

'The Enduring Relevance of Newspapers

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Good morning.

I have a confession to make. I'm in therapy. It has been about 40 hours now since I witnessed Scotland lose to Australia in the dying moments on Sunday.

I've no idea what it was like to be a neutral, but it is many years since I have heard the whole of Murrayfield chanting Scotland Scotland as one – and I don't think we've ever heard that particular roar at Twickenham. For 80 glorious minutes, those bloody chariots were impounded in a secure facility somewhere off the M4.

It was a magnificent day. It was an incredible story.

For a moment we dreamed: were off to face Argentina in the semis...we could have them...and then you're just a noravirus

outbreak in the All Black dressing room from winning the World Cup.

It was not to be. But what a day. What a story.

And after tuning into non-stop abuse on social media, I quickly graduated to newspapers and their websites. What were the pundits saying? Why had the South African referee Craig Joubert got it so wrong? Why hadn't he used the TMO (turns out he was right not to, but I needed a newspaper to clear it up for me), why had he run off the pitch like a scalded cat, not shaking a single player's hand in the process? Why is it so hard being Scottish?

Then I came across this snippet of brilliance from my colleagues on The Daily Telegraph in Sydney – the cheeky bastards had made Joubert man of the match. The citation reads:

Despite ruling for Scotland at times, a fine match for the Wallabies. Produced the goods when it really mattered. Showed a surprising turn of speed when making a break for the tunnel at the end of the match. 9 out of ten.

The Aussies have a sense of humour after all! Who knew?

There is a serious point to all this. Firstly, we now know that Joubert got it wrong. We know that Scotland was robbed. But we Scots can mump and moan as much as we want - it's not going to change the result.

The same is true in our industry. The technology revolution is not suddenly going to go into reverse. The barriers to entry that technology once afforded us have been smashed. The world will never be the same again.

Secondly – and this is good news - the excitement of that day was played out live on terrestrial television, it was live on the radio. Social media was pumping out commentary 100s of times a second. Pictures are being taken by professionals and amateurs in their millions. Videos are being posted and periscoped and streamed.

But it takes newspapers to pull all of these elements together and present the what, the how and the why in a succinct and engaging fashion. And what's more, people lap it up.

I am sick of our industry being done down. Since the late 90s, all I have heard is that we are finished. We are the dead tree press. We are going to be subsumed by social media, television, Apple, One Direction...even Russell Brand.

Not at all.

Yes, we sell significantly fewer newspapers than we did then, and yes, advertising salesmen have never had it so tough. But I'll tell you what; our content has never been more popular. Far more people consume Sun stories now than ever before. By the time it has been repurposed and repackaged, Sun stories get to all corners of the UK – and now the world. They might not always be through our own channels (in fact, more often than not, the stories will be repurposed by other outlets) but that news will travel far and wide.

This is a cause for massive celebration. This is not the tale of the dodo. This is not the story of the bloke with the Penny Farthing shop waking up one morning to find Henry Ford's moved in next door.

No, this is a story of great opportunity where those who are willing to strive, gamble, invest and change tack time and time again will win through.

I come to work each day worried about how we hit our numbers – but relaxed that we will ultimately find a way through because the consumer not only wants what we do, but actually needs it.

Last month, I crossed the Rubicon. I used to be a journalist, you know. I went from being a newspaper editor to being a newspaper manager. Over the years, the definitions around those roles have blurred but there is no doubt that both are more challenging than ever before.

The Editor has to contend with increased scrutiny, regulatory and legal pressures coupled with shrinking resources and publishing every minute of every day. The manager has to catch the falling knife and somehow rediscover growth in a world that is being pulled like a moth to the digital flame.

Having seen both sides of this coin, it is clear that the moaning has to stop. The time has come to start celebrating the success that we enjoy every day and reconnecting with the advertisers who want to be associated with the connection we have with our audiences.

It is worth reflecting on what we have been through as a newsroom, a company and an industry over the past four years. Fifty Operation Elveden charges were laid by the CPS against Sun journalists. One solitary charge was proven – and it is now being appealed.

