Original Article

A very conscientious brand: A case study of the BBC's current affairs series *Panorama*

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ABSTRACT The reputation of British current affairs and documentary series such as the BBC's *Panorama,* Channel 4's *Dispatches* or the now defunct Granada series *World in Action* have rested on an image of conscientious 'public service'. These popular, long running series have, at various points in their history, acted as the 'conscience of the nation', seeking to expose social injustice, investigate misdemeanours by the powerful and take on venal or corrupt vested interest. The BBC's flagship current affairs series *Panorama* is Britain's longest running television programme and, according to the *Panorama* website, 'the world's longest running investigative TV show'. It has provided a template for other current affairs series both in Britain, Europe and around the world while undergoing several transformations in form and style since its launch in 1953, the latest and arguably most dramatic being in 2007. This article will chart the development of *Panorama* as a distinctive, 'flagship' current affairs series over six decades. It will attempt to answer why the *Panorama* brand has survived so long, while so many other notable current affairs series have not. Using research and material from Bournemouth University's *Panorama* Archive, the Video Active website, the BFI and other European archives this article explores the development of an iconic current affairs series that has, at different stages in its history, proved a template for other news and current affairs programmes. Various breaks and continuities are highlighted in *Panorama*'s history and identity, and an attempt will be made to characterise and specify the *Panorama* 'brand' and pinpoint the series' successes and failures in reinventing itself in a rapidly changing media context.
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INTRODUCTION

The evolution of various strands of television journalism since the 1950s has been a key feature in the development of a popular, widely respected and distinctively British public service broadcasting tradition. This evolution has been exemplified in the news and public affairs coverage of the BBC, the world's largest media organisation, although strictly enforced public service obligations have extended to all British terrestrial broadcasters, at least until recent years. The high reputation of British current affairs and documentary series such as the BBC's *Panorama*, Channel 4's *Dispatches* or ITV's now defunct series *World in Action* (Granada) and *This Week* (Thames) have rested on an image of conscientious 'public service' (see Holland, 2006; Goddard *et al*, 2007). These long-running and highly influential series have, at various points in their history, acted as the 'conscience of the nation', seeking to expose social injustice, investigate misdemeanours by the powerful and take on venal or corrupt vested interest.

The BBC's flagship current affairs series *Panorama* is Britain's longest running television programme and, according to the *Panorama* website, 'the world's longest running investigative TV show' (BBC, 2009). Through much of its history it has 'conveyed the sense of speaking on behalf of a socially concerned establishment for an equally concerned audience' (Sassoon, 2006, p. 1201). In doing so, it has provided a template for other current affairs series both in Britain, Europe and around the world while undergoing several transformations in form and style since its launch in 1953, the latest and arguably most dramatic being in 2007.

Throughout *Panorama*'s lengthy history, the programme has attempted to conform to both senses of the term 'conscientious'. First, *Panorama* investigations and reports are often described as 'scrupulous' and are characterized by extreme care, rigour and effort to check facts and produce balanced, sober judgements. This is reflected in the programme's mission statement that states that *Panorama* aims to 'make programmes with authority which make waves and withstand scrutiny' (BBC, 2000). Second, like many current affairs and documentary programmes, *Panorama* is regarded as being guided by conscience, a sense of justice and social responsibility and is charged with the explicit duty 'to scrutinise the use and abuse of power, both public and private' (ibid.). This article will chart the development of *Panorama* as a distinctive, 'flagship' current affairs series over six decades. It will attempt to answer why the *Panorama* brand has survived so long, while so many other notable current affairs series have not. An attempt will be made to characterise and specify the *Panorama* 'brand' and pinpoint the series successes and failures in reinventing itself in a rapidly changing media context.

