

Print media coverage of breastfeeding in Great Britain: Positive or negative?

Rowena Merritt¹  | Tamsyn Eida¹  | Cara Safon² | Sally Kendall¹ 

¹Centre for Health Services Studies, University of Kent, Canterbury, UK

²Department of Health Law, Policy, and Management, BUSPH, Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Correspondence

Rowena Merritt, Centre for Health Services Studies, George Allen Wing, University of Kent, Canterbury CT2 7NF, UK.
Email: r.k.merritt@kent.ac.uk

Abstract

Media can be a powerful communication tool to promote breastfeeding, influence mothers' breastfeeding behaviour, create positive social norms and generate support among stakeholders and policymakers for breastfeeding. However, negative stories could deter women from starting or continuing to breastfeed. This study aimed to describe the breadth and focus of the media coverage of breastfeeding and the message frames that are found in three of the most widely read national newspapers and three popular women's magazines in Great Britain over a 12-month period, as part of the Becoming Breastfeeding Friendly in Great Britain (BBF-GB) study. For this retrospective media analysis, 77 articles were identified and 42 were included in the study for coding and analysis. We conducted two content analyses to examine the articles' (1) message framing and (2) alignment with the eight components of an 'enabling breastfeeding environment' using the BBF Gear framework. Articles featuring breastfeeding appear in British newspapers and women's magazines all year round. Twenty-four per cent had a neutral tone, while 59% predominantly focused on the positive aspects or positive social support for breastfeeding, and 17% were predominantly focused on the negative aspects or negative social attitudes towards breastfeeding. The articles mainly focused on personal stories reflecting societal barriers and positive shifts (68%), with 12% presenting an analysis of breastfeeding evidence or barriers. There were fewer references to the legislation (5%) and availability of funding (2%) and support (9%). There was no coverage of national coordination and strategy, evaluation systems, or the political will to raise breastfeeding rates.

KEYWORDS

breastfeeding, Britain, media

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

© 2022 The Authors. *Maternal & Child Nutrition* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Breastfeeding is one of the most available and cost-effective public health interventions, impacting positively the health of both child and mother. Increases in breastfeeding would see rates of obesity, asthma, diabetes, and infectious diseases such as gastroenteritis, and maternal cancers such as ovarian and breast fall significantly (Rollins et al., 2016; Victora et al., 2016). Despite these benefits and the recommendation by UN agencies that babies should be exclusively breastfed for the first 6 months of life and continue to receive breast milk to the age of 2 years and beyond, the prevalence of breastfeeding remains low in the UK when compared globally (Victora et al., 2016).

The reasons why women do not breastfeed are complex and may be an interaction of physical, social and psychological factors (Renfrew et al., 2012). A few of the most frequently cited reasons include unrealistic expectations (Trickey & Newburn, 2014), perceived insufficient milk (Public Health England, 2017), painful feeding (Berridge et al., 2005), the desire for more sleep, embarrassment feeding in public and prioritising immediate family well-being (Smith & Strand, 2008). Fathers also have an influence; the more fathers know about breastfeeding, the more likely they are to support it (Tohotoa et al., 2009). However, fathers can also have a negative influence on breastfeeding rates, caused by the father's desire to be a part of the feeding process (Merritt et al., 2019).

While media can be a powerful communication tool to promote breastfeeding programmes, influence mother's breastfeeding behaviour and generate support among stakeholders and policy-makers for breastfeeding (Pérez-Escamilla et al., 2012), it can also contribute to perceptions that breastfeeding is difficult for mothers and potentially dangerous for babies (Brown & Peuchaud, 2008). The media can help to discover public interests and legitimise them as a problem, given its influence in determining which political issues are most important and urgent to solve, hence establishing political priorities in the public agenda (Ferré-Eguiluz et al., 2020; Bou-Karroum et al., 2017). Despite the potential influence of media, there is limited information on how media coverage has influenced breastfeeding rates and affected the enabling environment (Bridges et al., 2018). This study was conducted to address this gap.

This paper presents research on the media and breastfeeding, undertaken as part of the Becoming Breastfeeding Friendly in Great Britain (BBF-GB) project. The BBF project is a global study led by Yale University in the United States (Pérez-Escamilla et al., 2012). The aim of the project is to work with countries and to empower them with their policymakers to explore the current status of the breastfeeding environment in their country and how it can be scaled up to promote, support and protect breastfeeding.

From 2017 to 2019, England, Wales and Scotland went through the BBF study process. The process is focused on an assessment of a country using the BBF Gear model, a visual representation of the

Key messages

- During the one-year study period, articles featuring breastfeeding appeared in the included British newspapers and women's magazines all year round rather than being focused on specific events, such as World Breastfeeding Week.
- Articles mainly focused on personal stories and were initiated by social media posts or discussions on television by mothers, often celebrity mothers.
- While articles discussed the difficulties mothers face during breastfeeding, they also detailed positive support for breastfeeding, presenting a more balanced view.
- The articles did not fully reflect BBF's Gear Model components for an enabling breastfeeding environment. Most were categorised as promotion articles with fewer advocacy pieces. There was little coverage of legislation, services and funding while political support, breastfeeding data and strategic oversight were not covered.

components that comprise an enabling breastfeeding environment. The model was developed based on global evidence and provides a framework for scoring countries against 54 benchmarks related to the eight interlocking gears (Pérez-Escamilla et al., 2012). The gears include (1) Advocacy; (2) Political Will; (3) Legislation and Policy; (4) Funding & Resources; (5) Training and Programme Delivery; (6) Promotion; (7) Research and Evaluation; and (8) Coordination, Goals and Monitoring. As part of the BBF-GB project, the University of Kent with Yale University conducted a media analysis of the top three British newspapers and women's magazines. A similar exercise was conducted in Mexico as part of their BBF work. A content analysis of media articles in relation to breastfeeding was undertaken in Mexico with the aim of exploring how media coverage influences the breastfeeding-enabling environment in Mexico. The study found that, in general, the media coverage in Mexico focused on the strengths of specific breastfeeding policies, and that there was limited news coverage of key factors that negatively influenced or threatened the breastfeeding environment (Ferré-Eguiluz et al., 2020).

