R. (2009). "Richard Morrison; Art matters". The Times, 21 February, 1.
28	Waterhouse, K. (2009). "Books still furnish a busy brain". The Daily Mail, 26 January, 18.
29	Independent Reporter (2008). "Libraries should be about books". The Independent, 9 October, 28.
30	Clare, R. (2008). "Local library choice". The Times, 26 September, 37.
31	Moss, C. (2008). "Libraries: just books or a community service?". The Times, 22 September, 25.
32	Hamilton, F. (2008). "I'm in the library. Bring a McDonald's and a drink, the footy will be on soon". The Times, 19 September, 8.
33	Hawtee, C. (2008). "Centenary celebrates beauty of books". The Times, 19 May, 51.
34	Times Reporter (2008). "Bookmanism". The Times, 7 March, 16.
35	Aberge, D. (2008). "Public libraries urged to embrace renewal". The Times, 7 March, 29.
36	Savage, M. (2008). "Does the decline in book lending spell the end for the public library?". The Independent, 16 January, 32.
37	Hattersley, R. (2008). "Passion in the library, and not just for books". The Daily Mail, 8 January, 18.
38	Clark, L. (2008). "Balls appeals for more reading (as 71 libraries close in one year)". The Daily Mail, 1 January, 10.
39	Independent Reporter (2007). "Wise words". The Independent, 31 December, 26.
40	Hensher, P. (2007). "These temples of learning transformed Britain". The Independent, 31 December, 4.
41	Byrne, A. (2007). "Anger at library cuts as ministers admit 40 have closed this year". The Independent, 31 December, 4.
42	Alberge, D. (2007). "New round of library closures threatened". The Times, 30 October, 24.
43	Littlejohn, R. (2007). "Bomb-making, sir? You'll find it under Religion". The Daily Mail, 7 September, 15.
44	Dolan, J. (2007). "Library values". The Times, 19 May, 22.
45	Alberge, D. (2007). "How the library romantics turned into thrill-seekers". The Times, 9 February, 35.

46	Daily Mail Reporter (2007). "Internet cafes that used to be libraries". The Daily Mail, 16 January, 33.
47	Bradbury, B. (2006). "Wonderful libraries". The Times, 31 October, 16.
48	Clarke, D. (2006). "In the stacks". The Times, 28 October, 22.
49	Chynoweth, C. (2006). "How do I become a Librarian?". The Times, 13 July, 7.
50	Molloy, M. (2006). "Letter: Briefly... - Lovely libraries". The Independent, 27 March, 32.
51	Alberge, D. (2006). "Outcry over loss of public libraries". The times, 27 March, 15.
52	Lammy, D. (2006). "Read all about it". The Times, 15 March, 16.
53	Hunt, M. (2006). "Libraries could flourish in the digital era". The Times, 14 March, 18.
54	Hawtree, C. (2006). "Libraries could flourish in the digital era". The Times, 14 March, 18.
55	Times Reporter (2006). "Public library book stock". The Times, 28 February, 4.
56	Brooks, J. (2005). "Library loyalty". The Times, 5 January, 18.
57	Doughty, S. (2005). "Libraries dump books for DVDs". The Daily Mail, 21 May, 51.
58	Bjortomt, O. (2005). "Knowledge is an open book". The Times, 29 March, 51.
59	Daily Mirror reporter (2005). "Libraries' £1Bn Bill". The Daily Mirror, 10 March, 28.
60	Alberge, D. (2005). "Report laments decay of libraries". The Times, 10 March, 10.
61	Orr, D. (2004). "Trip to the library should be inspiring". The Times, 26 October, 33.
62	Waterhouse, K. (2004). "Louder music, dimmer lights". The Daily Mail, 23 September, 16.
63	Batt, C. (2004). "Public Libraries". The Times, 3 August, 16.
64	Muirhead, J. (2004). "Letter: Library Service". The Independent, 12 May, 38.
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## Appendix B - CODING MANUAL