THE *PANORAMA* 'BRAND'

The question that first arises in addressing the title of this article is whether the television current affairs programme *Panorama* may be considered a 'brand' at all. Is a television programme ever really 'a brand'? Can, or should, a non-commercial identity such as the BBC, its numerous channels or any of the thousands of titles it produces every year be thought of as 'a brand' in the same way as, for instance, Heinz and its '57 Varieties' of soups and sauces? (see Haig, 2004). In fact, a perplexing variety of definitions can be found for the increasingly abstract concept of 'a brand', many of which stray far from the internationally agreed legal definition of a brand as 'a sign or set of signs certifying the origin of a product or service and differentiating it from the competition' (Kapferer, 2008, p. 10). Lury (2004), for instance, gives a number of somewhat opaque definitions and argues that to assume that the brand is

a single, specific thing 'would be to mistake the multiple and sometimes divergent layers of activity that have gone into producing the brand' (p. 16). Kapferer (2008) attempts to clarify matters by defining a brand as, in essence, 'a name that influences buyers, becoming a purchase criterion' (p. 10) that is assessed by how salient, exclusive and trustworthy that name is judged to be. Brand consultant Wally Olins (2008) describes a brand as 'simply an organization, or a product, or service with a personality' (p. 8) and traces how, in recent years, branding has moved way beyond the commercial area to include such diverse organisations as opera companies, orchestras, charities, universities, film companies and sports clubs. To this list we can add people (David Beckham, Madonna), cities, regions and nations (Paris, Andalusia, Malaysia), and political parties (New Labour, Conservative Party) (Lury, 2004; Theilmann, 2009). Broadcasting organisations, television channels and programmes take their place within this long list of recognised brands and as Johnson (2007) argues in relation to the fiercely competitive digital era of US television characterised by deregulation, multimedia conglomeration and expansion 'branding has emerged as *the* defining industrial practice' (p. 6).

Yet, as Lambie-Nairn (1997) points out, compared to other industries, British television broadcasters were surprisingly backward at utilising the standard tools and strategies of mass marketing and promotion such as advertising and branding. He argues that until the 1980s, concern over corporate identity both in the commercial and public sector was often given very low priority. He describes, for instance, how Anglia TV's revolving knight on horseback symbol was an impulse buy made by the chairman in 1959 at a New Bond Street jewellers that was simply 'plonked in front of a camera' (p. 9). He also gives an example of the BBC's attitude to brand awareness:

> The BBC blithely regarded quality programme making as far more important in promoting its image. Its outside broadcast vans, for example, were designed to keep a low profile at royal events, not to advertise a brand. (Lambie-Nairn, 1997, p. 10)

That is not to say, however, that there was no awareness of how the BBC projected its image, as an examination of Lord Reith's work as the Corporation's first Director General quickly shows (see Briggs, 1985; Miall, 1994). In addition to a concern with upholding a particular set of (largely paternalistic) moral and cultural values, Reith's impact can still be seen at work today in the BBC's ongoing commitment to 'universality, high standards, quality and integrity of output' (Born, 2004, p. 81) and the Corporation's core mission to 'educate, inform and entertain' (BBC, 2010). Moreover, the use of more overt branding techniques at the BBC can be traced back to the development from the 1920s of a coat of arms, and motto 'Nation shall speak peace unto nation', a motto quietly dropped in 1936 with the looming prospect of war (Audit, 1937), and in the evolving Jupiter symbol developed between the 1930s and 1950s which continued to influence BBC branding into the 1980s (see Lambie-Nairn's (1997) account of redesigning the 1988 BBC News titles).

PANORAMA IN THE 1950s

Consideration to what is now termed 'branding' is therefore apparent from the earliest days of broadcasting and is also evident in the distinctive signature titles developed for Britain's longest running television programme *Panorama* first broadcast in 1953. The original theme tune, which was featured in the first ever broadcast on 11 November 1953 was an extract from Sibelius' Pelleas and Melisande (Lindley,

2003, p. 8), a gentle piece suitable for introducing the 45-min general–interest programme. The early, fortnightly *Panorama* (1953–1955) was a loosely topical, magazine format programme with a broad remit that covered around five items dealing with culture and the arts, theatre and book reviews, debates on topics of the day and interviews with people in the news, mostly recorded on the British mainland for reason of costs. However, according to Richard Lindley's (2003) definitive history of *Panorama* the programme lacked a clear identity in its first two years and failed to impress audiences and critics (ibid, pp. 21–23).