2 | METHODS

The aims of the media analysis were to:

1. Explore how breastfeeding is depicted in three top British newspapers and three top women's magazines based on readership figures.
2. Understand the frequency with which breastfeeding is discussed in these channels.
3. Review the content around the concept of breastfeeding, including positive and negative coverage.

Newspapers	Women's Lifestyle Magazines
The Daily Mail/Mail on Sunday (including Scottish Daily Mail)	Good Housekeeping
The Sun/The Sun on Sunday (including Scottish Sun)	Women & Home
The Guardian/The Observer	Yours

FIGURE 1 Included media sources. Details of the newspapers and lifestyle magazines included in the media coverage review.

4. Review the extent to which the articles cover the components of a breastfeeding-enabling environment (BBF gears).

The top three newspapers and magazines were selected due to time and funding constraints of this project which meant not all newspapers and women's magazines could be included. Print and social media can be spread internationally, which can increase the potential influence of international policies and people's attitudes (Robbins & Dowty, 2019). Therefore, it is acknowledged that media from outside of Britain can have an influence on policies and women's attitudes toward breastfeeding in Britain. However, this study chose to focus solely on British newspapers and women's magazines, as the study was done especially to support the BBF-GB work.

To achieve the aims above, the following research questions were asked:

- How do the three top British newspapers and three top women's magazines (based on readership figures) frame the public discussion of breastfeeding?
- What breastfeeding topics and events are being covered, and in what sections of the media (e.g., in the 'health section' or 'news')?
- To what extent do the articles align with the BBF gears which make up the eight components of an enabling breastfeeding environment?

2.1 | Design

A retrospective content analysis of the top three national newspapers and women's lifestyle magazines ranked by sales volume in Britain was conducted (Figure 1). Rankings were taken from the website Statista.com (a provider of market and consumer data) based on readership for both newspapers and magazines. The list of newspapers and magazines was accessed 15 June 2018.

2.2 | Setting

Britain has 12 daily newspapers and 11 Sunday-only weekly newspapers distributed nationally (with additional other

newspapers being distributed locally). British newspapers are often split into two distinct categories: (1) broadsheets (sometimes referred to as the 'quality press') and tabloids (the 'popular press'). As a result of the Levison Inquiry (2011–2012)¹, all newspaper editors must follow the rules of the Editor's Code of Practice, and any complaints about breaches of the Editor's Code of Practice are investigated by the Independent Press Standards Organisation. A recent national survey found that while TV remains the most-used platform for news by British adults, newspapers are still popular. When combining the use of print newspapers and newspaper websites/apps, 49% of British adults read newspapers in 2019 (Ofcom, 2019). The *Daily Mail* remains the most popular print paper for 30% of British adults, followed by The Sun at 21% (Ofcom, 2019). In addition to national newspapers, Britain has numerous magazines published either weekly or monthly, aimed at women.

2.3 | Search strategy

We searched only the online newspapers, as opposed to the print versions. We searched the website platform of each individual medium listed in Figure 1 using the same search strategy and terms:

"breastfeed" OR *"breastfed"* OR *"breastfeeding"* OR *"human milk"* OR *"breast milk"*

Results were filtered by date. Additionally, where the collective search strategy failed to yield the full content of articles archived in any given resource, search terms were searched independently from one another. Finally, the term 'human milk' was searched both with and without quotations; the quotations were included in the search when searched in those databases (i.e., the online sites of the

¹A public, judge-led inquiry set up by the then Prime minister David Cameron to investigate the press after journalists at *The News of the World* were accused of illegally accessing the voicemail messages on other people's phones, without their knowledge or consent.