### CODING MANUAL

Type of Article		
1 News Report		4 Letter
2 Comment/Opinion		5 Other
3 Editorial		
Prominence of Article		
1 Front Page		3 Page 11-20
2 Page 2-10		4 20 +
Sources quoted		
1 Government official		5 Celebrity
2 Library professional		6 Non-Governmental organization
3 Member of the public		7 Business
4 Campaigner		8 Other
Code	Role of library mentioned	Explanation of category (where deemed necessary)
0	Not mentioned	
1	Promotion of reading/ lending books	Housing books and other printed materials; reading groups, poetry classes, reader development
2	Free access for all/ social inclusiveness	Universal access; free services; tackling social exclusion
3	Support for vulnerable/disadvantaged groups	Library as a place for unemployed, children, elderly, disabled, ethnic minorities; people from rural/deprived areas
4	Social/ Community role	Library as a social community hub; place to meet others; build community identity/cohesion; promote cultural diversity/tolerance; foster cross-cultural dialog; well-being of the community
5	Education and lifelong learning	Supports of formal and informal education; providing study space; literacy/numeracy classes; access to knowledge and skills incl. basic life skills; self improvement
6	Economic role	Support in job seeking; job training; business information; contribution to social/economic mobility
7	Access to digital services and skills	Access to technologies: computer, Internet, wifi; e-books; e-government; bridging the digital gap; creating digital collections
8	Support of leisure and recreational activities	Provision of DVD, video, music, (computer) games, films; lounging areas; coffee bars, dancing/swimming classes; personal creativity
9	Library as a quiet space	Place of peace; rule of silence
10	Cultural role	Organization of cultural programmes; collecting, preserving and promoting awareness of cultural artefacts/heritage; services/materials reflecting cultural diversity of community; historical documents
11	Access to information and advice	Local information, local history, newspapers, reference enquiries, reference books, genealogy; collecting and organizing of information
12	Other role	