According to the *Panorama* website, the BBC's flagship current affairs series *Panorama* is 'the world's longest running investigative TV show' (BBC, 2009). Yet, as Gaber (2008) has pointed out, *Panorama* was certainly not an investigative show on its launch and for much of its history following its re-launch in 1955 the programme was largely composed of straight reportage, analysis and landmark interviews, rather than investigations. *Panorama*'s re-launch was initiated by the BBC's Controller of Television Programmes Cecil McGivern who had decided that the programme was not making its mark or justifying its cost. McGivern met with Grace Wyndham Goldie, then Assistant Head of the Television Talks Department, and asked her to take charge of the programme. Goldie, a pioneer in early current affairs programme making, agreed on condition that she could appoint staff of her choosing to achieve the authoritative tone she wanted: 'We all wanted to give *Panorama* a new look; to make it harder, more concerned with the world outside Britain and outside the confines of the studio' (Goldie, 1977, p. 191).

As it was effectively going to be a new programme, Goldie also wanted to change the title, but Cecil McGivern would not agree, insisting that the title '*Panorama*'

was too valuable a property to be discarded. As Lindley (2003) writes, Cecil McGivern 'recognised that the *Panorama* brand was already worth too much to discard' (p. 40) underlining a basic concern with brand properties at a very early point in the programme's history. In an effort to distance the re-launched *Panorama* from its earlier manifestation the team added, what Goldie describes as, the 'somewhat absurd' subtitle 'A Window on the World' to indicate the programme's new intention of reporting on significant events at home and abroad. New music by Robert Farnon entitled 'Openings and Endings' was added and 'this assured and authoritative piece fitted in nicely with the heavyweight image of the BBC at the time' (BBC, 2005, p. 1).

The new-look weekly *Panorama* went on air on Monday 19 September 1955, just days before the launch of ITV. Richard Dimbleby presented the programme from a set that resembled a tower, or lighthouse[1], introducing films from various locations. These included a report by Woodrow Wyatt from Malta whose leaders were then engaged in round-table talks with Britain on the island's future independence. There were also filmed interviews with foreign tourists in Britain and a direct line to France using the 'Eurovision' terrestrial microwave network. Press reviews the following day indicated that *Panorama*'s re-launch had been a success and ratings for the programme quickly rose.

The launching of ITV that year was to challenge the Corporation's monopoly of television broadcasting, and the relatively combative style of news and current affairs interviews on the independent channel soon forced BBC to review its approach. Subsequently, as Robin Day writes in his memoir 'Grand Inquisitor', political interviews became 'less sycophantic'. Robin Day's brisk style at Independent Television News (ITN) typified the new, more

challenging coverage of news and politics that was emerging: mixing description with evaluation, asking probing questions of politicians in unrehearsed interviews, assuming a more authoritative and less deferential air.

In 1959, Leonard Miall, needing replacements for *Panorama* reporters Christopher Chataway and Woodrow Wyatt, who had both been elected to Parliament that year, offered Robin Day a contract. The fact that the BBC was poaching ITN talent was a recognition of the need for a sharper, less stuffy and deferential approach. Day's colleagues at *Panorama*, which he joined in November 1959, would include Charles Wheeler, Robert Kee, James Mossman, Ludovic Kennedy and John Morgan. *Panorama* was to enter the 1960s with probably 'the strongest reporting team ever gathered together for one television programme'.[2] The programme had showed that it was ready to learn from its rivals and move, albeit at a stately pace, with the times. *Panorama*'s place in the BBC's Monday evening schedule and in the nation's cultural and political life was now secure.