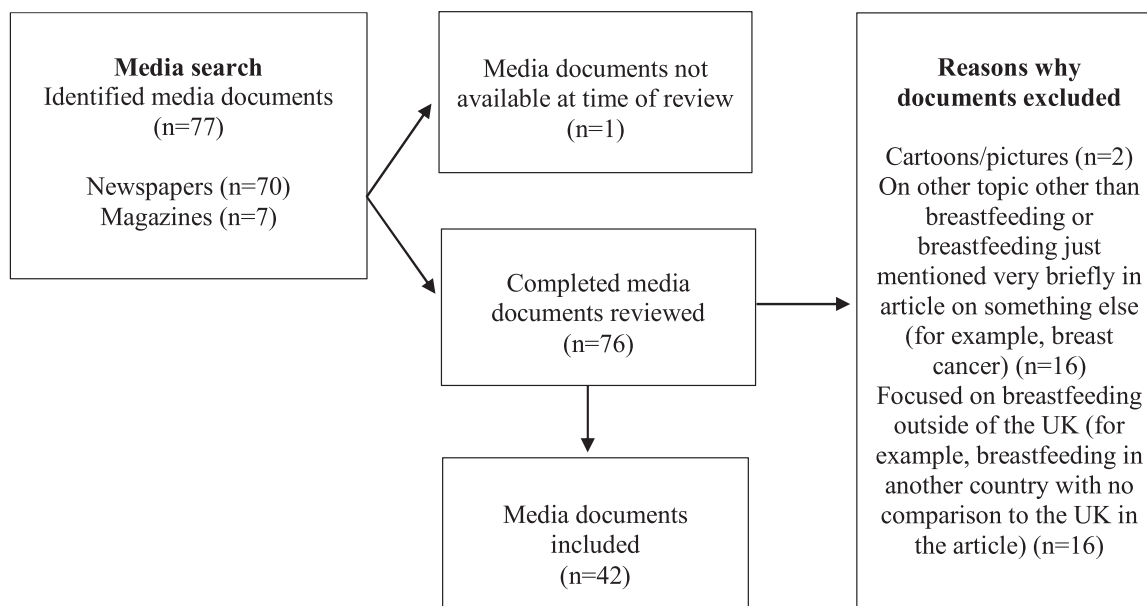


FIGURE 2 Flowchart to identify media article review. Flowchart of media article selection. Of the 77 articles identified, 42 were included in the final analysis.

publications) where the application of the quotations affected the final article yield.

2.4 | Media review

The search was performed on the newspaper and magazines' online sites only and included stories published between 1 June 2017 and 30 May 2018. This date range was selected to be in line with the BBF-GB study criteria which focused on the same time period when reviewing the gear evidence. The media search was designed to meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) published within the search timeframe; (b) related to breastfeeding in the UK (stories on international breastfeeding events were excluded as the study was done specifically to support the BBF-GB work which focused on country-specific data and evidence); and (c) not an advertisement.

Following the identification of 77 articles from the initial search, two researchers (R. M. and C. S.) reviewed them to confirm that they met the inclusion criteria. Of the 77 studies identified, only seven came from the included women's magazines. Thirty-four articles were excluded, and one article was not available online by the time of the review. The most common reasons for exclusion were: being on another topic other than breastfeeding; breastfeeding just mentioned very briefly in an article on something else (e.g., breast cancer) ($n = 16$); or focused on breastfeeding outside of the UK (e.g., breastfeeding in another country with no comparison to the UK in the article) ($n = 16$). A total of 42 articles were included in the final sample, of which 37 were from newspapers and five from magazines (Figure 2).

2.5 | Data analysis

A retrospective content analysis was conducted (Daly et al., 1997) to explore the content of the articles and examine their tone, categorising them as either positive, negative, or neutral towards breastfeeding. One researcher analysed all the data (R. M.), with a second researcher (T. E.) checking 20% of the media documents (selected at random) to ensure coding consistency. The qualitative data analysis software NVIVO (2019) was used to catalog and categorise the articles as either positive, negative, or neutral towards breastfeeding. R. M. added the full article text into NVIVO, then after a thorough reading, categorised each article as positive, negative, or neutral. These decisions were based both on the researcher's perceptions, guided by the definitions presented below.

Articles were classed as neutral if they either focused on fact, for example, simply reporting research findings with no spokesperson giving personal comments or the newspaper/magazine adding any additional information on the research findings, or if they gave both positive and negative options in roughly equal measure (i.e., tried to present a balanced argument, e.g., articles might have one mother talking about the difficulties of breastfeeding, as well as having another mother or a healthcare professional talking about the benefits of breastfeeding, or articles might have one woman talking about her difficulties, but then taking about how she overcame them). Articles were classed as positive if over 80% of the article focused on the positive aspect of breastfeeding, and negative if over 80% of the article focused on the negative side of breastfeeding (the percentage was based on content analysis as opposed to word count). Other variables were also coded (Figure 3), including:

- where the article was placed (e.g., which section—health, lifestyle, etc.) and
- article focus (e.g., research findings, health outcomes, personal stories).

The codes identified were reviewed during analysis meetings with R. M., C. S. and T. E. before the double coding was done.

We then analysed the content of the articles to understand how well the components of an enabling breastfeeding environment (the

Section type: the code for the section in which the article appeared

- News
- Lifestyle
- Opinion
- Women's column
- Health
- TV and showbusiness
- Other

Article focus: the code that best describes what the article was focused on (what the majority of the article discussed)

- Breastfeeding research findings
- Breastfeeding policy, including health polices and work-related policies, such as maternity leave/right to breastfeed in public/workplace
- Breastfeeding health outcomes
- Personal experiences/stories of people's own breastfeeding experiences
- Other

Article attitude: the code that best describes the attitude expressed in the article

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral: the author states no opinion on the issue or two opposing viewpoints are presented

FIGURE 3 Coding structure. Articles identified were coded for type, focus and attitude expressed. Two reviewers reviewed the articles in relation to attitude to try and reduce researcher bias.

eight BBF gears) were represented in the print media discourse. The BBF gears are Advocacy, Political Will, Legislation and Policies, Funding and Resources, Training and Programme Delivery, Research and Evaluation, Promotion, Research and Evaluation, and Coordination, Goals, and Monitoring (see Figure 4 for definitions). One researcher (T. E.) analysed the 42 articles by first deeply reading both the articles and comments sections (where available), then classifying each by gear theme. The gear themes and article links were recorded on an excel document. Some articles aligned with more than one gear and were therefore recorded in each appropriate category. Each article was then reread to check its relevance to the particular gear(s) and to identify the emerging subthemes and summaries. The document was then checked by R. M., followed by a discussion to resolve any differences.