Appendix C - CODING SCHEDULE

No	Prominence	Date	Topic	Type of article	Sources quoted	Roles performed

## Appendix D - CODING EXAMPLES

 <p>Daily Mirror July 31, 2012 Tuesday Edition 1;</p> <p><b>1-IN-5 LIBRARIES ARE THREATENED BY CUTS; 'In denial' Tory boss challenged to come clean</b></p> <p><b>BYLINE:</b> JAMES LYONS <b>SECTION:</b> NEWS; Pg. 8 <b>LENGTH:</b> 334 words</p> <p>ONE in five of all libraries are threatened with closure because of Government cuts, alarming research shows.</p> <p>The warning by the librarians' professional body comes after revelations that 157 libraries have already been shut down or handed over to volunteers.</p> <p>Another 225 are under threat, according to the prestigious Public Libraries News.</p> <p>Arts minister Ed Vaizey recently claimed that only around 60 have closed their doors since the Tory-led coalition came to power. But shadow minister Dan Jarvis said Mr Vaizey was in denial about a crisis that will only get worse as funding for local authorities is slashed over the next few years.</p> <p>Mr Jarvis said: "I'm all for being positive about the future of libraries, but at the very least this is a serious cause for concern."</p> <p>"People in dozens of communities affected by these cuts are asking if the minister is living on the same planet."</p>	<p><b>Sources: 1 (Dan Jarvis)</b></p>
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<p>"The only way the Tory minister can spin this line is by discounting the fact that dozens of branches are only being kept open by dedicated volunteers, by ignoring closures of mobile libraries and by turning a blind eye to the iceberg looming ahead."</p> <p>Britain's libraries provide a vital refuge for youngsters from chaotic homes to study</p> <p>Mr Jarvis challenged the minister to come clean on the latest figures from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals.</p> <p>He said: "The Government cannot stop all libraries from closing, nor should that be their aim. But they could make an effort to minimise the damage and encourage measures to cut costs without affecting vital services."</p> <p>"Instead we get half-measures and a vacuum of leadership. Our libraries deserve better."</p> <p>A Department for Culture, Media and Sport spokesman insisted that the Government was keeping a close eye on the situation and repeated that only 60 libraries had closed.</p> <p>He added: "It is also true many local authorities have opened new libraries - and that 40 new or refurbished public libraries will be opened in 2012."</p> <p>Voice of the Mirror: Page 12</p> <p><b>LOAD-DATE:</b> July 31, 2012  <b>LANGUAGE:</b> ENGLISH  <b>GRAPHIC:</b> SPIN3 Tory Minister Vaizey  REFUGE Children study in public library</p> <p><b>PUBLICATION-TYPE:</b> Newspaper</p> <p><b>JOURNAL-CODE:</b> DMR</p> <p>Copyright 2012 MGN Ltd.  All Rights Reserved</p>	<div data-bbox="1043 232 1404 293">Sources: 1 (Dan Jarvis)</div> <div data-bbox="983 320 1404 521">3 Support for vulnerable/ disadvantaged groups (Library as a place for children &amp; young people)</div> <div data-bbox="1043 548 1404 750">5 Education and lifelong learning (Library providing a place to study)</div> <div data-bbox="1043 777 1404 837">Sources: 1 (Dan Jarvis)</div> <div data-bbox="946 1247 1404 1386">Sources: 1 (unnamed DCMS Spokesman)</div> <div data-bbox="983 1599 1350 1715"> <div></div> – Role of the Library  <div></div> – Sources quoted </div>
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<p>The Times (London) May 19, 2007, Saturday</p> <p><b>Library values</b></p> <p><b>SECTION:</b> FEATURES; Pg. 22 <b>LENGTH:</b> 231 words</p> <p>Sir, Public libraries play a crucial role in supporting reading skills and developing an enthusiasm for books and reading activities from an early age ("160 books on must-read list for boys -full of blood, guts and class heroes", May 16).</p> <p>With a growing investment in books for children and young people, public libraries are engaging schoolchildren -not least boys -in choosing stock, designing library spaces, and running reading groups. Results from the recent Taking Part survey demonstrate the impact of this, with a higher percentage of young people visiting libraries than older age groups.</p> <p>Bookstart, led by libraries and partner agencies, encourages parents and carers to enjoy books with children, to stimulate a lifelong love of reading; 1.6 million young children and their families received Bookstart packs in 2006-07, with a personal invitation to join their local library.</p> <p>Most public libraries host activities for children and young people at weekends and throughout the school holidays. More than 650,000 children took part in last year's Summer Reading Challenge.</p> <p>There are 3,500 public libraries in England. A library service with skilled staff and an exciting range of printed and trusted digital resources helps to improve educational achievement, raise standards in skills and build community cohesion.</p> <p>John Dolan Head of Library Policy Museums, Libraries and Archives Council</p> <p><b>LOAD-DATE:</b> May 19, 2007 <b>LANGUAGE:</b> ENGLISH</p> <p>Copyright 2007 Times Newspapers Limited All Rights Reserved</p>	<div data-bbox="1018 338 1406 445">1 Promotion of reading/ lending books</div> <div data-bbox="1050 539 1406 786">3 Support for vulnerable/ disadvantaged groups (Library as a place for children)</div> <div data-bbox="1078 846 1406 994">1 Promotion of reading/ lending books</div> <div data-bbox="1050 1010 1406 1256">3 Support for vulnerable/ disadvantaged groups (Library as a place for children)</div> <div data-bbox="1050 1294 1406 1402">1 Promotion of reading/ lending books</div> <div data-bbox="1066 1429 1406 1536">7 Access to digital services and skills</div> <div data-bbox="1050 1552 1406 1749">5 Education and lifelong learning (Library providing a place to study)</div> <div data-bbox="994 1787 1398 1850">4 Social/Community role</div> <p>■ – Role of the Library</p>
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