Nick Cohen summed the situation up in his Observer skewering of Tom Watson last week. He wrote:

‘The police and Crown Prosecution Service began arresting Sun journalists and their sources for revealing information the government would rather have kept quiet. Only because tabloid journalists are so hated did the attempt to seal off the state from scrutiny fail to become the national, and indeed international, [scandal](#) it ought to have been.

It is as if the British establishment has a purge and binge-eating disorder. It fails to digest crimes for years, then goes berserk when

its negligence is exposed and chews up every innocent it can stuff into its jaws.'

Add into that Leveson, pizza plots, the Bribery Act and a structural change to the industry not seen for more than a century.

It has been a maelstrom. But there is now a moment in time.

We are through the worst. Now is the time to rebuild.

My colleagues have taken the real brunt and the personal cost to them can never be underestimated. But the whole industry should pick itself up, dust itself down and get on with it.

The election was a bit of a turning point for me. I have long been suspicious of exactly how powerful social media is. There is no doubt that billions of people around the world use Facebook and Twitter to find out what's going on. But are things like Twitter truly reflective of what the public thinks?

For months leading up to May 7 we had been running daily tracker polls from YouGov. Nothing seemed to move the dial, The Tories would go ahead by a point, seem to get a bit of momentum, and then fall back. As a paper that had made it pretty clear where we wanted the election to end up, it was very frustrating.

There were moments when you had to question your own judgement. When I heard Ed Miliband had been pictured going in to Russell Brand's place to do a video interview, I thought it must be an Alison Jackson stunt or a late April Fool. Did he really think aligning himself with Brand was going to help him win beyond the Shoreditch heartlands? Then the Edstone episode was so extraordinary. I had people on the newsdesk saying it was genius because he got all of Labour's pledges on to the front page of every paper. Thankfully, they were completely wrong.

But social media kept talking the talk of Labour victory. An "exit poll" by Talkwalker, a social media monitor, showed 2,500 claimed to have voted Labour against 777 for the Tories That's four to one in favour of Labour. . If you dipped into Twitter during the campaign, you would assume it was a done deal for Labour. There was a period for a couple of years at the start of the coalition

government where sentiment on Twitter definitely moved government policy. They actually believed it was representative of the country.

On the night of election, I was standing in the Sun newsroom when the broadcasters' exit poll was announced. The news was so shocking, and the pressure building up to that moment so intense, you could actually feel the wave of emotion and reaction rush through the office. It was incredible and something I will never forget. Nor will I forget putting together the papers over the next few hours and days as the reality and reaction sank in. And the realisation that YouGov and the rest of them had got it so spectacularly wrong.

It had been a particularly bruising campaign. The Sun had gone all in, The Times had taken a slightly more dispassionate view. While relations between The Sun and many in the Labour Party remained on good terms, those with the leader had broken down completely. But he was a gift that kept giving. The Two Kitchens scenario was particularly enjoyable – and then he just kept digging.

After the election we commissioned some polling – yes, all right, it does come from YouGov - on what the public actually think of newspapers. The results confirm what I've thought – newspapers play a massive role in the daily lives of the British people.

Look at these stats.

Over the course of a month, seven out of ten British adults use newspapers and their associated websites as a source of news.

Half of all adults trust newspapers to deliver political news.

The key statistic for me is that only 9 per cent trust social media.

As we've already seen, social media tends to be a collection of people shouting – and most of them screaming into a vacuum.

Everything either needs to begin or end with a trusted, established media brand either breaking the story or confirming or denying the rumour.

Newspapers outperform TV broadcast news across 9 content areas. In particular comment & opinion and editorial & in-depth analysis.

I am particularly drawn to our ability to shape opinion and debate.

This is our clear and common purpose and what sets us apart from other media.

I've been profoundly struck over recent months by the enduring relevance and impact of our journalism. Let me give you a recent example.

It's the Sunday Times exposé of the blood scandal in athletics.

The Insight team found that the athletes who had won a third of all medals at major global competitions had suspicious blood tests.