3 | RESULTS

Breastfeeding was covered in the media most months between 1 June 2017 and 30 May 2018 (10 months out of the 12 months) with May and August having the highest frequency of breastfeeding articles published (eight articles each month). The articles ranged from 67 to 1365 words, with an average of 565 words per article.

Most articles were published in the 'lifestyle' sections (31%) or in the 'TV and showbusiness' sections (19%). Only 13% of articles were published in the 'Health' sections (Figure 5).

Most articles (59%) were focused on personal stories from mothers. Ten per cent of the articles detailed findings from research articles, and seven per cent were focused on policy issues, such as relevant work-related policies—the need for a suitable space to express at work, and so forth (Figure 5).

Fifty-nine per cent of the articles predominantly focused on the positive aspects or positive social support for breastfeeding. For example, an article published in January 2018 in the *Daily Mail* newspaper, lead with the heading: 'New mum Ferne McCann wraps up as she enjoys the day out with two-month-old daughter Sunday... after revealing her weight loss is down to breastfeeding'.

Seventeen per cent were predominantly focused on the negative aspects or negative social attitudes toward breastfeeding. For example, an article in the *Daily Mail* newspaper published in February 2018, detailed a negative situation that had arisen when a mother tried to breastfeed in a supermarket café. The mother explained how she had been directed to breastfeed in a storage area which was 'unsafe' and she was made to feel 'ashamed' of breastfeeding. The mother said: 'I don't understand how such a big company can feel like that, especially when they supply everything for breastfeeding. There were only about four other customers in the cafe, and it is not as if I get my whole breast out; it is all very discreet.'

Twenty-four per cent of the articles had a neutral tone. A neutral tone was evaluated as providing an equal (or near equal) mix of both positive and negative information. For example, one of the personal stories identified in the women's magazine titled *Woman and Home*, detailed several female TV celebrities who had discussed their own

experiences of breastfeeding on the lunchtime show *Loose Women* (a British talk show that broadcasts on ITV weekdays from 12:30 pm to 1:30 pm, similar to *The View* show in the United States). The article detailed how the show's panelists talked about their own experiences of breastfeeding, such as: 'I had a terrible experience and I persevered and persevered and I'm really glad I did preserve because there is no doubt about it. There is nothing else on the planet that is brilliant as breastmilk. These incredible bodies we have, women, make this incredible thing called breastmilk' and 'It was horrendous from start to finish...But the main thing is that you have that sense that you are a rubbish mum, you're a failure. As much as I agree you should push breastfeeding, of course, it's the best thing for the baby, but I don't think you should be made to feel [like a bad mother].'

Our analysis of how the media documents related to the BBF gear themes that constitute an enabling breastfeeding environment showed that the majority aligned with the Promotion theme ($n = 31$, 72%), followed by Advocacy ($n = 5$, 12%). Beyond this, there were few references to Training and Programme Delivery ($n = 4$, 9%), Legislation and Policy ($n = 2$, 5%) and only one reference to Funding and Resources ($n = 1$, 2%). There was no reference to the Political Will, Research and Evaluation, or Coordination, Goals and Monitoring themes (Figures 6 and 7).

The promotion theme incorporated a wide range of articles, describing both the societal barriers to breastfeeding, such as the sexualization of breastfeeding and breastmilk, poorly trained staff members acting contrary to company policy, and unrealistic expectations of women and mothers to conform to societal norms around body image and work, and a lack of diversity in the breastfeeding information—to a perceived cultural shift in favour of breastfeeding through the sharing of positive breastfeeding photos, use of donor milk banks, a recommendation to improve young people's knowledge of breastfeeding through the school curriculum and discussion of the beneficial, protective and healing properties of breastmilk and breastfeeding for both infant and mother. One celebrity noted the lack of visibility of breastfeeding, 'I think one of the biggest problems in our society is that we don't see it. We're one of the very few cultures where we don't see it' (Nadia Sawalha; *Woman and Home* article) with another mother noting how the information available lacked diversity and how she was seeking to address this at a local level. 'I often seek out information [about breastfeeding], but the pages and hashtags are usually consumed with women who look nothing like me. It's only until I narrow down my search to include the word 'black' that the results begin to feel inclusive. I use my own social media as a way to be a resource for other women who feel like they don't see themselves' (Cosmopolitan article). The 'promotion theme' articles were more often presented as personal stories and were mixed in their presentation of breastfeeding and the reader response. Within articles, positive social media responses were frequently cited as part of positively framed stories, such as, 'Bravo for posting such a natural and beautiful thing. I always appreciate when public figures help in re-normalising the most natural thing in the world' (Prima article). The comments sections expressed both positive and negative responses. For example, in