PANORAMA IN THE 1960s

Panorama entered the 1960s at the peak of its power and influence with audiences frequently over 10 million in prime time and still very much at the centre of British cultural and political life. Yet, Rowland (2000) reminds us that *Panorama*'s success and 'heavyweight' reputation had to be seen in the context of limited competition, restricted audience choice and the 'freshness' of everything to television. And there was an awareness, even among those working on the programme that *Panorama* could no longer sustain an effective monopoly on the BBC's current affairs reporting.

As new current affairs-oriented programmes were launched on ITV and the BBC, *Panorama*'s 'Window on the World' was soon competing against other perspectives of the sweeping political and social changes of the 1960s. *Tonight* (1957–1965) provided the first serious challenge to *Panorama* from within the BBC. Then came the Arts strand *Monitor* (1958–1965), *Whicker's World* (1959–1988) first seen on BBC, *24 Hours* (1965–1972), the science programme *Horizon* (1964–), *Tomorrow's World* (1965–2003), *Man Alive* (1965–1981) and *Nationwide* (1969–1983). All of these – in addition to the strong documentary, news and current affairs competition ITV provided – strayed onto territory that was once almost exclusively *Panorama*'s. By 1960, current affairs had come to dominate television in the way Outside Broadcasts had done in the early 1950s, and *Panorama* was forced to rise to the challenge of its competitors by adapting and specialising. It began to concentrate on the major national and international events of the era and made use of the latest, but less than reliable, 'Outside Broadcast' technology to introduced 'live' from France, Denmark, Italy, Germany, the Soviet Union and within the United Kingdom. It is in this period that the now familiar *Panorama* logo comes to be used, initially as a large, relief globe of the earth that revolved slowly in the darkened studio from which the title emerged, and also as a two-dimensional graphic behind the presenter Richard Dimbleby. Later, the logo was transformed into a computer-generated, orange-and-black spinning vector design (see BBC, 2000) and more recently as an abstract globe composed of mirror surfaces reflecting different stories (BBC, 2009).

Although the programme's status as the 'flagship of BBC Television's journalistic fleet' (Day, 1990, p. 144) seemed unequivocal in 1960, by 1979 *Panorama* had been reduced, according to the Director General of that time Sir Ian Trethowan, to 'just one of a number of regular factual programmes' (Trethowan, 1984, p. 198). Trethowan, who had worked on the programme in 1965 and 1966, is ungenerous to the

Panorama of the late 1970s, arguably because of the 'flak' generated over the filming of an IRA roadblock in the Northern Irish village of Carrickmore and later controversies. Nevertheless, his observation is accurate to the extent that competition for the kind of factual stories that *Panorama* once had a near monopoly on grew enormously in the 1960s and 1970s. This growth threatened the survival of a magazine-style programme that, in its early days, could touch so many bases and forced *Panorama* to specialise in single-subject, in-depth current affairs, which inevitable would have a smaller audience.

Brand consultant Wally Olins has observed that brands are frequently reinvented or refreshed 'because the world in which they operate has changed or is changing'. With an existing brand that needs reinventing, a culture already exists, together with a tradition, an attitude and a reputation, often a long-standing one. Therefore resistance to change from employees and customers, or viewers, is only natural. To the question often asked by these stakeholders 'why tinker with what already exists?' Olins' answer provides some insight into the dilemma of preserving the successful features of the *Panorama* brand:

> The spirit of the times changes. Technologies change, fashions change; […] and therefore businesses and their brands have to change too, sometimes just in order to occupy the same space in the minds of customers, the market and the world. Just standing still while the world changes around you is not an option. You end up an anachronism, like the Boy Scout movement did. And that's why organisations reinvent themselves. It's why they rebrand, both themselves as corporations and as the brands they own. (Olins, 2008, p. 55)

In 1969, *Panorama*'s title music 'Openings and Endings' that had been the programme's signature for almost 15 years was replaced by Francis Lai's 'Aujourd'hui C'est Toi', a contemporary piece that remained largely unchanged until *Panorama*'s 2007 re-launch. This reflects a degree of continuity in the programme between 1969 and 2007, despite various efforts to refresh the brand and remain relevant and important at a time of increasing social tensions. Efforts to engage with controversial issues would sometimes put the programme on a collision course with Mrs Thatcher's Conservative administration from 1979 to her departure in 1990.