This story reached a potential global audience of over 2 billion people in 109 countries, with the United States of America supplying 21 per cent of the audience.

That's an enormous relevance and impact.

This shows the power of newspapers.

As our research shows, broadcast news is trusted but it lacks the ability to properly delve into stories.

And with a legal requirement to be unbiased, comment and opinion is not a feature of our TV news.

Further, publicly funded news relies on Parliament for its cash and is never very far from a Charter or financial review. Inevitably it has to operate under the threat of political interference. Does the

British public really want all its broadcast and digitally published news from the same state-funded source?

This means the role of newspapers remains highly distinctive.

We sustain detailed investigations that confront the controversies that others avoid, offering the public independent, rigorous and trusted news.

We offer comment and opinion worth listening to, with real authority and insight.

We provide reach, but also depth of analysis, which isn't easy to capture in a TV sound-bite or 140 characters.

Broadcasters report the comings and goings, claims and counter-claims, the set piece proceedings – but where's the real story? That's often down to us.

So it's no surprise that TV broadcasters begin most mornings looking at the newspapers to establish the day's news agenda.

Nowhere is this more true than in the coverage of politics.

Let me offer FOUR things that illustrate why newspapers are so critical to politics and vice-versa.

First, the facts. We rely on newspapers to act as the record of the political events of the day, the source for accurate information about what's going on in Westminster and beyond.

Their pages create space for the detail, often glossed over by TV or radio, and ignored by an under-resourced website.

And the details are made easy to understand and explore, with designers organising information into tables and graphics to ease the experience.

Then there's the debate. Politics is rooted in the battle of ideas, and newspapers remain the natural home of political debate.

We offer a range of views, and across the industry we cover all angles.

We also provide a platform for the opinions of politicians themselves – even if occasionally they may regret giving them.

Third, where there is politics, there is sometimes scandal and controversy, and newspapers play an invaluable role in shining a light on this, highlighting hypocrisy and exposing corruption.

There is also considerable political risk in breaking these stories.

It's difficult to imagine a broadcaster being prepared to run these stories first.

In fairness, the night we broke the Royal Nazi salute picture, the BBC had it up on screen and running as breaking news on their ticker. Sky News, by comparison, refused to show the front page or acknowledge the story until 22 minutes into the paper review – an hour after they had received it and long after the BBC had started running it.

Lord Sewel was roundly ignored by the broadcasters on the Sunday morning we broke the story. It was only when the Leader of the Lords ordered an investigation after lunch that the broadcast news editors developed the bollocks to report.

Every day newspaper editors are taking risks and gambles – and enduring sleepless nights - to publish the things that broadcasters won't go near until the water is safe. This is our USP. This is what makes our part of the trade so special and important.

And fourth of course, there's the satire and the fun!

Politics would be very dull without newspapers to keep us smiling – whether it is the wonderful humour of the parliamentary sketch writers or the brilliance of the political cartoon. And it is probably only The Sun that could sum up the budget with the Chancellor in high heels and hot pants.

We should remind ourselves that strong democracies need strong media, able to keep the public informed about the actions of their government, and others, and the decisions they take in our name.

It especially needs a press, free from political control.

Professional journalism is not about being cheerleaders for politics.

But in providing a sustained focus on public life, we provide valuable space to politicians whose legitimacy depends on their ability to engage a sceptical and often disinterested electorate.

Politics is too important to be left to the spin-doctors of party press releases.

It needs detailed analysis and courageous debate, something that newspapers do particularly well.

This is not to claim newspapers have a monopoly on political truth. Politics is stronger when there is a spectrum of opinions.

Newspapers remain the home of journalism that makes you think. We have the credibility, the skill and the nerve to set the agenda and pose the important questions.

And if we keep that in mind, I believe newspapers will continue to have a major relevance and impact for many years to come.

We need to remind people what makes us special. Remind them how our journalism makes a positive impact. And remind them what would be lost if we were not around.

Let's make that the focus of what we are trying to preserve, because it is a good thing to do – it truly is a job worth doing – and because it's a pretty good foundation for our commercial success too.

Thank you.