Themes	Definition
<i>Advocacy gear</i>	It is the effort for translating evidence-based recommendations into actions to promote breastfeeding. Advocacy seeks through a massive social mobilization engage people and resources to generate enough political pressure to influence political will
<i>Political will gear</i>	It is the expressed, institutional, and budgetary commitment on the part of a government to carry through a policy. Political will exists when a sufficient set of decision makers with a common understanding of a particular problem on the formal agenda is committed to supporting a commonly perceived, potentially effective policy solution
<i>Legislation gear</i>	It is the establishment and enactment of national laws, norms, regulations, and policies on breastfeeding that demonstrate a national commitment to scale-up, promote, and support breastfeeding programs and initiatives
<i>Funding and resources gear</i>	It is the budget of a government for a specific activity. National funding strategies that demonstrate a national commitment to scale-up breastfeeding programs, for example, (a) specific pay line for funding breastfeeding policies and programs and (b) provide a formal mechanism to fund maternity entitlements
<i>Training and programme delivery gear</i>	Training: It is the training provided to health care providers about attitudes, knowledge, and skills on breastfeeding counselling and lactation management.
	Programme delivery: It is the activities planned and delivery at all levels of health care, including facility-based programs (such as the baby-friendly hospital initiative) and community-based programs (including mother-to-mother support activities)
<i>Promotion gear</i>	It is the use of a variety of methods (including social media, national and local events, campaigns, community activities, and interpersonal skills) to convey breastfeeding messages to targeted audiences
<i>Research and evaluation gear</i>	It is a sound multilevel monitoring and evaluation system is needed to ensure that the breastfeeding programs are being properly implemented and to share information from the local to the national level and to enable proper decision making, at each level, in a timely fashion.
<i>Coordination, goals and monitoring gear</i>	The synchronization and integration of activities, responsibilities, and structures of command and control to ensure that government resources are used in the most efficient way to adequately fulfil the function of breastfeeding policy.

FIGURE 4 Definitions of BBF gears (Ferré-Eguiluz et al., 2020). Definitions of the BBF gears were used to support the coding of the print media articles (from Ferré-Eguiluz et al., 2020).

response to a *Daily Mail* story, 'I couldn't give her what she needed... but these women stepped in', readers varied in their response to this article about a mother who used donor milk after her cancer diagnosis and mastectomy from 'well-done mum' to 'she could have used formula nothing wrong with it'.

Those articles relating to Advocacy centred around two sub-themes: citing research evidence illustrating the positive impacts of breastfeeding, for example, through reducing allergies, which presents the breastfeeding evidence as a starting point for better-informing guidelines for preventing food allergies, and the benefits

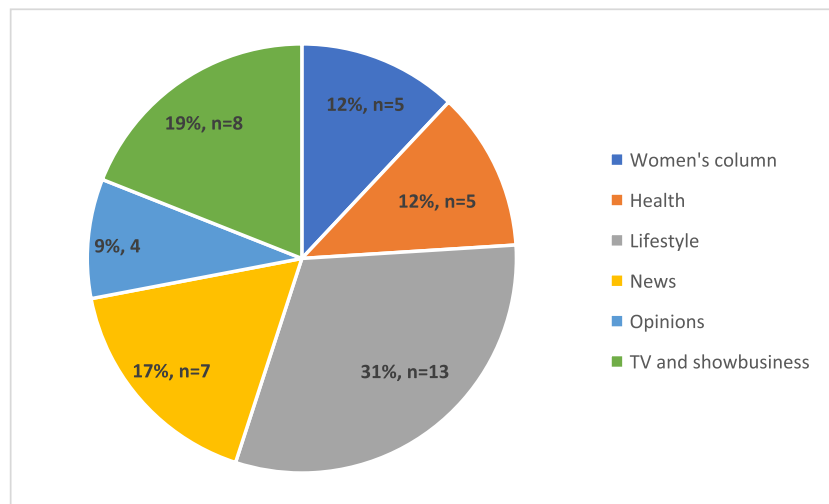


FIGURE 5 Where articles are placed in the newspapers and magazines (by percentage). Details where the articles were placed, with the highest percentage of articles coming under the lifestyle section in the newspapers and magazines.

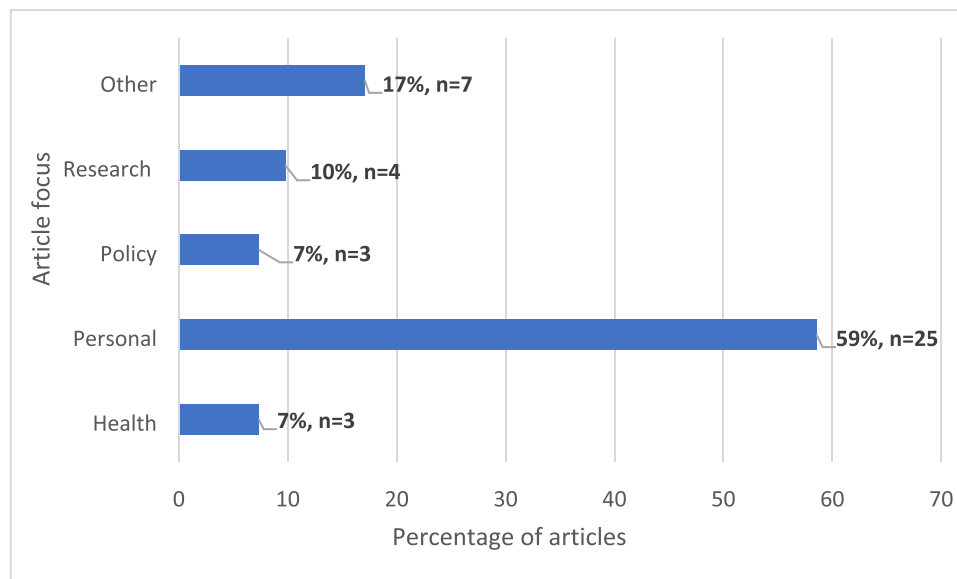


FIGURE 6 Article focus (by percentage). Details the focus of the identified articles, with the highest percentage having a personal focus, and telling mothers' own stories of breastfeeding.

for mothers' and babies' mental and physical health; and calling for accessible peer support delivery in line with national guidance and with a particular action in deprived areas to reduce health inequalities.