PANORAMA IN THE 1970s AND 1980s

'Dull' is an adjective rarely used to describe *Panorama* in the late 1970s and early 1980s, despite the move towards longer, more single subject programmes. Ruthless team rivalry was often encouraged and the programme gained notoriety over a number of stories, particularly in its coverage of Northern Ireland under Editor Roger Bolton. *Panorama* had shrugged off charges of complacency that had dogged it since the 1950s, but in the process had made itself and the BBC a target for politically motivated attacks that threatened the independence of the Corporation (McQueen, 2010).

The 1980s mark a particularly troubled decade for the BBC in its relations with the Government. *Panorama* found itself at the centre of two major controversies involving alleged government pressure and interference in the 1980s: the first, in its coverage of the Falklands Conflict in 'Can We Avoid War?' (tx: 10.5.82), which was the subject of intense anger from Conservative MPs; the second looking at the influence of racist groups and individuals within the Conservative Party in 'Maggie's Militant Tendency' (tx: 30.1.84) for which the BBC paid out of court damages, much to the dismay of the *Panorama* team responsible. However, Lindley's account (2003) indicates a series of other controversies, of

which only a small proportion involved direct Government pressure, some of which were not party-political matters at all, and many involving behind-the-scenes manoeuvres and interference that were not public knowledge at the time.

The sacking of Alasdair Milne in January 1987 over a series of current affairs and documentary programmes that had upset the government[3] (see Milne, 1989; O'Malley, 1994) and the arrival of John Birt as Deputy Director General is described as 'Year Zero' by Lindley who, only half-jokingly, compares Birt's tenure at the BBC to that of Pol Pot in Cambodia, with his assistants, many from London Weekend Television, characterised as 'black Armani suited revolutionaries' (ibid, p. 261). Birt's new regime resulted in dramatic changes for News and Current Affairs, the closure of the studios based at Lime Grove that had been *Panorama*'s home as well as close scrutiny and control of the programme's output.

Lindley gives many examples of interference by John Birt and the atmosphere of fear and caution it created at *Panorama*, including his own (effective) sacking for a critical film about the new Indian Prime Minister, which had received complaints from the Indian High Commission[4]. Birt and Chairman Marmaduke Hussey's 'grovelling' apology for the film is seen by Lindley as wholly misplaced and aimed at pacifying a British Government angry that the dispute 'could divert trade – notably a potential multimillion pound order for Aerospace Hawk trainers' (*The Guardian* cited Lindley, 2003, p. 339). Further interference with, and delays to, programmes on an alleged SAS shoot-to-kill policy in Northern Ireland, investigation of Peter Wright's *Spycatcher* allegations,[5] corruption in Conservative-controlled Westminster City Council and Conservative Party funding at the end of the decade only fuelled the suspicion that 'self-censorship' had become a habitual response to politically sensitive issues at the BBC.

THE BBC RE-BRAND

Panorama underwent a severe crisis in morale in the 1980s under pressure both from a largely hostile conservative media and government, as well as from Birt's micromanaging and disciplining tendencies. It is also around this time that the formal consideration of more strategic issues of branding for broadcasters, television channels and programmes really began. The importance of branding and of building and protecting 'brand equity'[6] emerged as a key concern as Britain's 'cosy duopoly' in television was challenged by a series of developments. These include the introduction of Channel 4 in 1982, which marked 'the first expression of a properly branded television channel' (Lambie-Nairn, 1997, p. 15), and the growth throughout this and subsequent decades of satellite and cable television (see Crisell, 1997; Esser, 2009). For the BBC, the urgent need to build brand equity and public support was not unconnected to the political battle to save the Corporation from a major assault on the license fee, which was the preferred route of reform for many in Margaret Thatcher's administration (see O'Malley, 1994).

