

News Media Coalition—written evidence (FON0036)

House of Lords Communications and Digital Select Committee inquiry: The future of news: impartiality, trust, and technology

Protecting News Content and News Business Freedoms

The News Media Coalition (the NMC) and Trustworthy News

The NMC is an international industry organisation, comprising reputable publishers as well as news agency content suppliers, many of which operate in the UK, across Europe and further afield. NMC members represent a significant proportion of the global news media sector and include major publishing houses and national and international news agencies such as: Agence France-Presse, Agencia EFE in Spain, Associated Press based in the US, Australian Associated Press, dmg media, Deutsche Presse-Agentur, ESI Media, European Pressphoto Agency, European Publishers Council, Getty Images, Guardian Media Group, News UK, PA Media, Reach plc's national and regional titles, SNTV, Shutterstock, Telegraph Media Group and Thomson Reuters.

They each run real news businesses and have teams of dedicated journalists in the field and in newsrooms who strive to deliver professionally-produced and independent content into news business and consumer markets. Their reporters, news photographers and video journalists create millions of news items each year in the form of journalistic storytelling of events of public interest, personal interviews, analysis of data, and witness accounts – what we term Primary Source Journalism ('PSJ').

The NMC Mission and Scope

The NMC supports the content strategies of those news businesses in two key respects. Firstly seeking to safeguard independent news-gathering opportunities, ensuring their legal intellectual property rights are respected. Secondly, by challenging arbitrary rules imposed on them by the organisers of staged events of high public interest, such as sports including those hosted in the UK, showbusiness, cultural and civic events. The NMC advocates for and supports the industry in discussions with event organisers, to preserve media freedoms. The NMC's public policy involvement includes observer status with the Council of Europe's 'media freedom and human rights' function, the European Commission and national governments. Most recently, NMC advocacy contributed to the UK's new Gold Framework policy on news media aspects of future hosted 'mega' events.

NMC Members and the Lord's Inquiry

The Committee has identified the issue of public trust when individuals seek to locate reliable news. This is most acute amongst the world of unsourced, re-constituted and fact-less information available across ever-expanding platforms. The most trustworthy news comes from the 'on the ground' work of news reporters, news photographers and video journalists who see, capture, assess and convey accounts of real-world happenings.

Despite economic challenges to the news media sector, it is PSJ which contributes (unlike reporter-less news aggregators) most to the daily and objective digest of 'current affairs' whether in contexts of civic and cultural events including sports tournaments, at public demonstrations, the work of courts, amongst financial institutions, or political processes at national or local levels.

Yet despite its ubiquity and societal importance, there are increasing constraints on PSJ. These barriers are absolute in the sense that it has generally become harder to report on news events; and relatively speaking because further constraints on news reporting impact more where public expectations have increased, such as in the digital and visual spheres, particularly amongst young news consumers.

What is Primary Source Journalism (PSJ)?

This witness-based journalism requires distinctive skill sets and is central to the availability of informative, educative and authentic reports produced by both private and public news media entities. PSJ is one of the most expensive forms of news operations – given the needs of resourcing, equipping (especially for photographers and video journalists), logistical outlays and unknown content outcomes. It is therefore highly vulnerable – whether at local, national or international levels – to economic pressures on and within the professional news sectors.

The ability to see, question, capture and share through news reporting is important across all areas of topicality, from government announcements and political processes to the work of courts, at cultural events including sports tournaments, at public demonstrations, amongst financial institutions, politicians and civic leaders at local level.

Where recognised and empowered, PSJ is vital in the contexts of combating mis- and dis-information, issues of media resilience, content technology change, journalism innovation, poor media literacy and democracy at all levels of public engagement. Without PSJ, the public will be fed PR spin, misinformation and at its worst, disinformation.

AI's Potential Undermining of Trust in Primary Source Journalism

The importance of PSJ will only be heightened in a world of increased synthetic, AI-generated content. Which means it is all the more important to safeguard media freedoms to witness and report events. There are two principal downward pressures on quality witness-based journalism.

While AI benefits and negatives continue to be explored by the creative industry, it is clear that the unauthorised use of news organisations' copyright material by generative AI, including large language models, poses a substantial and comparatively higher threat to PSJ, compared with other journalism. This is particularly true with photography and audio-visual material which relies especially upon a stable licensing market for the use and re-use of original content to generate a return on expensive newsgathering of this kind.

Secondly, despite the brand loyalties and editorial strengths of UK-based mainstream news media, unregulated AI products which capture original professional news material and create synthetic derivatives will have the potential to flood consumers with unsourced content and therefore weaken trust in *all* digital content including quality PSJ.

Supporting Primary Source Journalism

There is an urgent need for public policymakers to themselves foster environments in which this form of quality journalism can thrive and maintain its societal role as providing the raw material of knowledge, individually and collectively, of current affairs, for informed debate, for fact-based decision making and as a counterweight to mis- and dis-information and official subjective narratives.

Practically, this would entail government departments leading the way (building on the progressive attitude of the Ministry of Justice towards reporter attendance in courts) in opening up journalist access to official news situations and to information as part of the UK's commitment to media freedom.

In all respects, Primary Source Journalism is an essential pillar of democratic society and it is vital that media freedoms to report are safeguarded.

Barriers to Everyday News Reporting

Despite the determination of newsrooms and newsgatherers to overcome constraints on PSJ operations, challenges already exist in the following key areas:

1. Reduced space capacity or facilities for physical attendance by the written press, photographers and video journalists.
2. Failure to regard video journalism and other content production innovations as essential tools in contemporary newsgathering.
3. The exclusion of journalists from parts of the news sector.
4. Lack of independent newsgathering opportunities at current events of public interest – and the provision instead of subjective official 'news' by governmental and non-governmental entities.
5. Public figures including those from governments who denigrate the role of professional journalists and journalism.
6. Inconsistent recognition of industry Press Cards by authorities including at civil disturbances.
7. Lack of reasonable access by news journalists to witnesses and/or capture political leaders on duty including within parliamentary and campaigning situations.

8. Organisers of large-scale events backed by public funds or by governmental entities which fail to engage with the news sector at the earliest phase in planning (although the new Gold Framework policy has the potential for bringing about change).

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