The Legislation and Policy theme aligned with just two articles which explore the poor implementation of maternity rights and policy in practice at work and public places which can pose a risk to breastfeeding and its continuation. The articles present the mismatch between the experience of mothers and the policy (the mother) was sent to a storage area, filled with old Christmas decorations, by staff at a supermarket while trying to feed her baby... In a statement (the company) said it was a 'misunderstanding' of its company policy on behalf of the staff and said that

customers are welcome to breastfeed in all their cafes' (*Daily Mail* article).

Under the Training and Programme Delivery theme, articles highlight the gaps in local provision and information for mothers, with some criticism of a focus on 'why breastfeed' over 'how to breastfeed'. These stories aligned with those classified under the promotion gear which described mothers reaching out through social media for advice and struggling to understand or get help for pain or difficulties while breastfeeding. One article in particular detailed a UK-wide study describing the inadequate and inconsistent levels of peer support provision, with a commentator noting that alongside accessible peer support provision that was appropriately targeted, action was required to promote breastfeeding at the societal level.

Gear	Article references	Subtheme	Summaries	Article references
<i>Advocacy</i>	5	Research evidence illustrates positive impacts of breastfeeding	Study finds eating peanuts during pregnancy and BF can reduce allergies - present as a starting point for better informing guidelines for preventing food allergies	1
			Research shared that finds positive outcomes for eczema among breastfed babies	1
			Compares UK infant mortality data to that in other countries citing breastfeeding, obesity and later births as factors	1
			Cites research of the positive impacts for mothers and babies mental and physical health	1
			Call for improvements in peer support in line with national guidance	1
<i>Political Will</i>	0			0
<i>Legislation and Policy</i>	2	Poor implementation of maternity rights and legislation pose a risk to breastfeeding	Maternity provisions poorly delivered	1
			Women discouraged from breastfeeding in public places by untrained staff apparently unaware of company policy	1
<i>Funding and Resources</i>	1	Lack of funding for peer support	Funding for peer support is piecemeal and not matched to demand for services, contrary to national guidance	1
<i>Training and Programme Delivery</i>	4	Inconsistencies in local breastfeeding provision	Lack of accessible support	3
			Geographical disparities in provision of peer support	1
<i>Promotion</i>	31	Societal barriers to breastfeeding, especially in public, via:	Over-focus on 'why breastfeed' with insufficient focus and support on 'how to breastfeed successfully'	1
			... sexualisation of breastfeeding and breastmilk	3
			... negative response to older children breastfeeding	2
			... poorly trained staff members acting contrary to company policy	1

FIGURE 7 Content analysis of newspaper articles, by relevance to the BBF gears. Presents the number of media article references recorded and the themes and subthemes identified in line with each of the BBF gear components.

		... unrealistic expectations of mothers to 'get their figure back'/conform to body image norms, work, pay attention to husband etc.	4
		... resistance to perceived emphasis on breastfeeding by NHS/NCT etc. Breast is best vs Fed is best argument	2
		...lack of inclusivity and diversity in breastfeeding information	1
	Physical difficulties experienced: eg pain, mastitis, milk flow	Mothers discuss pain, sense of isolation and difficulties experienced, often without good support/advice	3
	Perceived cultural shifts in favour of breastfeeding in public	Families share breastfeeding stories, trend of sharing breastfeeding pictures among celebrities at weddings etc.	4
	Women supporting or using Donor Milk banks	Women with excess milk share their milk with professional Donor Milk banks	3
	Connection between mothers' milk supply and their diet/health choices	Value of balanced diet and responsibility while breastfeeding	3
	Responsive, protective, healing properties of breastmilk & breastfeeding	Breastmilk can reduce likelihood of certain allergies (nut) and conditions (eczema); adapts to child's health status Mother's mental health supported by breastfeeding	4
	Including breastfeeding in the curriculum	Discussion of whether educating children about breastfeeding is necessary or the state's role	1
Research and Evaluation	0		0
Coordination, Goals and Monitoring	0		0

FIGURE 7 Continued

The Funding and Resources gear had only one reference. It was made by the authors of the UK-wide peer support study noting that spending for breastfeeding peer support services was inconsistent, with some areas experiencing underfunding and others receiving 'significant local investment. But, the authors say, this was piecemeal and not matched to investment' (Guardian article).

4 | DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to try and understand how the most-read British newspapers and women's magazines frame the public discussion of breastfeeding, as well as determine what breastfeeding topics and events are covered the most. In relation to these aims, this study found that media coverage of breastfeeding was often positive and

frequently focused on mothers' experiences of breastfeeding. Other women discussing the reality of breastfeeding may be helpful for mothers and help them realise they are not alone if facing difficulties. However, it may also deter some women from starting breastfeeding if an article focuses too much on the negative experiences, as many women's experiences of breastfeeding are 'bittersweet', for example, they feel tired and may experience sore nipples at times, but also enjoy the closeness with their child (Davie et al., 2021).