One of the primary ways in which brands are made visible and the values of the brand are communicated to consumers is through the use of logos and idents (Lury, cited in Johnson, 2007, p. 9). This can be seen in the BBC's decision to redesign the identities of BBC1 and BBC2 between 1988 and 1991, and to overhaul other aspects of its on-screen presentation, which has been described as a 'pre-emptive strike' in a battle with Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government for the survival of a license-fee funded broadcasting corporation (Lambie-Nairn, 1997, p. 113). The Corporation called on the services of the branding consultant agency[7] that had produced the popular and influential Channel 4 logo in 1982 (ibid, p. 77). The agency's detailed report

presented to the BBC board in February 1989 drew an analogy between the BBC as producer and Ford as a manufacturer, each with their own brands and sub-brands[8], but was critical of the lack of any clear guiding promotional strategy from the Corporation's management.

Lambie-Nairn's account of the agency's efforts suggest they overcame resistance to marketing and advertising strategies – then regarded with suspicion within much of the BBC – through dialogue, engagement and agreement with all the relevant departments tasked with realising the new-look channel identities. Branding was still seen by many within television until the late 1980s, not just the BBC, as purely a logo or design issue, resulting in a superficial packaging approach or adopting voguish solutions that dated quickly. Lambie-Nairn's redesign of the greyish, staid **TWO** logo to a 'witty, innovative and surprising' **2** ident that came in a variety of guises or characters (for example, on wheels, with paint splashing over it, stuck at an angle into a surface, as a fluffy barking, hyperactive toy) was a breakthrough in this respect. It was based on meticulous research and detailed discussions with channel controllers to identify the gap between negative public perceptions of BBC2 and the channel's aspirations. The re-branding successfully shifted perceptions of the station in audience research from being 'heavy', 'quiet', 'middle-class', 'snobbish', 'boring' and 'highbrow' to more 'pluralistic', 'accessible and entertaining' without any change in programming (Lambie-Nairn, 1997, pp. 122, 135).

PANORAMA IN THE 1990s

The early 1990s are regarded by Born (2004) as a period of growing political sensitivity for the BBC, given the lead-in to Charter renewal in 1996 and she identifies evidence of intensifying 'managerial caution' and 'political emasculation' within news and current affairs. This is particularly evident

in the blocking or delayed transmission of two *Panorama* investigations: the first into how Britain supplied Iraq with a massively powerful piece of armoury in the lead up to the 1991 Gulf War ('Saddam's Supergun', tx: 18.02.91) and the second 'Sliding Into Slump' (tx: 04.05.92) 'in which Britain's economic problems were laid at the door of the former Conservative chancellor, Nigel Lawson' (p. 70).

Perhaps the most famous *Panorama* episode, and certainly the most highly rated, was transmitted under Steve Hewlett's Editorship (1994–1997). In November 1995, 22.8 million people watched Diana, Princess of Wales give a revealing interview to Martin Bashir. Under the Editorship of Peter Horrocks (1997–2000), *Panorama* continued the mix of stories that Hewlitt had developed with a broad audience appeal. In 1999, *Panorama* became one of the first programmes to introduce a programme website and an e-mail address, which Horrocks describes as a 'turning point' from a history of somewhat 'patronising instruction' in news and current affairs to a new 'anti-elitist revolution' in which audience interactivity and feedback would play a major role (Horrocks, 2006, pp. 3–4). Newspaper reports at the time suggest that *Panorama* suffered a 15 per cent cut in budget between 1996 and 1998 and a reduction in filming schedule from 14 to 11 days. There are also complaints about *Panorama*'s new scheduled slot of 22:00 being too late, although it continued to hold a healthy 25 per cent share and averaged around 4.4 million viewers (McCann, 1998).