There seemed to be no pattern in relation to when the breastfeeding articles appeared in the media, and during World Breastfeeding Week (in August) and National Breastfeeding Week (in June for England, Scotland and Wales), there were fewer articles published than in the month of May. This can be regarded as a positive as when a topic appears in the media more consistently, it can be more effective in shaping public opinion and influencing decision-makers (Liu et al., 2018).

Media can influence how people think about a topic, such as breastfeeding, helping people think about what are the causes, the seriousness and the possible solutions (Buckton et al., 2018). Framing these issues in the media could shape how mothers and the wider population and policymakers think about breastfeeding (Liu et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important that the British media keep publishing breastfeeding articles. However, it might help other women when they are deciding whether to breastfeed or not, to give a more balanced view of breastfeeding, talking about issues women face, as well as the benefits of breastfeeding. These benefits should not be solely health-focused; instead, they should also talk about the psychological benefits for both mothers and babies.

In relation to the BBF gear components of an enabling breastfeeding environment, the articles analysed focused primarily on Promotion, then Advocacy. Articles were often driven by TV debates or people posting pictures on social media (which were then written into articles). While a number of the articles crossed over more than one thematic/gear area, for example, by presenting a personal story then moving on to cite the guidance or evidence—sometimes in bold or italics for emphasis, the readers' comments suggest that even with the positively framed information or articles, some negativity about breastfeeding and breastmilk is entrenched and will require a more complex promotion strategy and gear-wide action to start to address the weaknesses in the breastfeeding environment. As the BBF Gear model suggests, there are wider contributory factors and some media articles explored the weakness of some maternity rights and breastfeeding protections in line with the Legislation and Policy gear. Yet their main focus was on breastfeeding in public with sparse or no analysis of the support available for mothers to return to work or the influence of formula milk marketing in the UK. One article under the Training and Programme Delivery and Funding and Resources gears explored research exposing the geographic disparities in peer support provision which can leave parents feeling isolated as well as suggesting a lack of evidence-led commissioning. These inconsistencies emphasised the value of national leadership and oversight supported by and driving consistent data collection (Political Will;

Coordination, Goals and Monitoring; Research and Evaluation gears); however, these critical components were absent in the print media discourse analysed here.

This study has some limitations. We only focused on three newspapers and three magazines and recognise that there are many other print publications within the British media. We also did not look at news articles outside of the British media which may have an impact on attitudes and perceptions in Britain due to the remit of the BBF study. However, it is likely that international media has an impact on those living in Britain. Another possible limitation is that two of the British papers are regarded as tabloids (*The Daily Mail* and *The Sun*), so a review of other broadsheets, such as the *Telegraph* or the *Times* may have produced different results. We did not examine social media activities, or radio and TV coverage. Social media potentially has the power to impact positively breastfeeding rates, by creating positive social norms, and in recent years have seen celebrity mothers such as Chrissy Teigen, Pink and Samantha Faiers, who have shared posts of them breastfeeding online. This might also make mothers feel more comfortable about sharing such images or discussing breastfeeding on a social media channel. The search was also restricted within a period of a year to fit with the BBF process criteria. However, this might limit the generalisation of the findings. Deciding whether an article is positive or negative is subjective and therefore different reviewers might interpret the findings differently although we attempted to mitigate this with a second reviewer.

While our study looked at the British print media over a 12-month period, another study (Henderson, 2000) analysed television programmes as well as articles from British newspapers in relation to a reference to breast or bottle feeding over a 1-month period (in March 1999). The study found that bottle feeding was associated with 'ordinary' families whereas breastfeeding was associated with middle-class or celebrity women. The study also concluded that the health risks of formula milk and the health benefits of breastfeeding were rarely mentioned, and the media seldom presented positive information on breastfeeding.

This study would suggest that since 1999, there has possibly been a positive shift in coverage around breastfeeding. However, it has been argued that through clever marketing, the formula milk industry still has formula milk positioned as the choice of the 'hard working' family, and as a women's right to choose to breastfeed (Hastings et al., 2020; Merritt, 2018). With this in mind, the findings from this study support the need to design strategies to engage journalists and the media much more in covering diverse aspects of breastfeeding and to give positive and well as negative experiences from mothers, and ensuring that breastfeeding is normalised for all mothers, regardless of socioeconomic status.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Rowena Merritt, Cara Safon, Tamsyn Eida and Sally Kendall designed the study and commented on the paper. Rowena Merritt, Cara Safon and Tamsyn Eida performed the research. Rowena Merritt and Tamsyn Eida analysed the data. Rowena Merritt, Tamsyn Eida, Cara Safon and Sally Kendall wrote the paper.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data available on request from the authors.