PANORAMA POST-2000

ITV's decision to axe the *10 O'clock News* is thought to have had a major impact on *Panorama* in October 2000 when it was moved from its traditional Monday night, to what many described as a Sunday night 'graveyard' slot of 22:15 under Editor Mike

Robinson (2000–2006) and reduced the number of programmes per year from 36 to 30. The move to make way for a new 10 O'clock BBC News bulletin was strongly opposed by the *Panorama*'s journalists and production staff. In the first week, *Panorama* lost a quarter of its viewers with a fall from 4.2 million for 'Who Bombed Omagh' (tx: 09.10.00) to 3.2 million for 'Gap and Nike: No Sweat?' (tx: 15.10.00), and never really recovered with average viewing figures falling from a 3.6 million average in 2000 to 2.6 million in 2005. Robinson oversaw the heavily criticised coverage of the 9-11 attacks (which Tom Mangold resigned over), as well as the invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). He also increased *Panorama*'s use of interactive technology, including the first live interactive forum[9] in which 19 000 people voted during the course of the programme on whether war was 'inevitable'. Debate about moving *Panorama* back to a prime-time slot was a constant feature of Robinson's editorship, but as Reevell (2005) points out, an internal BBC report rejected this idea on the grounds that other channels would then target the slot, audiences would fall to around the one million mark, talent would 'jump ship' and the show would be axed.

A great deal of controversy and press coverage accompanied *Panorama*'s eventual move back to prime time and a shorter 30-min (down from 40-min) slot in January 2007 under its new Editor Sandy Smith (formerly Editor of the consumer affairs programme *Watchdog*). Amidst allegations of 'dumbing down', *Panorama*'s new approach was described by BBC Head of Current Affairs George Entwistle as a significant 'shift towards audience focus while retaining an agenda commitment to report the world as it unfolds that will never change'.[10] The programme also had a new format: being introduced by Jeremy Vine, as it had been in previous years by the likes of Richard and David Dimbleby, and with a revamped title sequence and a new 'edgier' filming style. *Panorama*'s former longest-serving reporter Tom Mangold was one of many observers disappointed by the re-launched programme, lamenting the use of 'too many inconsequential stories' and complaining that it 'pratfalls noisily between two stools of silly tabloid guff and serious endeavour' (Mangold, 2007, p. 1). Programmes such as 'Should I Fight Back?' (tx: 08.2.07), 'Teenage Sex for Sale' (tx: 27.3.08) and, most notoriously, 'Scientology and Me' (tx: 14.5.07), in which John Sweeney exploded with rage while interviewing a Scientologist suggested that *Panorama* had lurched towards more 'tabloid' values. There were also concerns about programmes where there appeared to be a failure of investigative journalism, notably in the use of an apparently discredited scientist in 'Wi-Fi: A Warning Signal' (tx: 21.05.07) and the claim, subsequently withdrawn, that Pakistan's cricket coach Bob Woolmer had been poisoned and then strangled in Jamaica in 'Murder at the World Cup' (tx: 01.5.07). Together these may have amounted to a degree of 'brand contamination' for 'the world's longest running investigative show'.

The perception that *Panorama*'s 'brand equity' has fallen in recent years has yet to be accurately tested in terms of measuring some of the elements normally associated with brand success, such as customer satisfaction, 'loyalty, perceived quality, leadership, value, personality, […] awareness and market share' (Aaker, 1996, cited in Bellamy and Traudt, 2000, p. 153). Nevertheless, as a BBC governor's report published in 2005 noted, viewing of current affairs in digital homes is far lower compared with four- and five-channel homes, particularly among less well-off viewers (Reevell, 2005) and ratings for *Panorama* have continued to slide.

Former Director General of the BBC Greg Dyke seemed clear in a recent

interview as to why this might be, arguing that news had triumphed over current affairs in a long-running battle for primacy, partly due to technological developments, and that, as a result, current affairs was now more poorly resourced and less 'important':

> **GD:** When I came to the BBC there was an historic battle between news and current affairs. By the time I left news had won. Current affairs had become less and less important. Had less and less resources. (McQueen, 2009)

The decline in *Panorama*'s 'brand equity' therefore stems to a great extent from the ability of 24-hour news to do, often live, what was previously the exclusive province of current affairs – to report around the nation and from abroad, to hear expert opinion, to speculate and pass comment, and to provide 'backgrounders', investigations, analysis and interviews. What rolling news lacks in depth is made up for by other news programmes such as *Newsnight*, and beyond current affairs by numerous documentary strands. In an intensely crowded market, *Panorama* struggles to find a coherent identity or place and to reinvent itself so that it remains relevant to contemporary audiences. As Olins (2008) notes, 'Brands may have a life cycle of their own, quite distinct from that of the company' (p. 51) and it may be that, at the end of a nearly 60-year run, *Panorama* has been crowded out of the market, ironically, mainly by other BBC brands.

But it is probably too early to write off the BBC's venerable *Panorama* brand altogether. The title alone seems to hold a fascination as a survey of the diverse range of other *Panorama* programmes around the world proves. *Panorama* now actively attempts to appeal beyond its traditional aging, upmarket, male audience that could no longer sustain it on BBC1, and certainly not in its new prime-time slot. The programme is punchier, less concerned with the chatter of Westminster (which *Newsnight* covers amply and which bores much of the viewing population) and attempts to engage with issues of public concern previously regarded as off-limits, such as immigration. Although accusations of 'dumbing down' have hit home in some of the reports, there remains some evidence of a recent, increasing commitment to what traditionalists have been calling for in the programme's coverage of more 'broadsheet' and international stories. This represents a recognition of the need to maintain the conscientious public service values the *Panorama* brand is best known for. Although meticulously researched and scrupulously checked reports and investigations carried out in accordance with a strong sense of right and wrong may be unappealing to a majority of prime-time BBC1 viewers, in a multi-channel era these qualities are at the heart of *Panorama* and cannot be abandoned without real damage to the brand.

Panorama's ability to reinvent itself has been an enduring feature of its six decades of reporting current affairs. It may be that this willingness to adapt, innovate and yet remain true to a mainstream tradition of broadcast journalism will help one of Britain's oldest and mostly quickly recognised broadcasting brands survive the increasingly competitive age of digital broadcasting.

NOTES

1 The edifice, dubbed 'The Dimblebox' by stagehands, got in the way of the cameras and was quickly abandoned according to Goldie.
2 According to Michael Peacock, 'to whom flattery was foreign, when Editor of *Panorama*' (Day, 1990, p. 144).
3 Particularly *Panorama*'s: Maggie's Militant Tendency and the documentary series *Real Lives* portrait of political leaders in Northern Ireland.
4 'Rajiv Gandhi: India's Pilot Prime Minister', tx: 18.1.1988.
5 A proposed programme by John Ware on Peter Wright and the revelations about plots against former Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson in *Spycatcher* ('Wright

or Wrong?', tx: 13.10.1988) is initially blocked by Birt who insists on seeing a detailed script before granting permission for Ware to even talk to Wright.

6 Brand equity is 'a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service […]' (Aaker, 1991 cited in Bellamy and Traudt, 2000, p. 133).

7 Robinson Lambie-Nairn.

8 Both had several types of product and more than one brand; the Escort and the Granada, for example, and BBC1 and BBC2 and their sub-brands – the Ford Grenada 2.8 or BBC2's programmes (Lambie-Nairn, 1997, p. 123).

9 '*Panorama* Interactive: Iraq Crisis' tx: 29.09.02.

10 George Entwistle, Head of Current Affairs – cited in *The Guardian* 22 March 2006.

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