ORCID

Rowena Merritt  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7767-0991>

Tamsyn Eida  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8876-8051>

Sally Kendall  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2507-0350>

REFERENCES

- Berridge, K., McFadden, K., Abayomi, J., & Topping, J. (2005). Views of breastfeeding difficulties among drop in-clinic attendees. *Maternal & Child Nutrition*, 1(4), 250–262. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1740-8709.2005.00014.x>
- Bou-Karroum, L., El-Jardali, F., Hemadi, N., Faraj, Y., Ojha, U., Shahrour, M., Darzi, A., Ali, M., Doumit, C., Langlois, E. V., Melki, J., AbouHaidar, G. H., & Akl, E. A. (2017). Using media to impact health policy-making: An integrative systematic review. *Implementation Science*, 12(1), 52. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-017-0581-0>
- Bridges, N., Howell, G., & Schmied, V. (2018). Exploring breastfeeding support on social media. *International Breastfeeding Journal*, 13, 22. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13006-018-0166-9>
- Brown, J. D., & Peuchaud, S. (2008). Media and breastfeeding: Friend or foe? *International Breastfeeding Journal*, 3, 15. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1746-4358-3-15>
- Buckton, C. H., Patterson, C., Hyseni, L., Katikireddi, S. V., Lloyd-Williams, F., Elliott-Green, A., Capewell, S., & Hilton, S. (2018). The palatability of sugar-sweetened beverage taxation: A content analysis of newspaper coverage of the UK sugar debate. *PLoS One*, 13(12), e0207576. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0207576>
- Daly, J., Kellehear, A., & Gliksman, M. (1997). *The public health researcher: A methodological approach*. Oxford University Press.
- Davie, P., Chilcot, J., Jones, L., Bick, D., & Silverio, S. A. (2021). Indicators of 'good' feeding, breastfeeding latch, and feeding experiences among healthy women with healthy infants: A qualitative pathway analysis using Grounded Theory. *Women and Birth*, 34(4), e357–e367. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wombi.2020.08.004>
- Ferré-Eguiluz, I., Buccini, G., Hromi-Fiedler, A., Roveló, N., González de Cosío, T., Pérez-Escamilla-Costas, J. R., Pérez-Escamilla-González, J. R., & Pérez-Escamilla, R. (2020). Content analysis of media coverage of breastfeeding in Mexico. *Maternal & Child Nutrition*, 16(2), 12905. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mcn.12905>
- Hastings, G., Angus, K., Eadie, D., & Hunt, K. (2020). Selling second best: How infant formula marketing works. *Globalization and Health*, 16(1), 77. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-020-00597-w>
- Henderson, L. (2000). Representing infant feeding: Content analysis of British media portrayals of bottle feeding and breast feeding. *BMJ*, 321(7270), 1196–1198. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.321.7270.1196>
- Liu, S., Cai, L., & Zhao, X. (2018). The role of mass media in education policies: A Chinese case study. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 41, 186–203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2018.1554548>
- Merritt, R. K. (2018). The promotion of Breastfeeding. In Family Larsson Rosenquist Foundation. *Breastfeeding and breast milk—From biochemistry to impact*. A Multidisciplinary Introduction (pp. 211–215). Georg Thieme Verlag KG.
- Merritt, R. K., Vogel, M., Ladbury, P., & Johnson, S. M. (2019). A qualitative study to explore fathers' attitudes towards breastfeeding in South West England. *Primary Health Care Research & Development*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1463423618000877>
- Ofcom. (2019). Report: News Consumption in the UK: 2019. Accessed November 14, 2022. https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0027/157914/uk-news-consumption-2019-report.pdf
- Pérez-Escamilla, R., Curry, L., Minhas, D., Taylor, L., & Bradley, E. (2012). Scaling up of breastfeeding promotion programs in low- and middle-income countries: The "Breastfeeding Gear" model. *Advances in Nutrition*, 3(6), 790–800. <https://doi.org/10.3945/an.112.002873>
- Public Health England. (2017). Press release: New survey of mums reveals perceived barriers to breastfeeding. Accessed 30 June 2019. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-survey-of-mums-reveals-perceived-barriers-to-breastfeeding>
- Renfrew, M. J., Pokhrel, S., Quigley, M., McCormick, F., Fox-Rushby, J., Dodds, R., & Williams, A. (2012). *Preventing disease and saving resources: The potential contribution of increasing breastfeeding rates in the UK*. UNICEF. Accessed August 24, 2021. https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2012/11/Preventing_disease_saving_resources.pdf?epslanguage=en
- Robbins, R. H., & Dowty, R. A. (2019). *Global problems and the culture of capitalism* (7th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Rollins, N. C., Bhandari, N., Hajeerbhoy, N., Horton, S., Lutter, C. K., Martines, J. C., Richter, L. M., & Victora, C. G., Lancet Breastfeeding Series Group. (2016). Why invest, and what it will take to improve breastfeeding practices?. *The Lancet*, 387(10017), 491–504. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(15\)01044-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(15)01044-2)
- Smith, W. A., & Strand, J. (2008). *Social marketing behavior. A practical resource for social change professionals*. Academy for Educational Development.
- Tohotoa, J., Maycock, B., Hauck, Y. L., Howat, P., Burns, S., & Binns, C. W. (2009). Dads make a difference: An exploratory study of paternal support for breastfeeding in Perth, Western Australia. *International Breastfeeding Journal*, 4, 15. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1746-4358-4-15>
- Trickey, H., & Newburn, M. (2014). Goals, dilemmas and assumptions in infant feeding education and support. Applying theory of constraints thinking tools to develop new priorities for action. *Maternal & Child Nutrition*, 10(1), 72–91. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1740-8709.2012.00417.x>
- Victora, C. G., Bahl, R., Barros, A. J. D., França, G. V. A., Horton, S., Krasevec, J., Sankar, M. J., Walker, N., & Rollins, N. C., Lancet Breastfeeding Series Group. (2016). Breastfeeding in the 21st century: Epidemiology, mechanisms, and lifelong effect. *The Lancet*, 387(10017), 475–490. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(15\)01024-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(15)01024-7)

How to cite this article: Merritt, R., Eida, T., Safon, C., & Kendall, S. (2023). Print media coverage of breastfeeding in Great Britain: Positive or negative? *Maternal & Child Nutrition*, 19(S1):e13458. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mcn.13458>